

REVIEW ARTICLE

Restoration and Reaction: Reinterpreting the Marian Church

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Although the reign of Mary I (1553–8) was a tumultuous and eventful one, for over four hundred years there was little debate about it or about the queen's efforts to restore Catholicism to England. The reign was almost universally perceived as poor, nasty, brutish and short-lived and the restoration of Catholicism was believed to have been doomed to failure, both because the burning of heretics offended English sensibilities and because Protestantism was already so deeply embedded in England that it could not be uprooted.¹ Yet towards the end of the twentieth century, the tectonic plates of historical research began to shift and the resulting tremors altered the historiographical landscape of Mary's reign, and indeed of the English Reformation.

In 1987 a collection, edited by Christopher Haigh, was published which contained a number of chapters, notably those by Rex Pogson and Ronald Hutton, which emphasised both the challenges faced by the Marian Church and the considerable extent to which these challenges were met.² Five years later, two major studies appeared, almost in tandem,

¹ Influential and, in their time, highly regarded statements of this view appeared in A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, London 1964, 259–82, and G. R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation: England, 1509–1558*, London 1977, 392–8.

² Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation revised*, Cambridge 1987.

which challenged the traditional understanding of the Marian Church. The first of these, Eamon Duffy's seminal *Stripping of the altars*, argued that the Marian religious leaders conducted an intelligently planned programme of Catholic restoration that enjoyed significant success. Duffy drew attention to achievements of the Marian Church that had gone largely unnoticed, notably the Marian regime's innovative use of printing to further its pastoral goals. He also extended Pogson's work on the diligent care taken for the restoration of Catholicism at the parish level.³

Likewise, Christopher Haigh's *English Reformations* devoted two chapters to a bold reappraisal of the religious history of Mary's reign.⁴ Haigh described the revival of religious festivities and a general satisfaction, if not enthusiasm, at the return of the old ways. He noted a rise in ordinations and pointed out Cardinal Reginald Pole's plans to build on this success with seminaries and cathedral schools. Turning existing historical orthodoxy on its head, Haigh concluded that the 'last years of Mary's reign were not a gruesome preparation for Protestant victory, but a continuing consolidation of Catholic strength'.⁵

These works met with only slow, grudging acceptance. In the second edition of his *The English Reformation*, A. G. Dickens added a significant amount of new information to his account of Mary's reign on subjects such as Protestant women, the social background of the Marian martyrs, Protestant clergy and Protestant underground congregations.⁶ But the only modifications that he made to his account of the Catholic restoration was to remove an earlier comparison of Cardinal Pole to Robespierre and to add a brief description of the difficulties that Pole faced, based on Pogson's work.⁷ Dickens repeated, without change, his verdict that the Catholic restoration was an inevitable failure and would not have succeeded, even if Mary had lived longer.⁸

The late David Loades, one of the most eminent authorities on both Mary and her reign, conducted a sustained rearguard struggle against challenges to the established version of the Marian restoration. In 1979 Loades agreed with Dickens that the restoration was a failure, although he did not agree that this failure was inevitable; rather it was a combination of human error and 'acts of God', such as Mary's childlessness, bad harvests and epidemics. A second edition of this book, published in 1991 amidst the wave of revisionist studies, reprinted these passages exactly, with no concessions to

³ Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England, 1400–1580*, New Haven, CT 1992.

⁴ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: religion, politics and society under the Tudors*, Oxford 1993, 203–34.

⁵ *Ibid.* 234.
⁶ Dickens, *English Reformation* (1964), 264–77, cf. *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn, University Park, PA 1989, 295–306.

⁷ *Ibid.* (1964), 266; (1989), 294–5.
⁸ *Ibid.* (1964), 279–82; (1989), 313–15.

revisionist opinion.⁹ In his first biography of Mary in 1989, Loades noted the work of Pogson, Haigh and other revisionists only to dismiss it.¹⁰ In a second, 2006 biography, Loades was readier to acknowledge some of the Marian Church's achievements: the publication of pastoral works, the re-foundation of religious houses, patronage of preaching and the strengthening of Catholicism in the universities. Nevertheless, he concluded that 'the idea that she was simply a victim of misfortune at the time, and of a malign Protestant historiography after her death, is no more satisfactory than the legend of Bloody Mary'.¹¹

By this time a second wave of revisionist studies was discovering new vistas on the religious world of Marian England. In 2000 Lucy Wooding argued that Mary's religious policies were carefully shaped to create a humanist, but distinctively English, Catholic Church.¹² Wooding's book was controversial, particularly in its insistence on the insularity of the Marian Church, but her depiction of an intellectually coherent programme was a harbinger of research that would shortly come. In 2005 John Edwards and Ronald Truman edited an noteworthy collection of essays on the contributions – intellectual, pastoral and administrative – of the Spanish friar, Bartolomé Carranza, to the restoration of Catholicism in England.¹³ In emphasising the close collaboration between Carranza and Cardinal Pole, this collection suggested that Pole, far from rejecting the theology and proselytising strategies of the Counter-Reformation as had been repeatedly claimed, anticipated and even influenced, them.¹⁴ The late William Wizeman's incisive study of the Catholic religious literature of Mary's reign emphatically argued that the theology and spirituality of the Marian Church antedated, paralleled and perhaps inspired the reforms of the Tridentine Church.¹⁵ Wizeman also demonstrated the effectiveness and importance of Marian authors whom Dickens had dismissed as 'at best, a group of devoted mediocrities'.¹⁶ In a 2006 collection of essays,

⁹ D. M. Loades, *The reign of Mary Tudor*, London 1979, 428–52, cf. *The reign of Mary Tudor*, 2nd edn, Harlow 1991, 362–89.

¹⁰ Idem, *Mary Tudor: a life*, Oxford 1989, 339–45.

¹¹ Idem, *Mary Tudor: the tragical history of the first queen of England*, Kew 2006, 183, 212–19 at p. 212.

¹² Lucy E. C. Wooding, *Rethinking Tudor Catholicism in Reformation England*, Oxford 2000, 114–51.

¹³ John Edwards and Ronald Truman (eds), *Reforming Catholicism in the England of Mary Tudor: the achievement of Friar Bartolomé Carranza*, Aldershot–Burlington, VT 2005.

¹⁴ Classic statements of the view that Pole was too conservative and legalistic to utilise the Jesuits or to embrace the Counter Reformation are Rex Pogson, 'Cardinal Pole: papal legate in England in Mary Tudor's reign', unpubl. PhD diss. Cambridge 1972, and 'Reginald Pole and the priorities of government in Mary Tudor's Church', *HJ* xviii (1975), 3–21.

¹⁵ William Wizeman, *The theology and spirituality of Mary Tudor's Church*, Aldershot–Burlington, VT 2006.

¹⁶ Dickens, *English Reformation* (1989), 312.

The Church of Mary Tudor, Duffy and Thomas Mayer offered a striking rehabilitation of Pole as an administrator and portrayed him as the architect of a well-designed strategy for the restoration of English Catholicism.

However, up through this point there was a third rail upon which even the most ardent revisionists dared not tread: the burnings of some 285 people for heresy in the years 1555–8. Only Haigh had questioned the consensus that the burnings were a ghastly mistake which seriously hindered the restoration, and even he went no further than stating that ‘if it did not help the Catholic cause, it did not do much to harm it’.¹⁷ In 2009, however, Duffy launched an argument that the persecution had succeeded in eliminating a hard core of zealots, suggesting that the drop-off in executions in 1558 showed that the regime was running out of opponents. The persecution only failed for the same reason the restoration failed: the nearly simultaneous deaths of the queen and the cardinal.¹⁸ Others quickly developed, extended and reinforced Duffy’s arguments.¹⁹

This reassessment of the persecution remains controversial, but the rest of the revisionist case has won the field. No historian is now about to dismiss Mary, her reign or her Church in Dickens’s or Elton’s cavalier style. So how does this new collection add to our understanding of this crucial period?

Dale Hoak’s chapter, the first in this volume, is a something of an outlier in that it focuses on events in Edward vi’s reign, not Mary’s. Against Eric Ives’s contention that the attempt to disinherit Henry viii’s daughters and place Jane Grey on the throne was driven entirely by Edward vi himself, Hoak argues that the duke of Northumberland played a larger role in shaping the scheme as Edward became increasingly ill. Hoak also maintains that Mary’s success was not due to Catholic support, but to reluctance among the nobility and Edward vi’s councillors to countenance Northumberland’s tactics or acquiesce in the illegality of his plans.

Yet if Mary initially profited from the perception that her adversaries were acting outside the law, the perception that she herself was acting in violation of the law came to be used against her. Scott Lucas observes that an appeal to the rule of law was a common theme in Protestant works attacking Mary. Early in her reign there were denunciations of the queen and her officials for ignoring Edwardian statutes banning Catholic religious practices as well as attacks on Mary for her ‘treason’ in marrying Philip. Eventually these specific criticisms would evolve into a series of works by John Knox, Christopher Goodman and others which argued

¹⁷ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 234.

¹⁸ Eamon Duffy, *Fires of faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, New Haven, CT–London 2009.

¹⁹ Thomas S. Freeman, ‘Burning zeal: Mary Tudor and the Marian persecution’, in S. Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (eds), *Mary Tudor: old and new perspectives*, Basingstoke 2011, 171–205.

that violent resistance was legitimate against an ungodly and oppressive ruler. Andrew Hadfield, in a careful analysis of one of the most important of these works, John Ponet's *Short treatise of politik power*, takes some pains to place clear blue water between Ponet on the one hand, and Knox and Goodman on the other. Ponet accepted a woman's right to rule, which Knox and Goodman notoriously did not, and, unlike them, Ponet's work appealed to the individual conscience as the arbiter of the legitimacy of the demands of governments.

John McDiarmid looks at John Cheke: like Ponet, a prominent figure in Edward VI's reign who fled into exile. McDiarmid convincingly dismisses the claims of previous historians that Cheke, during his exile, was a major anti-Marian propagandist. He also postulates that Cheke was kidnapped by the Marian authorities, not for what he did in exile, but in order to secure the recantation of a well-known figure associated with Edward VI's government. Yet, as McDiarmid notes, the recantation was not in the end published. He explains this mystery by arguing that the regime 'was more focussed on making sure religious guidance and instruction reached the laity through the clergy than on addressing the laity with persuasive propaganda directly', and that Pole was ambivalent about the use of the press.²⁰ And yet this was the regime which backed the publication of *The displaying of the Protestants*, a work of polemical propaganda by the decidedly unclerical hosier Miles Hogarde. One possible alternate solution to this conundrum is that Mary's ministers overestimated Cheke's importance and kidnapped him in order to silence him. Another possibility is that the problems that they encountered with the publication of Cranmer's recantation made the Marian authorities wary about printing Cheke's recantation, although (as McDiarmid demonstrates) the recantation was widely circulated in manuscript.

Vivienne Westbrook discusses John Rogers, the first of the Marian martyrs to be executed. Unfortunately, her failure to place Rogers's execution within the context of the Marian persecution makes it hard to discern its significance. Why was Rogers burned? Why was he burned ahead of major figures like Ridley, Latimer and Cranmer? Why, after his being placed under house arrest on 13 August 1553, was he transferred to Newgate in January 1554? (Westbrook does not mention the house arrest, instead giving the misleading impression that Rogers was placed in prison shortly after Mary's accession.) In particular, she neglects to note that on 10 November 1554 Rogers was examined by Nicholas Harpsfield, the vicar-general of London, for destroying the cross in the rood-loft of his former church of St Sepulchre, without the consent of its

²⁰ John F. McDiarmid, "'To content god quietlie": the troubles of Sir John Cheke under Mary', in E. Evenden and V. Westbrook (eds), *Catholic renewal and Protestant resistance in Marian England*, Farnham–Burlington, VT 2015, 217, 222.

parishioners.²¹ It is an indication of the persistence of the myth of passive victimhood which still swirls around the Marian martyrs that, although the record of Rogers's iconoclasm was printed in the first half of the nineteenth century, it has been ignored not only by Westbrook but also in Chester's biography of Rogers and in the life of Rogers in the *ODNB*.

As William Wizeman demonstrated throughout his tragically short but remarkably productive career, there was no shortage of active pens in the Marian Church. In his chapter in *Catholic renewal and Protestant resistance*, Wizeman focuses on books written by Marian Catholics printed in the years 1556–7. While Wizeman discusses polemics, including Hogarde's acerbic *Displaying of the Protestants*, he also emphasises the powerful pastoral concerns manifested in Marian books as well as the production of devotional works. These works were predominantly in English, and a great many of them were translations of older Latin texts. The age of some of these works, going back to the reign of Henry VIII or beyond, led scholars such as Dickens and Loades to argue that they were irrelevant. Wizeman instead points out their popularity and even suggests that 'it appears more than likely that the religious texts printed in Mary's reign helped to move the first generation of diehard recusants to maintain their Catholic identity'.²²

Ian Gadd throws light on Marian printing by focussing on the printers, rather than the authors. Building on Peter Blayney's monumental study of the Stationers' Company, and also drawing on previously unconsidered evidence such as Pole's legatine constitutions of 1556, Gadd demolishes the common misconception that the Stationers' Company was established as a tool of censorship. Like Blayney, Gadd sees the Company's foundation as a commercial coup which gave a group of London printers control over English book production. In one sense, this chapter, with its focus firmly on the industry's economics, sits uneasily in a volume about religion. Yet Gadd's chapter also complements Wizeman's work in demonstrating the importance that the Marian authorities placed on printing and the crucial importance of Mary's reign for the development of the English book trade.

Following in the footsteps of Ronald Truman, John Edwards and others, Elizabeth Evenden emphasises the importance of the role that the Spanish clergy who came to England with Philip, particularly Carranza, played in the Marian Church. The chapter is well-researched, but in the absence of any newly-discovered documents, this line of scholarship has now gone

²¹ London Metropolitan Archive, DL/C/614, 2v. The incident almost certainly happened before – and caused – Rogers's incarceration in Newgate, although Rogers was not formally questioned about it for almost a year.

²² William Wizeman, 'The Marian Counter-Reformation in print', in Evenden and Westbrook, *Catholic renewal*, 149.

about as far as it can. Because of language difficulties – none of the Spanish clerics spoke English – and their unpopularity with the English populace, the clergy who came over with Philip II had to work behind the scenes. This has made the task of determining their influence necessarily speculative. For example, Evenden cites testimony, presented in the 1560s in order to defend Carranza from charges of heresy, that Carranza ‘met with those who worked as inquisitors [in England] by order of the queen’.²³ She suggests on this basis that Carranza was acting as an ‘Inquisition *consultor*’ for the English Church, and adds, a little defensively, that ‘even if the legal ability of Philip to instruct these clerics in the administration of the [English] Church was questionable, there is no doubt that it took place’.²⁴ Yet this testimony does not specify with which clerics Carranza spoke, whether it was a formal meeting and whether Carranza was representing Philip. Nor does the testimony state that Carranza was instructing the English clerics; they might have been briefing Carranza on the complexities of English heresy laws and trial procedures. Beyond the bare fact of a meeting between Carranza and the English ‘inquisitors’, the rest of Evenden’s description of this event is guesswork. There is no doubt about the importance of Carranza’s catechism or that Spanish clergy advised Philip and Mary, as well as Cardinal Pole, on ecclesiastical matters. It is also reasonable to assume that Pedro de Soto and Juan de Villagarcía played an important role in promoting Catholicism in Oxford University. But so far there is no direct evidence of the Spanish clergy shaping the major policies of the Marian Church or of their directing the implementation of these policies.

One of the priorities of the Marian regime was to eliminate the inroads that Protestants had made in the universities. Ceri Law describes and analyses the visitation of Cambridge University in 1557, which included the most dramatic episode of the Marian campaign in the universities: the exhumation and ritual burning of the bodies of the Protestant theologians Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius. Echoing Natalie Z. Davis’s famous article on the ‘rites of violence’, Law persuasively argues that the burnings were intended to remove a source of spiritual pollution from the university. Yet Law covers the entire visitation in detail, including the inspection of the colleges and the searches for heretical books and not just its theatrical and grisly conclusion. As she demonstrates, the university cooperated fully with the visitation and its concomitant purge of heretics. Catholics had already seized control of Cambridge’s colleges. The visitation was a Roman (in multiple senses of the word) triumph ritually celebrating an already completed conquest.

²³ E. Evenden, ‘Spanish involvement in the restoration of Catholicism during the reign of Philip and Mary’, *ibid.* 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

One of the Marian regime's greatest successes was in turning several Oxford and Cambridge colleges into bastions of Catholic orthodoxy which nurtured a generation of talented Catholic leaders. In a *tour de force* of prosopographical research, the late Thomas Mayer's chapter shows that numerous graduates of New College, Oxford, and other colleges filled the cathedral chapters. Mayer convincingly argues that this was the deliberate result of Cardinal Pole's patronage of both the universities and the cathedrals. The result was to turn the cathedral chapters into centres of persistent resistance to Protestantism in Elizabeth's reign. Carolyn Colbert takes up the theme of Catholic resistance in the volume's epilogue, which considers Mary's funeral, and in particular the sermon preached by John White, the bishop of Winchester, which so displeased the new Queen Elizabeth that White was temporarily placed under house arrest. The sermon has been seen by historians since John Strype as maladroit, but Colbert maintains that it was a bold, calculated attempt to rally resistance. It failed to preserve the Marian *status quo*, but it was also a clear signal of the forthcoming, determined resistance to the Elizabethan Settlement by the Marian senior clergy.

Evenden and Westbrook are to be congratulated for editing a volume of high quality articles which adds substantially to our knowledge of both Protestants and Catholics in Marian England. *Catholic renewal and Protestant resistance* is another milestone in the journey away from the outdated view of Mary's reign as an unproductive *cul-de-sac* in English history. In particular, the emphasis placed by Thomas Mayer, Eamon Duffy and John Edwards on the central part played by Cardinal Pole is further underlined here: Pole now appears to have been as important to the Marian Church as Thomas Cromwell was to the Henrician Church. Even more important, a number of the contributors demonstrate how the foundations for English Catholic resistance and survival in the reign of Elizabeth were laid in the reign of Mary. Mary I's untimely death blasted any hopes that Catholicism would be fully restored in England, but work done in her reign would foster Tridentine Catholicism both in England and on the continent.