

HMC Rutland	<i>The Manuscripts of his Grace the Duke of Rutland</i> , ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte (4 vols., 1888-1905)
MSS	<i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury</i> , ed. M. S. Giuseppi et al. (24 vols., HMC, 1888-1976)
HMC Salisbury	
MSS	
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HR	<i>Historical Research</i>
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
Lansd.	Lansdowne Manuscripts
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
n.p.	no place (of publication)
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus . . . Series (Latina) Prima</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (221 vols., Paris, 1844-64)
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
Rawl.	Rawlinson Manuscripts
RH	<i>Recusant History</i>
TD	M. A. Tierney, <i>Dodd's Church History of England</i> (5 vols., 1839-43)
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office

Introduction

Why offer to the press yet another book about politics and religion in early modern England? Considering the current flood of published material on the dissensions within the English Church before the Civil War, one might well admit, with John Hacket, that 'the easie Dispatch of so many Sheets in a day . . . hath found the World a great deal more Work then needs'.¹ My defence for adding to these torrents of paper is that this monograph is not another general review of the quarrels between Catholics and Protestants in late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. But its central topic - conversion to and from the Church of Rome - does, I hope, allow for a revision of aspects of the historiography of those quarrels, and principally in that vexed question of the course and intensity of the later English Reformation. Historians have recognised that there was considerable flux in religious opinion and practice during this period but they have notoriously disagreed about the speed and efficiency with which Protestant religion was accepted and enforced. There is little meeting of minds between those who see the triumph of novelty and reform and those who perceive insuperable obstacles to it, a mixture of Romishness and die-hard opposition to anything new.

Deciphering the course of the English Reformation has always entailed determining whether, primarily, politicians exploited Reformed ideas to achieve their political aims, or whether an irrepresible wash of novel, humanist, Protestant theological discourse exploited, and even sometimes determined, the ebb and flow of political conflict. I suggest that the perennial debate over the chains of causation in Reformation history can be extended by trying to determine what made a person think he had become either a Protestant or a Catholic, and also what the aims were of the manipulative controllers who sought to induce change of religion in him. This is not to pretend that a study of individual converts allows anything so precise as an accurate geographical or chronological record of the flux in

¹ John Hacket, *Scrimia Reserata* (1693), I, 1.

Protestant and Catholic allegiances. (Conversion does not generally lend itself to quantitative analysis.) But, even if the Protestant Reformation in England cannot be described as a series of individual conversions, an analysis of individual uncertainty and resolution of doubt may affect the way we think about central questions in Reformation studies.

On its own it might not seem very remarkable that, once the battle lines were drawn, a decision to become a Catholic or a Protestant in England should always be partly a matter of politics and partly a matter of religion, and that, try as they might, people could not consciously adhere to the Roman or the English Church without having an eye constantly to both sorts of motive. It is a commonplace in all ecclesiastical history that doctrinal beliefs have the capacity to engender factional allegiances which have a political character. In that the Church is an institution in which power is exercised by some over others, an organised form of ecclesiastical society as well as a religious concept, it has political characteristics, and the things which it does (even the way that it expresses doctrine) are affected by political considerations. In addition, because religious opinion affects the way that people behave, those who exercise authority on behalf of the State cannot ignore people's opinions about religion. In late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, attitudes to Rome incorporated not just a series of doctrines about grace but also a view of the relationship between the Church and the State. None of this is very surprising. But it is quite another thing to define exactly how politics and religion commingled in ecclesiastical flux. Conversion is an ideal topic for this type of study because it is drawn out of a matrix of political and religious factors. Consequently conversion is a key to unlocking the nature of religious allegiance in this period. It may be no great insight to perceive that, when people wavered between Roman and Protestant allegiances in England, the rationality of following their own best material interests could be disrupted by anxieties about right and principled belief and conduct just as easily as the purity of their faith and its observance could be clouded by the need to look to their temporal well-being. Still a view of the tensions plaguing the mind of the man who found himself engaged by politico-ecclesiastical questions allows us to think beyond the rigid and stultifying classifications of people based just on their outward behaviour (for example, whether they conformed to the observance of the religion established by law). Not everyone who acted outwardly in a similar way shared identical thought patterns. What are we to make of people who do not really fit into the pigeonhole categories of 'recusant' or 'conformist'? How do we interpret the motivation of the dutiful conforming 'church papist' who, when not under the watchful gaze of the State, suddenly exhibited an enthusiasm for religious ideas of which the State did not approve? More particularly, what of the moderate 'Church

of England man' who suddenly adopted explicit Romish opinions, or the rigid Protestant enthusiast who exchanged his Protestant doctrinal enthusiasms for precisely the ones which before he claimed most fervently to reject?

It might be thought that, when political and religious motives mixed, one would naturally subordinate the other almost into extinction. How could the purity of religious motivation (the persuasions based on theological discourse leading towards the regulation of a man's life and faith) autonomously coexist with political motivations (e.g., preservation of estates, career and self against the State's potentially violent intolerance of religious deviance) to believe and practice one thing rather than another? If a man's religious affections happened to coincide with the dictates of the regime, he was fortunate in not having to wrestle with conscience over his external religious profession. But, if a conflict did occur, then historians have tended to assume that he had to take the difficult path of principled resistance (and take the consequences) or cynically make a political accommodation with authority. Thus we see the historiographical fragmentation of the religious and ecclesiastical spectrum into zealots and conformists, and notably the Romish recusant Catholics separated out from the church papists or schismatics, the lukewarm ones who would, if necessary, be circumcised at Constantinople 'with a mental reservation'.²

But this study argues that when political and religious motives were both engaged in the mind of the individual convert they were maintained in a constant tension; they do not fuse, nor is one subordinated to the other. This approach to the paradoxes of politico-religious conflict allows us to determine the nature of ecclesiastical allegiance in a more sophisticated way than by saying merely that a certain person changed his religion because either his patron went to the wall, or he became alienated, wanted a better clerical job, more money, felt persecuted, had a mid-life crisis, or redefined his opinions about the doctrine of predestination. We can thus describe how different elements of political and religious motivation combined with each other and acted out of their separate spheres to influence individuals who were not securely anchored in their religion. In addition, since conversion was recognised as having a continuing quality as well as being a one-off event, its study can tell us not just about the nature of the initial decision to change religion, but, more generally, what it meant to be a Roman Catholic or a Protestant in England during this period.

It is common knowledge that in theology, conversion refers primarily to the way in which sinful man is made regenerate by grace. Nevertheless, the

² BL, Harl. MS 1221, fo. 65v.

theology of conversion raises certain imperatives about the sort of Church to which the regenerate man should adhere. This promotes a second type of conversion, namely between ecclesiastical institutions, which takes on a political character. The question of whether a man thinks that he has converted to the true Church, true faith or more generally to true religion raises the question of what he thinks about the conversion of others. The state of other people's religion affects his perception of the structure and regulation and government of the Church to which he and they both think they belong. After the break with Rome, a welter of contradictory philosophical views about central Christian tenets engaged with a series of political conflicts so that, for some, the alignment of true faith and Church with institutional faith and Church became exceptionally intense. The association of the two meant that alteration of opinions about the one naturally tended to promote alteration of opinions about the other. It was virtually impossible for people in this period to explain one aspect of change in religious opinion or practice without referring to the other sorts of conversion with which they were familiar: a man's fluctuation between Rome and the Church of England must affect his standing in grace just as deterioration (or amelioration) in his life and 'conversation' could be attributed to his consorting with (or rejection of) the errors and workmen of Romish popery or Protestant heresy.

This study therefore operates on two levels. First, it explores aspects of individual conversion between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in England in the later Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. On a second level it tries to relate individual alterations of opinion to some of the larger questions about the later English Reformation. It seems fairly clear to historians that at some point in Elizabeth's reign England became a Protestant country, but the debate about Protestantisation has more than occasionally been bedevilled by imprecision as to what it meant for England (or Englishmen) to be Protestant. This book, while not pretending to be a revision of everything which English Reformation historians have said, aims, by studying the microcosm of conversion, to reflect on the ways in which England could be said to have become Protestant.

THE POLITICS OF CONVERSION, 1580-1625

In one sense, of course, the issue was decided by the end of the 1580s. A forcible change of national religion with foreign military assistance was now no longer possible (assuming that it ever had been). English Catholics started to accept minority status. Rome imposed a severe definition of what it meant to be a Roman Catholic in England. The political conflict between the Churches was clarified and intensified, and alteration of a man's religious

allegiance became an extreme step. Did the extremism of Romanist politics, its scheming and flirtations with resistance theory, drive a wedge between religious and political Romanism? Outside the propaganda about popery and the threat from Rome, we might think, people would have made decisions about what they really believed in matters of faith in one part of their minds, and dealt with the aspect of religion which touched on allegiance to institutional Churches in another part entirely.

But large numbers of people were compelled to think about which Church they really belonged to precisely because faith was inextricably connected with the fact of the royal supremacy and the challenge to it which definitions of papal primacy seemed to imply. As Edmund Bunny wrote in reply to Robert Persons, English Romanism was proving a tough nut to crack because

no man . . . can be of that profession [Roman Catholicism], unlesse hee bee under that government too. Could their Church, and court [of Rome] be sundred; could their religion and regiment be parted . . . then indeed I think that (with many) much might be done; but when as these go so close together, than no man can professe the one, but that he must be under the other, that goeth . . . somewhat hard with many, that otherwise would finde no scruple at al.³

Undoubtedly many people would have liked politics and religion kept apart. Those Catholic clerics who saw their best interests served by a termination of the more ambitious plans for a Catholic succession wanted to sever the connection between their clerical affiliation and their political allegiance.⁴ Thomas Wright, a Jesuit who left the order in 1593 on political grounds, seemed to think that just because he was a loyalist the English regime would allow him to follow his conscience in matters of religion.⁵ The Lancashire gentleman John Ashton in 1605 said under examination that his conscience would not allow him to conform to the established religion but he acknowledged in his conscience the lawfulness of the royal supremacy.⁶ Towards the end of this period we find people like Richard Montagu speculating on the separation of the Church of Rome from the Court of Rome.⁷ But such accommodations flew in the face of most contemporary experience. Movement in one sphere meant movement in the other. John Racster expressed a truism when he wrote that 'the change of Common-wealths . . .

³ Edmund Bunny, *A Booke of Christian Exercise* (1585), sig. Yviii.

⁴ A. Pritchard, *Catholic Loyalism in Elizabethan England* (1979), 198; AAW, A VII, 444-5.

⁵ BL, Lansd. MS 109, fo. 48r.

⁶ J. Tait (ed.), *Lancashire Quarter Session Records* (Chetham Society, new series, 77, Manchester, 1917), 282-3.

⁷ Bodl., Rawl. MS D 1331, fo. 152v. When toleration came, temporarily, in August 1622, its basis was the suspension of penalties against Catholics in 'any point of recusancy which concerns religion only, and not matter of State', *CSPD 1619-23*, 436.

especially . . . beginneth with the change of religion', and that alterations of government are generally preceded by notorious heresy or schism.⁸ Virtually all Protestant polemicists treated the Catholics' toleration petitions in 1603 as an attempt to bring about a change of religion which would snowball into a subversion of the commonwealth.⁹ When Archbishop Marc'Antonio de Dominis asserted to Bishop Richard Neile in 1622 that Rome was a true Church (thus justifying his decision to return to full communion with it) Neile did not deny it but said that 'the toleration of two Religions would bee a certaine cause of a combustion in the Church; and subversion of the whole State'.¹⁰ Conversely, political alteration was seen to cause religious change. In 1607 William Bedell reported from Venice how disappointing it was that the Venetian State and the papacy had reached a compromise over their political quarrels. Nevertheless, Bedell thought that the Pope's power 'ys irrecoverable broken heere, and long yt will not be ere some change [of religion] follow'.¹¹ The English in Venice had reluctantly decided 'that to propound . . . [Protestant religion] in it owne naked simplici[ty] to men . . . blinded with superstition . . . were but to expose it to contempt'. Bedell believed, however, that the 'same men [who would ridicule Protestant doctrine] read gladly discourses of pollicy, so . . . [if] under that name [religion] could be conveyed it were like to find much better entertainement'.¹² Thomas Harding, the polemical writer who abandoned his Protestantism after Mary's accession, thanked God 'who used the change of the time, as an occasion and meane, whereby to change . . . [him] unto the better'. By 'the new condition of the time' he was 'compelled to seeke the truth which before . . . [he] knew not, and willingly to holde that, which before . . . [he] refused'.¹³ God could bring divine order out of human disorder.

Politics, though, was a two-edged sword. God did not always choose to correct human political errors and vice. The existence of a Protestant regime

⁸ John Raester, *A Booke of the Seven Planets* (1598), sig. A2^v.

⁹ Gabriel Powel, *The Catholikes Supplication* (1603), 27, 29; P. Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age* (1978), 72-6; *HMC Salisbury MSS XV*, 283; C. Russell, 'The Parliamentary Career of John Pym, 1621-1629', in C. Russell, *Unrevolutionary England, 1603-1642* (1990), 205-28, at p. 216, citing Pym's fears that papists having gained a toleration will progressively seek equality and then superiority, 'and after superiority they will seek the subversion of that religion which is contrary to theirs'.

¹⁰ Richard Neile, *M. Ant. de Dnis. Archbishop of Spalato, his Shiftings in Religion* (1624), 10-11.

¹¹ BL, Lansd. MS 90, fo. 108^v.

¹² BL, Lansd. MS 90, fo. 136^v. This thinking lay behind the presentation of James I's *Premotion* (condemning the papal deposing power) to the authorities in Venice, L. P. Smith (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (2 vols., Oxford, 1907), I, 100-7.

¹³ J. E. Booty, *John Jewel as Apologist of the Church of England* (1963), 74.

and even relative political security for its Church did not preclude the dangers of subversive popish alterations, as Protestant commentators who doubted England's elect status sometimes opined. At a deeper level, political forms and structures were no guarantee of any sort of religious stability and purity. True religion was always endangered by the corruption and decay of its external expression. The royal chaplain Benjamin Carier saw religion corrupted by politics: 'those points of doctrine wherein wee are made to be at warres with the church of Rome . . . argue the Corruptions of that state, from whence they come'. In his view 'the contradiction of doctrine hath followed the alteration of state, and not the alteration of state bin grounded upon any truth of doctrine'. In Humphrey Leech's opinion, the rule in England was 'pipe state; and dance Churché', and 'religion must have no coate otherwise, then measure is taken by the State'.¹⁴ Matthew Sutcliffe would have agreed with Carier, though from a different perspective. Among the motives which Sutcliffe identified as inducing 'so many to like their [Roman] religion' were 'Fire and Sword' and tyrannicide.¹⁵ William Bradshaw thought that conversion to true profession of Protestant religion was within the realm of grace but could be hindered by unfavourable political circumstances. Political uncertainty over religion assisted the Romanists greatly. The secular authorities must assist grace by dashing the political aspirations of the papist 'of state' who adheres to his Romanist profession because he conceives 'great brittlement and uncertaintie in the course of this present government which he supposeth cannot longe last'. By strict enforcement of the law such a person might be compelled to become a Protestant 'of state'. Political Protestantism could then create a holding area out of which Protestants of religion might be drawn by grace.¹⁶ For all these writers, movement in one sphere, political or religious, engendered movement in the other.

One might still enquire whether this mattered very much if England's Protestant polity was so firmly secured, particularly after the principal elements of Catholic resistance had petered out in the early 1590s. Undoubtedly, the actual number of people who, after a period of uncertainty, positively affirmed that Rome was the safe way to salvation, and then signalled it unequivocally by going abroad or refusing to attend church, was relatively small (considered in relation to the total number affected by contemporary religious issues). But this is to miss the significance of

¹⁴ Benjamin Carier, *A Treatise* (Brussels, 1614), 34; Humphrey Leech, *A Triumph of Truth* (Douai, 1609), 102; cf. James Sharpe, *The Trial of the Protestant Private Spirit* (St Omer, 1630), 271.

¹⁵ Matthew Sutcliffe, *The Examination and Confutation of a certain scurrilous Treatise entitled, The Survey of the newe Religion* (1606), 28.

¹⁶ William Bradshaw, *Humble Motives* (n.p., 1601), 10-15.

conversion. If conversion were just a matter of expressing allegiance to a political position, then defections to and from Roman Catholicism would be of little interest historically since there is no evidence that numerical fluctuation of itself was ever sufficiently great to make much difference.¹⁷ But, even in pure politics, it was clear enough that activism rather than a democratic counting process was what mattered. As Sir Robert Cotton remarked, 'to what purpose serves it to muster the names of the Protestants, or to vaunt them to be ten for one of the Roman Faction? as if bare figures of numeration could prevaile against an united party'.¹⁸ When an individual converted to Rome, he demonstrated the existence of a hidden fund of latent popery about which Protestants had every reason to be anxious. Paradoxically, most conversions from Rome also emphasised the instability of the religious settlement since they dressed up the providential Protestant homecoming in the language of escape from almost certain spiritual death and the alluring attractiveness to the majority of idolatry and superstition. Virtually all conversions, therefore, were a visible index of man's general tendency to stagger in religion. This was certainly not limited to the comparatively small number of overt and outrageous rejections of one or other Church which hit the headlines in this period (though such changes were thought, according to a religious domino theory of conversion and apostasy, to induce a cascade of further alterations in faith and allegiance).¹⁹ Whether the total number of Catholics was increasing or decreasing was far less important than whether the increase or decrease occurred through the mechanism of change of religion. Contemporaries were acutely aware of this. When, in the first

¹⁷ The problem of counting converts is an intractable one. John Bossy has made an impressive effort to estimate numbers of Catholics in England during this period, J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (1975), chapter 8. But this is a different exercise from measuring flux in religion to and from Rome. A manifest difficulty is that the records of changes of religion are even more patchy than the evidence of how many English people during this period could be described as Catholics or papists. It is, of course, possible to count people who abandoned the Church of England by becoming recusants, or conformed to the established Church by abandoning recusancy. (Such records confirm contemporary comment that at times when the regime took severe measures against papistry many more people would conform than at times when the State took a more relaxed view, and that when the regime looked set to tolerate Romishness, the number of persons prepared to consider themselves as in some way Catholic shot up.) But the records of conformity and nonconformity in religion were usually generated for bureaucratic purposes and so do not give a full account of how many people altered their religion in defiance of or obedience to the State. In consequence I have largely shied away from making bold statements about numbers of converts because such figures more often provide information about the system which recorded them than about national trends in conformity.

¹⁸ James Howell (ed.), *Cottoni Posthuma* (1651), 114–15.

¹⁹ Contemporaries frequently saw notorious conversions as indicators that other individuals would do the like. N. McClure (ed.), *The Letters of John Chamberlain* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1939), I, 483; CRS 68, 14; CRS 64, 36; G. Wickes, 'Henry Constable, Poet and Courtier, 1562–1613', *Biographical Studies* 2 (1953–4), 272–300, at p. 290.

decade of the seventeenth century, the Venetians quarrelled with the papacy the excited English diplomatic party in Venice attempted to convert specific Venetians and to create separate Protestant congregations there.²⁰ In part this was because anti-papal foreign Catholics were useful for the polemic they could write against papal authority.²¹ But the Venice phenomenon had a theological significance as well. One mark of the true Church which all contemporaries recognised was that it must continually increase. The Venetian quarrel with the papacy, and individual rejections of Rome associated with it, suggested to Protestants that the Church of Rome was in decline, and therefore not the true Church which it claimed to be.²² Many Protestants thought that the notorious Archbishop de Dominis's severance of links with Rome and arrival in England (by way of Venice) in 1616 was a sign of Rome's inevitable decline, God's apocalyptic decrees against Babylon. Thomas Goad saw that God had 'raised Wickleff from their Schooles, John Husse from their Pulpits, Martin Luther from their Cloysters, and now Mark Antonie [de Dominis] from their Arch-episcopall Chaire', and 'nowe Dalmatia [which de Dominis deserted] looking over the Venetian Gulffe, assureth Italie that her next Advertiser shall bee within her bowels'.²³

This perception of conversion suggests to us that it is a misreading to see the English Reformation just as a struggle between two tightly consolidated blocs, Roman and Protestant, facing each other across a deserted religious no-man's-land with a few isolated and lack-lustre nonentities risking the shell-fire in order to move backwards and forwards between the two positions. Institutional transfer of loyalties was a reflection of other aspects of conversion which can be seen only in the shallowest sense as the product just of institutional strife.

In the chapters which follow I propose to explore conversion as an historical phenomenon in this period. First, why did people change their religion? The polemical books, the manuals of controversy, contain almost every possible argument which was ever used to urge contemporaries to

²⁰ N. Malcolm, *De Dominis (1560–1624)* (1984), viii–ix, 37–8; Smith, *Life*, I, 90–1, 94, 116, 161–2, II, 148–9, 178–9; T. W. Jones (ed.), *A True Relation of the Life and Death of William Bedell* (Camden Society, second series, 4, 1872), 105–6; BL, Lansd. MS 90, nos. 54, 66; HMC *Salisbury MSS* XIX, 71–2; CSPV 1607–10, 270.

²¹ CRS 68, 11–12.

²² The contemporary annotator of the Bodleian Library's copy (Antiq. e. 1.608.8) of Anthony Wotton, *A Trial of the Romish Clergies Title to the Church* (1608), 290, a tract written in answer to John Percy, *A Treatise of Faith* (n.p., 1605), remarked that the Church of Rome could not be the true Church because 'she hath decreased within these 200 yeeres I thincke well nighte the one halfe of that she was'.

²³ Marc'Antonio de Dominis, ed. and transl. Thomas Goad, *A Declaration of the Reasons* (Edinburgh, 1617), 3–4.

think about change of religious allegiance. But as the second chapter argues, the essence of conversion does not lie in polemical texts, even though all contemporaries recognised that the changes of allegiance which polemicists dwelt on were a central element of true conversion. In chapter 3 I suggest that changing allegiances can be elucidated only through a reconstruction of what individuals did rather than what rival polemicists told them to do. There was a potentially radical division between the intellectual perceptions of religious division thrown at people and the way in which they actually experienced conversion between antagonistic expressions of Christianity. Of course, even without the hectoring of the clerical controversialists, the waverers still found that the aspects of religious faith which they regarded as changeable had a tendency to be battered into politically articulated forms and that their changes of religion tended to be subject to the quasi-political discipline of polemical ideas. If, as all the handbooks of practical religion told them, the pursuit of true faith meant a personal experience and outward effectual signification of conversion and repentance, this had to be given formal expression through the liturgy and sacraments of a true and particular institutional Church. This outward profession of conversion was vulnerable to a politicising of religion, even to the extent of virtually identifying either the Church of Rome or the Church of England with the practice of true religion. Still, conversion extended beyond mere allegiance to institutional Churches, and, so chapter 4 argues, changes of religion to and from Rome did not occur along a simple spectrum of obedience, at one end an acknowledgement of papal primacy, at the other a genuflection to a royal one. The second half of the book unravels contemporary attitudes towards practical proselytisation. The major player was the State which could not ignore the fact that people's innermost religious beliefs were in some ways connected with their political obedience. But how far could the State demand that people resolve the tension between religion and politics so as to conform according to law? Failure to enforce conformity was surely the result of inherent structural weaknesses in the early modern State rather than of any failure of nerve or intention on the part of the regime? But, chapters 5 and 6 contend, while the regime could quite effectively prevail upon individuals to conform very thoroughly, this was not the same as persuading all towards a profession of a single version of true religion. Tensions between the requirements of politicians and churchmen explain better than pure provincial localism or bungling officialdom the slow and uncertain spread of English Protestantism, or at least the ease with which its dispersal could be resisted. Chapter 7 suggests that the clerics on both sides who used their rhetorical gifts to influence potential converts did not always think just to instil a politico-ecclesiastical obedience in new proselytes. Instead they experimented with conversion in a way which transcended

politico-ecclesiastical boundaries. This approach to conversion, it is suggested, will perhaps alter the way we discuss Catholicism and Protestantism, and the nature, speed and success of the Reformation in England.

Initially there is bound to be a suspicion that what was said in polemic was simply the concern of a small professional clerical elite – an in-house debate which was completely alien to those without an extensive background reading in patristic literature and scholastic texts as well as a solid understanding of the forms of rhetorical and logical argument. John Aveling suggested that even the most basic exposition of Catholic objections to Protestant doctrines of grace, and the crudest invocation of the names of early Church heresies with which to characterise those doctrines, were far too complex for the average reader.¹ The modern historian wonders how dramatic these books would have appeared even to a theologically literate person. They seem turgid and it is hard to believe that their reasoning could have been thought decisive. To every polemical argument there is an equally good counter-argument. For every 'clear' proof for a particular doctrine from a patristic text, every opponent is able quite easily to bring a diametrically opposed citation, frequently from the same patristic work, often from the same chapter. As William Barlow said (citing Ecclesiastes 12: 12), 'There is no End of making many books . . . especially if they be Bookes of Encounter.'² John Brekeley wrote in one of his prefaces that he published 'not from any great hope to perswade', and others like Humphrey Leech doubted the power of the written word compared with spoken disputation.³ The speed with which some tracts were assembled suggests that their writers were offering merely standard responses to equally standard assertions.⁴

Yet polemic was more suited to persuasion than this and had a wider audience than clerics and scholars. Controversial books were not published just to reinforce the morale of the writers' co-religionists (though there was evidently a purpose in some of them to prevent waverers falling away). They were designed to be widely available, immediately comprehensible and were

¹ J. C. H. Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York 1558-1791* (CRS monograph 2, 1970), 74; J. C. H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (1976), 51; cf. more generally, George Gifford, *A Dialogue betwene a Papist and a Protestant* (1599), sig. A2; D. Nugent, *Ecumenism in the Age of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974), 32.

² William Barlow, *An Answer to a Catholike English-Man* (1609), 1.

³ John Brekeley (vere James Anderton), *Sainct Austines Religion* (n.p., 1620), sig. C; Humphrey Leech, *A Triumph of Truth* (Douai, 1609), sig. f3r.

⁴ John White, *A Defence of the Way to the True Church* (1614), sig. **6r, says that this massive work was completed only eighteen months after he received John Percy's *Reply made unto Mr. Anthony Wotton and Mr. John White* (St Omer, 1612) to which it is a reply. Aveling argues that the use of texts was dominated by the keeping of 'indexed commonplace books of quotations', and a highly uncritical approach, J. C. H. Aveling, 'The English Clergy, Catholic and Protestant, in the 16th and 17th Centuries', in J. C. H. Aveling, D. M. Loades, H. R. McAadoo and W. Haase, *Rome and the Anglicans* (Berlin, 1982), 131.

Conversion and polemical theology

On what grounds did people change religion? Conversion to and from Rome was discussed almost exclusively in doctrinal and, indeed, polemical terms. Few were so cynical as to suggest that a man's beliefs should automatically follow his best temporal interests. To change religion a man needed to persuade himself (or be persuaded by others) that one or other side could claim to be in some sense the true religion. Contemporaries could not, apparently, envisage such truth except in the phraseology of the sharp doctrinal oppositions with which they filled their books of polemical theology. Conversion, we are frequently told, came through a decision that the side previously favoured had lost its doctrinal charms under the scrutiny of rival polemicists. Common sense, therefore, might suggest to us that contemporary books of controversial theology are the first place we should look to establish a model of religious flux. Trite and opinionated as they seem outside the context of contemporary disputes, they nevertheless set out with absolute and bigoted clarity the reasons for belonging to one side or the other. The whole course of the Reformation, readers were told, could be understood by referring to the diametrically opposed Roman and Protestant doctrines of faith, assurance, perseverance, election and predestination, and the Church, underwritten by disagreement about the relative weight of authority in Scripture and the Church's tradition. There were many other motives to consider one's allegiance, but all ultimately turned on the question of who professed the true religion, the only certain path to salvation.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the arguments put forward polemically for changing religion and to indicate the potential and also the limitations of controversial theology in this sphere. The writers claimed that truth could be grasped in its entirety through their swift and mechanistic tractate summaries of the deepest puzzles of Christian soteriology, but did polemic really provide an adequate basis on which to change religion? Did it summarise, for contemporaries, the complex siren calls of antagonistic ecclesiastical structures?

meant to tap into established forms of persuasion and argument. Some of the tracts produced by clerical writers dealt with straight political questions (though with reference to religion): allegiance, resistance, the succession and so on. Their significance was obvious. They could not be ignored except by those who had no interest in politics at all. But the production of straight theological vernacular tracts in quite considerable numbers indicates that a sufficiently wide audience did exist to create a market for them as well.⁵ Even if each individual reader was not passionately concerned with the finer points of exegesis, the theological doctrines in the tracts were politicised and thus attracted the attention of people who otherwise might have been little interested by them.⁶ The theological basis for papal primacy was of more than academic concern when the views of Catholics about the papal deposing power were dangerously vague.⁷ Furious arguments about the interpretation of Augustine ensued when Catholic laymen imprisoned in York Castle were forced in 1599–1600 to listen to a series of puritan sermons preached for their benefit.⁸ John Good, MP for Camelford in James I's first parliament, resorted to Augustine's complete works to sort out religious doubts (prompted in part by a political row in the House of Commons over his opposition to prominent puritans there).⁹ Barbara Donagan has shown that dispute in this period based on patristic citations was quite within laymen's capacity, though they might find clerical dialectical disquisition on it boring.¹⁰ Richard Woodcock complained that

⁵ J. Ellul, *Propaganda* (New York, 1969), 49, argues that propaganda is effective (and, therefore, marketable) only when it is aimed first at a collective prior 'center of interest'. Cf. J. Solé, *Le Débat entre Protestants et Catholiques Français de 1598 à 1685* (4 vols., Lille, 1985), I, 153.

⁶ Cf. Solé, *Débat*, I, 145–6; William Allen, *An Apologie and True Declaration of the Institution and Endevours of the two English Colleges* (Rheims, 1581), fo. 27v: 'even the very severitie of the lawes made against the Catholikes . . . and the popular pulpit-mens perpetual balling . . . against the Pope, caused many one that otherwise should never have heard or thought of him, to enquire what the Pope is' and consequently they saw 'that there lay some great moment in these causes of religion'.

⁷ For the patristic debate about primacy at the trial of John Bodley and John Slade, J. H. Pollen, *Acts of English Martyrs* (1891), 51–2.

⁸ BL, Add. MS 34250, fo. 6^v.

⁹ BL, Lansd. MS 776, fos. 13^v, 33^v. Good had been to university but only to do the arts course, J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1500–1714* (4 vols., 1891–2), II, 581.

¹⁰ B. Donagan, 'The York House Conference Revisited: Laymen, Calvinism and Arminianism', *HR* 64 (1991), 312–30, at pp. 317–18; William Stillington, in York Castle, told Sir Thomas Cecil that he was unlearned and not able 'Logically to dispute . . . Controversies' yet he was able to 'allege authorities both of Scriptures and doctours for the chiefe poyntes of our Faith', BL, Add. MS 34250, fo. 63^v. Lay people as well as clerics used tracts to proselytise, M. O'Dwyer, 'Catholic Recusants in Essex c.1580 to c.1600' (MA thesis, London, 1960), 47; PRO, SP 12/192/52.i; BL, Lansd. MS 50, no. 76; cf. PRO, SP 12/193/18, fo. 30^v; AAW, Anglia IX, no. 68; John Swynnerton, *A Christian Love-Letter* (1606), sig. B; CRS 54, 233.

'every child and audacious woman' among the papists presumed 'to speake Fathers and Doctors'.¹¹

The writers were sensitive to the requirements, tastes and aptitudes of readers. They tried to adapt the length and format of their works to attract non-specialists. For example, some abandoned the standard lengthy lists of patristic authorities and took instead the shorter route of citing as proofs for their own opinions the texts of their opponents (or those who could be regarded as adherents of the opponents' side).¹² The long-running polemical debates between English Catholics and Protestants in the 1560s, fired by John Jewel's challenge issued at Paul's Cross on 26 November 1559, were exceptionally unwieldy and tedious (mainly because the protagonists thought it necessary to reply on every controverted point), but this style was not universally maintained.¹³ Outside of the individual duels between clerics like William Perkins and William Bishop, or John Percy, Anthony Wotton and John White, some controversial writers distilled their persuasions by reducing the disputed issues into essential summaries, manuals of controversies which lay out in short but numerous sections the differences between Catholics and Protestants.¹⁴

¹¹ Richard Woodcock, *A Godly and Learned Answer* (1608), sig. A3^r.

¹² Controversialists have always manipulated the ambiguities and contradictions among the statements of their enemies, but some of the polemicists in this period, especially Thomas Bell, John White, John Brekeley, Richard Broughton and George Fisher, employed this technique systematically, Thomas Bell, *Thomas Bels Motives* (Cambridge, 1593), sig. ¶2: God, said Bell, inclined his heart to 'peruse more seriously, some learned papists'; this was the basis on which he then wrote his polemic, BL, Lansd. MS 75, fo. 40^v; John White, *The Way to the True Church* (1616), sig. c8^v; John Brekeley (vere James Anderton), *The Apologie of the Romane Church* (n.p., 1604); *idem*, *The Protestants Apologie for the Roman Church* (St Omer, 1608); cf. William Wright, *A Treatise of the Church* (St Omer, 1616), 45, which cites *The Protestants Apologie* as if it were a Protestant book; Richard Broughton, *The First Part of Protestants Proofes* (n.p., 1607); *idem*, *Protestants Demonstrations* (Douai, 1615); *idem*, *A Booke Intituled: The English Protestants Recantation* (Douai, 1617); George Fisher, *The Bishop of London his Legacy* (St Omer, 1623), viii, says 'the acknowledgments of Protestants in poynts controverted, prevent, that we need not to recurre (through a long and wearisome enquiry) to Scriptures, Fathers, or Histories'. Richard Versteegan also contemplated writing in this style, CRS 52, 142. Cf. A. Milton, *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, 1995), 233.

¹³ M. C. Questier, 'The Phenomenon of Conversion: Change of Religion to and from Catholicism in England, 1580–1625' (DPhil. thesis, Sussex, 1991), 41–2.

¹⁴ For Catholic instances, Richard Smith, *The Prudentiall Ballance of Religion* (St Omer, 1609); Anthony Champney, *A Manual of Controversies* (Paris, 1614); cf. AAW, A XIII, 489; Edward Weston, *The Trial of Christian Truth* (Douai, 1614); C. W., *A Summarie of Controversies* (n.p., 1616); James Gordon, *A Summary of Controversies* (n.p., 1618); John Pickford, *The Safegarde from Ship-wracke* (Douai, 1618); Richard Smith, *A Conference of the Catholike and Protestant Doctrine with the Expresse words of Holie Scripture* (Douai, 1631). Longer tracts like Thomas Worthington, *An Anker of Christian Doctrine* (Douai, 1622) or Lawrence Anderton, *The Triple Cord* (St Omer, 1634) are more akin to reference works than manuals but fulfil a similar function. William Perkins's *A Reformed Catholike* (Cambridge, 1598) has a 'manual' form, and in 1612 one of the functions of the

Although Barbara Donagan suggests that what laymen could not take was argument about argument (i.e. subjection to the science of scholastic reasoning),¹⁵ polemicists thought that, in reasonably simplified form, techniques of logical argument were an aid to persuasion. William Fulke said that 'the truth of argumentes is best discerned when it is brought into the judgement of Logicke', and Anthony Wotton provided short guides to syllogistic disputation in the texts of his polemical tracts.¹⁶ John Percy's popular and effective tracts relied heavily on techniques of syllogistic debate. When Percy engaged in somewhat rowdy semi-public disputations with Protestant clerics the debate proceeded according to 'logic-form'.¹⁷ 'Logic-form' was simply an effort to regulate and schematise the way in which the mind was thought to contend over any disputed polemical point.¹⁸ Syllogistic or not, several tracts were the product of actual confrontations between belligerent Catholics and clerics of the established Church. They did not originate exclusively in ivory towers.¹⁹ There was a clear connection

English writers at the newly founded Collège d'Arras in Paris (several of whom wrote the above-cited works) was to produce 'a breife and pithye Enchyridion of Controversies like to that of Parkins', AAW, OB III. ii, fo. 430^v; cf. Queen's College MS 284, fo. 206^v, for Sir John Warner's choice of reading in the early 1660s to resolve his intellectual difficulties. John Morgan argues that a like simplification of abstruse points of divinity was performed by godly preachers in English pulpits, J. Morgan, *Godly Learning* (Cambridge, 1986), 128-9, 135. Thomas Worthington thought it was possible to cut down the verbiage by attacking only the first part of an opponent's work 'seeing that divers authours do commonly fortify and strengthen the first part of their wraytings, with more forcible proofes and authorities then the latter part' in order to 'invade the judgment of the reader' more quickly, because 'many do peruse the beginnings of bookes, who through a wiserome carelesnes do never reade the latter parte of them' (Thomas Worthington, *Whyte Dyed Black* (n.p., 1615), epistle dedicatory, sig. A6^v-7^r), even though Worthington's instances of John White's 'impertinences' seem to be drawn from all parts of White's *The Way to the True Church*. Francis Bunny also thought long treatises were unlikely to be read, Francis Bunny, *A Short Answer to the Reasons* (1595), published with his *Truth and Falshood* (1595), sig. Cc^v.

¹⁵ Donagan, 'York House Conference', 318; cf. Quirinus Breen, 'John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition', *Church History* 26 (1957), 3-21, at p. 14.

¹⁶ William Fulke, *A Retentive, to stay good Christians, in true Faith and Religion, against the Motives of Richard Bristow* (1580), sig. ¶iii; Anthony Wotton, *A Trial of the Romish Clergies Title to the Church* (1608), sig. A3^v-4^r; cf. *idem*, *Runne from Rome* (1624), 2-4, 6; cf. *Keepe your Text* (n.p., 1619), 4-5, 6-7.

¹⁷ Daniel Featley, *The Fisher Caught in his owne Net* (1623); BL, Add. MS 28640, fo. 113^r; Sylvester Norris, *A True Report of the Private Colloquy betweene M. Smith, alias Norrice, and M. Walker* (St Omer, 1624); George Walker, *The Summe of a Disputation* (1624), sigs. A3^r, C2^v-3^r; cf. *idem*, *Fishers Folly Unfolded* (1624).

¹⁸ L. S. Stebbing, *A Modern Introduction to Logic* (New York, 1961), 84. Ramist logic was arguably an attempt to construct a system which reflected the 'basic structures of human rationality', P. Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982), 101.

¹⁹ Robert Crowley, *An Answer to sixe Reasons, that Thomas Pownde . . . required to be answered* (1581), sig. Aii; Woodcock, *Godly and Learned Answer*, sig. A3^r; G. Ormsby (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Cosin* (2 vols., Surtees Society, 52, 55, 1869, 1872), I,

between printed tracts and the type of arguments which were employed when individual proselytisers tried to draw people to profess the religion of one Church or the other. John Percy's published works were derived from manuscript tracts written for precisely this purpose.²⁰ Even at a less intellectually refined level, for example when Protestant preachers castigated the catch-all of popery, the doctrines which they thought contributed to the more general and everyday popish sins of lust, idolatry and epicureanism were essentially the same as the doctrinal errors analysed by the higher-flown tract literature - papal primacy, implicit faith, transubstantiation, auricular popish confession and so on.

Contemporaries were in no doubt therefore that tracts really did exert persuasion to change religion. If writers were unwilling to allow that their enemies' books changed men's minds through any intrinsic virtue in their arguments they still conceded that leaving a tract unanswered was as good as admitting defeat.²¹ They believed that defections from their own side would occur if opponents' major works went without a reply. Bishop Tobias Mathew in 1597 called for a prohibition of the circulation of 'up-market' Catholic books which had no official Protestant answer attached to them: 'it is incredible what decay the contrary custom hath bred in religion'.²² William Bedell observed morosely in March 1605 that Robert Persons's massive reply to John Foxe, *A Treatise of the Three Conversions of England*, went unanswered.²³ Richard Woodcock wrote that even the delay in copying out his manuscript reply to a papist who had challenged him allowed his opponent to brag that the reasons for the truth of the

²⁰ 32-3. See also the genesis of Richard Bristow, *A Briefe Treatise of diverse plaine and sure Wayes to finde out the Truthe* (Antwerp, 1574), and *idem*, *Demaundes to bee proponed of Catholickes to the Heretickes* (Antwerp, 1576), William Fulke, *Two Treatises* (1577), sig. *iii^v-4^r.

²¹ White, *Way*, sig. d7^v: the copy of Percy's *Treatise of Faith* (n.p., 1605) which White answered was a manuscript one, and the basis of White's reply was the arguments which he had already used in refuting it verbally; cf. BL, Harl. MS 360, fo. 29^r. See also T. H. Wadkins, 'The Percy-"Fisher" Controversies and the Ecclesiastical Politics of Jacobean Anti-Catholicism, 1622-1625', *Church History* 57 (1988), 153-69, at p. 156; Questier, 'Phenomenon', 37-8, 71-2, 299.

²² Robert Persons, *The First Booke of the Christian Exercise* (Rouen, 1582), 2; CRS 52, 86. When William Stillington in York Castle found that he could not adequately answer the points made by Alexander Cooke in his sermon there in early 1600 (and was taunted on this ground by Sir Thomas Cecil), he obtained a copy of the sermon and sent it out of the prison to 'gett [it] answered', BL, Add. MS 34250, fo. 25^r.

²³ HMC Salisbury MSS VII, 453 (for which reference I am grateful to Anthony Milton). Bishop Curtesy had shown a similar concern in 1577. W. P. M. Kennedy (ed.), *Elizabethan Episcopal Administration* (3 vols., Alcuin Club, 25-7, 1924), II, 51. John Dove said, however, that recusant Catholics were 'contented to give more money for the Rhemish Testament alone, then for the same booke with Doctor Fulkes answer joyned with it', John Dove, *A Perswasion to the English Recusants* (1603), 7.

²⁴ Bodl., Tanner MS 75, fo. 132^{r-v}.

Roman Catholic religion which he had delivered to Woodcock 'could not be answered'.²⁴ Equally the writers said that if their own books were allowed to stand unchallenged this was a polemical victory irrespective of the book's subject matter.²⁵ Thomas Bell claimed that the papists' 'silence in not answering my . . . bookes, hath reclaimed many a man from their popish faction'.²⁶ A frenzy of reply and counter-reply developed in the debate over the Jacobean oath of allegiance, and Catholic clergy in England pleaded with their agent in Rome to ensure that adequate replies were solicited from Bellarmine to the English defenders of the oath.²⁷ Both sides thought that ideally there should be a systematic answering machine to deal with their opponents' tracts. Chelsea College and the Collège d'Arras in Paris were set up for this reason.²⁸

This account of polemic as persuader could still leave us thinking that the books were nothing more than a series of political slogans. On this reading the labels 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' were mere party tags. Changes of religion, justified by passing references to the latest polemical text, would have had no necessary connection with religion at all. But though the theology was politicised in a way which was utterly alien to non-partisan exegesis, a closer reading of what polemicists said shows that the theology of polemical debate is not merely for show. Polemic politicises theological ideas in order to represent a division into parties between which the reader *must* choose. The writer thus exerts a persuasive effect on the reader which is not derived purely from the writer's philosophical acumen. (Though, as Donagan indicates, argument about 'consequents' and 'antecedents' might well fatigue the layman, the level of logical sophistication in the polemical tracts was relatively low.)²⁹ Syllogistic reasoning deals in the comparison of

²⁴ Woodcock, *Godly and Learned Answer*, sig. A3r. For similar cases, Crowley, *Answer*, sig. Aiii; Robert Abbot, *A Mirror of Popish Subtilties* (1594), sig. *v.

²⁵ F. Edwards (ed.), *The Elizabethan Jesuits* (1981), 308-9. Walter Montagu pointed out that there had never been a Protestant answer to the book on which he based his conversion, Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fo. 166v.

²⁶ Thomas Bell, *The Downefall of Poperie* (1604), sig. Aiv. John Copley said that one of his relatives had promised to become a Catholic if he could see Perkins's *Reformed Catholike* 'well answered and confuted', John Copley, *Doctrinall and Morall Observations* (1612), 19-20.

²⁷ AA v, A IX, 395, X, 486 (John Jackson's message to the secular clergy's agent in Rome that answers are expected by the English Catholics to Lancelot Andrewes's *Tortura Torti* (1609) and Thomas Preston's *Apologia Cardinalis Bellarmini* (1611), 'or els it wyll . . . leave diverse staggering at the least'); TD IV, clxxiii.

²⁸ PRO, SP 14/54/91, fos. 134r-5r; SP 14/36/8; CRS 41, 52; Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 32-4; A. C. F. Beales, *Education under Penalty* (1963), 191-2.

²⁹ Donagan, 'York House Conference', 318. There is a general tendency to resort merely to accusations of the logical fallacy *petitio principii* (begging the question), engendering a perpetual redefinition of terms, Featley, *Fisher*, 14; O. N., *An Apology of English Arminianisme* (St Omer, 1634), 41; Stebbing, *Modern Introduction*, 216, 219. The

propositions rather than their substance; logical proof depends on first principles but cannot itself prove them.³⁰ Though writers were unlikely to persuade the reader just because they alleged proofs in a more scholarly way than their opponents, what polemicists did with the theological propositions at their disposal was crucial.

Of course, Catholic and Protestant polemicists did not try to bring over the hostile reader by attempts to present an impartial or even a particularly deep or sophisticated opinion about matters in dispute. Pure academic discussion might allow a reader to think that right was not all on one side. So they manipulated the doctrines which they dealt with in the text in order to construct a case which was strategically even if not academically superior to their opponents'. If done carefully this could leave the opponent in difficulties when he made his (perhaps doctrinally quite satisfactory) reply. Academic sophistication did not necessarily add bite to a polemical attack. Certainly the mere bringing in of increasingly heavy weights of citations was unlikely to offer the basis for any final decision by the undecided reader. Nor was the endless enumeration of individual doctrines sufficient to persuade. To argue about hundreds of specific single issues (e.g. the Real Presence in the eucharist) was tedious and, as far as one can tell, often fruitless. What was really required was to establish a general way of thinking about controverted polemical questions to which the reader might refer the various disputed elements which he subsequently encountered. As Thomas Clarke wrote, 'every error and controversie doth minister sufficient matter for . . . many sermons'; what is required is a rule of faith, a politicising of doctrine, which will govern attitudes to all questions in dispute.³¹ This was the principal drawback of the massive 'Challenge' controversy in the 1560s and 1570s. Some Catholics at the time thought it was a success and, later on, both Protestants and Catholics still believed the major tracts produced as a result of Jewel's challenge could induce changes of religion.³² But

sterility of the exchanges between John Percy, Sylvester Norris and their various Protestant adversaries in London in the early 1620s demonstrates that a resort to 'logic-form', on its own, was no guarantee of effective debate, Featley, *Fisher*, 8, 15; Norris, *True Report*; Walker, *Summe*, sigs. E-v, C2v-3r; and *passim*; *idem*, *Fishers Folly*, 9-10; Questier, 'Phenomenon', 38-9.

³⁰ J. H. Newman, ed. I. T. Ker, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Oxford, 1985), xvii-xviii.

³¹ Thomas Clarke, *The Recantation of Thomas Clarke* (1594), sig. A3v, A6v-7r.

³² Edmund Campion, *Campion Englished: Or a Translation of the Ten Reasons* (n.p., 1632), 106-7; Robert Persons, ed. E. Gee, *The Jesuit's Memorial, for the Intended Reformation of England* (1690), 41; R. Peters, 'Some Catholic Opinions of King James VI and I', RH 10 (1968-9), 292-303, at p. 294; Francis Walsingham, *A Search Made into Matters of Religion* (St Omer, 1609), 50, 128, 195, 234-5; Smith, *Life*, I, 90, 417; CRS 54, 202; K. C. Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, I (Church of England Record Society, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1994), 96-7; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fo. 16;

though the 'Challenge' appealed to a standard topic (the perennial question of the connection between Scripture and tradition in deciding how to interpret Scripture authoritatively) it was a flawed debate because it persistently degenerated into rival claims about who could interpret the Early Church writers more accurately. The 'Challenge' works are more like the proceedings of an exegetes' convention than the record of the political claims of two opposed ecclesiastical titans.³³

Post-'Challenge' polemicists tried to frame their use of controversial theology so that it would change the opinion and allegiance of an initially hostile reader. Basically, the more astute writers in this period worked in the same way when they attacked the theology of the opposing side. First, they wilfully attributed to opponents definitions of concepts held in common (e.g. faith, assurance, perseverance and so on) which those opponents did not accept. They then proceeded to attack their enemies' doctrinal statements (e.g. about the place of faith, assurance and perseverance in the process of justification) as if they did accept such definitions.³⁴ Thus it made them seem inconsistent, untrustworthy and mendacious. To be persuasive, however, a polemical writer had to do slightly more than this (since his enemy would always retaliate in an identical fashion and produce a mirror

John Harding, *A Recantation Sermon* (1620), 4. Richard Cholmeley was purchasing books by the 'Challenge' writers Thomas Dorman and Thomas Heskins as late as January 1618, 'The Memorandum Book of Richard Cholmeley of Brandsby 1602-1623', *North Yorkshire County Record Office Publications* 44 (1988), 151.

³³ The Catholic writers staked everything on the inextricable linking of Scripture to tradition which was not a crucial or necessary element of exegesis for Protestants anyway, Walsingham, *Search* (1609), 168, 197, 430; Francis Savage, *A Conference betwixt a Mother a devout Recusant, and her Sonne a zealous Protestant* (Cambridge, 1600), 15. Catholic and Protestant 'rules' for determining the Fathers' authority were almost identical, cf. John Strype, *The Life and Acts of John Whitgift* (3 vols., Oxford, 1822), I, 197-8; Daniel Featley, *Cygnæ Cantio* (1629), 30-2; Hugh-Paulin de Cressy, *Exomologesis* (Paris, 1653), 69; A. H. Mathew (ed.), *A True Historical Relation of the Conversion of Sir Tobie Matthew* (1904), 28. But it was inevitable that the Protestant concept of scriptural primacy should relegate the importance of the Church Fathers, J. E. Booty, *John Jewel as Apologist of the Church of England* (1963), 137-41; P. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (1965), 33; P. Collinson, *A Mirror of Elizabethan Puritanism: The Life and Letters of 'Godly Master Dering'*, Friends of Dr Williams's Library Seventeenth Lecture 1963 (1964), 5. The logical conclusion of Protestant polemic in this vein was that the Fathers had frequently been in error and were no reliable authority at all, Thomas Bell, *The Golden Ballance of Tryall* (1603), fo. 1^v; White, *Way*, 325, 327; cf. George Webbe, *Catalogus Protestantium* (1624), sigs. 12^v (arguing that even if manifest corruptions did not openly appear in the first 600 years, the 'Mysterie of Iniquitie', an entire principle of corruption, was at work in the Church during that time), K3^v; cf. at the extreme, John Kelbridge, *Two Godlie and learned Sermons* (1581), sig. Hiv, 'the Fathers have bene faithlesse, and have sinned: the Scriptures are sacred, and no filthinesse hath bene found in them'; cf. M. Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons 1534-1642* (Toronto, 1958), 215.

³⁴ Thus Matthew Kellison, *A Survey of the New Religion* (Douai, 1605), 276-7, attacks a parody of the Protestant concept of assurance by assuming that Calvin held a Roman doctrine of faith.

image of any hostile tract). If the first rule of polemic is that the issue in dispute must be one of central importance (which, arguably, much of the 'Challenge' debate was not), the second is that the writer should make central an issue which his enemy has no wish to use (because it creates dissension in his own ranks).³⁵ Sir Dudley Carleton wrote from Venice in April 1614 to his cousin George Carleton. He had received the latter's *Consensus Ecclesiae Catholicae contra Tridentinos* which was naturally of interest to the anti-papal Venetians. But said Dudley Carleton, 'to deale playnely with you, all men heer do not so well allow of your providence in some poyntes, as of your ingenuitie in all'. In some things George Carleton had taken a line which, though not doctrinally wrong, was polemically inconvenient. Catholic controversial writing constantly emphasised the authority of traditions within the Church. George Carleton was curiously informed that 'you allow of some traditions, whereof your self discover the danger, in that you doe "*fenestram aperire Pontifici figmentis*", but you shew no meanes how to shut this window agayne, and therefore we were best content our selves with the light we have from the sufficiency of the scriptures'.³⁶ It was necessary for a writer to locate an issue on which he and his opponents were utterly divided but on which his opponents found it difficult to agree among themselves so that they could not produce so easily a coherent equal and opposite reply to what he had said. At the York House Conference Lord Say and Sele warned that Richard Montagu's prevarications would allow the papists to 'take advantage against us out of his wordes' while Hugh Paulin de Cressy said that Romanist disputes afforded 'answers and objections to Protestants against Catholics'.³⁷ In consequence good polemicists tried to concentrate on areas where they saw their opponents divided on matters of principle and denied that apparent divisions over doctrine in their own ranks were fundamental.³⁸

³⁵ Catholics concentrated on Protestant opinions over Christ's descent into Hell because it was an article of the Creed which was variously interpreted by Protestants, D. D. Wallace, 'Puritan and Anglican: The Interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell in Elizabethan Theology', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978), 248-86; Bodl., Rawl. MS C 167, fos. 17^v-23^v; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fo. 38^r.

³⁶ PRO, SP 14/779, fo. 14^r.

³⁷ Bodl., Tanner MS 303, fo. 36^v; Cressy, *Exomologesis*, 72.

³⁸ William Rainolds, *A Refutation of Sundry Reprehensions* (Paris, 1583), sig. b3^v, b4^r, b6^v, b8^v-e^v; Wotton, *Trial*, 317-19; Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc7^v-8^r; Richard Sheldon, *The First Sermon of R. Sheldon Priest, after his Conversion from the Romish Church* (1612), 62; for concentration on Bellarmine as an anti-papist, Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc5^v-; Francis Dillingham, *A Dissuasive from Poperie* (Cambridge, 1599), sig. A5^v-; Thomas Bell, *A Christian Dialogue* (1609), 102; Joseph Hall, *The Works of Joseph Hall* (1634), 296; White, *Way*, 155, 169, arguing that all papists disagreed with each other at all times; cf. Thomas Morton, *A Catholike Appeale* (1609), 209-10. Robert Persons, *The Warr-word* (Antwerp, 1602), fos. 51^v, 57^v, 96^v-98^r, pointed to differences between Sir Francis Hastings and Matthew Sutcliffe over puritanism, an issue in which Catholics saw promising

Finally, to persuade his audience that his Church has a monopoly of truth, the polemical writer must frame his argument around the selected topic so that it reflects on and directs all polemical argument generally, and avoids the 'single-issue' nature of the 'Challenge', and the need to commence argument *ab initio* on every single disputed point. Doctrine must be subjected to a quasi-political form of discipline. In the conclusion of his tract against Marc'Antonio de Dominis, John Sweet considered (in a passage sufficiently significant to be worth quoting in full) the principal ways to convince a reader of the truth of the Roman religion:

Such reasons as may induce a man to be of any Religion, are of two sorts. For either they prove every point of Religion in particular to be true, or else they open, and declare the evidence of certaine generall principles, which being once received, draw after them the consent of the mind to all those things in speciall, which are taught or practised in that Religion. Unto the first kind do belong all those books, which treat of particular Controversyes, as of the Masse; of prayer for the dead; of prayer to Saints; Purgatory; and the like, which indeed to a man that hath but little will, or little leisure to read, is a wearisome course, and tedious way to tryall. Unto the other doth belong those shorter discourses which some have termed motives,

i.e. which constitute a general reason to change religion.³⁹ John Copley, in his tract describing his conversion, enumerated many motives for abjuring Rome, but the general motive to change which made them effectual could be traced to Christ and the effects of grace which led him to reject all Rome's

individual errors. He cites by way of analogy the phenomenon of the loadstone in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*: 'a Loadstone of so great power and efficacy, that it drew manie Rings unto it, which were one of them behinde the other, placed farre off asunder; first one, then that drew the other, the third the fourth, and so consequently all the rest, untill that at length by the secret vertue of the Stone, after an invisible manner adjoining the Rings together... [an]... entire Chaine was made of them'. In his case, Christ was the persuasive loadstone that worked to draw together in his mind the individual reasons or motives for leaving Rome (the Mass, transubstantiation, pardons, indulgences and clerical marriage) which his tract sets out.⁴⁰ This, then, might appear to be the way that polemic worked best to persuade people to change religion, and, indeed, the way that conversion between the Churches occurred in this period – through the polemical clarification of disputed doctrinal issues.

THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY POLEMIC

If we accept that the source of virtually all Reformation doctrinal controversy was a disagreement about the way that grace was allotted to men before time and is afterwards distributed in the world, then the polemic which most nearly expressed this in such a way as to indicate that grace is found exclusively in the polemicist's own concept of the true Church was likely to be the most direct and effective. If polemic were written convincingly along these lines, then all other controversial endeavour would become merely automatic and supplementary. The theological definition of the Church became the single most important authority to which doctrinal disagreement could be referred. Furious arguments about the true Church were accompanied by polemic about obedience to an ecclesiastical structure which faithfully represented it. All demands in controversial theology that people should change from one side to the other stand or fall ultimately by an exposition of the Church. So English polemicists (particularly after c. 1575) discoursed hard about the nature of the Church and its authority.⁴¹

All controversial writers acknowledged that the true Church had a series of distinguishing characteristics. In some sense it could be said to be not just one, holy, catholic and apostolic but also visible, infallible, universal and so

⁴⁰ Copley, *Doctrinal and Morall Observations*, 232–3; *De Civitate Dei* xxii, 4, CCSL, XLVIII, 763; cf. Bunney, *Truth*, sig. Ee7r.

⁴¹ This was something which the 'Challenge' writers had omitted to do. Not that they necessarily held opinions about the Church which were different from those of later writers, but they did not make them explicit in their polemic. Booty, *John Jewel*, 134–5.

Protestant divisions, CRS 52, 134 (Verstegan's comments on the appearance of Richard Bancroft's *Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline*). Francis Walsingham played on the differences over attitudes to the Church of Rome among moderate and puritan Protestants, Walsingham, *Search* (1609), 39–40; see also Leech, *Triumph*, 89–90. French polemicists employed the same tactic. Solé, *Débat*, I, 440. Protestants had a target to aim at in the way that some Catholic polemicists, notably Stapleton, handled theories of faith, Daniel Price, *The Defence of Truth* (Oxford, 1610), 22; White, *Way*, 27, 41; G. H. Tvard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church* (1959), 5, 25; A. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987), 140–1; and more obviously over the papal deposing power, as demonstrated by the disputes between Persons and Richard Smith over Smith's book, *An Answer to Thomas Bels late Challeng* (Douai, 1605), CRS 41, 122–3, and in the general controversy over the Jacobean oath of allegiance. During the Appellant controversy, astute Protestant writers like Thomas Bell exploited the factional divisions among the Catholic clergy and gave them a doctrinal twist, Bell, *Christian Dialogue*, 6–7; *idem*, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie* (1603), 5, 19–20 (playing also on the fact that the Jesuit Thomas Lister had castigated the refractory secular priests as 'schismatics'); cf. Andrew Willet, *The Antilogie or Counterplea* (1603), 13–14; AAW, OB III. ii, fo. 338r; J. H. Pollen, *The Institution of the Archpriest Blackwell* (1916), 39–40; P. Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age* (1977), 111, 124–6.

³⁹ John Sweet, *Monsigr Fate Voi* (St Omer, 1617), 153. Other writers said the same, e.g. Bristow, *Briefe Treatise*, fo. 2r–v; *idem*, *A Reply to Fulke* (Louvain, 1580), sig. A; John Percy, *A Treatise of Faith* (St Omer, 1614), sig. A4r–v; Bunney, *Truth*, sig. Ee7r; Bodl., Jones MS 53, fo. 235r–v; cf. Barbarini's instructions to the legate Panzani, Joseph Berington (ed.), *The Memoirs of Gregorio Panzani* (Birmingham, 1793), 241.

on.⁴² But Catholics and Protestants understood in different ways the true Church which possessed these characteristics. What they tried to do was to express them so as to point the undecided man towards a particular expression of the true Church on earth. Roman Catholic polemic stressed heavily the connection between characteristics such as inerrancy in the true Church and in the institutional Church. (The lesson to be drawn from this was that the Protestant separation made them schismatics and worse.) Protestant polemic emphasised the potential weakness of this connection. Their assertion of jurisdictional independence therefore was not a schismatic act. It was always finally an argument about defining where the true Church is located and how its essence is transmitted through time. The French Protestant Philippe de Mornay was ready to acknowledge the marks attributed to the Church in Romanist polemic but 'the question', he said, 'is . . . of the puritie of the Church'. Antiquity, a characteristic frequently alleged by papists (because to establish the continuous existence of the Church of Rome, Catholics thought, demonstrated its inerrancy), is not a guarantee of the integrity of the institution even if it is proof for continuous succession.⁴³ This was the reason that Protestants stressed the force of Scripture against tradition. In Reformed thinking Scripture is a figure for pure doctrine, not a physical series of authoritative texts (though Roman polemicists always pretended not to understand this);⁴⁴ and tradition for Protestants is always a series of human accretions (separate from revelation). The visible Church, repository for those traditions, might go astray, but God's promises to his Elect, and their scripturally based redemptive faith, would not be affected.

So, in conformity with these rules of polemic, the writers set down a general motive to convert to their own Church by dwelling on the nature of the true Church. To persuade the hostile opponent or the uncommitted waverer that they might communicate with the true Church through one

rather than another particular expression of it on earth, the writers all constructed somewhat extreme models of the Church. Catholics appear to say that the outward continuous earthly structure of the institutional Church (by definition in communion with Rome because continuous) is necessarily coterminous with the true indefectible Church. Protestants, by contrast, appear to say that the outward structure of the institutional Church has a natural tendency towards total corruption (though they might differ about the extent and certainty of that tendency).⁴⁵ The logical conclusion of the Protestant polemical line of argument which wanted to associate hostility to Rome with the natural errancy of human institutions and particular Churches was to identify Rome with the apocalyptic Babylon in the book of Revelation.⁴⁶ Although Reformers might well think that institutional particular Churches had characteristics which they saw as belonging properly to the true Church, Protestants who wanted to argue for radical separation from Rome had to say that in principle there must exist the possibility of a total and complete division between these two concepts of the Church. On earth the true Church might exist only in the body of the Elect, the saving remnant. In this sense it would be so separate from the structures of the institutional Church that for all intents and purposes it might be said to be 'invisible'.⁴⁷

This difference of opinion over the nature of the Church informs many other arguments which were put forward by writers to discredit their opponents and to persuade people that they ought to change their religion. In particular, material was drawn from the area where Scripture was thought to be in conflict with tradition. The arguments over the authority of the early Church Fathers were not an early modern exercise in source criticism but a comment on the Church which guaranteed their veracity. The Catholic polemical tendency to imply that the Church precedes Scripture is simply another expression of the Roman understanding of the connection between the true Church and the visible Church.⁴⁸ When Protestants claim

⁴² A. Milton, 'The Church of England, Rome, and the True Church: The Demise of a Jacobean Consensus', in K. C. Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642* (1993), 187-210, at pp. 188-91 (my debt to Anthony Milton in the following paragraphs is obvious); Philip de Mornay, *A Notable Treatise of the Church* (1579), sigs. Evi^v, Dii^v; Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc6; Wotton, *Trial*, 259.

⁴³ Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sigs. Diii^{v-v}, Eii^{v-v}; Walker, *Summe*, sig. B2^v. John White argued that the four principal marks of the Church were 'Qualities abiding in the Church, and certaine adjuncts belonging thereunto: but [they are] not . . . the marks whereby to finde it', thus denying the significance which a Roman polemicist would want to foist upon them, White, *Way*, 135. George Abbot told puritans in the Goldsmiths' Company that their banner depicting St Dunstan was not superstitious because Dunstan was his predecessor and his values were much to be admired (AAW, A XI, 23), but he would not define the true Church by reference to succession, George Abbot, *The Reasons which Doctour Hill hath Brought* (Oxford, 1604), 35; cf. Savage, *Conference*, 71; Sutcliffe, *Examination*, 6.

⁴⁴ Humphrey Leech, *Dutifull and Respective Considerations* (St Omer, 1609), 84-8.

⁴⁵ Milton, 'Church', 190; Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sig. Dviii^{v-viii}.

⁴⁶ Richard Finch, *The Knowledge or Appearance of the Church* (1590), sig. B2^{v-v}; P. Lake, 'The Significance of the Elizabethan Identification of the Pope as Antichrist', *JEH* 31 (1980), 161-78.

⁴⁷ Some Protestants argued that, in practice, this had taken place when, before the Reformation, the Church had been obscured by the 'mists of Popery', Milton, 'Church', 189-91.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Carter, *A Copy of a Letter* (n.p., 1615), 4; Leech, *Dutifull and Respective Considerations*, 84, 106; Thomas Vane, *A Lost Sheep Returned Home* (Paris, 1649), 23-5. The same thinking lies behind the tendency in Catholic polemic to associate the infallible judgment residing in the papacy with the inerrancy of the true Church, Brerely, *Saint Austines Religion*, 39-40, 50; R. Dodaro and M. C. Questier, 'Strategies in Jacobean Polemic: The Use and Abuse of St Augustine in English Theological Controversy', *JEH* 44 (1993), 432-49, at pp. 444-5. To Protestants, Catholics appeared to associate the true Church with the Church's governors, Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sig. Miii^{v-iii}; Abbot, *Reasons*, 26.

that the Fathers cannot be trusted because they were frequently in error (and that Scripture entirely precedes tradition) it is not because, as Catholics alleged, they just rejected texts which seemed to affirm a line which they found distasteful. It was because any concession that patristic writings were an independent source of authority pointed to an infallibility in the institutional Church which must have therefore the power to decide which of the patristic texts are to be credited as expressing orthodox doctrine.⁴⁹ Argument over what Augustine thought was a dispute more about the nature of the Church than the integrity of his complete works. A Protestant like William Crompton who might speculate on the potential defectibility of the entire institutional Church could nevertheless base every single argument for it on Augustine.⁵⁰ Both sides were prepared to distort the meaning of the patristic and other sources on which they relied. (The writers probably consoled themselves with the thought that a more balanced exposition of their sources of authority would actually hinder the wavering reader from arriving at a final decision about which Church possessed a monopoly of truth.) On the question of the infallibility of the Church, for example, Catholics tended to misinterpret what Augustine had said in a different polemical context over key scriptural texts like Ephesians 4: 5 and 5: 27.⁵¹ The promising language in some of Augustine's works about persecution dimming the light of the Church allowed Protestants to claim that Augustine sets down 'in . . . manifest termes' that 'in the time of persecution the Church shall not appear' (because limited to the body of the Elect).⁵² This is not exactly what Augustine meant in his quarrels with the Donatists about the true Church.⁵³ Catholic polemic which argues from Augustine that the true Church cannot be other than continuously visible in its institutional form is also misleading.⁵⁴

To coax the non-aligned into an unambiguous profession of Romanism, Catholics said that scriptural and patristic sources showed that the true Church was continuously visible. For it to be continuously visible there must necessarily have been an unbroken succession of pastors from Christ to the present day. Only the Roman Church could point to a visible succession of such pastors and 'professors' of its doctrines in every age of the Church since

its foundation. Rome's teaching authority was therefore guaranteed not by its conformity to Scripture (a precarious point to argue with a Protestant) but by its continuous visibility.⁵⁵ Even patristic works are cited not because they themselves are authentic independent sources but because their content shows their writers to have been in conformity with the present Roman Church.⁵⁶

This was rapidly translated into a series of debating points which came to typify the Catholic polemic of this period. It was unnecessary, Catholics claimed, to enquire endlessly into the doctrinal veracity of what the Roman Church said. That would be an uncertain way to faith, quite impossible for the unlearned, and confusing even for the educated. All that was necessary for the undecided man was to determine a continuous institutional visible profession of the faith back to the foundation of the Church and then he could be secure in the knowledge that this was the true profession of the Christian religion.⁵⁷ The way to do this was to take the marks or characteristics which all agreed belonged to the true Church and test which of the competing institutional Churches could claim them.⁵⁸ This, in fact, was the application of the 'general motives' principle (enunciated by John Sweet to the problem of persuading people to accept Rome's authority. Instead of wracking one's brain over each element of doctrine (transubstantiation etc.) individually, the recognition of the true Church by its characteristics is the pathway to certainty about all doctrine. Thus Sweet writes 'for the Catholic party' such persuasions are 'seen in such as have handled the notes of the Church, in "Campian his ten Reasons", in . . . [Robert Persons's]

⁵⁵ Leech, *Dutifull and Respective Considerations*, 44-5.

⁵⁶ Theophilus Higsons, *The First Motive of T. H. Maister of Arts, and lately Minister, to suspect the Integrity of his Religion* (Douai, 1609), 25; Anthony Clarke, *The Defence of the Honor of God* (Paris (imprint false, printed secretly in England), 1621), chapter 3; Tobias Mathew jnr, *The Confessions* (St Omer, 1620), sig. a4r; Edward Weston, *The Repaire of Honour* (Bruges (imprint false, printed at St Omer), 1624), 11-14; Matthew Sutcliffe, *The Unmasking of a Masse-monger* (1626), sig. A2r, 39-40; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fos. 32v, 33v. Protestants argued that patristic writers were members of their Church, but they put a different polemical slant on the Church's visibility, Alexander Cooke, *Saint Austins Religion* (1625).

⁵⁷ John Percy, *A Catalogue of diuers visible Professors* (St Omer, 1614), sig. A2r; Robert Persons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions* (3 vols., n.p., 1603-4), I, 631; Walsingham, *Search* (1609), 481-2; Percy, *Reply*, 5; N. N., *An Epistle of a Catholike Young Gentleman* (Douai (imprint false, printed secretly in England), 1623), 14-32.

⁵⁸ Percy, *Treatise* (1614); *idem*, *Reply*; *idem*, *Catalogue*; P. Millward, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age* (1978), 216-27; William Wright, *A Discovery of Certain Notorious Shifts, Evasions, and Untruthes uttered by M. John White Minister* (St Omer, 1614); *idem*, *Treatise*; Worthington, *Whyte*; Clarke, *Defence*; Sylvester Norris, *The Guide of Faith* (St Omer, 1621); *idem*, *An Appendix to the Antidote* (St Omer, 1621); Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fos. 20-1r, 22r-v, Bodl., Jones MS 53, fos. 221v-2r; all following the line of argument in William Allen's 'articles' which emerged in print in Bristow's *Briefe Treatise and Demandes*.

⁴⁹ BL, Lansd. MS 776, fo. 39r; Finch, *Knowledge*, sig. Gv; the Church of Christ should accept only a perfect rule of faith 'in stead whereof Antichristes generation hath many bookes and rules, as holy decrees and decretals, fathers, counsels, holy doctors'; White, *Defence*, 285-6.

⁵⁰ William Crompton, *Saint Austins Summes* (1625); P. Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church, 1570-1635', *P&P* 114 (1987), 32-76, at pp. 62-3.

⁵¹ Brerley, *Saint Austins Religion*, 39-40; *Contra Cresconium* I, 28, 33, CSEL LII, 352; *ep. liv*, 5, CSEL XXXIV/2, 165; *De Baptismo* VII, 53, CSEL LI, 359.

⁵² Crompton, *Saint Austins Summes*, 59-60; Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sig. Bv-vi.

⁵³ Dodaro and Questier, 'Strategies', 443-4.

⁵⁴ Dodaro and Questier, 'Strategies', 442-3.

booke of the "Three Conversions of England", in [Richard] Bristow, and others'.⁵⁹ These Catholic polemicists had translated the speculative theological ideas about the integrity of the Church's structure into an affirmation of Roman authority. In the debate held in June 1623 between John Percy, John Sweet, Daniel Featley and Francis White in the house of Sir Humphrey Lynde, the subject for dispute was the central one of visibility and succession. As Percy and Featley were hammering out the finer points of visibility, Lynde (perhaps unaware of its significance) interrupted and said 'prove me but this one point out of Saint Augustine, namely, Transubstantiation . . . and I will promise you to go to Masse'. Sweet coldly cut him off with the words, 'that is not now to the question'. In a controversy about the Church, transubstantiation was a relatively trivial matter.⁶⁰

The Church's characteristics were not individual points for debate, though a polemicist sometimes selected a specific mark for polemical treatment. Evidence that the Roman Church possessed one such characteristic (in the Roman sense) was evidence that it possessed all.⁶¹ When Roman polemicists argued that the true Church must enjoy a continuous visible expression upon earth, contention about which ecclesiastical institutions could claim to represent the true Church developed into an argument about the general historical nature of the Church. Church history is frequently thought to have been exclusively the province of John Foxe and his demonstrations of an invisible Protestant Church of the Elect existing before the Reformation. But Catholics also translated polemic about the Church into historical discourse.⁶² Richard Smith wrote that 'the questions of Doctrine are innumerable, but the questions of Fact, few', and 'there are few questions of doctrine of that nature, that all other controversies of faith depend upon them; but the most questions of Fact are such, as if they be well decided, al other Controversies of religion are at an end'.⁶³ History allowed

⁵⁹ Sweet, *Monsigr Fate Voi*, 153-4.

⁶⁰ Featley, *Fisher*, 10.

⁶¹ Cf. Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc5r. Percy followed Bellarmine in his emphasis that '[only] two things are required in every sufficient mark; the first is, that it be not common to many, but proper, and only agreeing to the thing, wherof it is a marke'; and the second requirement is that 'it be more apparent, and easy to be knowne, then the thing [of which it is a mark]'. Percy, *Treatise* (1614), 74-5; see also Persons, *Treatise of Three Conversions*, I, 654; Sweet, *Monsigr Fate Voi*, 154. Romanist concentration on the marks of the Church seems to come partly from Gregory of Valentia and very heavily from Bellarmine's controversial writings, *Disputationes . . . de Controversiis Christianae Fidei, Adversus Huius Temporis Haereticos*, the purpose of which was to act as a manual for polemical engagement with Protestants, R. C. Bald, *John Donne* (Oxford, 1970), 69; Wotton, *Trial*, 221; Wadkins, 'Percy-"Fisher" Controversies', 156.

⁶² Weston, *Repaire*, 7-8.

⁶³ Richard Smith, *Of the Author and Substance of the Protestant Church and Religion* (St Omer, 1621), sig. *2; cf. Campion, *Campion Englished*, 117. This was an entirely different exercise from the historical source criticism of e.g. Protestant polemicists like John

Catholic writers to Romanise the past and to align Rome's continuous historical visibility with an unbroken doctrinal profession which was guaranteed by its continuity through all centuries as much as by its substance. Robert Persons's *Treatise of Three Conversions* Romanised the history of the English Church in reply to Protestant writers like John Bale, Matthew Parker and Foxe, and later Matthew Sutcliffe, who saw the Saxon period as having a plethora of satisfyingly proto-Protestant 'professors'.⁶⁴

So, Catholics perennially put the historical question to the Protestants, 'Where was your Church before Luther?' They thought that insistence upon visible aspects or marks of the Church, for tactical and doctrinal reasons, gave them a vast polemical advantage. Some Protestant writers appeared to concede that this Catholic line of argument was effective in the sense that it was polemically (if not doctrinally) sound: Robert Crowley noted that an emphasis on the principal marks of the Church was the papists' most usual way of perverting the queen's subjects. John White observed that 'in all my acquaintance with persons affected to Popery' (in his own county of Lancashire) 'they object nothing against us more willingly' than visible succession. Robert Finch complained of the papists 'in whose mouth is ever Church, Church'. Robert Townson in a sermon in November 1602 pointed out that 'the papistes have a trick of appropriating the name of the church to themselves onely', though he was content to remark that 'as they reade the Church, it is theirs dead sure'. George Carleton prefaced a simplified version of his *Consensus Ecclesiae* by saying that since its appearance he has seen 'divers bookes' (evidently referring to those by people like John Percy) 'written in English to seduce the simple that cannot judge, insinuating to them faire pretences of a shewe of the Church: Which shewe of the Church is the thing that carrieth away many that cannot judge between trueths and shewes'. John Gee said that this polemical line, though nothing new in itself,

Cameron and Jean Daillé, Solé, *Débat*, I, 80-1, II, 573-4; B. G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (1969), 9-10, 12-13; J.-R. Armogathe, 'De l'Art de Penser comme Art de Persuader', in *La Conversion au XVII^e Siècle* (Centre Méridional de Rencontres sur le XVII^e Siècle, Marseille, 1982), 29-41, at p. 29. Initial English polemical lack of interest in historiography, commented on by Edmund Bolton, was made up for by Robert Persons, AA.W, A XIII, 669; Persons, *Treatise of Three Conversions*, written in reply to points made by Sir Francis Hastings, *An Apologie or Defence of the Watch-word* (1600), 191-3; Robert Persons, *An Answer to the Fifth Part of Reportes* (St Omer, 1606); Questier, 'Phenomenon', 62-4. French Catholic polemicists used history against French Protestants in the same way as English Catholic polemicists, Solé, *Débat*, II, 629-30. A survey of all relevant Church history was arguably as tedious as a survey of the patristic literary corpus, Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fo. 156^v.

⁶⁴ H. A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1982), 32, 35-9, 40; cf. Matthew Sutcliffe, *The Subversion of Robert Parsons* (1606), chapters 1-3; Bell, *Christian Dialogue*, 98.

had been intensified by Catholic clerics (like plagues of frogs and locusts) in James's reign. They have 'bene croaking and throting out this harsh note and noyse to every Protestant passenger, "Where was your Church before Luther?" and they think 'to choake us with this Question'.⁶⁵

Many people were pleased to record that they converted to Rome when they accepted the Roman case on the structure of the visible Church.⁶⁶ As the earl of Manchester's reply to Sir Walter Montagu's reasons for his conversion said, 'presently upon one poore prejudice, of Invisibility . . . you swallow all other scruples'.⁶⁷ Certainly Catholics thought that the quasi-physical representation of their case through an historical exposition of their visible Church was most effective. Richard Smith cited Isaac Casaubon to say that 'to insinuate into the mind of the Reader any opinion now in controversie, Baronius historyes are of greater force, then Bellarmines disputes'.⁶⁸

It would be a mistake, though, to assume that, simply because one side said that its case was proved by a particular line of argument, the reasons which it advanced to prove such a line would have been automatically convincing to the confused and wavering reader. The observations of writers like Sweet and Percy that their opponents cannot assemble a case to answer on the subject of the Church are merely polemical taunts. Protestant writers would not have dissented from Theophilus Higgons's opinion that 'the Church it selfe . . . [is] the highest sphere in the great world of theological controversies'. They were as ready to dispute about the Church as

any other topic.⁶⁹ In polemic Protestants countered Romanists by arguing that the true Church is invisible. Yet this does not mean that they were conceding simplistic Romanist charges that they imagined God's Church might fall irredeemably into corruption. They mean that its earthly structure lacks the integrity that could guarantee it from becoming entirely invisible to the non-Elect.⁷⁰ Reformed Protestants held a different concept of election from Roman Catholics. In Reformed Protestant thought the Elect cannot tumble from grace. Whatever spiritual disasters they may experience, they cannot fall finally and totally from their elect status. So it follows that the true Church cannot permanently be hidden from them, or they from each other. This aspect of their experience of grace is personal to them. It does not come through the Church and its sacraments and institutional structure. God's promises to his Elect will not fail if the Church falls into decay. For the Reprobate (in whatever manner their reprobation is thought to depend on the will of God), the Church cannot assist to reverse God's decrees in their unfortunate cases. Sometimes the true Church *may* be entirely hidden from them.⁷¹ Roman Catholics, who think differently about the way saving grace is allotted to men, and see justifying as well as sanctifying elements of grace within the institutional Church militant, cannot conceive of the defectibility of that Church in the same manner.⁷²

This meant that Protestants had perfectly adequate replies to every Catholic polemical point about the Church. Employing their Reformed concept of election, all they had to do was to reduce the extent to which the true Church's characteristics could be envisaged as necessarily institutionally visible, and emphasise how far the Church's marks could exist independently of its physical structure.⁷³ The unity which Roman polemicists described by reference to communion of particular Churches with Rome Protestants located in consent over fundamental points of doctrine, itself a sign of the invisible mystical unity of the church militant. The true Church on earth represented in its institutions is only visible, infallible, holy and so on, 'according unto the relation and dependance which it hath upon the Triumphant Church, and the assistance which it hath from Christ, his

⁶⁵ Robert Crowley, *A breefe Discourse, concerning those foure usuall Notes, whereby Christes Catholique Church is knowne* (1581), sig. Aiiiij; White, *Way*, 337; Finch, *Knowledge*, sig. B; R. P. Sorlien (ed.), *The Diary of John Manningham* (Hlanover, New Hampshire, 1976), 144; George Carleton, *Directions to Know the True Church* (1615), sig. A4v-5; Webbe, *Catalogus*, sig. ff.

⁶⁶ E.g. Theophilus Higgons, *The Apology of Theophilus Higgons lately Minister, now Catholique* (Rouen, 1609), 25; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fos. 35v-7; Queen's College MS 284, fos. 206v-7; Virtually no convert to Rome in this period omits the visibility issue among his recorded motives.

⁶⁷ Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fo. 156r.
⁶⁸ Smith, *Author*, sig. *4; Solé, *Débat*, II, 532, 546-52; cf. Edmund Bolton's point about the persuasiveness of arguments respectively from theology and the arts, AA.W, A XIII, 669. Walter Montagu based his account of his conversion squarely on Smith's distinction between history and school-disputes over divinity, Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fos. 153r, 166v. Converts like Theophilus Higgons accepted Roman doctrinal tenets on the basis of historical evidence (taken, in Higgons's case, from Persons's *Treatise of Three Conversions*), Higgons, *First Motive*, 20. The historical points which Benjamin Carier made against the break with Rome are evidently drawn out of Nicholas Sander, *Doctissimi Viri Nicolai Sanderi, de Origine ac Progressu Schismatis Anglicani, Liber* (Rheims, 1585), Carier, *A Treatise* (Brussels, 1614), 11, 38; George Hakewill, *An Answer to a Treatise Written by Dr Carier* (1616), sig. B2; cf. Carier, *Copy*, 6; cf. also CRS 54, 150, 233; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fo. 30r.

⁶⁹ Theophilus Higgons, *A Sermon preached at Pauls Crosse* (1611), 44; see also *idem*, *Apology*, 25; White, *Way*, sig. a2v; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fos. 18v-19; Sorlien, *Diary*, 143-4.

⁷⁰ Abbot, *Reasons*, 26; Wotton, *Trial*, 215; White, *Way*, 85-9; cf. White, *Defence*, 285, stressing that the Elect themselves do not at all times perceive the authority of the Scriptures because their authority can be discerned only through the operation of grace, not the mere status of election.

⁷¹ Finch, *Knowledge*, sig. F2: 'if it be dim and hid, it is hid unto them that perish: but unto the children of light it is manifest inough'; White, *Way*, 91.

⁷² Leech, *Dutifull and Respective Considerations*, 109-10.

⁷³ Milton, 'Church', 191.

Prophets and Apostles, upon whose doctrine and Scriptures it doth wholly cast it self'.⁷⁴ Protestants like Francis Bunny said that in determining the true Church 'there ought to be no question at al among us: but only, of the members therof, who they are, that more truly answer unto their calling', a consideration of visibility but locating the visible nature of the Church by reference to the activity of grace within the members of the Church.⁷⁵ In reply to the Catholic accusation exemplified in Walter Montagu's and John Good's criticism of John White that Protestants create a paradox by claiming a continued succession 'though not visible to the World', Protestants merely replied that the more the papists emphasised the integrity of the institutional visible Church the more they obscured the true Church.⁷⁶ In fact, if the integrity of the Church is to be measured by reference to Christ and Scripture then the allegations that the genesis of Protestantism is a recent historical phenomenon and that the Protestant Church lacks unity are quite irrelevant. As Sutcliffe replied to Kellison, 'Luther is not our founder, nor any of late time', and Francis Bunny rejected the Catholic use of 'reprochfull names of "Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinistes, Bezites", and such like' because 'we holde not any of these, no nor of them all, but as they holde of Christ'.⁷⁷ Protestants defined the Church as both visible and invisible, the multitude and the Elect, but they still thought that the true and the false Churches should not be confused with ecclesiastical structures. Thus Robert Finch, like so many other Protestants, challenged the papists to 'shewe unto us plainly in simple wordes, what Church they doe speake of, whether of the Church of Christ, or else of the Church of Antichrist'.⁷⁸ In such a scheme, Protestants had an equally serviceable model for persuading the reader to abandon one particular Church for another (even if they could not relate its terms to institutions in quite the way that Catholics did).⁷⁹ They simply argued

⁷⁴ Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sigs. Dviii-Eiiii; Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc6r, Cc7r; Abbot, *Reasons*, 25-6; Walker, *Summe*, sig. B4r.

⁷⁵ Bunny, *Treatise*, 108.

⁷⁶ Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fo. 154r; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fo. 22r; Abbot, *Reasons*, 31, 35-6.

⁷⁷ Sutcliffe, *Examination*, 39; Bunny, *Truth*, sig. Cc7r; Bodl., Rawl. MS D 853, fo. 156r.

⁷⁸ Finch, *Knowledge*, sig. B2r; Theophilus Higgons, *Mystical Babylon* (1624), sig. ¶4v.

⁷⁹ The effectiveness of the Protestant equal and opposite case on the Church is demonstrated by Persons's decision to answer in full the tract written by the otherwise rather insignificant renegade John Nichols who had used long passages from Mornay. John Nichols, *A Declaration of the Recantation of John Nichols* (1581), sigs. Cv-viir, Dv-viir employs passages from Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sigs. Diir-viir, Ev-ir. After these direct transcriptions Nichols follows Mornay's series of ideas. Persons noted that Mornay's book was proving influential in England, Robert Persons, *A Discoverie of J. Nichols* (1581), sig. Iv. Sir Anthony Hungerford claimed to have been converted in part by reading Mornay, Anthony Hungerford, *The Advise* (1639), 61.

that people should avoid the Roman Church by considering the nature of the true Church and the extent to which the Roman Church fell short of it.

Protestants therefore did not have to avoid the topics which might be thought to focus attention inevitably on visible aspects of authority – for example the papacy. For Roman Catholics, the significance of the Petrine texts was that they guaranteed the inerrancy of the Roman Church's earthly structure. The standard Protestant reply (based on patristic texts) was that of Matthew Sutcliffe: when Augustine spoke of 'the Rock, against which the proud gates of Hell cannot prevaile', he 'understandeth S. Peters Confession and Doctrine, and not the succession of Popes'; a spiritual not a physical succession.⁸⁰ The citations from Augustine which Protestant writers struck upon were frequently apposite. Andrew Willet and William Crompton could emphasise the 'invisible' elements of the petrine texts out of Augustine's works, notably *De Utilitate Credendi*, *Contra Litteras Petilianas* and *Retractationes*. Even if they did not grasp the exact significance which Augustine attributed to the fifth-century papacy, they could show that it was not the one Roman polemicists drew out of his works.⁸¹

Of course, the mere fact that the rival polemical arsenals were equally matched did not prevent the occasional hint of a tactical victory by one or other side. On the subject of visible succession within the Church, Protestants might sometimes leave themselves open to attack. Their lingering desire to demonstrate that they too could show an historical line of 'professors' of Protestant opinions sometimes put them in a dilemma as to whether they should deny the importance of succession altogether or qualify the papists' account of it. Both these difficulties seem to have beset Daniel Featley when he publicly took on John Percy in June 1623. Featley's own narrative suggests that the debate did not go as well as he might have liked. Percy syllogistically linked outward and spiritual succession, and when Featley tried to turn the argument so as to concentrate on the characteristics of an invisible Church, and thus avoid Percy's challenge to name some Protestant 'professors' in every age since the foundation of the Church, sections of the audience started to heckle him, chanting 'names, names, names'.⁸² Featley was simply stating the line subscribed to by most

⁸⁰ Sutcliffe, *Unmaskings*, 49.

⁸¹ Crompton, *Saint Austins Summes*, 63, 67; *Retractationes* I, 21, CCSL LVII, 62; *De Utilitate Credendi*, 17, CSEL XXV, 45; Crompton, *Saint Austins Summes*, 66; Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papsimi* (1600), 133, 146; *Contra Litteras Petilianas* LI, 118, CSEL LII, 88; Dodaro and Questier, 'Strategies', 439-41. Cf. Crompton's similar exploitation of other Augustinian passages, *Saint Austins Summes*, 61-2, 65; *Enarrat. in Ps. CVIII I*, CCSL I, 1585; *Tractatus in Epistolam Johannis X*, 1, PL XXXV, 2054.

⁸² Featley, *Fisher*, 11-13.

Protestants of a 'leftish' inclination in the English Church.⁸³ And Protestants were convinced that Featley had been victorious. It was Percy who was doing the evading since he 'neither could deny that Christ and his Apostles taught the same faith and doctrine, which the Protestants now professe, nor would abide the triall by it, but fled from that to the practise of ensuing times'.⁸⁴ But, Catholics seem to have been aware, certainly in the later part of James's reign, that they had found a potential polemical dilemma for Protestants in their disagreements over the Church as a theological concept. The definition of the true Church was inextricably bound up with Protestants' self-definition against Rome. Disagreement over that self-definition started to create serious divisions in the Jacobean Church. Arguments about the characteristics of the visible and invisible expressions of the Church had always been a shorthand device for debate about the structure and regulation of particular Churches. Some Protestants' positive emphasis on certain institutional elements of the Church, its sacraments and orders, was automatically expressed in definitions of the positive aspects of visibility which were unpalatable to other Protestants. As Anthony Milton has shown, there may have been a satisfactory agreement among moderate Calvinists like Richard Field and John Prideaux that visibility and invisibility were simply two aspects of the same Church. But the 'relative invisibility' to which moderate Calvinists subscribed arguably left them open to attack. If they conceded that the Church as an institution *had* to play some part in salvation, they were liable to be accused, as they were by Catholics, of ambiguity and evasion over the authority which could be accorded to an institutional particular Church. Apparently irreconcilable statements about the defectibility of the Church, and differences over who might be claimed from history as Protestant 'professors', then appeared to be evidence of perversity among Protestants.⁸⁵ There was a polemical inconsistency, even if not a logical one, in Featley's tactics of arguing on the one hand that Protestants did not need to show a formal succession of 'professors' and on the other that he could prove them to have existed in every age since the foundation of the Church.⁸⁶ He would probably have done better to avoid Percy's bait and take instead Wotton's more relaxed line: 'they bid us shew a beadrill of their names that were professors of our faith; what if we cannot? there may be a Catalogue, though we cannot shew it'; or alternatively the position taken by Richard Sheldon - to concede that

⁸³ Thomas Bell, *The Survey of Popery* (1596), 193; *idem*, *Christian Dialogue*, 66-7, 99-100; Savage, *Conference*, 62, 66, 70-1; Willet, *Synopsis Paptismi*, 69.

⁸⁴ Webbe, *Catalogus*, 87; T. Birch (ed.), *The Court and Times of James the First* (2 vols., 1848), II, 408-9; cf. Thomas Bedford, *Luthers Predecessours* (1624).

⁸⁵ Wright, *Treatise*, 48; Milton, 'Church', *passim*.

⁸⁶ White, *Way*, 338-9, conceded the uncertainty of Protestantism's historical record.

Rome (only) had been continuously visible but this was irrelevant (since continuous institutional visibility was not an aspect of the true Church).⁸⁷

It was considerably easier for a Catholic than for a Protestant to insist that an individual ought to belong to an institutional Church since Catholics connected membership of it with election and grace in a way that Reformed Protestant doctrine did not allow.⁸⁸ It is certainly possible to show that many of the motives which Catholic converts expressed, both in print and privately, for changing their religion to conform with that of Rome were closely connected with polemic. More often than not a convert will expatiate on his new perception of the form of the Church and refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the arguments over visibility. Thus Humphrey Leech, Theophilus Higgons and Benjamin Carier all attacked the faulty disciplinary structure of the Church of England - a sure sign that it did not possess all the outward visible marks of a true Church.⁸⁹ James Wadsworth and Francis Walsingham argued that certainty and security in religion were impossible among the fractured Protestant congregations.⁹⁰ Such converts follow the logic of polemic and emphasise the precedence of the Church's authority over that of Scripture.⁹¹

Yet even if in places it is possible to show that polemically one side had weaknesses, in the end that side could always find similar targets to shoot back at. Examples of clear polemical victories and defeats are few and far between. The impression is that reasons for changing religion which are phrased by reference to polemic are simply *ex post facto* rationalisations of whatever it was that really induced the conversion. Furthermore, it is arguable that the very characteristics which made polemic persuasive (as I have outlined them) were also its limitations. This was not just because polemic was so self-evidently a distortion both of the sources alleged for the arguments put forward and of the position of the other side. It was because

⁸⁷ Wotton, *Runne*, sig. L v; cf. White, *Way*, 338, 394, 403 (arguing that it is not necessary to show any external succession at all; proof that there were any Protestants before Luther is enough); Richard Sheldon, *The Motives of Richard Sheldons Pr.* (1612), sig. Dd4v; cf. White, *Defence*, 350. Before 1623 Featley was apparently more wary of Jesuit challenges to debate about the Church, George Roberts (ed.), *Diary of Walter Yonge* (Camden Society, first series, 41, 1848), 63.

⁸⁸ Mornay, *Notable Treatise*, sig. Dr. It was harder also for Protestant writers to persuade Catholic recusants that they must attend churches than for Catholics to argue that they must not.

⁸⁹ Higgons, *First Motive*, 21 (though the passage he cites from St Jerome could easily be employed in a diametrically opposed sense, cf. Wotton, *Trial*, 171); Leech, *Triumph*, 93; cf. Leech, *Dutifull and Respective Considerations*, 44-54; Carier, *Treatise*, 10; Balliol College MS 270, pp. 153-63. Carier among others located the substance of the Church in institutional forms in a way that was unthinkable for Reformed Protestants, Carier, *Copy*, 6.

⁹⁰ William Bedell, *The Copies of Certain Letters* (1624), 4; Walsingham, *Search* (1609), 55.

⁹¹ Carier, *Copy*, 4-5; cf. Vane, *Lost Sheep*, 23-5; N. N., *Epistle*, 12-13.

the way in which polemicists argued about the nature of the Church itself shows that there was no sufficient ground within their tracts for making up one's mind about the Church to which one should belong, or rather, no basis for deciding that one must, at peril of losing eternal life, adhere to one particular Church and reject another. This is not because the tracts failed to address the problem of ecclesiastical allegiance. They did, and polemicists could subtly combine political and religious considerations to persuade people to convert from one Church to the other. But an examination of what the controversialists said should have told an interested party in the sixteenth century what it tells us now: that there is no such thing, fundamentally, in polemic (on this issue of the Church and virtually all related matters) as absolute right and wrong. Polemical formulae do not provide the basis for conversion to and from Rome in the way that polemicists said they did.⁹² In fact, the politicised nature of the doctrinal debate did not allow the protagonists to express fully what they meant by conversion when they exhorted the uncommitted or hostile reader to adhere to their Church (even though such a change they would have considered as an integral part of true conversion). Or rather, their insistence on one particular reading of conversion meant concealing the elements of it which both sides held in common (though seen from different perspectives). Their agenda – that their readers had to decide between Roman and Protestant versions of the true Church – meant that they had to restrict artificially the full sense of what it means to belong to 'the Church'. Ultimately their books give only a veiled impression of why it is important to adhere to one or other institutional Church, and they necessarily produced only a parody even of the things which they genuinely thought erroneous in their opponents' position. This, rather than incompetence, prejudice or fraud, was the source of the complaints by polemicists like Theophilus Higgons that their opponents use patristic sources to 'make their conclusions against some doctrine, which is not particularly handled by the Fathers in those places, whence they assume such proofes', or William Rainolds that in his 'adversaries doctrine' there was 'no kind of stay or assurance, no maner of certaintie or steadfastnes', 'no order or forme to conclude and resolve of any thing'.⁹³

So the books were by themselves no adequate reason to convert. Anyone who did change his Church simply because of the doctrinal reasons presented by the polemicists did so on the basis of word-games and literary sleight of hand. It is possible that there were many who did look to the polemicists to confirm their opinions at times of uncertainty and even to justify a renunciation of one or other Church. Polemical reading might

⁹² *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (17 vols., Washington, 1967-78), III, 691.

⁹³ Higgons, *First Motive*, 114; Rainolds, *Refutation*, sig. a4r-5r.

actually trigger the doubts which led to a conversion. Still, in the accounts left by those who made a serious business of conversion, the statements that the careful reading of polemical books had changed their religion are slightly too uniform and trite to be convincing; or rather, if taken at face value, they are likely to mislead. Though leading clerical intellectuals wrote these polemical tracts it is scarcely credible that the intellectuals who converted should automatically have fallen into line behind such simplistic formulations. The emotional and spiritual forces unleashed by the doubts which many converts said they had experienced could hardly be satisfied by polemical books even though, after conversion, the convert might express his new perception of true religion by reference to polemical categories. Of course, there were many who claimed to have converted after going back to the patristic texts to examine them for themselves.⁹⁴ But even these texts were then immediately interpreted in the light of contemporary polemical attitudes. The tracts did, admittedly, deal with all the elements of what contemporaries said was true conversion: not just movement between the rival Churches but also the nature of sin, the process of regeneration, the mysteries of election, the terrors of predestination, the consolations of assurance and the necessity of perseverance. But all of these fell very quickly into a disciplined political line behind Roman or Protestant claims to truth. The reader was invited to associate true conversion in all its aspects with movement to and from Rome. Such extreme mental regimentation was not the sum total of contemporary conversion experience. Polemical books did not contain the essence of conversion.

That this is so can be demonstrated by a book – Robert Persons's *Christian Directory*. Despite its outwardly non-controversial character it was recognised as a solver of confessional doubt. People who were perplexed about the doctrinal division between the Churches and read this book seem often to have resolved their difficulties through reading it. And yet this work was capable of obviating doctrinal doubt altogether. In the preface to the first edition of 1582 Persons states that the 'principall cause and reason' for publication was 'to the ende our cuntrye men might have some one sufficient direction for matters of life and spirit, among so manye bookes of controversies as have ben writen, and are in writinge dailye. The whiche bookes, albeit in thes our troublesome and quarrelous times be

⁹⁴ J. C. H. Aveling, *Northern Catholics* (1966), 29; Robert Persons, 'Of the Life and Martyrdom of Father Edmond Campian', *Letters and Notices* 11 (1876-7), 219-42, 308-39 and 12 (1878), 1-68, in vol. 11 at p. 227; CRS 54, 215; *Walsingham Search* (1609), 229-30; Higgons, *First Motive*, sig. 17r; CRS 54, 229; BL, Lansd. MS 776, fos. 19v-33v; Foley VII, 1113-14; Cressy, *Exomologesis*, 74-5. Cressy relied not 'upon a few select passages and Texts pick'd out by late Controversists, but by observing the maine designe and intention of those Fathers'.

necessary for defence of our faith, againste so many seditious innovations . . . yet helpe they litle ofentymes to good lyfe, but rather do fill the heades of men with a spirite of contradiction and contention'.⁹⁵ The book was aimed at Protestants as much as Catholics. A spy reported in 1584 that Catholics were distributing it to Protestants, and that it (and the Rheims New Testament) 'are as much sought for, of the protestantes as papistes'.⁹⁶ George Birkhead, the future archpriest, wrote in August 1584 that 'both because its matter was new to us and also on account of its special object, viz., the reformation of a sinful life', it 'has borne immense fruit; the number of conversions of heretics to the faith by reading it can scarcely be believed'.⁹⁷ Thomas Worthington said in 1601 that by it not only were 'innumerable Catholiques' confirmed but also 'Schismatikes and Heretikes continually converted'.⁹⁸ Protestant editions of it were published, shorn of its Roman terminology.⁹⁹

Why should a book which refrained, except in the preface, from attacking the opposing religion and Church have been so effective in making people change their religion to Rome? Obviously its Roman terminology might make people think that Rome must be a true Church if it promoted the exercise of a godly life. Lawrence Caddey's printed recantation which appeared in 1583 claimed that Protestants 'cannot abide' books of 'contemplation, meditation, and instruction of Christian life and manners', because they know that 'devout praiser onely, penaunce and amendement of life, will easily bring men from their pretended Religion, in which no such devotions are found'.¹⁰⁰ But in the case of the *Christian Directory* this would be to put a purely polemical slant on a motive to change religion which cannot be explained in such terms. The *Christian Directory* transcended standard polemical discourse as well as cutting through the verbiage of ordinary controversial discourse. There is no doubt that it was intended to convince the reader that Roman Catholicism was orthodox Christian faith. But it took John Sweet's 'general motives' a step

⁹⁵ Persons, *First Booke*, 2.

⁹⁶ PRO, SP 12/168/31, fo. 75r; cf. *CSPD Addenda 1580-1625*, 112; PRO, SP 14/95/24.i, fo. 72r. The aim of the proselytiser was to induce the sudden moment of illumination which could then be capitalised on doctrinally. This would appear to be the way William Ramold's *Refutation* was used as well, CRS 54, 2; Mathew, *True Historical Relation*, 24. CRS 4, 153, 155.

⁹⁷ Thomas Worthington, *A Relation of Sixtene Martyrs* (Douai, 1601), 73.

⁹⁸ The Yorkshire puritan minister Edmund Bunny produced expurgated editions from 1584 onwards. Persons wrote a savage reply in the preface to the republished and expanded version of 1585, *A Christian Directorie Guiding Men to their Salvation* (Rouen, 1585); cf. PRO, SP 12/194/13, fo. 33r.

¹⁰⁰ William Allen, *A True Report of the late Apprehension and Imprisonnement of John Nicols* (Rheims, 1583), fos. 20v-1r. Caddey was referring not to Persons's work but to that of Luis of Granada.

further by abandoning polemic as the principal means of persuasion. William Fitch, who became a Capuchin, began his conversion which ended in the Roman Church by reading the Protestant version of Persons's *Christian Directory*. It seems from his account of his spiritual transformation that the essence of the change was achieved before he even considered the polemical arguments about which institutional Church he should embrace.¹⁰¹

In a very real sense, then, neither the mechanism nor the essence of conversion was contained in the polemic by which Rome and the Protestants appear to have set out the corpus of reasons for belonging to their Churches. Polemical reasoning is not really the key to understanding why people became Catholics or Protestants. Conversions were the culminations of a range of experiences as wide as the number of causes which unsettled the minds of contemporaries in religion. Even a man's vaguest discomfort with his ecclesiastical setting could not be adequately explained by looking in the neatly set-out sections of the polemical tracts. From the basest motive of temporal well-being and security through to the principled pondering of which Church was doctrinally sound, and finally the explosive spiritual experience of evangelical conversion which seemed to transcend polemical bickering altogether, the polemical books could point to the issues which might absorb the mind of a man who decided to express his uncertainties and final resolutions in religion through movement between the institutional Churches of England and Rome. But by themselves the polemical tracts were not it. Conversion surged through a realm of experience in which the books of controversial theology were a pale reflection of the sum total of contemporary understanding of change of religion. For this reason also, to talk about the advent of Protestantism after the collapse of the Marian restoration or the English struggle between Reformed Religion and Counter-Reformation Catholicism purely in terms of a polemical set of hatreds, tends to obscure how the country became, or failed to become, Protestant. Even though Protestant evangelisation proceeded on the back of an anti-Roman polemic (and, vice versa, Catholic conservative activism defined itself by a loathing of Reformed theology), it is still not adequate to say that people became Catholics or Protestants simply by defining their beliefs solely against a range of doctrinal opposites put about by polemical rivals. The Reformation, contemporaries thought, advanced largely through conversion, but conversion, they knew, was not limited merely to an exchange of opinions.

¹⁰¹ Jacques Brousse, *The Life of the Reverend Fa. Angel of Joyeuse* (Douai, 1623), sig. Bb5v-6v.