The myth of the English Reformation is that it did not happen, or that it happened by accident rather than design, or that it was half-hearted and sought a via media between Catholicism and Protestantism; and the point at issue is the identity of the Church of England. The myth was created in two stages, first in the middle years of the seventeenth century, and then from the third decade of the nineteenth century—in either case, by a ‘High Church’ party within the Church: first, the Laudians or Armenians; later the Tractarians or Anglo-Catholics. These parties largely consisted of clergy, with the particular motive of emphasising the structural Catholic continuity of the Church over the break of the Reformation, in order to claim that the true representative of the Catholic Church within the borders of England and Wales was not the minority loyal to the Bishop of Rome, but the Church as by law established in 1559 and 1662.

The nineteenth century growth of Anglo-Catholicism amounted to nothing less than an ideological revolution in the Church of England, which involved radically reinterpreting its history. The nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholics were in a good position to do this. They started life as a university-based movement, and they have always kept their university base; their opponents, the Evangelicals (the party which wanted to emphasise the Protestant character of the English Reformation) had also begun in the eighteenth century with a strong presence in the English universities, but they gradually lost it during the nineteenth century just as the time when universities were starting to treat history as a serious undergraduate discipline. The Anglo-Catholics were therefore left almost unchallenged; they did the most creative and interesting research in church history, and they asked the questions which they wanted to ask of their research and drew the conclusions which they wanted to draw. To the extent that the universities took any interest in the history of the Church of England, it was to the Anglo-Catholic...
tradition that they looked for an academically respectable view of the past.

The ecclesiastical giants of the Reformation under Edward VI and Elizabeth were the Iiving clergy: Cranmer, Parker, Grindal, Whitgift, Ridley, Hooper. Latiimer. All of them have embarrassed the Anglo-Catholic historiographical tradition. Cranmer gets some credit for creating the Book of Common Prayer, but much Anglo-Catholic ingenuity has been expended on trying to explain why his second version of the Prayer Book is not as important as the first one which he abandoned after an experimental three-year period. Grindal comes off worst, as the 'Puritan' Archbishop, with the implication that such an animal as a Puritan archbishop is an unnatural monster: so the aggressive High Church activist in Queen Anne's reign, Dr. Henry Sacheverell, called Grindal 'that false son of the Church ... a perfidious prelate'.

Similarly, the Puritans, who included some of the most able and energetic members of the Elizabethan Church of England, have been shunted off into a side, seen as not quite fully part of the Church of England. Their crime was to fail in their pre-ordained duty of preserving the Catholic character of the Church of England through the Reformation. This process of redefinition began long ago in the days of William Laud, when he had cast his eye down a list of senior clergy and noted against their names the initials O or P, standing for 'Orthodox' or 'Puritan'. The great divide had already begun to be turned by the seventeenth-century Anglo-Catholic historiography into the standard interpretation of the Church's past.

This rewriting of the Church of England's history was possible because the Church of England's establishment as a Protestant Church was extraordinarily confused: full of ambiguity, anomalies and compromises. The high-water mark of official movement in doctrinal statements and liturgical change in a Protestant direction was reached quite early in the English Reformation: not in the reign of Elizabeth I, who fossilised the official shape of the Church, but in the time of her predecessor but one, Edward VI. However, the conflict which brought this halt was a clash between two varieties of Protestant opinion: on the one hand, Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Ridley of London, and on the other, John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester.

1550 was a good moment for further Protestant reform in England. The Duke of Northumberland had consoli-
dated his position after the defeat of his rivals, and negotiated a treaty ending the war with the French which left him less dependent diplomatically on the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor. England was hosting a number of distinguished continental Protestant refugees, mainly on the initiative of Archbishop Cranmer, who was anxious to play the role of an international Protestant statesman and heal the divisions which were already deep among the reformers; his hopes for an international Protestant conference in England in the end came to nothing, because the continental reformers were far too divided to take up the idea. Nevertheless, the welcome given by the Edwardian regimes to refugees (despite the emperor's annoyance) meant that with the Lutherans ceasing to take initiatives in continental Protestantism, and Calvin's Geneva not yet in the dominant position which it would later assume, England had a good chance of taking the leading role internationally. How far would the government let the theologians take their reforms?

The crucial struggle came in 1550-51. It all depended on whether Northumberland would be consistent in his backing for Hooper, an English friend of the Zurich reformers who frequently found Cranmer a disappointment; Hooper might lead the English Reformation to be as thoroughgoing as anything in Switzerland. The possibility of a fruitful alliance between Northumberland and Hooper foundered on Hooper's lack of interest in compromise: when nominated as Bishop of Gloucester, he refused to be consecrated in the traditional vestments, regarding them as symbols of the concessions to popery which he and the Swiss theologians so deplored in Cranmer's liturgical work. Ridley led the fight against this intransigence, and was so successful in persuading the Privy Council that Hooper was attacking the commands of authority rather than furthering reformation that by 1551 Hooper had been intimidated into giving way.

Northumberland's abandonment of Hooper in the vestments affair represented the end of Protestant structural change in the Church of England.
further Reformation there was, owed its shape once more to Cranmer; yet there was nothing of the via media between Catholicism and Protestantism in Cranmer’s plans. He was indeed working in consultation with more moderate continental reformers like Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, but he was now under less pressure to conciliate Catholic opinion at home and abroad, with leading conservative bishops in gaol and the emperor less of a diplomatic threat.

Now the theological message which underlay the services of the 1549 Prayer Book could be spelled out more clearly, and although ordinary people may have found 1549’s introduction of English services more obvious and traumatic, a much more far-reaching theological consolidation of the new order was to follow. Altars were ordered to be demolished in 1550 and replaced by wooden tables, as an act of discontinuity with the hated sacrifice of the mass. In the same year Cranmer published a new Ordinal carefully omitting any notion of a priest offering sacrifice, and instead emphasising his role as a pastor and teacher. It is this Ordinal which provided the reasoning behind the Roman Catholic Church’s rejection of the character of Anglican orders in the nineteenth century, in response to the Anglo-Catholic claims for priestly continuity. Revised in some details in a Protestant direction, this formed part of an entire new Book of Common Prayer in 1552, which survives virtually unaltered as the norm for Anglican worship.

The 1552 Book was the ultimate expression of Cranmer’s theological outlook. In it, we can see how his view of the eucharist had shifted from traditional Catholicism by the way that the communion service had no specific moment of consecration of the elements by the priest, as had remained in his 1549 Prayer Book; the priest was even enjoined in the service to take unconsumed bread and wine home with him for his own use. Besides liturgy, Cranmer went on to produce definitions of reformed doctrine and law. In 1553 the doctrines of the Church of England were summarised in Forty-Two Articles; but now time was running short, with Edward dying of tuberculosis and his Catholic sister Mary waiting in the wings. The Articles may never have been brought before the Provincial Convocations, while a legal committee’s work known as the Reformatio Legum (which would have ended the Church’s dependence on medieval canon law and given it a reformed basis of discipline) remained a draft only. This was an unfinished job.

and Elizabeth’s Settlement only restored the Prayer-Book and the Articles, not the law-code.

The point at issue in the row between Cranmer and Hooper was not whether or not the Church of England should retain a Catholic character, but whether or not remnants of the Catholic past could be redirected to Protestant ends, in order to preserve order, decency and hierarchy. On the issue of ideology versus decency, Cranmer won; and in the construction of a framework for the Church’s worship, his work remained permanent. He produced the most elaborate liturgy of any Protestant Church in Western Europe; because of this, he bequeathed the Church of England ambiguity for Anglo-Catholics to exploit. Although the thinking behind the Prayer Book was consciously aligned with Swiss theology, it remained capable of being adapted in terms of outward symbolism in a startling variety of directions, as anyone who has done a Cook’s Tour of Anglican worship will know.

The problem must be not so much to explain how the ambiguity was possible, but to understand why English churchmen were prompted to exploit it. One answer must lie in the puzzling and unique survival of the cathedral system in the English Church without significant modification or reform. Only one cathedral building was lost in the English Reformation, and indeed six brand-new cathedral foundations were created out of former monasteries by Henry VIII. During the Reformation there were plenty of critics of cathedrals who (often rightly) saw them as ‘dens of loitering lubbers’, and the reasons for their survival are not entirely clear.

Deaneries and canonyes of cathedrals were a handy permanent source of patronage from the powerful to the deserving or from the powerful to themselves; they were a useful sideway into which one could shunt able but awkward clergy – a use which has continued down to the present day. However, these justifications could hardly be presented in public. What, indeed, was the point of a Protestant cathedral? Attempts were made to turn them into centres of excellence for Protestant preaching, with a certain amount of long-term success. Nevertheless, in reality, the chief purpose of cathedrals remained what it had always been: the elaborate singing and recitation of a regular round of liturgical acts performed by professionals; promoting the beauty of holiness in the face of Protestant denials that such beauty was a legitimate goal of Christian worship. Cathedrals acted as a liturgical fifth column within the Elizabethan Church; they demonstrated clearly the ceremonial possibilities provided by Cranmer’s Prayer Book. Once the cathedrals had survived the rocky Elizabethan years into the age of the Stuarts, the Laudians made the cathedral ideal of the beauty of holiness central to their religious programme.

On one side, then, we have the cathedrals; but we must not overestimate their place in the life of the reformed Church of England. For near-
ly three centuries their liturgical interpretation of the Book of Common Prayer was performed in almost complete isolation; similar worship would only be found in some Oxbridge College chapels, in the Chapel Royal and a handful of other places of worship. The thousands of parish churches and parochial chapels which provided the staple diet of Anglican worship treated the Prayer Book in an entirely different way, as the basis for reformed Protestant worship. The offices of matins and evensong were the norm, with occasional communions, and there was no music at all except the singing of metrical psalms according to the fashion popularised by Calvin at Geneva; together with psalm-singing, the bulk of the time in worship would increasingly be taken up by the sermon, as more and more of the clergy gained the expertise and the official licence necessary to preach. This great gulf between the worship of the cathedrals and that of the parish churches remained unbridged down to the nineteenth century; and that long-lived double tradition does much to explain why Anglican services can seem so contradictory in their performance and meaning.

The 1559 Settlement by which Queen Elizabeth revived Edward VI’s Church has often been seen as providing further ambiguity; combing over by Anglo-Catholic historians for signs that against all odds Catholicism kept a presence, it has furnished some crumbs of comfort.

First the Queen herself; her religious views, mostly very successfully kept under wraps, included such distinctly conservative elements as a dislike of married clergy, a scepticism about the overriding need for a preaching ministry in the Church and a liking for elaborate church music, monuments of the past and some church ornament. This has been seen as reflected in some acts of retrenchment in the 1559 Settlement: a few minor but significant moderations in the 1552 Prayer Book the assumption of a new royal title ‘Supreme Governor’ rather than ‘Supreme Head’. Indeed, one can point to contradictory voices in the Settlement. Most obviously there is the contradiction between the moderate tone of royal injunctions in 1559 which allowed the use of many of the old vestments in services and remained diplomatically silent about destroying other items of liturgical furniture, and the almost simultaneous action of royal commissions of senior Protestant clergy which unleashed a ruthless campaign of systematic vandalism in church furnishing.

Out of such signs of hesitation as these and from technicalities of parliamentary drafting in the Settlement legislation, the Tudor historian Sir John Neale, in his work on the Elizabethan period, erected a theory about the 1559 Settlement which perhaps by coincidence reinforced the Anglo-Catholic view: he suggested that the government wanted the minimum settlement possible on Elizabeth’s accession, little more than a break with Rome, but that Protestant activists in the Commons forced a thoroughgoing set of changes which became the Settlement as passed in 1559.

We can now be reasonably certain that the situation was in fact precisely the reverse: the government got the Settlement which it intended, and what hesitations there were, were caused by opposition from the other corner: conservative aristocrats and Mary’s Catholic bishops. These hesitations were eventually overcome by some fairly ruthless political manoeuvring on the government’s part. Whatever the Queen’s own views, she quickly resigned herself to the inevitability of a thoroughgoing Protestant settlement in 1559, since the only senior clergy prepared to operate a national Church for her were convinced Protestants.

Another important element in the myth of the English Reformation has been the conspiracy of silence about the role of iconoclasm: the Anglo-Catholic historiographical tradition has sought to ignore or to marginalise iconoclasm, but it was one of the English Reformation’s most central and distinctive features. Queen Elizabeth disapproved of excessive destruction, and tried in a proclamation of 1560 to save funeral monuments being wrecked alongside images which might attract superstitious worship, but her efforts
were largely futile. She had missed the point; medieval tombs spoke of the old devotional world, the enemy of all godly Reformation. Funerary portraits of clergy in eucharistic vestments and laypeople with rosaries, inscriptions summoning up the ghost of purgatory with an insistent cry of 'Pray for the soul', simply had to be disposed of along with the statues and the altars.

What is significant is that most of the pre-Civil War destruction of imagery was premeditated and carried out by lawfully constituted authority — churchwardens or the injunctions of senior clergy — rather than being the result of some sudden frenzy: to use a forensic analogy, it was not manslaughter but murder. One can find many surviving instances where destruction was very precise, taking out certain offensively popish words or symbols. To say this is not to underestimate the degree of popular approval which iconoclasm enjoyed, certainly in southeastern England. Enthusiastic Protestants even repeatedly physically attacked and damaged the silver cross and candlesticks which the queen obsti-
ately maintained in her private chapel; and, remarkably, those who did so were treated relatively leniently. The authorities do not seem to have regarded iconoclasm as at all marginal or unnatural, although it might be deplored if it threatened good order.

The iconoclasm question is therefore one clue to the character of the Protestantism which informed the English Reformation, ranging it firmly alongside churches in the Reformed and Calvinist tradition rather than those in the Lutheran camp. This is equally true if we consider two other themes within Edwardian and Elizabethan theology: a consistent distrust of 'real presence' notions in the eucharist, and a return to themes of moral legalism, away from Luther's rejection of law. The eucharistic views are expressed clearly in the 1552 Prayer Book, and the theme of moral legalism can be seen in the elaboration of covenant or federal theology in late Elizabethan England, perhaps our only original contribution to the thought of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Both motifs direct us to the links between Zurich and England; both memorialism in the eucharist and moral legalism would have been abhorrent to Luther. Once set in this Swiss mould, the link continued.

As Geneva became the most important creative centre of Protestant thought in the 1550s, English theologians began taking note, and borrowed significantly from the work of Calvin. Their borrowing was not blind or complete, but corresponded to the previous emphases of English theological thought. They more or less ignored Calvin's eucharistic views, which were much more akin to the real presence language of Luther than they were to the memorialist theologians of Zurich, and they were divided in their response to his suggestion that the ministry should be radically remoulded in a fourfold pattern which had no necessary place for bishops. They also found that Queen Elizabeth's forceful views on her own role as Supreme Governor of the Church left little room for Calvin's ideas about the independent voice which the Church ought to possess.

Counter-revolution; the backlash against Protestantism under Mary did not spare the dead, as this engraving of the ceremonial burning at Cambridge of the bones and books of Continental Protestant theologians indicates.

**How M. Barers and Paulus Phagius bones, were put into two new Cofins, and to bound to a stake.**

Hold up your noxes for dropping.

Salve festa dies.
Where English theologians wholeheartedly embraced Calvinist ideas was in the most important aspect of all: the developed Calvinist understanding of salvation and the way in which it is obtained. In the form of Calvin's ideas developed by his disciples such as Theodore Beza, this meant affirming a strict belief in the predestination of all souls by God to salvation or damnation, without any possibility that human effort could play any part in the process. This became the orthodoxy of the English Church from the 1560s into the 1620s, and attempts to prove otherwise have not carried great conviction. Archbishop Whitgift under Elizabeth and Archbishop Abbot under James I were almost as much in the intellectual debt of Calvin as their Puritan critics, and even the scourge of Puritanism, Archbishop Bancroft, was powerfully affected by the Calvinist tradition. To realise this is to see the extent of the myth of the English Reformation.

Two questions remain. First, why did the Puritans cause such a stir in the Elizabethan Church? Second, can we label such a Church 'Anglican' in any meaningful sense? We should not go so far as to claim that there was no such
thing as Puritanism. The Puritan movement represented a bitter sense of betrayal that the state of suspended animation represented by the defeat of Hooper in 1550-51 was never ended by official moves of further reform. The difference between the conformists who agreed to take high office in Elizabeth’s Church and the Puritans who often bitterly opposed them was the degree of regret which they felt about this situation, and the degree to which they accepted that nevertheless the Reformation could be advanced using the existing imperfect structures. For J.S. Coolidge the distinction has been symbolised by different interpretations of the word ‘edification’, as represented for instance in a favourite text from St. Paul, ‘Let all things be done unto edifying’ (1 Cor. 14.26: Geneva Bible). The Puritan attached a quite precise meaning to the word linked to its Latin origin in the idea of building. All things in the Church should be designed positively to build up the believer and act as an aid to salvation; there was no room for anomalies or abuses. Above all, edification of the believer was advanced by the sermon: the constant struggle with the word of God by an individual preaching. All the institutions of the Church should be geared to the end of providing sermons. By contrast, the conformist understanding of the word edification was a wider and vaguer understanding rather like our own: that which improves or instructs.

As far as the Church was concerned, that which was edifying might include a range of devotional structures such as liturgical prayer alongside the sermon; however desirable the long-term goal of a learned preaching ministry might be, one of the set homilies laid down by officialdom would be just as instructive as any barrage of freshly crafted prose.

Church government was also an issue of contention between Elizabethan conformist and Elizabethan Puritan. This was a particularly sensitive issue for the Anglo-Catholic historiographical tradition, for their raison d’être was their claim of a continuing consciousness of apostolic succession in the surviving threefold clerical orders of deacon, priest and bishop stretching across the Reformation divide. Here they seemed to be on strong ground: Calvinist though he may have been, Archbishop Whitgift’s career was based on his defence of episcopacy against those Puritans who wanted to transform the English Church’s government in the presbyterian mould of Geneva. However, when one sees the arguments which the generation of Whitgift put forward against their Puritan opponents, the ground begins to shift: the conformist emphasis was at first entirely on expediency. Whitgift, in a celebrated phrase, declared ‘I find no one certain and perfect government prescribed or commanded in the scriptures to the church of Christ; which no doubt should have been done, if it had been a matter necessary unto the salvation of the Church’. This argument was intended to knock down the presbyterian case that presbyterianism was in fact the certain and perfect government prescribed by divine law — that is, jure divino.

However, the generation of conformists below Whitgift — the generation of Richard Bancroft — tried out a radically different approach: they stole their presbyterian opponents’ clothes by reversing their case and claiming jure divino status for episcopacy. Nevertheless, they did not do this until 1587 at the earliest, and in other respects they remained within the mainstream Calvinist tradition of the English Church. They should not be confused with those clergy like Laud who would eventually be so marked out as opposing Calvinism that they would gain the nickname of Arminians from the parallel struggle led by Arminius in the Netherlands.

Throughout Elizabeth’s reign, theologians who opposed Calvinism in all its forms were systematically prevented from publishing or preaching their views apart from a very limited
and partial toleration within the universities. One of the most idiosyncratic of their fellow-travellers, Richard Hooker, would come in the course of time, as part of the myth of the English Reformation, to be seen as the defender of a continuous tradition of thought within the Church of England subsequently labelled Anglicanism: an appeal to reason and natural law, a positive evaluation of tradition and religious ceremony. All these attitudes have proved congenial in the long term to the Church of England. But Hooker, the defender of Anglicanism, needs to be replaced by Hooker, the inventor of Anglicanism; his views were virtually unparalleled in the Elizabethan Church, and certainly had only marginal correspondences with the writings of contemporary conformist defenders of jure divino episcopacy like Bancroft. His writings were not all published until after his death in 1600, and their impact was only gradual.

Anglicanism was therefore at best waiting in the wings when Elizabeth died: a synthesis which had not yet been blended from a mixture of conformist jure divino arguments, the rationalism and neo-traditionalism of Hooker and a suspicion of systematic Calvinism. The situation only began changing in the reign of James I. The hour of the Arminians had come; and under Charles I, they would capture the mind and emotions of the king, together with the leadership of the Church of England. Yet the consequences were disastrous. The Arminians were popularly seen as promoting an ecclesiastical and theological revolution, and when the secular policies of their allies in government led to national defeat and humiliation, they became the chief scapegoats of national fury. With them tumbled down the Church of England for twenty years.

We are thus left with an Elizabethan church establishment which wanted a Protestant reformation, did its best to adapt the unformed structures of the Church's government to that end, and put a Herculean and largely successful effort into creating an educated ministry in its own mould. Its beliefs were characterised by predestinarianism, memorialist views on the eucharist, deep suspicion of sacred imagery and a concern with the promotion of divine law within ordinary society. It is true that the Church of England's story is also a tale of retreat from the high water mark of Protestant advance in 1550, when it seemed for a moment as if the work of Reformation would progress towards the standard set by the best Reformed churches of the continent.

Hooper's defeat meant that the 1552 Prayer Book represented the most radical stage which the official English Reformation would ever reach. From then on the official Protestantism of the English Church was in a state of arrested development: although continental advances could sway the minds and hearts of the majority of clergy and activist laity, they could not proceed to move the structure any further forward from its idiosyncratic anchorage in the medieval past. Far from being deviants from an Anglican norm, the Elizabethan Puritans were merely trying to take up the logic of the signposts to the future represented by Hooper's stand in 1550, and force structural reform to match the theology of the people who led the Church: a symbol of this was their vain effort to see Cranmer's attempt at a proper Protestant law-code for the Church, the Reformatio Legum, turned into law in the 1571 Parliament. In the north of England, where the fight against Catholic survival in popular and gender religion was more finely balanced than in the south, Puritans were generally taken as allies in the establishment's fight, and suffered less official harassment than in the Province of Canterbury; here Elizabethan Puritanism might in many places have seemed to be achieving its aims in transforming the character of established religion.

Yet as so often in English history, it was the south and not the north which decided Puritanism's fate. The 1580s saw Puritans intimidated and thrust aside in Whitgift's campaign against them; from the 1590s, a group of churchmen began boldly to enunciate Arminian views which would take the English Church in a very different direction, and which for a brief period in the 1620s and 1630s, succeeded in capturing its leadership. The reaction of the Englishmen who had been nurtured by the Elizabethan Church was to overthrow the government which had allowed such a thing to happen; yet when a version of the 1559 Settlement was restored in 1600, never again was the established Church to prove comprehensive enough to contain the spectrum of Protestant belief which had been possible in the late sixteenth century.

From this story of confusion and changing direction emerged a Church which has never subsequently dared define its identity decisively as Protestant or Catholic, and which has decided in the end that this is a virtue rather than a handicap. Perhaps the Anglican gift to the Christian story is the ability to make a virtue out of necessity; and if destroying the myths about the English Reformation exalts this gift to its proper place, then it is a task worth undertaking.

FOR FURTHER READING:

A longer version of this article has recently appeared in the January 1991 issue of the Journal of British Studies (volume XXX, no.1).

Diarmaid MacCulloch is Tutor in History at Wesley College. Bristol, and Lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Bristol University.

Fierce controversy as to historical justification dogged the Oxford Movement's attempt to re-emphasise Catholic tradition in the Church of England; in this 1869 cartoon Latimer and Cranmer look disapprovingly on their Victorian counterparts.