Introduction

This book is an attempt to reconstruct the ideology underpinning the ecclesiastical policies of the Personal Rule. Its most basic contention is that such an ideology existed, and therefore that those policies did not merely represent a tidying-up exercise, the transaction of business as usual, through the pursuit of traditional ideals of uniformity, order and obedience, by a regime peculiar only in the intensity of its concern for, and the pertinacity of its pursuit of, such ideals. Rather we are dealing with something far more all-embracing and ambitious; a full-scale remaking, a true reformation, of the English church, based on a coherent vision of what that church ought to look like and of what the salvific mission of the visible church was, a vision at odds with a good deal that had passed for normal, or even orthodox, amongst English protestants in the decades since the Edwardian reformation and Elizabethan settlement.

The book argues that the scale and ambition of that project cannot be fully appreciated merely by looking at what those in control of the Caroline church, that is, the Laudians, did – impressively comprehensive though their actions in many domains were. Here I am referring to the altar policy, to their new model conformity and its attendant assault on various sorts of puritan ‘disorder’, and to their displacement of absolute predestinarianism, sabbatarianism and a version of anti-popyr, centred on the identification of the pope as Antichrist, from the hegemonic positions they had, more or less consistently, enjoyed over the preceding decades. No one even cursorily acquainted with the seminal work on these topics of Nicholas Tyacke, Ken Fincham, Anthony Milton, Ken Parker, John Fielding or indeed Tom Webster could doubt both the ambition and the real reach and effect of Laudian policies in these and other areas. However, I would

1 Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists; Fincham and Tyacke, Altars restored; Milton, Catholic and reformed and Heylyn; Kenneth Parker, The English Sabbath (Cambridge, 1988); John Fielding, ‘Conformists, puritans and the church courts: the diocese of Peterborough, 1603–42’. University of Birmingham, PhD
argue that the significance and impact of those actions can only be fully appreciated when what the Laudian and Caroline authorities did is set within the ideological and theological context of what they, their acolytes and supporters, said about what they were doing; about why they were doing it and about the nature of the forces opposing them.

Not that I am positing anything like a neat division between actions and objects, on the one hand, and ideology, theory or theology, on the other. To take the issue of the altar policy as an example, one could depict the resulting controversy as composed of two distinct parts; on the one hand, an abstruse theological debate about the senses in which the sacrament could or could not be conceived as a sacrifice, and therefore the communion table be conceived as an altar; on the other, a series of local disputes almost literally about moving the furniture. The first of concern only to those with an interest in such arcane matters, the second to churchwardens, and perhaps archdeacons, charged with maintaining the physical plant of the church in some sort of good order and for paying for and effecting whatever changes that demanded. In historiographical terms the first aspect would command the attention of historians of Christian doctrine and the second that of local historians.

But, in fact, that was not the case. The situation that the Laudians were seeking to change involved the communion table being used as just that, a table, except when the sacrament was actually being administered; and even then, it remained merely a physical aid to a series of essentially spiritual acts and transactions – a ‘utensil’ in Bishop Williams’ wonderfully acute turn of phrase. This was a state of affairs that Laudian theory or theology rendered utterly unacceptable and, as we shall see later, the Laudians regarded the customary uses to which the communion table was put out of service time as a form not merely of profanation, but even of sacrilege.

Now, the people who used the table in such ways – as a place where tax records could be drawn up, money collected and disbursed, school taught, or something that glaziers might use as a bench, when repairing the church windows – almost certainly did not think that they were profaning the church, still less committing sacrilege. Rather, in the communion table, and the various liturgical and social uses and practices associated

with it, the division between the secular and the spiritual, the sacred and the profane, and various distinct approaches to the nature and practice of outward worship, were being worked out and experienced on a quotidian basis. What we are dealing with here was therefore a conflict between different versions of divine worship and the division between the sacred and the profane; one worked out in and through a negotiation between quotidian practice, and what were taken to be the demands of the prayer book, the other expressed in explicit theological assertion, and rather different readings of what the prayer book required, by the Laudians.

A similar clash over the appropriate relationship between secular and spiritual notions of hierarchy and degree occurred when the Laudians attempted to reorder the pews in the church, so that no one could sit ‘above the altar’ and the sight lines of the congregation through to the altar and the celebration of the sacrament would be left unobstructed. Noting ‘some connection between Protestantism and pews’, and pews and preaching, Christopher Marsh observes that before the 1630s ‘ideally benches pointed towards the pulpit’, rather than the communion table or the altar. Initially, reseating schemes and the construction of pews had been a largely lay initiative, and certainly not the result of any episcopal direction. Indeed, between 1603 and 1630 Marsh finds that the vast majority of visitation articles scarcely mentioned church seating at all. Thus he concludes that, on their own initiative, ‘a substantial number of parishes had already been “ordering” their seats and “beautifying” their churches, long before Laud came to prominence’, albeit in ways that seemed to the Laudians anything but orderly, beautiful or conducive to true worship rightly conceived. We confront again radically different versions of the nature of worship and of the relation between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the spiritual, the one inscribed in the current physical layout and liturgical practices of various parish churches and the other contained in Laudian theology and emergent best practice. The two were brought into contact, and sometimes conflict, in the 1630s, when bishops like Laud, Walter Curle, Matthew Wren, John Towers and Richard Montague – the usual suspects, in fact – bombarded churchwardens with a range of questions on the subject of pews, which were reordered, removed from the chancel, wrenched from their current position to face east, reduced to a uniform size. This could cause trouble. Marsh finds that in the diocese of

1 Marsh, ‘Sacred space … the view from the pew’, pp. 292–3.
2 Marsh, ‘Sacred space … the view from the pew’, pp. 292–3.
3 Marsh, ‘Sacred space … the view from the pew’, pp. 292–3.
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Chester, in the period between 1580 and 1640 there were an average of less than five seating disputes a year, but ‘the 1630s produced between five and twenty such cases each year. Many parishes were ordered to alter their seats so that none was higher or grander than others. The gentry and yeomanry of Cheshire did not welcome this intrusion and often took out their frustrations on one another in the church courts.’ While the energetically reforming attempts of the Laudians thus caused disruption and alarm, Marsh observes that, due to a good deal of foot-dragging, the Laudians did not, in practice, achieve anything like the uniformly dramatic effects that their rhetoric implied and instructions demanded. ‘Even the dangerously energetic Bishop Wren had frequently to settle for modifications to chancel seating, rather than its wholesale removal’, Marsh concludes. As even Richard Montague was forced to concede, ‘the bishop is no ubiquity, that he can discover everything done’.

Typically, then, the Laudians managed to cause considerable upset without achieving the transformative results they desired, and which, according to their own theories, were necessary if their project were to work its transforming effects on the English.

In seeking to change the position of the communion table, and reorder the church around it – thus, as they claimed, defending it from various sorts of abuse – the Laudians did not have to up the ante by converting the table, name and thing, into an altar. A case could have been made simply in terms of decency and order, that is to say, of the need to protect the table from the unwanted attentions of stray dogs and errant glaziers, and the looming presence of grotesquely oversized pews. And at times such a case was made; famously, by Bishop Piers of Bath and Wells in a position paper of 1634/5 which justified the policy because it was legal, that is to say, entirely in line with the Elizabethan injunctions; convenient, in that it allowed more space for communicants, and rendered the presiding clergyman more audible; fitting, in that none could now sit above God’s table; expedient, in that now the parish churches were emulating the practice of their mother church, the diocesan cathedral; and decent, since all sorts of profanation could now be avoided.

The existence of that minimalist rationale allowed many of those appalled by the theological implications and wider purposes of the altar policy ultimately to accept, and even to endorse, it. Thus Stephen Hampton has

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1 Marsh, ‘Order and place … the view from the pew’, p. 20.
2 Marsh, ‘Sacred space … the view from the pew’, pp. 298–9; Marsh “Common prayer” … the view from the pew’, p. 84.
shown how in his *Of the institution of the sacrament of the blessed body and blood of Christ* of 1631, Bishop Thomas Morton had directly confuted the notion that the sacrament was a sacrifice, to be offered by a priest, on an altar, rather than a communion table. Morton was a famous anti-papal polemicist and his ostensible target here was popish error. However, by 1631, it would have been clear enough that his arguments were also directed against certain persons and practices in the contemporary English church. Moreover, by using arguments directed at the papists to address some of the central contentions of the Laudians, Morton was also implicitly equating Laudianism with popery. His tract therefore represented an implicitly aggressive, even somewhat daring, polemical act. However, when in 1635, Morton produced a second edition of the book, he added the remarkable aside that ‘all this notwithstanding, you are not to think that we hereby oppugn the appellation of priest and altar, nor yet the new situation therefore in our church for use as convenient, and for order more decent’. William Prynne, for one, was convinced that that passage must have been inserted against Morton’s will. For all that Morton had continued to denounce ‘“Romish opinion and doctrine” about the words priest and altar’, thus reinforcing his ‘opposition to the idea that the eucharist was a sacrifice, or the communion table an altar’, he had also nevertheless performed, in print, what amounted to a *volte face*, conceding the legitimacy of the altar policy, and, in the process, restricting the reach of his critique of ‘popery’ to the church of Rome. There was now clear blue water between Morton and the more radical ‘puritan’ critics of the altar policy like Prynne. And Morton had been enabled to do all that by the existence of the minimum position, outlined by the likes of Bishop Piers.\(^8\)

But ultimately, as we shall see in Part II, that minimum case was not how the Laudians really conceived, or ultimately chose to justify, the moving and railing in of the communion table. On the contrary, they came to insist on calling, and treating, the table as an altar, thus quite literally creating a controversy about altars, where there did not, in fact, have to be one.

I say they chose to do that, but, in fact, that is only partially true, since when they did decide to deal with the issue *in extenso* in print, the Laudians were in fact responding to moves made, and to some extent in terms set, by Bishop John Williams. Williams had first staked out his position on the altar well before there was any such thing as a national Laudian altar.

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policy. He had done so in his manuscript letter to the vicar of Grantham, which was in fact a position paper, indeed a manifesto, which circulated widely in manuscript. (Williams only took to print in 1637 after he had been attacked by Peter Heylyn.)

In both those texts, Williams exposed to public view, indeed to public derision, central aspects of the Laudian programme, without criticising Laud, or any of his fellow bishops, much less the king, but rather by unloading instead on the lowly vicar of Grantham. And so, through a critique of Laudian liturgical overreach and doctrinal excess of an almost painfully self-conscious moderation, orthodoxy and legalism, Williams had been able both to play to the puritan gallery and to establish himself in the public mind as a prelate of great experience and court connection but with a very different world view from that being pushed in pulpit and press, and ultimately in every church in the kingdom, by the Laudians. Definitively on the outs with Charles (and the Laudians), Williams was taking considerable risks in an attempt to establish himself as the obvious alternative to Laud should such a thing become necessary.

One might imagine that so direct a challenge positively demanded a response, and yet it took the Laudians literally years to decide to reply to Williams in kind. And when they did it was only after the altar policy was well under way, with every appearance of royal backing, and as but a part of a concerted legal and propaganda campaign to destroy Williams as a viable alternative to Laud and Laudianism. Accordingly, apologists like Heylyn and Pocklington threw the kitchen sink at Williams, deploying not only what I call below their ‘minimum position’, centred on order, obedience and decency, and the church’s authority over things indifferent, but also their ‘maximum’ one, in which the theological rationale for, and the both practical and theological implications of what they were doing were laid bare. Arguably, it was that shift that created the ‘altar controversy’.

Of course, it could be argued that Pocklington and Heylyn’s decision to go all-in was at least in part a function of the weakness of the legal and liturgical case in favour of the altar policy. If Williams was winning on that ground, then a switch would have to be made to other arguments and sources, if, that is, Williams were to be definitively seen off, the altar policy properly vindicated and the outlines of acceptable speech on the topic effectively redrawn on the back of Williams’ ruin. Either way, in going for broke, the Laudians ended up not merely revealing, but asserting with some considerable force, their fundamental beliefs, not only about the divine presence in the world, the church and the sacrament, and the appropriate human responses thereto, but also about the sacrifice they
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took the sacrament to be, and the nature of the altar upon which that sacrifice had to be offered.

Theology, and indeed polemic, thus mattered a great deal. In this context, by theology I mean the theoretical terms in which the new policy was described and legitimated. The stakes were raised by the fact that what was being overturned was not just the puritan conspiracy of Laudian fantasy, but rather customary practices, and everyday objects, like pews, in which members of the laity had a variety of both social and spiritual investments and which had come to embody a series of beliefs and assumptions about the relations between the sacred and the profane, the parish ‘community’ and the church, the clergy and the laity. Thus, because of the pervasive reach of the altar policy into almost every parish in the land, Laudian theology took on a far wider and more explosive significance than any merely theoretical account, however tactless or confrontational, of the real presence, or of the nature of the sacrament as sacrifice, would or could have done. Thus it is, that, in what I take to be an exemplary mix of different sorts of historical scholarship, Fincham and Tyacke have been able to show that it was a combination of novel theologising, political calculation, administrative ambition and changes in quotidian practice that made the altar controversy so significant, and indeed so controversial. Hence the propriety, indeed the necessity, of focusing an account of Laudianism on the 1630s, since Laudianism as conceived here was not merely an ideology, or world view, but rather the product of the application and working out, in the particular political context provided by the Personal Rule, of a set of principles, priorities, prejudices, of aesthetic and spiritual predilections, that can be traced back to the 1590s, and the work of Hooker, Harsnet, Howson and Andrewes. On this view, Laudianism was in equal parts world view, movement and moment.

The decision to enter into full-on public controversy about the altar paralleled that to allow the legality of ship money finally to be tested in the courts. In both cases, the choices to go public, which were made within months of each other in 1637, had been self-consciously delayed for some years. Once taken, they invited, indeed they virtually forced, the critics of the regime to respond in kind. In the process, what might have otherwise remained implicit disagreements, expressed in myriad disputes about local customs and interests – in the case of the altar, about where the table had

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9 See their *Altars restored*, esp. chapters 4, 5 and 6.
10 This is a topic that Noah Millstone and I hope to discuss at length elsewhere, in a book that we are tempted to call *1637, year of destiny*. No doubt cooler heads will prevail.
always stood; about who should pay for the new dispensation, or under whose remit, or in whose jurisdiction, such matters actually belonged; in that of ship money about the relative burden to be borne by this locality or that county – now tended to be subsumed into altogether more polarising and totalising views of the matter.

In the ensuing exchanges about the altar what the Laudians were really concerned with was revealed with crystal clarity. Unattractively rebarbative and pedantic as the resulting polemical works so frequently were, it would still be a mistake to write them off as so much ‘preachers’ talk’, arcane disputes of concern only to a certain sort of clergyman, or later, historian of Christian doctrine, and as such unworthy of the attention of the modishly cultural historian hot in pursuit of ‘lived religion’. On the contrary, such texts were, or rather they revealed, what I take to be the heart of the matter.

Hence the choice of sources upon which this book is based. Since I am concerned here with the public legitimation of the Laudian project I have chosen to concentrate, for the most part, on printed sources; that is to say, on tracts, sermons, polemical works and apologetics produced during the 1630s. Here I have privileged court, visitation and consecration sermons and tracts written in self-conscious defence of the central aspects of the Laudian programme. And here the altar policy and the assault on what the Laudians viewed or presented as ‘puritan’ sabbatarianism play a central role.

The fact that the materials I will be dealing with here were printed matters twice over. Firstly, it means that they reached audiences far wider than those who first heard them delivered in the pulpit and, secondly, that, being licensed, they had received the imprimatur of official approval, in a period when the authorities were coming increasingly to care about control of the press, and in which their opponents and critics were starting to monitor intensely, and with increasing alarm, what they took to be a major shift in just what one was and was not allowed to say in public and in print. Insofar as I have used manuscript sources and texts published

\[11\] For the ways in which tensions raised by ship money could be contained within the conduct of various local disputes, until, that is, they couldn’t, see P. Lake, ‘The collection of ship money in Cheshire during the sixteen thirties: a case study of relations between central and local government’, *Northern History*, 17 (1981), pp. 44–71.

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after the 1630s, I have limited myself to those first delivered in high-profile public places such that contemporaries would have taken them as reliable guides either to royal, or episcopal or archiepiscopal preference and policy. Hence the stress in what follows on a remarkable run of court sermons preached by Robert Skinner throughout the decade, or on the sermons also preached at court by Peter Heylyn in the late 1630s but only printed, as The parable of the tares, in 1659.

My subject is thus what one might call the public transcript of the Laudian church and the Personal Rule. To reconstruct that transcript, I have read these texts against one another, looking for central organising themes, common concerns, images, authorities and styles of argument. While I have not suppressed, and indeed, at times have highlighted, areas of internal tension and even contradiction both within the works of individual authors and the corpus as a whole, at least in the first four parts, the identification of differences between these texts and authors has not been my main priority. On the contrary, given the nature of the exercise, I have, of necessity, tended to privilege commonality of concern and argument over diversity, agreement over disagreement. This has not been hard, since, as I try to show in what follows, these texts do, to a remarkable extent, cohere around a number of central themes and concerns. At stake were both positive ideals, which these authors did their best to exalt to the level of unquestioned common assumption to which no one, or at least no one of genuine Christian orthodoxy or virtue, could object, and negative stereotypes with which no good Christian or loyal subject could or would allow themselves to be associated.

If, then, that cracker-barrel historiographer, J. H. Hexter, is right that all historians are, by temperament or basic approach, either ‘lumpers’ or ‘splitters’, then this book is, for the most part, that is, in its first four parts, an exercise in lumping. Its method relies on the aggregation of insights, opinions and quotations taken from myriad sources generated during the 1630s to construct something like the Laudian view of the world.

Such an approach has two main downsides, the one substantive and the other more personal. The personal downside is that I am, by preference or instinct, at least as much splitter as lumper. I am not the sort of extreme...
nominalist who views all such general terms of art as puritan, or Laudian, with suspicion and distaste. On the contrary, I have, over the years, put altogether too much time and energy into justifying the salience and centrality of the term puritan and its cognates for the analysis of the religious history of the post-reformation period, and spent even more time attempting to refine somewhat clunky neologisms like conformist Calvinist or avant-garde conformist for the same period and purpose.

Indeed, I firmly believe that without such general categories, which in themselves represent compressed or implicit acts of generalisation and categorisation, meaningful historical analysis and argument become almost impossible. But I also think such terms can all too easily become reified or hypostatised, operating as excuses not to think about the material in front of us, rather than as aids to that process. For that reason, most of my books on this sort of topic have not been extended model-building exercises, general accounts of the nature and salience of such terms and subjects in general, but rather about the actions and reactions of specific persons and groups, in the course of which such terms of art can be defined and redefined, applied and reapplied, both by the historian and by the historical actors he or she is studying, as we, as it were, watch them in action, inhabiting and working out in their own thought and practice the tendencies and tensions implicit in the general terms of analysis being used to describe their behaviour. In other words, I have tended to write about persons rather than categories, or at least to ground my use of the crucial categories in the thought and action, the doings and sayings, of particular groups and individuals.

This book diverges rather sharply from that model. It is, at least in its first four parts, in Hexterian terms, an extended exercise in lumping; or, as a jaundiced observer might see it, in egregious source-mining. As such, it is vulnerable to the sceptical gaze of the committed splitter; that is to say, to a sceptical observer who is inclined to view the existence of the coherent whole being conjured here with a certain scepticism, and who is accordingly determined to split, that is, to disaggregate, distinguish and analyse in isolation the materials being so sedulously compressed together in the first four parts of this book. And such sceptics are anything but in short supply, there being no lack of historians, not to mention apologists for certain styles of Anglicanism, who want to see the ecclesiastical policies of Charles I and Laud as the conduct of conformist business as usual, and

14 Cf. the preface to the 1990 paperback edition of Nicholas Tyacke’s Anti-Calvinism.