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How Socially Conservative Were the Elizabethan Religious Radicals?

Peter Iver Kaufman
University of Richmond, pkaufman@richmond.edu

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Social historians have long suspected that religious convictions made a difference in the sixteenth century, and historians of the late Tudor religious and political settlements have recently emphasized the differences that advanced forms of Calvinism are alleged to have made. They say that religious radicals—puritans and precisianists, to their contemporary critics—were social conservatives who thought wealth was a blessing and poverty a curse. According to Keith Wrightson and David Levine, the "firmly committed Puritans among the yeomen of the parish" promoted a "sense of social distance" between themselves ("the better sort") and the less respectable. The 1995 republication of Wrightson's and Levine's study of social discontinuity, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village*, seemed a splendid occasion to revisit the intersection of religious conviction and social practice and to ponder the precision with which puritanism's supposed contributions to social stratification—and the stratification itself—have been, and can be, measured.[1]

Measurements of a vastly different kind preoccupied Elizabethan religious theorists interested in gauging the effects of election and thus discovering whether they and their parishioners had been elected or chosen by God and redeemed. Assurances of election and of eternal reward were difficult to identify, because everything that Christians did or dreamed up was so deplorably flawed. "There remain relickes of syn" in the most righteous persons on earth, William

[1]Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1995), pp. 173–75, containing Wrightson's response to critics of the first edition (1979). Among the critics' alternatives, see the telling claim that the more intense Calvinists seldom settled and clustered at any single stratum of village society: Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 84–124; idem, "Religion, Communities, and Moral Discipline in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century England: Case Studies," in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London, 1984), pp. 177–93; Margaret Spufford, "Puritanism and Social Control," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 43–46; Nicholas Tyacke, "Popular Puritan Mentality in Late Elizabethan England," *The English Commonwealth, 1547–1640*, ed. Alan G. R. Smith, Peter Clark, and Nicholas Tyacke (Leicester, 1979), pp. 82–89. For reflections on, and refinements of, Elizabethan social stratification, see David Cressy, "Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England," *Literature and History* 3 (1976): 29–44, hereafter cited "Social Order"; Keith Wrightson's "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches," *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson (Oxford, 1986), pp. 177–202. For use of "puritan," accepted by Wrightson and Levine and acceptable here, see Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1988), p. 95: "[P]uritanism was neither alien to Protestantism [n]or even distinct from it but was its logical extension, equivalent to its full internalisation."

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Fulke preached in 1574; Christians desperate for assurance invariably experienced (and measured) those "relickes" as tokens of divine displeasure.[2]

The prolific William Perkins, who lectured and preached at Cambridge from the 1580s until his death in 1602, put a fictional Eusebius on display in his dialogue on the Christian condition, ostensibly to define assurance as something compatible with "relickes of syn" and the disorientations they occasioned. In the process, Perkins also addressed the issue of stratification, although his positions on piety, prosperity, and poverty were not immediately clear. Eusebius declined to say anything specifically about economic status; he was too busy with Timotheus, his interlocutor, who worried about the fate of faith beseiged by those relics of sin within. "The flesh is like a mightie gyant," Timotheus was afraid, "strong, lusty, stirring, enemie to God, confederate with the devil." What chance did anyone have to maintain confidence in his or her election?[3]

Eusebius answered from experience, dismantling the assumption that assurance was the antithesis of desperation: "Times were hard," he recalled, "I and my family were put to great pinches," surviving with but slender rations and with no animal left in his pen. Still, his wealthy neighbor had managed to look after his large flock of sheep—all the more remarkable an achievement, inasmuch as cruel circumstance in that season and region transformed so many honest husbandmen into thieves. "There was such great stealing," Eusebius reasoned that the risk of detection was low. Besides, he figured, a single lamb would not be missed from that teeming flock. So he stole an animal and seemed safely away, explaining to his family that the meat was a gift. Then came the first signs of trouble: "I did eate it with thanksgiving (as my manner is) but surely very coldly," Eusebius confided, "and me thought my prayer was abhominable in God's sight." Although two days passed without incident, during the third night, remorse struck at three in the morning.

Eusebius awakened from a bad dream only to discover that it was part of a nightmarish assault. The devil was throttling him with his own guilt, insisting that his trespass signaled a crippling character deformity, all "to persuade me that God had cast me away." Eusebius, while "turmoiled," confused, and "stung with the conscience of sin," was unprepared to resign himself to castaway status. He found a quiet corner, "and there upon my face groveling, I confessed my sinne and praied":

> On this manner praying I continued many hours, and God which is neere to all them that call upon him, heard me, eased my paine, and assured me of the remission of my sinne. After presently, for the more easing of my conscience, I went to my neighbor, and betweene him and me upon my knees confessed my fault

[2]See William Fulke, *A Comfortable Sermon of Fayth* (London, 1578) C6v–C7r.

[3]For this and what follows, see William Perkins, *A Dialogue of the State of a Christian Man*, in *Works*, 2 vol. (London, 1616), 1: 385–90. For Perkins' place among the radicals, see my *Prayer, Despair, and Drama: Elizabethan Introspection* (Urbana, 1996), pp. 56–68.

> with teares, desiring him to forgive me, and I would (as God's law requireth) restore that which I stole fourefold. He (I thank him) was contented and took pitie on me and ever since hath beene by God's mercy my good friend.

It is tempting to latch onto this reconciliation, using it to pry loose Perkins' thoughts on social inequality and stratification. To be sure, it bears comment (and we will return to it), but Eusebius pressed on to impress upon his interlocutor that "the grounde-worke of salvation is laid in God's eternall election and...a thousand sinnes cannot overthrow [it]." If the "relickes of syn" compromised God's care and the sinner's salvation, where would King David or the apostle Peter or, for that matter, the panel of other biblical (un)worthies have landed? Proof impersonal, however, could not satisfy Timotheus, who obviously found Eusebius's previous confidences compelling. "What meanes do *you* finde most effectuall," he inquired, "to strengthen faith and to raise you up againe when you are fallen?"

"I have very great comfort by the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," Eusebius replied, consoling Timotheus but, one suspects, startling scholars. Perkins is known to have been most popular among the reformed Christians who thought "gaping at the mass" was characteristically Roman and retrograde. Here, Perkins appears to subordinate sermon to sacrament.

> God of all his mercy and of his infinite pitie and bottomlesse compassion set up his Sacrament as a signe upon a hill where it may be seene on every side farre and neere, to call againe them that be runne away. And with the Sacrament hee (as it were) clocketh to them as a hen for her chickens to gather them under the wings of his mercy and hath commaunded his Sacrament to be had in continuall use to put us in minde of his continual mercy laid up for us in Christ's blood.

This summons to church and to the drama publicly reenacted in its signal sacrament seems strikingly incompatible with that private play of self-contempt in the "cloase corner" of Eusebius's cottage, but, by design, each reinforced the other. To see, smell, and taste "the bread broken," "the wine powred out," was to remember the cost and magnitude of God's mercy. John Freeman said in the 1580s that the time for signs and wonders in the clouds had passed. Tokens of celestial compassion came from other quarters. Noah had his rainbow; Christians who came to reformed services in the sixteenth century had the Lord's Supper, that sacrament "confirming and conferring" God's grace. Public recollection and commemoration conferred the grace and confirmed the faith that the faithful took home with them. ("I have very great comfort," broadcast Eusebius.) Yet what remedy might there be should a Christian "feeleth no comfort by the Sacrament"? Let the numb Christian "humble himselfe before the Lorde more heartily," Eusebius volunteered, "then he shall feele the fruite of the Sacrament." Left to themselves, sinners only "partlye knowe" the extent of their sin, so they can hardly build to the crescendo of self-contempt and remorse

required of the repentant, the "sighing and sorrowing" for which the reformed Christians were listening.[4]

Yet Christians were never "left to themselves" for long. God assisted with their repentance, with their "sighes of the heart" that therefore need not have waited on sacraments and set prayers. "Sighes" were "secret and sudden," often "lifting up the heart to God" without public preliminaries, wherever and whenever the heart's host remorsefully sifted past sins, Perkins noted. "Sorrow for sinne usually commeth on a suddanne as lightening into a house."[5]

It is hard for historians to make house calls in the sixteenth century, but we know what Perkins and his colleagues expected from parishioners' homework, a stinging self-incrimination motivated by, and further developing, what Richard Greenham once called a "craving" for God's compassion. Greenham preached at Dry Drayton, only an hour by slow horse from Cambridge, Fulke, and Perkins. He prescribed to parishioners a regimen of re-preaching, repetition and meditation at home to excite the right craving and propel laypersons closer to God "not on custom but of conscience."[6]

The contrast between custom and conscience was important to the Elizabethan religious reformers and is tremendously so for those now interested in their reforms. Together with the setting and staging of private sighing, sorrowing, and craving assurance, a concentration on conscience—to the exclusion of custom—suggests a generous degree of lay empowerment. Eusebius was a husbandman or, lower on the social scale, a laborer for hire, but Perkins took him as an authority. He made him a lecturer of sorts and had him meet his maker and redeemer in his chambers and in his conscience. Or should we draw a different lesson from the fiction? Eusebius was in awe of the sacrament and deferential to the neighbor he had wronged. Possibly, Perkins scripted Eusebius' scruples to plug the late Tudor aristocracies—clerical as well as lay—and to distance those elites from the disadvantaged. This second lesson seems plausible when one imagines what would have happened had the gospelers of the late 1540s and early 1550s gotten wind of the "great pinches" that squeezed Eusebius.

In 1552 Bernard Gilpin preached that the earth was the Lord's, not the landed gentry's, and occasionally played spokesman for the "thousandes in England who begge nowe from dore to dore which have kept honest houses." Hugh

[4]See William Perkins, *The Estate of a Christian Man in this Life*, in *Works*, 1: 374; John Freeman, *The Comforter or A Comfortable Treatise wherein are contained many reasons taken out of the Word of God to assure forgiveness of sins* (London, 1622), pp. 71–78.

[5]Perkins, *Estate*, p. 365. Also consult his *Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, in *Works* (London, 1631), 2: 67–68.

[6]Greenham, *Exposition on the 119. Psalm, in The Workes of the Reverend and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. Henry Holland (London, 1612), pp. 483–84.

Latimer's sermons similarly brimmed with indignation. Had Latimer or Gilpin been in the pulpits, blame would certainly have rained down on the sheepherders who kept large flocks while fellow Christians, much as Eusebius, had been driven by "the dearth" to larceny. But, as Andrew McRae now guesses, there was "a widely consistent shift of focus in [Elizabethan] preaching, from social justice to social order." William Perkins, with his Eusebius, may have been helping adjust the lens.[7]

Order was at a premium and was much on the minds of some returning exiles in 1559. They hoped for a more sweeping religious settlement but accepted those few reforms their new government was prepared to concede. John Jewel wrote to friends on the continent to explain that Queen Elizabeth, "notwithstanding she desires a thorough change as early as possible, cannot however be induced to effect such change without the sanction of the law, lest the matter should seem to have been accomplished not so much by the judgment of discreet men as in compliance with the impulse of a furious multitude." Jewel admitted that "dilatoriness has grievously damped the spirits of our brethren," but he allowed that political and religious transitions on so great a scale required time to complete. One should surely regret that changes were neither more radical nor more rapidly implemented, yet one could console oneself (and one's partisans on the continent) with prospects for further changes over the longer haul.[8]

Following the lead of Peter Burke, scholars now hustle those regrets and consolations and the reformers who harbored them into an early modern migration, or "withdrawal." According to those mapping the retreat, the landed and commercial elites, as well as the pastors who preached and purportedly pandered to them, dissociated themselves from the "multitudes" and, more broadly still, from some stew of impulse, impatience, fury, and burlesque identifiable as "popular culture."[9]

The ranks of those withdrawing were usually crowded with religious radicals repudiated by the likes of Jewel, Sandys, Parker, and others for "hunting for

[7]Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 61–72; Bernard Gilpin, *A Godly Sermon Preached at Court* (London, 1581), pp. 49–52; for the likelihood that the gospelers' social radicalism inclined the Henrician government against them, see Susan Brigden, "Popular Disturbance and the Fall of Thomas Cromwell and the Reformers, 1539–1540," *The Historical Journal* 24 (1981): 272–78.

[8]See Jewel's letter to Peter Martyr Vermigli (1559) in *The Zurich Letters*, 2 vols., ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge, 1842), 1: 17–18.

[9]In addition to Peter Burke's comprehensive study of withdrawal, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), see David Underdown, *Riot, Revel, and Rebellion* (Oxford, 1985); David Zaret, *The Heavenly Contract: Ideology and Organization in Pre-Revolutionary Puritanism* (Chicago, 1985).

alteration."[10] But reports of the retreat include an appreciable number of more moderate reformers and middlers of various stripes. William Shakespeare, for one, is said to have withdrawn with the rest, and there may be no better way to illustrate the withdrawal and to comment on its supposed creation and exaggeration of social distance than to reconsider what Shakespeare is alleged to have done to the ballad traditions of king-commoner congeniality. When King Henry V ventured out incognito among his troops, a playgoer expected expressions and gestures of solidarity. So say contemporary critics, because they had found that troubadours ordinarily used such bonding opportunities to prod ruled and rulers to get along. What playgoers heard from Shakespeare's king and commoners, however, was "a bristling exchange" tantamount to a rejection of "self-deluding populism." In the play Henry resents the needling, impudence, and skepticism of soldiers who doubt his dedication to their interests. By dramatizing the protests of these "mindlessly irresponsible" men, Shakespeare distinguished their trifling from "the awesome responsibility" of the men who ruled them, and he distanced himself, the argument now goes, from the leveling playwrights who preceded him.[11]

"Mindlessly irresponsible"? Shakespeare's soldiers appear neither mindless nor irresponsible. Michael Williams, the most self-possessed, intelligent, and intransigent among them, smartly skirted sensitive subjects—the justice of the king's cause, for example—yet was exceptionally clearheaded about Henry's "heavy reckoning" should the cause be unjust. To Henry, still disguised, Williams quickly called the king's bluff and bluster.

> King: I myself heard the king say he would not be ransomed.
> Williams: Ay, he said so to make us fight cheerfully; but when our throats are cut he may be ransomed and we ne'er the wiser.
> King: If I live to see it, I will never trust his word after.
> Williams: You pay him then! That's a perilous shot out of an elder-gun that a poor and private displeasure can do against a monarch. You may as well go about to turn the sun to ice with fanning in his face with a peacock's feather. You'll never trust his word after! Come 'tis a foolish saying.[12]

Williams is a curious fellow, unreal but realistic in one, if not in both senses, of the term. Plainly he is neither mindless nor irresponsible: he is thoughtfully

[10]The "hunt" is mentioned in an angry letter from Parker and Sandys to a member of the ecclesiastical commission. Matthew Parker, *The Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. John Bruce and Thomas Thomason Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), pp. 434–35.

[11]Henry V 4.1.24 ("Lend me thy cloak")—4.1.280 ("What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace / Whose hours the peasant best advantages"). Also consult Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 206–07, 234–42; Annabelle Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 89–91; Anne Barton, "The King Disguised: The Two Bodies of Henry V," reprinted in *William Shakespeare's Henry V*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1988), pp. 12–14; Brents Stirling, *The Populace in Shakespeare* (New York, 1949), pp. 151, 185–86.

[12]Henry V 4.1.189–200 and 4.1.124–46.

(and articulately) concerned with accountability, knowing pop-gun pretentiousness when he hears it pop. But if, as is claimed, Shakespeare "exorcizes" egalitarianism, distancing commoner from king and if Williams typified the portion left behind when the elites withdrew, one must learn more about the "sort" or stratum or social order he represented.

Elizabethan theatergoers would have recognized him immediately. Chroniclers spoke of a sturdy yeoman infantry "that in times past made all France afraid." So Shakespeare took the cue and had Henry amiably nudge his troops up the scaling-ladders at Harfleur. "[G]ood yeomen, whose limbs were made in England," the king coaxes, "show us here the mettle of your pasture." Certainly Henry conspicuously compliments as he quickens the nobility as well, but his friendly appeals, even that purportedly "bristling exchange" with Williams, suggest a special relationship with "good yeomen" and perhaps with baser sorts of soldiers as well.

> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers / For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile / This day shall gentle his condition.[13]

Possibly the play, on this level and leveling, was informed by observations offered years before by William Harrison, who wrote that English kings, unlike French rivals, "were wont to remaine among them who were footmen...thereby shewing where [their] chief strength did consist."[14]

But Harrison carefully distinguished the yeomen from elements of the baser or "meaner" sort. He was unsure anything could gentle the condition of persons so "vile." The same ought to be said of his Essex neighbor, Thomas Smith, who, borrowing entire passages from Harrison's *Description of England*, preferred to park yeomanry right alongside the landed gentry. Smith conjured up a clever, entrepreneurial sort that studded the English countryside with impressive, but not garish or pretentious, homes. Smith's unimpeachable yeomen were attached to the land, pillars of their parish communities but as ready to travel for edification as for profit. They were honorably opportunistic: they invested well and spent wisely to enlarge their holdings when the grand estates of "unthriftie gentlemen" were dismembered and put in pieces on the block.[15] Harrison, however, suspected that the yeoman's honorable opportunism was not the driving force in the rural economy. He suggested that the "greedy desire" of great families drove less substantial proprietors and countless copyholders from the land to make room for huge herds and game parks. In Norfolk, Francis Gaudy

[13]Henry V 3.1.25–28 and 4.3.60–63.

[14]See Harrison's *Description of England in Shakespeare's Youth*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London, 1877), pp. 133–34.

[15]Smith, *De republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 74–75.

depopulated a village dependent on the acreage he reserved for his animals. Harrison worried the countryside would soon be "converted from the furniture of mankind into the walks and shrowds of wild beasts," a species that, for him, probably numbered the hunters as well as the hunted.[16]

Thomas Smith was particularly upset about the enclosures. They "undoe us," he has a husbandman fret and complain in his *Discourse of the Commonwealth*, which must have been as pertinent when published in 1581 as when he wrote it thirty-two years earlier. Common land in England kept disappearing during the sixteenth century, at great cost to agricultural diversity and to labor. Smith reported "a dozen plows within less compass than six miles about me laid down." Changes over seven years were disastrous: "where forty persons had their livings, now one man and his shepherd has all." But where should we put the yeoman? Was he among the dispossessed or was he that "one man" who sent them packing? Harrison and Smith are little help: in their narratives, yeomanry was an ideal type, largely sheltered from the give and grab of agrarian controversy.[17]

Recent scholarly work on late medieval and early modern rural controversy complicates rather than answers the questions. Some say yeomen were narrowly self-interested—and socially and politically conservative—occupants of the peasantry's uppermost tier. Others have yeomen, occasionally with the lesser gentry, "procuring" riots or "stirs" against the more formidable property owners and landlords, voicing grievances, and leading protests.[18] These and related confusions derive in part from the dilemmas that Theodore Leinwand lately termed "taxonomic." Classifications lack specificity: no one at the time set (so some now freely and variously adjust) the amount of land, the number of household servants, or the size of the surplus any husbandman had to acquire to establish his standing as a yeoman. Moreover, regional differences make definition impossible to resolve: men in Cumbria, for example, styled themselves yeomen

[16]Harrison, *Description*, pp. 306–07. For Gaudy's "active estate policy," see A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558–1603* (Oxford,1974), pp. 179–80. The displaced villagers reportedly retaliated later and denied Gaudy's corpse a place in the local churchyard.

[17]Thomas Smith, *A Discourse of the Commonwealth*, ed. Mary Dewar (Charlottesville, Va., 1962), pp. 17–18. Also consult Neal Wood's remarks in "Foundations of Political Economy: The New Moral Philosophy of Sir Thomas Smith," in *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth: Deep Structure, Discourse, and Disguise*, ed. Paul Fideler and Thomas Mayer (London, 1992), pp. 146–48.

[18]See Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509–1640* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 64–65; Barbara Hanawalt, "Peasant Resistance to Royal and Seigniorial Impositions," *Social Unrest in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Francis X. Newman (Binghamton, New York, 1986), pp. 41–44; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County, 1500–1600* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 286–88, 302–07.

more indiscriminantly than men in East Anglia, where a yeoman was much likelier to have been literate.[19]

Land would seem to be the one inexpendable. A landless yeoman, after all, appears something of a contradiction. Yet attachments to the land differed. Land in Norfolk might have been owned by citizens of Norwich who rarely left the city for the rural estates that were cultivated for them. Were they yeomen? Whatever one calls them, they were not fools. Profits from commerce and careerism were impermanent, "of uncertain social significance." But the funds from commerce were "readily convertible" into "permanent profits of land" and with land, came status. Historians once thought that the flow of capital across the town ditch into the countryside attended the distinctively Tudor "march of a conquering middle class into the enemy territory of the aristocracy." We now estimate, however, that landed "classes" or "castes" had been "permeable" for centuries.[20]

Finally, no definition yet tried is likely to catch and hold yeomen who unquestionably lived on the land but also lived off their wits, competing with tradesmen in nearby towns and consequently bewildering scholars intent on distinguishing emergent urban capitalists from their country cousins in late Tudor England. Perhaps, then, we will only repossess the setting for the religious radicals' quest for assurance of election, if we melt yeomanry into the "broad middle layer" just below the gentry. There, freeholders, copyholders, and husbandmen joined merchants and craftsmen, whom Marjorie McIntosh calls "urban yeomen," all of whom were trying to get ahead rather than just get by. Admittedly, it would be an unwieldy group, harder to count than to characterize as a set of pragmatists "increasingly integrated into the cultural values of the elite," "increasingly willing to differentiate themselves culturally from the poor," and increasingly able to participate in substructures of government that developed during the Tudor period.[21]

[19]See Leinwand's splendid "Shakespeare and the Middling Sort," *The Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993): 284–303; also review David Cressy's restratification, *"Social Order,"* pp. 29–44; and see his comments in *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 150–61.

[20]For "permeability" and the "permanent profits of land," consult S. J. Payling, "Social Mobility, Demographic Change, and Landed Society in Late Medieval England," *Economic History Review* 45 (1992): 51, 66–67. Also see Alan Macfarlane, *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 158, which concludes from studying turnover in Essex and Cumbrian parishes that "property was very mobile"; and J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History: New Views on History and Society in Early Modern Europe* (2nd ed.; Chicago, 1979), pp. 91–92, which picks apart "the myth of the middle class."

[21]The characterization combines Jim Sharp's remarks with Ian Archer's analysis of the opportunities for participation in parish, ward, and company government. See Sharp, "Social Strain and Social Dislocation, 1585–1603," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed.

Shakespeare's "good yeoman," therefore, belongs in that capacious and amorphous middle that is home to the well-heeled, whom many early observers distinguished from the fleet of other commoners on the basis of soil, surplus, servants, and public service. There, too, one finds the resourceful, if not the rich—retailers, artisans, and cottagers pushing off from poverty yet susceptible to "great pinches." It would be tricky, then, to argue that radical religion served class interests *within this middle*, because efforts to place English yeomanry seem to illustrate the instability of our classifications and the instability of their "classes." It would be even trickier still to argue that radical religion was "the ideological accomplice of certain processes of social differentiation" *within this middle*, for regional diversity and economic changes (mostly downturns during the last few decades of the sixteenth century) make it nearly impossible to tell differences with precision over time and territory. The composition of village oligarchies varied; concentrations of wealth within (and between) cities varied tremendously.[22]

The point may yet be made that puritanism had kept the broad middle above the level or the tier beneath it. On this reading, religious radicals contributed to a "differentiation" or stratification far more dramatic than any division between the more or less lucky, mobile, and ambitious middlers. Puritans looked down on poverty. Disease and death formerly kept extreme poverty inconspicuous by creating labor shortages that proved to have been opportunities for employment and remuneration. But hygiene and health, along with enclosures and crop failures, swelled the labor supply, reduced wages, and increased the number of able-bodied, involuntary poor. That is how Tudor economics seems to the resolutely worldly twentieth century. But an unMalthusian explanation appealed more to the middlers of the sixteenth century, an unapologetically religious ex-

John Guy (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 208–09; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 14–17. For "urban yeomen," see Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500–1620* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 193; for the construction of that "middle layer," see Tim Harris, "Problematizing Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture in England, 1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (New York, 1995), pp. 1–27. To be fair, Mildred Campbell forewarned more than fifty years ago against melting early modern yeomen into some amorphous middle (*The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts* [New Haven, 1942]). She imagined an impressive set of traits or "standards," making yeomen compellingly conscientious and virtually incorruptible. Yet, giving ground, she also admitted that yeomen constituted something of "a land-hungry, profit-hungry, and profit-conscious class" (ibid., pp. 50, 63, 91, 220). Oddly, then, Campbell's exceptional study can be read as a striking monument to a distinct and stalwart caste of characters traditionally associated with yeomanry and, simultaneously, as an uneasier tribute to those same middlers "making their way" and, as she conceded, "on the make."

[22]For "ideological accomplice," see Peter Lake, "Defining Puritanism Again," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston, 1993), pp. 12–13.

planation: one's poverty was payment for sin. Withdrawal from the poor naturally followed in present theory, if not also in past fact. The relatively affluent and self-confidently godly, on this approach, wanted as little commerce as possible with the patently impious poor, so the socially conservative puritan consensus, having turned one kind of difference into another, used reprobation as something of a "cultural wedge," dividing middlers from "the multitude" and shutting out the poor as surely as enclosures did.[23]

Such claims seem inflated, for the religious radicals knew that the poor would always be with them. The puritans, Margo Todd avers, were more often reasonable than ruthless.[24] Christopher Hill, Keith Wrightson, and the others interested in social conservatism, however, assume that the radicals were both reasonable and ruthless: it was only reasonable that religious sanctions be used to assure that social distance and physical proximity did not lead to disaster, to allay the anxieties of the propertied, and to check the anger of the poor. When they imagine restraints and resentments, Hill, Wrightson, and the rest exchange the language of withdrawal for that of control: puritans, they say, not only made a difference, they tried to corset or control behaviors dangerously different from their own. Hill, for one, is not at all tentative about the economics of exploitation that, he says, lay behind the religious radicals' efforts to discipline and control the poor. Calvinists "lubricated" the labor market, and their objective was to indoctrinate the underclass. For Hill, the religious radical could easily play recruiter and pitchman, simply to staff the concerns of enterprising farmers, craftsmen, and merchants who were "beginning to give employment to a wider circle than their own famil[ies] and an apprentice or two." Middlers on the make would make good use of the men and women who "no longer waited at the rich man's gate for charity but who went out to offer their services."[25]

Reformed religion in England had been coupled with the rise of capitalism for some time when Hill put the pair in his script. One could say that he inherited from Weber and Tawney the puritan apologists for the disproportionate distri-

[23]See *The Collected Works of Christopher Hill: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, 3 vols. (Amherst, 1986), 2: 120–24; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 17–18; Keith Wrightson, "Sorts of People in Tudor and Stuart England," in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1500–1800*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York, 1994), pp. 34–44; William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 312. For a contemporary analysis of the late Tudor perceptions of the able-bodied poor, consult C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England, 1500–1700*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1984), 1: 223–24.

[24]See, for example, *Margo Todd, Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 161–62.

[25]See *The Collected Works of Christopher Hill*, 2: 117–19; and Hill's "William Perkins and the Poor," reprinted in *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1962), pp. 219–38.

bution of early modern resources.[26] But, according to Wrightson and Levine, socially conservative puritans were less interested in abandoning welfare for "workfare," less interested, that is, in what Hill calls "labour discipline" than in what they see as moral discipline. For Wrightson and Levine, religious radicals were busy redefining "civility" to express middler self-righteousness and to rule out as contemptible the drinking, cursing, dancing, and flirting of every member of the underclass—contemptible because these were frightening. Respectable, reformed Christians "invest[ed] apparently petty sources of social friction with massive moral and spiritual significance" and then prevailed on their pastors and constables to authorize a fairly constant purge.[27]

David Zaret also makes the puritan preachers, at their patrons' bidding, the purveyors of a social prejudice. Echoing the charges of Richard Bancroft, the puritans' nemesis in the 1590s, Zaret complains that the religious radicals winked at "the grosse synnes of their good maisters" while they harped on their bishops' slips and on underclass intemperance. Their purpose was self-protection. Puritans were looking for allies. They perceived that the "democratic implications" of their advanced Calvinism, if ever fully realized, would put clerical elites out of business. Therefore, they pulled up short of those implications and became the "servitors" of the new social elites. They mixed their metaphors of commerce with those of covenant, Zaret says, to dignify the middlers' economic aspirations and the new urban aristocracies. Religious radicals' sermons were spurs and bridles. As spurs, they encouraged achievement, sanctifying prosperity as well as the diligence that purchased it. As bridles, they restrained and trained the poor. They transformed the grievances and resentments of the lower sorts left behind—lower sorts like Perkins' Eusebius perhaps—into reverence for and deference to those who were getting ahead.[28]

Bridles? One gets a different impression from what Richard Bancroft had to say. "Our pretended reformers," he charged, exceed the Scots in "rebelling and rayling" against order and authority. To be sure, those reformers would have wanted a Eusebius in every household, but not the obsequious Eusebius of Perkins' making. They applauded an intensely personal sense of shame that led to assurances of election, but, Bancroft insisted, the personal in puritanism was subversively political. Bancroft's puritans were inciting the very people Wright-

[26]Patrick Collinson allows that those puritans resurrected by Tawney and Hill turned their desire to acquire "from a deplorable if natural frailty into the mainspring of society." See Collinson, *Tudor England Revisited* (London, 1995), pp. 13–14.

[27]Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 176–81, 200–11.

[28]Evidence for the combination of commerce and covenant is quite strong and suggestive. Evidence for bridling, by contrast, seems weak; Zaret is content to recycle general sixteenth-century comments on "the unruly multitude" and its irrationality, its fondness for "extremes." Zaret, *Heavenly Contract*, pp. 64–67, 192–95.

son, Levine, Hill, and Zaret now say that they had drugged and dulled. It is important to remember that Bancroft addressed persons of property, middlers and gentry who had much to lose from social strife. He likely exaggerated the danger of insurrection to win the propertied to his side. He wanted the new elites to dread the social and economic consequences of radical religion. Nonetheless, official efforts to suppress prophesying during the 1570s, campaigns for conformity in the 1580s, and polemics against the purported populism of puritan reformers in the 1590s suggest that those reformers were drawing in, not withdrawing from, "the inferior sort." But the polemics and their claims have had a long shelf life. Bancroft worried that puritans "endevoreth with the multitude"; Peter Heylyn, nearly a century later, scolded them for having abused the Protestants' trust in scripture and pulpit. The priests of old, he recalled, tried to prove from the Bible that parishioners ought to pave the chancel. Puritans, however, were even more outrageously flimflam. They left "no passage of God's book unransacked," Heylyn said; they misled "the common people," promoting all kinds of offensive innovations.[29]

Those "common people" preoccupied religious radicals like George Gifford, whose *Countrie Divinitie* allowed that low circumstance did not diminish a Christian's dignity: "a man may have a king's hart in his breast and yet a begger's coate upon his backe."[30] But Gifford would have objected strenuously to Bancroft's and Heylyn's characterizations of his interest. He was not duping the unlettered and unpropertied, he would have answered. He and his Calvinist colleagues were undoing what those priests of old had done. That was no mean challenge, for the standard line was that the Catholics had filled the heads of the poor with nonsense. Into the 1560s, the poor people of London, it was said, confused Jesus' powers with those of the pope. The "superstityon" of parishioners disposed puritan pastors to complain about one's kneeling at communion, a protocol, they let on, that was too closely connected with popish misconceptions of the mass.[31] Most destructive of all was the misconception undergirding Catholicism's customary satisfactions, the idea that self-improvement was the route to redemption. It made Gifford squirm to count "the common sort of Christians" in Essex who were discouraged by the Pelagianism and perfectionism

[29]Richard Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions and Proceedings published and practiced within this Island of Brytain under pretence of Reformation* (London, 1595) pp. 44–46, 61–62; Peter Heylyn, *Aerius Redivivus* (Oxford, 1670), book 10, p. 341.

[30]George Gifford, *Briefe Discourse of certaine points of the religion which is among the common sort of Christians, which may be termed the countrie divinitie* (London, 1598), p. 96.

[31]See the notes from John Bridges' sermon, Bodlian Library, Tanner ms. 50, f. 46r; and the testimony of Thomas Underdowne in the "Briefe and True Report of the Proceedings against some of the ministers and preachers of the diocese of Chichester", Dr. Williams' Library, Morrice Mss. B.2.41 and C.398.

pressed along with the idea or, alternatively, were consoled so easily by an equation of righteousness and redemption with any and every minimally good intention. "I do what I can," Gifford's Atheos announces in *The Countrie Divinitie*. "God hath made me able to do no better."[32]

The likes of Atheos were befuddled, Thomas Cartwright maintained; they had renounced "poperie" but "stil abide in an utter ignorance of the truth itself." In 1584, the author of an unattributed dialogue on reform agreed and appealed on behalf of "the untaught multitude" for more preaching: "let the people be taught to know wholsome doctrine, and they will never abide the rotten drugges of Roman apothecaries." But George Gifford expressed a different, more widely held opinion: "plaine countrie men" were often mulish, he said, more obstinate than ignorant. They "arme[d] them selves against true repentance" resisting "right understanding." They would have their pastors "for nothing but friendship." Nonetheless, to shake them up, shame them, jolt them from complacency, and pry them loose from their leftover Catholicism, those pastors would have to resort to tough talk from the pulpit, talk that Wrightson, Levine, Hill, and Zaret depicted as a distancing device, but that now seems more a missionary maneuver, inclusive rather than isolationist.[33]

According to the religious radicals, the people expected tough talk, welcomed it, and were at a loss without it. Tough talk bespoke no ill will. *The Lamentable Complaint of the Commonaltie* was composed during the late 1580s and endowed "the poore people of the countrie," the complainers, with a keen sense of what was needed to establish God's kingdom on earth. "An holy preaching ministerie" in every parish, they agreed, was the source of their salvation. Those four sermons that bishops ordered non-preaching curates to procure each year were insufficient. The "poore people" demanded larger and regular doses of a "plain and familiar kind of handling" of scripture. "The mighty oak of sin," they said, "cannot be felled by four strokes of an axe"; therefore, to assure that the "plain handling" cut through the weathered bark to ingrained habit and cut out "superstityon," the preaching required would have to "take an edge by exhortation."[34]

[32]Gifford, *Countrie Divinitie*, A2v–A3r and pp. 49–53.

[33]Eamon Duffy, "The Godly and the Multitude in Stuart England," *The Seventeenth Century* 1 (1986): 31–55, makes a similar argument, largely, although not exclusively, using later sources. For the sources cited here, see *Cartwrightiana*, ed. Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (London, 1951), p. 144; *A Dialogue Concerning Strife in our Church*, 5v–8r; "for friendship," see the letter from Bishop Pilkington (1564) in *The Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. John Bruce and Thomas Thomason Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), p. 221.

[34]*The Lamentable Complaint of the Commonaltie*, in *A Parte of the Register* (Middelburgh, 1593), pp. 206–07, 221–23, 269.

Lament and complaint turned satirical and offensive by 1589. The notorious Martin Marprelate struck scornfully at the authorities, who seemed to the radicals to have become indifferent to the infrequency of preaching and the reign of superstition. The "shameless, nameless, or by-named seditious Martinists and their favourers, disturbers of our good estate" irritated just about everyone. Moderate Calvinist reaction to Martinist ridicule, as Peter Lake acknowledges, closed "the magic circle of Protestant respectability" to the more radical reformers.[35]

The point, not to be lost in all that ridicule and reaction, is that "the poore people" were considered by moderates and radicals alike to have been looking for that cutting, incriminating "edge" of exhortation and to welcome what William Perkins called his "hammer," an apt instrument to "bruise in pieces" their "stony hearts." The aim of all the cutting, incriminating, and "bruis[ing]" was to shake "the commonaltie" from complacency. Once people were shaken by conviction, they could be trusted to make short work of Catholicism. John Bridges, no radical, had the clear thinking of "plaine" Christians travesty the notions of condign and congruent merit. John Foxe admired courageous cowherds and craftsmen who, at least in his staged debates, confuted learned Catholic clerics. The Calvinists' devotional narratives were stocked with lowly lay lecturers like Perkins' Eusebius and Gifford's Zelot. "Plaine countrie men" were increasingly familiar with the kind of critic and hero Foxe lionized. God clearly preferred "the colours of lowliness," a renowned preacher told them in a striking sermon against pride and fashion, as good and as conspicuous a vehicle as any other for the praise of modesty and poverty.[36]

But the lay front consisted of substantial citizens as well, of householders, for instance, who were told in catechetical tracts to "drive" their families and servants to "repentaunce." They had been instructed to "turn [their] musicke into mourning," and should their efforts fail, the treatise warned, God's displeasure would be visited on householder and household. Not to worry, though, the catechist was quick to remark. After only four months of "treatment" with his text, the heads of households had seen excellent results, even among those

[35]Lake assesses the consequences of Marprelate in *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought From Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988), pp. 82–85. For Thomas Rogers' assessment ("shameless, nameless"), see his *Sermon upon the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses of the 12th chapter of St. Paul's epistle unto Romans* (London, 1590), p. 14.

[36]Henry Smith, "A Dissuasion from Pride and an Exhortation to Humility," in *The Works of Henry Smith*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1866), 1: 203–14. For Foxe, consult Helgerson, *Nationhood*, pp. 264–66; also see, in addition to the humble sorts elevated by Perkins and Gifford, Anthony Gilby's *Pleausaunt Dialogue conteining a large discourse betweene a souldier of Barwick and an English chaplain* (London, 1566). For Perkins' "hammer," see his *Foundation of the Christian Religion*, in *Works*, 1: 78–79; for Bridges' confidence, see his *Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London, 1571), pp. 73, 80–82. Patrick Collinson, however, is sure that there was much less admiration for commoners' inspired common sense and that Gifford's Atheos was the more typical tyke (*Tudor England Revisited*, p. 5).

of the lowest stations, milkmaids and kitchenboys. Confidence of the kind documented here must be close to that level Ian Green nears when he defines "puritan" as that class of Calvinist most optimistic about what could be achieved by household instruction, although Green adds that confidence in domestic catechesis may have been misplaced. What happened in Tudor parlors—and to what effect—is beyond telling. We can only say for sure that religious radicals assigned homework and expected householders to undertake it with great seriousness of purpose. "[W]ee have a great help by our inferiours in many things," Nicholas Bownde confirmed, "so the Lord would have us helpe them in the chiefe and principal."[37]

One might guess that such "helpe" was somewhat overbearing, that "inferiours" were scrupulously kept in their places, and that domestic catechesis reinforced patterns of deference. Youngsters and servants, however, were not without voice. Lancelot Andrewes invited questions, remembering how Jesus, at the age of twelve, interrogated his hoary instructors.[38] Bownde endorsed a greater degree of popular participation. Something of a populist impulse seems to course through parts of his patently patriarchal discourse. When he summoned domestic "conferences," he stipulated that persons of every station should talk so that all would learn to what extent each was "mooved at the hearing and reading" of scripture. Bownde believed that the apostles and early pastors had commended collaborative instruction, and he rigged his own recommendations to get householders to promote mutual exhortation and thereby show how "plenteously" the words of Jesus "dwelled" among participants in Calvinist conferences. To restrict participation to the clergy or to the learned, to those "not belonging to the common people," in Bownde's estimation, "is a thing more meete for the dark night of poperie."[39]

Bownde, here, recycled the clichés that had Roman Catholicism consigning "the commonaltie" to silence as well as superstition and that had Protestantism liberating the laity. Conceding to chroniclers of the Calvinists' withdrawal from "inferiors" that any distinction of this character was overdrawn and would have been far less telling than its designers had imagined, one may still find it difficult to reconcile Bownde's catechetical conferences with the notion that the religious radicals increased "social distance." Lawrence Chaderton of Cambridge proposed a scheme during the 1580s that can be arrayed with other evidence collected

[37]Nicholas Bownde, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath plainely layde forth* (London, 1595), p. 260. Also see Ian Green, *The Christian's A B C: Catechesis and Catechizing in England, c. 1530–1740* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 71–79, 210–229; for mourning and milkmaids, see *Short Questions and Answeres conteyning the summe of the Christian Religion* (London, 1580), A3r–A4v.

[38]*The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1854; reprint ed., *New York, 1967), 6: 5–6, citing Luke 2:46.*

[39]Bownde, *Sabbath*, pp. 214–21.

against withdrawal. Chaderton welcomed widows and reformed paupers into the diaconate to dispense "mercy and chearfulnesse" to relieve others in return for relief they received. The arguments for withdrawal and social conservatism ordinarily rest on surveillance and disciplinary programs that reportedly pinned the poor to their places, but Chaderton at his desk hoisted the poorest and powerless into the ministry of the church.[40]

Thomas Rogers published a parody of Chaderton's scheme. Rogers wondered who would pay for all that mercy and cheer, and he mocked that massive and mongrel ministry in which "farmers and artificers," politically influential elites, and the down-and-out rubbed shoulders and reduced the pastor to the post of indentured servant. Chaderton's proposal was much less encompassing and empowering than Rogers made it out to be, but the scheme does, in theory, close rather than broaden a chasm between the prosperous and the poor. Apparently, Chaderton hoped to diminish the distances between the respectable and the unruly by offering incentives for, and marking new routes to, respectability.[41]

We know nothing that would lead us to suspect Chaderton's scheme was ever implemented, but we know so little about what went on behind closed doors. Unconventional and underground Elizabethan fellowships left few traces. Social historians must content themselves with the exaggerated fears of the nonconformists' critics, with reports from the likes of Thomas Bilson and Bancroft, who feared that the "consistorian puritanes" were fashioning little Genevas and plotting to overthrow the established ecclesiastical order. One could say that fear, rather than any specifiable feature or figure, defined the late Tudor "conventicle."[42]

There seems no way, then, to retrieve much reliable information about the "reasonable assembly of faithfull people" who gathered in defiance of two archbishops to hear Giles Wigginton preach in 1586 on "sabbath dayes one after another in [his] house" in Sedbergh. The social composition of that assembly and its disposition to experiment with discipline are beyond recovery. Guesswork that takes the defiance seriously might make the group plausibly proletarian and propertyless. Wigginton was known to have befriended the illiterate and itinerant

[40]Chaderton, *A Fruitfull Sermon upon the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Verses of the 12th Chapter of the Epistle of S. Paul to the Romans* (London, 1584), pp. 80–81.

[41]Rogers, *Sermon*, pp. 43–48. On respectability, Paul Slack makes a related point with reference to social control, "Poverty and Social Regulation in Elizabethan England," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. Christopher Haigh (Athens, 1985), pp. 231–45; also see Todd, *Christian Humanism*, pp. 147–49.

[42]See Patrick Collinson, "The English Conventicle," in *Voluntary Religion*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford, 1986), pp. 233–59; Joseph W. Martin, *Religious Radicals in Tudor England* (London, 1989), pp. 13–39. For "consistorian" plots, see Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions*, B1v–B2r, pp. 67–69; Thomas Bilson, *The Perpetual Gevernment of Christ's Church* (London, 1593), pp. 357–61, for the terror of democratizing tendencies that privileged "the rashnesse and rudenesse" of commoners.

exhibitionist William Hacket, who, several years on, turned insurgent. Yet Hacket numbered gentry among his followers, and Wigginton himself cultivated the patronage of the four most powerful men at court (who subsequently saw to his reinstatement at Sedbergh) and conceived of himself as head of a project employing "worthy schollers" to dispute the pope's "pretended supremacy." So what are we to make of Sedbergh? There is nothing to suggest that more concentrated study would yield evidence of the social polarization that Wrightson and Levine found around Terling. But there is nothing to suggest that the possible leveling at Wigginton's house was any more representative of the radicals' worship than social discontinuity at Terling.[43] Wigginton, at times, looks rather like the "servitors" Zaret describes, ingratiating and grateful for support from court, but he could be as unbending as his fellow radical Robert Cawdry, who lectured a patron that "preachers must be no milkesopes. [They] may not study to please men more than God."[44] Perhaps there were angry words in Sedbergh, for Wigginton drew parishioners from sabbath worship at the local church. Angry words—what Wrightson called "dichotomous language"—were frequently used by religious radicals seeking to create a new public without necessarily separating or withdrawing from the old. Little in Sedbergh would likely have confirmed Richard Bancroft's fears, little would have shown that "ridiculous men and bewitched" conducted themselves, their conversations, and their worship as if "Christ's soveraignty...were no where acknowledged or found but where halfe dosen artizans, shoomakers, tinkers, tailors, with their preacher and reader...rule the whole parish." But there is enough in Wigginton's village to forbid generalizing too far from Terling.[45]

The critics at the time thought that they had found what they feared everywhere they looked. They saw nothing to chose between Hacket and the likes of Wigginton, in part because they suspected that "plaine countrie men" were so susceptible, that is, so "apt to believe upon a very slender warrant and to

[43]For Wigginton and Hacket, see Thomas Cartwright, *A Briefe Apologie* (London, 1596), B4r. For Hacket and his affluent friends, see Richard Cosin, *Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation* (London, 1592). Wigginton's letter to Cecil, British Library (BL), Lansdowne Ms. 84, f. 238, elaborates a plan for the "worthy schollers"; a report of "Mr. Wigginton's Troubles" mentions Sedbergh's alternative congregation, Wigginton's "reasonable assembly," Dr. Williams' Library, Morrice Mss. B.2.34v and C.765.

[44]Compare Cawdrey's letter to Burghley, BL, Lansdowne Ms. 55, ff. 162r–165v ("milkesopes" at 165r) with Wigginton's note, BL, Lansdowne Ms. 77, f. 159.

[45]See Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions*, p. 44. Also consult Patrick Collinson, "The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful," *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, 1991), pp. 51–76; Christopher W. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. pp. 177–79 on social integration and the conventional character of expressions of polarity.

imagine infallible truth where scarce any probable show appeareth."[46] Gifford, Gilby, Perkins, Bownde, and many others had more confidence in those "plaine" people, taking commoners under their wings, so to speak, thus arousing critics' suspicions. To be sure, advanced Calvinists could not have contentedly enlisted lay collaborators until complacence and residual Catholicism had been purged. And purgation required tough talk, the hard line occasionally mistaken for the last word in "distancing" or segregating. Tough talk, however, was often taken as part of the preliminaries, as something of "a wake-up call" or a first stride toward integration and laicization. Radicals, deprived of the pulpit, as was Wigginton, doubtlessly continued to toe the hard line at home, employing "privat meanes of privat reading, catechising, instruction, reproof."[47]

Many religious radicals, then, resembled Bownde's pious householders, and, if they agreed with Bownde and other catechists, they encouraged participants of all "sorts" to confer across "caste" boundaries. Of course, my reconstruction of the "reasonable assembly" of yeomen and lesser parishioners who met in Wigginton's parlor has only a slightly more solid foundation than Bancroft's suspicions—which is to say that such a reconstruction and such suspicions are close to unfounded. They are, nonetheless, more defensible than the conceit that religious radicals serviced the social elites, bridled the masses, and enabled some lay vanguard to withdraw from, yet discipline, "the common sort." To counter the claims that sixteenth-century puritanism anticipated the practices of modern democracies, scholars for several decades have tended to underscore those socially conservative effects of religious radicalism. Nicholas Tyacke concedes "puritanism has been deflated as a revolutionary force. But...what began as a sensible attempt at redressing the balance now threatens to turn into a caricature." Ideally, Elizabethan religious radicalism can be "restored," as Tyacke hopes, "to its rightful place" without unduly simplifying the complexity or variation of late Tudor religious and political cultures.[48]

Wigginton's "conventicle," Bownde's ideal household, Chaderton's widows, and Perkins' Eusebius: we have far too few planks to cross to some new and compelling generalization about religious conviction and social practice. The convictions and practices—and the correlations attempted—are much less tidy than colleagues sometimes admit, less tidy, certainly, than the chroniclers of "withdrawal" allow. Their story of withdrawal and their analyses of social conservatism rest upon a bipolar model of society that, as Martin Ingram now

[46]See the dedication to the fifth book of Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 6 vols. ed., W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 2: 3–4.

[47]John Sprint, *Cassander Anglicanus* (1618), cited in Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1991), p. 102.

[48]Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism' and the Legalizing of Dissent, 1571–1719," in *From Persecution to Toleration*, pp. 17–18.

regrets, "makes it hard to do justice to the infinite gradations of the social hierarchy," most of which he and I collect in the capacious middle of the Elizabethan mass. Should everyone have to be numbered and named a yeoman, patrician, or pauper for anyone to be understood, we would be in a terrible fix. For, as it happens here, the untidiness and overlap help us appreciate nuance and variation. The few instances of "social distancing" and the examples of leveling demonstrate the versatility of the religious radicals' rhetoric and document what David Cressy, writing of slightly later Calvinist conviction, calls "the latitudinarian genius" of the Church of England, "permitting a wide range of local emphases and practice."[49]

[49]David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley, 1989), p. 34; Martin Ingram, "From Reformation to Toleration: Popular Religious Cultures in England, 1540–1690," *Popular Culture in England,* c. 1500–1850, pp. 95–96.

PETER IVER KAUFMAN is Professor in the Department of Relgious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is author of *Redeeming Politics* (1990), *Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity* (1996), and *Prayer, Despair, and Drama: Elizabethan Introspection* (1996), as well as of numerous articles concerned with Elizabethan religion and culture.