

THE GOSPEL AND
HENRY VIII

*Evangelicals in the Early English
Reformation*

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CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>Notes on the text</i>	xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xviii
Introduction	1
The woman on the rock	1
The nature of the problem	5
Part I: The regime and the reformers	
1 A Counter-Reformation?	13
Interpreting the 'Henrician reaction'	13
The whip with six strings	23
Religious policy in the 1540s	39
2 Fearing God and honouring the king	58
The obedience of a Christian man	58
'Walke soberly': defiance, dishonesty and discretion	69
Part II: The faces of reform	
3 The exiles	93
4 Pulpit and printshop	113
A loyal opposition	113
Polemicists and their audiences	121
Justification and the Mass	134
The commonwealth	145
5 The universities	157
Godliness and good learning	157

	'The corruption of the realme'	170
	Pronunciation and authority	183
6	The court	194
	In the shadow of the king	194
	'A madding tyme': poets and reformers	205
	The road back to Rome	213
7	The evangelical underground	223
	The unacceptable face of reformism	223
	Radical conventicles and respectable patrons	237
	Conclusion	248
	Appendixes	259
	<i>Appendix I: Reformers executed or exiled between the passage of the Act of Six Articles and the death of Henry VIII</i>	261
	<i>Appendix II: Controversial religious printing in English, 1541–6</i>	271
	<i>Bibliography</i>	274
	<i>Index</i>	293

FIGURES

A1	Controversial religious imprints in English, 1541–6	<i>page</i> 271
A2	English-language imprints by type, 1541–6	273

TABLES

5.1 Works by Protestant authors owned by Cambridge testators, 1535–47	<i>page</i> 172
7.1 Accusations of heresy against Kentish clergy, 1543	224
7.2 Accusations of heresy against Kentish laity, 1543	225
7.3 Accusations of heresy against London laity, July 1540	225

1

A Counter-Reformation?

The heauen is hye, the earth is depe, and the kynges herte is vnsearcheable.

Proverbs 25:3.

INTERPRETING THE ‘HENRICIAN REACTION’

Historians aspire to follow our evidence impartially and fearlessly, over whatever terrain it may lead us; but in practice we often find ourselves being drawn along the paths beaten by our predecessors. This is particularly so when negotiating a landscape as scarred by passage as the English Reformation. Christopher Haigh, for example, judged that A. G. Dickens’ influential account of the English Reformation had followed the deepest of these channels, cut by John Foxe in the sixteenth century.¹ The period 1539–47, however, contains its own distinct set of historiographical tiger traps. Dickens’ view is best summed up by the title of the relevant chapter in his survey: ‘A balance of forces’.² On this interpretation, the forward march of Protestantism was hindered in the early 1540s, as religious conservatives vied with evangelicals for the ear of the king, and scored some successes. However, the most striking aspect of the treatment of this period by the whole ‘Whig-Protestant’ tradition was the extent to which it was ignored altogether. Patrick Collinson has suggested that the approach taken by Dickens and his contemporaries

confined the essential history of the English Reformation to the thirty years from 1529 to 1559, a manageable three-course meal preceded by a few late medieval apéritifs and rounded off with a small cup of Elizabethan coffee.³

¹ ‘Introduction’, *English Reformation Revised*, ed. Haigh, 1.

² Dickens, *English Reformation*, 167.

³ Patrick Collinson, ‘Comment on Eamon Duffy’s Neale Lecture and the Colloquium’, in *England’s Long Reformation 1500–1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (1998), 71.

On this analogy, the 1540s were treated as a *pause digestif*, of the kind that can sometimes be necessary when a heavy and somewhat unusual appetiser is to be followed by bolting down a conventional main course. Perhaps understandably, a historiography which was interested chiefly in the advancing tide of Protestantism, and the failure of attempts to stem it, skipped over the early 1540s as an interlude in which little of lasting significance appeared to be happening. The late Henrician period has received much less scholarly attention than the rest of that thirty-year crisis.

One of the many valuable services which Dickens' work performed for English Reformation scholarship was to serve as a lightning-rod for the attacks of his 'revisionist'⁴ successors. Like so many other parts of his thesis, Dickens' view of Henry VIII's last years has been disputed. The revisionists, however, disagree as to which of the forces that Dickens believed to be balanced was actually in the ascendant. Eamon Duffy has described this period as one phase of an ongoing attack on traditional religion. He does identify a 'resurgence of traditionalism' in the period, but he emphasises that the reformers continued to inflict serious damage on central aspects of traditional piety, such as the cult of the saints and prayer for the dead.⁵ Haigh, by contrast, sees this period as the first of England's official Counter-Reformations, asserting that in late 1538 'Henry VIII stopped the Reformation dead'. On this view, the last eight years of his life were a period of almost unmitigated gloom for the reformers.⁶

This has more or less become the new consensus.⁷ The case for this view is clear enough. The late 1530s had been heady days for the evangelical minority in England. Following the break with Rome in 1534, Thomas Cromwell held the office of vice-gerent in spirituals, effectively exercising the newly established royal supremacy over the English Church on Henry VIII's behalf. He was supported by his fellow-evangelical Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, and by several other highly placed reformist sympathisers. Their activities were permitted and to a degree encouraged by the king himself. During this period, official statements cast doubt on a range

⁴ A term which is contentious amongst those it has been applied to: Haigh uses it enthusiastically of himself, while Eamon Duffy argues that all competent historians are revisionists by definition. Like much of the terminology surrounding the study of the English Reformation, it is used here with a due sense of unease, and without an intention to prejudice the issues involved.

⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London, 1992), 424–47.

⁶ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 152.

⁷ See, for example, Litzenberger, *English Reformation and the Laity*, 33, 44; Andrew Petegree, *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies* (Aldershot, Hants., 1996), 86; Glyn Redworth, 'A study in the formulation of policy: the genesis and evolution of the Act of Six Articles', *JEH* 37 (1986), 45, 51; Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (Basingstoke, 1993), 144–5; Martha C. Skeeters, *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation c. 1530–c. 1570* (Oxford, 1993); 'Introduction', in *Long Reformation*, ed. Tyacke, 8.

of traditional doctrines and practices, most notably purgatory and prayer for the dead. Royal injunctions and proclamations drastically restricted the use of images and the veneration of saints, and effectively ended the practice of pilgrimage. The English Bible, so long prohibited, was not merely legalised but ordered to be placed in every parish church in the realm. Most dramatically of all, monasticism, a way of life which represented all that evangelicals most deplored in the old Church, was entirely exterminated, through an astonishing exercise of royal power. At the end of 1538, however, the first signs appeared that the king wished to apply the brakes. A proclamation reasserted that certain heretics were going to remain unacceptable: notably Anabaptists, who profaned baptism, and sacramentaries, who denied Christ's corporal presence in the Eucharist. To reinforce the point, the king himself presided over the trial and execution of one outspoken sacramentary, John Lambert. In 1539, this new mood was given statutory backing. Under close royal supervision, Parliament passed 'An acte abolishing diversity in Opynyons', which reasserted six key points of traditional doctrine and which was commonly known, at the time and ever since, as the Act of Six Articles. It laid down fearsome penalties for those who denied the articles. A year later, in July 1540, Thomas Cromwell was executed for treason and heresy, along with three prominent evangelical preachers. Sporadic persecution of reformers continued for the remainder of the reign, driving some into exile and forcing others to lie low. The new direction of policy was underlined in 1543, when another statute, the 'acte for thadvancement of true Religion', restricted access to the English Bible. The long-awaited comprehensive statement of the Henrician Church's doctrines which was published the same year, the so-called *King's Book*, also gave little comfort to the reformers. In particular, it robustly rejected the evangelical conviction that Christians are saved by faith alone and not by works. This conservative reaction continued, albeit in fits and starts, to the very end of the reign. In the last summer of Henry VIII's life, in 1546, a further bout of heresy prosecutions claimed several prominent victims, and even Henry's last queen, Katherine Parr, only narrowly escaped arrest.⁸

This interpretation, however, has a dubious intellectual pedigree. By emphasising the conservatism of the 1540s, Haigh and others have, ironically enough, brought their interpretation back into line with the views of John Foxe and of the other, earlier English reformers on whose writings and opinions he drew. In his massive martyrological history, the *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe wrote that 'after the taking a way of the sayd Cromwel...

⁸ Most surveys of the period summarise these events: see, for example, Haigh, *English Reformation*, 152–67. For a less polemical view, see Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480–1642* (2003), chapter 2.

the state of Religion more and more decayed, during all the residue of the raygne of king Henry'. Such an unlikely alliance between Foxe and the modern revisionists might indicate that they must both be right. However, by following Foxe's interpretation, the revisionists have made themselves heirs to a narrative which is seriously flawed.

Foxe's account began with Henry VIII's disastrous fourth marriage, to Anne of Cleves, which collapsed in recriminations almost before it had begun. Foxe believed that underlying this debacle was a factional conflict between Thomas Cromwell and Stephen Gardiner, the conservative bishop of Winchester. Foxe then went on to describe how 'in the yeare next folowing, which was of the Lorde [1]540 . . . [the king] summoned a solemne Parliament to be holden at Westminster the 28. day of Aprill'. It is in this parliament that Foxe placed the Act of Six Articles, which he described, borrowing Richard Grafton's phrases, as 'the whip with 6 stringes', 'the bloody act'. In fact, the parliament which enacted the Six Articles had opened on 28 April 1539, not 1540. Foxe was misled by the peculiar dating system in the chronicle which he used as his source for this account. He did, however, correctly date Cromwell's fall from power to 1540, and this convenient chronological error served to make his account much more compelling. Misdating the Six Articles by a year allowed him to write that 'after the Parliament was finished . . . the Lord Cromwell . . . within few dayes after was apprehended'.⁹ On this reading, the passage of the Six Articles and Cromwell's arrest – events a year apart between which there was no direct connection – become two halves of a papalist *coup* led by Bishop Gardiner.¹⁰

Foxe's narrative moved on to depict a gathering storm of persecution. He noted that on 29 January 1541, a commission was issued under the Act of Six Articles for the arrest of suspected heretics. This commission was responsible for the prosecution and execution of a young Londoner called Richard Mekins, a story which Foxe told in some detail. However, this firmly dated event served as a peg upon which a series of more significant and more dubious tales of persecution could be hung. The prosecutions under the Six Articles, Foxe wrote, 'extended . . . to Salisbury, Northfolke, Lincolne,

⁹ *AM*, 1134–6. Much of Foxe's account was drawn from Edward Hall and Richard Grafton, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (RSTC 12721: 1548), which used mayoral years rather than regnal years for dating – hence Foxe's confusion. In the first English edition of his book (*AM* (1563), 586–9), Foxe also followed Hall and Grafton for Cromwell's fall, which he therefore dated to 1541. However, while he corrected the latter date in subsequent editions, he did not amend the date of the Six Articles. This is clearly error rather than conspiracy, from a historian with little interest in chronology, but it was an error which fitted neatly into Foxe's preconceptions. I am grateful to Tom Freeman for his assistance with this point.

¹⁰ Gardiner was a consistent villain to Foxe and other early Protestant writers. On this, see Michael Riordan and Alec Ryrie, 'Stephen Gardiner and the making of a Protestant villain', *Sixteenth Century Journal* (forthcoming).

and through all other Shyres and quarters of the realme; so that whereas any popish Prelate most bare stroke, there most persecution increased'. His examples were three burnings from Salisbury (these can tentatively be dated to 1541–2, but it seems there were in fact only two executions); and seven recantations and two burnings in Lincoln diocese. These last two victims underline the slapdash nature of Foxe's chronology. Their crimes were pre-Reformation Lollard offences (the use of English prayers and Scripture), and Foxe elsewhere recorded them as having been executed in 1521.¹¹

The centrepiece of Foxe's evidence for the impact of the Six Articles, however, is an impressive list of some 200 Londoners arrested under the Act during the spring of 1541. This list, while invaluable, is again dogged by chronological problems. At the end of the list we find the cases of several prominent reformers – Alexander Seton, John Porter, Thomas Becon, Robert Wisdom and others – which in fact were scattered through the early 1540s. Foxe made no distinction between these and the others, probably because his research assistants compiled the list carelessly. The main list itself is also misdated; these arrests can be shown to have taken place in July 1540 – that is, shortly before Cromwell's execution.¹²

These scattered cases, fused together by Foxe's chronology to suggest sustained, nationwide persecution, set the tone for his account of the remainder of the reign. Throughout that account, Foxe argued that Henry VIII was little more than a reluctant accomplice to crimes committed by court conservatives, in particular Gardiner. This was a most useful fiction. Foxe could scarcely have ignored Henry's persecution of evangelicals, even if he had wished to do so. But nor could he condemn the old king outright; it would have meant rejecting Henry's real contributions to the evangelical cause, and undermining the legitimacy of the Elizabethan Church. By portraying Henry as his councillors' puppet, Foxe solved several problems at once. He managed to incorporate the testimonies he had received from informants such as Ralph Morice and the earl of Bedford, both of whom described late Henrician politics in these terms; he was able implicitly to chide his own queen for listening to evil counsellors; and he more or less succeeded in strapping Henry VIII's religious ambiguities into a confessional straitjacket.¹³ As such, he could fit some measures of real reform into his story. In particular, he

¹¹ AM, 774, 838.

¹² AM, 1201–7. The London arrests can be dated from a packet of twenty indictments dated 17 July 1540 and endorsed by the mayor. All but two of these name persons from Foxe's list and include details of the same offences Foxe records. Richard Hilles' testimony confirms that these twenty indictments represent only some of the arrests at that time; he wrote that before the general pardon of 15 July 'a number of people from everywhere in England were imprisoned, in particular the preachers of the Gospel'. PRO SP 1/243 fos. 61–80 (LP Addenda 1463); ET, 138 (OL, 208). Cf. Brigden, *London*, 320, n. 127.

¹³ I am grateful to Tom Freeman for discussions on this point.

praised Henry for his orders of 1541 restraining the use of images, for his relaxation of the Lenten fast and for the statute of 1544 which moderated the penal code of the Act of Six Articles.¹⁴ Somewhat surprisingly, however, Foxe did not mention any swing towards the evangelical party in the last months of the king's life. Indeed, while Foxe claimed that in 1545 Henry was coming to distrust Gardiner, 'wherby he was the more forward to incline somewhat in furthering the desolate cause of religion', by the following year little trace of this inclination remains. Foxe did include Archbishop Cranmer's somewhat dubious claim that in August 1546 Henry was considering the abolition of the Mass. However, he emphasised that Henry's last public religious statement was a draconian proclamation against heretical books of the same month. That proclamation, Foxe commented darkly, would have

done much hurt in the church among the godly sort, bringing them either into great daunger, or els keeping them in much blindnes, had not the shortnes of the kinges dayes stopped the malignant purposes of the foresayd Prelates, causing the king to leave that by death vnto the people, which by his life he would not graunt.

Thus Henry's death almost becomes a divine judgement on the proclamation. In the first edition of the *Actes and Monuments*, this was reinforced by a tale that Gardiner had presented the king with a list of evangelicals' names, 'the execution of whome shoulde shortly haue folowed' if Henry had lived.¹⁵

In other words, Foxe's account of the early 1540s, for all its subsequent influence, is highly problematic. Chronology was never Foxe's strongest point, and in this section of his book that problem was compounded by the haste with which he and his researchers were working, the tendentious nature of many of his sources and his sometimes inept attempts to resolve the contradictions which these problems threw up. The result is a thoroughly chaotic account. Foxe could be tempted to include some peculiar tales, such as Gardiner's list of wanted evangelicals. He gave only the scantiest attention to some key events: the 1543 Act for the Advancement of True Religion is only mentioned once, in passing, when it is (again) misdated to 1544 and presented as if its purpose was to permit the nobility and gentry access to the Bible in English rather than to forbid it to their social inferiors.¹⁶ This disarray meant that Foxe's account was more than usually susceptible to being moulded by his biases and preconceptions. His view of the king as a puppet, his account of the Six Articles and other aspects of this section of his book all show this pervasive influence. His interpretation does not, of course, depend exclusively on his errors; but those errors are serious enough to call the interpretation into question.

¹⁴ AM, 1210, 1230–1. Cf. *Statutes of the Realm, printed by command of his majesty King George III*, vol. III (1817), 960–1 (35^o Henry VIII c. 5); TRP, 261, 309.

¹⁵ AM, 1231, 1245, 1259; AM (1563), 673–4. ¹⁶ AM, 1230.

Moreover, this skewed interpretation can be traced back into Foxe's sources themselves. The most striking forerunner of Foxe's view of the early 1540s is Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, published in 1548. The sections of this piece dealing with the last years of Henry's reign were in fact written by Hall's publisher, Richard Grafton, whose sometimes incautious combination of reformist commitment and commercial activity made him one of the most eye-catching evangelicals of the period. For Grafton, as for Foxe, the tone for the last years of Henry's reign was set by the Act of Six Articles, which he reviled in a much-quoted passage.

Among the common people it was called the act of sixe articles, & of some it was named the whip withe sixe strynges, and of some other and that of the moste parte, it was named the bloody statute, for of truth it so in shorte time after skourged a great nombre in the cite of London. . . . In fourtene daies space there was not a preacher nor other persone in the cite of name, whiche hod spoken against the supremacie of the bishop of Rome, but he was wrapped in the sixe articles, insomuche as thei indicted and presented of suspicion to the nombre of fue hundred persones and above.

Grafton not only used many of the terms which Foxe would later adopt, but also made a similar chronological error. This ferocious purge, which he claims took place 'in shorte time after' the passage of the Act in 1539, is in fact clearly that of July 1540 (the purge which Foxe was to misdate in the other direction).¹⁷ It is rather harder to explain Grafton's chronological confusion than Foxe's. Grafton was describing a recent event which we may be sure he would have found memorable, since he himself was one of those arrested.¹⁸ However, this mistake, if mistake it was, powerfully reinforced Grafton's contention that the passage of the Act of Six Articles marked a decisive change in the tenor of the regime's religious policy. He concluded his description of the first commission's cruelties by generalising the event:

In the tyme that these sixe Articles indured whiche was eight yeres and more, thei [the commissioners] brought many an honest and simple persone to there deaths, for suche was the rigour of that lawe, that if two witnesses false or true, had accused any and auouched that thei had spoken agaynst the sacrament, ther was then no way but death.¹⁹

Although modern accounts are usually couched in more subtle terms, this description of the 1540s as the age of the Six Articles is distinctly reminiscent of the current historiographical consensus.

¹⁷ Any doubt that Grafton is describing the same quest recorded by Foxe, Hilles and the mayoral indictments is removed by his statement that those arrested were released through the intervention of Lord Chancellor Audley. Foxe's account is identical, and Hilles' differs only in that he believed that it was Edward Crome's intercession which had moved the king to mercy. *AM*, 1206; *ET*, 138 (*OL*, 208).

¹⁸ *AM*, 1203. ¹⁹ Hall, *The vnion of . . . Lancastre & Yorke*, fo. 234^v.

However, it is only in Edward VI's reign that we find reformers writing of 'their whip of correction . . . hanged [with] .vi. stringes'.²⁰ The consensus becomes less clear-cut if we consider the opinions of those evangelicals who were writing while the Six Articles were actually in force. Few reformers would have agreed that they were living through a time of unbridled persecution. It is true that they abhorred the Six Articles. Foxe's mentor John Bale wrote in 1544 that they were 'enacted and establyshed with more tyrannie than euer vndre the Romishe Pope, Mahomete or anye other tyraunt afore'.²¹ The London radical Henry Brinklow joined many others in deploring the ferocity of the rules of evidence which the Act laid down: 'Whan so euer .ij. false knaues shal secretly accuse a man, althoughe he were as ignorant as a chylde of .ii. dayes old, yet must he eyther dye, beare a fagot, or recant. . . . Death, death, eyn for tryfys, so that thei folow the high prystys in crucyfyng Christ.'²² These writers did not, however, see the passage of the Act as a decisive turning-point or a defining moment in the way that Grafton, Foxe and their modern successors do. Indeed, the closer we come to 1539, the more low-key the Act's opponents become. William Jerome, burned as a heretic in 1540, denounced the House of Commons as 'Butterflies and knaves with other wordes of reprofte' for passing the Act – which is certainly impolite, but on the scale of Reformation polemic it hardly registers.²³ Even those inclined to use stronger language found themselves in some difficulties when attacking the Act. In 1544, Bale wrote that the aim of the Six Articles was

to repare the broken walles of youre ryall Rome agayne, as in dede they wold do euen to the verie cloudes yf they were wele folowed. . . . Were they ones receyued, graunted, and executed vndre peyne of deathe, the Pope shulde neuer dye in Englande.²⁴

In other words, Bale was forced to admit that the Act's threats had not been fully implemented, and that its dangers remained largely potential.

Even these more nuanced attacks on the Six Articles do not represent the mainstream of contemporary evangelical opinion. Grafton and Foxe, with the help of some chronological shuffling, portrayed the Six Articles as the inauguration of a period of more or less steady persecution, but this was not how matters appeared at the time. Thomas Cromwell survived the passage of the Six Articles by a year, and as continental visitors reported with surprise, for much of that year the prospects for reform seemed bright.²⁵ In February

²⁰ Peter Moone, *A short treatise of certayne thinges abused* (RSTC 18056: 1548), sig. A3^v.

²¹ John Bale (ps. Henry Stalbrydge), *The epistle exhortatorye of an Englyshe Christiane unto his derely beloued contraye of Englande* (RSTC 1291: Antwerp, 1544), fo. 6^r.

²² Henry Brinklow (ps. Roderick Mors), *The complaynt of Roderick Mors . . . unto the parliament house of Inland* (RSTC 3759.5: Strassburg, 1542), sigs. D1^v–2^r.

²³ PRO SP 1/158 fo. 120^v (LP XV 411.2).

²⁴ Bale, *Epistle exhortatorye*, fo. 6^v. ²⁵ MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 257.

1540, a well-connected young evangelical named Nicholas Partridge wrote to Heinrich Bullinger, the chief minister of Zurich and European Protestantism's most energetic networker. Partridge's news was good. With a modest whiff of patriotism, he stated that the reformers' advances in England were 'perhaps not to be despised'. By this he meant the completion of the dissolution of the monasteries, and the executions of three conservative abbots some months before. But he was also concerned to allay Bullinger's fears regarding the impact of the Six Articles.

Good pastors are freely preaching the truth, nor has punishment been visited on them on account of the articles of which you write. The most merciful king would willingly desire the promotion of the very truth; and to this end he has willed several bishops to consult about the selection of twelve monasteries, where boys might be brought up in all kinds of good learning with piety and holiness.

Partridge's friend John Butler, another correspondent of Bullinger's, drew attention to the outspoken preaching of Robert Barnes, a stalwart of the evangelical movement who was to be executed in the wake of Cromwell's fall. Butler also drew some comfort from the fact that 'books of every kind may safely be offered for sale'.²⁶ Bullinger, we may assume, met these assurances with a measure of scepticism. Certainly, Martin Luther and his right-hand man Philip Melancthon saw the Six Articles as a disaster.²⁷ At least one distinguished Continental Protestant, however, refused to write off Henry VIII after the Six Articles. The Strassburg reformer Martin Bucer wrote to Thomas Cranmer in October 1539 stating his belief that the king's apparent lurch towards conservatism was purely a by-product of his foreign policy. If the implementation of the Six Articles could be delayed, Bucer hoped, 'the disguises of Antichrist being detected, the king would at length see Christ's truth'.²⁸ Despite the 'bloody Act', in early 1540 informed evangelicals could justifiably remain optimistic.

However, this Indian summer of the Cromwellian Reformation came to a sudden and brutal end when, just under a year after the passage of Six Articles, Cromwell himself was arrested. He was executed in July 1540, as were Barnes, Jerome and Thomas Garrett, and as we have seen, large numbers of other reformers were rounded up. It was certainly the worst crisis which English evangelicals had faced since they had first scented royal favour. Yet they were not wholly dismayed. Indeed, within weeks of Cromwell's death evangelicals could be found hoping that the world might turn again in

²⁶ *ET*, 398, 406 (my translations); cf. *OL*, 614, 627.

²⁷ Philip Melancthon, *The epistle of the famous and great Clerke Philip Melancton made vnto oure late Souereyne Lorde Kyng Henry the eight, for the reuokinge and abolishing of the six articles* (RSTC 17789: Antwerp, 1547); Martin Luther, *Luther's Works vol. 53: Letters III*, ed. and tr. Gottfried G. Krodell (Philadelphia, 1975), 204-6.

²⁸ *ET*, 345 (*OL*, 528).

their favour. After all, if this was the worst crisis, it was not the only one. The king's supposed commitment to the evangelical cause had survived the fall of Anne Boleyn in 1536 and the passage of the Six Articles in 1539, and it might plausibly enough survive this disaster as well. In the months and years after Cromwell's fall, most reformers still pinned their hopes for the future on the king. In May 1541, the Salisbury evangelical John Erley wrote to two of his contacts in London, asking optimistically for news from the capital:

You be not onely assosiat And in compenye dayly with suche maner of men as be faouorable to the worde of gode, But also with suche as can partely delate whethr that it be of any lichod [likelihood] that godes worde shall haue free passage or no.²⁹

Those who were closer to the centre of power could do more than simply wait. On 15 September 1540, four evangelical members of the royal households fell to talking politics in the king's great chamber. All agreed that the evangelical cause was opposed, not by the king himself, but by Stephen Gardiner and the duke of Norfolk. One of this group, a sewer in the queen's privy chamber called William Smethwick, was more forthright than the others, and John Lassells, who held the same post in the king's chamber, felt the need to offer a word of advice. As Lassells wrote shortly afterwards:

I did perswad master smythwyke not to be to rashe or quike in mayntenynge the scrypture, for yff we wolde lette them [Gardiner and Norfolk] a lone and suffer a lettell tyme they wolde (I doubte not) ower throwe them selves, standyng manyfestlye a nenst god and theyr prynce.

As evidence for this sanguine view, Lassells told his friends a story of how Norfolk had confronted a man who was rumoured to have married a former nun. According to Lassells, the man replied,

My lorde, I knowe no nonnes nor religious folke in thys realme nor no suche bondage seyng god and the kyng haue made them free. To the same worde the Duke sayd, by godes body sacred it wyll never owt of my harte as longe as I lyue.³⁰

Norfolk's easy way with words would plant his destruction, and the evangelicals need only wait; or so Lassells believed. This was not simply a case of a timid courtier urging caution, for Lassells was no quietist. Six years later, he was to boast abroad his desire to be called before the Privy Council to be examined for his sacramentarian convictions, and to go to the stake without wavering. In 1540, however, his optimism rested partly on his underestimate of the duke of Norfolk – a common mistake amongst both contemporaries and historians – but much more on his certainty that the king was ultimately on the side of the angels. Unlike Grafton and Foxe, and unlike the authors of

²⁹ PRO STAC 2/34/28 fo. 6^r.

³⁰ PRO SP 1/163 fo. 46^r (*LP XVI* 101). Smethwick was foolish enough to disregard Lassells' advice and to accuse Norfolk of treason – hence Lassells' record of the conversation.

the modern consensus, Lassells and those like him did not believe that there had been a fundamental change in the regime's attitude to reform with the passage of the Six Articles, or even with the fall of Cromwell. Those events were of course disturbing, but more evident was the continuity represented by the king himself. For the time being, most reformers continued to be confident that while the storms of faction might blow him from his course, his destination was set. Henry had publicly and deliberately assumed the mantle of the great reforming kings of the Old Testament, and his evangelical subjects believed him. He was Josiah, and Hezekiah, and David, and the reformation for which they looked would come from him. This conviction was itself an important political fact. It remains to be seen to what extent it was an exercise in wishful thinking.

THE WHIP WITH SIX STRINGS

The greatest obstacle to evangelical trust in the king was, of course, the periodic execution of evangelicals in the king's name. Yet this was not quite so severe a problem as it might appear. Behind Foxe's carefully constructed picture of generalised persecution lies a more complex reality. Records survive of at most thirty-nine evangelicals who died at the hands of the regime for religious offences between the passage of the Act of Six Articles and Henry's death.³¹ Three of these – 'Henry' and his servant, and Oliver Richardine – are recorded only by Foxe, and dated sufficiently vaguely that it would be unwise to date their deaths firmly to this period. Two more – Andrew Hewet and Nicholas Belenian – appear to have been listed by Foxe in error, as other sources name other men in their places. Of the remainder, three were executed for treason rather than heresy; and three died in custody, the three deaths being, it seems, one accident, one suicide and one murder. Twenty-eight persons remain as almost certainly having been burned for heresy in the period. Most of them died during two short bursts of persecution: nine in 1540, around the time of Cromwell's fall, and ten more in the summer of 1546. Moreover, these victims have a distinctive doctrinal profile. It is possible to guess at the offences for which twenty-four of the twenty-eight died. Of these, twenty were apparently executed wholly or principally for sacramentarian beliefs, which as we shall see, marks them out from the common run of English heretics.

Records are, of course, patchy. For example, the case of Thomas Capper, executed in Cardiff in 1542, is known only through a note in the Cardiff bailiffs' accounts recording the expenses of his imprisonment and burning.³² There were certainly more victims from across the country of whom we will never know. Nevertheless, these figures are strikingly low. Compared to the

³¹ See Appendix I. ³² Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff 1997), 143.

scale of the persecution under Queen Mary, when around 300 reformers died in a shorter period, this was negligible. More telling, perhaps, are comparisons with the contemporary situation on the Continent. In the Netherlands, between 1539 and 1545, some 105 persons were burned for heresy in the province of Holland alone. Another twenty-seven suffered in Flanders, and comparable numbers also died in Brabant and other provinces. During this period, several Dutch reformers sought the comparative safety of exile in England. The records of the prosecution of reformers in France are not so complete, but in Paris alone, the *Chambre ardente* burned thirty-nine reformers in three years shortly after this date, and in Provence, hundreds of Waldensians were massacred in 1543.³³ The situation in England in Henry's last years seems more comparable to the clampdown on Lollardy in 1520–2, during which some eleven heretics died in Coventry and the Chilterns.³⁴ It is also worth remembering that during the same period, 1539–47, at least fourteen people were executed for their allegiance to the papacy. Although well aware of the executions that took place, for most of this period evangelicals were conscious that the full power of the state was not being brought to bear on them.³⁵ Given the fearsome threats of the 'bloody statute', remarkably little blood was actually shed.

This comparative lenity may be attributed, in part, to the weaknesses of the regime. The legal process was never entirely under the control of the state, and convictions could not always be secured. When Bishop Bonner prosecuted the London teenager Richard Mekins in 1541, he found himself in unexpected difficulties. Mekins' heresy was not particularly extreme, and he was apparently willing to recant in order to avoid the flames. While the Act of Six Articles gave him no legal right to do this, it seems to have affected the jurors' opinions, for they refused to reach a verdict. Bonner had to face the embarrassment of empanelling a second jury, which he put under considerable pressure to secure a conviction. Mekins burned, but it was a Pyrrhic victory for Bonner: the case became notorious, and he was not foolish enough to attempt such a prosecution again.³⁶ Foxe claimed that Bonner remarked of the first jury, 'In London they euer finde nothyng'; if this is true,

³³ Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (1990), 71, 92, 99; Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1986), 81; Mark Greengrass, *The French Reformation* (Oxford, 1987), 36–8.

³⁴ John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards 1414–1520* (Oxford, 1965), 238.

³⁵ John Bale, *A brefe chronycle concernynge the Examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (RSTC 1276: Antwerp, 1544), fo. 10^r. Some reformers were willing to put a sinister interpretation on this lenity: see below, pp. 82–3.

³⁶ AM, 1202. This case is referred to by, amongst others, John Bale in his *Epistle exhortatorye*, fo. 8^v; Hall, *The vnion of . . . Lancastre & Yorke*, fo. 244^r; Wriothesley, 126; TCC MS R3.33 fo. 127^{r-v}; George Joye (ps. James Sawtry), *The defence of the mariage of preistes: agenst Steuen Gardiner* (RSTC 21804: Antwerp, 1541), sig. D3^v.

it suggests that the difficulties of prosecuting heretics ran deeper than this one case. Fear of such complications may have been behind the decision in 1540 to convict Robert Barnes and his two companions of heresy by attainder, so bypassing the judicial process. The regular general pardons that accompanied parliamentary sessions complicated prosecutions; jurisdictional clashes might protect suspects; and even the creation of Six Articles commissions could be a cumbersome process.³⁷ Moreover, law enforcement was an expensive business, and impoverished bodies such as the newly erected dioceses sometimes found that their ambitions outran their pockets.³⁸

Such obstacles aside, authorities were sometimes unwilling to use their powers against heresy, dragging their feet over technicalities.³⁹ Muriel McClendon's recent study of Norwich, England's second city, suggests that concerns about civic autonomy and authority could override religious fears. Although any principled toleration is most unlikely, the Norwich magistrates do seem to have seen 'a measure of spiritual diversity' as a lesser evil than the intrusion of royal or ecclesiastical authority into the city's affairs.⁴⁰ The mayor of Canterbury went so far as to allege that if the king was Supreme Head of the Church in England, he was supreme head of the Church in Canterbury, and would govern matters there as he chose – although this comment landed him in court.⁴¹ Even in London, according to Bishop Gardiner, some aldermen tolerated evil-doers and made light of royal and parliamentary commands – regarding them either as ungodly, or as unrealistic. The bishops themselves were often willing to go well out of their way to avoid executions where law and policy made it possible to do so. Gardiner stated that he had no wish to be 'over curious' in searching out offenders who had concealed their heresy, aiming merely to punish those who had broadcast their allegiance to proscribed doctrines.⁴² And everywhere, the rules were bent in the favour of wealthy or well-connected offenders.⁴³

³⁷ Muriel St Clare Byrne (ed.), *The Lisle Letters* (Chicago, 1981), vol. V, 539, 546, 569, 586; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 300–1; PRO SP 1/158 fo. 72^r (LP XV 362).

³⁸ For example, the planned visitation of Gloucester diocese in 1542 quickly petered out: Gloucester Record Office GDR 2, pp. 11–43.

³⁹ CLRO Repertory 10 fo. 214^v.

⁴⁰ Muriel McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, 1999), 14–15.

⁴¹ PRO STAC 2/20/3.

⁴² Stephen Gardiner, *The Letters of Stephen Gardiner*, ed. James Arthur Muller (Cambridge, 1933), 134, 160; and see below, pp. 81–4.

⁴³ For example, London livery companies such as the Skinners and Drapers were regularly able to secure preferential treatment for members accused of heresy. Even Bonner emphasised to Anne Askew that she had been treated with more gentleness than usual because she was 'come of a worshipfull stocke'. CLRO Repertory 11 fo. 158^v; AM, 2060; Anne Askew, *The first examinacyon of Anne Askeu, lately martyred in Smythfelde*, ed. John Bale (RSTC 848: Wesel, 1546), fo. 37^v.

Even apparently well-founded cases could unravel if witnesses were thought to have been bribed or to be malicious.⁴⁴ The ferocious penalties for misprision might also persuade witnesses to withdraw evidence or remain silent, for merely to be slow in coming forward was potentially a grave offence.⁴⁵ Sometimes, however, the prosecuting authorities were unable to find witnesses at all, even when the offence was a public event. When arrested for expounding the Bible in St Paul's Cathedral – hardly a surreptitious offence – John Porter reportedly boasted that the charge would never be proved against him.⁴⁶ Growing public opposition to heresy executions was already a feature of prosecutions on the Continent, and evangelicals alleged that in England, too, executions sometimes took place before dawn to avoid crowds gathering.⁴⁷ Conservatives were certainly uncomfortably aware of an unease with persecution which was far more widespread than actual sympathy with heretical ideas. In 1546 Richard Smith, the regius professor of divinity at Oxford and a leading conservative, denounced 'that clemencie & lenitie, which our delicate gentlemen do require & looke to be shewed, euen to manifest & notable heretiques in our time'.⁴⁸ Even a state as centralised as Tudor England could not prosecute heresy systematically against the wishes of a large section of the population.

These problems, however, can be only a partial explanation for the regime's comparative lack of prosecution. Ultimately, the restrained nature of the late Henrician persecutions must be ascribed to the deliberate policy of the regime. There were bouts of persecution tied to political events: notably in 1540 and 1546, and to a lesser extent in 1543. Those in traditionally Lollard areas such as Colchester and Ipswich also continued to be vulnerable, as they had been for nearly a century and a half. Otherwise, a heretic had to be exceptionally notorious or exceptionally unlucky to be brought to the stake. Despite what Grafton, Foxe and many of their successors believed, the Act of Six Articles was not used as the legal basis for a general purge of evangelicals. Indeed, many even of those who were troubled were not prosecuted under the Act. On closer examination, the legend of the 'whip with six strings' proves somewhat ill-founded. Reformers tended to assess the Act according to where it fell on a one-dimensional spectrum between Rome and their own particular brand of evangelicalism, and their historians

⁴⁴ In 1542 heresy charges against a group of Coventry reformers collapsed after they argued that the mayor of Coventry was simply pursuing a grudge; likewise, in 1545, the only witness who came forward when Anne Askew was first prosecuted was dismissed as malicious. PRO STAC 2/3 fo. 61^r; PRO KB 9/129; Wriothesley, 155; and see below, pp. 228–9.

⁴⁵ PRO SP 1/164 fo. 197^v (LP XVI 518.1).

⁴⁶ AM, 1207. Cf. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants*, 243.

⁴⁷ Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism*, 160–1; Bale, *Epistle exhortatorye*, fos. 14^v–15^r.

⁴⁸ Richard Smith, *The assertion and defence of the sacramente of the aulter* (RSTC 22815: 1546), fo. 7^v.

have largely followed this lead. However, much of the Henrician settlement does not fit neatly onto such a spectrum, and the Six Articles need to be assessed on their own terms.

There was plenty in the Act to cause reformist disquiet. Its penal code was draconian and was open to considerable abuse. As the contents of the Act became known, there was an unseemly scramble of evangelicals trying to ensure their safety. On 15 July 1539, three days after the Act came into force, Cromwell's chaplain Henry Malet was desperately trying to recall a contentious biblical commentary from the printer. Malet had authorised the book for publication before he had seen the Act, but he was now back-peddalling. 'I dare not be so bold over such statutes', he explained, 'as I can with doctors vpon scriptuer.'⁴⁹ A few weeks earlier, Cromwell had received a letter from a priest called John Foster, which makes pathetic reading. Foster had recently been hoping for a place at court, but he had also been rash enough to marry. The Six Articles' prohibition of clerical marriage therefore left him badly exposed. His letter briefly stated his belief that clerical marriage ought to have been permitted, but he then proceeded to try to undo as much of the damage as he could.

By the noyse of the peopull I perseyue I haue dunne amysce: which saythe that the kyngys erudyte yugementt, with all hys cowncell temperall & spyrytuall hathe stableschyd a contrary order; that all prestys shalbe separat by a day: with which order I haue contentyd my selfe. And as sone as I herde yt to be tru, I sentt [her – deleted] the woman to her frendys iij score mylys from me, and spedely and with all celeryte I haue resortyd hether to desyre the kynges hyghtnes of hys fauor and absolucyon for my amysce doynge.⁵⁰

The humdrum tragedy behind this meek obedience, suggested eloquently by Foster's alteration of the word 'her' to 'the woman', must have been repeated in dozens of ways across the country. It is this bleak pragmatism, rather than the eye-catching heroism of the few who fled into exile, which shows us the reality of the change in atmosphere brought about by the Act.

Important as the penal code was, however, the heart of the Act was the schedule of six articles which gave it its common name. These articles first appeared as a list of leading questions put to the House of Lords by the duke of Norfolk on 16 May 1539,⁵¹ and in their final form in the statute they were framed as follows.

- I. First, that in the most blessed Sacrament of the Aulter, by the streng[t]he and efficacy of Christes myghtie worde, it beinge spoken by the prest, is present really, under the forme of bread and wyne, the naturall bodye and bloode of our Saviour

⁴⁹ PRO SP 1/152 fo. 164^r (*LP XIV* (i) 1272). The book was published the following year, once it had become clear that the Act was not going to be rigorously enforced (RSTC 21038).

⁵⁰ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E.iv. fo. 140^r (*LP XIV* (i) 1125). ⁵¹ *LJ*, 109.

Jesu Criste, conceived of the Virgin Marie, and that after the consecracion there remaineth noe substance of breade or wyne, nor any other substance but the substance of Criste, God and man;

- II. Secondly, that Communion in bothe kindes is not necessarie ad salutem by the lawe of God to all persons; . . .
- III. Thirdly, that Preestes . . . may not marye by the lawe of God;
- IV. Fourthlye, that vowes of Chastitye or Wydowhood by Man or Woman made to God advisedly ought to be observed by the lawe of God . . . ;
- V. Fyftly, that it is mete and necessarie that private masses be contynued and admytted in this the Kinges English Churche and Congregacion as wherby good Cristen people orderinge them selves accordingly doe receive bothe godly and goodly consolacions and benefyttes, and it is agreable also to Gods lawe;
- VI. Sixtly, that auricular confession is expedient and necessarie to be retayned and contynued used and frequented in the Churche of God.⁵²

It is easy enough to see how the Act came by its reputation as ‘a comprehensive, statutory, and penal definition of the six essential points of Catholic doctrine’.⁵³

There is, however, more to this list than meets the eye. If this was intended as a general restatement of a conservative orthodoxy, it was a distinctly peculiar one. Vast areas of doctrinal controversy were passed over in silence. One evangelical petitioner against the Act drew attention to this, arguing that there were other issues which would cause ‘asmuche variaunce in your graces realme as any of them treated of’ – naming purgatory; prayer to saints; the question of whether the authority of the Bible was supplemented by so-called ‘vnwritten verities’; free will versus predestination; the use of images; and justification.⁵⁴ The king’s emphatic rejection of the evangelical view of that last subject in particular was well known, yet the Act only touched on the issue in the most indirect way. Most surprisingly of all, there was no attempt in the Act to regulate access to the English Bible. In April 1539 a proclamation had been drafted, reiterating the need to use the Bible with due respect for authority. The king heavily amended the draft, so that in its final form it laid down that no one

shall openly read the Bible or New Testament in the English tongue in any churches or chapels *or elsewhere* with any loud or high voices *and specially* during the time of divine service . . . *Notwithstanding*, his highness is pleased and contented that such as can *and will* read in the English tongue shall and may quietly and reverently read the Bible and New Testament *quietly and with silence* by themselves *secretly* at all times.⁵⁵

⁵² *Statutes*, 739–40 (31^o Henry VIII c. 14).

⁵³ Redworth, ‘Genesis . . . of the Act of Six Articles’, 51.

⁵⁴ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E.v. fo. 53^v (LP XIV (i) 971).

⁵⁵ TRP, 285. Royal emendations are italicised.

Despite the extreme nature of these proposed restrictions, however, the proclamation was never issued. There was no mention of the matter in the Six Articles, and indeed no action was taken until 1543.

What was included in the Act was as odd as what was omitted. The demand for communion in both kinds – that is, that the laity should receive both bread and wine in communion – was never a key point of contention in England as it was on the Continent, perhaps in part because Lollardy had never had much concern with this issue.⁵⁶ A few cases of evangelical clergy attempting to give their congregations communion in both kinds can be found during this period, and a few polemicists had words to say on the subject, but it was a dispute with little energy in it.⁵⁷ Following the proposition of the six questions, the bishops and mitred abbots debated them, and some records of their deliberations survive. On this question, only two bishops – Cranmer, and Barlow, the bishop of St David's – registered opposition to the proposed clause. All the other evangelical bishops apparently acceded to it – even Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Shaxton, who were to be forced to resign for their opposition to the Act as a whole.⁵⁸ Even if English evangelicals would have preferred communion in both kinds, few were willing to argue that it was necessary for salvation, or to disobey a king who wished to forbid the practice. Equally odd is the use of the phrase 'private Masses' in the fifth article. This was a derogatory term which orthodox conservatives would not normally have used and which probably derived from the vocabulary of continental Lutheranism.⁵⁹ In other words, the Act's doctrinal priorities were thoroughly peculiar.

This much has always been apparent, but an explanation has only recently begun to emerge, thanks to the work of Rory McEntegart. He has analysed the linked religious and military negotiations between England and the alliance of German Lutheran princes known as the Schmalkaldic League. McEntegart shows that five of the Act's six clauses arose directly from those negotiations. The first article, on the Eucharistic presence, was conceived separately from the others, and, as we shall see, it was also perceived as separate in England. The remaining five derived precisely from the five issues identified as the key disputed points when negotiations between English and

⁵⁶ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford, 1988), 289. By contrast, for the Hussite tradition in Central Europe, communion in both kinds was a central demand.

⁵⁷ See, for example, John Bale (ps. John Harryson), *A dysclosynge or openynge of the Manne of synne* (RSTC 1309: Antwerp, 1543), fos. 85^v–6^r; William Turner (ps. William Wraghton), *The rescuynge of the romishe fox . . . The seconde course of the hunter at the romishe fox* (RSTC 24355: Bonn, 1545), sigs. I4^r–6^v; Bowker, *Henrician Reformation*, 168–9; Elton, *Policy and Police*, 38–9.

⁵⁸ PRO SP 1/152 fo. 19^v (*LP XIV* (i) 1065).

⁵⁹ An observation which I owe to Richard Rex.

Lutheran diplomats broke off inconclusively in 1538. The arguments advanced in favour of those five articles in Parliament in 1539 were the same as had been put forward by the English during the negotiations of 1538.⁶⁰

The process by which these diplomatic disputes led to domestic anti-heresy legislation remains somewhat unclear. The possibility of a parliamentary act against heresy was first floated early in 1539 by a (somewhat unreliable) friend of the evangelicals, Lord Chancellor Audley. At much the same time, Thomas Cromwell was also planning 'a device . . . for the unity in religion'.⁶¹ McEntegart suggests, plausibly, that these plans were moving towards an 'act of one article', which would affirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. That doctrine was still widely accepted in English evangelical circles (as well as by the Lutherans). Against this background, a fresh German delegation arrived in England. McEntegart has shown that at this stage the king was willing to continue negotiating on the theological questions, and that the Lutherans refused to do so, instead proposing thoroughly unrealistic military terms for an alliance. During April and May 1539 several attempts to break this deadlock failed (a failure for which McEntegart squarely blames the Germans). It was during this process that Norfolk formally put to Parliament the six questions which eventually formed the core of the Act.⁶²

However, while McEntegart is surely right to insist that the Act should be seen in the context of these diplomatic events, there is no direct evidence as to how it was connected. He does not explore this beyond suggesting that the Lutheran delegates' refusal to engage in further theological discussions prompted the king to send the disputed questions to Parliament for discussion.⁶³ It seems clear, however, that the questions were framed so as to elicit conservative answers, and the involvement of so prominent a conservative as Norfolk confirms this. Parliament was being asked to confirm doctrinal decisions already taken. A more plausible explanation would be that the king was using Parliament itself as a negotiating tool. On the same day as Norfolk put the questions to the Lords, a further delegation was sent to the Lutheran ambassadors demanding that they soften their stance. The threat of legislation to enforce a conservative settlement of all of the issues that had been left outstanding may have been a piece of brinkmanship, intended to shock the Lutherans into negotiation; for while Norfolk's questions invited conservative answers, their form held open the possibility of backing down without losing face. If this was so, the bluff was called. The Lutheran negotiations collapsed, the bill progressed through Parliament with a few amendments, and England was left with an anti-heresy statute which froze

⁶⁰ Rory McEntegart, *Henry VIII, the League of Schmalkalden and the English Reformation* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2002), 108–27, 150–63, esp. 159.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150; LP XIV (i) 655.

⁶² McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 135–7, 150–63. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157–8, 162–3, 166.

into legislation the issues at the centre of a passing diplomatic dispute. As a result, the Act reflected neither the king's central concerns about domestic heresy nor the realities of the English situation.

Indeed, despite its title, the Act, as it eventually emerged, dealt with only three issues: auricular confession, clerical and monastic celibacy, and the Mass. Even on these three points, it has long been recognised that the Act did not actually roll back any of the official reforms of the 1530s. It certainly dashed the hopes of those who had looked for further change, but none of Cromwell's achievements were undone. Moreover, on one of the three issues, the reformers managed to modify the text of the original bill sufficiently to make it acceptable. When the bishops debated the subject of confession, the core group of evangelicals – Cranmer, Latimer, Shaxton, Barlow, Goodricke of Ely and Hilsey of Rochester – were joined by Salcot of Bangor, Holgate of Llandaff, Warton of St Asaph and Reppes of Norwich, as well as the abbots of Westminster and Gloucester, in denying that confession was 'necessary by the lawe of god'. Instead, they claimed, 'thei canne not fynde expresly by the worde of god that Auriculare confession is necessary by the same, but thei doone saie and affirme that yt is very requysyte and expedient to be obserued and vsed'. Their view still only commanded the support of a minority, but this was not a democratic process. When the bill returned to Parliament, Henry himself let it be known that he was on the reformers' side – although for very different reasons.⁶⁴ The leading conservative bishops – Gardiner, Tunstall of Durham and Archbishop Lee of York – were forced to accept defeat, although not with grace. Tunstall tried to reopen the issue, but only succeeded in infuriating the king.

A year later, the scars left by this defeat were still visible. In April 1540, a committee of bishops and senior clergy was established by the king to work towards an official statement of the Henrician Church's doctrine. At some stage early in its deliberations a series of questions on the seven sacraments was put to it, and the various committee members' responses to each question were conflated to give collective answers. In some cases one or two dissenters refused to subscribe to this collective response. One of the questions was: 'Whither a man be bounde . . . to confesse his secrete deddly synnes to a preiste?' All but Archbishop Cranmer agreed that a Christian conscious of guilt of deadly sin must confess to a priest 'if he will obteyne the benefyte of absolucyon ministred by the preste'. However, the committee then split, apparently irreconcilably, between nine evangelicals and fellow-travellers who

⁶⁴ The success of a minority in the Lords in persuading the king to change his mind, and thus in changing the legislation, underlines the fact that Norfolk's questions were to be answered by the king himself and not by parliamentary process. PRO SP 1/152 fo. 19^r (*LP XIV* (i) 1065); BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E.v fo. 131^r (*LP XIV* (ii) Appendix 29); Alec Ryrie, 'Divine kingship and royal theology in Henry VIII's Reformation', *Reformation* 7 (2002), 64–5, 71.

believed that ‘absolution by a preste is the surest waye, if he maye be conveniently had’, and ten conservatives, including Lee, Tunstall and Gardiner, who insisted that ‘absolution to be ministred by a preste, if a convenient preste may be had, is necessarie’. It was the only question on which there was no consensus, and the importance which conservatives attached to it is underlined by Gardiner’s presence on the list. He was not a member of the committee and played no other recorded part in its deliberations. It seems likely he was brought in to provide a casting vote on this critical issue. Yet the difference between these two statements is if anything slenderer than the difference between the two statements at issue in 1539. The subject still clearly touched a raw nerve.⁶⁵

For many moderate evangelicals, the clause eventually enacted in the Six Articles was an entirely satisfactory statement, rather than a compromise which they could bring themselves to swallow. Reformers were certainly suspicious of auricular confession, but most of them wished to reform the practice rather than to abolish it.⁶⁶ Even a radical such as John Bale, who saw confession as having been invented by the clergy to conceal their treasons and to detract from the work of Christ, hastened to affirm the value of confession to ‘prestes of godlye knowlege’.⁶⁷ Thomas Becon went so far as to write of ‘the holye sacrament of Penaunce’, and while he deprecated unlearned confessors, he added, ‘why auriculare Confession shuld be condemned & exiled from the boundes of christianite I se no cause, but that it shoulde be approued, retayned, maynteyned & vsed, I fynd causes many.’ The causes he gave were impeccably evangelical. Confession encourages humility and self-knowledge, allays doubt and provides a forum in which the priest may teach his flock. Becon valued even the absolution, understanding it as ‘a free deliuerauuce [*sic*] from all youre synnes thorow Christes bloud’, and arguing that the penitent should hear the priest’s words and believe them ‘as though God him selfe had spoken them’.⁶⁸ From this point of view, the sixth of the Six Articles was entirely unexceptionable.

Reformist attempts to amend the other two sets of articles, dealing with the Mass and with celibacy, failed. There is no denying that these clauses were a serious blow to the evangelical cause. Nevertheless, the picture is less

⁶⁵ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E.v fo. 43^{r-v} (LP XV 826).

⁶⁶ Davies, *Religion of the Word*, 100–1.

⁶⁷ John Bale, *John Bale’s King Johan*, ed. Barry B. Adams (San Marino, CA, 1969), lines 2500–2; Bale, *A dysclosynge or openynge of the Manne of synne*, fos. 22^v–23^r, 30^{r-v}, 67^v; Anne Askew, *The lattre examinacyon of Anne Askewe, latelye martyred in Smythfelde*, ed. John Bale (RSTC 850: Wesel, 1547), fo. 32^v.

⁶⁸ Thomas Becon (ps. Theodore Basille), *A new yeares gyfte more precious than golde, worthy to be embrased no lesse ioyfully than thankfully* (RSTC 1738: 1543), sig. L6^v; Thomas Becon (ps. Theodore Basille), *A Potacion or drinkyng for this holi time of lent* (RSTC 1749: 1542), sigs. E2^r–4^v, 6^v; cf. PRO SP 6/9 no. 3, p. 69 (LP XVIII (i) 611.6).