

# Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon

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## Chapter 1

# Breaking with a Puritan Past

### A Mother's Concern

Anne Bacon was a woman of the godly sort. She had been raised to it. Her father, Sir Anthony Cooke, had educated her in Latin as well as in the Greek of the New Testament and the Church Fathers.<sup>1</sup> His own belief was profound. He had been tutor and advisor to the young Edward VI, and when the reign of Mary Tudor began in 1554, he became one of the “Marian exiles” who fled to Geneva. For families such as that of Anthony Cooke, Geneva was more than a place of refuge. In the city of John Calvin all Christians of the Reformed branch of Protestantism could experience the ultimate model of a faithful society. The people of Geneva, by their own account, had not stopped short of a full Reformation as had the Lutherans, who retained many popish ceremonies and doctrines. Neither had the Reformation derailed here as it had among the Anabaptists, who, according to the Reformed, had invented many of their own doctrines, and whose communities could spiral into chaos and anarchy. In Geneva the Law of God as found in the Bible, and only that Law, reigned supreme, resulting in order and genuine piety. For those English men and women who had gone into exile, Geneva was the measure by which their own society was to be judged, and it always fell short. Anne shared the views of her father and the other exiles, but she had stayed behind as she had recently married Sir Nicholas Bacon.

Anne Bacon had two sons whom she had tried to raise the right way. She had seen to much of their education herself, and had hired the very best tutors. The education of her children was of the utmost importance to Anne, for her boys were growing up with unwholesome influences all around. Although England had officially become Protestant once again with the death of Queen Mary and the accession of Elizabeth, the Elizabethan Religious Settlement had been a profound disappointment to Anne and many others like her, for the queen had sought peace through compromise and the toleration of a wide variety of opinions rather than completing the Reformation. The roots of the Puritan movement are to be found among the families of the Geneva exiles, and this can certainly be seen in the convictions of Anne Bacon. She rebelled against the guidelines laid down by Elizabeth and her bishops, and she prayed for a purer Church. Anne had done her best with Anthony and his younger brother, Francis, but, once they were grown, she had become convinced that something had gone wrong somewhere with Francis.

In 1592 Anthony Bacon, then thirty-four years old, received a letter from his mother, filled with a mother's concern over her son's spiritual well-being. The letter

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<sup>1</sup> On the life of Anne Bacon see Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (New York, 1998).

was prompted, at least in part, by the apparent wandering of thirty-one-year-old Francis. The following is an excerpt:

This one chiefest counsel your Christian and natural mother doth give you even before the Lord, that above all worldly respects your carry yourself ever at your first coming as one that doth unfeignedly profess the true religion of Christ, and hath the love of the truth now by long continuance fast settled in your heart, and that with judgment, wisdom, and discretion, and are not afraid or ashamed to testify the same by hearing and delighting in those religious exercises of the sincerer sort, be they French or English. *In hoc noli adhibere fratrum tuum ad consilium aut exemplum. Sed plus dehinc.* [In this do not be willing to consult your brother in counsel or example, but more on this to follow.] If you will be wavering (which God forbid, God forbid), you shall have examples and ill encouragers too many in these days, and that arch Biss, since he was Βουλευτής, ἐστὶ ἀπολεία τῆς ἐκκλησίας μεθ' ἡμῶν· φιλεῖ γὰρ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δόξαν πλεον τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ [and that arch Bish(op), since he was a councilor, is the destruction of the Church among us, since he is more fond of his own glory than the glory of Christ].<sup>2</sup>

Anne is alluding to a number of points which would have been common knowledge to Anthony and herself. Those parts of her letter which might cause real scandal, if they were to be casually seen and become a matter for gossip, have been given a greater measure of secrecy by placing them in Latin and Greek. Nevertheless, the message is clear from a historical context. The archbishop mentioned, for example, is Whitgift, who had by this time a well-earned reputation as the scourge of the Puritan movement. Anne's words, "but more to follow," point toward a postscript in the letter in which she tells Anthony that she assumes his entire household is gathering for prayer twice a day, "having been where reformation is" (since Anthony had been to Geneva and the Calvinist lands on the continent). She follows this with the remark, "your brother is too negligent herein." Apparently, the example which Anthony was not to follow was that of his brother who was not observing proper Calvinist patterns of personal devotion. At the very least, Francis was too tolerant of those in his household who did not follow these patterns. But there was more to Lady Anne's concern than merely a haphazard prayer life. Anthony is warned against consulting his brother's "counsel." Francis was not only lax, he had opinions which, to Anne's thinking, ran counter to "the true religion of Christ."

Francis Bacon's own writings from this time tell much of the rest of the tale. There is a recognizable trajectory in Bacon's adult life away from his Puritan upbringing, and ultimately away from the dominant Calvinism of his society as well. But this was also a trajectory *toward* some of the other options available to him in late Tudor England. Bacon's abandonment of his mother's Christianity does not mean that he himself abandoned Christianity. As with so many in the Reformation era, he wanted to get Christianity right. Over the last decade of the sixteenth century Bacon wrestled with the various theological issues and ideas that were current in his society. What resulted was a coherent belief system, unique to him in many points, which suffused his writings pertaining to the reform of learning and the advancement of sciences, or his "Great Instauration." Bacon's entire understanding of what we call "science," and what he called "natural philosophy," was fashioned around the basic tenets of his belief

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<sup>2</sup> WFB, vol. VIII, p. 112.

system. Understanding Bacon's early rejection of Calvinism is key to understanding the Instauration writings themselves, particularly those mysterious passages where Bacon suddenly breaks into biblical quotation and theological discourse. So, before we can proceed to Bacon's writings it is important that we take a good look at the intellectual environment of late Tudor England, which could give rise to a godly mother's concern.

### Turmoil and Diversity in the English Reformation

The Reformation was an era of intellectual turmoil and a remarkable diversity of thought which too often has been told as a tale of Protestants and Catholics. However, there was always more on the table than such a simple dichotomy would suggest. "Protestantism" never existed as a unified set of beliefs in the sixteenth century. The Lutherans, the Reformed, and the Anabaptists were all technically "Protestant," yet their differences with each other were as great as the differences of each with the Church of Rome. From the Catholic side, the apparent doctrinal unity of the Council of Trent always cloaked tremendous latitude in interpretation and practice. The Reformation on the continent was far from a tidy affair, characterized by debate even within unified movements such as Lutheranism or the Reformed, but the situation in Bacon's England was even more complex.

Much of the turmoil and diversity of England at the time can be understood as what must happen when a Catholic king and "Defender of the Faith" finds it suddenly necessary to break with the Church of Rome for reasons other than religion. In this case the need was for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and Henry, for his part, was not particularly interested in doctrinal changes beyond those that would permit the divorce. Compared with the Reformation on the Continent, the English Reformation was effected out in reverse: first came the break with Rome, and the theology necessary to justify that break and establish a new ecclesial order followed.

It is important to note that what set the English Reformation apart was not that it was an act of state rather than Church.<sup>3</sup> At some point, the Reformation was always an act of state, as the decree of the ruler was necessary to safeguard the existence of non-Roman Christianity everywhere. The principle of the Peace of Augsburg that the ruler should determine the religion of a province (*cuius regio ejus religio*) was, in many respects, not an innovative idea, but an acknowledgment of the way in which the Reformation had developed ever since Elector Frederick of Saxony gave Luther his protection. In Scandinavia, as in England, the Reformation occurred through specific decrees of kings. Throughout Scandinavia the Reformation occurred from above, and for reasons which were far from purely religious.<sup>4</sup> But in these countries, unlike England, the doctrinal choice was clear: Roman doctrine was being rejected

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<sup>3</sup> There is an unfortunate debate within the historiography of the English Reformation over whether the Reformation was primarily an act of state or a religious development. For a summary of the basic ideas involved see J.F. Davis, "Lollardy and the Reformation in England" in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation: 1500–1640* (London, 1997), pp. 37–52. All reformations were both acts of state and religious, if they succeeded at all.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief account which balances political motives with the religious interests of the Lutheran movement see Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era 1500–1650* (New York, 1954), pp. 235–41.

in favor of the doctrine of Lutheranism, as clearly stated in the Augsburg Confession and the mass of writings streaming northward from Wittenberg. Subscription of the Augsburg Confession meant adoption of the Lutheran package *in toto*.

In the Palatinate and in those cantons of Switzerland which adopted the Reformed faith the theological formulations were also clear, although initially a single normative statement such as the Augsburg Confession was often lacking. The distinction between Lutheran and Reformed was established along specific doctrinal lines by the reformers themselves, and although the idea of confessional subscription did not function so rigidly in the Reformed lands, conformity to Reformed doctrine was expected. After some early disputes Geneva adhered to the doctrine of Calvin, and those who did not adhere were welcome to leave (with some exceptions, of which Servetus is the most notable). Henry VIII had no such doctrinal agenda, however, when he broke with Rome.

In some measure, the king himself had blocked the possibility of confessional unity in England. Until 1536 Henry's actions were designed to transfer decision-making power from the Roman Catholic authorities to himself. The Ten Articles which were forwarded in 1536 as a doctrinal statement were ambiguous by design. They left room for both Catholic and Lutheran interpretations, though between a Lutheran and a Catholic, the Catholic probably would have been more comfortable with them, given their interpretation of sacraments and tradition. Rather than a positive doctrinal statement, A.G. Dickens observed that the Ten Articles might "be used to exemplify our English talent for concocting ambiguous and flexible documents."<sup>5</sup> In the *Bishops' Book* of the following year, the doctrinal position is still more Catholic, but subscription was never enforced, and Henry "used it instead to test the theological appetite of the nation."<sup>6</sup> Catholic doctrine was not particularly discouraged, beyond the question of allegiance to Rome. At the same time, the break with Rome encouraged the development of nascent Protestant movements in England, and these movements were fueled by the appearance of Protestantism which came with the dissolution of monasteries and the seizure of Church property. The replacement of Catholic bishops with Lutheran superintendents and the enforced subscription of the Augsburg Confession, which made it possible for Scandinavian kings to obtain rapid uniformity, had no parallel in England. The wholesale adoption of Wittenberg's pattern of doctrine and liturgy which occurred under the kings of Sweden and Denmark was not possible for Henry, not the least because he had distinguished himself early on as an enemy of Luther. Alec Ryrie has aptly summarized Henry's problem with a Lutheran solution which would have brought swift uniformity:

As [Basil] Hall has argued, the king's suspicion of Lutheranism in general, his loathing of Luther in particular, and his heartfelt attachment to his own authority guaranteed that the English Church would remain beyond Wittenberg's sphere of influence. Henry's reformation was, as Richard Rex has recently emphasized, 'its own thing, folly to Catholics and a stumbling block to protestants.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (second edition, University Park, 1991), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53/1 (January 2002), pp. 66–7. Ryrie also points out that any tendency toward Lutheranism as a settlement among the English Protestants themselves was thwarted both by

Throughout Henry's reign, the Church of England remained a Church without a doctrinal identity. The long-term effect was to allow a tremendous doctrinal diversity to develop.

The Thirty-Nine Articles, when they came about, did provide genuine stability and unity for the Church of England, but this stability and unity should not be confused with any great degree of doctrinal uniformity. Rather, they should be recognized as allowing and establishing tremendous doctrinal latitude within the official Church during this era. The accession of Elizabeth and the actions of queen and parliament up through the Act of Uniformity of 1559 established the Church of England as genuinely Protestant, and the official adoption of the Thirty-Nine Articles at this time (in 1562 by Convocation and by parliament in 1571) was the part of that stabilizing chain of events which addressed doctrine directly. Yet it has often been noted that the most remarkable feature of the Thirty-Nine Articles is their ambiguity, which stems partly from the mixture of Lutheran and Calvinist sources in their composition.<sup>8</sup> Although the wording of articles on predestination and the Lord's Supper is typical of Calvinist formulations, there is no requirement that these articles be interpreted according to Calvinist doctrine. Attempts to refine the meaning of the Thirty-Nine Articles by incorporating the Lambeth Articles and rendering the interpretation to be unequivocally Calvinist were rejected both by Queen Elizabeth and later, King James. With careful reading, the articles could be, and were, interpreted from almost every Protestant angle. They are ambiguous enough to have been embraced by both a committed Calvinist, Archbishop Whitgift, and a committed anti-Calvinist, Archbishop Laud.<sup>9</sup>

Another reality of the Elizabethan Settlement was that it would not be, nor could be, thoroughly enforced. Neither Elizabeth nor Lord Chancellor Burghley was interested in tactics that would be seen by the queen's subjects as religious persecution. The only group which could claim martyrdom under Elizabeth by the end of her reign would be the Roman Catholics, and action was only taken against them when it was clear that some of their number were actively working to subvert the realm.<sup>10</sup> The true goal of the Religious Settlement, including the Thirty-Nine Articles, was not doctrinal uniformity but national unity and an orderly and peaceful realm. In application, attempts at forcing uniformity often backfired at the local level, leading bishops to turn a blind eye to religious diversity rather than provoke a reaction.<sup>11</sup> King James continued Elizabeth's policy of promoting a broad and

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reaction against the king driving Protestant divines toward a more radical position, and by the complicating factor of native Lollardy (pp. 85–92). Without Lutheranism being imposed from above, there was already too much diversity among the anti-Roman Catholics themselves for “Lutheran moderation” to be a real option.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Schaff describes Cranmer's use of Lutheran and moderately Calvinist sources in *History of the Christian Church* (8 vols, New York, 1910), vol. 8, p. 817.

<sup>9</sup> On Laud see John F.H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558–1640* (Stanford, 1964), p. 75. The term “anti-Calvinist” is from Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, p. 382.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1450–1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (Atlantic Highlands, 1976), pp. 124–53. Her discussion demonstrates that doctrinal uniformity was, as a rule, sacrificed for unity.

tolerant Protestantism.<sup>12</sup> For King James, just as for Queen Elizabeth, theological squabbles were the lesser threat, and alienating large numbers of his subjects the greater. The consequences of forcing controversy underground would be manifest only in the reign of Charles I, with the Archiepiscopacy of Laud.

The Thirty-Nine Articles lacked the normative control of the Augsburg Confession among the continental Lutherans, whose ministers were often removed if they disagreed with any aspect of the document, and hence the Articles failed to achieve that level of confessional unity. Similarly, they lacked the common popular assent and enforceable authority of the *Institutes*, *The Geneva Confession*, and the *Heidelberg Catechism* in the Reformed lands. England's religious diversity was beyond the point where it could still be reined in with a demand for confessional subscription. However, the ambiguity of the Thirty-Nine Articles served the agenda of national unity well, while recognizing that the Church of England was too diverse for rigid doctrinal unity.

The actual diversity of religious thought in Tudor and Stuart England is poorly represented by the traditional continuum which places Catholics at one end, Puritans at the other, and the official state Church between the two as a "*via media*." This three-part continuum remains popular today, and it is not without the legitimation of historical precedent: it was used even in the Tudor era as a convenient way of simplifying the religious disputes at the time. The problem with the continuum is that, although it has always been convenient, it has never been accurate.

In 1603, at the dawn of the Stuart era, a tract of polemical verse was published entitled, "The Interpreter, wherein three principal Terms of State, much mistaken by the vulgar, are clearly unfolded." Significantly, the tract demonstrates both the prominence of the three-part continuum at the time and the early recognition that there were problems with it. The poem begins as follows:

Time was, a Puritan was counted such  
 As held some ceremonies were too much  
 Retained and urged; and would no Bishops grant,  
 Others to Rule, who government did want.  
 Time was, a Protestant was only taken  
 For such as had the Church of Rome forsaken;  
 Or her known falsehoods in the highest point:  
 But would not, for each toy, true peace disjoint.  
 Time was, a Papist was a man who thought  
 Rome could not err, but all her Canons ought  
 To be canonical: and, blindly led,  
 He from the Truth, for fear of Error, fled.  
 But now these words, with divers others more,  
 Have other senses than they had before:  
 Which plainly I do labour to relate,  
 As they are now accepted in our state.<sup>13</sup>

In the rest of the tract the tidy definitions which operated for Puritans, Protestants, and Papists once upon a time are presented as having become hopelessly complicated by

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> Charles H. Firth (ed.), *Stuart Tracts: 1603–1693* (Westminster, 1903), p. 233.



political interests. The author shows a marked preference for the Puritans, who act as a magnet for those focused on the noble cause of the Reformation. The worst that can be said of them, according to the author, is that their dedication to higher principles means that they may not recognize what is in the best interest of the state. The other two groups, the Protestants (the typical *via media*) and the Papists, are presented as having betrayed their doctrinal convictions for political loyalties, the former to the English king and the latter to his overthrow. It is certain that the “Protestant” or the “Papist” would not share the author’s appraisal of what went wrong with the categories. Nevertheless, the tract is a witness to the antiquity of the threefold division and the early recognition of the instability of the categories.

Current scholarship on the English Reformation reveals even less validity in the threefold continuum, with no evidence for the tract author’s assumption of an original period of tidy doctrinal dividing lines. “Catholic” is, of course, the easiest category to define in Tudor and Stuart England, if we allow that it requires allegiance to the pope, adherence to a body of traditional doctrines, and eventual adherence to the doctrine of the Council of Trent. This should not be understood to mean that it was by any means easy to tell who was and who was not a Catholic. On the one hand, when open adherence to Catholicism was equated with treason, English Catholicism went underground. On the other hand, accusations of Catholicism were freely made (and sometimes with a degree of accuracy) to tarnish the image of those regarded as not adequately Protestant. Nonetheless, the term “Catholic” signifies a coherent doctrinal identity which is lacking among the other two “typical” groups of the English Reformation.

The “Puritan” mentioned in the tract above was also a recognized category at the time, and the term was not merely, as some have claimed, a pejorative label applied to those who were considered too radical in their Protestantism.<sup>14</sup> While some objected to the label, others such as the tract writer regarded it as a mark of having one’s priorities straight. Nevertheless, a single, coherent definition of what Puritans believed is difficult to establish.

The approach of Patrick Collinson has come to form a basis for consensus in the historical study of Puritanism. In his landmark treatment of the subject, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, “puritanism” is acknowledged to be just as “loosely defined” and “widely dispersed” as the various uses of the appellation at the time would indicate.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in the course of the Elizabethan era Collinson discerns the rise of a “puritan movement” with a discreet and recognizable agenda that would manifest itself both within the Church of England and in English politics. One of the primary difficulties, in addition to the diachronic change in definitions that the tract writer had noted at the time, is that the Puritans’ agenda was never stated positively, but rather in terms of that what they opposed or rejected. What the Puritan movement stood *against* was the direction of the Reformation in England, and particularly the official policies of the state, which were regarded as having stopped the Reformation short of its proper goal.

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<sup>14</sup> This was the claim of Charles and Katherine George in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation: 1570–1640* (Princeton, 1961), p. 6

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), p. 29. e.

For this reason, Collinson cautioned, “there is little point in constructing elaborate statements defining what in ontological terms Puritanism was and was not, when it was not a thing definable in itself, but only one half of a stressful relationship.”<sup>16</sup>

However, it would be unfair to conclude that there was nothing that Puritans actually stood *for*, rather than against. Indeed, the individuals within the movement stood for a great many things, but the movement was, at any given time, most clearly united by that which it opposed. On this list of objectionable things were elaborate church ceremonies and any of the trappings of the Roman Catholic liturgy, but we cannot allow this to be the only entry, lest we mistakenly think, as did some opponents at the time, that Puritanism was mainly about external forms.

The doctrinal basis behind Puritan objections must likewise be recognized as separating Puritans from their opponents. Through the course of Collinson’s treatment in *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* Calvinism emerges as the most common doctrinal foundation of the movement.<sup>17</sup> This is not surprising, given the common scholarly recognition that the roots of Elizabethan Puritanism lie primarily with those exiles from the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary who took refuge in Geneva, Basel, Zurich, and other Reformed areas.<sup>18</sup> The Puritans did not look uncritically to Calvin and Geneva for guidance, but the very fact that their opponents appealed to Calvin in an attempt to quiet them and end the debate is evidence that the movement held Calvin in very high regard. We may note that it was only with reluctance that Thomas Cartwright, when confronted by Archbishop Whitgift, admitted that there were issues on which he and Calvin would disagree.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, it would be better to say that the Puritan movement was Reformed in theology, associating it with the branch of Protestantism of which Calvin was the most prominent figure, rather than suggest a specific allegiance to Calvin.<sup>20</sup>

To properly distinguish between set and subset, we must avoid conflating English Calvinism and the Puritan movement. There were plenty of English Calvinists who differed from their Puritan contemporaries in either emphasis or degree. Another reason why Whitgift quoted Calvin against Cartwright was that Whitgift was himself

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1988), p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 36–7, 52–3.

<sup>18</sup> On the Marian Exiles themselves see Christina H. Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge, 1938). Specifically in relationship to the rise of the Puritan movement in more recent scholarship see Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 24, and 52–3 for concrete examples.

<sup>19</sup> Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 72, 104. We may also note that these differences were usually matters of casuistry – the practical application of the doctrines themselves – rather than differences of doctrine proper, as is the case of Cartwright on page 104.

<sup>20</sup> Collinson is not concerned with such a subtle systematic distinction, but remains content with simply avoiding calling the Puritans “Calvinist.” This distinction is important if we wish to keep Calvinism in perspective. Calvin gave Reformed theology practical expression in Geneva, and a degree of doctrinal definition which it had not achieved under previous theological leaders. In theological circles to this day, “Reformed theology” and “Calvinist theology” are treated as essentially coterminous when referring to the later sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

a Calvinist, as were the majority of English theologians at the time. But the Puritans were essentially concerned with getting Reformed theology right, since there were many issues of Reformed theology and practice where they felt that the institutional Church was failing. This brings us to another important aspect of the Puritan identity – its fundamental and vehement anti-Catholicism. Protestant though Elizabeth’s Church of England was, it remained, for the Puritan in her reign (as it would in the reign of her successor), far too Catholic. To this extent, Trevelyan’s old definition can still apply: Puritanism was “the religion of all those who wished either to purify the usage of the established Church from the taint of popery, or to worship separately by forms so purified.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Puritans were those English Calvinists who believed that, on any number of issues, the established Church had simply not gone far enough in rejecting Roman forms and religion and adopting the fullness of Reformed theology, and they took a stand on these issues because they felt them to be of critical importance. Beyond a clear basis in Reformed theology it is difficult to say what doctrines the Puritans positively held, and the details of what specifically was wrong and what was needed to correct it varied between one Puritan to the next.

The complexity of the Puritan question reflects the complexity of the era. We are dealing with a period of religious history that defies the systematization of simple categories. This is particularly true of the so-called *via media* of the old continuum, the “Protestants” mentioned in the poem, who were merely united by the two facts that they were not loyal to Rome, and that they did not share the concerns voiced by the Puritans regarding the established institutional religion. In Francis Bacon’s lifetime the vast majority of the English population could be situated in this category, and, as the anonymous tract quoted earlier makes clear, to the Puritan or Roman Catholic observing from the outside it looked like a category of unhealthy compromise. However “compromise” can be a seriously misleading word. Those in this category were agreeing to conform to the Henrician Reformation, the Elizabethan Settlement, or the later official policies of the Crown. They were agreeing to tolerate one another, and they rejected any clearly partisan agendas which would divide the Church. Lack of adherence to partisan agendas should never be confused with being theologically “moderate” or with compromise at the level of personal belief. Rather than a compromise, the *via media* was, from the inside, an umbrella, covering those who had firm, though not homogenous, convictions, and who recognized that some latitude was necessary for good order in the realm. Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset, was one individual who represented the *via media* in the seventeenth century and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes was another. In considering them we can see the difficulties that the category itself presents for placing an individual within the context of the Tudor and Stuart religious milieu.

In an essay on Edward Sackville, David L. Smith has explored some of the difficulties that arise when we attempt to analyze an individual – especially one of the ruling and intellectual elite – according to the categories of the continuum.<sup>22</sup> During his lifetime, the Earl of Dorset “was called everything from a Puritan to a papist – and

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in Dickens, *English Reformation*, p. 368.

<sup>22</sup> David L. Smith, “Catholic, Anglican, or Puritan? Edward Sackville, Fourth Earl of Dorset, and the Ambiguities of Religion in Early Stuart England” in Donna

other things besides.”<sup>23</sup> Dorset himself never kept a diary or made a convenient public announcement in which he said, definitively, what his own religious convictions were. His last will and testament, which might have given a clue to his convictions, is thoroughly ambiguous as well. The preamble to the will is a moderately Calvinist statement of faith, his executors were Roman Catholics, and his bequests were made to family and staff without consideration of religious affiliation. In the Star Chamber, Dorset had made a number of statements on behalf of religious toleration, but these, as Smith points out, do not reflect a “personal credo,” but, rather, a “wider concern to preserve order” in the realm.<sup>24</sup> Dorset employed several domestic chaplains, but a distinction must be drawn between those whom he chose on account of their close personal contacts with his family and those whom he may have selected more freely. Without more specific personal evidence, Smith concludes that nothing definitive can be said about Dorset’s personal beliefs beyond the recognition that he clearly represented what Peter Lake has called a “conformist cast of mind” in which one could avoid extremes and tolerate “a plurality of belief within a broad national church.”<sup>25</sup> That he held such a general position of conformity does not mean that Sackville can be placed neatly on the continuum since, as Smith notes, “people of quite contrasting opinions could claim to be ‘conformists’ in early Stuart England.”<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, there is no lack of information on the theological positions of Lancelot Andrewes. He left a wealth of sermons and personal devotional writings which clearly reveal a problem with the assumption that a conformist was necessarily interested in compromise, or in moderating the extremes of Catholicism and Puritanism. Andrewes might be said to represent his own extreme, which does not fit along the linear continuum at all. Nicholas Lossky has shown that, although Andrewes considered himself anything but a Papist, his theology was not typically Protestant either.<sup>27</sup> He was informed by his own reading of the Church Fathers, and his theology was shot through with ideas which, while common enough in Eastern Orthodoxy, are neither Protestant nor Catholic. He could have a great deal of sympathy for the Puritan focus on personal faith while insisting upon the necessity of Catholic liturgical forms and the Apostolic Succession. He was not governed by Western categories or systematic theology, and so he could also have a radical doctrine of free will which would have been condemned by Catholic and Puritan alike. Andrewes truly believed in, and advocated, the broad toleration which is the mark of the conformist. In his case it is clear that he was also the beneficiary of the broadly tolerant system which existed before his younger admirer William Laud became archbishop. Despite what the name implies, “conformity” in Andrewes’ England was far from a lockstep affair, although it also had very real

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B. Hamilton, and Richard Strier (eds), *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England: 1540–1688* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 115–37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127–8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Lossky, *Lancelot Andrewes, the Preacher (1555–1626): The Origins of the Mystical Theology of the Church of England*, trans. Andrew Louth (Oxford, 1991).

boundaries. Conformity permitted Andrewes to freely consider the wide range of ideas and authorities which were to be found in Reformation England.

Both of these examples are relevant for our consideration of Francis Bacon. It was precisely Bacon's conformity which disturbed his mother, but, as with Dorset, merely saying that Bacon was a conformist does not tell us what he believed. Like his friend and mentor, Lancelot Andrewes, Bacon took advantage of the diverse range of ideas and texts which surrounded him and, also like Andrewes, he developed an idiosyncratic belief system from them. Dorset was thirty years younger than Bacon and lived in a far less tolerant time. As a result, Dorset needed to be far more reserved with his own opinions than Bacon or Andrewes. In considering any individual from this period we must remember that the habit of placing people on a continuum stretching from Catholicism to Puritanism misrepresents the diversity of opinion which was to be found. There was far more on the theological table of early modern England than Calvin's *Institutes* or the *Summae* of Aquinas, and the questions were much more complex than asking how these two systems should be balanced. Theologians, and intellectuals generally, had before them a smorgasbord of ideas and theological influences that would mix and blend as they were taken up or ignored, assimilated or rejected. The self-identified *via media*, far from being a "middle way" compromise between Catholic and Puritan, was an area of turbulent diversity of opinion from which only those who were divisive, particularly the Roman Catholics and the Puritans, were excluded. It was an area where "truth" could be sought rather than assumed. While Puritan and Papist each knew his respective truth, others, less clearly partisan but equally devoted, sought it out. Thinkers such as Andrewes and Bacon approached the problem with rigorous method and genuine reverence for the new edifice that they were constructing: a theology composed of truth, not polemic.

### The Influences and Options Available in English Reformation Theology

So what was available for consideration by the theologians and intellectuals of Bacon's era? Nicholas Tyacke has emphasized the dominance of Calvinism throughout English society at this time, and this is a crucial first ingredient. The intellectual and theological world of Francis Bacon was a Calvinist world in which the non-Calvinists were a significant minority.<sup>28</sup> We may accept this statement with the same caveat that was applied to Puritanism earlier, namely that "Calvinist" is here used as a cover term for Reformed theology. However, Calvinism must not be allowed to overshadow the host of other trends and influences in Tudor and early Stuart religion. Tyacke also insists that non-Calvinists did exist. For them, Tyacke has coined the term "anti-Calvinist," reflecting the fact that they were in conscious tension with the dominant trend of English theology, and that these opponents to Calvinism pre-dated any movement in England which could legitimately be called "Arminian" as the Anti-Calvinists have often been characterized. Ultimately there was an "overthrow of Calvinism" in 1625, in which Arminianism itself could be said to have taken the field; but Tyacke's concern is important: we must not ignore the wide variety of thought present among the

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<sup>28</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 1–2, 7.

non-Calvinist minority in England prior to 1625. The anti-Calvinist movement in England was gaining momentum long before the writings of Arminius were available.<sup>29</sup> There were also other alternatives. All of the main trends in continental Protestantism are represented in the English literature from this period.

Lutheranism, despite its failure as an option for unifying the Church of England, remained influential as a package of theological ideas throughout Bacon's lifetime. If the antipathy of Henry VIII made it less than prudent to adopt Lutheranism wholesale, the continuing influence of Lutheran thought, particularly on biblical exegesis and sacramental theology, can be traced in the writings of numerous individuals.<sup>30</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles left plenty of room for all but the most dogmatic Lutherans to fit nicely into non-Calvinist corners of the Church of England.

Anabaptism is also commonly recognized as a component of the diverse English religious scene in this era. Exponents of the radical reformation of the continent, the Anabaptists, began to emigrate to England soon after Henry broke with Rome. Some of the first immigrants met with the same reaction they had been encountering on the continent and were promptly burned in St. Paul's churchyard. At no time were the Anabaptists accepted by the official Church of England, and they were the constant target of authorities in both the Church and the state, who resented their separatism as much as their radical doctrines.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the English environment proved to be considerably more hospitable to Anabaptists than most areas of the continent, if only because the irenic policy of the Elizabethan Settlement precluded them from being rooted out wholesale as they were in genuinely Lutheran, Calvinist, or Catholic lands. In fact, England served as something of an incubator for Anabaptism. The movement continued underground, and various ideas of Anabaptist association floated through the English intellectual scene rather freely before England's own native Anabaptists eventually emerged to complicate the strife of the English Civil War.<sup>32</sup> It is as important to acknowledge that the movement provided the various parties of the Church of England with the unifying influence of having a common enemy as it is to consider their actual contributions to English thought.

Of course, apart from Calvinism, the most active and direct continental influence was that of the Roman Catholic Church. Reclaiming the island lost to the papacy was a special project of the Jesuit Order during this period, and its effect is not only to be measured in the number of actual converts to the Roman Church, such as Bacon's close friend, Sir Tobie Matthew. The continued presence of Roman Catholic voices challenging, and contributing to, the intellectual discourse of Reformation England led significant figures such as Lancelot Andrewes and William Laud to become concerned with questions of the continuity of the Church, the doctrine of Apostolic Succession,

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<sup>29</sup> On the "overthrow of Calvinism" see *ibid.*, p. 8. On the ideological sources for this overthrow see p. 4, and chapters 1–4.

<sup>30</sup> See Basil Hall, "The Early Rise and Gradual Decline of Lutheranism in England 1520–1660" in *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia ii (Woodbridge, 1979). See also the only other major work on the subject, Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England* (Philadelphia, 1890).

<sup>31</sup> Dickens, *English Reformation*, pp. 262–68.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. Note the influence that Dickens describes of Anabaptism upon the development of religious toleration – for example, on p. 379.

and, generally, the danger of throwing out the baby of Christian tradition with the bathwater of Roman abuses. Novel and logically consistent answers had to be found to the challenges of the Jesuits, such as “Where was the true Church before Luther?” and “How can those who do not repent of schism be saved?”<sup>33</sup> Thus the continued Catholic presence served both as a motor for intellectual activity and as an influence upon the development of “high-church” thinking within the Church of England.

Religion in England, and especially English Protestantism, cannot be understood simply in terms of continental developments. English theology was always marked by a uniquely English synthesis. Lollardy, in particular, had become thoroughly combined with English Protestantism by 1540.<sup>34</sup> Although after Wyclif’s death it was less of a doctrinal position and more of what Alec Ryrie has aptly termed an “amorphous body of native heresies,” Lollardy profoundly influenced the development and direction of English Protestant thought, and added to the complexity of the theological landscape of Reformation England.<sup>35</sup> By Bacon’s time, Lollard doctrines could no longer be cleanly separated from broader Protestant discourse, and hence Lollardy *per se* is of very limited use in analyzing the theology of Bacon or his contemporaries. The incorporation of Lollardy into the theology of the English Reformation is an important reminder that the contours of English theology were never completely contiguous with continental theology. Long before the Reformation era, from Pelagianism through Lollardy, the island had earned a reputation for unique theological opinions. During the Reformation Wyclif and his movement became icons of English theological distinctiveness, and contributed to the justification for England’s continuing to go in its own theological direction. If the lack of theological definition in Henry’s break with Rome permitted theological diversity in England, the cultural icons of Wyclif and Lollardy had already nurtured a type of experimental thinking that only added to that diversity. In the Reformation England did not have to conform to prepackaged ideas any more than it had in the past.

### Intellectual Trends: Patristics and Hebrew

Up to this point we have only been considering the elements of the early modern religious scene which could be called “factions” or “parties,” and these are fairly

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<sup>33</sup> The first question is a common challenge of the Jesuits, particularly in Lutheran lands on the continent. It was apparently also found in England, as the tract *Luther’s predecessours, or, An answer to the question of the Papists : where was your church before Luther?* (London, 1624) attests. The second question is one raised by Tobie Matthew himself as the common theme of his tract, *Charitie Mistaken* (London, 1630).

<sup>34</sup> Dickens (*English Reformation*, pp. 49–60) makes three important points in this regard: 1) Lollardy survived as a movement until the Reformation; 2) Lollardy prepared the way for Reformation doctrine in England; and 3) once the Reformation was underway, Lollardy was quickly supplanted as a movement by “Protestantism” generally. However, Lollard doctrines were not the same as those of continental Protestantism, and were, as Ryrie argues, as much of an obstacle to Lutheranism as an aid to its reception in England. See Ryrie, “Strange Death of Lutheran England,” pp. 79–85.

<sup>35</sup> Ryrie, “Strange Death of Lutheran England,” p. 79.

typical of textbook accounts of the Reformation. However, we cannot understand these factions properly without paying attention to certain intellectual trends which are not so commonly considered. These trends fueled the Reformation on all sides and did much to contribute to the diversity of theological opinion in the early modern period, particularly in England. The first set of trends is linked to the recovery of ancient texts by the Renaissance humanists in the centuries prior to the Reformation. For the purpose of understanding Bacon's environment we will focus on two developments in particular: first, the recovery of the Church Fathers and other writings associated with Christian antiquity; and, second, the recovery of the Hebrew language and texts among Christians.

Along with other aspects of the Renaissance movement, the fourteenth century saw what Charles Stinger has called a "renaissance of patristic studies."<sup>36</sup> Thanks to the efforts of the humanists, the writings of the Christian theologians of the first seven centuries, both Latin and Greek, were gradually recovered and made public. Over time, as more and more ancient authorities came into circulation, this development dealt a serious blow to the method of medieval Scholastic theology. The internally consistent logical formulae of Scholasticism were at odds with the theological method, and often with the doctrines, of the ancient authorities.<sup>37</sup> Those differences posed no difficulty for many humanists, who saw little worth in the Scholastic method anyway. Erasmus, who stands at the apex of humanist theology, valued the Greek and Latin Fathers precisely because they demonstrated that medieval Scholasticism was a novelty. In his view, to return to the true *vetus theologia* – the original theology of Christianity – Scholasticism had to be abandoned.<sup>38</sup> By the time of the Reformation, interest in the expanding corpus of the Fathers had proceeded so far that the debates of the Reformation were saturated with continual citations of the Greek and Latin Fathers. Among Catholics and mainstream Protestants alike, it is difficult to find a scholarly theological work from the second half of the sixteenth or the seventeenth century that does not place tremendous weight upon the opinions of the early Church Fathers. The impact of the recovery of the Church Fathers extended far beyond theology to areas as diverse as cosmology, rhetoric, and civics. The humanist movement found the Fathers to be Christian authorities who themselves lived in classical antiquity, and were thus uniquely situated to justify and guide the humanists' use of pagan classical sources. The Greek Fathers reintroduced to the West a profoundly Platonic form of Christian theology which would have a significant influence on both the cosmology of humanists such as Pico, and, more generally, on discussions of the place of man in the universe. Yet the crisis which the recovery of the Fathers, and particularly the Greek Fathers, caused in theology was huge; it must be considered as central not only

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<sup>36</sup> Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (Albany, 1977), p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> Regarding the preceding decline of Patristic theology in the Middle Ages, especially of the Greek Fathers, see *ibid.*, pp. 84–97.

<sup>38</sup> On Erasmus' concept of the importance of the *vetus theologia* see Istvan Bejczy's discussion in *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The Historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 24–32, 104–5, 108–17, and 192–4.



to understanding developments in Catholic thought from the time, but also to the development of the Protestant Reformation.

The Catholics of Erasmus's day were saddled with reconciling the official theology of the Church as it had developed through the centuries with authorities which had fallen into disuse. There were also those who believed that the gulf between late medieval theology and the purer theology of the Early Church was simply too great to be reconciled, and, because of them, the unity of Western Christendom was lost. Protestantism, from its inception, shared with Erasmus the concern for recovering the *vetus theologia*. If the theology of the early centuries of Christianity could be identified, then all the errors of medieval Scholasticism, and of the papacy generally, would be clearly seen for the accretions that they were. The Church could then recover its original, and proper, theological emphasis and move forward from there. The Greek Fathers, who were problematic for the Catholic adherents of Scholastic theology, were a new arsenal for Protestants engaged in identifying Catholic error and supporting the break with Rome, though the Latin Fathers received equal attention; and the Patristic era also functioned as a unified authority for early Protestants. Closer to the fountainhead of Christianity, the Fathers were purer in their theology, and hence an important key to understanding when and where the Roman Church went wrong. But they were also studied positively as sources which gave clear precedent to Reformation theology and provided necessary insight into the original nature of Christianity. Thus the study of the Fathers was a central occupation of Protestants across Europe, and they were largely responsible for the development of Patristics as a discrete field of academic theology.<sup>39</sup>

The common Protestant concern for Patristic authority must qualify our understanding of the famous *sola scriptura* principle among early Protestants. For mainstream continental Protestants, such as the Lutherans and the Calvinists, the Bible was never the sole authority. It was the sole *absolute* authority, or the sole *infallible* authority. It was the authority by which other sources and authorities were to be measured and judged. Among Protestants of Bacon's era (with the exceptions of the more radical elements among the Puritans and of the Anabaptists generally) a theological argument was seldom considered complete without extensive reference to the opinions and decisions of the Early Church. Just how much authority the Fathers were allowed on any given issue was another matter. In Lutheran and Reformed lands, where there was an established doctrinal agenda for the Reformation, the Fathers were allowed to support the Lutheran or Reformed doctrines, but were rejected when they conflicted with the stated doctrines and confessions. For example, the Lutheran Martin Chemnitz makes use of both Basil and Epiphanius to support his defense of Lutheran doctrine against the Council of Trent, but both are rejected when their statements run foul of the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (4 vols, Westminster, MD, 1984), vol. 1, p. 1. Quasten traces the earliest name of the field, *Patrology*, to the Lutheran Johann Gerhard, in 1653.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (4 vols, St Louis, 1971). See vol. 1, p. 257 for the use of these Fathers for support, and pp. 287 and 267 for the rejection of the authority of Epiphanius and Basil respectively.

According to Chemnitz, these Fathers were already guilty of Romanist errors. Similarly, although Chrysostom is among Calvin's favorite Fathers to cite in support of the Reformed view of the Sacraments, he carefully distances himself from those passages in Chrysostom's writings which refer to the Lord's Supper as a "sacrifice."<sup>41</sup> What was pure in the Fathers and what was part of the imperfections already present in the early Church was determined by the established agendas of the Lutherans and the Reformed.<sup>42</sup>

In England, where the Reformation had no such clear agenda, the Fathers could be, and often were, given much more weight. Jean-Louis Quantin, in an article surveying the reception of the Fathers in seventeenth-century Anglican theology, portrays England as more focused upon Patristic theology than any location or group on the continent. This was also recognized at the time. Isaac Casaubon saw England as a refuge from both Catholicism and continental Protestantism, where he would be free to follow the theology of the ancient Church. Because of England's interest in Patristic theology and in the freedom to follow it, seventeenth-century London became a powerhouse for the production and publication of critical editions of the Church Fathers.<sup>43</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, for example, gave the Fathers a great deal more authority than was condoned by continental Protestants, and he often sided with the opinions of the Fathers over those of the Reformers. English theologians such as Andrewes were free to discuss the Apostolic Succession and the authority of tradition in ways that were theologically precluded on the continent. This would have a lasting impact on the doctrine and practices of the Anglican Church.

It is important to remember that the early modern West read the Greek Fathers with concerns and assumptions which were often far removed from the cultural context of the Fathers themselves, and hence Western thinkers often used the Fathers to draw conclusions which would have been foreign to the intent and understanding of the early Christian East. Nor were the orthodox Fathers recovered alone. A most notable example of an extra-Patristic text which shaped the theological landscape of Europe (along with many other intellectual developments of the Renaissance) is the *Corpus Hermeticum*, recovered and disseminated by Marsiglio Ficino in the late fifteenth century. Ficino believed that he had recovered part of the *prisca theologia*, the ancient or pristine theology, in this collection of philosophical and magical texts. The recovery of this supposedly ancient body of otherwise lost wisdom conformed to the idea of recovering lost learning that was driving the humanist movement in the Renaissance. There is also a kinship between Ficino's notion of a *prisca theologia* and Erasmus' concern for the recovery of the *vetus theologia*.

Certainly the *Corpus Hermeticum* itself was a controversial collection of texts. Not all intellectuals of the Renaissance would acknowledge Ficino's argument for its acceptability among Christians. However, the way in which it was supported

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<sup>41</sup> ICR, IV,18.11.

<sup>42</sup> See Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers*, p. 227 regarding the use of the Lutheran doctrine of Justification as a guideline for reading the Fathers among Melancthon and his associates.

<sup>43</sup> Jean-Louis Quantin, "The Fathers in Seventeenth Century Anglican Theology" in Irena Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 987–1008.

or rejected tells us much about the theological climate of early modern Europe. Proponents, such as Ficino, were bolstered in their assessment of the *Corpus* by the fact that the attitude of the Church Fathers, taken as a whole, was truly ambiguous toward the value of the *Corpus* and one could easily focus on the Patristic opinions that were positive. In addition, the Greek Fathers in particular held the same Platonic and neo-Platonic views of an immanent God, which are found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Opponents, such as Isaac Casaubon, focused on the inconsistencies between the *prisca theologia* and an established understanding of orthodox theology, focusing on negative statements by the Fathers. Between proponents and opponents there were those who weighed parts of the *Corpus* and embraced that which was found to be acceptable to the Christian worldview, even if the tradition itself was far from pure. The key is to recognize the role of theology, and especially Patristics, in measuring the value of these texts. All ideas in the seventeenth century were theological in their implications, if not in their very nature. That there was such a profound difference of opinion over whether the Hermetic texts were acceptable, and just how much of this tradition could be accepted, is a further testimony to the tremendous turbulence and diversity of early modern religious opinion.

Another important intellectual development in this era has received even less scholarly attention, namely the Christian rediscovery of the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Scriptures. This trend had profound effects on Christian theology and the Christian worldview in the early modern era. At stake was the meaning of two-thirds of the Christian Scriptures, and there were implications for natural philosophy as well as theology, particularly since it involved the creation accounts of the book of Genesis.

As with nearly every project designed to recover lost knowledge by a return *ad fontes*, the blossoming of the Christian interest in Hebrew in the early modern era had its beginning among the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, and in particular with Giannozzo Manetti and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.<sup>44</sup> Other scholars soon followed, including Pico's disciple Johannes Reuchlin and the Dominican, Sanctes Pagninus. Pagninus undertook a new translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew in 1524, arguing that the ancient sources used by Jerome were admitted by Jerome himself to be unreliable and that the Church now had access to the resources to do a better translation. Despite the inherent criticism of the Church's official version of the Scriptures at a time when Protestants were busy criticizing the same, Pagninus' work received the blessing of Popes Leo X, Adrian VI, and Clement VII.<sup>45</sup> Papal approval, however, did not guarantee freedom from controversy.

Because of the need to rely upon Jewish sources, the study of Hebrew was by far the most controversial humanist undertaking to Roman Catholic theologians. The Christian scholars who undertook the study of Hebrew had to rely entirely upon the theologians of another religion in order to carry it off. The keepers of the Hebrew language were Jewish, and the Hebrew texts to which the Christian scholars turned were the product of generations of rabbinic transmission, and a prepackaged

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<sup>44</sup> G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 19–30; and Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (2 vols, Chicago, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 578–600.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *Discovery of Hebrew*, p. 40.

rabbinic interpretive tradition came along with them. Scholars who pursued the discipline were in the midst of a constant debate. Critics of the study such as Johannes Pfefferkorn, himself a converted Jew, roundly decried practitioners such as Reuchlin as the polluters of the true faith. While Pfefferkorn and his Dominican associates stoked fires with Hebrew texts, Reuchlin found his fellow humanists often reluctant to join him in an unqualified defense of the study of Hebrew.<sup>46</sup> Even among those who generally supported the study of Hebrew there was a concern over just how much a Christian scholar could trust or rely on rabbinic commentaries. Finally, there was a pervasive attitude among those not directly involved in the controversy that, regardless of the fascinating insights which Hebrew might offer, the study could only be of limited usefulness. For many, Hebrew had some value as a missionary and apologetic tool for the conversion of the Jews, but there could be no real point in redoing what Jerome had done correctly in the first place.<sup>47</sup>

Objections to the study of Hebrew were almost non-existent among the Protestants, who were not at all convinced that Jerome should have the last word on the Old Testament. Hebrew meshed well with the Protestant concern for getting the interpretation of the Scriptures right, and reforming the Church around the proper sense of the sacred text. As a discipline, Hebrew took off in Protestant centers of learning such as Wittenberg, where Reuchlin's precocious nephew, Philip Melancthon, taught, and Basel, which Sebastian Münster turned into a center of Protestant Hebrew studies. Later, Oxford and Cambridge took up Hebrew as well. But the reliance on Talmudic interpretations, or rabbinic authority, was still regarded with much suspicion by Protestant scholars. Luther, for example, was convinced of the value of Hebrew, but was equally convinced that rabbinic exegesis had no place among Christians.<sup>48</sup> Calvin was cautiously ambivalent about the value of rabbinic sources.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Sebastian Münster's approach drew heavily upon the rabbis of all eras as authorities in Old Testament interpretation, and he was sharply criticized for this.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of the simultaneous rejection of Jerome and the rabbis as proper interpreters of the Hebrew text, there was a prevailing sense among the Protestants that the true Old Testament theology – the true meaning of the original text – was currently being recovered in its fullness. This belief in change and development in interpretation meant that there was a great deal of variation in Protestant Old Testament exegesis, which was lacking in that of Roman Catholics or Jews. The net effect of the early modern recovery of Hebrew may actually be regarded as a trend toward *less* uniformity in textual interpretation, rather than greater precision. More options were on the table than ever before, multiplied not only by Jewish exegesis, but also by the different theological agendas of the various Protestant groups.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 26–36.

<sup>47</sup> This, for example, is the objection raised by Leonardo Bruni to Manetti. See Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, vol. 2, pp. 578–600.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Discovery of Hebrew*, pp. 56–66.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 76–7, 78–9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 44–8.

## Millennialism and the Belief in a Providential Age

In addition to these essentially intellectual developments which shaped early modern Christianity were other trends which were less precise though no less influential. One of these, which is of particular significance for a consideration of Bacon, is the cultural phenomenon of a widespread belief that humanity had just entered, or was on the threshold of, a special age decreed by divine providence. There have been many fine studies of Millenarianism and apocalypticism in the early modern period, but both of these phenomena are rightly conceived as subsets of something which is much more pervasive in early modern thought. Almost all of the literature dealing with millenarianism and apocalypticism as trends in the early modern period is concerned with popular movements and groups within a broader society. To recognize those groups and movements as distinct from the rest of early modern society, scholars make use of narrow and specific definitions of “millenarianism” or “apocalypticism,” and confine themselves to very narrow aims. For example, in order to separate out those groups or movements which he wants to study, Howard Hotson uses a fairly typical example of a narrow definition: “Millenarianism, strictly defined, is the expectation that the vision described in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation of a thousand-year period in which Satan is bound and the saints reign is a prophecy which will be fulfilled literally, on earth, and in the future.”<sup>51</sup> Apocalypticism is usually more broadly defined by the omission of the strict interpretation of a period of one thousand years, but the emphasis on the Book of Revelation is still strong.<sup>52</sup>

Useful as they are, social and cultural histories of millenarian movements and trends of apocalyptic thought can obscure the fact that the specific movements and trends being considered are but elements of a much broader trend. For example, it is too easy for the modern reader of these histories to forget that the early modern critics of millenarian sects were themselves steeped in a culture of apocalyptic expectation and speculation, and held ideas which we would recognize as very similar to those which they were denouncing. Those who condemned a specific and rigid reading of the Apocalypse of John might well call upon other apocalyptic sections of the Old and New Testaments to do so: what was being rejected was not the idea of a special age, but a particular interpretation of what that age would entail. Throughout early modern Europe there was a widespread belief that a special age had or would soon

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<sup>51</sup> Howard Hotson, “The Historiographical Origins of Calvinist Millenarianism” in Bruce Gordon, (ed.), *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (2 vols, Aldershot, 1996), vol. 2, p. 160.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Bauckham, for example, begins with the broadest possible definition of “apocalyptic,” but soon moves to in-depth discussions of Revelation and the literal descent of the New Jerusalem, etc. See Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism, and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 14–16. See also Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain: 1530–1645* (Oxford, 1979); and Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978). While other biblical texts are also considered “apocalyptic” (Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, etc.) the trends being described involve a Johanine reading of these texts as well.

come upon them in which momentous changes, wrought by the hand of God, would transform the world, and that such an age was foretold in the Scriptures.

This belief in a glorious providential age was especially pervasive among Protestants, who saw the Reformation as the threshold of just such an age.<sup>53</sup> It was also a concept that was informed by the tremendous political changes which were taking place in early modern Europe. The emerging sense of national identity in Europe was enmeshed with ideas of divine favor or disfavor, and the common belief that God was raising up a particular chosen people for His special work. This was an age when the providential hand of God was beginning to operate within the bounds of nations. For the Spanish, the sailing of the Armada was “God’s obvious design,” while the English saw the obvious design of God in its failure.<sup>54</sup> In Bacon’s own writing, as well as that of his followers, there can be found the conviction that Britain, her king, and her people, were set aside by God for a particular glorious destiny.

### **Bacon’s Break with the Godly**

When Francis Bacon left home there was indeed a wide world of alternatives to his Puritan upbringing, and Francis left home for the first time at an early age. In 1573, at the age of twelve, he joined his brother Anthony at Cambridge. The two boys were housed and tutored by none other than John Whitgift, whose influence over Francis would later be lamented by Anne in her letter to Anthony of 1592. From his later writings it is clear that Francis Bacon was a creature of the religious landscape we have just toured. He was intimately acquainted with the Church Fathers and had chosen his favorites among them. This would not have necessarily disturbed Anne, who read the Fathers in Latin and Greek herself and whose sister, Margaret, had made a translation of St Basil’s sermon on Deuteronomy 15.<sup>55</sup> What Bacon himself got out of the Fathers, however, was far from reinforcement for his mother’s beliefs, for he shared the widespread belief that his society was on the cusp of an important age decreed by providence, but his conception of that was unique, as we shall see. Although there is no evidence that Bacon was personally qualified in the Hebrew language, he became well acquainted with those who were, and the flexibility of

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<sup>53</sup> The images used in Reformation polemic make the apocalyptic significance of the Reformation vividly clear. See Charles Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981). Consider also Jaroslav Pelikan’s discussion, “Some uses of Apocalypse in the Magisterial Reformers” in C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittrich (eds), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), pp. 74–88. For Catholics, who interpreted the Reformation differently, the sense of an imminent change was neither so pervasive nor so positive, though among Catholics as well there was a widespread expectation that God would soon end the schisms and restore the unity of Christendom. Also consider the more overt forms of Catholic millenarianism discussed in Karl A. Kottman (ed.), *Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarolla to the Abbé Grégoire* (Dordrecht, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> After the death of Mary Queen of Scots, Philip’s ambassador in Paris wrote that it was “God’s obvious design” to use him and give him the kingdoms of England and Scotland. See P. Gallagher and D.W. Cruikshank (eds), *God’s Obvious Design* (London, 1988), pp. vii, 167.

<sup>55</sup> Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, p. 25.

interpretation which marked the reading of the Old Testament at the time permitted him to reconsider both prophecy and the creation narrative of Genesis in his own way. Lady Anne Bacon's concern for her younger son was well founded. As an adult, Francis had left his Puritan heritage behind, and, three years prior to Anne's letter to Anthony, Francis had made his position known in a public statement.

In 1589 Francis Bacon circulated a tract in manuscript form entitled *An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England*, which weighed in on the Marprelate controversy, a tract war begun by the vitriolic Puritan who went by the pseudonym "Martin Marprelate." James Spedding has aptly characterized this exchange as "that disgraceful pamphlet war which raged so furiously in 1588 and 1589 between the revilers of the bishops on the one side, and the revilers of the Puritans on the other, and in which the appeal was made by both parties to the basest passions and prejudices of the vulgar."<sup>56</sup> The controversy between the two sides began years earlier when Bacon was a student at Cambridge, and his close connection with both sides gave him a unique perspective.

Bacon's *Advertisement* has never been subjected to a close reading in order to understand the theological points made there. Most interpreters have characterized it as a simple call for toleration and compromise, designed to ensure that he was properly situated politically on issues of religion, and having little theological substance.<sup>57</sup> Bacon does counsel moderation and toleration in this tract, but he does so in a way which goes far beyond mere political propriety. The tract reveals a keen grasp of Church history and is theologically nuanced. Whether at Whitgift's hands or elsewhere, Bacon had been trained well. It would have been foolish to wade into such a vicious controversy without having the skill to navigate the subtleties of theology. The key players on both sides were skilled in the field. Even when discussing "matters of indifference" one had to take a theological stand in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for the question of *which* issues were actually indifferent was theologically volatile wherever it arose. To advise moderation on theological matters required a well-informed theological position in an era when theology was so charged, but Bacon does more than advise moderation. He makes significant theological points of his own, which demonstrate that the breadth of the *via media* had allowed him to develop in his own way.

Bacon's tract begins with a lament that such a controversy should have begun among Protestants. This fight was over things which were not part of the essential "mysteries of faith" which precipitated the Christological controversies resolved by the Church Fathers in the early Councils. Rather, the two sides are divided over matters which, for the most part, are matters of "indifference" pertaining to ceremonies and the "extern[al] policy and government of the church." He calls upon both sides to adopt the more conciliatory approach of the Apostles and early Church

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<sup>56</sup> WFB, vol. VIII, p. 72.

<sup>57</sup> This is the conclusion of Perez Zagorin in *Francis Bacon* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 6–7; also Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 38. See also Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, p. 125, who suggest that this was a mere act of self-fashioning which went against his own personal Puritanism, which he retained.

Fathers, “which was, in the like and greater cases, not to enter into assertions and positions, but to deliver counsels and advices” and if this were done, the English Church “should need no other remedy at all.”<sup>58</sup> The most lamentable error of each side lay, according to Bacon, in their insistence that the other side was ungodly. Like the Earl of Dorset, Bacon was a conformist primarily interested in quelling controversy. But he was far from suggesting that the truth was to be found in the middle. Although the rhetorical tone of Bacon’s *Advertisement* is mediating, placing the blame for the controversy squarely upon both sides, it also gives evidence of Bacon’s personal opinions and biases in the matter, particularly when we consider *what* Bacon finds blameworthy in either side.

The bishops, and those who side with them, are reprimanded for their intractability, their heavy-handedness, and their failure to listen to the other side. In short, this party is to blame for the harshly dismissive *way* in which they handle criticism and objections. Bishop Thomas Cooper, the first to respond to “Martin Marprelate,” did so admirably, according to Bacon, not sinking to “Marprelate’s” level, but by reverently responding to the issues raised, rather than to the anonymous person and his language. Others did not follow the example of Bishop Cooper and are truly guilty of making the matter into a major controversy; for, as Bacon quotes, “he that replieth multiplieth.”<sup>59</sup> Among the party of the bishops, Bacon noted, “there is not an indifferent hand carried toward these pamphlets as they deserve.”<sup>60</sup> While they began well, they had since become increasingly firm on all matters, denying that there was anything in the Church of England that could benefit from change or reform. The bishops themselves cannot avoid blame “in standing so precisely upon altering nothing,” and they are certainly guilty of “unbrotherly proceeding” in charging the opposition “as though *they denied tribute to Caesar*, and withdrew from the civil magistrate the obedience which they have ever performed and taught.” The Puritans, regardless of what the bishops may think of their doctrine, were not to be confused with radicals such as the Family of Love; and the bishops had all too eagerly believed every accusation against the Puritans by which they could be unfairly condemned.<sup>61</sup>

The Puritans were subject to a much weightier censure in Bacon’s *Advertisement*. They were also guilty of “unbrotherly proceeding” in their harsh attacks on the bishops, who were often godly and “men of great virtues.”<sup>62</sup> They had also gone to an extreme in insisting that matters which should be indifferent were not, and then hiding behind the “honorable names of sincerity, reformation and discipline ... so as contentions and evil zeals are not to be touched, except these holy things be thought first to be violated.” While claiming to be for “reform,” the Puritans were in fact perpetuating controversies merely for the sake of change. Quoting an unnamed “father,” Bacon concluded: “They seek to go forward still, not to perfection, but to

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<sup>58</sup> WFB, vol. VIII, p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87–9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.



change.”<sup>63</sup> The Puritans were genuinely responsible for the schism in the Church even as Whitgift claimed, for “they refuse to communicate with us, reputed us to have no church.”<sup>64</sup> Bacon’s conformity is evident in the use of the first-person plural.

There was, according to Bacon, evidence that the Puritans had gone to a dangerous extreme in many of their doctrines, and he associated them with certain heretics. He noted how those most firmly opposed to Arianism in the early Church came to the equally heretical position of Sabellius.<sup>65</sup> Even so, the Puritans, by the vehemence of their opposition to all things which smacked of Roman Catholicism, had gone to the opposite extreme and begun to discard the good with the bad.<sup>66</sup> Thus, like those of old who became heretics by virtue of their zeal against heresy, the Puritans had chosen a questionable path in their objections to the Church when they claimed that reformation had not gone far enough:

As in affection they challenge the said virtues of zeal and the rest, so in knowledge they attribute to themselves *light* and *perfection*. They say, the Church of England in King Edward’s time and in the beginning of her Majesty’s reign, was but in the cradle; and the bishops in those times did somewhat for daybreak, but that maturity and fullness of light proceeded from themselves. So Sabinus, Bishop of Heraclea, a Macedonian, said that the fathers in the Council of Nice [the first ecumenical council of Nicea] *were but infants and ignorant men; and that the church was not so to persist in their decrees as to refuse that further ripeness of knowledge which the time had revealed ... so do they censure men truly and godly wise (who see into the vanity of their assertions) by the name of politiques; saying that their wisdom is but carnal and savouring of man’s brain.*<sup>67</sup>

As a function of the Puritan love for simplicity, which comprehended reliance on Scriptural precedent for all things and the preaching of the Word in sermons as the central mark of the true Church, they had developed a dangerously narrow view of Christianity:

But most of all is to be suspected, as a seed of further inconvenience, their manner of handling the Scriptures; for whilst they seek express Scripture for everything’ and that they have (in manner) deprived themselves and the church of a special help and support by embasing the authority of the fathers; they resort to naked examples, conceited inferences, and forced allusions such as do mine into all certainty of religion. Another extremity is the excessive magnifying of that which, though it be a principal and most holy institution, yet hath it limits as all things else have. We see wheresoever (in manner) they find in the Scriptures the *word* spoken of, they expound it of preaching. They have made it almost the essence of the sacrament of the supper, to have a sermon precedent. They have (in sort) annihilated the use of liturgies, and forms of divine service, although the house of God be denominated of the principal, *domus orationis*, a house of prayer, and not a house of preaching. As for the life of the good monks and the hermits of the primitive church, I know they will condemn a man as half a Papist, if he should maintain them as other than profane, because they heard no sermons. In the meantime, what preaching is, and who may be said to preach, they make no question. But as far as I see, every man that

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

presumeth to speak in chair is accounted a preacher. But I am assured that not a few that call hotly for a preaching ministry deserve to be of the first themselves to be expelled.<sup>68</sup>

Bacon's particular equation of the errors of Puritans with ancient heresy suggests that he was aware of, and utilizing, the historic definition of "heresy": from the Greek, ἀίρέομαι, "to choose." Heretics were those who "chose" to separate themselves from the Church, thus dividing the Church, or who "chose" certain aspects of the faith to emphasize at the expense of others. Bacon's discussion concludes as it began, with a plea that both sides of the controversy rein in their invective before the situation becomes worse.

It must be remembered that Bacon's argument in the context of the Marprelate controversy was directed principally against the more extreme Puritans as they were to be found in the late 1580s. Many who were themselves of a more Reformed frame of mind and would even be regarded as Puritans in other contexts would have agreed with his basic tolerance. However, in the course of his discussion, Bacon went far beyond a mere call for peace, and expressed sympathies for a great many ideas which would not sit well with even more moderate Puritans. He wrote a number of things which would come to be regarded as "high church" when the term came into general use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the exact *form* of ceremonies might be open to debate, the importance of ceremonies, or the ordered prayer of the Liturgy, was not, and the efficacy of the Lord's Supper was neither to be eclipsed by, nor made conditional upon, sound preaching. The authority of the Scriptures, though ultimate, was not exclusive, for the Church Fathers would thus be denied to the Church. Monks and hermits – at least those of the primitive Church – were mentioned with reverence, without any suggestion that the monastic calling was itself dangerous or flawed (a point that will resurface in Bacon's later writing). On the whole, this suggests that Bacon held a very high view of many things that are not explicitly sanctioned by the Scriptures, at least as the Puritans read them. And, for Bacon, Puritanism itself, by insisting on its own rectitude and necessity, was always in danger of genuine heresy. Although Bacon's censure of the bishops may have been moderated by his political situation, there can be no question that he clearly distanced himself from the Puritans in this tract. Significantly, his objections to the Puritans were theological, whereas his objections to the positions of the bishops centered on issues of casuistry and behavior.

Were the *Advertisement* a work written in isolation a claim still could be made that the positions expressed in it are not necessarily those of Bacon himself. But other works written during the next decade add greatly to our understanding of the development of Bacon's religious thought prior to the publication of his works pertaining to the Great Instauration. The *Advertisement* is indicative of more profound changes in Bacon's beliefs as he reconsidered many of his society's common theological assumptions. At the heart of his re-evaluation were questions about the nature of the relationship between God and creation, and the special place of human beings in the order of things.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

After 1594 Lady Anne Bacon's mental and physical health began to decline. We know very little of what may have passed between mother and son during the later years of her life. In 1600 Francis made a passing reference to Anne's "worn" health in a letter. It is the last reference to his mother in his writings prior to an expression of grief at her death in 1610.<sup>69</sup> In 1602 Lady Bacon signed over a number of manors to Francis as her heir. This may have been nothing more than a legal formality since her only other son, Anthony, had died several months before.<sup>70</sup> The sense of estrangement between Anne and Francis in these years is hard to avoid, and it adds a melancholy chord to his life. Francis's turn away from Puritanism disappointed his mother, but it also proved that he was her heir in more than her estates. From her he had received the education, the piety, and the passion for a correct understanding of the faith which would shape everything that he wrote.

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<sup>69</sup> Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, p. 321.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.