

There are, of course, unanswered questions. First and foremost of these is the interpretation of the test of reasonableness, which will inevitably have to be established by case law. The diagrams illustrating solutions in theoretical situations serve in some instances to highlight the impossibility of providing access in specific practical cases without extensive—and often costly—interference with existing and often historic fabric. No mention is made of the possible reverse effect of the Act, whereby churches—and particularly the larger churches and cathedrals frequented by tourists—might elect to close parts of their buildings to the public altogether rather than suffer the architectural or archaeological damage and financial costs of the alterations needed to avoid a charge of discrimination. The possibility that the service provider's personnel (clergy or lay assistants) may themselves be disabled is not addressed. Nor is any thought given to possible future developments in technological aids for the disabled which could render some physical modifications redundant in the foreseeable future. But for the present this excellent booklet is an essential aid to keeping churches out of trouble with the law.

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*PRAYER BOOK AND PEOPLE IN ELIZABETHAN AND EARLY STUART ENGLAND* by JUDITH MALTBY. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge University Press. 1998, xvii + 310pp (hardback £40) ISBN 0-521-45313-5.

In this important study Judith Maltby suggests that recent historical writing on the Tudor and Stuart period has produced many 'group portraits' of English Christianity but has left some important figures off the canvas. The attention given to groups and individuals who in various ways were dissatisfied with the character of the established Church may have produced the impression that happy acceptance of the Church of England was only to be found among those who lacked zeal or commitment. This is a study of those who were committed to the Church and its worship as a matter of sincere belief and not of political or social expediency.

We are learning that we can no longer accept the picture of late medieval English Christianity as empty of vigour and devotion, and that the Reformation must be seen as having been, for most people, a matter of obedience to authority rather than religious conversion. Many might have preferred the old ways; some were disappointed that change did not come more quickly; in the end, the majority accepted the 'Settlement' of religion with its Articles, Prayer Book and bishops; but this hardly means we should conclude that nascent Anglicanism lacked genuine supporters. Probably the most important lesson we are learning from the recent debates is to see the Reformation in terms of process rather than event: the *experience* of vernacular liturgy, for example, created and nourished a constituency no less committed than the one which would have preferred to worship in a 'strange tongue', or the one which would rather have had no liturgy at all. As Dr Maltby says, familiarity need not breed contempt: it may nurture devotion.

Dr Maltby describes and explores the world of those who might be called 'Prayer Book Protestants'—a group hitherto virtually invisible, and still difficult to trace in contemporary sources. She begins with the records of the church courts, which are not surprisingly more concerned with recusants and puritans than with conformists, but which nevertheless bring to light supporters of the settlement using the law to protest against the behaviour of their clergy and neighbours. In 1577 the parishioners of Manton in Lincolnshire objected to their parson failing to provide Evening Prayer on Wednesdays and Fridays because he was playing bowls. At Tarpoley in Cheshire in 1639 a parishioner brought a suit against the curate for refusing to wear the surplice

and for omitting lawful ceremonies such as the Ten Commandments at Holy Communion. The same curate had preached in a neighbouring parish that the 'reading of Common prayer had bene the meanes of sending many souls into hell. That the booke of Common prayer doth stinke in the nostrails of god. That reading of common prayers is as bed or worse than the mumbling of masse upon beades'. Lay people came to realise that the fixed liturgy of the Prayer Book limited the freedom of the clergy to impose their own tastes and opinions upon their communities and that the church courts provided them with a means of making their views heard and acted upon.

Next Maltby examines the petitions to Parliament produced in support of the Prayer Book and episcopacy on the eve of the Civil War, when there was a marked sense among conformists that the Church of England was 'in danger'. The initiative for these came primarily from lay folk, and, even though political motives can often be detected, it is clear that for many of the petitioners devotion to the Prayer Book was a serious spiritual matter. The Prayer Book had engendered the Reformation: its continued and regular use preserved the Church of England from relapse into popery or sectarianism: in it 'many Christian Hearts have found unspeakable joy and Comfort'. Petitioners defended the Book of Common Prayer against charges that it was an innovation or that it was merely an album of scraps from the old Mass-books and Breviaries. Lancashire conformists saw it as 'composed according to the Primitive Patterne by our blessed Martyrs, and other religious and learned men'. Kentish petitioners wisely drew back from including the phrase 'penned by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost'.

Prayer Book Protestants saw the Church of England quite differently from its puritan deriders: not as a church only partly reformed, but as one governed and worshipping 'according to the Primitive Pattern', yet purged and refined by the fires of the Marian persecutions. Their acceptance of the authenticity of non-episcopal churches on the continent means they must also be distinguished from the Laudians whose influence on Charles I undermined what conformists considered to be the natural affinity between Church and Crown, as well as from modern Prayer Book Catholics'.

Among the revisionist claims that Dr Maltby challenges—and which invite greater consideration—is the view that the English Reformation put an end to the less 'rational' and more 'emotional' aspects of religion, and replaced the old rhythms and rituals with a sterilised, 'wordy' observance. The scorn of the 'godly' about attachment to ceremonial indicates that Prayer Book worship provided a real 'sense of the sacred' for many participants—as is illustrated by petitioners' outrage against disruption of services and irreverent behaviour in church.

Satisfaction with, and loyalty to, the Prayer Book is demonstrated by the fact that there is more evidence for its continued clandestine use in the 1640s than for the purchase by parishes of its replacement, the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. The events of the mid-seventeenth century—Commonwealth and Restoration—redefined the Church of England, which, with the Toleration Act of 1688/9, was finally transformed from a national into a merely established church. As such it was free to define itself more clearly, 'in so far as clarity has ever been an Anglican virtue'. Prayer Book conformists, Dr Maltby concludes, 'provide the thread of continuity back before 1642', but she reminds us that they were then only one strand in a 'Church which exhibited an even greater degree of pluralism than it does today.

Like so many academic volumes today, Dr Maltby's cannot disguise its origins as a PhD thesis, and it would have been good to have had the balance between reflection and supporting evidence more balanced in favour of the former. One senses—often in the very comprehensive and challenging footnotes—the priest and pastor in the author straining to launch out into a discussion of the present state of the Church and the realities of ministering to generations with little sense of history.

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