

SUSAN LOUGHLIN

Insurrection

HENRY VIII, THOMAS CROMWELL
AND THE PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE



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In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

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Introduction

Of all the enigmas in the English Reformation, the motivations and intentions of King Henry VIII remain some of the most difficult to elucidate.¹

Lucy Wooding's view echoed that of Felicity Heal, who stated that making sense of Henrician religious policy was a 'trying business'.² As is widely known, the king's break with Rome was caused by the refusal of the papacy to sanction his divorce from his queen, Katherine of Aragon. There appears to be a pervasive view that Henry's Anglican Church was merely an organisation which represented Catholicism without the pope. This is incorrect: the king, aided by his deputy in ecclesiastical matters, Thomas Cromwell (until his fall in 1540), simply chopped and changed doctrine according to expediency, whim or whatever suited him. Henry's later innovations will not be discussed here but Heal's assessment that Henry's own erratic and eclectic understanding of his role as Supreme Head was 'underpinned not by a coherent theology but by little more than a "ragbag of emotional preferences"'³ is an accurate appraisal.

It is, perhaps, for these reasons that the study of the English Reformation remains an appealing and fascinating task. As Susan Wabuda has stated, the challenges for understanding what the Reformation presents are among the most rewarding in all fields of scholarship.⁴ Writing in the same year, Alec Ryrie gave as his *raison d'être* for a study of *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, that the 'golden age of the local study of the English Reformation' was drawing to a close. Ryrie therefore justified his attempt at a national overview as 'traipsing once again through the crowded field of Tudor high politics . . . despite the fact that it might appear to be pointlessly repetitive'.⁵

The Reformation in England is indeed a fascinating subject to explore and this book focuses on one particular event, the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536.⁶ The Pilgrimage was a huge insurrection in which an estimated 30,000 men participated and has been described as the largest uprising against a Tudor monarch⁷ – some historians have argued that it had the potential to threaten Henry VIII's throne.⁸

Although the Pilgrimage was confined to the North of England, its ramifications extended further and, whilst this is by no means an attempt at a national overview, the North cannot be viewed in total isolation, somehow divorced from the rest of England or, indeed, Christendom. In the same way as I, Ryrie, I have had, once again, to traipse through a crowded field but would hope that the approach taken here will yield other topics for discussion. As Richard Hoyle has stated, the discovery of a new body of material on the Pilgrimage is 'a rare occurrence'.⁹ Thus, this book explores different dimensions of the religious innovations in the North, using the Pilgrimage as its centrepiece, and concentrates on particular individuals and the parts they played in the movement.

It is necessary, at the outset, to provide a brief historiographical overview of the English Reformation, as well as a historiography specific to the Pilgrimage of Grace. The English Reformation has been the subject of much study and its common or dominant paradigm (until relatively recently) was dictated by the Whig interpretation of history – the inevitable march of progress. The Reformation was regarded as necessary in the process of state-building, forging a national identity and freeing the people from the foreign tyranny and superstition of the papacy. Since the 1970s, scholars have used the term 'confessionalisation' to describe how the Reformation became interlinked with the process of state-building. The contention is that monarchs (both Catholic and Protestant) rigorously promoted a single confession, or type of Christianity, within their territories in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. They repressed alternatives as a means of exercising and increasing control over their subjects.¹⁰

The first phase of that reformation in England, the Henrician Reformation, had been viewed as relatively easy and fast by many historians in the 1950s and 1960s, including G.R. Elton and A.C. Dickens. This rapid reformation theory influenced many scholars, including Claire Cross.¹¹ Where Elton and Dickens diverged was on their emphasis – Elton concentrated on a reformation imposed from the centre, whilst Dickens and Cross emphasised the religious, as opposed to the political, roots of the conversion.¹² However, both schools were underpinned by an acceptance of the Whiggish position and shared the belief that the populace acquiesced readily as there was an underbelly favourable to reform.

Christopher Haigh succinctly summarised the main strands of the historiography of the English Reformation in 1987 and placed four main approaches within a matrix structure. These four approaches were, broadly: a rapid reformation from above; a rapid reformation from below; a slow conversion from above (in the localities); and a slow reformation from below. The Whiggish interpretations of Elton and Dickens were analysed and largely refuted by Haigh. Elton was identified as being the foremost exponent of the idea of a rapid reformation, imposed and enforced from the centre, as a result of deliberate government action – the ‘Protestant advance was entirely the result of official coercion’.

The Whig consensus paradigm began to be challenged by what became known as the ‘revisionist school’. The revisionist historians questioned what was really happening to people’s religious beliefs throughout the Tudor period. Christopher Haigh, alongside Eamon Duffy, is one of the foremost scholars of this genre. Haigh questioned the idea of a widespread anti-clericalism as a springboard for the Reformation. He also challenged the ‘Whig’ interpretation of the Reformation as ‘an inexorable process, a necessary sequence unfolding easily to a pre-determined conclusion’ and argued that there ‘was nothing inevitable about the final Protestant victory’.¹³

One of the aims here is to avoid labels which, inevitably, will become redundant with the passage of time – hence it does not claim to be a revisionist account in itself. Eamon Duffy has explained the origins of the term and stated that the historians commonly described as revisionists ‘shared no single agenda’. Although my paradigm model differs from historians such as Dickens and Elton, it seeks to harness the work of the revisionists in an attempt to identify the methods through which Henrician religious policy was enforced. However, at the outset, it should be acknowledged that I share the view that the Reformation had ‘not been achieved on a tidal wave of popular enthusiasm, but had to be worked for, by force, persuasion and slow institutional transformation’.¹⁴ The evidence presented here would appear to support the ‘slow reformation from above’ position.¹⁵ The Pilgrimage of Grace appears to be a good example to support this contention, but will the evidence and indeed the events of the aftermath bear this out?

It is my belief that the Henrician phase of the English Reformation should properly be referred to as an experiment. A reformation presupposes that there was a need or desire for reform and the evidence of a genuine, widespread theological conviction would need to be present. The label ‘Henrician religious experiment’ or the description ‘Henrician religious policy’ appear to be more fitting. Indeed as Peter Marshall has stated, it is highly probable that Henry VIII used his Royal Supremacy to create a hybrid theology in which no one but the king actually believed.¹⁶

The influence of religiosity on the uprisings in the North of England in 1536 is of fundamental importance and an awareness of theological debate and controversy is pivotal to an understanding

the nature of the opposition. Lutheran ideas are clearly reflected in the Ten Articles and the subsequent First Henrician Injunctions issued in August 1536. Luther's influence is evident: only three of the traditional seven sacraments were mentioned and there was a reduction in the number of holy days. Images, relics and miracles were condemned as superstitious and hypocritical.¹⁷ The developments will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

Bush and Bownes summarised the situation when they stated that the religious revolution that the changes represented was not a response to the wishes of the people or most of the clergy: 'Essentially it was an act of state resulting from the control a small number of Protestants exercised over the government.'¹⁸ It is the real experience of innovation and how it impacted upon the laity which is crucial in understanding dissent. It can surely be no coincidence that the Northern Rebellions broke out within eight weeks of the dissemination of the First Injunctions.¹⁹ The injunctions fostered the sense of grievance at the time. The dissolution of the monasteries, more especially the suppression of the lesser houses, further represented an attack on the old order and threatened the sense of security of many of the laity.

It is appropriate, at this juncture, to consider the historiographical analysis specific to the Pilgrimage of Grace. The Pilgrimage of Grace was very much a large-scale insurrection and it is referred to as such in numerous sources from the period,²⁰ but its significance has been underplayed in the Whig tradition. Elton and Dickens argued that socio-economic factors and not religion were the prime motivation in the rebellion. Elton also criticised the notion that it was large-scale.²¹ There are numerous references in the contemporary sources to the extent of the rising, with estimates of between 20,000 and 50,000 rebels²² – indeed the king himself referred to a 'great rebellion in Yorkshire'²³ yet Elton refused to acknowledge the sheer magnitude of the rising. However, he stated elsewhere that virtually all of England north of the Trent was in rebel hands.²⁴

His view can be challenged by many, including Michael Bush, who discussed the huge force consisting of nine separate hosts which 'dwarfed' the army royal. Bush is also of the opinion that the Pilgrimage was a 'great' rebellion because all three orders of the realm were involved.²⁵ This is echoed by Richard Hoyle, who states that the Crown had lost control of virtually all of the North of England and Shagan, who estimates 'perhaps 50,000 men at arms' and speculates that if this force had marched on London no royal force could 'possibly have stopped them'.²⁶

Although the motivation of the participants in the rebellions has been the subject of debate among historians, there is an abundance of evidence to support the contention that the Pilgrimage of Grace was primarily motivated by religious issues and concerns. Elton appeared to disregard such evidence when he stated that it was 'not really possible to agree' that the risings were a 'religious movement'. He reiterated the point when he argued that the 'religious purposes of the Pilgrimage of Grace had shallow roots'. Dickens stated that he concurred with Rachel Reid that the Pilgrimage had 'predominantly secular and economic causation'.²⁷ This view has been ably challenged by other scholars, notably Christopher Haigh, C.S.L. Davies, J.J. Scarisbrick, Peter Marshall, Scott Harris and Ethan Shagan.

Dickens maintained that 'however the Pilgrimage may be regarded, it was not a war, not even a potential war between Protestants and Catholics'. This view can be sharply contrasted with that of Hoyle who stated that the insurrection 'was England's war of religion', whilst Marshall described the Pilgrimage as 'the most dangerous expression of internal disaffection' and stated that it was undoubtedly a reaction against interference with local religious culture. According to Shagan, it is 'indisputable that the Pilgrimage of Grace was a revolt against the Reformation', whilst Scarisbrick

succinctly summed it up in his famous conclusion that the Pilgrimage ‘must stand as a large-scale spontaneous, authentic indictment of all that Henry most obviously stood for’.²⁸ The wide body of evidence to support the conclusion that the Pilgrimage was primarily motivated by religion will be discussed below.

Bush, Harrison and Hoyle are all of the view that the rebellion was a popular revolt and led by the commons,²⁹ whilst Elton was adamant that the rising could be attributed to a conspiracy. He maintained that the insurrection was ‘not the spontaneous work of the commons but owed far more to the activities of alienated members of the ruling sort’.³⁰ Without much hard evidence to make such a claim, Elton argued that the Pilgrimage was the brainchild of a disappointed Aragonese–Maria faction, aided and abetted by London lawyers.³¹ Elton’s arguments appear contradictory: on the one hand, he stated that the outbreak of the Pilgrimage was ‘sudden’³² but he then asserted that ‘a sizeable movement’ could have been organised without inducement, management and influence.³³ In this statement, he actually concedes that the Pilgrimage was a sizeable movement.

The conspiracy theory is also a theme for Dickens, who stated that Lord Thomas Darcy was a frequenter of the back-room of Chapuys’ and had urged Charles V to invade England in 1534. Davies refuted any idea of a conspiracy and cited the examples of the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Northumberland as those who had potential sympathy with the rebels’ cause and yet did not become involved. Indeed, ‘Norfolk took an expedient and calculating decision’ to lead the army royal when he potentially could have raised East Anglia.³⁵

Andy Wood has stressed the idea of a society of orders but maintained that ‘early modern historians remain oddly resistant to the category of class’.³⁶ Order and deference were undoubted features of the society within which the Pilgrimage occurred. Whether or not we accept the usage of the term ‘class’ in relation to the early modern period, it is essential to highlight the fact that the Pilgrimage embodied the co-operation of the different societal orders in an attempt to alter Crown policy. Arguing from a social history perspective, Wood had this to say of the Pilgrimage: ‘The sudden intrusion of rebellious plebeians into conventional histories of government, court faction and administration, ruptures the assumption that politics stemmed only from the central state and the “political nation” of the gentry and nobility.’

Wood made the point that historians have often attempted to distinguish between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ motivations in the Pilgrimage and sees this as flawed. Secular issues, he stated, are seen as relating to economic and social concerns ‘as though religion existed in a separate realm from the “material world”’.³⁷ This is exactly the case: why indeed do the two have to be regarded as mutually exclusive? It is a view also shared by Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch. Acknowledging that their study, *Tudor Rebellions*, attempts to sift the economic from the religious motivations, they state that the exercise is ‘essentially artificial in terms of contemporary understandings of economic society and religion’. They state, rightly, that economic and social grievances were seen as moral or religious grievances, as economic and social misbehaviour was an offence against God.³⁸

The Henrician Reformation must have had the impact of an epistemological seismic shock on the king’s subjects; securely held and cherished world views were shattered and insecurity and fear had the potential to spread like a virus in such circumstances. As Haigh has stated, the ‘Reformation shift from a ritualistic to a bibliocentric presentation of religion was a disaster in the countryside’,³⁹ and the events of the autumn and winter of 1536 in the North of England bear this contention out. One thing we can speculate about is the nature of the sudden and shocking withdrawal of one set

practices and their replacement (or lack thereof) with another – this would be bound to lead to rupture in societal hegemony and cohesion.

In a society of orders where structure and strata were paramount, the opportunity for individual agency was, of course, extremely restricted in the sixteenth century. That as many as 30,000 individuals sought to take action and exercise agency led to the spontaneous outburst that was the Pilgrimage of Grace. In such a static society of orders, any departure from the status quo was bound to be viewed with suspicion and hostility. Michael Bush has placed great emphasis on the idea of the body politic⁴⁰ and this contemporary perception of a Christian community will be examined in conjunction with theological analysis.

This book is, therefore, not primarily a narrative account of the Pilgrimage as, by common consensus, the Dodds' account remains the standard in this respect.⁴¹ Nor does it concentrate on the minutiae of military detail and day-to-day accounts of manoeuvres – Bush has provided an in-depth study in his *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536* (1996). This book explores the methods used to secure compliance with the Henrician religious innovations of the 1530s particularly in the North. Broadly speaking, these can be identified as the promulgation of the Royal Supremacy, rhetoric, retribution and reward.

The primary sources, notably the State Papers, have been thoroughly read and scrutinised for evidence of both regime and anti-regime rhetoric and propaganda. The same method was adopted in relation to evidence for reward and patronage, as well as reports of sedition, disloyalty and retribution. Interrogations and depositions of the rebel Pilgrims have been examined to illuminate the areas of concern for the Crown and the views of the disaffected. Many of these papers have survived, as they were retained by the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell.

As is obviously the case at this stage, the domestic State Papers have been well mined. However, the Spanish State Papers have provided useful alternative documents and other original manuscripts. The National Archives, Kew and the British Library have been examined, where appropriate. They include the Inquisitions Post Mortem. Copies of wills and inventories have also been obtained from the Archbishop's Register in York and the collections of the Surtees Society. Contemporary chronicles, such as those of Edward Hall and Robert Parkyn, have also been analysed, as they provide differing accounts of the religious innovations.

The regime's rhetoric and propaganda will be discussed from the period 1536 onwards, in the aftermath of the high-profile executions of Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher and the survey of the monasteries, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of the previous year. Such rhetoric sought to promote the Royal Supremacy and reiterate the duty of obedience that subjects owed to the sovereign. The Royal Supremacy was indeed a ground-breaking innovation and imposed on Henry's subject a dual requirement of political and religious loyalty. Indeed the years surrounding the Pilgrimage have sometimes been described as the 'Henrician tyranny'.⁴²

What can the Pilgrimage of Grace reveal to us about the themes of religiosity, reward and rhetoric? The *Pilgrims' Ballad* and the Pontefract Articles are two examples of hostility to the Crown's religious innovations during this period. The Pilgrimage in the North will form a central part of the book, but will be placed in a wider English context; examples of dissent, propaganda, reward and retribution existed in all parts of the realm. Was the North of England so very different from the rest of the realm?

Before turning attention specifically to the Pilgrimage of Grace, it is necessary to provide a brief description and summary of the North of England and seek to highlight the state of affairs there on the

eve of the Pilgrimage. Writing in 1921, Rachel Reid addressed what she called the ‘problem of the North’. In Reid’s view, the country north of the Trent was mainly mountain, forest, high pasture and moorland waste – an area constantly menaced by Scottish raiders. It was, she argued, the ‘home of feudalism’ and a centre of resistance to royal authority. She even went so far as to label it ‘the natural refuge of lost causes’.⁴³ Perhaps Reid was influenced by the fact that the North, and in particular the north-east, had been the power base of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later, Richard III. According to A.J. Pollard, Richard had achieved unquestioned supremacy over the region – he reunited northern and eastern society and created a following of ‘awesome’ proportions personally committed to him.⁴⁴ As W.G. Zeeveld has pointed out, the ‘presence of an armed force in the northern counties led to disgruntled Yorkists with the avowed purpose of changing basic policy by coercion was a potent reminder that the wounds of civil war were still green’.⁴⁵

Professor Steven Ellis has described the far north as a region of compact lordships. Its patterns of landholding and its political, social and governmental structures were unmistakably English. However, the region exhibited marked differences from those in lowland England. According to Ellis, the overriding concern of this marcher society was security and defence rather than peace and an effective government.⁴⁶ Pollard, however, has concluded that ‘by no stretch of the imagination ... was north-eastern England a remote, poor and backward corner of the land’.⁴⁷

It is also worth highlighting the insecurity many in the region (and indeed the whole realm) must have felt in the period prior to the outbreak of the northern risings. Not only was religious belief and practice being altered by the king, there was no indication of who his heir might be. Henry, by that time, had been married three times and his only issue were Mary and Elizabeth, both of whom had been declared illegitimate. Even his acknowledged illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, had recently died.⁴⁸ There was a real concern in the North that the Crown might pass to Scotland, by way of Henry’s sister, Margaret, who was queen there. The Scots were, after all, the perennial enemies of the English and the people in the North were acutely aware of the raids and ongoing enmity.

Whatever the situation with regard to the topography and landholding in the North, what can be said as to the predominant characteristics of its society and people? Richard Rex has described the North as the most religiously conservative region of the country. R.B. Merriman has also maintained that devotion and loyalty to the ‘old faith’ was far stronger in the North. Merriman was also of the opinion that ‘Cromwell’s spy system operated less perfectly there’.⁴⁹ It will be revealed that the North, though undoubtedly conservative, was by no means alone in opposing the changes Henry sought to make in religious policy and practice.

Notes

¹ Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England*, Oxford, 2000, p.50.

² Felicity Heal, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland*, Oxford, 2003, p.133.

³ Ibid. – Heal cites Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reign of Henry VII*, p.178.

⁴ Susan Wabuda, ‘The Reformation Revised: The English Reformation Beyond Revisionism’, *History Compass*, Vol. 1 (2003), p.3.

⁵ Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation*, Cambridge, 2003, p.7.

⁶ As Peter Marshall has stated, the study of the Reformation is often a personal engagement or debate about the meaning of religion. See Peter Marshall, ‘(Re)defining the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 48 (2009), pp.564–86,

particularly p.574.

- 7 Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, 5th edition, Harlow, 2004, p.45.
- 8 Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, Cambridge, 2003, p.89.
- 9 R.H. Hoyle, 'Thomas Master's Narrative of the Pilgrimage of Grace', *Northern History*, Vol. 21 (1985), p.53.
- 10 Peter Marshall, *The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2009, pp.65–66.
- 11 Claire Cross, *Church and People: England 1450–1660*, Glasgow, 1976.
- 12 G.R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation: England 1509–1558*, London, 1977; A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, London, 1964; Cross, *Church and People, 1450–1660*.
- 13 Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised*, Cambridge, 1987, pp.19, 20, 23, 30 & 32.
- 14 Eamon Duffy, 'The English Reformation after Revisionism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (2006), p.3.
- 15 In this respect, this work would appear to fit the post-revisionist/post-confessional paradigm as discussed by Ethan Shagan in *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Policy and Identity in Early Modern England*, Manchester, 2005, p.1, and Marshall, '(Re)defining the English Reformation'. Marshall makes the point that both Haigh and Duffy have been willing to embrace the post-revisionist label in recent years (p.566) and also draws attention to Diarmaid MacCulloch's concerns with regard to 'ancestor worship' – the temptation to focus attention of the perceived progenitors of one's own denomination (p.571) of which I am mindful.
- 16 P. Marshall, '(Re)defining the English Reformation', p.584. For other proponents of this perspective, see Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*, Basingstoke, 1993, pp.171–73. Rex discusses the 'idiosyncratic nature of Henry's religious settlement', a view shared by Paul O'Grady, who was of the opinion that Henry's 'Reformation' reflected a 'melange of incoherent prejudices'. Paul O'Grady, *Henry VIII and the Conforming Catholics*, Minn., 1990, p.10.
- 17 Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation*, Cambridge, 1994, pp.162–74.
- 18 Michael Bush and David Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace*, Hull, 1999, p.406. This book aims to avoid the label 'Protestant' for, as Marshall has highlighted, this is somewhat anachronistic in this context. See 'Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism', in Shagan (ed.), *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation*, p.23. For the purposes of this work, 'reformers' or 'evangelicals' will denote those in favour of a reformed theology.
- 19 Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation*, pp.175–78.
- 20 The National Archives (TNA), Kew – SP1/108, f.106; SP1/108, f.212; *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII (L&P)*, arranged and catalogued by Gairdner & Brodie, H.M. Stationery Office, London, 1905; (L&P, Vol. XI: 739, 807, 698 and 848). All provide evidence of the numbers involved.
- 21 G.R. Elton, 'Politics & the Pilgrimage of Grace' in *After the Reformation*, B.C. Malament (ed.), Manchester, 1980, p.30.
- 22 See, for example, TNA, SP1/107, f.154; TNA, SP1/108, f.3; L&P, Vol. XI: 663, 672 & 698.
- 23 L&P, Vol. XI: 712.
- 24 Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p.261.
- 25 M. Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536*, Manchester, 1996, p.407.
- 26 Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, Oxford, 2001, p.9; Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, p.89.
- 27 Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p.264; Elton, 'Politics & the Pilgrimage of Grace', p.43; A.G. Dickens in 'The Pilgrimage of Grace' in his *Reformation Studies*, London, 1982, p.58.
- 28 Dickens, 'Secular & Religious Motivation', p.81; Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, p.453; Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England*, Aldershot, 2006, p.10; Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, p.127; J.J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, Yale, 1997, p.341.
- 29 Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of 1536*, pp. 415–16; Scott Harrison, *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Counties, 1536–37*, London, 1981, p.87; Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, p.423.
- 30 Elton, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace', p.33.
- 31 Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p.252; 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace', pp. 40, 41, 45, 47 & 52.

- [32](#) Elton, *Reform and Reformation*, p.259.
- [33](#) Elton, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace', p.31.
- [34](#) Dickens, 'Secular & Religious Motivation', p.64.
- [35](#) C.S.L. Davies, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered', *Past and Present*, No. 41 (Dec 1968), p.76.
- [36](#) Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Modern England*, Cambridge, 2007, pp.4 & 12.
- [37](#) Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke, 2002, pp.49 & 54.
- [38](#) Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, 2004, p.15.
- [39](#) Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised*, p.24.
- [40](#) Michael Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536*, p.409.
- [41](#) Madeleine Hope Dodds and Ruth Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace 1536–37, and the Exeter Conspiracy*, Cambridge, 1915.
- [42](#) W. Gordon Zeeveld, *Foundations of Tudor Policy*, London, 1969, p.200.
- [43](#) Rachel Reid, *The King's Council in the North*, London, 1921, p.1.
- [44](#) A.J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England during the Wars of the Roses*, Oxford, 1990, p.316.
- [45](#) Zeeveld, *Foundations of Tudor Policy*, p.171.
- [46](#) S.G. Ellis, 'Civilizing Northumberland: Representations of Englishness in the Tudor State', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 12 (1999), pp.103–27. This assessment is reiterated by Steve Gunn, David Grummitt & Hans Cools in *War, State and Society in England and the Netherlands, 1447–1559*, Oxford, 2007, p.318. The North was a more militarised region than the South and the extreme borders were 'thoroughly attuned to war'.
- [47](#) Pollard, *North-Eastern England during the Wars of the Roses*, p.397.
- [48](#) Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 1997, pp.351.
- [49](#) Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*, p.46; Roger Bigelow Merriman, *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*, Vol. I, Oxford, 1968, pp.182–83.

Background: Government and Religion in 1536

When looking back at the year 1536, Thomas Cromwell must have questioned the merits of astrology. In January, one astrologer, John Robyns, advised him that ‘nothing noteworthy is to be expected’.¹ Robyns clearly did not predict the imminent death of Katherine of Aragon, the fall of Anne Boleyn or the outbreak of an insurrection so large that it had the potential to threaten Henry VIII’s grasp on the throne – the largest popular revolt in English history.² The Pilgrimage of Grace was indeed a massive rebellion against the policies of the Crown and those closely identified with Thomas Cromwell. The underlying causes of the insurrection and the motivation of the participants has been the subject of much debate and controversy among historians and a consensus has not been achieved.

At the start of the New Year 1536, it is probable that Henry VIII thought that the worst of his tribulations in matters of religion had passed. Rome had been repudiated and Parliament had acquiesced in the king’s desire to be recognised as the Supreme Head of the Church within his own realm. His treatment of Katherine of Aragon may have aroused condemnation and censure but Henry had escaped any meaningful retribution by her nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Anne Boleyn had borne him (another) daughter and was pregnant again, undoubtedly desperate for the chance to present Henry with his longed-for son and heir. The queen and her evangelical adherents must have had grounds for optimism – the Succession Act of 1534, which named Henry and Anne as heirs, and the executions of Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher all pointed towards a new era.

What, then, did happen to bring about the Pilgrimage of Grace? And to what extent was it religiously motivated? How did a situation arise where such a vast uprising in the region was made possible? What was the perception of Henry’s behaviour abroad? Northern power structures will be examined in due course but initially the religious flux in the realm needs to be addressed. To explore the religious motivation, the events preceding the rebellion and the use of rhetoric (from both sides) harnessing religious sympathy will be identified.

The Act of Supremacy of 1534 is crucial to the Henrician Reformation/experiment. Clearly the king could not have legally pursued his policies and reformation without it. It is therefore fundamental to have an appreciation of the context in which the Reformation was enforced. The king had annexed the power of visitation, the power to discipline the clergy, the right to correct opinion, supervision of canon law and doctrine and the right to try heretics.³ However, in 1535, Henry delegated his ecclesiastical powers to the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell, when he appointed him vicegerent, vicar general, and Cromwell has become synonymous with the ‘policy and police’⁴ or the enforcement of the Reformation in the 1530s. According to Bush, ‘Cromwell’s vicegerency arose from the government’s urgent need to conduct a survey of the English Church following the break with Rome’. Whilst this might well be true, it also was typical of Henry to delegate power to a favoured minister as he himself had such distaste for everyday administration and the minutiae of detail this concerned. As might be expected, Thomas Cranmer, as Archbishop of Canterbury, also had a role to play in the

Henrician Reformation, but it is interesting to note that the experiment became synonymous with Cromwell, a layman.

Before examining any evidence for resistance to the Henrician Reformation in these years, it is necessary to highlight the significance of An Act Extinguishing the Authority of the Bishop of Rome and both the First and Second Henrician Injunctions. The 1536 act, extinguishing the ‘pretended power and usurped authority of the Bishop of Rome, by some called the Pope’, was the final piece of legislation severing England’s ties with Rome. The act made it illegal to ‘extol, set forth, maintain or defend the authority, jurisdiction or power of the Bishop of Rome’ with effect from the first day of August 1536. Anyone guilty of so doing and ‘being thereof lawfully convicted according to the laws of this realm ... shall incur ... penalties, pains and forfeitures’. Clearly this statute is absolutely central to the enforcement of the Royal Supremacy and any changes, doctrinal or otherwise, resulting from it. These statutes and the promulgation of the Ten Articles of the Faith of the Church of England and the dissemination of the First Henrician Injunctions underpinned the king’s religious policy prior to the autumn of 1536.

In early January 1536, the Imperial Ambassador to Rome, Dr Pedro Ortiz, wrote to Katherine of Aragon that the ‘intention of the pope is that ... prayers shall be offered for the Queen and Princesses and the Saints who are fighting for the faith in England’.⁷ Dr Ortiz’s communications throughout 1536 do appear to be both lively and dogmatic but they are also prone to exaggeration and a scant regard for detail. However, his letter to Katherine as she lay dying at Kimbolton (exiled by Henry and forbidden from seeing her daughter, Princess Mary) does illustrate that the English Reformation was by no means perceived abroad as the abject capitulation of Henry’s subjects. This can also be seen in the writings of Johannes Cochlaeus. On 6 January, he wrote to Henry that he was encouraged by the constancy of Fisher and More, whom Henry had put to death, and enlarged on the crimes into which the king has been led by his ‘lawless passion’.⁸

The Reformation was disseminated and enforced by injunctions, proclamations and statutes and in February 1536, a draft Act of Parliament was drawn up ‘against pilgrimages and superstitious worship of relics’.⁹ In March 1536, we witness Cranmer hard at work on the preliminaries. Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, wrote to Charles V:

The prelates here are daily in communication in the house of the archbishop of Canterbury for the determination of certain articles and for the reform of ecclesiastical ceremonies ... they do not admit ... purgatory ... the use of chrism ... the festivals of the saints and images ...¹⁰

It would be only natural that fear and uncertainty would have been present within the realm, as the previously held certainties and practices were swept away. In February, Chapuys reported that the people were in despair and seeking help from abroad; and in April, a priest in Cumberland was reported to Cromwell for having said that 40,000 would rise up in one day. Henry himself was ‘apprehensive of some commotion’ in June when the people expected the restoration of the Princess Mary, following the fall and execution of Anne Boleyn in May.¹¹

The pace of reform, however, continued. The Act Extinguishing the Authority of the Bishop of Rome was followed by an Act of Convocation for the Abrogation of Certain Holydays, especially during harvest time, which was passed in August.¹² The First Henrician Injunctions were drawn up by Thomas Cromwell and issued in August 1536 and instructed the clergy on the changes in religion that they were an accompaniment to the Ten Articles of the Anglican Church.¹³ The clergy in convocation had acquiesced with the Ten Articles and rejected Purgatory, as well as accepting the abrogation of

holy days. Purgatory and prayers for the dead had been a central tenet of the medieval Church and were woven into the fabric of local religious culture, which also set great store by the veneration of local saints and pilgrimages.¹⁴ At the same time as these disturbing innovations were taking place, the monasteries were being dissolved (the legislation of empowerment having been enacted in February–April of 1536).¹⁵ The timing of the outbreak of the Northern Rebellions is significant. It surely can be no coincidence that a rebellion which commenced no more than eight weeks after the First Henrician Injunctions would have been motivated by the changes in religion.

It is appropriate, at this juncture, to look at some instances of opposition to the Henrician religious innovations prior to the outbreak of the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire risings. Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were by no means the only counties where dissent was evident; it was indeed a concern in ‘every part of the realm’.¹⁶ For example, the Vicar of Stanton-Lacy in Shropshire was examined before the Council in the Marches in September–October 1535 for having failed to delete the pope’s name from his service books. Bishop Rowland Lee forwarded the papers to Cromwell but no more was heard of it.¹⁷ Bristol, which had been the base of the evangelical Hugh Latimer, was the setting for what Elton has described as ‘violent exchanges’ from the pulpit between the old and new.¹⁸

Preaching was an important tool in promulgating the Crown’s religious message throughout the country prior to and after the Pilgrimage. A Friar Brynstan preached at Glastonbury Abbey in March 1536, and clearly his views would have been at odds with Cromwell’s but perhaps more representative of the groundswell of opinion. He spoke about those who embraced the ‘new books’, calling them ‘adulterers’ and ‘filthy lechers’. He further accused them of being full of envy and malice, while being ready to wrong their neighbours. Master Lovell, in Dorset, was reported for disloyal preaching in the summer of 1536. He had encouraged the people to keep holy days and offer candles, as well as cautioning them against heretics and the practice of reading the New Testament in English. A prior at St Alban’s Abbey, Hertfordshire, denounced Cromwell and Anne Boleyn as the maintainers of a variety of heresies and asked what should be done about those whose purpose it was to destroy his religion? However, the sub-prior of Woburn, Bedfordshire, sought pardon for the scruples he had entertained regarding the Royal Supremacy and his erroneous estimation of More and Fisher.²⁰ The First Henrician Injunctions were issued in August 1536 and as early as 30 September, Sir Henry Parker was reporting of opposition in Hertfordshire: the curates and sextons of Stortford and Little Hadham had kept the holy day with high and solemn ringing and singing, contrary to the king’s injunctions.²¹

How were events in England perceived outside the realm prior to the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage? Charles V and King Francis I of France had done little to interfere in developments in England since the break with Rome. It would be hard to determine a motive for any potential French involvement, apart from wanting to appease the papacy and perhaps stir up some more trouble for their perennial enemies, the English. The ‘Most Christian King’, Francis, was more than preoccupied with Hapsburg–Valois rivalry and the Italian Wars. Indeed these priorities had led him to form an alliance with Suleiman the Magnificent and the Ottoman Turks.²²

Certainly a little more surprising was the laissez-faire attitude of the Emperor and King of Spain, Charles V. Charles was, after all, the nephew of Katherine of Aragon and her cruel and shameful treatment at the hands of her husband was both a family and diplomatic matter. For all that, Charles’s priorities lay elsewhere. He was embroiled in the Italian Wars and deep-rooted enmity with the Valois and Francis I. His role as Holy Roman Emperor brought him the problems of repelling the Turks and also the religious difficulties which ensued from Luther’s stance in Germany. Moreover, he was responsible for his dominions in the New World. Apart from providing moral support to Katherine and

Mary and being a potentially threatening presence, Charles had not become directly involved in the affairs of England.²³

So, in the period leading up to the Pilgrimage of Grace, there had been no direct or practical involvement from the papacy or European monarchs in the English political or religious scene. Although a second excommunication had been drawn up against Henry in August 1535, a Bull of Deprivation was not finally approved in consistory until January 1536.²⁴ In the middle of the month Chapuys reported to Charles V that the people were indignant because of Henry and Anne's gleeful rejoicing at Katherine's death (she died on 7 January). Poison and grief, he suggested, were being blamed for the queen's death. He then advised that, given the people's indignation, the time was ripe for the pope to proceed with the 'necessary remedies'. The following month, whilst reporting on the state of religion in England, Chapuys advised Charles that if the matter were ten times more unjust, none would dare to contradict Henry without outside support.²⁵ Around this time, rumours were circulating in Scotland that Francis I 'abhorred' Henry's break with Rome.²⁶ According to Chapuys, the king had determined that curates hearing confessions should not absolve anyone who did not accept that the pope was the Antichrist and the king the Supreme Head of the Church.²⁷

Having had experience of religious turmoil in Germany, Charles was aware of potential trouble in England. The emperor informed Chapuys that the withdrawal of Henry from the Church of Rome was truly a matter of great importance, the outcome of which could be division and confusion in his realm. Charles, however, was probably not concerned with internal strife in England. He must have feared a relatively powerful fellow ruler at close proximity to the German Lutheran princes. Reginald Pole (an exile in Italy and a Plantagenet cousin of the king who had refused to agree with the Royal Supremacy) expressed his dissatisfaction with the inertia of the papacy and the emperor shortly afterwards in not enforcing the laws of the Church against Henry.²⁸

A few weeks later, in mid-April 1536, Charles showed his hand. He informed Chapuys that he had persuaded the pope to suspend the Declaration of Privation against Henry and the appeal to the secular arm (Charles in his capacity as Holy Roman Emperor) until Charles advised him to do so.²⁹ His letter to his ambassador was written in the context of proposed war with France and he desired to demonstrate his amity towards Henry. This suggests that Henry was, in reality, not a player on the chessboard of European politics: the issue of England's break with Rome was clearly not a priority for the emperor. Charles simply wanted to avoid Henry giving any sort of support to Francis I.

At the same time, Dr Ortiz advised the emperor's wife, Isabella, that the English were confirming their heresies by translating the Bible, altering many passages to support their errors. Meanwhile, Charles instructed Chapuys to conduct negotiations with Cromwell with regard to the possibility of Henry's reconciliation with the Holy See. Chapuys continued to inform his master of the developments in England and shortly after advised that the English Church sought to 'usurp' the foundations for the redemption of the dead – the doctrine of Purgatory and the practice of Masses for souls. William Weston of Lincoln College in Oxford felt the need to preach a sermon at the university in which he said that although he had been commanded to avoid mentioning Purgatory, it was a heresy to deny it.³⁰

Dissatisfaction with the Henrician injunctions and the direction in which the Church in England was proceeding was clearly not confined to the North. About this time, Chapuys was able to gleefully report of the fall of Anne Boleyn: the people, he said, were joyous at the ruin of the concubine and hopeful of Princess Mary's restoration.³¹ Such was the state of affairs in the spring and summer of 1536, prior to the issue of the First Henrician Injunctions in August and the ensuing uprisings at the

start of October.

On the domestic front, the disgrace and fall of Anne Boleyn may have given conservative factions grounds for optimism and the possibility of a fresh start. Anne was a figurehead for the evangelical cause and had been found guilty of sexual crimes then associated with witchcraft.³² Anne's rise and haughty demeanour had not endeared her to many and some were certain to believe slanderous accusations against her. The accusation of witchcraft and entrapment had also been levelled at Henry's grandmother, Queen Elizabeth Woodville, by her detractors. Elizabeth was also a commoner who had been raised up by her marriage to King Edward IV. The fact that the king had been so anxious to be rid of Anne probably had her opponents rubbing their hands with delight and anticipation. However, Henry immediately remarried – to Jane Seymour – and the First Henrician Injunctions were issued in late summer. The conservatives had experienced a false dawn. At about the same time, the Plantagenet exile Reginald Pole was putting an interesting slant on the Kildare Rebellion in Ireland (1534), where he advised Cardinal Contarini that the Earl of Kildare had been condemned to death for courageously vindicating the pope's authority in Ireland.³³

In the year which witnessed the deaths of two queens and the crowning of another by mid-summer as well as a change in religion and dissolution of monastic houses, it is hardly surprising that people were susceptible to rumours. These circulated in England in the autumn of 1536. John Tregonwell reported to Cromwell from Cornwall on 5 September and said that, prior to his arrival, there had been rumours that he was coming to remove crosses, chalices and other 'idols' of the churches.³⁴ On 1 September, the Duke of Norfolk advised that an organ maker in Norwich deserved death because he intended to organise an insurrection in the shire.³⁵ Rumours were readily believed in Lincolnshire prior to the outbreak of rebellion there at the start of October.

What then of the North? How was power used in the region? And in what ways did the Crown seek to exercise its authority and enforce religious changes in this peripheral area? Was the region really so remote and backward as to be a refuge for lost causes, as Rachel Reid claimed? The North was not isolated in its displays of opposition to the Henrician religious changes, was it atypical in the exercise of royal power and the structure of its society?

Any discussion of the Pilgrimage and its aftermath in the region, particularly in terms of patronage and reward, needs to be underpinned by an analysis of power. Power, of course, was vested in the person of the monarch, but how was it disseminated? Henry was aided in the enforcement of his policies by the legislative sanction of Parliament and by the Privy Council, the chief executive instrument of the Crown. The council was comprised of members of the nobility and powerful gentry who met with him on a regular basis to offer advice, frame laws and govern the realm. Thomas Cromwell, as Lord Privy Seal, was a pivotal figure. Although, in principle, all land belonged to the king, the ruling elites were the land-owning nobles and gentry who attended both Parliament and Court. They controlled and enforced law and order, government and administration in the localities.

Of course, England's system had been feudal in medieval times but (in common with much of continental Europe) by the sixteenth century the state had assumed more responsibility and the government was becoming more centralised. However, governance in the localities was dependent upon the co-operation of both the ruling elites and an increasingly numerous gentry. In return for the services in office, the gentry received prestige, patronage and the potential for profit. By the use of royal commissions, the king conferred on individuals ad hoc legal powers to perform certain specific tasks in his name.³⁶ Treasons and felonies were dealt with by sheriffs and Justices of the Peace and the link between Crown and community was maintained.

The 'North' encompassed a proportionately large geographical area, if it is to be viewed as the region north of the River Trent. Yorkshire was the largest county in the region. The northern nobility was comprised of the leading figures of the Earl of Derby in Lancashire, the Earl of Northumberland and the Earl of Westmorland. In addition, there was the Earl of Cumberland, Lord Dacre, Lord Darcy and, further south, the Earl of Shrewsbury. To be a noble was to be prestigious and the gentry continued to serve their superior lords in the 1530s, as an organising feature of northern society. As Hoyle has stated, power was personal, and the nobility had the potential to raise large contingents of troops, particularly if they had deep roots in an area. Local loyalties were an important factor and men were mustered under local noble captains. This situation, however, was not unique to the North; nobles from elsewhere in the realm were equally able to raise and command their tenants during this period and the northern nobility did not present an increased threat to the Crown.³⁷

The nobility and gentry thus exercised power in the region and were the conduits between periphery and core. Commissions of the Peace enforced the law and there had been, intermittently, specific councils set up to govern the North. The Council of the North had originated in the private council of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III, but this expired with his death and Henry VII did not make specific arrangements for a council in the region. However, a new Council of the North was established in 1525, on the recommendation of Cardinal Wolsey, and was attached to the Duke of Richmond's household. Richmond (Henry Fitzroy) was the king's illegitimate son and was appointed lieutenant. The northern magnates – the Percys, Nevilles, Cliffords and Dacres – resented the council as an intrusion and by 1530, Richmond was replaced by the Bishop of Durham as president and its jurisdiction was confined to Yorkshire.³⁸

The pre-1536 councils served to act on the king's behalf and report back to him but their records have virtually disappeared.³⁹ The council came to be a significant feature in northern society and governance in the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace, as will be discussed in due course. The Commissions of the Peace, and indeed any councils, had to be staffed by appropriate members of the nobility and gentry. These appointments were important in terms of reward and patronage, as will be discussed in a later chapter. However, it should be acknowledged that Northumberland suffered from administrative problems as a result of the paucity of resident gentry in the county.⁴⁰ This dearth of suitably qualified gentry will be examined and discussed when we turn to consider the government of the North in the wake of the 1536 risings. In addition, the far outposts of the region were on the border with Scotland and were governed in a frontier fashion. This area was divided into three marches: the West, Middle and East marches. A warden was appointed to each march in order to defend this militarised area. Another distinctive character of the region was that it encompassed three palatinates: Cheshire, Lancashire and Durham. The king's writ did not run in these areas and they were administratively distinct from the English law court system. The governance of these palatinates was exercised in the name of the lord of each: in Cheshire and Lancashire, the king; in Durham, the bishop.⁴¹

As Professor Steven Ellis has stated, the North did possess a pronounced regional identity, a varied geographical terrain, a distance from the centre, a land border (with Scotland) and a marcher society. The far north was relatively poor and barren; a land of moorland waste, mountain and forest. The insecurity of a border/marcher region obviously presented special challenges for effective governance. Thus, the Crown was obliged to delegate power in a fashion that was rarely required in lowland England. This had resulted in a mass delegation of power to the region's magnates and strengthened their position as marcher lords. These regional magnates resented the intrusion of the Duke

Richmond's council. These magnates also could call upon their *manraed* (tenants and political affinity) when required. The consequence of all this was that royal governance was not nearly effective in these areas and the structures of power had evolved differently.⁴² The North, broad speaking, was a case apart and distinct. The far north was certainly a region which swam against the tide of Tudor centralisation and uniformity.

In summary, Henry VIII's religious innovations and the way in which they were enacted and enforced by the government through its power structures up to the autumn of 1536 sets the scene. It has been acknowledged that although the North was a distinct region, distant from the core, and presented its own particular problems of governance, it was by no means alone in producing examples of dissent within the realm. Evidence that Henry's changes were unpopular in other areas of the country demonstrates that the North was not unique in this respect. In addition, the perspectives of foreign commentators have shed light on how Henry's policies were viewed abroad. It will be necessary to analyse developments in England in a wider context given the break with Rome, the influence of Lutheran theology and the general political intrigues in continental Europe.

So, what actually happened to precipitate the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace? The risings will be considered in the subsequent chapter and a narrative of the events is essential in enabling an understanding of the impact of the movement on the North in terms of governance and religiosity: the fate of the protagonists will serve to illuminate how power and religion were intertwined in the region in the aftermath.

Notes

¹ L&P, Vol. X: 121.

² Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.45.

³ W.J. Sheils, *The English Reformation 1530–1570*, Harlow, 1989.

⁴ G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell*, Cambridge, 1972.

⁵ Bush, Michael, *The Pilgrims' Complaint: A Study of Popular Thought in the Early Tudor North* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.4

⁶ The Statutes of the Realm (Stat. Realm), Volume III, A. Luder (ed.), London, (1810–28), pp.663–66; L&P, Vol. XI: 1087, 8 June.

⁷ L&P, Vol. X: 11 (quotation).

⁸ L&P, Vol. X: 34.

⁹ British Library, Cotton, Vespasian, C/XIV/2, f.47; L&P, Vol. X: 246.

¹⁰ *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives of Simancas and Elsewhere (CSP Sp.)*, Pascual De Gayangos (ed.), Ontario, 1536–38: p.601.

¹¹ L&P, Vol. X: 308; TNA, SP1/103, f.139 (L&P, Vol. X: 693); L&P, Vol. X: 1036.

¹² L&P, Vol. XI: 270.

¹³ Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation*, p.175.

¹⁴ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580*, London, 1992 pp.338 & 347.

¹⁵ Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of 1536*, p.424.

¹⁶ Elton, *Policy and Police*, Chapter 3, pp.83–170.

¹⁷ TNA, SP1/96, ff.210–13 (L&P, Vol. XI: 408).

¹⁸ Elton, *Policy and Police*, 1972, p.112.

¹⁹ TNA, SP1/102, f.45 (L&P, Vol. X: 318); L&P, Vol. X: 1140; L&P, Vol. XI: 354.

²⁰ L&P, Vol. XI: 1239.

²¹ L&P, Vol. XI: 514.

- [22](#) G.R. Elton, *Reformation Europe 1517–1559*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1999) pp.79, 109 & 112.
- [23](#) Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*. Although Charles had attempted to prevent the divorce of Henry and Katherine by putting pressure on Pope Clement VII and encouraging delaying tactics, he had not become militarily involved. Indeed, in April 1536, just a few months after Katherine's death, he appeared to entertain rapprochement with Henry and this was reinforced by the execution of Anne Boleyn the following month (see p.335).
- [24](#) *Ibid.*, pp.334, 335 & 282.
- [25](#) *L&P*, X: 141; Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, p.335.
- [26](#) BL, Cotton, Caligula, B/III, f.195.
- [27](#) *L&P*, Vol. X: 494.
- [28](#) *L&P*, Vol. X: 575 & 619.
- [29](#) *L&P*, Vol. X: 666.
- [30](#) *L&P*, X: 698, 699, 752 & 950 (*The Ten Articles, the First Definition of the Faith*, produced by Henry as Supreme Head, was published this year).
- [31](#) *L&P*, Vol. X: 908. See also Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.339.
- [32](#) Ronald H. Fritze, *Historical Dictionary of Tudor England, 1485–1603*, London, 1991, p.62.
- [33](#) *L&P*, Vol. XI: 376.
- [34](#) TNA, SP1/106, f.134 (*L&P*, Vol. XI: 405).
- [35](#) TNA, SP1/106, f.183 (*L&P*, Vol. XI: 470).
- [36](#) David Loades, *Power in Tudor England*, Basingstoke, 1997, pp.4, 11, 24 & 45.
- [37](#) Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, p.39; Gunn, Grummitt & Cools, *War, State, and Society in England and the Netherlands*, p.317.
- [38](#) Loades. *Power in Tudor England*, pp.123–4.
- [39](#) *Ibid.*, p.32.
- [40](#) *Ibid.*, p.30.
- [41](#) *Ibid.*, p.31.
- [42](#) Steven G. Ellis, *Tudor Frontiers and Noble Power: The Making of the British State*, Oxford, 1995, pp.15, 20, 40, 41, 47 & 48.

The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Holy Crusade?

A series of revolts against the Crown broke out in the autumn of 1536. What actually precipitated them? It will be argued here that the cause of religion was the paramount motivator for the participants and that the revolts were, in essence, spontaneous and popular. The king's religious innovations were discussed in the previous chapter. In addition to the dissemination of the Ten Articles and First Henrician Injunctions, government commissioners were working in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire in September and October in an 'atmosphere of rumour and alarm'. It was the presence of these commissioners in Lincolnshire, following the first wave of the dissolution of the monasteries, that arguably was the catalyst that unleashed the latent fear and resentment of a huge number of the king's subjects in the North.

Although the Lincolnshire Rising ended by 11 October when the gentry sued for pardon,¹ the revolt had spread to Yorkshire and gathered pace. It is the Yorkshire rising which is correctly referred to as the Pilgrimage of Grace and the title seems to have been devised by the rebel leader, Robert Aske, York² – it is first mentioned in the State Papers on 14 October. The revolt was so large that the Duke of Norfolk referred to it as representing 'all the floure of the north'³ and it was brought to an end on 12 December when the king's messenger, Lancaster Herald, brought a general pardon and the commons dispersed.⁴ A number of renewed revolts broke out early in 1537 and will be discussed in the following chapter; these will be referred to, using Professor Michael Bush's term, as the Post-pardon Revolts.

The first references to a disturbance in Lincolnshire in the State Papers are dated 3 October and refer to 'rebellious knaves' in Lyndsey and a 'great multitude of people from Loweth'.⁵ The rebellion actually commenced in Louth on 2 October, when the Bishop of Lincoln's registrar was seized, and was heralded by bell-ringing and assemblies.⁶ This was followed by the murder of the Bishop of Lincoln's chancellor, Dr Raynes, and the burning of his books. The rebels stated that they wanted the suppression of the monasteries to cease and they wanted Cranmer, Latimer, the Bishop of Lincoln and Cromwell delivered up to them or else banished from the realm.⁷ The main architects of the rhetoric of reform were thus targets for the rebels.

The religious intent of the first outbreak of trouble at Louth was on Sunday, 1 October 1536 – a yeoman and singing-man, Thomas Foster, stated, 'we shall never follow [the Cross] more' in a procession.⁸ Lord Thomas Burgh advised the king on 3 October that a sudden great multitude of people from Louth had come within a mile of him and said that they would not pay any more silver and had caused the church bells to be rung. Sir Robert Tyrwhyt reported on the same day that 20,000 of the king's 'true and faithful subjects' had assembled because it had been reported that all jewels and goods of the churches were to be taken away to the King's Council.⁹ The commissioners had been working in an atmosphere where rumours were rife that the Crown intended to appropriate the goods of the parish churches, and it was small wonder that these were believed when everything else in the

matter of religion seemed to be changing. The king reproached the Commissioners for the Subsidies early in the rebellion and stated that the removal of the goods of parish churches had never been intended, and he advised Thomas, Lord Darcy on 8 October that it appeared that the insurrection 'grew by crafty persons reporting that we would take the goods of all the churches'.¹⁰

Lord John Hussey appears to have been the first to have mentioned the Lincolnshire Rising, in a letter to the Mayor of Lincoln, Robert Sutton, on 3 October 1536.¹¹ Hussey advised Cromwell that the country was becoming increasingly rebellious on 5 October, and the rebels' oath was reported to Cromwell the same day. Its religious tone is illuminating: 'Ye shall swere to be trew to Allmyte god to crystes catholyke church, to owr sovereyne Lorde the Kynge and unto the comons of thys realme so helpe you god'.¹² Sir Marmaduke Constable and Robert Tyrwhyte also reported that the rebels' petition was for pardon and that they may keep holy days as in the past and also that the suppression of religious houses might remain. So, even at this early (and less serious) stage of the Northern Rebellions, the rebels were clear that they opposed the dissolution of the monasteries. It is thus hard to see why Dickens could have argued that the 'monasteries should be deleted from religious motives'.¹³

Lord Darcy wrote to the king of the situation in Lincolnshire on 6 October. He spoke of 'sedition in Northumberland which were dangerous and encouraged by the Scots. The rebels' oath was to suffer neither spoils nor suppressions of abbeys, parish churches or their jewels'.¹⁴ In the light of what was to come later, the king's letter to Darcy of 9 October is somewhat curious. Henry praised Darcy for his wisdom and diligence and stated, 'what an opinion we must have of your fidelity'.¹⁵ About this time the king's gentleman usher, Christopher Ascugh, informed Cromwell that the rebels had used 'rigorous' words against the Lord Privy Seal and that the Prior of Spalding had refused to help against the rebels, stating that he was a spiritual man.¹⁶

Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, was duly diligent in reporting the events to the emperor. On 7 October, he advised Charles V that there had been a great rising against the king's commissioners over the previous five days. He informed Charles that the uprising was against the demolition of the abbeys and convents throughout England, with the rioters blaming Cromwell. The ambassador also informed his imperial counterpart at Rome, the Count of Cifuentes. Revealingly, Chapuys stated that the rising had no leader of note and cautioned that popular risings of the sort which at first appeared formidable, often ended in smoke;¹⁷ not exactly the report of an ardent conspirator in the commotions.

Robert Aske is first referred to in a letter of 9 October, when he and others issued a proclamation for all men to assemble on Skypwithe Moor in order to take the oath to be 'true to the king's issue and to the noble blood, to preserve the church from spoil and be true to the common wealth'.¹⁸ The following day, the town of Beverley in Yorkshire wrote to the commons of Lincolnshire stating that they too had risen. They stressed that the commons were sworn to their prince but were hostile towards his counsellors. They wished to enquire as to whether the captains and commons in Lincolnshire required their help. At the same time, parishioners and tenants in Northumberland were petitioning their priest, Master Deyn, to pray for the pope of Rome as the head of their mother Holy Church.¹⁹

The Lincolnshire rebels sued for pardon on 11 October, by which stage the Yorkshire rising was underway. Writing to the empress on 14 October, Eustace Chapuys informed her that a 'great number of men' had risen who 'object to the suppression of churches, wishing ecclesiastical matters to be as formerly'.²⁰ He also mentioned the position of the princess (Mary) and advised that her cause would be the next important issue for the rebels, after that of the Church. We would expect Chapuys' rhetoric

to be anti-heretical and perhaps prone to exaggeration, but the numbers he put the rebels at (30,000 to 50,000) and his succinct summary regarding religion are indicative of quite an informed and accurate picture of the insurrection at this stage.

This first stage of the insurrection in the North was over by 11 October and it is the uprisings in Yorkshire, led by Robert Aske, a London-based lawyer, which are properly referred to as the Pilgrimage of Grace. On 14 October, the mayor, aldermen and sheriffs of York wrote to advise the king that the commons had rebelliously assembled and that York was 'ill provided' for defence.²¹ A copy of a set of rebel articles existed in York at this time, addressed 'To the king our sovereign lord' and these contained five broad grievances.²² They reveal the religious concerns of the rebels and also their distaste for members of the government. It is worth highlighting three of the articles to illustrate the mindset of the participants:

Item 1: By the suppression of so many religious houses, the service of God is not well performed and the people unrelieved.

Item 4: The king takes of his Council, and has about him, persons of low birth and small reputation who have procured these things for their own advantage, whom we suspect to be Lord Cromwell and Sir Richard Riche, Chancellor of the Augmentations.

Item 5: Are grieved that there are bishops of the king's late promotion who have subverted the faith of Christ, the bishops of Canterbury, Rochester, Worcester, Salisbury, St David's and Dublin.

Robert Aske also issued a proclamation to the City of York between 15 and 16 October, which denied that the rebels had assembled on account of impositions laid on them but because 'evil-disposed persons being of the king's council' were responsible for 'many and sundry new inventions, which be contrary [to] the faith of God ... and thereby intendeth to destroy the church and ... further intending utterly to spoil and rob the whole body of this realm'. The proclamation said that whether what was stated were true or not should be put to conscience but that if those who decided to fight against the rebels should prevail, it would put 'both us and you and your heirs and ours in bondage forever'. The proclamation went on to state clearly that 'we will fight and die against both you and those that shall be about ... to stop us in the said pilgrimage, and God shall judge which shall have his grace and mercy ...'²³

Darcy and the other lords in Pontefract Castle wrote to the earls of Shrewsbury, Rutland and Huntingdon on 15 October and advised that 20,000 men were meeting at York and that they were in no doubt that the commons of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire received messages from each other – 'the increase in every parish and the cross goes before them'.²⁴ Sir Brian Hastings informed Shrewsbury of Aske's triumphal entry into York on 16 October by letter the following day. According to Hastings the rebels were present in an area between Doncaster and Newcastle and numbered 40,000. He was of the opinion that Lord Thomas Darcy would surrender Pontefract Castle and the rebels had already taken the abbey.

At this juncture, Hastings advised that Lords Latimer and Scrope had been sworn by the rebels. Hastings implored Shrewsbury urgently to advise the king as he didn't dare trust anyone and confirmed that the rebels had been received at York the previous Monday with a procession at 5 p.m. The momentum was clearly with the rebels: on 18 October, Shrewsbury, Rutland and Huntingdon advised the Duke of Suffolk of the fact that the mayor and commons of Doncaster had been sworn to the rebels' cause 'never sheep ran faster in a morning owte of their fold than they did to receive the said othe'.²⁵

Aske prepared an oath to be sworn by the participants and it appears to be at this stage, whilst in York, that the term Pilgrimage of Grace was devised. The oath is a highly illuminating declaration of

the rebels' rhetoric:

Ye shall not enter into this our Pilgrimage of Grace for the commonwealth, but only for the love that ye do bear unto almighty God, his faith and to holy church militant [and for] the maintenance therof, to the preservation of the king's person [and] his issue, to the purifying of the nobility, and *to expulse all villain blood and evil councillors* against the commonwealth *from his grace and his privy council* of the same. And ye shall not enter into our said Pilgrimage for no particular profit to yourself, nor to do any displeasure to any private person, but by the counsel of the commonwealth, nor slay nor murder for no envy, but in your hearts put away fear and dread, and take afore you the Cross of Christ, and in your hearts his faith, the restitution of the church, the suppression of these heretics and their opinions by the holy contents of this book.²⁶

Aske followed this dazzling early success with an order for the suppressed religious houses to be restored and prepared a draft of protection for the monastery of St Mary's at Salley (Sawley) in Lancashire. The abbot and monks had been reinstated there by the commons on 12 October. The monastery then petitioned Sir Henry Percy, stating that the whole country supported the monks in entering their house and was ready to extend the pilgrimage of Christ's faith. Sawley monastery was a hot bed of dissent and resistance and two revealing documents are to be found in the convent's papers from this time. The first is a paper written in Latin entitled *Summa Summarum*, which stated that it was lawful to fight for faith and country, that men should bear injuries done to themselves, but not those done to God and their neighbours.²⁷ The second is an example of anti-regime religious rhetoric in the form of a poem which has come to be known as the *Pilgrims' Ballad*.²⁸ It contains sixteen stanzas of seven lines each; listed here are six of them which serve as an illustration as to the nature of the concerns and grievances of the Pilgrims and will be analysed in turn:

Crist crucifyd!
For thy woundes wide
Vs commons guyde!
Which pilgrames be,
Thrughe godes grace,
For to purchache
Olde welth and peax
Of the spiritualtie.

The crucified Christ is called upon to guide the commons in their pilgrimage. Through God's grace they believed they would achieve their objective of the restoration of the spiritual peace. We see here the emphasis placed upon the (five) wounds of Christ.

The following stanzas deal with the role of the monasteries:

Gaif to releif,
Whome for amice greve
Boith day and even,
And can no wirke;
Yet this thay may,
Boith night and day
Rusorte and pray
Vnto godes kyrke

Those unable to work had been provided with relief. The fact that the monasteries provided alms for the poor is reiterated in the following stanzas. The poor commons had been prompted into action for the Church's sake. This, it was said, was not surprising because it was clear that the decay of the Church, if allowed to continue un-checked, would be sorely lamented by the poor:

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