

INTRODUCTION

The Baker, the Bishop and the Baker's Son

On 29 October 1597 Joan Pie, a fortuitously-named baker from Nottingham, went to the house of her neighbours Thomas and Anne Porter to pay them a visit. But the object of her attention was unusual – Thomas's apprentice, a young man named William Sommers. Sommers had been a bad apprentice to Thomas Porter. He was the kind that masters dreaded, loafing in alehouses when he was supposed to be running errands, and coming home late and penniless. He even ran away for periods of several months. He had a low opinion of his master's abilities which he did not hesitate to share. But Joan Pie wanted to see this unhappy youth because he was reported to be possessed by the devil. She was one of the first, if not the first, visitors to Sommers – soon tens of others would follow, with one hundred and fifty people present nine days later on 7 November for Sommers's dispossession. Joan was ahead of the crowd and she took an active interest in Sommers's evolving condition. She visited in the mornings, evenings and at noon, keeping abreast of Sommers's behaviour and speeches in his fits.¹

On 5 November, a preacher arrived in Nottingham hoping to dispossess Sommers. Although he had been sent for by the Mayor and local ministers, the first person to meet him was Joan Pie. She had left Sommers's bedside purposely to intercept him and give him the latest, sensational news. Joan told the minister, John Darrell, exactly what he must expect when he saw Sommers – which appeared to the godly (puritanically-inclined) onlookers to be the possessed boy's imminent death. Darrell was later to explain that Joan accosted him as soon as he dismounted from his horse: 'I was no soner light but tydinges was brought to me, by one of they[r] neighbour women Joahn Pye by name'.² Darrell discussed Sommers's case briefly with Joan, and she then escorted him to the house, entering triumphantly with the man that the assembled crowd hoped would cure William Sommers and cast out the devil from their midst.

The group commenced the pious investigation of Sommers's trouble, and that weekend they dispossessed him by prayer and fasting – the approved godly method, which avoided any 'popish' ritual and, they thought, drove out the devil by the force of Protestant faith expressed in sermons, self-denial and extemporary prayers.

Later, Joan Pie gave evidence to the ecclesiastical Commission appointed to investigate the events surrounding Sommers's dispossession by Darrell. Her evidence occupied two closely-printed pages of the pamphlet published by Darrell's supporters to spread the word about the success of his method. Joan's is one of the longest statements to survive, and is notable for its confidence and vividness. She reported that Sommers had convulsed extraordinarily, 'his bodie doubled, and his head betweene his legs: and then suddenly he was plucked round upon an heape'. When Sommers was thus curled up, Joan described his body as 'like a greate browne loafe', a cottage loaf as we would now call it. Her simile was, of course, drawn from her own and her husband's trade. Later, she returned to the same accessible imagery to describe Sommers's starting eyes – like walnuts – and a strange mobile swelling in his body – like a '3 penie white l[o]afe'. Other similes concerned the kind of pests likely to be found in a baker's premises – a rat, and a black 'clock' or beetle. Her readers saw Sommers through Joan Pie's eyes, his body made of bread, his eyes of nuts, his substance invaded and preyed upon by vermin. This gingerbread boy, a creature from folktale, also had religious resonances, for Christ's own body was likened at Communion to bread, and his blood to wine. Sommers, in Joan's imagery, was thus both common and extraordinary. And Joan herself was both the streetcrier of this edible wonder, and a blessed apostle. Her evidence would be part of a communal meditation – an 'exercise' or 'prophesying', as the godly called them – on the significance of dispossession by prayer and fasting. And it would be printed and publicized across the nation.

How did the readers of Joan's words value this evidence, given by a woman who in describing matters of high religious importance spoke of little beyond her own mercantile world – who made no forays into the intellectual fields of medicine or theology and who did not speak the languages of those professions? For readers who identified with Joan, and perhaps particularly to illiterate or partially literate listeners to whom the pamphlet could be read out, her similes would have had a directness and familiarity that carried conviction. If an otherwise mysterious and inexplicable 'running lump' in the body could be likened to a man-made, priced and consumable item like a threepenny loaf, perhaps it could be grasped and believed as a wonder by ordinary Christians. Like the accessibility of Christ's parables and the stories of his miracles, which similarly spoke of seed and sheep, loaves and fishes, Joan's words may have appealed to the godly layman of the 'common sort'. But for sceptical and espe-

cially for educated readers, Joan Pie's similes might carry evidence of their own intellectual limitations.

Why, they might ask, was this ordinary woman being cited as an authority on the mysteries of demonology? Matthew Sutcliffe, Dean of Exeter, had written five years before of his disgust that in godly (and particularly presbyterian) circles ordinary people, 'Hick, Hob and Clim of Clough, yea, and Margaret and Joan too', judged ecclesiastical matters. 'It would be very ridiculous' he thought 'if the base sort of people, leaving the shuttle, the plough and the spade and shop board, should busy their heads in discussing matters of religion and government'.³ Commonness and femininity were both disqualifications in such a field. Many of Joan Pie's fellow witnesses were of the same 'sort' or class of persons – a cordwainer (shoemaker), a locksmith, a tailor. That men of the cloth, like Darrell, and gentlemen also gave evidence was little comfort, and that the chaplains and agents of aristocrats should be present was even less so. It was worrying that such dissimilar people, drawn together only by 'puritan', or godly, sympathies, should be consorting in the bedroom of a provincial apprentice and then publishing their conclusions on what they had seen there. Their shared cultural community was one of which the established Church of England, of which the godly were a part, was very suspicious. That the preacher, the gentleman and the baker's wife thought alike was cause for concern rather than complacency.

This group in Sommers's bedroom, said Samuel Harsnett, chaplain to the Bishop of London, formed in effect a kind of presbyterian *classis*, or illegal conventicle.⁴ Here untrained and half-trained theologians were making up their own doctrine, assisted by the illiterate and ignorant. They were dismantling the hierarchical organization of the established Church, where archbishops and bishops made decisions, ministers obeyed them, and laity obeyed both. Despite the Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on individual paths to God through the understanding of his Word, lay people like Joan Pie had no business offering their own interpretations of religion. John Darrell, as an unbeneficed preacher, likewise had no right, nor did William Sommers, a musician's apprentice. In fact, no-one in Nottingham ought to be deciding Church doctrine. This was done at Canterbury, York, Lambeth and other seats of Church power, at convocation and in synod. Under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury Harsnett's employer, Bishop Richard Bancroft, had spent the last decade of his career attempting to put down such rebellious tendencies in his church, both in the courts and in print. Ironically, his chaplain Harsnett was the son of a godly baker, and made his name attacking precisely the kind of people that his parents had been, as well as destroying the career of their most celebrated exorcist, John Darrell.⁵

John Darrell and Dispossession by Prayer and Fasting

The godly did not particularly care what bishops and their chaplains thought of their dispossessions, because they believed that the gatherings were based on the best possible textual warrant: the gospels. In Mark 9:29, Christ had spoken to his disciples about a particular kind of demonic spirit that could possess human bodies. 'This kind' he said 'can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting'.⁶ Christ himself was able to cast out demons by simple command, since he was the son of God. His apostles had less power, but could achieve similar results because some of Christ's power had been given to them. But after the end of the Apostolic era, what power was left in the church to cast out devils? The Roman Catholic church had developed a complex rite that, they argued, drove out the demon by harassing him with hallowed objects, and charging him in God's name to leave. But after the Reformation, Protestants had no method of their own, because they found the idea of holy objects repugnant. They also thought it presumptuous to command the devil to do anything, since in providential theory the devil could do nothing without God's having willed it, and no Christian might presume to command God.

But Darrell, and a number of other godly ministers and lay people, became convinced that Mark 9:29 contained the solution of this problem. Here, they thought, Christ gave specific, if obliquely-expressed, instructions about how to drive out a devil by humbly *petitioning* God to intervene, 'therein secretly promising, that praier and fasting being used, evill spirites doe and shall goe out'. And so their godly group began to practice dispossession by prayer and fasting, arguing that it would show Protestantism to be the true church, and refute Catholic claims that only their priests could exorcize. Prayer and fasting was not a dispossession method invented, or even revived, by Darrell and his friends, however. As Keith Thomas has shown, it had been used by John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, as early as 1574. Harsnett suggested that Darrell's models were two Kentish ministers, Roger Newman of Westwell and John Brainford of Kennington, who dispossessed a servant girl in October 1574, but they charged the devil rather than praying as Darrell prescribed.⁷ Darrell was more familiar with the work of John Foxe the martyrologist, who used prayer without fasting, with his most famous exorcism being that of a law student, also in 1574. Darrell himself did not, apparently, fast or encourage others to fast in his own first dispossession. He simply prayed for the deliverance of the victim. Only later did he add fasting, because he came to believe it was advocated in the gospels, and he became known as the leading promoter of this method.

Ironically, in view of the Church of England's horrified reaction to Darrell's activities, there was no obvious theological objection to Protestant ministers performing dispossession by prayer and fasting, as Bishop Parkhurst's use of it

shows. But it was not widely accepted that the scripture was sufficient warrant for dispossessions by minor godly clergy and lay people. This seemed likely to strip authority from the hierarchy and governmental structures of the national church, which could not be allowed, and to promote the political aims of the godly wing of the church, which – as we shall see – were widely regarded by the ‘ungodly’ as revolutionary. So, after his dispossession at Nottingham, and apparently much to his surprise, John Darrell was arrested. He was accused first of heresy and then of fraud, in particular of teaching his supposed patient William Sommers to simulate the symptoms of demonic possession, so that Darrell could become a godly celebrity when he ‘exorcized’ him. The minister was subjected to a lengthy trial by the ecclesiastical Court of High Commission in London, deprived of his ministry and imprisoned, with his fellow-minister George More, for eighteen months. When he was freed, he went into hiding and he and his friends engaged in a war of words with the church authorities that lasted until 1603 and produced at least fifteen books of up to two hundred pages in length. Darrell’s dispossessing and publishing activities even changed the basis of church law on dispossessions, for in 1604 new canons forbade any exorcisms unless licensed by a bishop.

This book is about the struggle in the Church of England over dispossession by prayer and fasting, and especially the pamphlets and books written by Darrell, his godly friends, and their opponents. It is also about the other struggles for authority that were part of the bigger battle: broadly, between the marginal and the central, geographically, socially, in terms of age, authorial status, religious beliefs and political power.

‘Puritanism’ and the Church of England in the 1570s

The Darrell affair took place in the context of a much wider political debate, which we must explore in order to understand why he was represented as such a threat to good order in the Church and beyond. In the 1570s it had become clear to the governors of the Church of England (the Queen, her archbishops and bishops) that some English Protestants – ‘puritans’ – were so dissatisfied with the progress of reform in the church that they could be treated as posing a danger to it. To modern readers, this may seem an extremely surprising position for the church to have reached, especially so soon after the ‘Elizabethan Settlement’. It has looked this way for some time: in 1819 Joseph Goadby prefaced his description of the difficulties inflicted on puritans by the Church of England with the necessary explanation that ‘a spirit of intolerance abounded’ and ‘strange as it may seem, the clergy persecuted the clergy’. Goadby remarked serenely that in modern times ‘if I differ from another, it may also be said another differs from me; and whoever he may be, he has no more right given

him of God, to persecute me, than I have to persecute him'.⁸ Goadby might have written differently later in his own century, but his basic perception was correct: that from the late seventeenth century onwards it became to most people curiously distasteful, perhaps even un-English, to brawl over religion.

Religious infighting had been one element of the Civil War, and came to symbolize stereotypically its causes: long after quarrels over taxes had been forgotten, the troublesome figure of the 'puritan' remained as the antithesis of the ruling 'cavalier'. The puritans preferred to think of themselves as 'the godly', but the stereotype of them as overly precise and uppity religious fanatics stuck. Few wanted to return to the debates of the 1570s. Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* made the point succinctly, using Israel as a metaphor for England:

The sober part of Israel, free from stain,
Well knew the value of a peaceful reign;
And looking backward with a wise affright,
Saw seams of wounds, dishonest to the sight:
In contemplation of those ugly scars
They cursed the memory of civil wars.
The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,
Inclined the balance to the better side.⁹

But Dryden's poem, despite its advocacy of moderation, also reworked the rhetoric that Elizabeth's government had deployed against the more extreme kinds of Protestant. For Dryden they were a 'host of dreaming saints', each filled with canting 'zeal to God and hatred to his King'.¹⁰ Dryden agreed with contemporary historians of puritanism like Peter Heylyn: the godly, as they called themselves, were of 'rude humor and ungoverned Zeal' and 'Turbulencies and Seditions' were their legacy.¹¹ They actively fomented trouble against any type of authority, Dryden believed, as many of Queen Elizabeth's bishops had believed before him. Catholics were, more understandably he thought, just trying to preserve their ancient, well-established rights; but the godly wanted dangerous and anarchic innovation, a cranky individual liberty that was not allowable. He, Heylyn and subsequent historians inherited this view directly from the Elizabethan bishops John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft, among others.

The decision of the Queen and the leaders of her church that extreme Protestants were a threat, and the continued representation of them as such into modern times, is particularly striking given the context of Catholic activities in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign. Why attack fellow Protestants as 'greater enmities ... then the papists' when Catholics were a far more stereotypical 'fifth column',¹² backed by the outright threat of foreign invasion? The point was made by the godly courtier Sir Francis Knollys to Lord Burghley in 1584:

it grieves my heart to see the course of popish treason to be neglected and to see the zealous preachers of the gospel, sound in doctrine (who are the most diligent barkers against the popish wolf to save the fold and flock of Christ) to be persecuted and put to silence as though there were no enemies to her Majesty and to the state but they.¹³

Knollys had plenty of evidence to adduce. In 1569 the ‘Northern Earls’ of Westmorland and Northumberland had led a Catholic rising against Elizabeth. She had then been excommunicated by the Pope in 1570, giving *carte blanche* to anyone else who wanted to depose her on behalf of the Catholic church, but had been hesitating because the Queen was God’s anointed monarch. If Elizabeth was assassinated, she might be succeeded by a Catholic, especially by her cousin Mary Queen of Scots, which would put an end to England’s Protestantism; and there were a string of plots surrounding Mary. But the Queen and her government’s harsh response to godly agitation is, in reality, partly explained by just this Catholic threat. No government wants to fight two battles at once, or feel that it being undermined by extremists from within its own party. The godly had chosen a particularly bad time to open their campaign for further church reform. They simply could not wait and refused to choose politically expedient moments for public and parliamentary action, because they believed that God’s work should not be delayed. A time of national crisis such as that of the rebellion and excommunication was not the ideal moment for Thomas Cartwright, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, to begin to argue publicly for a reformed system of Church government. But this was what Cartwright did in 1570. It was also clear that he ‘said out loud what many of the most active laity and ministers of the Church had been thinking’.¹⁴

Cartwright and his sympathizers wanted, in modern terms, a flatter Church management structure, with greater equality for ordinary clergy and even laity. This meant abolishing the higher ranks of deans, bishops, archbishops and so on – which begged a question about the continuing status of the Church’s supreme governor, the Queen.¹⁵ Such parity would allow a move towards giving all clergy equal rights to form opinions, shape their own religious practice, and open up debate on knotty issues of divinity. Cartwright and his followers believed that this had been the original form of the Christian church, before Catholicism had corrupted it by introducing episcopacy. But this was the opposite of what the Church hierarchy wished to hear: as we shall see, their aim was to ensure stability, by moulding the new Church into conformity and uniformity based on obedience to superiors, and silence upon contentious subjects. Cartwright’s speech and publications were thus a serious threat – and also an affront. The Queen was not to be lectured by mere clerics. Elizabeth thought, broadly, that reformation had gone as far as was desirable. She did not

wish to persecute Catholics beyond what was necessary to ensure order and loyalty. She did not want to hear either that others wanted more power within her Church – through, for instance, Cartwright’s presbyterian system in which each parish church would form a self-governing body – or that they thought existing arrangements popish. Parliament was also becoming overly interested in the regulation of religion, with bills on church law and the Prayer Book brought forward in the early 1570s. Publication was part of this campaign. A group of godly ministers led by Thomas Wilcox and John Field wrote and had printed an *Admonition* to Parliament which laid out their objections to bishops, hierarchy and certain ceremonies, and argued that presbyterianism was the form of Church government endorsed by the Bible. The ministers were jailed for this ‘breach of courtesy to well-intentioned churchmen’, and Cartwright was dismissed from Cambridge, but their opinions and especially their attitude would not go away.¹⁶ This book will discuss many ministers and lay people who shared that attitude, refusing to remain silent, and insisting on their right to speak and publish their opinions.

The Queen was so determined to suppress godly dissent that when her new Archbishop of Canterbury, Edmund Grindal, attempted to defend some reforming practices, she had him placed under house arrest at Lambeth Palace. Grindal had defended so-called ‘prophesyings’ meetings of ministers to preach complementary sermons and discuss doctrine in front of a lay congregation. The godly minister John Ireton, who was later one of Darrell’s friends and advisors, called them ‘universities of the pore ministers’.¹⁷ But the Queen was suspicious of these meetings because she thought they might be, as Patrick Collinson put it, ‘a first step in the partial delegation of the bishop’s pastoral functions to permanent moderators of local synods’. Even first, partial moves towards such an outcome were anathema. Grindal, who was more sympathetic to godly arguments than his predecessor Archbishop Parker, had enjoyed good relations with the more assertive reformers in his previous Archdiocese of York – some of these would become key players in the exorcism controversy that is the focus of this book. His loss of authority and his death in 1583 meant that such people were deprived of a sympathetic ear, and the Queen lined up a successor who shared her views, and the views of the conformists within the Church. Grindal was replaced by John Whitgift, who was both conservative and disciplinarian. Although, as Diarmaid MacCulloch points out, Whitgift was unlike later Anglican conservatives in that he was not inspired by the older Church forms of worship, he valued them and intended that others should do so also.¹⁸ With Whitgift at Canterbury, the Church shifted towards the complete suppression of godly nonconformity.

Whitgift and the Attack on the Godly

Whitgift had a list of three articles drawn up, to smoke out nonconforming clerics and make the government's position on Church matters crystal clear. Clergy were required to assent to these articles, subscribing their name to them in agreement. Most obviously difficult for puritan ministers to subscribe to was the second article, which asserted that the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer was consistent with Biblical instructions for worship, containing nothing contrary to them. A minister did not need to be a presbyterian to feel uneasy about the Prayer Book, although he might be labelled as such if he expressed it. In fact, ministers who thought of themselves as soundly conformist might have significant doubts about such matters as Biblical authority for the wearing of clerical vestments, or kneeling at communion. The ceremonies prescribed, and the dressing up, seemed inherently popish to a good number, who saw no reason to distinguish themselves and their activities as sacred in this way. Anything suggesting a mystical sacredness in communion smacked to them of the Catholic belief that it was more than a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice. For Catholics, Christ, his body and blood, were really present. For Protestants, the communion service was simply a metaphorical act, where a concentration on objects and gestures was actually destructive of the inner processes and the words of the communicants. Whitgift tried to persuade the godly that such objects and gestures were 'things indifferent' or *adiaphora*, which might be performed quite harmlessly whether one thought them correct or not, but they could not agree. His articles brought the controversy to a head, and between three and four hundred ministers refused to assent to them. They were suspended from their posts.

This provoked uproar in their communities, in Parliament and at court, where the godly included in their number the Earl of Leicester, Sir Francis Walsingham and Sir Francis Knollys. Their protests were accompanied by challenges from lawyers to the Church's right to suspend and dismiss ministers for non-subscription. English justice was still based on several competing bodies of law – common, civil and canon – which conflicted with each other and with the Queen's prerogative to govern as she chose. Under common law – which those lawyers who practised it believed should be the basis of equitable government – the articles were not legally valid as a reason to deprive a man of his living. What about the right to trial by one's peers, and the right not to be deprived of one's freehold except by the judgment of such peers and by the law of the land?¹⁹ Moreover, the Prayer Book prescribed in the articles was not the one named in statute, because when the key acts had been passed that established the Queen's supremacy in the Church and its right to enforce uniformity, the Prayer Book had been substantially different. Whitgift was thus violating common law, they argued, and his plan to enforce subscription through the church

courts was also invalid because these were outdated anomalies, not consistent with common law. Ministers should be treated in the way that other subjects were treated: as common men not subject to special (and persecutory) jurisdiction. Every time a clergyman was deprived of his living and driven from his parish, Magna Carta was at stake, argued the common lawyers. There was an 'ideological parallelism' between godliness and the practice of common law in the pursuit of fundamental rights.²⁰

This put Whitgift in an exposed position. It was his belief, as it was the Queen's, that it was perfectly lawful to demand whatever she wanted in the Church – it was her prerogative to do so. But the Queen should also be kept aloof from dangerous controversy, and her ministers and archbishops should ensure that conformity was obtained without recourse to her.²¹ So Whitgift introduced a further test for those who would not subscribe. A series of interrogatories would probe the beliefs and practices of ministers beyond their mere assent to the prayer book. Did they wear the surplice and use rings in marriage, as required? Those interrogated had to swear '*ex officio mero*', a form of civil law oath, that they were telling the truth and answering each question fully. The *ex officio* oath had to be sworn before the minister had seen the questions that he would be asked, and bound him in effect to incriminate himself by his answers, since he could not remain silent or equivocate without breaking his oath. Neither could he refuse to take the oath without being punished. To some, like Lord Burghley, this seemed like the Catholic Inquisition, and to common lawyers it violated common law even more comprehensively – it was unlawful to require a man to incriminate himself.²² In introducing the use of the *ex officio* oath, Whitgift thus opened up a new front in the battle with the godly. The oath was attacked in legal, moral and religious terms. The idea that ministers of the gospel might lie, or resort to Catholic techniques of sophistry rather than bearing witness truthfully, filled many with fury. But, more interestingly, what was in question was which set of laws governed England and her church. This was an attempt to extend Magna Carta to a new group of English subjects, not to defend ancient rights being eroded among those who had always enjoyed them. This meant a new equality under the law to be shared by ministers and laity – and although the case was not made and was unmakeable in the legal circumstances of its time, by implication there was the suggestion that everyone else, from the Queen down, should be equal under the law too.

Like many political disputes, this one ended in a fudge. Whitgift agreed to accept a limited type of subscription, in the form of a letter promising to observe the Book of Common Prayer and the orders of the Church, a formula suggested by the godly politician Sir Francis Walsingham. Such pressure prevailed enough to get a large number of ministers reinstated, so long as they subscribed to the basics of ministerial life and promised good behaviour. They

could still, however, be followed up through the Church courts and ultimately deprived if found to be consistently nonconforming. And there was lasting damage: as the Church of England had become more repressive and demonstrated its unwillingness to reform further, so more and more ministers had become detached or semi-detached from it. From the suppressed prophesyings, where several ministers from different parishes would preach on the same text, developed a re-invention: 'exercises'. Now only one sermon would be heard in public and the rest of the event would be a private ministerial gathering – but a gathering at which anything might be said.²³ University graduation ceremonies provided another occasion for private meetings of the disaffected godly.²⁴ Some ministers attended decisively secret meetings, in effect the kind of little local synods on doctrine and church politics that had been feared. When organized by presbyterians, these were known as *classes*, but less radical participants preferred to think of them as 'conferences'. All these meetings operated outside the official Church structures, crossing the boundaries of parishes and dioceses, and this culture of travelling, gathering and debate was hard to attack.

Some organizations were almost impenetrable. The godly group which met at Dedham is particularly well known to historians, since it was formal enough to keep minutes, which have survived. But it was not discovered in its own time.²⁵ Equally notorious was the network of Northamptonshire ministers whose leaders were tried in the Star Chamber with the still-troublesome Cartwright in 1591. This *classis* too had formal structures of debate and governance, but they were only revealed when one of its members decided to expose its existence.²⁶ As well as keeping quiet about their activities, the godly argued in public that their meetings were simply away-days, intended to facilitate clerical education, abolish un-Protestant practices and allow ministers to share good practice. Often the meetings do seem to have been nothing more. But exercise shaded into conference shaded into *classis* in what Patrick Collinson has described as 'not ... the private enthusiasms of a small faction of clergymen, but rather a religious revolution which was continuing to make impressive inroads on the upper ranks of lay society'.²⁷ These connections would become key in promoting another form of godly gathering, the dispossession fast and prayer meeting. And what made these dispossessions distinctive was that they were sometimes put into print. The godly did not publish the minutes of their *classes*, or the debate and table talk of their exercises. But they did sometimes offer a detailed report of a dispossession.

After 1588: The Suspension of Godly Agitation

In 1588, amid all this ferment deriving from Whitgiff's policies and resistance to them, came four significant events which ultimately ended for several decades the large-scale godly revolt within the church. The first, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, ended the immediate threat of Catholic invasion, and made it look as though, as MacCulloch put it, God approved of the Church of England in its unreformed state. Then there was the death of the reformist Earl of Leicester, and that of John Field the godly organizer in London – emphasizing that many of puritanism's traditional supporters were ageing and losing power.²⁸ Field's death was especially significant for godly propagandist literature. Like all pressure groups and many persecuted sects, the godly hoarded information and argument likely to be useful to their cause. Their passion for documenting their own religious struggles was also a duty, and so they produced carefully-preserved records of appearances in ecclesiastical courts, and the insult and difficulty heaped upon them by the church authorities. Field collected these as a 'Register' – Knappen calls it 'the puritans' Book of Martyrs'.²⁹ He received them by hand and letter from all over England, and he kept them alongside personal jottings and annotations of key texts. Field even kept religious poems in his collection, perhaps his own. He was not just an organizer but a kind of literary agent and anthologist, all rolled into one. His loss left a literary gap in the puritan movement. But it was filled by the fourth event of significance to the godly in 1588: the appearance of the first in a long series of pamphlets by a presbyterian calling himself 'Martin Marprelate'.

As his name suggested, the debate was moving into more extreme territory. Martin was not interested in reasoned debate about moderate godly issues – kneeling at communion, or the sign of the cross at baptism – he was writing to mar the prelates, attacking the whole idea of ecclesiastical hierarchy itself. If the bishops were ejected from their palaces, Martin suggested, none of these issues would be problematic. No-one would be expelled from the ministry. God's Word could be directly interpreted by ministers, who had the best right to do so. For Martin, the prelates thus stood between individual Christians and true religion, primarily in the defence of their own troughs, filled with tithe monies, fine wines and bejewelled robes. Works of theological argument had never been hybridized before with the scurrilous witty pamphlets of the kind produced by Thomas Nashe and other professional satirists. Cartwright and others hastily distanced themselves from Martin, horrified by his colloquial directness and rudeness: the Dry Drayton preacher Richard Greenham summed up their feeling when he said Martin made 'sin ridiculous, whereas it ought to be made odious'.³⁰ Ironically, Martin damaged the godly consensus on the inadequacy of the church, because most of the movement could not bear to be identified with him, and he made them all look like extremists. But

what he did demonstrated beyond question the potential of the publishing industry for spreading uncensored opinion. Why argue about the *ex officio* oath in Parliament when you can reach everyone from the Earl of Essex to the man on the Clapham carrier's cart with one little pamphlet? The godly polemicists who came after Martin both benefited and suffered because of his example; John Darrell and his supporters in the exorcism controversy offering the closest parallel, and paradoxically meeting the most Marprelate-like opponent in Samuel Harsnett.

At the time of the Marprelate tracts, Harsnett's future patron Richard Bancroft was chaplain to Sir Christopher Hatton, the Lord Chancellor, but he was also making himself useful to Archbishop Whitgift. Rosemary O'Day neatly sums up the shared vision of the two men by referring to them as a single entity: 'Whitgift/Bancroft'.³¹ Whitgift later wrote, in a 'reference' for Bancroft, that 'by his advice, that Course was taken, w[hi]ch did principally stop Martin and his Fellows' mouths, viz: to have them answered after their own vein in writing'.³² Bancroft understood the decisive power of literature in such a contest between ideas, searching out Field's collections as well as Martin's pamphlets. Diarmaid MacCulloch describes him as having a 'passion for sniffing out the concealed', and he set about examining printers, publishers and ministers who might be sympathetic to Marprelate's cause.³³ Looking for secret presses and satirists was a useful excuse for a general assault on godly freedom of thought and association. By collecting evidence in raids on suspects, spying, intercepting letters and rigorously questioning the accused, Bancroft uncovered some of the secretive presbyterian organization. He brought some of its participants before the Court of High Commission that would one day try Darrell. Meanwhile, in 1588 a Royal Proclamation had been issued against seditious, schismatical books and libels, putting forward what the government thought to be erroneous doctrines and libels against individuals. A flow of people began to appear before the High Commission and Court of Star Chamber on charges related to Marprelate books and more general dissent. Large fines and imprisonment were the commonest punishments, but printers and authors accused of producing seditious works were found guilty of felony and sentenced to death. The most notorious was perhaps John Udall, who was convicted of felony for writing a book on Church discipline and died in prison appealing against his death sentence.

Most severely punished was John Penry, said to have written a number of the Marprelate books as well as others judged to be seditious. He was hanged in Southwark on 29 May 1592. But Penry was also being disposed of because he was a separatist, like Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, executed in the same year.³⁴ These men wanted to form a separate church, and they were prosecuted and executed under legislation designed to catch Catholic missionaries, which caused shock and anger among those who had framed it and voted it into

law. What was especially disturbing was that moderate puritans could easily be accused of the same militant tendency, even when they actually abhorred such an idea. If the government was using legislation designed to suppress illegal publications and Catholics to harass and even execute Protestants whose views challenged the state church, the godly were in serious trouble. ‘Puritans were terrified’ says MacCulloch simply.³⁵ The more moderate godly were appalled at the government’s action, but this draconian policy – and the inquisitions, torture and harassment that accompanied Bancroft’s search for Martin – persuaded many to conform outwardly. The godly became inward-looking, turning away from presbyterianism, argues MacCulloch.³⁶ Certainly, the Darrell faction pay almost no attention to Church government in their books. Naive, principled or crazy as they were, only one of Darrell’s writers paid the ultimate price for his beliefs. But all knew that the stakes were high, because godly people were now openly being treated as schismatics and heretics by a government and a Church that only twenty years previously they had hoped might support their desire for further Protestant reform. As the godly sagged into submission, Marprelate stopped writing, and most elements of the controversies he had fuelled cooled as the Whitgiftian party consolidated their position.³⁷

A New Marprelate?

So did John Darrell and his friends, following the example of godly controversialists into print with their accounts of dispossessions, walk innocently into the vacancy left by Martin Marprelate? A recurrent question for readers is whether they were fully aware of the hostility and injustice that they would encounter if they expressed openly their views about dispossessing demoniacs. Contemporary estimates of Darrell’s age suggest that he was born in about 1562, and it can hardly have escaped his notice that his world was saturated with religious controversy. Thirty years later, just before Darrell came decisively to public attention, the former Catholic John Donne was still lamenting ‘Seek true religion. O where?’³⁸ Since Elizabeth’s accession to the throne about four years before Darrell’s birth, every religious rite and associated Church practice, from the eucharist to bell-ringing, had come into question: was it acceptable to the new reformed Church? Was it sufficiently Protestant, or still tainted by whiffs of popery and superstition? Darrell went to Cambridge University in the 1570s, which was awash with discussion of further reform of the Church. It was whilst he was at Cambridge that the Queen’s ability to destroy the authority of even her Archbishop of Canterbury, Grindal, became obvious. Darrell then spent a year in the mid-1580s in London studying common law at the height of the battle over subscription. Yet in his books he displays no interest whatever in Church polity. Did he not connect his dispossessions with the

ongoing tension over these matters? Or was he brave or naive enough not to reflect on the consequences of entering the fray?

It seems that Darrell and his fellow godly believed that it would be possible to offer a sincere account of his activities without being drawn into the wider battle and regarded as schismatics. Whilst Whitgift, Bancroft and Harsnett saw the godly as dangerous rebels, following the trajectory of their notions of freedom of conscience into anarchy, they saw themselves as obedient and pious subjects, asking only for modest reforms. They thought that people would believe that Darrell was well-intentioned if he said so, and would treat his arguments fairly. They were, of course, wrong, and this book explores the literary and other consequences of their misplaced optimism. By the end of his trial Darrell, at least, was very well aware of the cultural context of his dispossessions in the government's battle with godliness and its different kinds of insurgent threat. But he still protested that there was 'no cause why these puritanes (as they call them) should be hated, despised, abhorred, and so shamefully intreated, as they were rather dogges, then men'. Astonishingly, he had even heard the godly called 'Sathanists' – perhaps because of their insistence on the devil's active presence in the world and his ability to invade even the human body. Radicalized rather than quieted by his representation as an unscrupulous fundamentalist, Darrell himself now believed that the devil had worked through the ecclesiastical authorities at Lambeth who had arrested and imprisoned him and More, and had had them deposed from the ministry. Harsnett, he said, was not really interested in the notion that Darrell and his patients had counterfeited possessions, which was the argument that he put forward in public. What he really wanted to question and destroy were godly works, and for this reason he was going straight to hell. He was 'one of those that will neither enter into the kingdome of heaven, nor suffer those that would'.³⁹

Darrell, then, did not see himself as a new Marprelate, consciously trying to destabilize the Church of England in order to promote a particular political viewpoint. He argued that he was simply and earnestly doing God's work, that he had not sought publicity for his activities (a claim that this book endorses), and that he did not see why they were so problematic (which this book tries to explain). Like Malvolio, Shakespeare's puritan to whom we will return in Chapter 6, Darrell had had 'greatness' thrust upon him. He was represented by others as a deliberately seditious schismatic, writing and publishing illegal texts together with a disreputable band of other disaffected ministers and lay people. For all his denials, it was a view of him that has proved very persuasive until fairly recent times.

History, Literature and John Darrell

So who is right about John Darrell? What does the controversy over his activities and the texts produced by his group tell us about godly culture, about the methods and assumptions of his group of authors and their opponents, and the ways in which they and their works were perceived? It is part of the argument of this book that, in order to answer these bigger questions, more localized enquiries need to be made. Previous accounts of the Darrell exorcisms have established some of the facts of the cases, but have left largely unexplored the specific cultural context of individual dispossessions and the publications that came out of them. Literary scholars have ignored them almost entirely, and historians have not yet explored some of the archival deposits, with some in the past making large claims based on very limited evidence. The pamphlets about the case have more recently formed the basis for interesting reconstructions of Darrell's story, most successfully among many others by Corinne Holt Rickert, D. P. Walker and Thomas Freeman. But it has not seemed possible to me to offer a full reading of these works without intensive archival work to establish their genesis in the cultural climate of the English Midlands. Some of the sources I found most useful – St Peter's Parish Register, the Manorial Court Rolls of Mansfield, the Register of St Helen's in Ashby de la Zouch, for instance, where Darrell's marriage, the births of his six children, and his administration of an estate decisively establish a chronology for a part of his life contested in print for over four hundred years – had hitherto remained untapped, as had the wonderfully rich Nottingham Borough Records and until recently the mass of relevant deposits relating to Burton-upon-Trent, the location of another key dispossession.⁴⁰

It is now possible to offer for the first time an analysis of all the surviving texts, taking into account the fact that they are very fragmentary, and emphasizing the importance of their local and regional origin in specific cultural circumstances. This book continues the 'school' of history initiated by Alan Everitt and his colleagues, and characterized by Patrick Collinson and John Craig as being 'the writing of national history as the history of the localities of which the nation consisted'.⁴¹ This analysis is combined with the tools of literary criticism, and together these approaches help to explain why the impact on the national scene of the dispossessions of Darrell and his group, and the pamphlets written about them, was so varied and remains so contentious. Reading the pamphlets alone cannot solve the central mysteries of the Darrell case. Did he teach William Sommers to counterfeit? Did he try to use pamphlets about dispossession to gain a foothold in important Midland towns so that he could spread his godly message? What happened to him when he was released from prison? The works are so long and complex, scattering information about like confetti, that any reading looking for a ready and coherent narrative is doomed

to repeat past mistakes. Only by a really close reading, examining each narrative or polemic in the context of other surviving texts and willing to accept unclarity, can Darrell's story be most fully told. This book therefore offers the most comprehensive biography of Darrell to date, establishing beyond reasonable doubt his innocence of the central crime with which he was charged, and tracing for the first time his family and the social and cultural context of his books as a vital background to understanding the writings of his godly group.

Another concern of this book is the texts that did *not* get written, did not survive or did not make it into print. We do not know anything concrete about Darrell's religious upbringing or his influences at university or in his early life as a minister. We do not have records of his birth or death and we know absolutely nothing of his life from 1599–1607, 1607–17 and after 1617. The manuscript account of Darrell's first dispossession is lost, as is a manuscript (or possibly a published pamphlet) on his exorcisms in Lancashire. His relationship with important godly figures like Richard Bernard, John Robinson, Alexander Reddish, Isabel, Lady Bowes, Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon, Percival, Lord Willoughby of Wollaton and the second Earl of Essex is almost impenetrably obscure. The records of Darrell and his colleague George More's High Commission trial are lost, except for one document recently purchased by Lambeth Palace Library, and discussed here for the first time. Many of the important events of the case are obscured by controversy, but some are simply not discussed at all. It is important silences and absences, just as much as what does survive, that should shape our understanding of the Darrell affair. Why were some exorcisms more important than others? Why were some texts considered inflammatory, whilst others were not? How can we best explore the life and works of an early modern man who began his life in obscurity, provoked and then suffered a brief rise into textual exposure, and then – partly voluntarily – vanished back into silence? As Alexandra Walsham has suggested, written and published text was not the favoured medium of the godly – that was speech, and so it has not survived.⁴² It leaves us with some thorny issues of reading what the godly did think it worthwhile to put in print, which can be usefully approached through literary criticism.

However, we can extrapolate from the works of Darrell and his fellow authors some insistent concerns and this book focuses in particular on extending Tom Webster's insights, in his book *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England*, about the godly's emphasis on sociability and gatherings. It has been argued by literary theorists, following Stephen Greenblatt, that godly (as well as Catholic) exorcisms had many interesting homologies and direct connections with the cultural work going on in the Elizabethan theatre. Whilst this is true to some extent, it depends on how one looks at such dispossessions. The godly would not have seen them in this light, since the insight was one offered by their enemies. This book argues that they would have seen them as, firstly, occasions for

speaking and for writing texts, rather than acting, and secondly as sociable matters – indeed, more specifically, through the imagery of family. This emphasis on gathering to speak and write can, I think, be seen in the form and content of the pamphlets written about the godly dispossessions involving John Darrell, as can an insistent anxiety about both defining their own ‘family’ structure and their place in the wider family of the English church.

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