

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

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THE TRAGEDY OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

The Tragedy of the English Reformation was smaller but not simpler than that of the whole Reformation. On all sides there was spiritual endeavour, heroic effort as well as much that was short-sighted, selfish and sordid.

The three successive stages of the English Reformation were:

(i) the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) and his son, Edward VI (1547-53), when Catholic life, doctrine and worship were first set aside;

(ii) the reign of Henry's elder daughter, Mary (1553-58), when Catholic doctrine and worship were restored without an accompanying spiritual revival;

(iii) the reign of Henry's younger daughter, Elizabeth I (1558-1603), when Catholic life was once more pushed underground. At Elizabeth's death, English Catholics could work and hope for relief from persecution, but prospects of an early Catholic recovery of the English Church had disappeared.

Five Distinct Stories in the English Reformation

Five distinct but not altogether separate stories make up the complicated tragedy.

Royal Power

Secondly, there is the ever-present foreground story of the power and prestige of reigning Kings and Queens, who were feared, flattered and fawned on as never before. The reigning King or Queen was thought to be God's Prime Minister, whose commands had to be obeyed, and whose leadership was in fact decisive at every crisis of the English Reformation. The course of the English Reformation was changed more by a change of monarch than by a monarch's change of mind.

Ambitious Laymen

Firstly, there is the ever-present background story of ambitious laymen reacting strongly against the dominating influence of the clergy who ran so much of fifteenth and early sixteenth century society; the universities and education; most of the government service; all questions of business principle (defaulting business contractors could be prosecuted for perjury in church courts); and parish priests had been known to use charges of heresy as the most efficient debt collecting devices against parishioners refusing to pay their dues. Then, great wealth in the hands of the clergy induced itching fingers among laymen. Schemes for unlocking church land and using it for lay education or the relief of the poor were usually fig leaves covering naked greed.

Catholic Deficiency

Thirdly, there is the story of shortcomings among English Catholics. The Church does not fail, but some of its members may falter. Spiritual inadequacy was visible before the Reformation, and partly led to the Reformation. English Catholics, proud of their saints, have little reason to dwell on the fifteenth century as a century of sanctity. How many English persons who died in the fifteenth century have been canonised?

Too many clergy made a business career out of their pastoral obligations. Too many religious relaxed comfortably in their material security. The spiritual life of too many laymen seems to have been a round of devotional practices, mechanically performed. The Bible itself was not well known to laymen by direct reading, although Biblical events and characters were familiar from preaching, paintings and popular stories. No English Bible was printed before the Reformation, because the bishops feared that free reading would stimulate free doctrine. Advanced study of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate, continued on traditional lines. A revision of study methods was probably overdue. The old way had been very fruitful and was still useful, but its elaborate style made simple reading more difficult. When John Colet lectured in 1497 on St. Paul's Epistles considered as immediate words to living men, he was thought to be a startling revolutionary in England.

Protestant Religious Movements

Fourthly, there were the Protestant religious movements which inspired the English Reformation. Significantly, they began before the Catholic spiritual revival had any wide effect. They derived from three distinct sources.

Lollardy

The Lollards followed the teaching of the fourteenth-century heretic, John Wycliffe, who urged men to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. His translation, secretly studied, was used to attack the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, and understandably frightened the bishops off freely circulating English translations of the Bible. The Lollards, mainly poor men, were more active than was earlier supposed. In the diocese of London alone between 1527 and 1532 over 200 heretics, mainly Lollards, were made to abjure their heresy. Of the 273 burned for heresy by Mary Tudor between 1555 and 1558, and commemorated in his Book of Martyrs, John Foxe gives little more than the bare names of two-thirds. Many of these may have been Lollards.

Early Cambridge Reformers

Lollard heresy was strongly reinforced intellectually by the spread of Luther's teaching among influential Cambridge scholars. Hugh Latimer, a Cambridge don, in 1524, recalled how "from that time forward I began to smell the word of God and forsook the school doctors" (i.e., the traditional scholastic theologians) William Tyndale helped out from Oxford. His translation of the New Testament, printed in Germany in 1526, was one of the great instruments of the English Reformation. Concentrated Bible reading and Lutheran views were the main support of the Cambridge reformers. Tyndale deftly provided both at once.

Others from Cambridge were Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1556, whose graceful style lives in the Book of Common Prayer; Nicholas Ridley, Protestant Bishop of London, 1551-3, whose theological eminence was acknowledged by an opponent's claim that "Latimer leaneth to Cranmer, Cranmer leaneth to Ridley, and Ridley to the singularity of his own wit"; John Bradford, scholar and preacher, whose gentleness won acclaim from Robert Persons, S.J.; John Rogers, translator and editor of "Matthew's Bible", issued in 1537 partly because "the dissemination of Bibles would put a stop to the religious disputes then rife in the realm"! In Bradford's phrase, Rogers "broke the ice valiantly" as Mary Tudor's first victim in 1555, and was attended by his "wife with her eleven children who formed the tragic little retinue at the place of execution". These five Cambridge scholars and theologians were all burned as confirmed heretics by Mary Tudor between 1555 and 1556. By then, however, their work had been done, and their legacy lived on in the Church of England. A later sixteenth-century follower, Richard Hooker (c. 1554-1600), the author of the most important Anglican apologia, intended, according to his first biographer, "to show such arguments as should force an assent from all men, if reason, delivered in sweet language, and devoid of any provocation, were able to do it." The Catholic reader will not agree, but he will gratefully remember Hooker's reasonableness and gentleness and his warning against narrow-minded zeal.

Later Cambridge Reformers

During Elizabeth's reign and beyond, two further waves of Cambridge reformers led the way towards a Puritan "New Jerusalem".-Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) and Walter Travers (c. 1548-1643) carefully constructed and expounded a complete Calvinistic church system to be made supreme in England. A great organiser, John Field (1545-88) from Oxford, brought them near, but not near enough, to success. Then followed a succession of Cambridge Puritans who concentrated more on Calvinistic religious ideas and behaviour than on Calvinistic Church organisation. Some of these were: William Whitaker (1548-95), whose portrait hung in the study of his admirer, St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J.; William Perkins (1558-1602), whose passing bell was heard with unrepentant joy by one listener whose conscience would no longer be troubled by the preaching of Perkins; William Ames (1576-1633), whose library was shipped, after his death, to a grateful colony in New England; Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), of whom one admirer wrote-

"Of this blest man let this just praise be given
Heaven was in him before he was in Heaven";

and John Preston (1587-1628), who, when visiting the barber, characteristically went on reading the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, and who would blow the falling hairs off the page and read on keenly.

It is difficult to exaggerate the influence of such "marching and counter-marching of learned doctors on the printed page" in early Puritan America and on the English Puritan Revolution in the seventeenth century.

Catholic Spiritual Recovery

Fifthly, there is the story of English Catholic spiritual recovery in the reign of Elizabeth I. This story has rarely failed to move those interested in English history.

The beginning was disappointing. In the early years of Elizabeth, Catholics in large numbers went to the Protestant Established Church. William Allen, an Oxford scholar ordained in the Netherlands in 1567, worked for a solution. He insisted on a way "to train Catholics to be plainly and openly Catholics; to be men who will always refuse every kind of spiritual commerce with heretics."

Catholic Missionary Movement

Allen's solution was to found at Douai in 1568, the first seminary to train priests "the greatest religious achievement of Elizabethan England", Fr. Philip Hughes has said. The English Catholic religious recovery owed much to the Catholic Reformation on the continent of Europe. Douai, now in France, then in the Spanish Netherlands, lay in the heart of a religiously rejuvenated society. From Douai, Edmund Campion, in 1572, assured an English Protestant friend that "every age, rank and sex" in the Spanish Netherlands were a spiritual example "worth six hundred Protestant Englands".

Priest Martyrs

Between 1568 and 1603 hundreds of young Elizabethan Catholics flocked to the college to be trained and ordained for the dangerous duty of missionary priests. From 1574 to 1603 four hundred and thirty-eight Douai priests returned, ninety-eight of them to martyrdom. Twenty-five other martyr-priests also suffered.

Sir Richard Grenville, the hero of the fight of *The Revenge*, in 1591, was knighted not for his exploits at sea, but for his determination, in 1577, in capturing, and ensuring the execution of, Douai's first martyr, Blessed Cuthbert Mayne (1543-77).

In 1580, the Society of Jesus sent two priests, Edmund Campion (1540-81), and his superior, Robert Persons (1546-1610), to join the English mission. Campion, outstanding in character and intellect, knew what to say, Persons knew how to pass on the message to Elizabethan England, just as he knew how to contact Catholics after a lonely arrival in 1580. He went straight to the chief London prison holding Catholics. Campion closed this first Jesuit mission with words at his trial and death which aroused devout response among Catholics. Elizabethan authorities who had to use perjury to convict him under the existing treason laws were also affected but with dismay at the public effect of his words.

"If our religion do make us traitors, we are worthy to be condemned; but otherwise we are, and have been, as good subjects as ever the Queen had."

According to William Cecil, a leading Elizabethan statesman, Campion was "one of the diamonds of England". The setting of this diamond included distinction at Oxford, the conversion of Cuthbert Mayne, compassion for Sir Philip Sidney, "the poor wavering soul", the friendship of William Allen, Douai's founder, and of Gregory Martin, the first Catholic translator of the whole Bible into English.

Lay Martyrs

The Elizabethan Catholic revival also went deep among lay people. Fifty-nine died for their faith.

Blessed Margaret Clitherow (c. 1556-86), the wife of a York butcher, was converted in 1574. She made her house a centre for priests and, in order to save her family and friends from appearing as witnesses at her trial, she refused to plead guilty or not guilty. She resolutely suffered the legal penalty of being crushed to death for contempt of the law.

Blessed John Rigby, a London solicitor, martyred in 1600, readily admitted that he had been "reconciled to the

Catholic Church". His spiritual advisor, Fr. John Gerard, S.J., recollected that Rigby "had been told that it was always sinful not to confess his Catholic faith and he may not have known that it was lawful to throw the burden of proof on the prosecution, as Catholics who are wise to it do". Rigby told his judges, more tellingly, that if the law held it treason "for a man fallen into the displeasure of God through his sins to be reconciled to God again," then, "if this be treason, God's will be done."

Campaign of Spiritual Reading

Dedicated missionary work and vigorous lay response were supported by a Catholic translation of the Bible and a campaign of spiritual reading. Father Gregory Martin's translation of the New Testament appeared in translated Old Testament in 1609. These translations together gave three thousand readings to the Authorised Version of 1611. Gregory Martin, in his preface, warned that translations were not necessary, nor was indiscriminate reading without danger. His warning was perhaps excessively heeded as Bible reading did not become widely established among English Catholics. The fourth edition of this New Testament, 1633, was the last, as was the second edition of the Old Testament in 1635.

Robert Persons' *The Christian Directory* (1582) has claims to be ranked with Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* (1471) and St. Francis Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609). Ironically enough, while English Protestants vilified Persons as a "lurking wolf" they pirated his spiritual message from *The Christian Directory* by as many as fifteen editions before Persons' death in 1610.

THE PROGRESS OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

1509-53

Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, 1509-53

The most striking Reformation development in the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) was the denial of the Pope's authority over the Church in England. This renunciation took place in 1533-4 and replaced the Pope's authority by the supremacy of the King. The main motive for this change was Henry VIII's resentment at the Pope's failure from 1527 to annul Henry's marriage with Catherine of Aragon so that Henry could marry Anne Boleyn. If the Pope was held to be only a bishop, like any other bishop, then Henry's case might then be tried in England by English bishops under the vigilant eye of Henry, the Supreme Head. Indeed, after this was asserted in 1533 the six years of Papal delay were ended by English bishops in under three weeks and in Henry's favour. This revolution in the Church won influential support amongst leading lords and gentry. Their secular and anti-Papal feelings were reinforced by gifts and sales of the property of religious houses, seized between 1536 and 1540.

OLDER VIEWS

Earlier opinion, Catholic and Protestant, deduced that Henry VIII's Reformation was, essentially, a schism, a denial of Papal authority without further alteration of Catholic doctrine. As the disappointed reformer, John Hooper, declared, Henry VIII has destroyed the Pope, not popery. According to this view, other important religious changes were introduced only in the reign of Edward VI.

Today our understanding has been altered or enlarged in four ways.

Earlier Protestant Tendencies

Catholic and Protestant scholars have clearly shown that more Protestant tendencies were encouraged in Henry VIII's reign than were once thought. We have noted that Protestant reformers were active in England from at least the 1520's. Then in the later 1530's and 1540's disputes arose about the validity of some Catholic beliefs challenged by Lutherans. Prayers for the dead, Purgatory, the number of Sacraments, the purpose of good works and the meaning of Justification were some vexed issues. No sixteenth-century government could allow religious disputes to continue unchecked, as they would lead to brawls and, perhaps, to civil war when loyalty to the state meant loyalty to official religious doctrine.

Henry's government, denying itself any appeal to the Pope, decided for itself. On five occasions between 1536 and 1549 Henry, with the help of the bishops, issued pronouncements "to abolish diversity of opinions". These pronouncements not all consistent with each other are not entirely reassuring about Henry VIII's Catholic beliefs. His friend, Archbishop Cranmer, later admitted that Henry, before his death, was thinking of further changes in religion. And Henry did, after all, place his son and successor, Edward, in the hands of educators and advisers with Protestant sympathies. This decision led directly to extensive Protestant changes by the governments of Edward VI.

Materialist Outlook

The sordid outlook of Henry VIII's England also needs to be given greater stress. "It is difficult to think of an age in which unselfishness, devotion to an ideal, faithfulness to a master or a friend were rarer in public life, or one in which lust for material gain was greater." And, according to Dom David Knowles again, even one of the great exceptions to the prevailing spirit, the martyr of 1535, St. Thomas More, appears to have come late to his sanctity. He developed "very markedly in purity of vision" only when he abandoned his interests and endured hardship, treachery, loneliness and "the ultimate solitude of misunderstanding from those he loved most".

The Bishops

Henry VIII's bishops must be seen against the background of career making and profit seeking, with the shining exception of St. John Fisher (1469-1535), and to a much lesser extent of William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1503 to 1532, whose stature, like More's, grew in adversity. Warham was, in many ways, the typical Henrician bishop, whose promotion in the Church was a reward for dedicated service to the King. His outlook reflected his career as lawyer, administrator and diplomat. His frequent maxim was "the wrath of the Prince is death". Such bishops, servants and dependents as they were, needed the King's additional protection against the rising tide of anti-clerical feeling, dangerously expressed in Parliament from 1529 and skilfully directed from 1532 by Thomas Cromwell, a master of ecclesiastical revolution. Such bishops could not lightly risk royal displeasure and nearly all did not.

The strongly exercised secular spirit, with its distrust of Papal power politics of the early sixteenth century, would probably have led to some change in the exercise of Papal control of the Church in England even without Henry VIII's divorce arrangements. Papal control in England was more extensive in 1530 than in Catholic France or Spain. In these countries Pope and King had rearranged the Papal exercises of control.

The clear duty of the bishops was to prevent such rearrangement injuring the Pope's essential spiritual authority. In England, only Bishop Fisher stood resolved on this from the beginning to the point of martyrdom in 1535. Archbishop Warham finally abandoned his deference to Princes. Before he died in 1532, he penned a noble protest against royal intrusion into the rights of the Church. At the last, he appreciated his position as successor to St. Thomas Becket, the victim of earlier royal aggression. Old man that he was (he was nearly eighty), Warham died just too soon. Had he lived his final resolution might have made an impression on the other bishops from whom Fisher was set apart by his sanctity. Warham's portrait (on the cover) reveals the man whose steadfast integrity was long overlaid by monumental patience with the arrogant claims of others and by a sad worldly realism. The tragedy of Henry VIII's Reformation lines his face.

EDWARD VI

The Reformation in the reign of Edward VI, 1547-53, was the natural climax of the Henrician Reformation. Protestant Reformers gathering strength under Henry VIII won an expectedly clear victory over the schismatic bishops, who had vainly trusted Kings to safeguard the Mass, the Sacraments and Catholic devotional life. Such bishops, as Stephen Gardiner, Cuthbert Tunstall and Edmund Bonne, were defeated as well as discredited. Reformers, aided by royal power, now openly abandoned Catholic fundamentals. They substituted a new form of worship contained in the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552 and Protestant doctrines contained in the 42 Articles of 1553, the forerunner of the 39 Articles.

The Reformers, however, had to depend on the politicians and the age of materialism reserved its most blatant specimens for the reign of Edward VI. For example, Richard Rich, whose perjury betrayed More in 1535, crowned an

infamous career in 1548 by occupying More's old office of Lord Chancellor. The Reformers wanted things to be otherwise. John Hooper desperately nailed the leading politician of the reign, John Dudley, as a "most holy and fearless instrument of the Lord". Dudley willingly advanced Reformation measures, but the Reformation could hardly have prospered for long under the patronage of this "incarnation of the hypocrisy and self-seeking which marred the Reformation".

Reign of Mary Tudor, 1553-8

Under the Catholic Queen, Mary Tudor, the importance of royal leadership was seen in the speedy restoration of Papal authority and in the speedier undoing of the Reformation measures, except that, by Papal insistence, the restoration of confiscated religious property was not demanded.

Blunders

The new beginning was soon marred by serious governmental errors. Indeed, one of the unending pursuits of historians of this reign is to attempt to blame or exonerate one of other leading figures for the major blunders.

Spanish Alliance

One blunder was Mary's marriage to Philip II of Spain. A Catholic or Spanish alliance was not unpopular in itself, but Mary allowed a fiercely independent England to be subordinated to Spanish Continental policies. It was a disastrous confusion of foreign interest with Catholic interest.

Burning Heretics

Another blunder was the implacable drive against those convicted of unrepudiated heretical opinion. This was more than blunder. In many instances it was a crime. Many of those convicted of heresy were brought up from 1534 in a heretical society. They were not properly Catholic from the first. They had not renounced the Catholic faith. They had never been taught it. In Fr. Philip Hughes' words, "Many of those tried and convicted and burned were not, by the canon law, really liable to these penalties, whatever their beliefs, and whatever the obstinacy with which they clung to them."

To make matters worse the judges of heresy were those bishops of whom nearly half had been responsible, in Henry VIII's reign, for creating or furthering the heretical climate in which many of their victims were brought up.

Not all Mary's victims, however, were brought up in a heretical society. Most of the famous names were technically heretics. Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Rogers, Bradford and Hooper were all adult before 1534.

Mary's Failure

The Marian Restoration, for all its interest in burning, failed to light the fires of spiritual fervour among Catholic clergy and laity or to warm English hearts with ardent Papal loyalty. Wayward leadership was made ultimately futile by bitter hostility from the failing, 80 years old Pope Paul IV. He detested everything Spanish, including Mary's England, suspected Mary's Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Pole, of heresy, and refused to help him further. On this depressing note Mary's reign ended in November, 1558, with vacancies in five bishops' sees and the English Church insufficiently prepared for the coming challenge.

Reign of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603

Under Elizabeth I royal leadership proved once more important, and this time decisively important, in the English Reformation. This was not as clear at the time as it is now. In 1559 the Royal supremacy once more replaced Papal authority in England and the Prayer Book service once more replaced the Mass. In 1563, the 39 Articles, a revised edition of the 42 Articles of Edward VI, re-imposed Reformation doctrine.

In vain, all the surviving Marian bishops, except one, refused to accept the revival of Royal supremacy, and were replaced by Protestant bishops. Most of the clergy acquiesced in the change.

How long would the new arrangements last? The English Catholics wondered as they waited.

Six issues must be noticed.

GOVERNMENT AIM

The Elizabethan government constantly aimed at the destruction, not the toleration, of the Catholic faith in England. English Catholics, as far as possible, were to be assimilated into the Elizabethan Church. This was to be brought about in three ways.

The Elizabethan Church was made as attractive as possible to Catholics even if some Protestants, especially Puritans, were affronted. Vestments were used. The main service sounded familiar and inoffensive and reassuring statements were made about the meaning of the Royal supremacy.

Strong government pressure, backed by fire and imprisonment, was used to force Catholics to attend the Elizabethan Church.

Catholics were to be spiritually starved by being denied the ministrations of Catholic priests. By 1585 to give or receive such ministrations became a capital offence.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS INTENT

The Elizabethan policy, in intent, was both political and religious. Politically, it accepted the common sixteenth-century assumption that all good citizens had to profess the same official religion for the sake of public peace. Furthermore, those who rejected this religion rejected half the duty of citizens and were suspect on the other half.

Religiously the Elizabethan policy accepted the usual sixteenth-century governmental view that one religion was true, its own, and all others were false. False religion, offensive to God and dangerous to souls, must be suppressed.

In all this Elizabethan policy was basically no different from other sixteenth-century governments: "One King, one Faith, one Law," as the French put it.

Of course, within Elizabethan government, various individuals differed. Elizabeth herself was probably moved more by political interest although she could use the religious argument. She said to Parliament in 1585, "if I were not persuaded that mine were the true way of God's will, God forbid that I should live to prescribe it to you." Her chief minister, William Cecil, whose outlook was strongly political, seems to have been moved by marked religious hostility to the Catholic faith. Some others, like Francis Walsingham, appear to have been so obsessed by hatred of the Catholic Church as to be constant advocates of a "holy war".

The public pronouncements of the Elizabethan government against Catholics concentrated, however, on political arguments and spoke of the mildness and patience of Elizabethan religious policy.

CATHOLIC RESPONSE

The Catholic Church could never accept the Elizabethan religious policy, however commonplace it was in Europe, and however gently the Elizabethan pressure might have been applied compared with the large numbers killed by other sixteenth-century governments savagely trying to stamp out religious opposition.

The Catholic Church had to forbid its members to attend Prayer Book services whatever the penalties for absence.

The Catholic Church had to supply priests for England even if they had to be smuggled in to work under cover, at the risk of being mistaken for foreign agents, spies or plotters and of being killed for being priests.

The Catholic case had also to be put clearly in pamphlet and book to answer the Protestant case and to persuade public opinion. In the new lay society opinion was best won by spiritual leadership and force of argument. Campion's Ten Reasons, Allen's True, Sincere and Modest Defence of English Catholics, Persons' Christian Directory, and even the Douai Bible itself, to mention a few, all armed and fortified Catholics in the great battle of the books.

CATHOLIC SCHEMES OF MILITANT OPPOSITION

Religious efforts to rescue Elizabethan Catholics under persecution were complicated by Catholic political and military efforts in the same cause.

Between 1568 and 1586 a series of resistance movements and plots were concocted to replace Elizabeth by her Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. In 1570, to ease Catholic consciences, Pope St. Pius V excommunicated

Elizabeth and absolved her Catholic subjects from obedience to her. In 1580, Pope Gregory XIII's Secretary of State, in a private answer to a private question, held it no sin to kill Elizabeth but a glorious and meritorious deed if done "with the pious intention of doing God service". In 1579 Pope Gregory XIII, the great patron of seminaries and missions, sent a small military expedition to Elizabethan Ireland to raise revolt. This embarrassed Campion and Persons in England in 1580. In 1588, an attempt to restore the Catholic faith by force was defeated, to the unmistakable relief of Pope Sixtus V, when the Spanish Armada was dispersed before it embarked invasion troops.

No doubt some of the plots were hopelessly organized and many known in advance to the English secret service. But in the sixteenth century the desperate weapon of assassination often succeeded and usually on unexpected occasions. The current Catholics' method of trying to explain away the plots is less convincing than to point to the obvious loyalty and distaste of most English Catholics for plots and invasions, whether these schemes were Papal, English or Spanish.

ELIZABETHAN PROFIT FROM CATHOLIC SCHEMES

The schemes provided a golden opportunity to the Elizabethan government to identify all Catholic activity as treason, and to carry out its unswerving policy of exterminating the Catholic faith under the cover of patriotism and protection of the realm. For example, early missionary martyrs, like Mayne and Campion, could only be convicted on trivial technicalities or trumped up charges of conspiracy. But by 1585 the atmosphere changed enough to support legislation allowing priests to be convicted merely for being priests.

FADING CATHOLIC OPPORTUNITY

Can we know when the Catholic opportunity of recovering England faded? No certain answer is possible. Yet it seems to have been in Elizabeth's reign and it seems to have little to do with the prospects of success of militant activities like Catholic plots or the Spanish Armada.

Pope Sixtus V's doubt about the recovery of England by Spanish troops came from a sound instinct. Catholic religion could not effectively be restored by violence triumphant, while violence that failed would leave a long legacy of hatred of all things Catholic.

Two factors were apparently more important.

Elizabeth's Long Reign

The unexpectedly long reign of Elizabeth. This enabled a new generation to grow up to accept the Elizabethan Church, and enabled the Puritan movement to imbue Protestant Englishmen with a moral purpose, more widespread than earlier Protestant influences and determinedly hostile to Catholic claims.

Restricted Activity of Catholic Missionaries

The Catholic missionaries in England for all their dedication, heroism and suffering, necessarily moved in a very restricted field. Unlike, say, St. Francis Xavier, S.J., who died near China in 1552, and who is said to have made 700,000 Asian converts, the English missionary had no wide opportunity of preaching or influencing large numbers. He was tied to his host's family and friends as he moved secretly from country house to country house. Fr. John Gerard, S.J., even declared that while in the Clink, a London prison, between 1593 and 1597, "We had, by God's grace, everything so arranged that I was able to perform there all the tasks of a Jesuit priest, and provided only I could have stayed in this prison, I should never have wanted to have my liberty again in England." Furthermore, those they converted or whose faith they confirmed were marked men in society and excluded, as far as possible, from positions of public influence.

Catholic recovery of England was hardly possible under these circumstances. The missionaries did not achieve what the world calls success, yet they did not fail.

Blessed Robert Southwell, S.J. (c. 1561-95) abandoned a great career as a poet for the greater career of martyr-missionary. He knew that in Elizabethan England the love of God was love in a cold climate. One of his poems speaks to Catholics and Protestants alike.

*"As I in hoary winter's night stood shivering in the snow,
Surpris'd I was with sudden heat which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright did in the air appear;
'Alas!' quoth he, 'but newly born in fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my fire but I.
My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding thorns;
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke, the ashes shame and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals;
The metal in this Furnace wrought are men's defiled souls;'
With this he vanished out of sight and swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I called unto mind that it was Christmas Day."*

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Bernard O'Connor,
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