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Heresy and Popular Protestantism in England, 1527-1553

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HERESY AND POPULAR PROTESTANTISM
IN ENGLAND, 1527-1553

by
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Graduate Division of Wayne State University,
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INTRODUCTION

Miles Hogarde, writing during the reign of Queen Mary, described a sermon given by an itinerant preacher named Father Browne who was active in London and the surrounding counties during the last years of Edward VI. There were three religions in England during his day, Brown contended, the established Protestantism of the King and Lord Chancellor, the beliefs associated with Archbishop Cranmer and Bishops Ridley and Latimer, and his own religion, or, as he preferred to describe it, "God's religion".¹ There were many such Father Brownes in mid-sixteenth century England and the popular Protestantism they preached attracted a large following. Recent scholarship, however, has devoted comparatively little attention to the popular aspects of the English Reformation, despite an increasing appreciation of the role and importance of sectarian religious groups in

¹ Miles Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes (London: R. Caly, 1555).

sixteenth century life. Much work has been done on the nature and scope of non-magisterial Protestantism on the continent, the so-called "Radical Reformation",² but these studies have largely ignored the presence in England of a contemporary movement to restore primitive Christianity together with an ethical religion based on Scripture. There was a deep current of what might be called "Protestant" feeling in England that had little to do with either the Henrician Reformation or the doctrinal changes enacted by Somerset or Northumberland. This current had its roots in the later Middle Ages but was not without certain affinities with continental Anabaptism and Lutheranism. Unfortunately, recent studies have largely ignored the beliefs of ordinary people despite the fact that an examination of available sources reveals much about the nature of this popular Protestant thought as well as the extent of its debt to medieval heretical activity and its relationship to its continental counterparts.

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G.H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962) is the most complete overview of this research, supplemented by the same author's earlier bibliographical essay, "Studies in the Radical Reformation (1517-1618): a Bibliographical Survey of Research since 1939", Church History, Vol. XXVII (1958), pp. 46-69, 124-160.

No comprehensive account of the spread of Protestant ideas is available and this will certainly not be one. It is an examination of some of the salient characteristics of sixteenth century English heresy and attempts to give some insight into the things that ordinary people believed. It is not based on archival research and provides no narrative account of the progress of sixteenth century English Protestant thought. In most cases, background information has been limited to a few short lines and a bibliographical footnote. A short note on sources accompanied by a full list of those cited follows the text. In the interest of clarity and simplicity, but at the risk of losing some of the expressive flavor of documents that point up the lack of any clarity and simplicity in complex religious movements, I have modernized all spellings and corrected all punctuation in the text of the paper. Footnote references have not been altered.

Throughout the paper, the phrases "Protestant" and "heretic" are used interchangeably, oftentimes accompanied by the term "popular". Although "Protestant" seems appropriate today, it was unknown in sixteenth century England where the term "heretic" was freely applied to any form of religious deviation. Finally, since popular

Protestant ideas spread among ordinary people all too often over-looked in an age of socio-economic analysis, I have included proper names whenever possible. Hopefully, the choice of quotations will convey something of their vitality and good humor as well as the course brutality that accompanied strong religious feelings.

CHAPTER I

POPULAR PROTESTANTISM AND RELIGIOUS PRIMITIVISM

"This is a marvelous world", the Abbot of the monastery of Woburn declared in 1538, "some will have down Purgatory, some speak against images, some against veneration of saints, some against the Pope".¹ "Vilanus persons", Robert Parkyn agreed, "denied that most blessed sacrament and so would have no mass used within this realm, yea and stiffly affirmed that Messiahs was not yet born and so finally denied all sacraments, except matrimony . . . affirming also that it was lawful for priests to marry women".² Both of these men expressed some of the confusion felt by anyone faced with the bewildering variety of religious beliefs in sixteenth century England. Denials of transubstantiation and the validity of the sacraments, attacks on the mass and traditional rites, affirmations

¹ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, ed. J.S. Brewer (London: Longmans, Green, Roberts and Green, 1864-1868), Vol. XIII, #981, p. 359.

² A.G. Dickens, "Robert Parkyn on the Reformation", English Historical Review, Vol. LXII (1947), p. 68.

of clerical marriage and even anti-trinitarian ideas were all part of the bewildering welter of religious beliefs that accompanied the ecclesiastical developments of the Henrician and Edwardian reformations. Beneath the confusion was a common desire to return to the ideals of primitive Christianity, ideals that many felt had been lost during the Middle Ages. "In Christ's time and the apostles' time and in the times of the holy martyrs", William Turner contended, "was the most perfect Church".³ The gospel, Richard Kitchen agreed, "was not truly preached for the space of some three hundred years past".⁴ James Bainham felt that the interval was closer to eight hundred,⁵ while Thomas Patmore knew only that it had been "a long time".⁶ All four of these men were conscious of a disparity of both time and custom that separated sixteenth century Christianity from that of the primitive Church. This awareness was accompanied by both a desire for the restoration of primitive Christianity and a recognition of the necessity of disavowing the religious developments of the medieval period. This

³ William Turner, The hunting and finding out of the Romishe Fox (Basle: 1543), STC 24353.

⁴ John Foxe, Acts and Monuments, ed. Stephen B. Cattley (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837), Vol. V, p. 28.

⁵ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 697.

⁶ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 35.

religious primitivism was the core of English popular Protestantism, a core that welded a wide variety of anticlerical and antisacerdotal ideas into an intelligible program not of reform but of restoration.

The priesthood was the principal object of attack in any disavowal of medieval institutionalized Christianity. It is important to distinguish between these attacks on the priesthood and anticlericalism. England had known anticlericalism for years and there was nothing necessarily Protestant about it. Humanists like Erasmus, John Colet, and Thomas More and Erastian statesmen like Edmund Dudley had attacked clerical vices since the beginning of the sixteenth century but their intention was the reformation of demonstrable abuses.⁷ Like Alexander Barclay, author of the anticlerical satire Ship of Fools, who confessed to writing his poem with

⁷ The literature on English humanism is voluminous but the studies that give the most insight into the anticlerical implications of humanist thought are Frederic Seebohm, The Oxford Reformers (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896), pp. 76ff; J.H. Lupton, The Life of John Colet, D.D. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909); John C. Olin (ed), Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Desiderius Erasmus (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); H.A. Mason, Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 54-55. The best introduction to Erastian anticlericalism is Edmund Dudley, The Tree of Commonwealth, ed. D.M. Brodie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 31-33.

"wet cheeks by tears thick as hail",⁸ they were devout men sincerely interested in reforms. The English heretical community among whom Protestant ideas spread, however, was completely uninterested in any sort of reformation. They denied the validity of the priesthood as an institution and demanded its abolition.

The best introduction to the relationship between this heretical anticlericalism and religious primitivism is an anonymous short pamphlet entitled A Supplication to the Poore Commons, written sometime during the reign of Henry VIII.⁹ The early church, the author contended, knew no priests. The sixteenth century priesthood had its roots in the corruption of ministerial offices established during the reign of Constantine for the organization and management of poor relief, a corruption perpetuated by the creation of canon law and church traditions during the Middle Ages. "These ministers soon became greedy, kept hospitality from the poor, took not only tithes but possessions" and the unfortunate results were all too evident by the mid-sixteenth century.

⁸ Quoted by Arthur Koelbing in A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (eds), The Cambridge History of English Literature (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1933), Vol. III, p. 68.

⁹ J.M. Cowper (ed), Four Supplications (London: Early English Text Society, 1871), pp. 70-75.

The power of the English priesthood, however fraudently acquired, was a painful reality to men committed to a restoration of primitive Christianity.

Although many reformers staunchly insisted on the ill-defined, almost nebulous, nature of the priesthood, there was little lack of precise definition among priests themselves. A 1537 document entitled "The Declaration of the Functions and Divine Institution of Bishops and Priests" emphatically stated that the priesthood was the "only means where [God¹⁰] will make us par-¹¹takers of the reconcilliation which is by Christ". This concept of priestly orders was based on the belief that the priest alone, by the appointment of Christ, could impart grace through the sacraments, grace without which no redemption was possible. The ecclesiastical reforms initiated by Gregory VII and his successors clearly distinguished the importance of the holy office that conferred on its members powers of consecration and absolution that were essential to the salvation of mankind. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, by making the mass and the transubstantiated eucharist the center

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¹¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. VIII, #20, p. 7.

David Wilkins (ed), Concilia Magnae Brittaniae et Hiberniae (London: R. Gosling, 1737), Vol. IV, pp. 832-834.

of Christian worship, also rendered any salvation without miraculous priestly intervention inconceivable.¹²

These developments were roundly condemned in popular Protestant circles.

The eucharist and auricular confession were the two sacraments most intimately linked with priestly claims to divinely-ordained powers and they were also the two most virulently attacked by sixteenth century reformers. Controversy over transubstantiation, the priestly claim to be able to effect a miraculous change in the substance of the eucharistic bread and wine was certainly nothing new and hardly implied a necessary association with religious primitivism. But unlike the theological argu-

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The best studies of the medieval priesthood are Ernest C. Messenger, The Reformation, the Mass and the Priesthood (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), especially Vol. I, pp. 73-99 and Gerd Tellenbach, Church, State and Christian Society at the time of the Investiture Contest, trans. R.F. Bennett (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), especially pp. 42, 56, 70-71, 111-117. Valuable insight into the nature of the priesthood generally can be found in E.O. James, The Nature and Function of the Priesthood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), which makes special reference to sixteenth century England, and Christopher Dawson, Religion and Culture (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948). H.F. Woodhouse, The Doctrine of the Church in Anglican Theology, 1547-1603 (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1954), pp. 29-46 and E.O. James, Sacrifice and Sacrament (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), pp. 269-271 analyse the sacramental theory of Henrician and Edwardian churchmen, while John Mardeley, Here is a short Recytal of certayne holy Doctours (London: Thomas Raynalde, 1548), STC 17318 presents a contemporary view evidently intended for popular consumption.

ments of Lanfranc and Berengar in the eleventh century or Cranmer and Ridley in the sixteenth, these heretical attacks addressed themselves exclusively to the implications of transubstantiation for priestly power. These implications were perfectly clear to Henry Brinkelow. Transubstantiation, he contended, enabled the priesthood to change "the holy memory of Christ's death" into the "worshipping of their God made of fine flower".¹³ Attacks centered on a denial of any claims to divinely-ordained priestly consecratory powers. "No priest hath power to consecrate the very Body of Christ", Giles Van Beler, a York heretic, insisted, basing his argument significantly on the fact that the apostles claimed no such power.¹⁴ John Morbecke, a Windsor musician examined by ecclesiastical authorities in 1543, agreed that transubstantiation was as "sinful and open robbery of the glory of God from which an open heart ought to abhor and flee",¹⁵ while Robert Crowley warned

¹³ Henry Brinkelow, A Lamentacyon of a Christian ageynst the Cytie of London (London: Early English Text Society, 1904), p. 98.

¹⁴ J.S. Purvis, "The Registers of Archbishops Lee and Holgate", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. XIII (1962), p. 189.

¹⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #327, p. 184.

priests that they possessed no real powers,¹⁶

"for it is plain in holy writ
that none can offer sacrifices for sin,
either in flesh or spirit".

Luke Shepherd, a London physician, mocked priestly
claims denouncing transubstantiation as a "pestilent
business",¹⁷ and John Ramsey attacked clerics who,
after making their God out of bread,

". . . prayeth unto him for all sick-
ness and pain
and at length doth eat him, both shoulder,
leg and back
and the next day can make another again".¹⁸

George Bloggle, pardoned for heresy by the King in 1546,
contended that a mouse might as well be put into the
pix as a host, an opinion shared by Anne Askew and
other heretics.¹⁹ An anonymous man detected in 1537
ably summarized popular opinion on the question of
transubstantiation when he told his clerical examiners
that "the sacrament of the altar was not the body of

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Robert Crowley, Select Works, ed. J.M. Cowper
(London: Early English Text Society, 1872), p. 70.

17

Luke Shepherd, "John Bon and Mast Parson" in
A.F. Pollard (ed), Tudor Tracts (New York: Cooper Square
Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 167.

18

John Ramsey, A Plaister for a Galled Horse
(London: Thomas Raynalde, 1548), STC 20662.

19

Letters and Papers, Vol. XXI, #1383, p. 684.

Christ and that the priest had no power to consecrate²⁰ and make it flesh and blood".

The other priestly power of great importance was the ability to absolve penitent sinners through auricular confession. Like transubstantiation, auricular confession was the subject of considerable theological controversy in the sixteenth century but the radical reformers were exclusively concerned with its implications for clerical power and authority. A Coventry heretic adopted a typically contemptuous attitude when he maintained that he would "as lief be confessed to a post as to a priest"²¹. Dionysius Tod, who had a long history of heretical religious activity both in England and on the continent, likewise insisted that men were subject to God alone and were "not bound to confess to any priest"²². There was general agreement that auricular confession was both unnecessary and undesirable. Bartholemew Joye, a Kent man, for instance, admitted to being a sinner but refused to tell his

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Letters and Papers, Vol. XIII, #1189, p. 498.

²¹

Ibid., Vol. XVII, #537, p. 311; Addenda, Vol. I, #1463, p. 50.

²²

Ibid., Vol. XVII, #427, p. 243.

individual sins to a priest,²³ while John Voley, detected in London in 1539, contended that "he needeth not, nor will not, nor is bound, to rehearse in confession his sins particularly, but generally in general words, saying he hath offended in breaking the commandments of Christ and in the seven deadly sins but not showing how".²⁴ An account of Protestant services in Denmark describing a general confession, "every man in his own conscience", enjoyed a wide circulation in heretical communities.²⁵

Auricular confession and the eucharist were not the only sacraments that required priestly administration and they were not the only ones singled out for attack. An anonymous heretical tract entitled The Sum of Scripture which circulated widely during the reign of Henry VIII contended that special ceremonies used in the dispensation of baptism were unnecessary, that the water was merely a sign of the inward working of faith.²⁶ Others like Thomas Carden of Lynne insisted that the

²³ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 300.

²⁴ Ibid., Vol. XIV, #1001, pp. 462-463.

²⁵ Miles Coverdale, The Order that the Church and Congregation of Christ in Denmark and in many places of Germany doth use, STC 5894. MSS in the Cambridge University Library.

²⁶ Wilkins, Vol. III, pp. 729-730.

"water of the font is no better than other water".²⁷
 Many believed that a child might as efficaciously be²⁸
 baptized in a tub or a ditch as in a church font.
 Attacks on extreme unction as only "a godly sign" were
 likewise common,²⁹ as were denials of the sacramental
 nature of holy orders.³⁰ It was also popular to deny
 the necessity of religious marriage rites performed
 by a priest. Many heretics agreed that "it was as good
 enough to wed upon a cushion when the dogs be abed
 as by their priests wed".³¹

Priests had also acquired certain privileges that further enhanced their prestige and authority. Certainly some of these privileges were becoming increasingly difficult to defend in the face of two centuries of increasing secularization and gradual dwindling of

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Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 306.

28

Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, pp. 311-312; Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 698, Vol. V, p. 650; Lilian Swinburn (ed), The Lantern of Light (London: Early English Text Society, 1917), p. 42.

29

Foxe, Vol. V, p. 454.

30

Ibid., Vol. V, p. 29; Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 310.

31

Thomas More, The Confutacyon of Tyndales Answere (London: William Rastell, 1532), STC 18079, sig. B.iii; cf. R.W. Dixon, A History of the Church of England from the Abolition of the Roman Jurisdiction (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1881), Vol. I, pp. 405-408.

clerical authority in temporal affairs.³² But while clerics no longer enjoyed guaranteed access to governmental office and a monopoly of education,³³ they still retained the exclusive right to preach, read and interpret the Scripture. A fifteenth century English vernacular tract on the Decalogue instructed readers that only priests possessed the "cunning and authority" to preach and teach, and contended that laymen should busy themselves "to hear preaching of God's word".³⁴ Preaching was restricted to clerics above the rank of sub-deacon and to others only by special license, a privilege rarely granted to anyone except university

32

On this growing secularization, see T.F. Tout, The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1936), pp. 301-327; J.A.F. Thomson, "Tithes Disputes in later Medieval London", English Historical Review, Vol. LXXVIII (1963), pp. 1-17; Leona C. Gabel, Benefit of Clergy in the Later Middle Ages (Northampton: Smith College Studies in History, 1928); Helen Miller, "London and Parliament in the Reign of Henry VIII", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, Vol. XXXV (1962), pp. 143-145; J.J. Scarisbrick, "Clerical Taxation in England, 1485-1547", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. XI (1960), pp. 41-54; F.R.H. Du Boulay, An Age of Ambition: English Society in the late Middle Ages (New York: Viking Press, 1970).

33

Joan Simon, Education and Society in Tudor England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 19-32; Kenneth Charlton, "Liberal Education and the Inns of Court in the Sixteenth Century", British Journal of Education, Vol. IX (1960), pp. 25-38.

34

G.R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 4.

graduates in theology. Just as laymen were never permitted to preach, so they were never allowed to interpret the Bible, the clergy in this respect serving in the traditional priestly role of custodians of sacred writings. Since few laymen could read Latin, Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions of 1408 prohibiting the translation of Scripture into English³⁵ practically insured that only clergymen would even be able to read the Bible let alone interpret it.

Proponents of the restoration of primitive Christianity could only view this monopoly of preaching and Scriptural interpretation as clear confirmation of the clergy's desire to secure the corrupt gains of centuries of usurpation. The anonymous author of a supplication to Henry VIII denounced this "crafty policy" as a clerical plot to keep "knowledge of God's word from all men that they might unlawfully be promoted to spiritual cures".³⁶ The author of an account of the examination of the Lollard John Oldcastle

³⁵ A.W. Bollard (ed), Records of the English Bible (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 80; cf. Charles C. Butterworth, "How Early could English Scripture be printed in England", The Library Chronicle, Vol. XIV (1947), pp. 1-12.

³⁶ "A Supplication to our most Sovereign Lord King Henry VIII", in Cowper (ed), Four Supplications, p. 35.

condemned priests as "Pharisees and Scribes" who tried to "blear the eyes of the unlearned multitude with one false craft or another".³⁷ "The neglecting of preaching, desire of glory and subtle wresting aside of the Scriptures in the beginning", the author of a defense of the gospel contended, "caused ignorance to bear such a stroke amongst us by little and little the clergy wrought their feit, turning true things to false, virtue to lucre, purest and best to the worst".³⁸ Others repeated Tyndale's claim that the clergy refused to allow laymen to read the Bible in order to "keep the world still in darkness to the intent that they might sit in the consciences through vain superstition and false doctrine, to satisfy their filthy lusts, their proud ambition and. . . to exalt their honour above king and emperor, yea and above God himself".³⁹ The author of the Supplication to the Poor Commons agreed that priests "say it suffieth a layman to

³⁷ "The Examination and Death of Lord Cobham" in John Bale, Select Works, ed. Henry Christmas (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1859), p. 16.

³⁸ A Godly Invective in the Defense of the Gospel (London: R. Grafton, 1547), sig. D.1-11.

³⁹ A.W. Pollard (ed), Records, p. 122.

believe as they teach, and not to meddle with the interpretation of the Scripture and what meaneth that but that they would have us so blind again".⁴⁰ The continued use of Latin in religious services, he maintained, was an extension of this same policy. Priests "baptize our children in the Latin tongue bidding us say 'volo' and 'credo' when we know not what it is they demand of us".⁴¹ Without vernacular services and free access to English scriptures, many believed that laymen would be "unarmed and naked in every side" and consequently vulnerable to the "glosses, commentaries and scale points"⁴² of the clergy.

The growth of priestly authority was not the only thing that separated the primitive Church from its sixteenth century English successor, however, and records of heretical examinations indicate widespread hostility to the rites and ceremonies of medieval Catholicism. Bishop Bonner, for instance, noted that many persons in London "hath murmured, grudged or spoken

⁴⁰ Cowper (ed), Four Supplications, p. 64.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴² News from Rome concerning the blasphemous sacrifice of the papistical masse (Canterbury: J. Mychell, 1550), sig. A.ii; of. E.F. Rogers (ed), The Correspondance of Sir Thomas More (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 441.

against directly or indirectly the mass and other divine services, and the administration of sacraments and sacramentals".⁴³ An excellent example of such attacks on the uselessness of all sacramentals and ceremonies is the short verse tract by Peter Moone published by Ipswich printer John Owen in 1548. Lamenting the fact that sacramentals and rites had all but replaced "God's word" in religious services, Moone denounced

"holy palms, holy ashes, holy candles, holy fire
 .holy bones, holy stones, holy cruets at the altar
 holy censors, holy banners, holy crosses, holy atire
 holy wax, holy pax, holy smoke, holy smyer."

"We have", he complained, "bells christened, vestments consecrated, chalices anointed, high altars washed and hallowed" and every other conceivable ceremonial rite, all "by the jugglers invented that God's word should not flourish".⁴⁴ Without the benefit

⁴³ Articles to be enquired of in the general visitation of the Diocese of London (London: 1554), STC 10248.

⁴⁴ Peter Moone, A Short Treatise of Certain Things abused in the Popish Church, long used but now abolished to our consolation and God's word advanced, the light of our salvation (Ipswich: John Owen, 1548); partially printed with commentary in Thomas Corser (ed), Collectanea Anglo-Poetica, Pt. IX (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1879); cf. A.G. Dickens, "Peter Moone: the Ipswich Gospeller and Poet", Notes and Queries, Vol. XCCIX (1954), pp. 513-514.

of Moone's wit and verse, Thomas Dawley captured the same feeling when he told his clerical examiners that all church services were "baggage".⁴⁵ Grace Palmer, arrested for heresy in 1531, contended that it was unnecessary to bear palms on Palm Sunday because "it was but a thing used and need not",⁴⁶ a view supported by the anonymous pamphleteer who maintained that the "grevious observations of unprofitable traditions is not greatly to be required".⁴⁷ Hamond Bett, a Kent heretic, told his local church officials that when he died he "would have neither ringing or singing nor any manner of alms deed to be done for his soul and cared not whether he were buried in a ditch".⁴⁸ Joan Boucher likewise denounced matins and evensong as no better than "the rumbling of tubs",⁴⁹ while Alice Fonge thought that holy water was no help to salvation,⁵⁰ an opinion

⁴⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, pp. 304-305.

⁴⁶ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 33.

⁴⁷ A Compendious Treatise of Sclaundre (London: Rychard Lant, n.d.), STC 24216a; cf. Foxe, Vol. V, p. 26.

⁴⁸ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307; cf. Vol. IX, #1424, p. 569.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 312.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. XII, #221, pp. 94-95.

shared by the anonymous London heretic who pointed out that, while it may be religiously inefficacious, such blessed water was "more savory to make sauce with" and "is also a very good medicine for an horse with a galled back".⁵¹ John Tybal, detected in Kent in 1527, told his examiners that "the water of the sea and other running water" was virtually indistinguishable from holy water.⁵² More graphically, Margaret Toftes declared that her daughter could "piss as good holy water as the priest could make".⁵³

Saint-worship, images, and pilgrimages, all unknown in the primitive Church, were objects of vigorous attack. Paul Luther, for example, told his examiners that "saints cannot help us neither know any more what men do here in this world than a man in the north country knoweth what is done in the south country".⁵⁴ A Kent heretic named Bland main-

⁵¹ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 806.

⁵² Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307.

⁵³ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. XII, #436, p. 176; cf. Foxe, Vol. V, p. 27; John Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1837), Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 570.

tained that the "sight of the image of St. Michael with the balance was enough to bring a man to the devil" and that "no man may pray to saints for anything".⁵⁵ Thomas Carden, detected for heresy in 1543, felt that St. Katherine was "rather a devil in Hell than a saint in Heaven".⁵⁶ Robert Wisdom insisted that saints departed "do not come again and walk and play bopeep with us".⁵⁷ Attacks on the Virgin were especially popular. Rumors circulated in London, for instance, that the "Ave Maria" was written by a priest's harlot,⁵⁸ and London women claimed that "they be as good as Our Lady, for we have bore four or five children and know the father of them and she bore but one and knew not the father".⁵⁹ Margaret Toftes told the authorities that she saw no good reason for concluding that our Lady was in heaven,⁶⁰ and John Swynnerton agreed that, in heaven

⁵⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 311.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 306.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #539, pp. 314-316.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Vol. IX, #1424, p. 569.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Vol. XII, #1147, p. 529.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307.

or not, whe "was not of such honor as the people
 paid her".⁶¹ Many people believed that "our lady
 was no better than another woman".⁶²

Both images and pilgrimages, objects of in-
 creasing abuse, provoked considerable hostility.
The Fantasy of Idolatry, a verse satire on image-
 worship written in 1538, enjoyed a wide circulation.⁶³
 John Tybal felt that such images "were not profitable
 and that men should not worship or kneel to images in
 church, nor set up candles or lights before them; for
 they be but stocks and stones".⁶⁴ Margaret Toftes
 likewise felt that the "images in the church were
 devils and idols and wished the church and they were
 set on fire".⁶⁵ This transference of hostility from
 images to church buildings themselves was quite common.
 The anonymous author of a fifteenth century tract
 that circulated widely during the reign of Henry VIII

⁶¹ Ibid., Vol. IX, #1424, p. 569.

⁶² Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 806.

⁶³ The poem is printed in the 1563 edition of
 Foxe; cf. the comments of C.H. Firth, "The Ballad His-
 tory of the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII", Trans-
 actions of the Royal Historical Society, third series,
 Vol. II (London: Royal Historical Society, 1908), p. 37.

⁶⁴ Strype, Vol. II, Pt. I, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307.

pointed out that such buildings were without any special intrinsic worth and were useful only in so far as they kept out the wind and rain.⁶⁶ The author of the heretical tract The Revelation of Antichrist claimed that "the temple of God is not stones and wood neither in the time of Paul was there any house which was called the temple of God".⁶⁷ Among the heretical ideas cited as dangerous by the London clergy was a proposition stating that "it is not necessary or profitable to have any church or chancel to pray in",⁶⁸ while the author of a popular Protestant treatise on Christian worship defined a church as simply "a company gathered or assembled together of true and faithful Christian people which as members of one body. . . are fastened in one head Christ Jesus".⁶⁹

Hostility to pilgrimages, fast days and similar observances likewise increased markedly in the early sixteenth century. Stephen Gardiner complained about

⁶⁶ Swinburn (ed), The Lantern of Light, p. 42; cf. Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, pp. 311-313.

⁶⁷ Wilkins, Vol. III, pp. 729-730.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. III, p. 805.

⁶⁹ The True Belief in Christ and his Sacraments (London: G. Lynne, 1550).

the widespread distribution of the Legenda Aurea, a satirical work attacking pilgrimages, and remarked that Jack of Lenten Testament, a scurrilous verse pamphlet dealing with fasting, was being sold openly in Winchester market in 1547.⁷⁰ Robert Wisdom spoke for many when he told his examiners that no one was bound to observe any fast days,⁷¹ as did the anonymous London heretics who contended that "pilgrimages, fasting alms deed and such like are not to be used and that a man is not bound to the Church".⁷² Rumors circulated to the effect that the Ember Days were made with the intercession of the pope's concubine.⁷³ John Hewes warned prospective pilgrims that it "were better first that ye look upon your poor neighbors who lack succour".⁷⁴ Henry Brinkelow ably summarized the prevalent feeling against images, pilgrimages, and saint-worship, complaining that when the citizens of London "feel themselves plagued they go to Peter, Paul,

⁷⁰ J.A. Muller (ed), The Letters of Stephen Gardiner (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1933), pp. 311-312; of. Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 582.

⁷¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #539, p. 316.

⁷² Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 806.

⁷³ Letters and Papers, Vol. IX, #1424, p. 569.

⁷⁴ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34.

James and John, Martha and Mary and I think with a few years they will. . . call upon Thomas Wolsey late cardinal and upon the unholy (I should say) Holy Maid of Kent. Why not as well as upon Thomas Becket".⁷⁵

Much of this hostility toward the ceremonies of medieval Christianity found a focal point in attacks on the mass. "The blessed mass", Luke Shepherd reported, "is hated in every border and railed on and reviled".⁷⁶ Many heretics felt that the mass was simply a ceremony lacking both sacrificial character and precedent in the history of the early Church. "The Mass", John Ardeley maintained, "is of the pope and not of Christ and therefore it is not good, nor having in it any goodness saving the Gloria in Excelsis, the Epistles and Gospel, the Creed and the Pater Noster".⁷⁷ A popular translation of a Latin tract by Philip Melancthon contended that "masses were unknown before Gregory [VII]'s time" and were the creation of "doltish assheaded bishops".⁷⁸ John

⁷⁵ Brinkelow, Lamentation, p. 82.

⁷⁶ A.F. Pollard (ed), Tudor Tracts, p. 168.

⁷⁷ Foxe, Vol. VII, p. 90.

⁷⁸ Philip Melancthon, A Newe worck concernyng both partes of the sacrament to be receivyd of the lay people (London: Richard Jugge, 1546), sig. B.ii.ii.

Daye likewise denounced the mass as a product of "high professors", "Possessors" and "Confessors", contending that the mass had as little in common with Scripture as a heretic with a Christian.⁷⁹ The anonymous author of a pamphlet denouncing the mass and saint worship called for the rejection of both as unknown to the primitive Church.⁸⁰ Hostile to both the priesthood and the mass, heretics like John Young claimed that the mass was "of a juggler's making",⁸¹ while Thomas Fougeler claimed that he "would rather hear a dog sing" than listen to a priest at mass.⁸² Jasper Wetzell, detected in 1531, told his examiners that he "would as lieve go to the gallows where the thieves were hanged" as go to mass,⁸³ and Anne Askew told Archbishop Cranmer that she preferred to "read five lines in the Bible than hear five masses in the temple".⁸⁴ John Mayler, a London grocer, reported that the "blessed mass is called beyond the

⁷⁹ John Daye, The Upohering of the Messe (London: John Daye and Willyam Seres, 1547), STC 17630.

⁸⁰ News from Rome. . .

⁸¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. IX, #1424, p. 570.

⁸² Ibid., Vol. IX, #1424, p. 569.

⁸³ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Bale, Select Works, p. 149.

sea 'the mysse' for. . . all is amiss in it".⁸⁵
Robert Reynold, a stationer, declared that the mass
"was naught and the memento was bawdry and after the
consecration of the mass it was idolatry".⁸⁶ William
Turner also thought that the mass was an idolatrous
ceremony, "not ordained of God", contrary to Scrip-
ture, and "a blasphemous member of Antichrist".⁸⁷
William Punt captured the feeling of all of these
people when he remarked that as far as the mass and
ceremonies were concerned, "the nearer the church,
the further from God".⁸⁸

The priesthood, the mass, the sacraments and
the rites and ceremonies associated with saint-
worship, pilgrimages, fasting and images were a pro-
duct of medieval Catholicism. Lacking any clear
precedent in the primitive Church, they were all re-
jected by an emerging popular Protestantism that
sought a return to the religion of the first Christians.

⁸⁶
R.R. Sharpe, London and the Kingdom (London:
Longmans, Green and Co., 1894), Vol. I, p. 422.

⁸⁷
William Turner, A Newe Dialogue wherein is
contained the examination of the Masse and of that
kind of priesthoode (London: 1548), STC 24362.

⁸⁸
William Punt, A New Dialogue called the En-
dightment of Wether Messe (London: William Sites,
1548), STC 20500.

William Worsley, arrested for heresy in 1530, pointed the way toward this restoration when he confessed that "mass and matins is not the thing that shall save a man's soul but only to hear the word of God".⁸⁹ The constructive counterpart of heretical attacks on medieval hierarchical religion was an affirmation of the validity of a lay-oriented preaching religion stressing the ethical message of the gospels.

One of the major characteristics of English popular Protestantism was the enlarged role in religious affairs given to laymen. Unlike medieval Catholicism which sharply distinguished between cleric and non-cleric, even those heretics willing to concede the validity of holy orders insisted on the equality of priest and layman. "Every man", Roger Dichaunte contended, "is a priest and hath power to consecrate the Body of our Lord".⁹⁰ Abraham Waters,

⁸⁹

Foxe, Vol. V, p. 29.

⁹⁰

G. Hinde (ed), The Registers of Cuthbert Tunstall and James Pilkington, 1530-1539. (London: Surtees Society, 1952), p. 35. The best discussion of the role and importance of laymen in both medieval and sixteenth century European society are the articles by R.W. Southern and C.N.L. Brooke in S.C. Neill and H.R. Weber (eds), The Layman in Christian History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). On the role of laymen in sectarian religious groups

detected in 1527, told his examiners that he could "make a piece of bread the body of Almighty God, as well as the best priest of them all",⁹¹ an opinion shared by a group of anonymous heretics arrested in the following year in London.⁹² Robert Man, a servant arrested in 1531, was charged with heresy for asking a priest why a layman could only handle the chalice while wearing sheepskin gloves, ridiculing the implication that "God put more virtue in a sheepskin than he did in a Christian man's hands for whom he died".⁹³ The London clergy complained of the prevalence of the belief that any layman could administer sacraments,⁹⁴ and Jasper Wetzell told his examiners in 1531 that "he cared not for going to the church to hear mass, for he could say mass as well as the priest".⁹⁵

Epecially popular was the belief that confession to one's neighbor was more efficacious than

generally, see P. Alphandery, "Remarques sur le type sectaire dans l'heresologie medievale Latine", Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions, Vol. II (1908).

⁹¹ Strype, Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 113-114.

⁹² Foxe, Vol. V, p. 648.

⁹³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 33; cf. Letters and Papers, Vol. IV, #4444, p. 1945.

⁹⁴ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 805.

⁹⁵ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 32.

confession to a priest. George Bull, for instance, told the ecclesiastical authorities that "there be three confessions, one principal to God; another to his neighbor who he had offended and the third to a priest; and that without the first confessions . . . a man could not be saved".⁹⁶ Likewise, Richard Browne, a York man arrested in 1540, claimed that "if a man were deposed and thought it convenient he might be confessed of a lay man".⁹⁷ Henry Brinkelow encouraged people "to confess and reconcile themselves to their neighbors whom they have offended",⁹⁸ while Anne Askew agreed that every man "ought to acknowledge his faults to others", formal auricular confession to a priest being unnecessary.⁹⁹

These claims to lay powers of consecration and absolution were extended to include the ability to both interpret the Scriptures and preach their

⁹⁶ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34; cf. The True Belief in Christ and his Sacraments.

⁹⁷ Pervis, op. cit., p. 190.

⁹⁸ Henry Brinkelow, The Complaynt of Roderick Mors (London: Early English Text Society, 1904), p. 47.

⁹⁹ Bale, Select Works, p. 150; cf. Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 805.

message. James Bainham, for instance, insisted that "he that preacheth the word of God purely, whatsoever he be. . . hath the key that bindeth and looseth both in heaven and earth".¹⁰⁰ John Hig, detected in 1528, claimed that "all men might preach the gospel",¹⁰¹ while Henry Brinkelow was joined by many others in calling for all church services to be conducted in the vernacular,¹⁰² "that all may laud and praise God together". A popular heretical tract written in the fifteenth century but still enjoying a wide circulation in the reign of Henry VIII affirmed the right of every individual Christian to study the Scriptures in the vernacular and interpret them for himself.¹⁰³ Robert Wisdom admitted that he "trusted to see the day that maids would sing the Scripture at their wheels", a hope shared by John Lambert and many others as well.¹⁰⁴

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Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 703; cf. A.G. Dickens, "The Writers of Tudor Yorkshire", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series, Vol. XIII, pp. 58-59.

101

Letters and Papers, Vol. IV, #4038, p. 1793.

102

Brinkelow, Roderick Mors, p. 47; Cowper (ed), Four Supplications, p. 90; Turner, The hunting . . .

103

Swinburn (ed), The Lantern of Light, p. 16.

104

Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #538, p. 313; Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 181.

Especially revelatory of popular Protestant ideas on the equality of priest and layman was the controversy over clerical celibacy that characterized much English heretical thought. Clerics had long used celibacy as an additional means of setting themselves apart from the laity.¹⁰⁵ One of the fundamental premises of English heretical thought was that clerical celibacy was in no way superior to marriage. Henry Brinkelow contended¹⁰⁶ that priests had always been allowed to marry, and at least one anonymous author claimed that St. Paul had insisted that everyone should do so.¹⁰⁷ The author of an heretical exposition of St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians claimed that all of the apostles as well as the early Christian bishops had wives and noted that matrimony was to holy orders as gold was to dung.¹⁰⁸ In a lengthy treatise

¹⁰⁵ The best short summary of ancient and medieval ideas on clerical celibacy is A. Franzen, Zolibat und Priesterche in der Auseinandersetzung der Reformationszeit und der katholischen Reform des 16. Jahrhunderts (Munster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1969).

¹⁰⁶

Brinkelow, Roderick Mors, p. 48.

¹⁰⁷

The True Belief in Christ and his Sacraments.

¹⁰⁸

Wilkins, Vol. III, pp. 732-734.

on the marital state, Thomas Becon insisted that priests be allowed to marry and attacked the supposed superiority of virginity, appealing to the example of the primitive Church and using frequent quotations from Scripture and the Church fathers to support his arguments.¹⁰⁹

Becon's appeal to Scripture in this matter is both interesting and important. These sixteenth century Protestant thinkers insisted that their beliefs, unlike those of their medieval Catholic predecessors, were based solely on Scripture. Miles Hogarde described this fundamentalism as one of the English Protestant sects' most distinctive characteristics. They "allege, preach, utter or talk of nothing but Scripture", he contended, and they used this Biblical fundamentalism to support their claims to be the true Church.¹¹⁰ Robert Wisdom encouraged people to "take the Scriptures into their hands".¹¹¹ Henry Thomson praised the virtues of the New Testament

¹⁰⁹ Theodore Basille /Thomas Becon/, The Golden Book of Christen matrimony (London: John Mayler and John Gough, 1543).

¹¹⁰ Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes.

¹¹¹ Strype, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 570.

calling it "the Blood of Christ".¹¹² Robert Strawghwyn, an heretical preacher, told his followers emphatically that they "be not bound to believe anything which is not written or contained in the Holy Scripture".¹¹³ As the only surviving account of primitive Christianity, Scriptural sanction was the sole criterion of belief for these heretics. Without Scriptural sanction, the clerical ceremonial religion of medieval Catholicism had no validity in their eyes and was to be replaced by an anti-institutional faith identical with that of the early Church. "The people have not hitherto had the good wine of God's word", an heretical preacher named Sandwich claimed in one of his sermons, "but a day would come that they should have good wine again".¹¹⁴ This restored faith aimed at proclaiming the message of the gospels, stressing their ethical content at the expense of theology.

"If a man had a pair of beads or a book in

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Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34.

113

Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 308.

114

Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 292.

his hand", William Wegen told his examiners in 1529,
 "and were not disposed to pray, it was naught".¹¹⁵

Henry Brinkelow captured the prevailing feeling against the ceremonial, magical elements in clerical Christianity when he remarked that priests stressed quantity rather than quality in religious worship.¹¹⁶

"God", Hugh Cooper explained, "did not regard the prayers but the persons" and this affirmation of the importance of sincerity and piety in religious matters was a fundamental characteristic of English popular Protestant thought.¹¹⁷ A translation of a Dutch anticlerical tract, for instance, praised the Waldensians as true Christians whose antisacerdotalism was accompanied by a sincere spirit of charity, love of neighbor and humble piety, a combination that sixteenth century English heretics hoped to emulate. Thomas Becon's treatise on fasting developed the same theme, stressing the importance of sincerity and zeal in any form of Christian

¹¹⁵

Foxe, Vol. V, p. 28.

¹¹⁶

Brinkelow, Roderick Mors, p. 64.

¹¹⁷

The Original and Sprynge of all Sectes and Orders (London: J. Nykolson, 1537), STC 18849.

worship while recognizing the all-encompassing nature of the true Christian life. "The true Christian fast is to abstain not only from all kinds of meats and drinks", he maintained, "but also from all those things wherein the flesh hath pleasure and delectation, to occupy ourselves in all godly and spiritual exercises unto the glory of God, the comfort of our neighbor and the health of our own souls. But it is to be noted that this abstinence or fast must be freely and willingly done".¹¹⁸ This insistence on the importance of voluntary action was common to many Protestant tracts. The anonymous author of the Sum of Scripture, for example, contended that every Christian "must keep God's commandments by love and not by hope to get for his service everlasting life".¹¹⁹

The commandment of Christian love was fully discussed by Thomas Becon in a widely-circulated treatise called the New Nosegay written under the pseudonym Theodore Basil. Like the sweet-smelling floral bouquet from which it took its name, this

¹¹⁸ Thomas Becon, A Fruitful treatise of Fasting (London: John Day, 1552), STC 1722. The best study of Becon is R. Pineas, "Thomas Becon as a Religious Controversialist", Nederlandsch Archief voor kerk-geschiedenis, Vol. XLVI (1965), pp. 206-220.

¹¹⁹ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 731.

work was intended to provide spiritual refreshment and inspiration for the Christian reader through a series of Scriptural citations stressing the importance of humility, innocence, obedience, mutual assistance and charity. Unfortunately, the author lamented, "the Christian religion beginneth utterly to decay. We speak much of Christ but many live no part of Christ. Vice still regneth, virtue has no place".¹²⁰ Cast in the form of a dialogue between four fathers of the primitive church, the tract combined an exaltation of early Christianity with a denunciation of the ceremonial excesses of medieval religion and defense of the essentially ethical message of the gospel. Encouraging his readers to "live virtuously", Becon concluded that the true Christian will studiously do that unto the which God hath called him".¹²¹

The nature of this Christian calling was explicitly detailed in an anonymous pamphlet, one of many exploiting the familiar "Christian plowman"

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Theodore Basil (Thomas Becon), A Pleasant New Nosegay (London: J. Maylerre and J. Gough, 1542); cf. Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 733 for a list of condemned propositions from this work.

121

Ibid.; cf. Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 734.

motif, written around 1531. With heavy anticlerical and anti-ceremonial overtones, this work dwelled at length on the "Seven Commandments of the teachings of the gospels", a clear statement of the ethical ideals of English popular Protestantism. The first commandment, "to love God above all and thy brother as thy self", was supplemented by others extolling meekness, long-suffering, mercy, chastity and humility, together with an exhortation to "stand steadfastly in the truth".¹²² The increasing popularity of this view of Christianity as a way of life rather than a routinized system of salvation provoked a variety of similar works. The poet Peter Moone, for instance, after presenting a long denunciation of ceremonial abuses, encouraged all Christians to simply "love God above all things", claiming that this together with love of neighbor was the "chief foundation" of religion.¹²³ The anonymous author of a popular verse exposition of Protestant thought likewise encouraged all men to "live and

¹²²
The Praier and Complaynte of the Floweman unto Christ (Manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Tanner 23), STC 20036.

¹²³
 Moone, A Short Treatise.

go Christian like after the gospel",¹²⁴ while the author of an attack on the use of images written in 1538 urged Christians to win converts through example, "and prove Christ is alive in thee and that all thy deeds and saying do breath and savour of him".¹²⁵ All three of these works significantly contain many Scriptural citations, usually drawn from the Pauline epistles, together with frequent appeals to the example of the primitive Church.

This emphasis on the ethical content of the Christian message was accompanied by a disdain for theological speculation. Anne Askew, for example, told her examiners that she "knew not the course of schools" and was content to "believe as the Scripture doth teach".¹²⁶ "Universities", the author of the Revelation of Antichrist declared, "are the very confused cloud and opened gate of hell", while Archbishop Cranmer remarked that it was impossible to satisfy English heretics through theo-

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"The Booke in Metre of Robin Conscience" in W.C. Hazlitt (ed), Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England (London: John Russell Smith, 1866), Vol. III, pp. 225-247.

125

A Treatise declaring that pictures and other ymages are in no wise to be suffered in Churches (London: 1538), STC 24239.

126

Bale, Select Works, p. 158.

logical disputation and that any attempt to do so¹²⁷ only made them "hate learned men all the more". There was, in fact, a genuine belief in the desirability of theological ignorance. An anonymous pamphlet attacking the mass praised the "unlearned professors of the gospel",¹²⁸ and the theological unsophistication of the peasant in the "John Bon" dialogue enabled him to expose the weaknesses in the priest's arguments all the more easily. The author of a similar dialogue between a layman and a cleric maintained that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise",¹²⁹ and the introduction to a sixteenth century edition of an earlier Lollard work contended that "untaught men in the people shall teach full many men".¹³⁰ Henry Hart captured the spirit of this attitude when he pointed out that "truly knowledge is dangerous where love and obedience is lacking".¹³¹ The

¹²⁷ Letters and Papers, Vol. V, #10, p. 766.

¹²⁸ News from Rome, sig. A.ii.

¹²⁹ Pollard (ed), Tudor Tracts; A Dialogue or Disputation between a gentleman and a Priest (London: 1531); cf. the comments of C.H. Herford, Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886), p. 54.

¹³⁰ Wycklyffes Wycket wyoh he made in King Ry-cards days the second (Rosenburch: 1546), STC 25590.

¹³¹ Henry Hart, A Godly Newe Short Treatyse (London: Robert Staughton, 1548), STC 12887.

appeal of the moral rather than the intellectual side of Christianity was overwhelming for these sixteenth century Protestants.

A religion without ceremony, priesthood or speculative theology was the goal of English popular Protestantism. Drawing on the Bible as the only valid source of Christian inspiration, sixteenth century heretics sought a religion of the spirit that combined an anti-institutional disdain for medieval ceremonial with a firm belief in the simply ethical content of the Christian message. Margaret Toftes the elder, a Kent heretic detected in 1543, admitted to not having crept to the cross in the traditional Good Friday ceremony in three years, telling her examiners that "it was abominable idolatry and she would creep to the Lord in her heart, which was the right creeping"¹³². It was a religion without priesthood and the accompanying distinction between cleric and layman, without sacraments and the theological disputation associated with them, without ceremony and its attendant abuses. As in

¹³²
Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307; of. #539, pp. 314-316.

the case of Margaret Toftes, sincerity and zeal were of foremost importance, as these heretics believed they had been in the time of the apostles. This restoration of primitive Christianity accompanied by a repudiation of the religious developments of the Middle Ages was based on a firm conviction of the essentially ethical character of Christianity and the necessity of total commitment to its demands. As the author of the Revelation of Anti-christe explained, "God demandeth nothing but the heart".¹³³

¹³³ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 731.

CHAPTER II
NATIVE AND CONTINENTAL INFLUENCES IN ENGLISH
POPULAR PROTESTANTISM

, "All the sacraments of the Church" the accused heretic Stephen Swallow contended, "be void and of none effect". In the eucharist, "remaineth the substance of material bread" and baptism "is not necessary to the salvation of a child born between a Christian man and a Christian woman". Auricular confession, he maintained, was superfluous "if a man be contrite in his heart and make his confession secretly and inwardly to God". Purgatory, pilgrimages, images and ceremonies were without Scriptural sanction, as was the priesthood that instituted them. The Pope, he concluded graphically, "is an old hoore"¹. This testimony provides a good comprehensive summary

¹
A.F. Pollard (ed), The Reign of Henry VII from Contemporary Sources (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), p. 235.

of the chief tenets of English popular Protestantism - condemnation of the priesthood and medieval Catholicism, denial of transubstantiation and the efficacy of auricular confession, rejection of ceremonies and image-worship, and emphasis on sincerity and devotional zeal. Swallow made this confession of faith, however, in 1489, over a quarter of a century before the religious changes that marked the beginning of the Reformation in England. The fact that a fifteenth century heretic could anticipate so much of sixteenth century religious belief points up the close relationship between English popular Protestant thought and its medieval heretical predecessors.

Swallow was what contemporaries called a "Lollard", although it is extremely unlikely that even the ecclesiastical officials who condemned the persons to whom the name was applied fully understood it. Literally, a Lollard was a "murmerer", one who spoke against the Church and the term was used both in England and on the continent throughout the later Middle Ages. In England, Lollardy was a late fourteenth and fifteenth century

heresy associated vaguely in the public mind with the teachings of John Wyclif, although contemporaries never formulated an adequate definition of it. Chaucer's parish priest, for instance, found himself accused of being a Lollard merely on the strength of a few anticlerical remarks,² while an Elizabethan court book described Lollards as persons who refused to observe fast days.³ Reginald Pecock, who probably understood these Lollards as well as anyone in the fifteenth century, thought that insistence on the importance of Scripture was the focal point of their belief. "It seems to them", he explained, "that they need nothing into the school of God's law and service save Holy Scripture alone".⁴ Anticlericalism, hostility to Church traditions, and Scriptural fundamentalism were certainly three close points of contact between medieval

An examination of two representative Lollard works

² Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, ed. Nevill Coghill (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 173.

³ The Articles of Lete and Courte and the Liberties of Southwarke (London: John Cawood, 1561).

⁴ Reginald Pecock, The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy, ed. C. Babington (London: Longmans, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), Vol. I, p. 129; cf. E.F. Jacob, "Reynald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester", Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. XXXVII (1951), pp. 121-153.

further emphasizes the strength of this relationship.⁵

The "Twelve Conclusions" was a late fourteenth century statement of Lollard tenets that indicated the importance of religious primitivism and anti-sacerdotal elements in this late medieval English heresy.⁶ "Our usual priesthood", the authors contended, "is not that priesthood which Christ ordained for his apostles", and this implication of clerical

⁵ Worthwhile studies on medieval Lollardy include K.B. MacFarlane, John Wyclif and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity (New York: MacMillan Co., 1952); J.A.F. Thomson, The Later Lollards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), the best study of the movement in the fifteenth century; J. Fines, "Studies in the Lollard Heresy" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation; University of Sheffield, 1964); and G.F. Nutthall, "The Lollard Movement after 1384: its characteristics and continuity", Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society, Vol. XII (1935), pp. 243-250. Gustav A. Benrath, "Stand und Aufgaben der Wyclif-Forschung", Theologische Literaturzeitung, Vol. XCCII (1967), pp. 262-263 is a good survey of recent literature on both Wyclif and the Lollards, while Edith C. Tatnall, "John Wyclif and Ecclesia Anglicana", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. XX (1969), pp. 19-43 deals with religious primitivism in Wyclif's writings. More specialized studies include E.J.B. Ried, "Lollards at Colchester, 1414", English Historical Review, Vol. XXIX (1914), pp. 101-103 and Raymond Fourville, "Manifestations de Lollardisme a Exeter in 1421", Le Moyen Age, Vol. LXIX (1963), pp. 691-706.

⁶ Text in Henry Gee and W.J. Hardy (eds), Documents Illustrative of English Church History (London: MacMillan Co., 1896), pp. 126-133 and W.W. Shirley (ed), Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif (London: Roofs Series, 1858), pp. 360-369.

deviation from the practices of the first Christians was accompanied by a condemnation of all ceremonies lacking Scriptural sanction. Denying the validity of both transubstantiation and auricular confession, the author defended the ability of the layman to dispense all sacraments and perform all religious rites. An attack on the value of theological speculation followed a denial of the superiority of clerical celibacy and an exaltation of the role of the layman in Christian society.

The Examination of William Thorpe, a fifteenth century heretical account of the trial and testimony of a Lollard arrested by Archbishop Arundel in 1407, contained these same anticlerical and antisacerdotal ideas so important in later sixteenth century popular Protestant thought. Like the anonymous authors of the "Twelve Conclusions", Thorpe rejected all images, pilgrimages and saint-worship as the devil's work, all the more dangerous for detracting from the propagation of the gospel. "Both men and women", he explained, "delight now more for to hear and know miracles, than they do to know God's Word or to hear it effectuously. Wherefore, to the great confusion of all that thus do Christ saith, ' The

generation of adulterers requireth tokens, miracles, and wonders'. Nevertheless, as divers Saints say, now, when the faith of God is published in Christendom, the Word of God sufficeth to man's salvation, without such miracles".⁷ He also felt that there was a wide gap between the fifteenth century Church and that of the earliest Christians, that the priests of his day "live contrary to Christ and His Apostles" and was insistent about the necessity of reading and accepting the message of Scripture. "The Gospel is not the Gospel", he maintained, "for the reading of the letter, but for the belief that men have in the Word of God; that is for the Gospel that we believe, and not the letter we read: for because the letter that is touched with man's hands is not the Gospel, but the sentence that is verily believed in man's heart is the Gospel".⁸ Affirming that the Bible contained all laws necessary to Christian men, he encouraged his readers to "follow Christ patiently, travailing busily, prively

⁷ A.W. Pollard (ed), Fifteenth Century Prose and Verse (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), p. 137.

⁸ Ibid., p. 153.

and apertly, in work and in word, to withdraw whomsoever that they may from vices, planting in them virtues, comforting them and furthering them that standeth in grace; so that therewith they be not borne up into vainglory through presumption of their wisdom, nor enflamed with any worldly prosperity: but ever meek and patient, purposing to abide steadfastly in the Will of God".⁹

It is significant that the testimonies of both Swallow and Thorpe, together with the "Twelve Conclusions", anticipated so much of what was later associated with English popular Protestantism. It would be difficult to over-estimate the many similarities between Lollardy and sixteenth century heresy. Anticlericalism and anti-intellectualism, hostility to ceremonies, Scriptural fundamentalism with an emphasis on the ethical message of the gospel and the importance of zealous devotion were religious ideals both believed they shared with the earliest Christians. Orthodox contemporaries were themselves aware of the closeness of this relationship. William Peryn, for instance, noted that "the horrible heresy

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Ibid., p. 105.

of Berengar and Wyclif, sacramentaries abominable, was railed again of late by means of evil and pestiferous books crept secretly into the hearts of many".¹⁰ The rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace likewise demanded the extirpation of the "heresies of Wyclif",¹¹ while Lollard writings enjoyed considerable circulation in sixteenth century heretical communities.¹² Especially popular were Thorpe's examination, an account of the trial of Sir John Oldcastle, a Lollard indictment of sacramentals called the Lantern of Light, and a spurious fifteenth century pamphlet attributed to Wyclif entitled The Wicket, an antisacerdotal summary of Lollard ideas on the priesthood and sacraments. George Bull's belief that "where Wyclif's bones were burnt sprang up a well" indicated the growing reputation of the Lollards' supposed progenitor in sixteenth century heretical circles.¹³ An even

¹⁰ William Peryn, Three godly and notable sermons of the most honorable and blessed Sacrament (London: 1548), STC 19780.

¹¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. V, #10, p. 766.

¹² Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 24-39 gives some typical examples; the authoratative study is Margaret Aston, "Lollardy and the Reformation: Survival or Revival?", History, Vol. XLIX (1964), p. 162.

¹³ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34.

more significant indication of the relationship of English popular Protestantism to its medieval predecessor was the combined printing of an edition of Wyclif's Wicket with a confession of faith made by John Lancelles, a sixteenth century heretic arrested for deviant opinions about transubstantiation, confession and ceremonies, as well as a denial of any priestly power except the ability¹⁴ "to preach and pronounce the lord's death". Equally interesting is the fact that Bishop Bonner warned his London diocesan clergy to be on guard against anyone who "hath murmured" against divine services, the use of this particular phrase significantly pointing up an awareness of Lollard survivals in mid-century heresy.¹⁵ As late as 1555, new editions of Wyclif's works attracted considerable attention in Protestant circles. A 1550 edition of one of Wyclif's Biblical commentaries, for instance, contained not only a commendatory epistle praising the importance of his

¹⁴ Wycklyffes Wycket (Rosenburch: 1547), STC 25591a; also 25590, 25591, and 25592.

¹⁵ Articles to be enquired of . . . in the diocese of London.

religious thought but an illustrative woodcut¹⁶ depicting the heretic in a solemn pose. Clearly, Lollardy stamped sixteenth century English popular heresy with its own anticlerical, antisacerdotal and anti-intellectual tendencies. An examination of the reception and assimilation of continental Protestant ideas by the sixteenth century English heretical community reveals how indelible this stamp was.

Largely because of the difficulties of travel¹⁷ caused by geographical isolation, continental heretical movements had little influence in medieval England. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed only two instances of any sort of continental heresy in England. In 1161 a group of about thirty German-speaking men and women were arrested in Oxfordshire on charges of speaking against the sacraments. They were probably Waldensians and with the exception of their leader were all illiterate.

¹⁶ A True copy of a Prologue written about two C. yeres paste by John Wycliffe (London: Robert Crowley, 1550), STC 25588.

¹⁷ On this point see J.B. Russell, Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 309, n.80 and Gordon Leff, Hersey in the Late Middle Ages (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), Vol. I, p. 33, n.2.

Their preaching gained them only one convert, an old woman who later abjured.¹⁸ All were punished in a manner that was evidently sufficiently terrifying to discourage similar immigrants for the next incident occurred almost fifty years later when a suspected Catharist heretic was arrested in London. If he made any converts before his speedy execution by local ecclesiastical authorities in 1210, there is no record of them.¹⁹

The early sixteenth century, however, witnessed an increasingly rapid influx of continental Protestant ideas and writings and there is considerable evidence that English heretical communities had considerable contact with both Lutheran and Anabaptist thought. The Ninety-Five Theses first appeared in England sometime before 1520, a year in which the flood of Lutheran books was so great that ecclesiastical authorities threatened burning.²⁰

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The major contemporary account from the chronicle of William of Newburgh is translated in W. Wakefield and A. Evans (eds), Heresies in the High Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 245-247.

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Details with references in Arno Borst, Die Katharer (Stuttgart: Hiersmann Verlag, 1953), p. 94.

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Proben to Luther, 14 February 1519, quoted in Charles Mallet, A History of the University of Oxford (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), Vol. I, p. 656; cf. Letters and Papers, Vol. III,

Henry Edgeworth, a preacher active during the reigns of Henry VIII and Mary, recalled that while he was a young divinity student "Luther's heresies rose and were scattered here in this realm, which in less space than a man would think, had so sore affected the Christian folk. . . that the king's majesty and all Christian clerks in the realm had²¹ much ado to extinguish them". By 1531, Lutheran ideas were sufficiently widespread to attract the notice of imperial Ambassador Chapuys and the invective of preachers at Paul's Cross,²² and even the King himself had read Luther's tract on the Babylonian Captivity.²³ This rapid diffusion of Lutheran works provoked not only a series of declamatory

#810, p. 284. Good general accounts of the Lutheran movement include E.G. Rupp, Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) and The Righteousness of God (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953); H.M. Smith, Henry VIII and the Reformation (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962); G. Constant, "La transformation du Culte Anglican sous Edward VI", Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique, Vol. XII (1911), pp. 38-80, 242-270, 474-495; and N.S. Tjernagel, Henry VIII and the Lutherans (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

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Quoted in F.A. Gasquet, Eve of the Reformation (London: George Bell and Sons, 1923), p. 188; cf. Letters and Papers, Vol. V, #148, p. 68.

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Letters and Papers, Vol. V, #283, p. 132; M. Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534-1642 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), p. 22.

²³

Letters and Papers, Vol. III, #1193, p. 449.

sermons by John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, but also an elaborate book-burning ceremony staged by Cardinal Wolsey at Paul's Cross, followed two months later by the publication of the King's defense of the seven sacraments.²⁴ A list of books condemned by Cuthbert Tunstall in 1526 and again in 1531 contains several of Luther's own works plus a supposed anthology of Lutheran writings entitled "Piae Predicationes", a no longer extant collection known to have circulated in heretical circles in an English translation by Geoffrey Lome.²⁵ In addition to the German reformer's own writings, Lutheran ideas reached English audiences through the works of Tyndale, Robert Barnes and other native Lutherans. Tyndale's Wicked Mammon, for instance, leaned heavily on Luther's sermon on the unjust steward in providing a sharp defense of justification by

²⁴ J. Mayor (ed), The English Works of John Fisher (London: Early English Text Society, 1935); G.J. Gray, "Fisher's Sermons against Luther", The Library, Vol. III (1912), p. 62; Letters and Papers, Vol. III, #1210, p. 455, #1233, p. 467, #1273, p. 485, #1336, p. 536, #1740, p. 733; Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 421-422; Mallet, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 441.

²⁵ Strype, Vol. I, p. 254; Letters and Papers, Vol. V, #18, p. 768; James Gairdner (ed), Three Fifteenth Century Town Chronicles (London: Camden Society, 1880), pp. 89-90; A Proclamation to avoid such English Books (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1546); Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 586; Vol. V, p. 26.

faith,²⁶ while Robert Barnes followed Luther's commentaries on the epistles and gospels closely in a series of works that enjoyed considerable popularity during the reign of Henry VIII.²⁷ John Frith published an enlarged pseudonymous translation of Luther's De Antichristo in 1529 and there is evidence that these writings penetrated even the northernmost parts of the kingdom.²⁸

Like these Lutheran ideas, Anabaptist thought was well-known in sixteenth century English heretical communities. By 1531, in fact, a contemporary observer noted that they had gained a "firm footing"²⁹ in England, and in May of 1535 a group

²⁶ William Tyndale, Writings (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.); cf. Preserved Smith, "Englishmen at Wittenberg in the Sixteenth Century", English Historical Review, Vol. XXXVI (1921), p. 422, n.3 and L.J. Trinterud, "A Reappraisal of William Tyndale's Debt to Martin Luther", Church History, Vol. XXXI (1962), pp. 24-45, both of which deal with Tyndale's relationship to Lutheran thought.

²⁷ Alan G. Chester, "Robert Barnes and the Burning of Books", Huntington Library Quarterly, Vol. XIV (1951), p. 212; N.S. Tjernagel, "Dr. Robert Barnes and Anglo-Lutheran Relations, 1521-1540", (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: State University of Iowa, 1955), summarized in Church History, Vol. XXV (1956), pp. 372-373.

²⁸ W.A. Clebsch, "The Earliest Translations of Luther into English", Harvard Theological Review, Vol. XVI (1963), pp. 76-77; Purvis, op. cit., p. 189.

²⁹ Letters and Papers, Vol. VIII, #846, p. 323.

of twenty-four Dutch or Flemish Anabaptists were burned at Smithfield and several other towns.³⁰ A royal proclamation of 1536 noted the arrival of many "rebaptized persons" in the realm,³¹ the king himself receiving regular reports on the progress of Anabaptism both at home and abroad, especially in Munster where a number of refugees were reportedly heading toward England.³² By 1538, the growing number of English Anabaptists had issued a printed

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John Stow, The Chronicle of England (London: R. Newlievie, 1580), p. 1004; Letters and Papers, Vol. VIII, #771, p. 290, #846, p. 323; Ralph Flenley (ed), Six Town Chronicles of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 197; Charles Wriothesley, A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors, ed. William Hamilton (London: Camden Society, 1875), Vol. I, p. 35. The progress of Anabaptism in England is less well known than that of Lutheranism, largely because of the lack of easily obtainable secondary accounts. The most comprehensive study is I.B. Horst, "Anabaptism and the English Reformation", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of Amsterdam, 1966). It is scheduled for publication in expanded form in 1971, but can be found briefly summarized as the article "England" in the Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. II. Older, but still informative, accounts include D.B. Heriot, "Anabaptism in England during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", Congregational Historical Society Transactions, Vol. XII (1935), pp. 256-271 and B.P. Roosen, "Die Angange der Taufgesinten in England", Mennonitische Blatter, Vol. III (1856), pp. 73-76. Robert Friedmann, "Conception of the Anabaptists", Church History, Vol. IX (1940), pp. 341-366 contends that there were no Anabaptists in England before the seventeenth century.

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Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 779; A Proclamation concerning Heresie (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1536).

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Letters and Papers, Vol. VIII, #197, p. 76; #475, p. 183; #982, p. 388.

book on the Incarnation³³ and, in the same year, a number of Dutch Anabaptists were burned at Smithfield while four other suspects bore faggots at Paul's Cross.³⁴ As a result of this increased heretical activity, a royal commission headed by Archbishop Cranmer was appointed to examine suspected Anabaptists and turn those who refused to recant over to the King's government for punishment.³⁵ In 1539, a royal proclamation promised a pardon to any person "seduced" by Anabaptist errors,³⁶ evidently reflecting the growing fear that Munster emigrants were on their way to England, a fear supported by the appearance of a short pamphlet describing Anabaptist activities in Germany and featuring a woodcut illustration of John of Leyden on the front page.³⁷ At least one royal administrator lamented

³³ Peter Tesch to Jorg Schnabel, in W. Kohler et al, Urkundlich Quellen zur Hessischen Reformationsgeschichte, Bd. IV (Marburg: G. Braun, 1951), pp. 158-162; partially reprinted in translation in Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #265, p. 105.

³⁴ Wriothesley, Vol. I, p. 90.

³⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XIII, #498, p. 195.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. XIV, #374, p. 144.

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. XIII, #427, p. 163, Vol. XIV, #103, p. 40; A Trewe nyewe tydynges of the wonderfull worckes of the Rebaptizers of Mustzer (London: 1540), STC 546; or. K. Vos, "De Delftsche martalaren", Doopsgezinde Bijdragen (1917), pp. 160-167.

this state of affairs,³⁸ while Bishop Hooper re-
 marked that Anabaptists regularly flocked to hear
 his sermons.³⁹ In an attempt to check further
 diffusion, especially among the large alien popu-
 lation of the city of London, King Edward VI
 gave the resident Germans the Austin Friars' Church
 for their own services,⁴⁰ but England continued
 to gain a reputation as "a harbor for all infidelity".⁴¹

³⁸ Letters and Papers, Vol. XIV, #11, p. 8.

³⁹ Henry Robinson (ed), Original Letters rela-
 tive to the History of the Reformation in England
 (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1839), Vol. I, p. 65.

⁴⁰ J.G. Nichols (ed), Literary Remains of
 King Edward VI (New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.),
 Vol. II, p. 280; G.B. Beeman, "The Early History
 of the Stranger's Church", Proceedings of the
 Huguenot Society of London, Vol. XV (1934), pp. 261-282.
 A letter from Francis Dryander to Joachim Vadian,
 5 June 1549 in Robinson (ed), Original Letters,
 Vol. I, p. 352 contended that there were about 4,000
 German aliens in London at mid-century. Studies on
 the number and significance of the alien population
 of England in the late medieval and early Tudor
 period include M. Roslor, "Die Lebensweise der Aus-
 lander in England im Spateren Mittelalter und in
 Der Renaissance", Englische Studien, Vol. LXVIII
 (1933), pp. 17-58; Sylvia Thrupp, "Survey of the
 Alien Population of England in 1440", Speculum,
 Vol. XXXII, pp. 262-273; Vincent Redstone, "The Dutch
 and Huguenot Settlements of Ipswich", Proceedings of
 the Huguenot Society of London, Vol. XII (1917),
 pp. 183-204; Lionel Williams, "Alien Immigrants in Re-
 lation to Industry and Society in Tudor England",
Ibid., Vol. XIX (1952), pp. 146-169; William Cunningham,
Alien Immigrants to England (London: Frank Cass and
 Co., 1969), an older but extremely useful account.

⁴¹ William Turnbull (ed), Calendar of State Papers,
 Foreign Series of the Reign of Edward VI (London: Long-
 mans, Green, Longman, Roberts, 1861), p. 122. Fully

as Anabaptist activity continued largely unchecked,⁴² especially in Kent, into the reign of Queen Mary.

Any analysis of the spread of continental Protestantism is complicated by the ambiguous way in which contemporaries used the terms "Lutheran" and "Anabaptist". Especially in the earliest years of the Reformation, the term "Lutheran" was applied to any religious ideas that were the least bit suspect by English ecclesiastical authorities, whether or not they were shared by Luther himself. Even as late as 1550, there was sufficient uncertainty in this respect to enable one contemporary witness to define a Lutheran as a person who wanted Church services to be in the vernacular, making no mention of distinctive Lutheran theological opinions.⁴³ In the same way, the term "Anabaptist" was freely and pejoratively applied to offenses ranging from a simple

quoted in P.J. Tytler, England under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), Vol. I, pp. 379-380.

⁴² Robert Lemon (ed), Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1547-1580 (London: Longmans, Brown, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1856), Vol. XV, #35, p. 46; Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward VI (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925), Vol. III, p. 347; Strype, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 19.

⁴³ News from Rome, sig. A.ii.

reluctance to attend Mass to a complete denial of transubstantiation.⁴⁴ This very ambiguity is itself significant however. In Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, there was little difficulty in distinguishing the essential characteristics of either Lutheranism or Anabaptism. Lutheranism, especially, was a system of well-defined theological ideas, and Anabaptism, although more complex, had certain characteristics that set it apart from its other Protestant contemporaries. Yet English witnesses were clearly unable to distinguish either one of them from native antisacerdotal ideas popular for a century and a half. It is too easy to mistake the rapid infiltration of Lutheran and Anabaptist thought into England for evidence of acceptance by popular Protestant communities. English heretics took from these continental Protestant movements beliefs compatible with their Lollard background. While there were Lutheran and Anabaptist ideas in the air, there were few Lutherans or Anabaptists in mid-sixteenth century English heretical groups.

An examination of the assimilation of Lutheran thought by English heretical circles indicates the great strength of native heretical traditions. The

impressive amount of available information concerning the introduction of Lutheranism into early sixteenth century England encourages an over-estimate of its impact on popular Protestant beliefs. Many Lutheran works circulated exclusively in university circles, far removed from the anti-intellectualism of popular heresy. There is no indication that English heretics were interested in Lutheran theology. The strong anticlerical elements inherent in their basically Lollard outlook were attracted instead to the personality of the German reformer, especially his personal defiance of the papacy. For many of them, Luther was less theologian than hero, the "discloser of the Pope's Juggling Box", as one anonymous author described him.⁴⁵ The most complete analysis of Lutheran thought written by a sixteenth century Englishman concentrated exclusively on Luther's anti-clericalism, ignoring theology with the exception of a few brief comments on his view of transubstantiation, significantly misrepresenting the reformer's position as indistinguishable from Lollardy.⁴⁶ The Oxford

⁴⁵ The Disclosing of the Canon of ye Popish Masse (London: Hans Utpryche, 1548).

⁴⁶ William Barlow, A Dyaloge describing the original ground of these Lutheran facoyens (London: William Rastell, 1531), STC 1461.

bookseller John Dorne sold fourteen copies of Luther's works during the year 1520, a relatively large number for the early sixteenth century, only two less than the combined total of all works of St. Augustine, St. Gregory and St. Jerome sold by him during the same year. Of these fourteen, six were copies of Luther's De Poteste Papae,⁴⁷ an anticlerical attack on the powers of the pope. Similarly, the widely circulated anthology of Lutheran writings entitled "Piae Predicationes" reflected the anticlerical and anti-papal sympathies of the editor, Geoffrey Lome, a man with known contacts in Lollard communities and a background of heretical activity.⁴⁸ For some, like George Bull, Luther was simply "a good man",⁴⁹ while William Weger praised him for "preaching twice a day" without reference to his theology.⁵⁰ This pre-occupation with the ethical message of Christianity and the recognition of the importance of preaching

⁴⁷ C.R.L. Fletcher (ed), Collectanea (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1885), Vol. I, pp. 149, 160, 164; cf. Preserved Smith, "English Opinions of Luther", Harvard Theological Review, Vol. X (1917), pp. 129-135.

⁴⁸ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34; Edward Hall, A Chronicle of England (New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 736.

⁴⁹ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 28.

the gospel, combined with the anticlericalism implicit in much Lutheran thought to increase its popularity among heretics already influenced by decades of Lollard antisacerdotalism.

The common ground between Lollardy and Lutheranism accounted for the great attraction of the idea of a priesthood of all believers, with its implicit critique of the claims of the clergy to special status and the affirmation of the individual's ability to establish a relationship with his God without clerical mediation, and justification by faith often associated with a disdain for ceremonies and rituals. Both opinions were preached by John Hardyman in his parish of St. Martin in Iron-Monger Lane, London⁵¹ and Thomas Hardyng in Lincoln. Hardyng, like Geoffrey Lome, had a long history of anticlerical agitation before being attracted to Lutheran thought.⁵² A translation of a Dutch Protestant tract mixed these ideas of justification and believer's priesthood

⁵¹
Letters and Papers, Addenda, Vol. I, #1463, p. 499, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 317; Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 731.

⁵²
 G.E. Wharhurst, "The Reformation in the Diocese of Lincoln as illustrated in the Life and Work of Bishop Longland", Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society Reports, Vol. I (1939), pp. 169-170, quoting Longland's register. On Hardyng's connections with Lollard groups, see Margaret Bowker (ed), Episcopal Court Book for the diocese of Lincoln, 1514-1520 (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1967), pp. 15-16.

with an insistence on the importance of right behavior and love of one's neighbor,⁵³ but the most illustrative intermingling of Lutheran and native Protestant thought was a pamphlet entitled Tracy's Testament. Significantly, this tract was often printed with Lollard works. Tracy, a "worshipful esquire of Gloucester", was a man of advanced Protestant sentiments whose last will and testament combined a disavowal of the efficacy of saint worship and funeral ceremonies with a strong affirmation of the sole necessity of faith for the salvation of the individual soul. Quoting St. Augustine to the effect that "the funeral pomps are rather the solace of them that live", he would have none at his own burial "and further said that he trusted in God only and hoping by him to be saved and not by no saint". "Touching the wealth of my soul", he continued, "the faith that I have taken and rehearsed is sufficient without any other man's work or works". Reflecting the ethical pre-occupation of the Lollards and their sixteenth century successors,

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The True Belief in Christ and His Sacraments.

Tracy maintained that "a good work maketh not a good man but a good man maketh a good work, for⁵⁴ faith maketh the man both good and righteous". The tract was often printed with a commentary by Tyndale commending both the Lutheran and Lollard⁵⁵ elements in Tracy's thought.

This compatibility of continental and native Protestant ideas that so greatly influenced the reception of Lutheran thought in English heretical communities, also affected the assimilation of Anabaptism. There were, of course, many similarities between Anabaptism and Lollardy. Both denied transubstantiation and the efficacy of ceremonies, stressing moral didacticism and the virtues of piety and humility. But Anabaptists took an interest in theological speculation that Lollards never shared. The spread of Anabaptist theology among heretics normally disdainful of any sort of speculation can only be explained with reference to its appeal to certain aspects of native tradition.

This was certainly the case with the most famous

⁵⁴ Hall, pp. 796-797; Foxe, Vol. V, p. 31; for some indication of the distribution and popularity of the work see Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 29, 38-39.

⁵⁵ See STC 25588, 25590 and 25591.

of all Anabaptist tenets, the concept of believer's baptism. Only one Englishman, Robert Cooche, produced any written refutation of the validity of infant baptism. Cooche's work has unfortunately been lost but it can be partially reconstructed from the lengthy excerpts quoted in a controversial rebuttal by William Turner.⁵⁶ Denying the validity of the concept of original sin in infants, Cooche argued that baptism was merely an outward sign symbolizing the acceptance of the inward message of the gospel, an acceptance only meaningful when made by an adult capable of understanding the baptismal statutes and willing to amend his life in accordance with them. Without this willingness, baptismal vows were meaningless. "Christ had his disciples to preach the comfortable tidings to every creature of mankind: but he never had baptize other than such as their preaching would believe", he maintained, for "by baptism alone is no salvation but by baptism and preaching and certain it is that God is able to have his chosen Church without these means". Although

⁵⁶ William Turner, A Preservative or triacle agaynst the poyson of Pelagius (London: R. Jugge, 1551), STC 24368.

it was never printed, Cooche's treatise apparently circulated in manuscript form and was sufficiently popular to provoke Turner's refutation. Yet, despite this popularity, there is no evidence that Englishmen underwent rebaptism in any large numbers. In fact, there is no evidence that any Englishmen were rebaptized at all and, though a royal proclamation made mention of rebaptized adults, the persons involved were clearly foreigners. The appeal of the treatise lay instead in its many affinities with native heretical ideas. Like Lollard heretics, Cooche stressed the importance of the regeneration of the spirit accompanying the administration of the spirit accompanying the administration of the baptismal rite, a regeneration without which the rite was useless. Like native heretics, Cooche also insisted on the importance of preaching as vital to salvation, and his defense of both regeneration and preaching rested on appeals to the example of the primitive church. Lollard communities detected as late as 1511 had held similar opinions about the efficacy of baptism and the ceremonies that surrounded it. ⁵⁷ William

⁵⁷ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, pp. 306-314; A.B. Hinds (ed), Calendar of State

Nicholson, an English heretic detected in 1538, had told his examiners that infants were not to be baptized,⁵⁸ while an heretical preacher named Bland taught his followers that "in christening of children priests be murderers".⁵⁹ Cooche's work appealed to this native heretical tradition and the strength of such appeal alone sufficiently accounts for its popularity.

While Cooche's views on the validity of infant baptism appealed to a firmly rooted native heretical tradition that disdained all ceremonies and rites, nothing seems further removed from that tradition than the Melchiorite belief that at the time of the Incarnation Christ took no flesh of the Virgin. First popularized by the Dutch Anabaptist Melchior Hoffman, this view of the Incarnation was widespread in mid-sixteenth century England despite its highly speculative, almost esoteric character. Briefly, Hoffman and his followers believed that Christ brought

Papers: Milan (London: Hereford Times, Ltd., 1912), p. 380; Wilkins, Vol. III, pp. 729-230, 809; Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 698, Vol. V, p. 650.

⁵⁸ Wriothesley, Vol. I, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁹ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 312.

his body with him from heaven and owed nothing of his substance to the Virgin Mary, through whom he passed like water through a pipe.⁶⁰ Their ideas were known in England by the later years of the reign of Henry VIII. John Raulinges, a London man, was known to have distributed a printed work expounding this Melchiorite opinion, while John Clarke, a suspected Anabaptist, owned forty copies himself.⁶¹ Unfortunately, the treatise is no longer extant. Michael Thombe, a London butcher and one of the few English native Anabaptists known by name, had evidently read it or the works of Hoffman himself because he told Archbishop Cranmer in 1549 that "Christ took no flesh of our lady" and confessed to having taught this opinion to others.⁶² Joan Bocher, probably the most notorious of all sixteenth century English heretics,⁶³

⁶¹ Letters and Papers, Addenda, Vol. I, #809, p. 281.

⁶² John Strype, The Life of Thomas Cranmer, D.D. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1837), Vol. I, p. 257; Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 42.

⁶³ The literature on Joan Bocher, also known as Joan Butcher, Joan Boucher, and Jean of Kent, is enormous. The major primary accounts include Stow, Chronicle, p. 1004; Robinson (ed), Original Letters, Vol. I, p. 65; Wriothesley, Vol. II, pp. 12-13; Letters and Papers, Vol. XV, #498, p. 217; John Hooper, Later Writings (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1857), pp. 1-2; Thomas Becon, Early Works (Cambridge:

was burned for it in the same year and contemporary estimates of the number of her followers in the city of London run as high as one thousand. ⁶⁴ Although this figure is certainly exaggerated, it is clear that this highly speculative view of the Incarnation gained considerable notoriety among a group of people usually disdainful of theological speculation of any sort. At first glance it seems to have nothing in common with native beliefs but more careful examination reveals similarities that make its appeal more understandable.

Virginity and saint worship were both unpopular with English heretics. Implicit in the Melchiorite view of the Incarnation was an attack on the Virgin, the center of much veneration in both the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, as well as a denigration of supposedly superior clerical celibacy.

Parker Society, 1843), pp. 410-418; and Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 43. T.J. Van Braght, A Martyrology of the Churches of Christ commonly called Baptist, ed. E.B. Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1850), pp. 348-350 provides a complete narrative with quotations from original sources. Edmund Becke's poem, "A brefe Confutation of this most detestable and Anabaptistical Opinion" in J.P. Collier (ed), Illustrations of Early English Popular Literature (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), Vol. II, pp. 1-12 is an attack that presents the orthodox reaction to Anabaptist thought.

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Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes.

The Lollards had insisted on these two points for well over a century. The idea that Jesus maintained the same relationship to the Virgin as spice to a saffron bag, the latter serving merely as a container of no intrinsic value, was familiar in native heretical communities before the infiltration of Melchiorite Anabaptism and was even attributed to men like Robert Barnes, himself a known opponent of Anabaptism.⁶⁵ Joan Bocher's career as a heretic reflected the extent to which these native influences coexisted with foreign ones. Despite the notoriety of her Christological opinions, most of her religious beliefs were Lollard. She had a long history of anticlerical agitation and a reputation as a rabid opponent of ceremonies, images, and saint-worship. Many of her supposed one thousand followers were doubtless attracted by these other, more readily, comprehensible, aspects of her thought.

This same compatibility with native tradition accounts for the popularity and rapid spread of the

⁶⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 294; of. M.A.S. Hume (ed), Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England written in Spanish by an Unknown Hand (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), p. 194 where specific reference is made to this aspect of Barnes' thought.

Anabaptist notion that the validity of the sacraments depended on the character of the priest. Bishop Ridley warned his Norwich clergy to be on guard against opinions "that the wickedness of the minister doth take away the effects of Christ's sacraments", and similar views were turned up by diocesan investigators in other areas.⁶⁶ The belief was itself nothing new. It was known in the days of the primitive Church and its revival and renewed popularity in the sixteenth century may be in part attributable to increased emphasis on early Christian thought. More substantially, however, this belief contained an implicit critique of the concept of the priesthood as a holy order endowed with special powers. The heretical insistence on the efficacy of the sacrament as dependent on the character of the priest ignored the medieval distinction between man and office, making the two inseparable. The office contained all the failings of the man. No guaranteed system of salvation through the dispensation of sacramental grace was

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Articles to inquired of in the visitation. . .
in the bishopric of Norwiche (London: 1549), STC
10285.

possible. Fifteenth century Lollards had believed the same thing.⁶⁷ It appealed to anticlerical and anticereemonial sympathies while further undermining the supposed distinction between cleric and layman.

The case of the English "Free-Willers" provides further insight into this complex intermingling of Anabaptist and native heretical thought. The name was applied by ecclesiastical authorities to a group of heretics detected in Kent in 1549 whose central beliefs consisted of a denial of pre-destination and a defense of human free will.⁶⁸ "All good works are in our own power either to do them or to leave them undone, proceeding from our own free will".⁶⁹ Man was the determiner of his own salvation. There were close contacts between some of these Free-Willers and continental Anabaptists,⁷⁰ both in public opinion and in reality. Their

⁶⁷ Shirley (ed), Fasciculi Zizaniorum, p. 278.

⁶⁸ O.T. Hargrave, "The Free-Willers in the English Reformation", Church History, Vol. XXXVII (1968), pp. 271-280 is the best secondary account of this group.

⁶⁹ Quoted by Nycolas Lesse in his introduction to St. Augustine, A Worke of the predestination of saints . . . translated out of Latin into English by Nycolas Lesse (London: 1550), STC 920. An opponent of the Free-Willers, Lesse's introduction provided one of the few useful sources for the history of the movement.

⁷⁰ See "Trewe's Narrative" in R. Laurence (ed)

leader, a man named Henry Hart, apparently attended an Anabaptist conference in Germany in the early sixteenth century as well as having close contacts with Lollard communities in London.⁷¹ As an example of an English heretic whose beliefs reflected both native and continental influences, he indicates something of the complexity of sixteenth century popular Protestantism.

Hart's Enormities preceeding of the opinion that predestination, calling and election is absolute in man as it is in God was a defense of free will couched in theological argument, attacking the concept of predestination in intellectual terms and considering its implications for the Covenant between God and man, the concept of divine omnipotence and the quality of divine justice. It, in turn, provoked an equally intellectual refutation by John Bradford whose work is now our sole source for the

Authentic Documents relative to the Predestinarian Controversay (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1819), p. 63; M.E. Kronenburg, "Notes on English Printing in the Low Countries, 1491-1540", The Library, fourth series, Vol. IX (1928), pp. 139-163 indicates the extent of contacts between English and continental heretics.

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Full references are given by Horst in his doctoral dissertation. A brief summary is presented in Williams, op. cit., pp. 780-781.

arguments of this no longer extant treatise.⁷² An earlier work entitled A Godly Newe Short Treatise, however, is completely devotional in tone, dealing with the regenerative power of the spirit and the necessity of subjection to the will of God.⁷³ Not only is the work devoid of theological argument but it is definitely anti-intellectual, a characteristic of Hart's thought also revealed at his examination. "Faith", he told the ecclesiastical officials, "was not grounded upon learned men for all errors were brought in by learned men".⁷⁴ The contrast between Hart's theological treatise on election and devotional Short Treatise, together with the anti-intellectualism of his trial testimony, reflects the complex inter-action and subtle intermingling of continental and native influences that characterized much sixteenth century English Protestant thought. But, while Hart's Lollard background may have made him especially sensitive to

⁷² John Bradford, Writings (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1853), Vol. I, pp. 319-327.

⁷³ STC 12887

⁷⁴ C.B. Burrage, Early English Dissenters (London: Russell and Russell, 1967), Vol. II, p. 2.

Anabaptist influences with their stress on the importance of the ethical message of the gospel, the theological tone of his work on election has no parallel in native heretical tradition. Clearly, there were ideas circulating in English popular Protestant communities that had no roots in medieval Lollardy.

Some sixteenth century English heretics held anti-trinitarian opinions that were definitely outside of the mainstream of native belief. The fifteenth century Lollards, like William Thorpe, had emphatically insisted on their orthodoxy with respect to the trinity, maintaining that "all three Persons are even in power, in cunning and in might".⁷⁵ Although there were several scattered cases of persons detected for Arian opinions during the later Middle Ages in England, these were definitely isolated instances.⁷⁶ In the sixteenth century, however, at least three persons received sufficient notoriety for their anti-trinitarian beliefs to be mentioned in contemporary sources by name. The most famous of these was George van Paris, a Dutch physician

⁷⁵ Pollard (ed), Fifteenth Century Prose, pp. 108-112.

⁷⁶ Full references are given in E. Willbur, A History of Unitarianism (Cambridge: Harvard University, Press, 1952).

burned as an Arian in 1549. Claiming Scriptural sanction for his beliefs, Van Paris argued that it was impossible for an everlasting, immortal, incomprehensible God to partake of the visibility and mortality of human flesh. Since Jesus was subject to the infirmities of human nature, he could not be God. Supporting his opinions with Scriptural citations, he concluded that Christ was merely "the first begotten. . . among many brothers". At his examination he refused either to recant or to agree that his opinions were heretical.⁷⁷ A London butcher named George Jonson and John Assheton, a sometime cleric, held similar views. Examined in 1548, Assheton told Archbishop Cranmer that "the Trinity of Persons was established by the confession of Athanasius" and lacked Scriptural sanction. He contended that the Holy Spirit "is not God but only a certain power of the Father" and that Jesus was a "Holy Prophet" who could not be God because

⁷⁷ J. Proctor, The Fall of the Late Arrian (London: 1549), STC 20406; John Philpot, "An Apology written for spitting on an Arian" in Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. III, Pt. III, p. 361; Wriothesley, Vol. II, p. 47; Strype, Cranmer, p. 258; Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 44; Letters and Papers, Addenda, Vol. I, #809, p. 281, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 310.

"he was seen, and lived and thirsted".⁷⁸ Unlike Van Paris, both Jonson and Assheton recanted and escaped execution.

Like anti-trinitarianism, the belief that any person who committed a sin after baptism could not be saved had parallels in both the primitive Church and continental Anabaptism but none in English medieval heresy. It was evidently widespread in mid-sixteenth century England, however, and Thomas Cotesforde recalled meeting a woman brought to the brink of despair by a conviction of her own inevitable damnation.⁷⁹ A large number of persons in Bishop Hooper's diocese shared her concern,⁸⁰ while many of the twenty-four Flemish Anabaptists arrested in 1535 did too.⁸¹ It is impossible to account for the prevalence of either anti-trinitarianism or this belief in the damnation of sinners after baptism

⁷⁸ Strype, Cranmer, Vol. I, p. 255; Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 41; cf. Wilbur, op. cit., p. 170; Robinson (ed), Original Letters, Vol. I, p. 66.

⁷⁹ Thomas Cotesforde, Introduction to his translation of The Accompt and Rekenynge and Confession of the Faith of Huldreich Zwinglius (Geneva: 1555), STC 26140a; cf. I.B. Horst, "Thomas Cotesford's Two Letters", The Library, Vol. XI (1956), pp. 44-47.

⁸⁰ Robinson (ed), Original Letters, Vol. I, p. 65.

⁸¹ Stow, Chronicle, p. 1004; Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 317; Vol. XV, #498, p. 217.

on the basis of similarities with native Lollard tradition because there were none. It is possible, however, that the popularity of these ideas is too easily over-estimated. Although contemporary witnesses frequently complained of the popularity of anti-trinitarianism, only three offenders are mentioned in sources by name, and of these three Van Paris was a Dutchman and Johnson was Flemish. Only Assheton was a native Englishman. It is hardly conceivable that a notorious heretical belief that struck at one of the major points of Christian faith would have escaped mention had it been more widespread. Like Lutheranism and other Anabaptist ideas, it is possible that anti-trinitarianism and the belief in the damnation of baptized sinners attracted more interest than actual adherents. Yet the admonitions of Nicholas Ridley, warning his Norwich clergy to be on guard against them, indicate that contemporary ecclesiastical authorities considered them a serious enough threat to warrant constant vigilance. English popular Protestant thought was sufficiently complex to defy easy analysis in

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Ridley, Articles to be inquired of. . . in the diocese of Norwich.

this respect. As William Turner pointed out,
sixteenth century heresy was a "seven-headed hydra"
made up of much that was old together with new
ideas equally dangerous.⁸³

⁸³ Turner, A Preservative or Triacle.

CHAPTER III
POPULAR PROTESTANT COMMUNITIES

Although an occasional isolated heretic was detected, popular Protestantism was a community phenomena. Almost all heretics lived or had regular contact with persons who shared their religious views. Without statistical data it is of course impossible to accurately assess the numerical strength of popular Protestantism in the first half of the sixteenth century. The general impression given by contemporary sources is that the number was large and getting larger. Writing from London in 1511, Andrew Ammonio remarked that "every day there are a great number of heretics to make bonfires for us, and still their numbers continue to grow"¹. In his sermon to convocation, John Colet noted the increasing opposition of

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H.C. Porter (ed), Erasmus and Cambridge: the Cambridge Letters of Erasmus, trans. D.F.S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 125.

heretics throughout the country,² and even Thomas More, who usually considered these estimates greatly exaggerated, agreed that the membership of heretical groups had "recently increased considerably",³ later adding that the titles of forbidden books were themselves sufficiently numerous to fill a book.⁴ The anonymous author of the Grey Friar's Chronicle agreed with Colet that the spread of heresy left no county untouched,⁵ while John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, noted with alarm in 1521 that there were "no small number" of heretics in his own diocese.⁶ Richard Hilles wrote to Heinrich Bullinger that few people took note of Robert Barnes' execution, "for it is no new thing to see men hanged, quartered or beheaded" for religious offenses.⁷ A London churchman's

² J.H. Lupton, A Life of John Colet, D.D. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), p. 238.

³ Thomas More, The Apologve of Syr Thomas More knyght, ed. Arthur Taft (London: Early English Text Society, 1930), p. 185.

⁴ The Confutacyon of Tyndales answere made by syr Thomas More knyght (London: William Rastell, 1532), STC 18079.

⁵ J.G. Nichols (ed), Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London (London: Camden Society, 1852), p. 48.

⁶ Wharhurst, op. cit., p. 166.

⁷ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVI, #578, p. 271.

similar belief that suspect religious opinions had "crept into every corner of the court. . . even into the privy chamber",⁸ was supported by Ambassador Chapuys observation that England was full of heresy.⁹ The difficulties of making any numerical estimate are further compounded by the fact that many heretics chose not to reveal themselves. William Lancaster, for instance, admitted that he only received the Sacrament regularly out of fear of the "speech of the people",¹⁰ while John Chapman "did creep to the cross more for company than for devotion".¹¹ "What a rabble of new found scatterers there be", John Philpot lamented, "such a sort as never at once have been heard of in one realm".¹²

The two most striking features of these heretical groups were the extent of kinship and the important role of women. All available evidence points to the importance of kinship as a determining factor in the membership and organization of popular Protestant communities. Many persons were literally born

⁸ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 474.

⁹ Letters and Papers, Vol. VIII, #1, p. 2.

¹⁰ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 39.

¹¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 308.

¹² Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. III, Pt. III, p. 371.

heretics for, as Miles Hogarde pointed out, "the parents being infected with heresy the child must follow the same".¹³ Thus it is not surprising to learn that Joan Lashford, who claimed to have been an opponent of transubstantiation at the age of eleven, was the daughter of two convicted heretics,¹⁴ and that the ten year old daughter of John Wiley who could recite the entire twenty-fourth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew by heart was a member of an entire family arrested in 1532 on charges of refusal to observe Lenten fasting and reading forbidden books.¹⁵ Even persons converted in later life received their first introduction to Protestant ideas from their relatives. John Pykas, a Kent heretic detected in 1527, told his examiners that "about five years last past at a certain time his mother. . . sent for him and moved him that he should not believe in the Sacraments of the Church", giving him an English copy of the Epistles of St. Paul

¹³ Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes.

¹⁴ Foxe, Vol. VII, p. 715; cf. Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 122.

¹⁵ Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 42-43.

and bidding him live "after the manner and way of
the gospels".¹⁶ Thomas Hempsted, examined at the
same time, first learned to say vernacular prayers
from his wife,¹⁷ and John Hacker claimed to have
learned "all and singular his errors and heresies"
from his father-in-law.¹⁸ Of thirty-seven members
of the heretical community detected in Bumstead
in 1528, at least thirty had one or more relatives
in the group and of these a total of twenty-nine
were members of just four families.¹⁹ Similarly,
Edward Freese was burned in 1531 with his brother
and sister-in-law,²⁰ while Thomas Patmore, examined
in the same year, had a brother who spent three
years in prison for advocating clerical marriage
and, as parson of Hadham, performing a wedding cere-
mony for a fellow priest.²¹ Further, members of
heretical communities often chose their mates from
among other heretics. James Bainham, accused of

¹⁶ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 61.

¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 115.

¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 113-134; Foxe, Vol. V, p. 41.

²⁰ Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 695.

²¹ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 35-37.

heresy during the reign of Henry VIII, married the widow of Simon Fish, author of the anticlerical pamphlet A Supplication of Beggars,²² and John Hacker, detected in Kent in 1527, married a woman whose father was burned for heresy in 1513. Her sister also married a man active in the heretical community in Kent.²³

Feelings of kinship were frequently extended to non-relatives through the use of terms like "brother" and "sister" to refer to fellow members of heretical groups. Thomas Hempsted, for instance, confessed in 1528 that when Richard Fox and John Tybal, two figures influential in heretical activities in Kent, found out that he knew the Lord's Prayer in English they called him "brother in Christ", an appellation used by Lollards in the fifteenth century.²⁴ Both Cuthbert Tunstall and Thomas More commented on the existence of such heretical "brotherhoods" in London,²⁵ and Miles Hogarde remarked

²³ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 115.

²⁴ Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 61.

²⁵ Charles Sturge, Cuthbert Tunstall (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), p. 128; Thomas More, The Apologve of Syr Thomas More Knyght (London: William Rastell, 1533), sigs. C.iii, X.ii.

that the heretics he had observed often referred to one another as "mother, sister, son".²⁶ Likewise, a 1555 ballad commemorating the death of the heretic Robert Glover noted that he considered his fellow heretic Laurence Saunders a "brother true".²⁷

This importance of kinship ties within these popular Protestant communities was further emphasized by the relatively large role played by women within heretical groups, a role reflective of their important position within the family unit but made all the more striking when compared with their general social status and the relatively small role accorded them within the established church. Sixteenth century women, like their medieval predecessors, were expected to keep in the background and the ignorance resulting from a lack of education reinforced the popular belief that they were inferior.²⁸

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Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes.

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H.E. Rollins (ed), Old English Ballads, 1553-1625 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), p. 45; Bryan Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", American Sociological Review, Vol. XXIV (1959), p. 14 indicates that such pseudo-kinship ties are a common feature of sectarian religious groups in all periods.

28

Good studies on the role of women in the Tudor period include Wallace Notestein, "The English Woman, 1580-1650", in J.H. Plumb (ed), Studies in Social

English nunneries were virtually moribund in the later Middle Ages and there was no place for them in the sixteenth century.²⁹ Primitive and medieval sects, however, had included a large number of women heretics, accepting them on an equal footing with men and even allowing them to serve as preachers and ministers.³⁰ This was the case in the sixteenth century also. The two most notorious heretics of

History: a Tribute to G.M. Trevelyan (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955); C.L. Powell, English Domestic Relations, 1487-1653 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), especially pp. 147-178; Mildred Campbell, The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 274, which gives some useful information on the education of country wives. For a contemporary opinion, see Bale, Select Works, p. 147.

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The authoritative work is Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), especially pp. 246-251.

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On the role of women in sectarian groups see Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 20, 55, 319; Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 165-166, 283, 293; Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects", Past and Present, Vol. XIII (1958); D. Obolensky, The Bogomils: a Study in Balkan neo-Manichaeism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 50, 135, 199, 201; Stephen Runciman, The Medieval Manichee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), pp. 15, 18-19, 131 deals with the woman's role as preacher and confessor among Catharist heretics in eastern and western Europe. Bryan Wilson, Sects and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) is a study of modern religious groups in which women play a large role.

the Tudor period, Anne Askew and Joan Bocher, were both women. Wives were frequently detected with their husbands and, as in the case of Thomas Hempstead, were sometimes instrumental in their conversion.³¹ A group of forty-four persons examined in Bumstead in 1528 included three widows, seven wives detected with their husbands, one wife detected alone, and six apparently unmarried women. A similar group of forty-three suspect persons examined in Bybrook in the same year included one widow, eleven wives detected with their husbands, one wife detected without her husband,³² and four unmarried women. The wives of nine persons in Aldermanbury parish in London were detected with their husbands in 1541,³³ and at least five, and possibly more, of the twenty-four Dutch immigrants examined as Anabaptists in 1535 were women.³⁴ Although there is no record of women preaching in England before the mid-seventeenth

³¹ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 61; Letters and Papers, Vol. IV, #4850, p. 2095.

³² Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 41-42.

³³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 448.

³⁴ Stow, Chronicle, p. 1004; Wriothesley, Vol. I, p. 28.

century,³⁵ John Lambert, burned for heresy in 1538, advocated it,³⁶ and women regularly provided refuge and food for fugitive heretics. Elizabeth Statham, for instance, housed a number of suspect preachers in her home in St. Mary Magdalen parish in London,³⁷ while heretics in Kent frequented the homes of two women known as Mother Bocher and Mother Charte.³⁸ In these cases, the use of an appellation denoting kinship underscores the importance of the role of both family ties and women in heretical communities.

It was in private homes like Mother Charte's, whether owned by men or women, that sixteenth century English Protestants regularly met, always informally, sometimes for dinner, usually followed by a Scriptural reading and discussion.³⁹ John Tybal, a Colchester heretic examined in 1528, told

³⁵ R. Barclay, The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1879), pp. 155-156 contends that the first preaching Englishwomen appeared sometime before 1641 and that the custom was probably brought into the country by Dutch Anabaptists.

³⁶ Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 181-219.

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 444.

³⁸ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 53; Letters and Papers, Vol. II, #4850, p. 2095.

³⁹ The private conventicle was a common form of organization among medieval heretics including Lollards and sectarians generally; cf. Joachim Wach,

his examiners that he and three other persons "souped at John Pykas' house whereas they three⁴⁰ communed together of many and diverse articles". London heretics regularly assembled at John Rawlinges house while Robert Neoton, a confessed dealer in heretical books examined by Cuthbert Tunstall in 1528, admitted having "read diverse times in the New Testament in English" in private homes throughout the diocese of London and Norwich.⁴¹ Bishop Longland complained to Cromwell in 1536 that throughout the countryside people "assemble many times together and "read English books all day", a complaint supported by Bishops Hooper and Ridley.⁴² Elizabeth Warne was arrested at one such meeting in a house in Stratford-le-bow churchyard in 1555,⁴³ and eight persons in the London parish of St. Matthew were charged with

Sociology of Religion (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1962), p. 174; Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 65-72; Leff, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 575.

⁴⁰ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 53.

⁴¹ Letters and Papers, Addenda, Vol. I, #809, p. 281; Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 64-65.

⁴² Letters and Papers, Vol. X, #804, p. 339; Robinson (ed), Original Letters, p. 65; Nicholas Ridley, Articles to be Inquired of in the Visitation of the Diocese of London (London: 1550), STC 10247

⁴³ Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 342-343.

heresy "for gathering together in the evening" and listening to "ill preachers".⁴⁴ A large group in Aldermanbury parish was examined in the same year on similar charges,⁴⁵ while an un-named Kent heretic detected in 1528 confessed that he attended private Scriptural readings in the homes of six different persons.⁴⁶ Such meetings were not confined to private homes, however, and contemporary records indicate that there was "much speaking" against the sacraments and the mass even in the streets of London,⁴⁷ while occasionally bold preachers would hold public meetings that attracted large crowds. Henry Daunce, a London bricklayer, "used to preach the word of God in his own house in his garden, where he set a tub to a tree", attracting large

⁴⁴ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 446.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 448.

⁴⁶ Letters and Papers, Vol. IV, #4850, p. 2095. Similar complaints lodged against fifteenth century Lollard heretics further indicate the continuity within English heretical religious thought. See the text of the act "De Haeretico Comburendo" in Gee and Hardy (eds), op. cit., p. 134.

⁴⁷ Queen Mary's first proclamation about religion complained of much preaching and interpretation by persons "after their own brains" in both public and private. Wilkins, Vol. IV, p. 86; cf. A Proclamation against the unreverent disputers and talkers of the Sacrament (London: R. Grafton, 1547), STC 7812.

crowds reportedly ranging upwards of one thousand persons.⁴⁸ Bishop Hooper, likewise, complained that London Anabaptists disputed openly during his sermons.⁴⁹ Such occurrences were, however, likely to prove dangerous and such meetings were best confined to the more usual places of assembly, especially public taverns. Thomas Skygges, arrested for heresy in 1546, had met frequently with "divers young men" in taverns to discuss matters that earned him a reputation as a "common talker of Scripture",⁵⁰ and the large number of similar cases provoked a royal proclamation complaining of the "erroneous and fantastical opinions" discussed in "open places, taverns and alehouses".⁵¹ Colchester officials evidently considered the situation serious enough to warrant an ordinance prohibiting assemblies in taverns after eight o'clock in the evening.⁵²

⁴⁸ Wriothesley, Vol. I, pp. 82-83; Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes; Letters and Papers, Vol. XII, #594, p. 220, Vol. XIV, #42, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁹ Robinson (ed), Original Letters, p. 65.

⁵⁰ Letters and Papers, Vol. XXI, #836, p. 411.

⁵¹ A Proclamation against heretical books (London: R. Grafton, 1538); Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 342; Cranmer, Vol. I, p. 99, Vol. II, p. 686.

⁵² W.G. Benham (ed), The Red Paper Book of Colchester (Colchester: Essex County Standard, 1902), p. 23.

Although such meetings, both public and private, were informal, they did have a leader who provided direction and guidance, functioning in the capacity of preacher and teacher.⁵³ As was the case in so many medieval heretical communities, this leader was often an apostate priest or friar,⁵⁴ although some were apparently simple laymen. Ecclesiastical authorities in Kent noted that some persons "did take upon them to minister which were no priests", and many of these were evidently employed in other occupations.⁵⁵ Miles Hogarde, for instance, attended an heretical meeting led by a man known to his followers as Father Brown but described not as a priest but as a "broker".⁵⁶ Once again, the use of the title "Father" underscored the importance

⁵³ On the role of the leader in religious sects, see Joachim Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and non-Christian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 205.

⁵⁴ See Cohn, op. cit., p. 60; Letters and Papers, Vol. IX, #230, p. 76; Foxe, Vol. VII, pp. 77-85; Muller (ed), Letters, p. 170; F.R.H. Du Boulay, "The Quarrel between the Carmelite Friars and Secular Clergy of London, 1464-1468", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. VI, pp. 156-174.

⁵⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 301.

⁵⁶ Hogarde, The Displaying of the Protestantes.

of kinship ties within the heretical community and was a fairly common appellation. John Hacker, for example, was known to the heretics detected in Kent in 1528 as "Father Hacker" and he regularly spent much time giving religious instruction in various private homes. Robert Necton, himself sometimes a reader of Scripture at such meetings, told his examiners that he heard Hacker speak "of prophecies" and "diverse articles" in a sermon following a Scriptural reading in a house in Colchester.⁵⁷ Likewise, a Flemish immigrant named Bastiane was known as "bishop and reader" to suspected London Anabaptists in 1540,⁵⁸ while Nicholas Field regularly expounded Scripture before a group of about ten persons in John Taylor's house in London.⁵⁹ In the same home, John Ryburn admitted to hearing two hour sermons on the Passion delivered by one John Simons,⁶⁰ while Thomas Hytton supposedly had a number of "congre-

⁵⁷ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 64-65.

⁵⁸ Letters and Papers, Addenda, Vol. I, #809, p. 281.

⁵⁹ Foxe, Vol. IV, p. 584.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 583.

gations" that he visited regularly, giving members both instruction and comfort.⁶¹ Likewise, Henry Hart, Cole of Faversham and George Broderidge were recognized as teachers by the Free-Willers of Kent in 1550.⁶²

An equally familiar and important figure in heretical circles was the itinerant preacher, a constant source of irritation to ecclesiastical authorities. Like Thomas Man who travelled throughout the country to convert over seven hundred persons in the early sixteenth century,⁶³ these wandering preachers helped to provide contact between otherwise scattered local sectarian groups, their popularity proving the source of considerable alarm on the part of the authorities. An itinerant preacher named Swynnerton, for instance, attracted such a following in the diocese of Lincoln in 1536 that Bishop Longland was noticeably frightened, complaining to Cromwell that "wherever this priest preaches they have monition one from another, though it be six or eight miles

⁶¹ More, Confutacyon, sig. B.iii.

⁶² Burridge, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 2.

⁶³ Foxe, Vol. V, p. 208.

off, to be with him".⁶⁴ William Cowbridge travelled throughout Essex, preaching and attracting large crowds,⁶⁵ while a group of Free-Willers from Kent went over to Essex to encourage the establishment of similar communities there.⁶⁶ These wandering preachers were frequently the subject of prohibitory legislation.⁶⁷

A lesser, but very important, role in heretical communities was filled by those persons who provided shelter for fugitive heretics and wandering preachers or maintained heretical writers and teachers. John Toftes, for example, was cited by ecclesiastical authorities as a notorious "maintainer of heretics and of persons who have made themselves priests and were none", and he had apparently provided lodgings and financial assistance for Joan Bocher and other suspect persons.⁶⁸ Similarly, William Smith, a

⁶⁴ Letters and Papers, Vol. X, #804, p. 339.

⁶⁵ Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 251-253; cf. T.W. Davids, Annals of Evangelical Non-Conformity in the County of Essex (London: Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, 1863), p. 18.

⁶⁶ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. II, Pt. I, p. 370.

⁶⁷ See, for example, A. Clark (ed), Lincoln Diocese Documents, 1450-1544 (London: Early English Text Society, 1914), p. 196.

⁶⁸ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 312.

London tailor, lodged Richard Bayfield and several other heretics in his home in 1531,⁶⁹ and Andrew Hewet lived two days in John Chapman's London house after escaping from prison where he was awaiting examination on charges of heresy.⁷⁰ John Stacy, detected in Kent in 1528, kept a man in his house who was translating the Apocalypse into English.⁷¹ Women like Elizabeth Statham frequently served in this capacity within heretical groups.⁷²

Although a contemporary witness claimed that no class was spared from the infection of heresy, the membership of popular Protestant communities included few members of the upper classes.⁷³ This does not mean that all heretics came from the lower classes, however, and there is some indication that the most notorious heretics like Anne Askew received support from persons influential in court circles.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Foxe, Vol. IV, pp. 680-688; of. Vol. V, pp. 38, 43-44.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 16.

⁷¹ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 115-116.

⁷² Foxe, Vol. V, p. 440.

⁷³ Letters and Papers, Vol. XXI, #1227, p. 608.

⁷⁴ Bale, Select Works, p. 222.

In addition, three of the six persons examined with her were noted to be "gentlemen", George Blage being described as "a man of fair lands".⁷⁵ Similarly, Thomas More complained of the support given to the forbidden book trade by wealthy "brethren",⁷⁶ but the bulk of the evidence indicates that such complaints were largely exaggerated and it is likely that as Henry Brinkelow lamented, "stiff-necked" rich citizens had little interest in Protestant thought or the message of the gospel.⁷⁷ Most contemporary witnesses agreed that heretics were usually poor. The French ambassador, for example, described heretics executed in 1540 as persons "of very low condition",⁷⁸ while a group of persons arrested for violation of the Six Articles in York had to be released from prison because they were too poor to sue for and purchase a pardon.⁷⁹ Further, the large number of heretics in London must have come

⁷⁵ Wriothesley, Vol. I, p. 167.

⁷⁶ Thomas More, The Answer to . . . the Supper of the Lord (London: William Rastell, 1534), STC 18077, sig. A.V.

⁷⁷ Brinkelow, Lamentacyon, p. 79.

⁷⁸ Letters and Papers, Vol. XV, #651, p. 310.

⁷⁹ Nicholas Pocock, "Papers of Archbishop Holgate, 1547", English Historical Review, Vol. IX (1894), pp. 542-548.

mostly from the poorest classes since the bulk of the city's population consisted of unemployed persons too poor to even pay taxes.⁸⁰ Significantly, no members of the five London parishes with the largest total charitable bequests in the middle of the sixteenth century were examined in the extensive heresy investigations associated with violations of the Six Articles, while the four poor parishes of St. Andrew Hubbard, Holy Trinity, St. Michael Queenhithe, and St. Margaret Fish Street accounted for fifteen suspects.⁸¹ Many of these poor citizens, especially in London were artisans, an occupational group that was also instrumental in the spread of both medieval heresy and continental Anabaptism.⁸² An examination of thirty-eight suspected heretics from different areas detected between 1531 and 1535

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On urban poverty in sixteenth century London, see the comments of Christopher Hill, Reformation to Industrial Revolution (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 45; cf. Brinkelow, Lamentacyon, p. 90.

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W.K. Jordan, The Charities of London, 1480-1660 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), pp. 34, 55; Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 543-548.

82

Sylvia Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), contends that the bulk of London's sixteenth century population probably consisted of artisans and merchants. On the role of artisans in medieval heresy and continental Anabaptism, see Cohn, op. cit., pp. 28-29 and A.F. Mellink, De Wederdopers in De Noordelijke Nederlanden, 1531-1544 (Groningen: J.B. Walters, 1953), pp. 362-366.

for whom specific occupational information is available indicates that twenty-two were artisans.⁸³ Of sixteen persons detected in London for whom occupational data is provided, eight were artisans,⁸⁴ while another twelve persons for whom no specific information is given had surnames indicative of an artistic background.⁸⁵

In the areas outside of London, clothworkers formed a large part of the heretical population. In 1550, for example, Sir George Norton, the sheriff of Essex, received orders from Archbishop Cranmer to arrest a number of clothworkers on charges of heresy.⁸⁶ Similarly, at least eighteen of twenty-nine male heretics detected by Father Hacker in 1528 were tailors and clothworkers.⁸⁷ Since spinning was originally a woman's occupation, it is likely that the widowed and unmarried female heretics detected at the same

⁸³ Foxe, Vol. V, pp. 29-36.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 443-448.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 443-448. Although in many cases surnames were hereditary and not reflective of occupation by the mid-sixteenth century, most persons with occupational surnames were still practitioners of the trades indicated. See E. Eekwall, Studies on the Population of Medieval London (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wikall, 1956), p. lxxvii.

⁸⁶ Strype, Cranmer, Vol. I, p. 335.

⁸⁷ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 53-65.

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time were also connected with the weaving industry. Like their London artisan counterparts, these rural weavers and tailors were scarcely prosperous. Suffolk textile workers captured their economic desperation when they complained that the weaving industry "is already decayed in so much that no man in these parts will put their children to that occupation"⁸⁹ and artisans in country towns evidently possessed less than ten percent of the wealth, many being so poor that they owned no assessable goods.⁹⁰ A further reflection of the importance of these artisans within popular Protestant communities was the appearance of the merchant and tailor as a hero in heretical literature. A 1534 anticlerical tract entitled The Book of Marchauntes typically contrasted the dishonesty and greed of prelates who trafficked

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On women in the weaving industry, see Alice Clark, Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), pp. 93-103 and Eileen Power, "The Position of Women" in C. Crump and E.F. Jacob (eds), The Legacy of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), pp. 401-434. On the importance of cloth workers among German sectarians and the relative importance of women in such groups, see C.P. Clasen, "The Sociology of Swabian Anabaptism", Church History, Vol. XXXII (1963), pp. 150-180.

89

R.H. Tawney and Eileen Power (eds), Tudor Economic Documents (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), Vol. I, p. 342.

90

Julian Cornwall, "English Country Towns in the 1520's", Economic History Review, Vol. XV (1962), pp. 63-67..

in spiritual offices with the honesty and integrity of merchants and artisans whose conduct revealed them to be true Christians.⁹¹ Likewise, Anthony Scoloker's translation of Hans Sachs' German dialogue, printed in 1548 under the title A Goodly Disputation between a Christian Shoemaker and a Popish Person, praised the simple piety and humble virtue of the artisan, favorably contrasting him with the vanity and insincerity of the Catholic priest.⁹²

English sixteenth century heretics were not only poor but usually uneducated as well. Many people noted the poor grammar and uncouth style of heretical writings,⁹³ while others remarked about the appeal of Protestant ideas to the "lewd and simple".⁹⁴ Bishop Gardiner noted that the "unlearned"

⁹¹
The Book of Marchauntes right necessary unto all Folkes (London: Thomas Godfraye, 1534), STC 3321.

⁹²
 Hereford, op. cit., pp. 51-54.

⁹³
 Laurence (ed), Authentic Documents, p. 35; cf. More, Supper of the Lord, sig. G.1.

⁹⁴
 John Veron in his introduction to an English translation of Heinrich Bullinger, An Holsome Antidotus or counterpoyson against the pestilent heresy and sect of the Anabaptists (London: Humphrey Powell, 1548), STC 4059; cf. Letters and Papers, Vol. XXI, #836, p. 411.

were constantly attracted to heresy,⁹⁵ and Bishop Longland contended that the itinerant preacher Swynnerton appealed most to "light people".⁹⁶ The London bricklayer and preacher Henry Daunce admitted that he tried to learn to read several times without success,⁹⁷ while a note in the margin of the recorded testimony of the suspected heretic Richard Moore reported that "this man is simple and allegeth to learn the same of others".⁹⁸

The necessity of issuing repeated prohibitions against the spread of heretical books, however, indicates that not all sectarians were illiterate. Certainly by the end of the fifteenth century most London guilds required their members to be able to read, and Thomas More's contention that over forty percent, and perhaps as many as sixty percent, of the population could read was reflected in a 1543 statute forbidding the reading of the Bible by

⁹⁵ Stephen Gardiner, A Detection of the Devil's Sophistry (London: 1546).

⁹⁶ Letters and Papers, Vol. X, #804, p. 339.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Vol. XXI, #836, p. 411.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Vol. XXI, #836, p. 411.

women, artificiers, serving men and laborers.⁹⁹ The frequent condemnations of English books only, however, indicates that few such persons were able to read Latin, a language described as "not known" in the royal injunctions of 1547.¹⁰⁰ The importance of the "reader" in many heretical communities further suggests that many persons were unable to read the Bible for themselves. Thomas More also noted that many heretics complained that his books were too long, "and therefore tedious to read",¹⁰¹ while Bishop Gardiner's observation that heretical literature appealed to the same audience that read the tales of Robin Hood indicates a low level of reading ability despite a high literacy rate.¹⁰² Furthermore, guild regulations concerning literacy were largely inoperative in the rural areas where the clothworking

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Simon, op. cit., p. 15; More, Apology, sig. C.iii-CC.ii; J.W. Adamson, "Literacy in England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", The Library, fourth series, Vol. X, (1930); A Proclamation . . . to avoid and abolish all such Englishe bookes (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1546).

100

Articles to be enquired of in the Kings Majesties Visitations (London: R. Grafton, 1547), sig. A.iii.

101

More, Apology, sig. B.i.

102

Muller (ed), Letters, p. 293.

industry took root,¹⁰³ and the lack of any significant charitable bequests for educational purposes on the part of the artisan classes reflected their apparent feeling that education was of no immediate importance to them.¹⁰⁴ Finally the fact that most of the Kent heretics who confessed to reading the Bible in English in 1528 signed their abjurations with a cross indicates that the ability to decipher familiar written words was not necessarily accompanied by the ability to write.¹⁰⁵

Uneducated, poor and likely to be either unemployed or an artisan, the English sixteenth century heretic differed little from either his Lollard predecessors or Anabaptist contemporaries. The importance of kinship ties and the large role of women were features of medieval heretical sects. The formation of private conventicles by Lollard groups throughout the fifteenth century indicates a continuity of organization that paralleled the

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Simon, op. cit., p. 15.

104

Jordan, Charities, Appendix.

105

Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 122ff.; Pt. II, pp. 59ff.

importance of native influences in the content of popular Protestant thought. Although it is fairly easy to draw a sociological portrait of this type for a typical English heretic, no heretic was ever typical. The source materials are full enough to reveal their own inadequacy in this respect and it is unlikely that anyone will ever be able to determine the reasons why real people became heretics, regardless of what might be known about typical sociological constructs. How many heretics, for instance, shared William Flower's confessed desire to die in making his attack on a priest in 1555? How many others were merely seeking what Thomas More described as "good company",¹⁰⁶ hoping to mitigate the loneliness of their private lives by joining a closely knit sectarian community? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered although an awareness of their importance is necessary to a recognition of the limits of this study.

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 More, Apology, sig. XX.i; cf. Foxe, Vol. VIII, pp. 68-77.

CHAPTER IV
ENGLISH POPULAR PROTESTANTISM IN ITS
CONTEMPORARY SETTING

Although sixteenth century English heretics formed private conventicles for purposes of worship, most of their lives were spent in a world essentially hostile to their religious beliefs. Whatever the complexity and variety of their views and motives, all members of popular Protestant communities had one thing in common - almost everyone considered them dangerous. In the opinion of both royal and ecclesiastical authorities, heresy was a crime and heretics were punished as criminals.¹ This view was reflected in the phraseology of royal pardons granted to accused heretics in the first half of the sixteenth century. In 1546, for example, Richard

¹
H.O. Richardson, "Heresy and the Lay Power under Richard II", English Historical Review, Vol. XI (1936), pp. 1-28 contends that after 1382 heresy was the joint concern of royal and ecclesiastical authorities, and that the lay power took charge of prosecution and punishment of heretics.

Mannock of Suffolk received a royal pardon for "heresies, felonies and heretical opinions and words".² In the following year William Owskey, a Lincolnshire serving-man, was absolved of heresy and "other crimes".³ An atmosphere of fear surrounded religious heterodoxy, a fear not simply limited to the religious sphere but concerned with the potentially disruptive effects of heresy on the very fabric of society.

Ever since the Peasant's Revolt of the fourteenth century, there had been a close association in the English public mind between religious discontent and social turmoil. Late medieval eyewitness accounts stressed the connection between the revolt and Lollard eucharistic ideas and, while recent research has clearly demonstrated that there was no substance to such charges, the connection survived well into the sixteenth century.⁴ Nycolas

² Letters and Papers, Vol. XXI, #332, p. 164.

³ Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward VI (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925), Vol. I, p. 145.

⁴ The most complete account is Margaret Aston, "Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431", Past and Present, Vol. XVII (1960), pp. 1-44.

Lesse, for instance, maintained that the aim and end result of all religious change was "the utter confusion and subversion of whole common wealths".⁵ Bishop Hooper agreed that heretical opinions must "lead to sedition and violence",⁶ while a popular translation of Bullinger's treatise against the Anabaptists described the "tumults which did spring in times past" from religious deviation.⁷ Henry Brinkelow complained that the ecclesiastical authorities condemned all suspected heretics as "causers of insurrection",⁸ a complaint supported by Bishop Longland's statement that the unlicensed preachers in his diocese were engendering "contrariety and dissention".⁹ William Barlow's widely read treatise on Protestant sects described Luther and his followers as "seditious persons" and lamented the disruptive effects of sectarianism, contending that all heretics were invariably motivated by anarchistic designs.¹⁰ Edmund

⁵ St. Augustine, A Worke on the Predestination of Saints.

⁶ John Hooper, Later Writings, ed. C. Nevinsen (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1852), p. 76.

⁷ Bullinger, An Holsome Antidotus, sig. XXXX.ii.

⁸ Brinkelow, Roderick Mors, p. 118.

⁹ Clark (ed), Lincoln Diocese Documents, p. 196.

¹⁰ Barlow, A Dyaloge.

Becke, likewise, was joined by both John Bale and Bishop Christopherson in condemning Anabaptist ideas as blatantly seditious,¹¹ while among native heretics John Goughe, a printer, was arrested in 1543 for sponsoring the translation of a "seditious and erroneous"¹² commentary on the gospels and a varied group of heretical opinions were labelled seditious by an ecclesiastical commission in Kent in 1546.¹³ Many of the works of Tyndale, Barnes and Frith were condemned as inflammatory and seditious.¹⁴ Thomas Starkey cited the example of the German Peasant Wars as an indication of impending danger in England,¹⁵ and the appearance of a pamphlet dealing with the activities of the Anabaptists in Munster together

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Collier (ed), Illustrations, p. 12; J.S. Farmer (ed), Dramatic Writings of John Bale (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 291; Nicholas Pocock, "The Condition of Morals and Religious Belief in the Reign of Edward VI", English Historical Review, Vol. X (1895), pp. 417-444.

12

J.R. Dasent (ed), Acts of the Privy Council of England (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891), Vol. I, p. 115.

13

Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 292.

14

Ibid., Vol. V, #50, p. 24; Vol. XV, #916, p. 454; Calendar of Patent Rolls, Vol. I, p. 359; A Proclamation against heretical books (London: R. Grafton, 1538).

15

Thomas Starkey, An Exhortation to the people instructing them to unity and obedience (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1540).

with reports that many of John of Leyden's followers were headed for England did little to alleviate panic.¹⁶ Fears of social upheaval were not limited to royal and ecclesiastical authorities however. In Lincolnshire, for instance, rumors circulated that increasing religious change would be accompanied by drastic changes in life style for everyone, claiming that "all manner of prayer and fasting, all God's service should utterly be destroyed and taken away, that no man should marry a wife or be partakers of the Sacraments, or at length should eat a piece of roast meat".¹⁷ Little wonder then that many felt that "it was a merry world before men spoke of such matters that is to wit to have any reformation among them".¹⁸

Ecclesiastical and royal officials were especially concerned with the potentially disruptive effects of having the Bible translated into English

¹⁶ Letters and Papers, Vol. XV, #982, p. 388; Trewe Newe Tydyngs.

¹⁷ Hall, p. 820.

¹⁸ A Litel Treatise ageynst the mutteringe of some papistis in corners (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1534), STC 19177.

and placed in the hands of heretics. A 1542 royal proclamation providing for vernacular Scriptures to be placed in every church expressly noted that these were to "be read for devotional and inspirational purposes, not disputation"¹⁹. Most churchmen were clearly frightened by the thought that men might interpret the Scriptures for themselves. John Standish, a staunch Catholic opponent of the vernacular Bible, contended that the only results of having the Scriptures in English would be "obstinaoy, disobedience, loss of devotion and swarms of errors and heresies"²⁰. Thomas More agreed that the result of such religious devotion was inevitable recalcitrance, and to expect a man who can interpret Scripture for himself to be meek and humble "standeth as well with reason as to make a man drunk and bid him be sober"²¹. Thomas Starkey, like More, deplored the confusion he expected would result from everyone

¹⁹ A Proclamation for the Bible of the largest and greatest volume to be had in every church (London: R. Grafton, 1542).

²⁰ John Standish, A Discourse wherin is debated whether it is expedient that the Scripture should be in English (London: Robert Caly, 1554), STC 23207, sig. A.ii.

²¹ More, Confutacyon, sig. D.iii.

interpreting the Bible "after their own fantasy",²²
 and Bishop Longland complained that in areas of
 his diocese where heretical groups regularly
 assembled for Scriptural readings, robberies had
 increased.²³ Roger Edgeworth warned that he him-
 self had known some persons who were led into a life
 of idleness and crime through the study of Scripture
 in English.²⁴ Most churchmen and royal officials
 agreed that "vice, uncharitableness, lack of mercy,
 diversity of opinion and other like enormities have
 reigned ever since men had the Scripture in English".²⁵

This fear of social upheaval was accompanied by
 an equally close association in the public mind
 between religious innovation and sexual licentious-
 ness. There was a general feeling that all reli-
 gious heretics were "full of wild liberty".²⁶ that
 freedom to interpret the Scripture was accompanied

²² Starkey, An Exhortation, p. 24.

²³ Clark (ed), Lincoln Diocese Documents, p. 196.

²⁴ Quoted in J.W. Blench, "Two Forgotten Preachers
 of the Early Sixteenth Century", Review of English
 Studies, new series, Vol. V (1954), pp. 123-143.

²⁵ Cowper (ed), Four Supplications, pp. 63-64.

²⁶ A Compendious Treatyse of Solaundre.

by freedom from sexual inhibitions. Bullinger's widely-read attack on Anabaptism condemned all heretics as advocates of a "beast-like carnal liberty".²⁷ William Barlow reported that some Protestant communities held their meetings in the nude in order to affirm that "they be in the state of innocence".²⁸ A royal commission appointed to examine heretics in Kent in 1552 attempted to indict two persons, evidently suspected Anabaptists, on charges of sexual misconduct.²⁹ Bishop Gardiner observed that this sexual libertinism was intimately connected with the threat of social upheaval for, while sectarian groups made much of the importance of the Spirit, "all is for the flesh, women and meat with liberty of hand and tongue", an attitude that could only lead to the "dissolution and dissipation of all estates".³⁰

Such charges of sedition and sexual licentiousness were more popular than valid, but they were not

²⁷ Bullinger, An holosome antidotus.

²⁸ Barlow, A Dyaloge.

²⁹ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 19.

³⁰ Muller (ed), Letters, p. 279.

completely groundless. Neither can be completely dismissed as a figment of the public imagination. The widely circulated heretical tract, The Sum of Scripture, for instance, mixed religious heterodoxy with social theory in a way that needed little straining to interpret as seditious. "No man", the author contended, "is under the secular power, but they that be out of the Christian estate". Furthermore, he maintained that Christian men among themselves have naught to do with the sword nor with the law" and that the state had no power to compel obedience of anyone, for "all things necessary are declared in the New Testament but no man is compelled but according to their own will". He likewise opposed the taking of oaths or any resort to courts, since "the good Christian shall not defend themselves by justice in no manner, for any manner of wrong that they suffer, but recommend all to the will of God". "There be two sorts of people in the world", he concluded, "one is the kingdom of God, to which belong all true Christian people and in this kingdom Christ is king and lord and it is impossible that in this kingdom that is to say, among very true Christian men, that the sword of justice temporal should have ought to

do". In fact, Christ himself was very clear that "no Christian shall resist evil nor sue any man at law".³¹ This denial of the jurisdiction of the monarch in an age when the state was everywhere expanding its power, coupled with a refusal to swear oaths in a society whose feudal bonds demanded such swearing, bordered on sedition and pointed out the potentially disruptive character of heresy.

This anonymous author was not alone in his opinions and the support they attracted lent increasing credence to charges that heretics were a threat to the social order. Bishop Bonner, for instance, instructed his diocesan clergy to look out for persons who believed "that a Christian man or woman ought not to swear before a judge nor one to sue another in the law for his right."³² Bishop Ridley ordered an examination of persons in his diocese to determine whether any of them believed that "all things be common or that there ought to be no magistrates, gentlemen, or rich men in Christian realms".³³ Tyndale's enemies supposedly found evidence of anarchistic designs

³¹ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 732.

³² Articles to enquired of in . . . the Diocese of London.

³³ Articles to be enquired of in the bishopric of Norwiche.

in his works. "He saith", they contended, "that the children of faith be under no law".³⁴ A list of heretical ideas current in 1540 contained the proposition that Christians should not take oaths and "that no man's laws ought to be obeyed".³⁵ Especially disturbing to royal authorities were threats to the social order implied in the testimony of men like Edward Large, a priest indicted in 1537. In addition to the common denial of the efficacy of rites and ceremonies, Large was charged "with having preached that Christ did not die for us who live now, but only for those who died before his Incarnation and that it was the peers of the realm in those days high and learned who put him to death".³⁶ This combination of Lollard antisacerdotalism together with Anabaptist Christology and an attack on the English nobility provoked fears that were further encouraged by heretical attacks on the concept of private property. "That all things be common and nothing several"³⁷ was one of the most frightening

³⁴ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 729.

³⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XV, #498, p. 217.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. XII, #303, p. 125.

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. XV, #498, p. 217.

ideas associated with sixteenth century heresy since it implied a direct threat to the very fabric of society. A Dutch tract commending medieval continental heretics that circulated widely in English Protestant communities praised the Waldensians for having all goods in common,³⁸ and William Barlow's widely-read account of Anabaptist practices stressed the importance of community of goods as a guiding principle intimately linked with Anabaptist religious beliefs.³⁹ Other heretics, like Anne Askew, questioned the right of the King to impose the death penalty for crime, contending that an examination of Scripture indicated that "neither Christ or his apostles put any creature to death".⁴⁰ The author of the Revelation of Antichriste maintained that "no man is compelled but according to their own will, therefore Christ teacheth that a rebel should not be killed but avoided".⁴¹ The Lollard "Twelve Conclusions" had included a similar pacifistic statement.⁴²

Despite this professed pacifism, much of the

³⁸ The Original and Sprynge of all sectes.

³⁹ A Dyaloge.

⁴⁰ Bale, Select Works, p. 202.

⁴¹ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 730.

⁴² Gee and Hardy (eds), Documents, p. 132.

heretics' reputation for seditious and potentially disruptive activity rested on acts of real violence committed by members of Protestant communities. In London, for instance, heretics made a number of threats on the life of a man who had arrested a popular priest as a heretic.⁴³ John Fishcock, a Kent man arrested in 1546, threatened to strike the children who carried the pax in religious processions,⁴⁴ while Margaret Toftes the elder warned Archbishop Cranmer that when he returned to his diocese she trusted "to have a day against you".⁴⁵ In many parishes, the destruction of images was only accomplished with considerable violence,⁴⁶ and in the church of St. Mary Woolnoth, a boy was whipped for throwing his cap at the host at the time of the consecration.⁴⁷ Physical attacks on priests were rarer but still occurred. William Flower, for instance, assaulted a priest at mass in 1555.⁴⁸

It is too easy, however, to exaggerate the evidence in favor of the connection between heresy and

⁴³ More, Confutacyon, sig. X.iii.

⁴⁴ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 311.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 307.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. XIII, #348, p. 120; Vol. XVIII, #546, pp. 311-312.

⁴⁷ Sharpe, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 422.

⁴⁸ More, Confutacyon, sig. X.iii.

social upheaval. Some of these acts were the work of youngsters or emotionally disturbed adults and had nothing to do with religious conviction. Many heretical works could be construed as seditious only under the most strained interpretation. Tyndale, for instance, had written that rulers who refused divine counsel perished by their own, with obvious reference to Henry VIII,⁴⁹ and heretics were fond of quoting Robert Barnes' statement that "men's constitutions bind not the conscience".⁵⁰ Thomas Becon had maintained that "no man should be sworn and wholly addict to the doctrine and teaching of any man except it agreeth with holy Scripture".⁵¹ William Turner wrote that "Christian men need no other law. . . but the law of the gospel".⁵² Any of these statements, without considering the context of the work or the career of the author, might easily be considered anarchical or disruptive. Yet neither Tyndale or Becon were ever involved in seditious activity and

⁴⁹ The First Booke of Moses called Genesis newly corrected by W.J. (London: 1534).

⁵⁰ Letters and Papers, Vol. XV, #345, p. 138.

⁵¹ Becon, Early Works, p. 278.

⁵² Turner, The hunting and finding out of the Romishe Foxe.

Barnes was a member of a royal commission for the examination of heretics in Kent.

The same is true in the case of Cuthbert Tunstall's opinion that the Hortulus Animae, an English primer printed in 1530, was a dangerous book, likely "to do great harm among the people".⁵³ The work itself was apparently written by George Joye and there is little in it that appears overtly seditious. Certain passages, however, might be construed as potentially disruptive. The author, for example, noted that his own day had witnessed "trouble and calamity" largely because of the increased "ungodliness and sins of the kings and of their subjects", a statement certainly open to interpretation as seditious, while his contention that the situation would be shortly remedied by either the Second Coming or another indefinite sort of "marvelous sudden change" savored of millenarianism and the threat of social upheaval.⁵⁴ In both cases the danger evidently lay

⁵³ Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 274.

⁵⁴ The Hortulus is today an extremely rare book. The only known copy is in the British Museum. Extracts are printed in L.A. Sheppard, "The Hortulus Animae in English, 1530", The Library, fifth series, Vol. VI (1951), pp. 109-115, and C.C. Butterworth, "Bishop Tunstall and the English Hortulus", The Library Chronicle,

more in the eye of the beholder than in the intention of the author for there is no record of the Hortulus playing any role in the social disturbances of the sixteenth century.

In similar fashion, John Lancelles' warning, quoting the prophecy of Daniel, that God "shall let men to unhallow the sanctuary, to put down the daily offering and to set up the abominable desolation" or a preacher named Gardiner's contention that "as Christ was accused by two or three false knaves, so a man may be accused by two or three false knaves, and the judge as false a knave as the best and so be condemned",⁵⁵ might easily be construed as seditious or potentially disruptive, a possibility made all the more likely by the overwhelming fear of the common people among whom heretical ideas spread in the sixteenth century. Almost all ecclesiastical and royal officials shared William Thomas' view that "for peril, none is to be compared to the frenzy of the people".⁵⁶ As Juan Luis Vives pointed out in a

Vol. XVI (1950), pp. 37-45. Valuable information on the Hortulus type of religious literature can be found in C.C. Butterworth, The English Primers, 1529-1545 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), especially pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ Wycklyffes Wycket, STC 25591a; Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 292.

⁵⁶ "A second discourse by William Thomas for the King's use", in Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Vol. II, Pt. II, pp. 372-377.

widely-read work, the common people "are a great schoolmaster of great errors",⁵⁷ and, worse still, most churchmen and royal administrators agreed that they were invariably unstable.⁵⁸ "The way of error", Stephen Gardiner warned, "is let in at a little gap and when men hear of new gear, every man maketh his request, some new hose, some new robes, some new caps, some new shirts. Like as in religion we have seen attempted where the people thought they might prevail".⁵⁹ Given this predisposition to panic, heretical comments and writings that might be potentially disruptive seemed actually so.

A similar combination of real and imagined sexual licentiousness further limited the appeal of sixteenth century popular Protestantism and made the English heretic seem even further removed from the mainstream of societal development. The association of heresy and erotic freedom was certainly not without precedent in the history of medieval

⁵⁷ Juan Luis Vives, An Introduction to Wisdome (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1540), STC 24847, sig. B.1.

⁵⁸ Peryn, Three Godly and notable Sermons.

⁵⁹ Strype, Cranmer, Vol. II, pp. 782-783.

sectarian groups like the Brethren of the Free Spirit, while the polygamous regime of the Munsterite Anabaptists was well known in England. The writings and testimony of the Middlesex heretic John Champneis made the authorities' worst fears in this matter seem realized.

Self-described as "an learned lay man", Champneis was born in Somerset but at the time of his examination by Archbishop Cranmer in 1549 was living in the parish of Stratford-le-Bow, Middlesex. Both his recorded testimony and his only extant work reveal a wildly apocalyptic thinker. Like most of his contemporaries, Champneis was contemptuous of theological speculation, condemning "clerkly sophistical doctrine" and advocating a religion based on "the regeneration of the spirit of Christ" and patterned after the primitive Christian community.⁶⁰ The similarity ended there, however, as Champneis went on to call for the ruthless extermination of not only the priesthood but all who lacked his personal convictions. "The time is come",

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John Champneis, The Harvest is at hand wherein the tares shall be bound and cast into the fyre and brent (London: H. Powell, 1548).

he contended in a passage reminiscent of the German Anabaptist Thomas Muntzer, "that whosoever will not receive the true doctrine of Christ shall be destroyed" and he called for a war against the "ungodly transgressors" of the gospel, a war conducted by an army of the regenerate. This obviously disruptive passage was accompanied by a defense of erotic freedom for all those possessed of the spirit. "God doth permit to all his elect people", he maintained, "their bodily necessities of all worldly things".⁶¹ After a man had experienced regeneration, he could not sin and though the "outward man might sin. . . the inward man could not sin". In short, "godly love falleth never away from them which be regenerate in Christ, wherefore they cannot do contrary to the commandment of Christ". Although Champneis recanted all these "false doctrines and damned opinions", the close relationship between much of his thought and the mainstream of sixteenth century English popular Protestantism contributed to the public image of the heretic as a person full of "carnal liberty".

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Wilkins, Vol. IV, pp. 39-40.

Champneis was not the only English heretic who advocated erotic freedom for the Elect. An anonymous 1557 tract indicated that the belief that the regenerate of spirit, "though they sin grievously are. . . never out of the favor and election of God neither can they by any means finally perish" had widespread support in heretical communities during much of the sixteenth century. Noting that anyone who accepted this tenet might freely commit "theft, fornication, adultery, murder or any other sin", the author deplored an opinion "invented to provoke men to live a careless and libertine life more"⁶². Similarly, the author of the Revelation of Antichriste insisted that "the people of Christ doth nothing because it is commanded but because it is pleasant and acceptable to them",⁶³ a statement open to many possible interpretations most of them unfavorable to its advocates.

Like the fear of sedition and social upheaval, however, concern over heretical sexual promiscuity was often exaggerated. Even the most hostile witnesses

⁶² W. Whitley, "The Confutation of the Errors of the Careless by Necessity", Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, Vol. IV (1914), p. 110.

⁶³ Wilkins, Vol. III, p. 729.

often admitted that many heretics were persons of exemplary character. A Catholic priest of the college of Winchester, for instance, praised Anne Askew as a devout woman who spent many hours in fervent prayer,⁶⁴ and an anonymous Canterbury man who denied transubstantiation was likewise "of very many praised a good and holy man".⁶⁵ Hugh Latimer remarked that George van Paris, the convicted Arian,⁶⁶ was a "great man" reknowned for his piety.

Heretical writings had traditionally insisted on the necessity of a stern sexual ethic, frequently faulting the priesthood for concupiscence. Early Protestant drama like the anonymous Hye Way to the Spittel Hous condemned clerical licentiousness and lack of sobriety,⁶⁷ while the 1509 edition of the frequently performed play Everyman contended that "sinful priests haunteth women's company" and thus "giveth the sinners example bad".⁶⁸ Hyockscorner,

⁶⁴ Nichols (ed), Narratives, p. 40.

⁶⁵ Letters and Papers, Vol. XVIII, #546, p. 291.

⁶⁶ Alan G. Chester (ed), Select Sermons of Hugh Latimer (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1968), p. 191.

⁶⁷ Hazlitt (ed), Remains, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Joseph Q. Adams (ed), Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 300.

which appeared for the first time in the same year, provided similar observations on clerical morality, contending that to "live clean" was "the least thought they have of fifteen".⁶⁹ The anonymous author of the supplication to the commons written during the reign of Henry VIII complained that clerical celibacy was unaccompanied by any sexual restraint outside of marriage. "We may not think they ought to marry wives", he lamented, "though we take them daily abusing other men's wives".⁷⁰ Others insisted that "it was not convenient for a priest to hear the confession of a woman",⁷¹ while the author of the mid-century poem Robin Conscience adopted an extremely puritanical attitude toward female sexuality, even condemning the dying of hair in a passage reminiscent of Tertullian.⁷²

Despite such insistence, however, the picture

⁶⁹ J.S. Farmer (ed), Hickescorner (London: T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1908), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Cowper (ed), Four Supplications, p. 75; of R. de la Bere (ed), John Heywood, Entertainer (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 244; C. Van der Spek, The Church and the Churchman in English Dramatic Literature before 1642 (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1930), p. 24.

⁷¹ Letters and Papers, Vol. XIII, #1189, p. 498.

⁷² Hazlitt (ed), Remains, Vol. III, p. 247.

of the Protestant heretic as a person dangerous to accepted standards as well as to the very fabric of society persisted in the public mind. In their private conventicles, sixteenth century English heretics remained essentially alienated from a society which viewed them as a menace, a view which certainly limited the spread of popular Protestant ideas.

CONCLUSION

The popular Protestant ideas associated with sixteenth century English heresy all rested on a firm conviction of the necessity of returning to the example and customs of the primitive Church. Stressing the ethical message of the gospels and the importance of strict adherence to the precepts of Scripture, these heretics denied transubstantiation, auricular confession, sacramentals, and ceremonies and with them the distinction between priest and layman that had been an essential part of medieval Christianity since the eleventh century. Defending the role of the layman in sixteenth century Christian society through an explicit denial of divinely-ordained clerical powers, popular Protestant thought went far beyond any concern with the mere reformation of proven abuses, aiming instead at the complete abolition of medieval traditions lacking Scriptural sanction and precedent in the primitive Church. Their voluntary organization in private conventicles,

together with a reputation for potential disruptiveness and sexual immorality, further underscored the gulf that separated them not only from Henrician Protestantism but also from the more moderate reformers like Cranmer and Latimer who shared the content but not the intent of much of their opposition to images, pilgrimages and saint-worship.

Unconcerned with and even disdainful of theological speculation, sixteenth century English heretics were insistent on the necessity of sincerity in religious devotion. Condemning the magical rites and ceremonies associated with the medieval priesthood, they sought a religion of the spirit in which the role of the sacraments would be subordinate to religious conviction and ethical precepts drawn from the New Testament which all were free to interpret for themselves. This Scriptural fundamentalism was as important to sixteenth century heretics as it had been to their Lollard predecessors and the many similarities between English popular Protestantism and medieval Lollardy were strikingly indicated by the way in which Lutheran and Anabaptist ideas were received in English heretical communities. Although foreign, often esoteric, ideas lacking any precedent in

Lollard beliefs, like anti-Trinitarianism, enjoyed some popularity, the most widely-circulated continental Protestant ideas like justification by faith or the priesthood of all believers bore considerable similarity to Lollard antisacerdotalism. Even the organization of sixteenth century heresy - the private conventicle, the itinerant preacher, the importance of the kinship bond, and the enhanced role of women - was reflective of this Lollard background, as was the contemporary association of heresy and social upheaval. Sixteenth century English popular Protestantism actually bore little relationship to the contemporary events associated with the continental and English Reformations. Its roots were in the medieval past and it borrowed from the present only those things compatible with its Lollard background.

Finally, it is important to note that only detailed archival research can provide more adequate information about the extent of popular Protestant sentiment in individual local areas, and there is still much to know about the motivation of individual heretics. The available material, however, clearly indicates the major tenets of sixteenth century English heretical thought and provides some idea of what ordinary people believed in an age of rapid change.

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Any serious study of sixteenth century English heresy and popular Protestantism will find a convenient starting point in the collected state papers and correspondence of the reign of Henry VIII edited by J.S. Brewer during the later nineteenth century, as well as the documents reprinted by Wilkins and Strype, and the accounts based primarily on episcopal registers provided by the sixteenth century Puritan John Foxe. Fortunately, none of these collections is terribly difficult to master. With very few exceptions, the materials are in English and the calendared letters and state papers are especially valuable, many seemingly irrelevant documents containing considerable information. Although the mixed summary and direct quotation method used by Brewer and his assistants may at times prove misleading, an examination of some of the most important original documents sufficiently confirms the accuracy and usefulness of the collection.

Beyond Brewer, Foxe, Strype and Wilkins, source materials are more difficult to locate. Many of the printed pamphlets and broadsides of the early sixteenth century contain valuable information that is well worth the struggle with turgid prose and pages of repetition and irrelevance. The writings and extant correspondence of early reformers like Frith and Tyndale, as well as their opponents Thomas More and Miles Hogarde, are extremely useful. In almost every case, however, these authors deal with popular Protestant thought only tangentially and much information must be gained by inference.

There are really no adequate secondary treatments of Tudor heresy. The studies of A.G. Dickens, especially his Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, are sometimes provocative but often unsubstantial and over-rated. The following bibliographical list includes primary and secondary materials used in the preparation of this study. With a few exceptions, the titles included have been cited in footnote references in the text of the paper. The others are valuable studies that give an indication of the contemporary political, social and religious setting of sixteenth century heresy. Works merely examined, but not used directly in the preparation of the paper, have been omitted.

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