

How Protestant was the Elizabethan Regime?*

Her Majestie hath from the begynning shewed hir naturall disposition to be such, towards hir subiectes in the cause of relligion, as they who have bene repugnant or mislykors of hir relligion, have not lacked hir favor.

*William Cecil, Lord Burghley, April 1572*¹

I

Historians have become increasingly accustomed over recent years to seeing the English Reformation as a long and slow process, embracing significant elements of continuity as well as change. In place of the picture, painted by scholars such as A.G. Dickens, of a rapid and popular introduction of the new religion, historians have instead emphasised the difficulties of early English Protestantism, its slow acceptance by the people and its ongoing weakness. Much attention has been paid to the divisions between different stripes of Protestants within the English Church. Likewise, a great deal of attention is currently being paid to the survival and continuing vitality of English Catholicism in one form or another. In particular, the identification of church papists as a category has opened up important new lines of enquiry, with a shift away from focusing purely on recusants and martyrs—those who bravely resisted the demands of the state—to a more sophisticated and nuanced picture of Catholics which takes account of those who made varying forms of compromise.²

Yet in spite of all the interest in different forms of religious identity and strong elements of continuing religious conservatism in Elizabethan England, relatively little attention has been paid to the effect of religious disunity on the mainstream political narrative of the reign. While what might be called the social regime—the networks of control laid down by social hierarchy and patriarchy—has come to seem more fragmented in

* I am grateful to George Bernard, Peter Lake, John Morrill, Alec Ryrie and Malcolm Smuts for commenting on earlier drafts of this article, as well as to this journal's editors and anonymous readers for their help and suggestions.

1. British Library [hereafter BL], Cotton MS Caligula C III, fo. 457, 'Certen matters wherin ye Q. Maj[es]ty's forbearng and delays hath produced, not onely inconveniencies and inccress of expences, but also daungers', Apr. 1572.

2. See, for example, C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993); A. Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993); E.H. Shagan, *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2005); M.C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c.1550–1640* (Cambridge, 2006).

religious terms, the historiography of the political regime, the decision-making elite of councillors and courtiers surrounding the queen, has developed largely in the opposite direction.³ The current picture of the latter might be summarised thus: the highest levels of the regime were almost uniformly composed of strong Protestants, and the regime's policies reflected this.

The central historiographical landmark here is a series of articles written in the 1980s by Simon Adams.⁴ These rejected the influential argument, adumbrated as early as 1913 by Conyers Read and later reiterated by Sir John Neale, that Elizabethan politics was factional, divided between a conservative grouping led by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and a hotter Protestant group led by Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and Sir Francis Walsingham.⁵ Adams argued instead that there is little evidence for sustained hostility between Burghley and Leicester; in fact, there is plenty of evidence of cordial relations and effective co-operation, on the basis of a shared commitment to Protestantism (and some degree of indulgence for Puritanism). Indeed, Adams painted a picture of a very homogeneous and harmonious governing elite, in which the main point of friction was not between factions, but between a dominant group of committed Protestants (encompassing Burghley, Leicester, Walsingham and others) and the more cautious Elizabeth herself.

This line of argument has been broadly endorsed by other leading figures in the field, such as Patrick Collinson, John Guy, Peter Lake, Stephen Alford and Natalie Mears.⁶ Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that, like most significant historical interpretations, Adams's original arguments have become somewhat oversimplified over time, as the subtleties, nuances and qualifications of the original artefact are worn away by overuse. Adams's arguments were in fact drawn quite narrowly. They focused on the central period of the reign, largely leaving aside both the 1560s and the 1590s. They also dealt primarily with the relationship

3. For these two uses of 'regime', see P. Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford, 1979), for an account which stresses the broader structure of Tudor government; and on the other hand W.T. MacCaffrey and P. Collinson using 'regime' to refer to the 'governing group': Collinson, 'The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I', in his *Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994), pp. 31–57, at p. 40. The latter use is preferred hereafter.

4. S. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned? The Court and its Politics', in C. Haigh, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (London, 1984), pp. 55–77; 'Faction, Clientage and Party: English Politics, 1550–1603', *History Today*, xxxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1982), pp. 33–9, and 'Favourites and Factions at the Elizabethan Court', in R.G. Asch and A.M. Birke, eds., *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 265–87; all reprinted in Adams's *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester, 2002).

5. C. Read, 'Walsingham and Burghley in Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council', *English Historical Review*, xxviii (1913), pp. 34–58; J.E. Neale, 'The Elizabethan Political Scene', in his *Essays in Elizabethan History* (London, 1958), pp. 59–84.

6. See Collinson, 'Monarchical Republic', pp. 40–41; J. Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 253–8; P. Lake, *How Shakespeare put Politics on the Stage: Power and Succession in the History Plays* (New Haven, CT, 2016), pp. 19–20; S. Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. pp. 28–9; N. Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 56–7.

between Leicester and Burghley, denying the characterisation of their relationship as factional—and doing so convincingly—rather than completely dismissing faction *per se*. Adams's model explicitly accepts that the politics of the 1590s *was* factional, and implicitly accepts that there was conflict in the 1560s, referring to an 'attempted overthrow of Sir William Cecil in 1569'.⁷

Adams by no means suggested that there was no conflict at all in Elizabethan politics, but this is how his argument is often taken. Thus, recent assessments of Elizabeth's regime tend to lay heavy stress on the dominant position of strong Protestants: 'Elizabeth's privy council was thus small, secular, Protestant and packed with men whom she felt she could trust to provide her with good counsel'; 'English Catholics were frozen out of power throughout Elizabeth's reign and long afterwards'; 'the leading councillors and members of the household were almost all identified with reform'; the Privy Council 'had a decidedly Protestant complexion'; the 'exclusion of religious conservatives' led to a council that was 'dangerously narrow and weak in its membership ... The ruling group ... were committed Protestants who believed that a Catholic league led by Rome was planning the extirpation of heresy'.⁸ This view has not been completely unanimous—Susan Doran, for example, has argued against overstating the degree of harmony and underplaying conflict in Elizabethan politics—but it would be fair to say that it has become the dominant account.⁹

This amounts to a considerable revision of our picture of the Elizabethan ruling elite; in particular, of the role of Burghley. Whereas earlier generations of historians saw Burghley as cautious, moderate, even conservative, more recently he has tended to be reclassified as almost as hot a Protestant as Walsingham or Leicester.¹⁰ While Burghley remains enigmatic (despite, or even because of, the voluminous evidence of his thinking), this shift owes much to the changing preoccupations of historians. Older historiography focused heavily on foreign policy, which brought out Burghley's conservative and cautious side. By

7. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned?', pp. 55 (on the 1560s), 63, 68 (on the 1590s); id., 'Favourites and Factions', pp. 266–7, 273.

8. D. Dean, 'Elizabethan Government and Politics', in R. Tittler and N.L. Jones, eds., *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 44–60, at 46; A. Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms, 1485–1603* (Harlow, 2009), p. 246; S.G. Ellis with C. Maginn, *The Making of the British Isles: The State of Britain and Ireland, 1450–1660* (Harlow, 2007), p. 217; S. Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion, 1558–1603* (London, 1994), p. 7; C. Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (2nd edn., London, 1998), p. 72.

9. S. Doran, 'Religion and Politics at the Court of Elizabeth I: The Habsburg Marriage Negotiations of 1559–1567', *English Historical Review*, civ (1989), pp. 908–26, esp. 909–10. See also D. MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603* (2nd edn., Basingstoke, 2001), p. 39, n. 2; P.E.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585–1597* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 2.

10. S. Alford, *Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven, CT, 2011); id., *Early Elizabethan Polity*. For assessments of him as a conservative (opposed to Leicester and Walsingham), see, for example, W.T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588–1603* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), p. 457.

contrast, recent historical interest has turned to problems such as the domestic religious situation, the succession and Mary, Queen of Scots, in which Burghley emerges as a fully committed forward Protestant, and even a constitutional radical—not least because he, like Leicester and Walsingham, would have been unlikely to survive the transition to a non-Protestant monarch.

Furthermore, most of the other main currents of historiography in recent decades have focused on these committed Protestants. Patrick Collinson's notion of England as a 'monarchical republic' is the most prominent, taking its origins from plans by Burghley and his allies, such as Thomas Digges and Walter Mildmay, to preserve the Protestant succession at almost all costs.¹¹ This links to interest in the impact of Renaissance political thinking, humanism and Ciceronianism—primarily the preserve of university-educated lawyers.¹² Also significant has been the degree of scholarly interest in the middle layers of Elizabethan government, Michael Graves's 'men of business'—particularly Thomas Norton and Robert Beale, the apparatchiks of forward Protestants such as Burghley and Walsingham.¹³ The trend is reinforced by the attention paid to Elizabethan intelligence practices, and the campaign against Catholic extremists in particular.¹⁴

Turning to other aspects of Elizabethan political history, recent interpretations of Parliament have moved away from stressing opposition and discord and instead emphasise constructive co-operation and effective management by the council on a basis of solid, shared Protestantism.¹⁵ The 'New British History', promoted in the sixteenth-century context by Stephen Alford and Jane Dawson, focuses on the co-operation of English and Scottish Protestants, in particular (on the English side) William Cecil, although the interpretation of Irish affairs is considerably more complex.¹⁶ The recent interest in the supposedly distinctive nature of the 1590s also reflects an implicit assumption that the hot Protestant Burghley–Leicester–Walsingham regime was the earlier norm, and that, before the final decade of the century,

11. Collinson, 'Monarchical Republic'; J.F. McDiarmid, ed., *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (Aldershot, 2007).

12. Collinson, 'Monarchical Republic'; Alford, *Early Elizabethan Polity*; J. Guy, 'Tudor Monarchy and its Critiques', in id., ed., *The Tudor Monarchy* (London, 1997), pp. 78–109.

13. M.A.R. Graves, 'The Management of the Elizabethan House of Commons: The Council's "Men-of-Business"', *Parliamentary History*, ii (1983), pp. 11–38; M.A.R. Graves, *Thomas Norton, the Parliament Man* (Oxford, 1994); M. Taviner, 'Robert Beale and the Elizabethan Polity' (Univ. of St Andrews Ph.D. thesis, 2000).

14. A. Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services* (Stroud, 2000); Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, ch. 5; S. Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London, 2012); J. Cooper, *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London, 2011).

15. G.R. Elton, *The Parliament of England, 1559–1581* (Cambridge, 1986); D. Dean, *Law-Making and Society in Late Elizabethan England: The Parliament of England, 1584–1601* (Cambridge, 1996).

16. Alford, *Early Elizabethan Polity*; J. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Cambridge, 2002).

Elizabethan politics was much less ruthless and dangerous (notions surely belied by the crisis of 1569–72).

Such approaches often involve a tendency to conflate this hotter Protestant group with ‘the council’, ‘the regime’ or ‘the government’. This elision can be seen, for example, in John Guy’s descriptions of the Crown-in-Parliament sovereignty argument as ‘the Privy Council’s political creed’, and, a few lines later, as ‘Cecil’s political creed’.¹⁷ It is, in fairness, often exceedingly difficult to identify precisely which individual or group a policy or argument originated with. But just as, in Collinson’s words, historians are prone to refer to “the queen and her advisers”, or to “the queen and Cecil”, as if they were the front and rear legs of a pantomime horse’, so they are too ready to regard policy as the policy of all councillors, whether or not that can be actually proven.¹⁸

To paraphrase Peter Lake, a great deal of ink has recently been spilt considering the political thinking of Lord Burghley and his fellows.¹⁹ One reason for this is the richness of the sources relating to Walsingham, Leicester, and above all to Burghley himself, which enables historians to chronicle their thoughts, plans and activities in great detail—a point to which we will return. We see the period through their eyes, and we inevitably tend to identify with them: they become, in effect, the heroes of the story.

II

There are reasons to be sceptical about aspects of this historiography. First, it suggests that the key political dynamic of the reign was significant and ongoing conflict between Elizabeth and her hotter Protestant ministers. Yet this raises important questions. Why, in that case, did they remain her ministers? The queen and her advisors disagreed fundamentally on crucial issues, yet it apparently never crossed Elizabeth’s mind to have other councillors whose thinking was more in line with her own instincts. The picture presented by this scholarship is also a remarkably harmonious one: there is very little interest in court intrigue or manoeuvring, internal debate, dissent or opposition within the regime—something which one struggles to reconcile with the usually highly competitive nature of politics.²⁰

17. Guy, ‘Tudor Monarchy and its Critiques’, p. 98. It should be noted that I am not disputing Guy’s argument *per se*, merely its applicability to the entire Privy Council.

18. Collinson, ‘Monarchical Republic’, p. 39.

19. P. Lake, “‘The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I’ Revisited (by its Victims) as a Conspiracy’, in B. Coward and J. Swann, eds., *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution* (Farnham, 2004), pp. 87–111, at 87.

20. Glyn Parry has made a similar point about the need to reintroduce issues of ideological disagreement into Elizabethan politics: ‘Foreign Policy and the Parliament of 1576’, *Parliamentary History*, xxxiv (2015), pp. 62–89, at 89.

In what follows, I will argue that historians' narrow focus on a small number of hot Protestants presents an incomplete picture of the regime. In fact, many leading figures within it had much more ambiguous religious attitudes, as a survey of the membership of the Elizabethan political elite, the Privy Council, makes clear.

This is perhaps most obviously the case for the early, and currently neglected, phase of the reign. It is widely acknowledged that this was a period when the religious settlement was very loosely enforced.²¹ What is perhaps more often forgotten is that Protestant domination of the highest levels of government was far from complete. Several important figures who had served Elizabeth's three predecessors, and who indeed had been major figures since the 1540s, continued in government: William Paulet, first marquess of Winchester; Henry FitzAlan, twelfth earl of Arundel; William Herbert, first earl of Pembroke; and William Howard, first Lord Howard of Effingham. Several of these had senior positions in government—Winchester was Lord Treasurer, Howard was Lord Chamberlain—and they played important roles in policy-making.²² This grouping was joined by the young Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, who became a councillor in 1562. Camden wrote that such men were 'were of Queen *Mary's* Council, and of the same Religion with her', though their religious positions are probably better characterised as conforming and conservative, rather than as Catholic in any strict sense.²³ They accepted the royal supremacy, but showed little zealous attachment to Protestantism. Howard of Effingham has been described as 'a Henrician "catholic", both spiritually pragmatic and politically conservative'.²⁴ Pembroke actively opposed the aborted Uniformity Bill in Parliament in 1559, was noted as a supporter of Mary Stuart's title to the throne and was described by the Spanish ambassador, writing to his master, as 'one of the best servants your Majesty has here'.²⁵ Winchester, too, 'is generally believed to have been a Henrician Catholic, and sympathetic to Catholic interests'; in 1559 he voted against the Supremacy Bill.²⁶ Arundel, whom Adams describes as 'semi-Catholic', had been pivotal in bringing the Privy Council over to support for Mary I in 1553 and forcefully opposed the intervention in Scotland in 1559–60.²⁷

21. P. Marshall, *Reformation England, 1480–1642* (London, 2003), pp. 171–3.

22. W.T. MacCaffrey, *The Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime: Elizabethan Politics, 1558–1572* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), pp. 27–31 and *passim*.

23. William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England* (4th edn., London, 1688), bk. 1, p. 13.

24. J. McDermott, 'Howard, William, First Baron Howard of Effingham (c.1510–1573)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *ODNB*].

25. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 118; *The Memoirs of Sir James Melville of Halhill*, ed. G. Donaldson (London, 1969), p. 40; *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas* (4 vols., London, 1892–9) [hereafter *CSP Simancas*], 1558–1567, p. 11.

26. L.L. Ford, 'Paulet, William, First Marquess of Winchester (1474/5?–1572)', *ODNB*.

27. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned?', p. 66; A. Boyle, 'Henry Fitzalan, Twelfth Earl of Arundel: Politics and Culture in the Tudor Nobility' (Univ. of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2003); E. Ives, *Lady Jane Grey: A Tudor Mystery* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 213–24; *CSP Simancas, 1558–1567*, p. 131.

These men remained notable members of the regime; their political heft was too great to be dispensed with. Several of the professional administrators on the council had similar outlooks. Elizabeth retained the veterans Sir William Petre and Sir John Mason: both were religious conservatives and Petre's family became very prominent Essex Catholics.²⁸ Elizabeth also appointed to the council Thomas Parry, her Comptroller, who was regarded by the Spanish as sympathetic ('although he is not so good a Catholic as he should be, he is the most reasonable of those near the Queen'). All of these were seen by hot Protestants as very bad influences. In the words of Lord John Grey, 'what I thynke of Parry the Tresorer, I had rather tell yt him to his Faes, then wryt yt, or say yt to onny'.²⁹ In short, describing the Privy Council of the 1560s as clearly Protestant significantly oversimplifies the case. On one hand, there were several committed Protestants, such as Cecil, Nicholas Bacon, the earl of Bedford and Francis Knollys, who pursued an essentially confessional approach to politics and foreign policy. On the other, the essentially dynastic mindset of the great nobles made them profoundly dissatisfied with the direction of policy over the unsettled succession, and with such risky foreign policy manoeuvres as antagonising France and Spain by sending loans to the Huguenots in La Rochelle and seizing Spanish treasure ships in 1568–9.³⁰

The political influence of the great nobles, and its limits, was demonstrated in the crisis of 1569–72, precipitated by Mary Stuart's irruption into the English political scene in 1568. This was arguably the most significant political event of the reign, both because it constituted the only frontal attack on the linchpin of the strong Protestants, William Cecil, and because it failed. Most historians have concluded that the crisis began with an attempt by Norfolk, Arundel, Pembroke and others to steer Elizabeth into a settlement of the succession, the greatest political issue of the day. Under this plan, Mary, Queen of Scots, the heiress presumptive to the Crown, would be acknowledged as such and married to England's senior nobleman, Norfolk. Dynastically, this was a plausible solution, especially as Elizabeth's preference for a Stuart succession seems clear. It was to be accompanied by a rapprochement with Spain, and the removal of the more aggressively Protestant councillors, principally Cecil, whose policies threatened to lead to war with France or Spain, or both.

None of this was very far from what one might call the centre ground of early modern politics. It could well be seen as a responsible effort by

28. For Petre, see C.S. Knighton, 'Petre, Sir William (1505/6–1572)', *ODNB*; for Mason, A. Harding, 'Mason, Sir John (1503–66)', in P.W. Hasler, ed., *The House of Commons, 1558–1603* (History of Parliament; 3 vols., London, 1981), iii. 30.

29. Lord John Grey to Cecil, 20 Apr. 1560; quoted in Alford, *Early Elizabeth Polity*, pp. 75–6. For Parry, see A. Harding, 'Parry, Sir Thomas (1510–60)', in Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, iii. 178–80.

30. MacCaffrey, *Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime*, pp. 313–18.

the nobility to use their right to counsel the monarch to provide for the future stability of the kingdom—a plan, rather than a plot. Indeed, Wallace MacCaffrey referred to the plan's proponents as 'moderates'. It was also, however, a bid for power by the conservative aristocracy. In that sense, it recalled the removals by their predecessors of major political figures such as Wolsey, Cromwell or the duke of Somerset, as well as what their counterparts in Scotland had been doing to Mary. Leicester's close involvement with this group at the time may suggest that he expected they would succeed. In the event, the plan was wholly rejected by the queen, but it revealed that many powerful councillors were by no means supporters of Cecil and his approach to policy.³¹

In the wake of this debacle, and the failure of the much more openly Catholic northern rebellion of 1569–70, Norfolk was made the scapegoat; he was implicated in the (possibly confected) Ridolfi plot in 1571 and executed in 1572.³² Pembroke died in 1570; William Howard retired from active public life. The papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* of February 1570, excommunicating the queen, significantly increased the difficulties of loyal Catholics. All of this clearly marked a new phase in the politics of the reign, with the influence of religious conservatives curtailed. New Protestants were brought onto the council: Francis Walsingham, Henry Sidney and others.³³ Yet the Protestant triumph was not overwhelming. Some of the conservatives were rehabilitated, notably Arundel. More importantly, and dispelling the notion that Elizabeth had any fixed objection to loyal religious conservatism, other conservative figures were promoted to the council. Sir James Croft, appointed in 1570, was one of the most prominent of these, and often thought to be (in Christopher Haigh's words) a 'Catholic willing to accept a royal supremacy'.³⁴

More significant, however, was the rise of Sussex and Hatton. Thomas Radcliffe, third earl of Sussex, joined the council in 1570. He was a man very much in the mould of his friends and relatives Norfolk and Arundel: an old-fashioned aristocrat, equally loyal and obedient to Mary and Elizabeth, and prepared to implement their religious settlements in turn.³⁵ He associated with conservative or Catholic courtiers (many of them his kinsmen) and what we know of

31. The fullest account of these complex events remains MacCaffrey, *Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime*, pp. 293–329, and see pp. 297–9, 305 for this grouping as 'moderates'.

32. For the case that Roberto Ridolfi was 'turned' by Walsingham prior to his 'plot', see G. Parker, 'The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II of Spain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xii (2002), pp. 167–221, at 215–17.

33. Adams argues that the appointments of Mildmay, Sadler, Smith, Warwick, Sidney, Walsingham and Wilson in the 1570s 'gave both Court and Council a more distinctly Protestant tone', yet he also acknowledges that there were also 'more ambiguous' appointments such as Croft, Sussex, Hunsdon and Hatton: 'Eliza Enthroned?', pp. 66–7. Here, as elsewhere, the Protestants may have been the more significant, but the conservatives were scarcely invisible.

34. Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, pp. 40–41.

35. S. Doran, 'The Political Career of Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex (1526?–1583)' (Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis, 1977), p. 104.

his personal views strongly suggests religious conservatism, as does his recurring hostility to Leicester and his allies.³⁶ Sussex was undoubtedly a leading councillor during the middle years of the reign, but we are hampered in assessing his importance by the almost complete lack of an archive.³⁷ His most significant political role, as we shall see, was in the marriage negotiations with the Habsburgs and later with the duke of Anjou, in which he clearly demonstrated that his concern for the future of the dynasty outweighed religious considerations; but he was active across government for many years.³⁸

Another crucial development at this point was the rise of Sir Christopher Hatton. He had been at court since about 1564, ascending gradually in royal favour and political stature, and he joined the council as Vice-Chamberlain in 1577. It has always been recognised that Hatton was friendly and tolerant towards Catholics. His biographer notes that he 'was almost certainly brought up as a Catholic and was probably ... a crypto-Catholic' in the 1560s and early 1570s.³⁹ Later, Hatton conformed to Protestantism and was quite happy to attack popes, Jesuits and Catholic traitors in his celebrated parliamentary oratory.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Hatton's clientage network continued to be very rich in Catholics. His family (both close and more distant) included many of them.⁴¹ He patronised many Catholic gentry, including members of the Tresham, Roper and Sheldon families.⁴² His close servants included such men as Richard Swale, whom Burghley accused of papistry, and Edward Dodge, who frequented underground Catholic circles in London.⁴³ His gardener at Holdenby was a Catholic priest,

36. Doran, 'Political Career of Thomas Radcliffe', pp. 152–60, 175. Sussex was certainly believed to incline to Catholicism by, for example, William Herle: The National Archives [hereafter TNA], SP 83/16/2, fos. 2r–5v, William Herle to Francis Walsingham, 5 May 1582; TNA, SP 101/1/53, fos. 96r–99v, Herle to Walsingham, 15 May (?) 1582; BL, Cotton MS Caligula C VIII, fos. 204r–6v, Herle to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, 23 Nov. 1583. On Sussex's associations with court conservatives, see N. Younger, 'Drama, Politics and News in the Earl of Sussex's Entertainment of Elizabeth I at New Hall, 1579', *Historical Journal*, lxxiii (2015), pp. 343–66.

37. On Sussex's political significance, see Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse*, p. 50 and ch. 2, *passim*; Doran, 'Political Career of Thomas Radcliffe'; W.T. MacCaffrey, 'Radcliffe, Thomas, Third Earl of Sussex (1526/7–1583)', *ODNB*.

38. Doran, 'Political Career of Thomas Radcliffe', p. 194.

39. E.St J. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton: Queen Elizabeth's Favourite* (London, 1946), p. 61.

40. *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, II: 1584–1589, ed. T.E. Hartley (Leicester, 1995), pp. 219–21, 414–24.

41. C. Enis, 'The Dudleys, Sir Christopher Hatton and the Justices of Elizabethan Warwickshire', *Midland History*, xxxix (2014), pp. 1–35, at 3–4; Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 61, 67–8.

42. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 210–19; *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton*, ed. Harris Nicholas (London, 1847), pp. 60–62; TNA, SP 12/249/92, Declaration of Henry Young, 16 Aug. 1594; A. Davidson, 'Roman Catholicism in Oxfordshire from the Late Elizabethan Period to the Civil War (c.1580–c.1640)' (Univ. of Bristol Ph.D. thesis, 1970), pp. 260–62.

43. On Swale, see Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 336–7. On Dodge, see TNA, SP 12/190/62, Information against Priests and Recusants, June? 1586; and his will, TNA, PROB 11/91/21.

Hugh Hall, and other priests visited his London house.⁴⁴ Even more remarkably, he had many close links with the covert Catholic networks which spawned plots against Elizabeth; he had connections with the originators of the Arden–Somerville plot of 1583, two of the Babington plotters were his servants, and another notorious practiser against Elizabeth's life, Giacomo 'Captain Jaques' de Francisci, had also been his servant.⁴⁵ During the middle phase of the reign he was probably the single greatest patron of English Catholics, especially conforming Catholics or church papists. Some at the time believed him to be a papist of some kind himself.⁴⁶ No concrete evidence about Hatton's personal religious beliefs has been found (again, his archive is extremely thin), but his patronage of Catholics contrasts markedly with Burghley, Walsingham and Leicester; these three occasionally showed favour to individual Catholics, but favoured strict execution of anti-Catholic laws. Clearly, Hatton had no aversion to English Catholics, and indeed his behaviour is hard to explain if he did not in some measure share their views. At the same time as cultivating this network, Hatton was a key patron of anti-Puritan churchmen such as John Aylmer, John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft: these two streams of patronage ran alongside each other throughout his political career.

Outside the council, but prominent at court in the 1570s, was a rather controversial group of Catholic-leaning aristocrats centred on the earl of Oxford and Lord Henry Howard. The latter, Norfolk's brother, illustrates a degree of continuity between successive conservative groupings. It can be difficult to take these figures seriously—not least since Alan Nelson's biography comprehensively demonstrated Oxford's foolishness and instability.⁴⁷ But Oxford was a significant favourite of the queen, and in a personal monarchy such people could rapidly attain political significance, as the examples of Leicester, Hatton, Raleigh, Essex and others show. This group (and its associates in wider Catholic networks) strongly pushed schemes such as the Anjou match, and the near success of that project in 1579–80 appears to have brought it close to power. Lake, following John Bossy, has termed this a 'Catholic loyalist moment' in the late 1570s and early 1580s, one in which a Catholic consort might have led to 'a major shift in the ideological orientation and factional composition of the Elizabethan establishment, not to

44. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, p. 257; P. McGrath and J. Rowe, 'The Recusancy of Sir Thomas Cornwallis', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, xxviii (1961), pp. 226–71, at 245; TNA, SP 12/168/25 II, fo. 53r, Declaration by Ralph Betham, 24 Feb. 1584; Davidson, 'Roman Catholicism in Oxfordshire', pp. 406–16.

45. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 256–69, 271, 280, 359; TNA, SP 53/18/61, Thomas Philipps to Walsingham, 19 July 1586. I intend to explore Hatton's patronage and his career in general much more fully in a forthcoming book.

46. Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 62–3, 198, 259.

47. A. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool, 2003).

mention greatly improved terms of allegiance and existence for English Catholics'.⁴⁸

The Anjou match's failure, however, saw their downfall.⁴⁹ In the wake of this, and the reaction against the Jesuit mission, there began a period of more decisive Protestant dominance, in which conforming Catholics were marginalised in much legitimate political activity, popular anti-Catholicism was stoked by a series of plot scares and heightened political tension culminated in Mary's execution in 1587. Even in this period, however, there were promotions to the council which forward Protestants can hardly have welcomed. Two good examples are Lord Buckhurst and Sir John Fortescue.

Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, a distant Boleyn cousin of the queen, was wealthy, cultivated, a humanist and a conformist. As Michael Questier has written, however, his affinity was 'riddled with Catholics', not least his mother, his wife, one of his sons and a daughter-in-law; he married his daughter into the most prominent Catholic family in England, the Brownes, viscounts Montague, and he educated his sons at Hart Hall, Oxford, a notably pro-Catholic institution. Buckhurst patronised Catholics both in Sussex and beyond; as Lord Lieutenant of the county, he discouraged his deputies from over-zealous persecution. There may have been a priesthole at Knole, his home in Kent; a man reported being converted in his house. There are links, albeit fairly slender, with Robert Persons and Richard Verstegan, and it was claimed (though also contested) that Buckhurst was reconciled to Rome on his deathbed.⁵⁰ Little is known about his contacts in his earlier court career, but there was an interesting episode in 1580 when he rode publicly through London with prominent court Catholics: Lord Paget, and the earls of Northumberland, Kent, Worcester, Rutland and Southampton.⁵¹ He was also an active promoter of the Habsburg and Valois marriage proposals.⁵²

Sir John Fortescue (1533–1607) was a fixture at court throughout the reign. Like Buckhurst, he was a cousin of Elizabeth's through the Boleyns and served as Keeper of the Royal Wardrobe from 1559. His real rise to prominence came in 1589, when he was appointed a

48. J. Bossy, 'English Catholics and the French Marriage, 1577–1581', *Recusant History*, v (1959), pp. 2–16; id., *Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story* (New Haven, CT, 2001); P. Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 15, 97 (quotation).

49. Bossy, 'English Catholics and the French Marriage', pp. 8–9.

50. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, pp. 80 n. 43, 83–7; BL, Harleian MS 703, fo. 51v, Buckhurst to the deputy lieutenants of Sussex, 7 Feb. 1588; M. Hodgetts, 'A Topographical Index of Hiding-Places, II', *Recusant History*, xxiv (1998), pp. 1–54, at 21. On Buckhurst's personal religion, see R. Zim, 'Religion and the Politic Counsellor: Thomas Sackville, 1536–1608', *English Historical Review*, cxxii (2007), pp. 892–917; see also Patrick Collinson's account in *Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 53–4.

51. *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, Preserved at Longleat House* (Historical Manuscripts Commission; 5 vols., London, 1904–80) [hereafter *HMC Bath*], v. 24.

52. Zim, 'Religion and the Politic Counsellor', p. 896.

privy councillor and Under-Treasurer of the Exchequer, an office with considerable powers of patronage (he became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1592). Williams writes that he 'occupied a central place' and was 'a figure to be counted'.⁵³ He was the son of Sir Adrian Fortescue, executed in 1539 and regarded as a Catholic martyr, and the stepson of Thomas Parry.⁵⁴ Sir John conformed, but Catholicism remained strong within his family. His brother Anthony was convicted of high treason for engaging in Catholic conspiracies against Elizabeth, and later went into exile.⁵⁵ John Fortescue sent his sons to the strongly Catholic-leaning Gloucester Hall, Oxford; one of them, Francis, 'declared himself a Catholic', sheltered a Jesuit at his house and had links with the Gunpowder plotters. Two of Sir John's grand-daughters became nuns in the Spanish Netherlands.⁵⁶

In 1603, a Spanish assessment of the new king's ministers stated that Fortescue favoured peace and toleration of Catholics. At the same time, a Jesuit 'affirmeth Sir John Fortescue to be a Papist, and that he hath a brother maintained only at his cost at Lyons, that is either a Jesuit or a priest'.⁵⁷ Questier describes him as being 'at the head of a large and essentially Catholic nexus which stretched into Sussex and Hampshire'.⁵⁸ Most strikingly of all, there are multiple testimonies from seminary priests and Jesuits that they found refuge at John Fortescue's official residence, the Wardrobe, in London. He appears to have been aided in this by his nephew and servant, also named John Fortescue. It is not always clear which John is being referred to in the evidence, but the Jesuit Oswald Tesimond's reference to finding refuge at 'the house of a gentleman, by name Sir John Fortescue, Keeper of the Queen's Wardrobe' seems clear.⁵⁹ This is supported by the fact that Sir John's steward, Robinson, was a committed Catholic who also sheltered fugitive priests and sent his son to receive a Catholic

53. P. Williams, *The Later Tudors: England, 1547–1603* (Oxford, 1995), p. 27.

54. R. Rex, 'Fortescue, Sir Adrian (c.1481–1539)', *ODNB*.

55. W. Wizeman, 'Fortescue, Sir Anthony (b. c.1535, d. in or after 1611)', *ODNB*.

56. M. Foster, 'Thomas Allen (1540–1632), Gloucester Hall and the Survival of Catholicism in Post-Reformation Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlvi (1981), pp. 99–128, at 113; 'Fortescue, Francis (c.1563–1624)' and 'Fortescue, John I (1533–1607)', in Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, ii, 147–51; V.C.D. Moseley and R. Sgroi, 'Fortescue, Sir John (c.1533–1607)', in A. Thrush and J.P. Ferris, eds., *The House of Commons, 1604–1629* (History of Parliament; 6 vols., Cambridge, 2010), iv, 303–6. M. Hodgetts, 'Coughton and the Gunpowder Plot', in P. Marshall and G. Scott, eds., *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 104–5.

57. *Spain and the Jacobean Catholics, I: 1603–1612*, ed. A.J. Loomie, Catholic Record Society, lxiv (1973), p. 6; *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury ... Preserved at Hatfield House* (Historical Manuscripts Commission; 24 vols., London, 1883–1976) [hereafter *HMC Salisbury*], xv, 216–17.

58. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 269. See also *HMC Salisbury*, vi, 141.

59. *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers, Related by Themselves: First Series*, ed. John Morris (London, 1872), pp. 144–7, 174–6 (Tesimond), and *Second Series* (London, 1875), p. 373 (Anthony Tyrrell); TNA, SP 12/193/13, Simon Fennell, 1586, and SP 12/238/62, 'Fennell the priest', a seminary, ?Feb. 1591. See also SP 12/246/49, William Polwhele's confession, Dec. 1593; Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, pp. 65, 188.

education overseas.⁶⁰ In view of all this, it seems safe to see Fortescue as essentially a church papist; clearly, he was able to get away with this array of questionable connections because he enjoyed royal favour.

Conservative figures remained politically prominent during the later period of the reign. Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper and privy councillor from 1596, was a Catholic in his youth, and had close links to the deeply conservative Stanley networks in the north-west.⁶¹ With the shrinking of the council later in the reign, Lord Buckhurst and Charles, Lord Howard of Effingham (later earl of Nottingham), emerged as leading figures. They were men of whom Diarmaid MacCulloch has recently commented that 'it was odds-on that [they] would have conformed to a restoration of Catholicism in England if it had happened to take place'.⁶²

Indeed, conservative figures on the council proliferated in the closing years of the reign. New additions in 1601 included the seventh earl of Shrewsbury (whose close family and followers included many Catholics) and the fourth earl of Worcester. The latter conformed to Protestantism, but he sheltered Jesuits at Raglan Castle, and even donated land to support them. Elizabeth is reported to have said that in his person Worcester 'reconciled what she thought *inconsistent, a stiff papist, to a good subject*'.⁶³ Edward Wotton, who became a councillor in 1602, converted to Catholicism under James I.⁶⁴ At the same time, the Howards were returning to favour, with the readmission of Henry Howard to court and the rise of his nephew Thomas, promoted to the peerage as Lord Howard de Walden in 1597.⁶⁵

While noble dynasties such as the Dudleys, Russells and Hastings championed Protestantism in their 'countries', other important aristocratic families remained closely linked to Catholicism. Some of the most visible of these figures were successive earls of Derby and Shrewsbury, heads of two of the wealthiest and most powerful families in England. The third and fourth earls of Derby, and the fifth, sixth and seventh earls of Shrewsbury, were all privy councillors.

60. HMC *Salisbury*, ix, 187; *The Responsa Scholarum of the English College, Rome, I: 1598–1621*, ed. A. Kenny, Catholic Record Society, liv (1962), pp. 257–8.

61. 'Egerton, Thomas I (1540–1617)', in Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, ii, 80–83; J.H. Baker, 'Egerton, Thomas, First Viscount Brackley (1540–1617)', *ODNB*; B. Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley, and Earls of Derby, 1385–1672: The Origins, Wealth and Power of a Landowning Family*, Chetham Society, 3rd ser., xxx (1983), pp. 46, 133.

62. D. MacCulloch, 'Young Man's Nostalgia', *London Review of Books*, 31 July 2014, p. 19. Howard worked well with his Protestant colleagues on the council but was also on good terms with the Catholic circle around his cousin the earl of Oxford: Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary*, p. 206.

63. David Lloyd, *State-Worthies; or, The States-Men and Favourites of England since the Reformation* (2 vols., London, 1766), i, 469; H. Thomas, 'The Society of Jesus in Wales, c.1600–1679: Rediscovering the Cwm Jesuit Library at Hereford Cathedral', *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, i (2014), pp. 572–88, esp. 579.

64. A.J. Loomie, 'A Jacobean Crypto-Catholic: Lord Wotton', *Catholic Historical Review*, liii (1967), pp. 328–45.

65. P. Croft, 'Howard, Thomas, First Earl of Suffolk (1561–1626)', *ODNB*.

They were given significant political responsibility as lord lieutenants and local governors in their countries, as well as (in the sixth earl of Shrewsbury's case) the guardianship of Mary, Queen of Scots, and (in the fourth earl of Derby's) major embassies. As numerous government papers document, their families and clientage networks were riddled with Catholics: the Talbots, it was said, were 'all Papistes'.⁶⁶ In the Talbots' case, these religious tendencies had few, if any, effects on their political loyalty, though it was noted of Shrewsbury (admittedly by an unfriendly witness) that 'the papists of our shire are retained by my lord and are shrouded by his greatness'.⁶⁷ Various Stanleys were much more dubiously loyal; two were involved in pro-Marian plots in 1569–70, and Sir William Stanley famously betrayed the Dutch town of Deventer to the Spanish in 1587.⁶⁸

A considerable number of courtiers also seem to have had Catholic inclinations, among them the earls of Oxford, Arundel and Northumberland, and Lord Windsor. Numerous Catholics participated in occasions such as court tournaments.⁶⁹ Some of the queen's female attendants, such as Mary Scudamore and Dorothy Stafford, were decidedly conservative.⁷⁰ Many of the noblemen Elizabeth sent abroad as ambassadors—Viscount Montague, the earl of Derby, Sir Edward Stafford—would have found themselves very comfortable worshipping at the courts of France or Spain. Many senior lawyers were widely believed to remain Catholic at heart: Sir William Cordell (Master of the Rolls, 1557–81) and Sir Christopher Wray (Chief Justice of Queen's Bench, 1574–92) are good examples.⁷¹

III

As the foregoing survey shows, individuals who were, at the very least, far from being hot Protestants played prominent parts in politics throughout Elizabeth's reign. In many of the cases described, the precise religious attitudes of the people in question are hard to pin down. They all showed

66. *Illustrations of British History, Biography, and Manners, in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I*, ed. Edmund Lodge (3 vols., London, 1791), ii. 102. On the Talbots, see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth: 1591–1594* (London, 1867), p. 174; HMC *Salisbury*, v. 526–8; Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 201. On the Stanleys, HMC *Salisbury*, i. 575–6; L.A. Knafla, 'Stanley, Edward, Third Earl of Derby (1509–1572)', *ODNB*.

67. Quoted in B. Cobbing and P. Priestland, *Sir Thomas Stanhope of Shelford* (Radcliffe-on-Trent, 2003), pp. 221–2.

68. HMC *Salisbury*, i. 572; R. Rapple, 'Stanley, Sir William (1548–1630)', *ODNB*.

69. S. Simpson, *Sir Henry Lee (1533–1611): Elizabethan Courtier* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 54–5.

70. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned?', p. 71.

71. On Cordell, see Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, pp. 154–5; on Wray, N.G. Jones, 'Wray, Sir Christopher (c.1522–1592)', *ODNB*. For a helpful survey of the range of conforming and barely conforming positions possible among MPs and local officials, see Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, i. 26–34.

a greater or lesser degree of sympathy for Catholicism, but can any of them be meaningfully described as Catholics? The issue is problematic, not least since contemporaries themselves disagreed about the qualifications necessary for being a good, or even a real Catholic.⁷² In the case of the individuals discussed here, all of them, by virtue of their official positions, must have sworn the Oath of Supremacy, attended Protestant services, enforced anti-Catholic laws or indeed sat in the parliaments which passed them. Certainly, few, if any, openly identified with the Catholic cause. Yet historians have been prepared to see at least some of them as authentically Catholic: Christopher Haigh, for instance, has written that Croft and Worcester 'seem to have been Catholics willing to accept a royal supremacy'.⁷³ Henry Howard, at court for much of Elizabeth's reign before achieving high office under James I, is generally regarded as a Catholic.⁷⁴ Others, as noted above, have been described as 'Henrician' Catholics. Contemporaries, too, described such people as Catholics, or at least as tending towards that direction. The Spanish ambassador de Spes wrote that Croft was 'believed to be a Catholic'; the Jesuit William Crichton declared that he believed Hatton to be 'a Catholic at heart'.⁷⁵ A Spanish assessment of the Privy Council at the beginning of James I's reign noted that Buckhurst 'is always favouring a peace as a Catholic might, with the condition that freedom of conscience be given to Catholics'; Worcester 'has been a Catholic and is believed to remain one'; Edward Wotton had 'a favourable view towards the Catholic religion'.⁷⁶

Indeed, the most likely explanation for someone having been ready to shelter seminary priests, employ and protect Catholic laymen or donate lands to Jesuits is that they were in effect church papists or secret Catholics, and that their professed Protestantism was more a matter of convenience than of conviction. Did they, perhaps, hanker for a form of religion that accepted the royal supremacy but retained traditional Catholic approaches to salvation and the sacraments, such as figures such as Stephen Gardiner had pursued in Henry VIII's reign? And if so, did they (or should we) regard this as being a meaningfully Catholic position? In terms of providing a label for political figures

72. See the documents printed in *Recusancy and Conformity in Early Modern England: Manuscript and Printed Sources in Translation*, ed. G. Crosignani, T.M. McCoog and M. Questier, with P. Holmes (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 170; Toronto, ON, 2010).

73. Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, p. 41; see also Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 173.

74. For an examination of Henry Howard's attempts to find a form of reconciliation between Catholicism and the Church of England, see J. Bossy, 'The Devotional Compositions of Lord Henry Howard, 1584–1596', in L. Clark, M. Jurkowski and C. Richmond, eds., *Image, Text and Church, 1380–1600* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies Papers in Mediaeval Studies, 20; Toronto, ON, 2009), pp. 239–55.

75. *CSP Simancas, 1568–1579*, p. 227; *Mary Queen of Scots and the Babington Plot*, ed. J.H. Pollen, Publications of the Scottish History Society, 3rd ser., iii (1922), p. 168.

76. Loomie, *Spain and the Jacobean Catholics*, pp. 2–6.

of the general persuasion described here, the most suitable term (one recently suggested by John Morrill) may simply be ‘conservatives’.⁷⁷

In any case, figures of this kind were very different from Burghley, Walsingham, Leicester and their allies, who, as we have seen, are often taken to typify the regime. Their behaviour suggests that many of them were not irrevocably committed to Protestantism or to the attitudes that are often assumed to characterise the Elizabethan regime. They did not necessarily hate or fear Catholics, and may not have feared a Catholic succession or restoration (although they would hardly have seen a Spanish invasion or an assassination plot as the way to proceed). In fact, their attitude towards Catholics might be seen as a mirror image of the attitude of Leicester, Burghley and their friends towards Puritans: sympathetic, supportive, protective, but either unwilling or unable to commit fully and openly to the cause. Above all, they did not share the imperative which has often been seen as central to Elizabethan government: to perpetuate English Protestantism at all costs. All this casts doubt on the notion that Catholics were straightforwardly frozen out of power in Elizabethan England. Catholics in the nation at large had some degree of access to power, if not at first hand, then at second.

Nor do close links with Catholics seem to have had a serious impact on the careers of these men, as the comment by Burghley used as an epigraph to this article suggests. A case in point is the marriage in 1592 of Buckhurst’s daughter Jane to Anthony Maria Wingfield, soon-to-be second Viscount Montague and head of one of the most ostentatiously Catholic families in England (Buckhurst’s son was already married to a Howard). Questier has noted that this ‘might have been regarded as a rather politically dangerous union’, as indeed it might—yet it did nothing to impede Buckhurst’s steady rise to become Lord Treasurer and ultimately an earl.⁷⁸

Indeed, as Simon Adams himself acknowledges, Burghley and Leicester’s pre-eminence was not total, and at various times the ‘inner ring’ of councillors also included Parry, Bacon, Winchester, Pembroke, Walsingham, Hatton, Sussex, Robert Cecil, Buckhurst and Nottingham.⁷⁹ At least six of these twelve (Winchester, Pembroke, possibly Parry, Hatton, Sussex, Buckhurst and Nottingham) can fairly be characterised as conservatives who might have felt very little reluctance to support a Catholic monarch or policy.

Adams also writes that the various conservative figures at court ‘hardly amounted to a coherent conservative party’, and this is fair.⁸⁰

77. ‘The [Stephen] Gardiner tradition of “Henrician Conservatives” tweaked as a movement of “Elizabethan Conservatives” is a subject awaiting its author’: J. Morrill, ‘Richard Bancroft and Anti-Puritanism (2012)’, in *Patrick Collinson and his Historiographical Legacy*, special issue of *History*, c, no. 342 (2015), pp. 584–98, at 591.

78. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 234.

79. Adams, ‘Eliza Enthroned?’, p. 63.

80. Adams, ‘Eliza Enthroned?’, p. 71. See also id., ‘Favourites and Factions’, p. 286.

But if the group was neither fully coherent nor a party, at times there seems to have been a good deal of co-operation: between Arundel, Sussex and Norfolk in the 1560s; Oxford and Henry Howard in the 1570s; anti-Puritans such as Hatton, Buckhurst and Fortescue in the late 1580s. They may be best seen not as a fully formed faction, but as representatives of a tendency which existed within the Elizabethan elites. Recent historiography has emphasised the long lingering of residual Catholicism as well as the galvanising impact of new forms of counter-Reformation piety. For much of Elizabeth's reign, many among the clergy had been ordained as Catholics.⁸¹ Furthermore, many characteristics of hot Protestantism were innately unattractive to early modern landed elites, who were aristocratic, conservative, monarchist, legitimist, supporters of hierarchy, and sceptical of innovation. It is not hard to suspect that the concomitants of forward Protestantism—the threat of presbyterianism, the danger of war with Catholic powers, the failure to secure the succession—would have alienated a considerable proportion of this constituency. Indeed, the fact that the conservatives were *not* a party or grouping reinforces this impression: conservative councillors arose independently and at different times because such opinions were widespread within the governing classes. Even Lord Burghley's own descendants, his grandson William, second earl of Exeter, and great-grandson William, sixteenth Lord Ros, flirted heavily with Catholicism (the former within Burghley's lifetime), and may even have converted; Leicester's illegitimate son, Robert Dudley, quite certainly did so.⁸²

However common men of these conservative views were in the upper orders of society, they could only be appointed to the highest ranks of government at the behest of the queen herself. It is often stated (or assumed) that Burghley was at the centre of the workings of politics and the council. On an administrative level, this is unobjectionable, but mastery of administration is not the same as full control over decision-making. The figure at the centre of Elizabethan politics was not William Cecil, but Elizabeth Tudor. No one else could appoint councillors or make top-level decisions. Historians have broadly agreed that Elizabeth's own religious views were markedly more conservative than those of the hot Protestants, and therefore it is hardly surprising that many of her councillors were of a similar stamp.⁸³ For Elizabeth, personal loyalty took precedence over private religious beliefs. Buckhurst and Fortescue were there because they were her cousins,

81. Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 145–7.

82. 'Cecil, William (1566–1640)', in Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, i. 581–2; A. Bellany, 'Cecil, William, Sixteenth Baron Ros (1590–1618)', *ODNB*; S. Adams, 'Dudley, Sir Robert (1574–1649)', *ODNB*.

83. P. Collinson, 'Windows in a Woman's Soul: Questions about the Religion of Queen Elizabeth I', in his *Elizabethan Essays*, pp. 87–118; Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, ch. 2; S. Doran, 'Elizabeth I's Religion: The Evidence of her Letters', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, li (2000), pp. 699–720.

Parry because he was an old and trusted friend, Croft because he had stuck by her under Mary, Hatton because he was her favourite—and she chose not to open windows into their souls. In this sense, she operated her politics on dynastic and personal, not religious, grounds; a fundamental distinction between her and councillors such as Burghley or Walsingham. Elizabeth also (unsurprisingly) rewarded those who conformed to the law, both during her own reign and during that of her sister—as Diarmaid MacCulloch has pointed out, few Marian exiles prospered greatly at her hands.⁸⁴

There was also the matter of maintaining a balanced government. Elizabeth surely recognised that her country was divided in religion and that it would be conducive to stability if her government reflected this. A number of historians have suggested as much: MacCaffrey, for example, wrote that Croft was promoted to ‘conciliate and soothe her Roman Catholic subjects’.⁸⁵ Elizabeth appears to have been happy to have both quite conservative and quite radical ministers, provided she trusted them.

At least some of the conservatives were there by necessity. Elizabeth needed noblemen to give her regime political weight. The fact that those nobles tended to be markedly conservative in religion may have encouraged her to counterbalance them by entrusting day-to-day government to councillors of rather more forward Protestant views than she herself held. Men such as William Cecil (whose considerable political ability cannot be doubted) gave her support against potentially domineering nobles, most notably in 1569. This attempt to maintain balance can be compared with contemporaries such as Mary, Queen of Scots and Catherine de’ Medici, both of whom, in the right circumstances, brought diverse religious voices into their councils.⁸⁶

IV

If conservatives were present at the highest level of political society, rather than exiled to the political cold, we need to assess their influence. Was their inclusion in court and council merely honorific, or were they actually driving events? One reason for the tendency to dismiss their importance is that decisions appear to have been influenced much

84. D. MacCulloch, ‘The Latitude of the Church of England’, in K. Fincham and P. Lake, eds., *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 41–59, at 48–9.

85. MacCaffrey, *Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime*, p. 445.

86. On Mary’s initial efforts to maintain a balanced government, see J.E.A. Dawson, *Scotland Re-Formed, 1488–1587* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 244–5. On Catherine, see R.J. Knecht, *Catherine de’ Medici* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 83, 96; M.P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2005), pp. 63, 81.

more strongly by leading Protestants such as Burghley, Walsingham and Leicester.⁸⁷ Yet there are reasons to consider modifying this view.

The mere presence of conservative councillors in high office constituted influence and power in itself. Having such status enabled them to provide political protection to their kin, clients, friends, tenants and dependents. The authorities would tend not to pursue or prosecute the friends of powerful men; this was the essence of the patronage system. Considering the intricacy of the network of gentry kinship, patronage and friendship relations, a fairly large proportion of Catholics must have been able to appeal to an influential contact to protect them. Therefore, even without their pursuing major political projects, the conservatives' presence in high office was significant. This, of course, applied equally to Puritans, whose protection by allies such as Walsingham, the second earl of Bedford and, above all, Leicester was crucial to their political significance.⁸⁸ It is worth noting that Elizabeth clearly did not (or could not) stop her favourites protecting people of whom she personally disapproved, as Leicester's patronage of Puritans such as Thomas Cartwright showed.⁸⁹

A linked phenomenon was the ability of powerful conservatives to protect and help promote Catholics in local office: Catholics, or church papists, continued to serve in offices such as Justice of the Peace, sheriff and deputy lieutenant. There was, for instance, a remarkable sprinkling of Catholic sheriffs appointed in the 1570s, such as Edward Arden in Warwickshire in 1574–5, Sir John Petre in Essex in 1575–6, William Catesby in Warwickshire in 1577–8, and Sir Benjamin Tichbourne in Hampshire in 1579–80. The Protestants may have wished to purge local government of Catholic sympathisers, but clearly failed to do so.⁹⁰

More substantively, are there examples where the hotter Protestant vision of policy failed or where more conservative policies prevailed against it? It should first be said that answering this question is seriously complicated by the nature of the sources, as none of the conservatives left a significant archive of political papers or correspondence. Elizabethan history is largely written from archives left by forward Protestants, whether the Hatfield and Lansdowne collections of Lord Burghley,

87. Glyn Parry has argued that 'councillors marginalised by Burghley and Leicester could, nevertheless, play a spoiling role' in policy-making, citing the role of Croft and Hatton in the debates over intervention in the Netherlands in 1576: 'Foreign Policy and the Parliament of 1576', pp. 65–6. It is argued here that, in fact, they could initiate policies as well as obstruct them.

88. S. Adams, 'The Protestant Cause: Religious Alliance with the West European Calvinist Communities as a Political Issue in England, 1585–1630' (Univ. of Oxford D.Phil., 1973), ch. 1, esp. p. 35.

89. P. Collinson, 'Cartwright, Thomas (1534/5–1603)', *ODNB*.

90. *List of Sheriffs for England and Wales, from the Earliest Times to AD 1831* (List and Indexes, 9; London, 1898), pp. 45, 56, 146. On broader efforts to exclude Catholics from local office, and their limited success, see N. Younger, *War and Politics in the Elizabethan Counties* (Manchester, 2012), pp. 35–6; A.H. Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558–1603* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 80–86; R.B. Manning, 'Elizabethan Recusancy Commissions', *Historical Journal*, xv (1972), pp. 23–36.

the state papers compiled under his or Walsingham's supervision, the fairly extensive correspondence of the earl of Leicester, papers such as Robert Beale's, or even sources such as William Camden's *Annals*, which drew on Burghley's papers. This problem is particularly acute for the 1560s, making the crucial political manoeuvres of that period especially difficult to fathom; as ever, while William Cecil's role can be clearly traced, the role of his rivals is indistinct.

The problem is partly a matter of the chance survival or destruction of family archives, but it also reflects the fact that the conservatives were mostly nobles or courtiers, while the keener Protestants were lawyers and administrators; the latter were intrinsically more experienced and prolific record-keepers. Similarly, while strong Protestants tended to dominate the administrative side of government, conservatives were much more prominent at court.⁹¹ William and Robert Cecil, Walsingham and Sir Thomas Smith served as secretaries, but figures such as William Howard of Effingham, Sussex, Croft, Hatton and Worcester held important court positions. Both administration and court were important loci of power; the former had the advantage in terms of information-gathering, the latter in proximity to the queen. The membership of the council balanced the two. But the administrative side, inevitably, is much better documented. Administrators such as Burghley and Walsingham were often away from court on official business in London or Westminster, and they communicated in writing. Courtiers such as Hatton and Sussex were in daily attendance on the queen, and most of what they said to her in private can never be known; it may be that the intimacy of the court offered opportunities to articulate views that could not be aired in council or Parliament. A point often overlooked is that the private opinions of the queen herself on many subjects form a great—the greatest—lacuna, for largely the same reasons.

All of this, in effect, makes the conservatives 'known unknowns': we know (or should know) that they were there and we can reasonably assume that they were doing and thinking something, but we know very little about what this was. Where would Elizabethan historiography be without Cecil's personal papers? What might we know if we had the equivalent for Hatton or Norfolk? Historians should perhaps do more to resist the temptation to look out over Elizabethan England from the viewpoint of William Cecil's desk. This archival problem has both caused and been exacerbated by the dearth of scholarship on these figures. There is almost no serious published work, for example, on Sussex or Arundel; the best biography of Hatton appeared in 1946.⁹² By extension, their power-bases of landed influence and clients have received very little study, certainly compared with the detailed accounts

91. Parry has also alluded to the political influence of 'catholic courtiers, who enjoyed privileged access to the privy chamber': 'Foreign Policy and the Parliament of 1576', pp. 65–6.

92. Susan Doran's thesis on Sussex remains unpublished, but see MacCaffrey, 'Radcliffe, Thomas'; Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*.

of the patronage of Leicester or Essex. Wealthy, powerful nobles such as Norfolk, Sussex, Pembroke and Arundel had many followers; such people had political views and (like their masters) they must have been doing something—but what?⁹³

Despite these difficulties, it is possible to identify the influence of conservatives at various points in the reign. One, of course, is the crisis of 1569–72, already discussed. In addition, the involvement of conservatives of one stripe or another in two of the most prominent political debates of the reign has been widely accepted by historians, even if the broader significance of this has not always been acknowledged.

The first is the debate, running through to the start of the 1580s, about the queen's marriage. Leaving aside Leicester, and the candidates who never really interested Elizabeth (Philip II and the German and Swedish princes), there were two major prospective sources of suitors: the Austrian Habsburgs and the French Valois. It is striking that both dynasties were Catholic. In the case of the negotiations for a Habsburg match, the earl of Sussex was the leading figure, with considerable support within the regime, in a matter which was a very prominent feature of the politics of the 1560s; indeed, the conservative nobility's frustration with the queen's refusal to provide for the succession was an important contributory factor to the crisis of 1569.⁹⁴ The prospect of a marriage with a Valois prince was an even longer-running affair. The most critical period was 1578–80, and at this point, Sussex again made the running.⁹⁵ It is clear that Sussex, the aristocratic court Catholics around Oxford, Henry Howard, and a number of others, probably including Burghley, were in favour of the match.⁹⁶ Almost all historians have agreed it was a real prospect, and Catholics both at court and in the country roused themselves to promote it.⁹⁷ Elizabeth seems to have been serious enough to contemplate a major shake-up in the council to carry the matter through. Ultimately, the refusal of both Habsburg and Valois candidates to conform to Elizabeth's church settlement doomed the matches, but they were undoubtedly serious proposals. Any assumption that it would have been inconceivable for Elizabeth to take a Catholic consort is surely undercut by the fact that both James I and Charles I had Catholic queens (Mary, Queen of Scots, by contrast, married a Protestant, Bothwell).

93. Some analysis of Norfolk's following can be found in Smith, *County and Court*, and N. Williams, *Thomas Howard, Fourth Duke of Norfolk* (London, 1964); see also Boyle, 'Henry Fitzalan, Twelfth Earl of Arundel'.

94. S. Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London, 1996), ch. 4.

95. Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, ch. 7, and see the important letter which Sussex wrote to the queen on the matter: HMC *Salisbury*, ii. 195; *Illustrations of British History*, ed. Lodge, ii. 177–86; and Hatton's copy, published in *Memoirs of... Hatton*, ed. Nicolas, pp. 81–9.

96. Bossy, 'English Catholics and the French Marriage'; Younger, 'Drama, Politics and News'.

97. Younger, 'Drama, Politics and News', pp. 348–50 and *passim*.

The second major episode where we can see the conservatives at work is the fall of Grindal. Edmund Grindal was the only one of Elizabeth's three archbishops of Canterbury with whom forward Protestants can have been wholly satisfied, but in 1576, barely a year into his primacy, he clashed with the queen by refusing to implement her demand to suppress the preaching exercises known as 'prophesyings'. He was shortly afterwards suspended from office, and, despite the efforts of Burghley, Leicester, Walsingham and others, he remained suspended until his death in 1583. There are strong indications that Hatton was involved in these events. There are even stronger indications that, in the same period, it was Hatton who secured the appointment of several anti-Puritans to bishoprics: John Aylmer to London, John Piers to Salisbury, John Young to Rochester and John Whitgift, first to Worcester and in 1583 to Canterbury itself. Hatton also patronised other churchmen, including the arch-anti-Puritan Richard Bancroft. The protests of Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham, supposedly the queen's leading ministers, were all ineffectual; the most Burghley could do was use his power as Lord Treasurer to demand petulantly the payment of the new bishops' first fruits on disadvantageous terms.⁹⁸

Once installed as archbishop, Whitgift launched a major attack on organised Puritanism which continued, on and off, for the rest of the reign. This sequence of events was a disaster for any hopes of comprehensive reform in the Church, and constituted 'the ecclesiastical watershed of the reign', paving the way for a drive to rein in Puritanism and defend the Elizabethan settlement.⁹⁹ All of this, historians have concluded, was instigated by Hatton, with, of course, the queen's support and allies such as Whitgift and Buckhurst: in Collinson's words, 'Hatton was in political respects the man behind the reactionary turn which events took after the downfall of Grindal'.¹⁰⁰ This victory for a conservative vision of the Church over a hot Protestant one surely shows that conservatives could achieve political successes. Indeed, one important issue which has been largely overlooked is the overlap within the regime between the proponents of anti-Puritanism and those with Catholic sympathies. Some of Whitgift's leading supporters in the campaign against Puritans in the late 1580s and early 1590s were precisely those with strong links to Catholics, notably Hatton and Buckhurst, but also Fortescue.¹⁰¹ That moderate Protestants ought to ally with

98. B. Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy, 1559–1577* (London, 2003), pp. 144–6; P. Lake, 'A Tale of Two Episcopal Surveys: The Strange Fates of Edmund Grindal and Cuthbert Mayne Revisited', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xviii (2008), pp. 129–63; Collinson, *Richard Bancroft*, pp. 51–3.

99. Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, quotation at p. 135.

100. Collinson, *Richard Bancroft*, p. 53.

101. P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967), p. 419; Zim, 'Religion and the Politic Counsellor', pp. 904–6.

Catholics against the true extremists, Puritans, was an argument made by Catholics at the time.¹⁰²

In these cases, conservatives mounted very significant political efforts antithetical to the ends of hot Protestants. Over the queen's marriage, they failed; in the case of the Church, they were more successful. These are perhaps the most high-profile political initiatives which can be ascribed to them, but there were numerous other instances when Elizabeth's government pursued policies which were hardly to the taste of hot Protestants, in which we can often detect the hand of some of the figures described above. These range across the whole of government activity, from the succession to foreign affairs and religious policy.

The hotter Protestants had very mixed success in the nexus of interrelated questions concerning the succession and Mary, Queen of Scots. As noted above, it seems that Elizabeth's preference was always for a Stuart succession (whether in the person of Mary or James), and indeed that this preference for dynastic legitimacy over Protestant purity had widespread appeal in the country at large.¹⁰³ Elizabeth steadfastly refused to settle the Crown elsewhere, or even to offer signs of encouragement to the Grey sisters or other potential English candidates, and she encouraged repeated efforts to reinstate Mary in Scotland in some way.¹⁰⁴ In refusing to countenance more extreme measures against Mary, Elizabeth stoutly resisted strong pressure from her councillors, parliaments, and even bishops, for a very long time indeed. In many ways, Mary was treated rather well for most of her time in England. If the intention had been to treat her roughly, Elizabeth would hardly have sent her to live with the earl of Shrewsbury, the richest man in England, whose comfortable houses were filled with his Catholic and conservative relations and entourage, and who himself was a considerate host. Elizabeth took a great deal of political heat to keep Mary alive, and only after almost twenty years of badgering did she agree to execute her; even then, the *coup de grâce* had to be delivered by an astonishing act of defiance of her authority on the part of the ministers who despatched the execution warrant. Councillors such as Hatton are well documented as having at least some degree of sympathy towards Mary; it does not seem unlikely that their counsel was significant in Elizabeth's resistance to pressure from Mary's opponents within the regime.¹⁰⁵

In the field of foreign policy, the record of the forward Protestants is also mixed. Much more than the succession, foreign policy divided the Protestants—in particular bringing out Burghley's conservative side,

102. See P. Lake and M. Questier, 'Thomas Digges, Robert Parsons, Sir Francis Hastings, and the Politics of Regime Change in Elizabethan England', *Historical Journal*, lxi (2018), pp. 1–27.

103. S. Doran, *Elizabeth I and her Circle* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 53, 69, 74, 82.

104. Doran, *Elizabeth I and her Circle*, pp. 83–5, 93; Lake, *Bad Queen Bess*, p. 111.

105. TNA, SP 53/14, fo. 22, notes by Nau, secretary to Mary, Queen of Scots, Nov. 1584; Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 305–6.

on financial grounds if nothing else. Equally well known is Elizabeth's reluctance to be drawn into continental conflict. While the pro-Protestant (but also anti-French) intervention in Scotland at the start of the reign was a success, the position was much less straightforward in relation to the Netherlands. The debate over whether or not to intervene went on almost from the start of the Dutch Revolt in 1567–8; Walsingham was in favour of war against Spain by 1571.¹⁰⁶ Yet for the better part of twenty years, the forward Protestants failed to persuade Elizabeth to intervene openly—they were, in fact, losing this argument. Elizabeth's breach with Spain over the seizure of treasure ships in 1568 was patched up by the treaty of Bristol in 1574; this looks very much like Elizabeth returning swiftly to the centre ground after the apparent triumph of the Protestants in 1569–72, as well as the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in France, and thereby postponing open war by a decade.¹⁰⁷ Glyn Parry has recently argued that Hatton and other conservative courtiers and councillors played a key role in steering Elizabeth away from active involvement in the Netherlands in 1576.¹⁰⁸ While much has been made of the sometimes paranoid Protestant belief in a Catholic conspiracy against England, it is thus far from clear that Elizabeth and her more conservative councillors shared that worldview.¹⁰⁹

Even when Elizabeth did enter into war with Spain in 1585, she probably intended only a short-term intervention, and she considered making peace at several points.¹¹⁰ One long-running peace initiative was pioneered by James Croft. This began even before Leicester left for the Netherlands, and there were discreet contacts with the Spanish Governor of the Netherlands, the duke of Parma, during 1586 and 1587, until peace talks were arranged to take place at Bourbourg in February 1588.¹¹¹ Historians have been somewhat dismissive of these talks, but the queen's lack of appetite for a major war is hardly doubted. Elizabeth was represented at the Bourbourg conference by a heavyweight (and distinctly conservative) delegation: the earl of Derby, Lord Cobham, Croft and Valentine Dale (who was probably a Hatton client), as well as a young Robert Cecil. In effect, this mission represented the side of Elizabeth that was unconvinced about the intervention to begin

106. S. Adams and A. Bryson, 'Walsingham, Sir Francis (c.1532–1590)', rev. M. Leimon, *ODNB*.

107. R.B. Wernham, *Before the Armada: The Growth of English Foreign Policy, 1485–1588* (London, 1966), chs. 22, 24; P. Croft, "'The State of the World is Marvellously Changed": England, Spain and Europe, 1558–1604', in S. Doran and G. Richardson, eds., *Tudor England and its Neighbours* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 178–202, at 185–6.

108. Parry, 'Foreign Policy and the Parliament of 1576', pp. 62–89.

109. M.R. Thorp, 'Catholic Conspiracy in Early Elizabethan Foreign Policy', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, xv (1984), pp. 431–48.

110. Leicester's acceptance of the governor-generalship can be seen as an attempt to bounce Elizabeth into more committed support of the Dutch: Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 49.

111. On this affair, see Wernham, *Before the Armada*, pp. 374–6, 387–8; MacCaffrey, *Making of Policy*, pp. 391–9. Historians have consistently attributed this plan to Croft, although others (such as Burghley) were clearly involved.

with and sought to make it as brief as possible. In this case, she used a conservative proxy to pursue one policy option, whilst keeping a military option active. This was the first but by no means the last effort at making peace with Spain: there were others in 1588, 1593–4, 1598, 1599–1600 and 1602.¹¹²

Finally, there is the question of the regime's religious policy itself. Even leaving aside the comparatively moderate settlement put in place in 1559, no one would suggest that the progress of the Church over Elizabeth's reign lived up to the hopes of hot Protestants. Nor was this wholly due to the intractability of the population: it was also a result of the drift of government policy. Undoubtedly, all Catholics faced severe limitations on their freedom of religion and access to the sacraments. Many individual Catholics were fined or imprisoned, often thanks to the initiative of zealous local officials; foreign-trained priests and those who aided them faced even stiffer penalties. Nevertheless, the official response to this issue was nowhere near as stringent as many hot Protestants wished, as Burghley's laments about laxity show.¹¹³ The policy of the regime towards Catholics was not one of terror. Again, the presence of Catholic-leaning (but conforming) figures in government was an important factor here, both in practical and symbolic terms.

Indeed, at various points, especially in the 1560s, the regime was in dialogue with moderate elements in Rome, suggesting a lingering possibility that Elizabeth could come to some form of terms with them.¹¹⁴ There was even consideration given at times to offering toleration to Catholics; we should not forget that formal toleration was official policy at various times in France. In February 1586, for instance, the government mooted the notion of offering recusants freedom from persecution in return for a composition payment. It is unclear who initiated this plan, but, since Leicester was absent in the Netherlands and had offended the queen by accepting the governorship there, and Whitgift, Cobham and Buckhurst had just been added to the council, it may be that the conservatives seized the initiative.¹¹⁵ Later still, in the closing years of the reign, Sir Robert Cecil explored the possibility

112. See Younger, *War and Politics*, p. 2.

113. See, for example, *A Collection of State Papers, Relating to Affairs ... from the Year 1542 to 1570*, ed. Samuel Haynes (London, 1740), pp. 587–8; *A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, from the Year 1571 to 1596*, ed. William Murdin (London, 1759), pp. 325–6, 331; HMC *Salisbury*, ii. 252; and the epigraph to this article.

114. MacCaffrey, *Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime*, pp. 103–9; K. Bartlett, 'Papal Policy and the English Crown, 1563–1565: The Bertano Correspondence', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, xxiii (1992), pp. 643–59; J.H. Pollen, 'Four Papers Relative to the Visit of Thomas Sackville, afterwards Earl of Dorset, to Rome in 1563–64', *Miscellanea II*, Catholic Record Society, ii (1906), pp. 1–11. C.G. Bayne, *Anglo-Roman Relations, 1558–1565* (Oxford, 1913), p. 214.

115. There seems to be no detailed study of this plan, but see TNA, SP 12/186/81–2, Privy Council to sheriffs, 25 Feb. 1586 (with replies from the counties in the same volume); C. Read, *Sir Francis Walsingham* (3 vols., Oxford, 1925), ii. 298–9; C. Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1960), p. 421; W.R. Trimble, *The Catholic Laity in Elizabethan England, 1558–1603* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), pp. 193 ff.; *Acts of the Privy Council of England* (46 vols., London, 1890–1964), xiv. 8.

of reaching an accommodation with moderate Catholics during the Archpriest controversy.¹¹⁶ Again, this suggests that the government considered pragmatic solutions to religious disunity. All of these efforts ultimately failed (except, of course, for the widespread tacit toleration of quiescent Catholics), but they make it hard to see the regime as blindly and implacably anti-Catholic. This brief survey of some of the key political developments of Elizabeth's reign suggests, therefore, that it would be wrong to assume that hot Protestants consistently dominated affairs. In fact, they regularly failed in their major policy initiatives, something which tends to be overlooked in much of the literature: two recent biographies of Burghley and Walsingham, for example, overlook the fall of Grindal.¹¹⁷

Where scholars do take note of this, the tendency has been to attribute these decisions to the queen herself: her delays, indecision, meanness or obstinacy. This is the viewpoint implied by Adams's non-factional model of Elizabethan politics, by Collinson's 'monarchical republic' approach and by the revisionism of Christopher Haigh.¹¹⁸ On some level, this is clearly right, since the final decision was always Elizabeth's. Yet, as we have seen, in the failure of forward Protestant policies it is often possible to detect the role of influential conservatives at court.

Some signs of this court influence can also be found in comments made by forward Protestants about their rivals. Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham often complained about being thwarted, or that the queen was badly advised. We read this most commonly in the correspondence of Walsingham, who enjoyed complaining. In 1576, he was apparently accused by court enemies of being a greater supporter of William of Orange than of Elizabeth: 'some have gone about to persuade her' against him. Walsingham lamented 'their malice that are the authors of these reports', and told Burghley that 'as I am your successor in place, so am I of the hardships you had, to be subject to malicious and slanderous reports'.¹¹⁹ In 1578, Walsingham complained that 'allways or most commonly the persons that wysse best, and the causes that woorke best, are most myslyked [by the Queen]: and therfor to persuade Her Majestyte to entre into any further dealyng in this cause ... I mean not'.¹²⁰ In 1578, Laurence Tomson (writing on behalf of Walsingham) commented that 'of late such as encline more to the faction of Spaine, then to her Majesty's safetie & quiet estate of her Crowne & realme, have persuaded with her that she can not deale in honor to the furtherance of the states [of the Netherlands] ... until she heare some resolute answere from the Kinge & Don Juan. ... this great

116. Collinson, *Richard Bancroft*, pp. 183–91.

117. Alford, *Burghley*; Cooper, *Queen's Agent*.

118. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned?', pp. 74–6; Collinson, 'Monarchical Republic', pp. 40–42; Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, p. 73.

119. Read, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, i. 335 (16 Oct. 1576).

120. TNA, SP 83/9, fo. 28, Walsingham to Burghley, 20 Sept. 1578.

working be wrought by such as would the contrarie faction shold more prevaile then were for the good of this state'.¹²¹ In 1586, during Croft's peace negotiations, Leicester expostulated to Walsingham that 'yf all the Spanish faction in England procure her majestie a peace fitt for hir, in any respect, lett me be hanged for it'.¹²²

Burghley tended to be more stoic, or perhaps less willing to acknowledge his political failures by admitting that he could not persuade the queen to take his line. However, in 1565 we can find him writing that 'in every corner of the Realm the faction, that most favoureth the Scottish Title is grown stout, and bold, yea seen manifestly in this Court both in Hall and Chamber'. In 1574, he referred to 'the mallyce of some discontented persons, wherewith the Cowrt is overmuch sprynkled'. His location of these problems specifically in the court is telling.¹²³ During the months of his disgrace, following his part in the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Burghley referred to 'secret ennemyes to my self ... my ennemyes may presume that hir Majesty's eares ar oppen to any sinister calumniation'.¹²⁴ Burghley also recognised that some of his colleagues were doing things for and with Catholics of which he deeply disapproved. We see this in some of his dealings with Hatton, and also with Fortescue, and he was acutely aware of the many Catholics associated with nobles such as the Talbots and Stanleys.¹²⁵ He had to turn a blind eye to this because they were the queen's councillors, but also because he seems not to have wished to acknowledge such heterodoxy and defiance of the law. That one of the most important recurring complaints of these councillors was that the queen would listen to other counsel is very revealing.

Equally revealing is the consistent perception among Catholics that the authors of their misfortunes (and the men they needed to get rid of) were a handful of Protestants, principally Burghley and Leicester. This perspective was reflected in the libels against the regime recently analysed by Peter Lake, which targeted their venom closely at Burghley, Leicester and a few others, rather than the government as a whole.¹²⁶ This was a polemical and rhetorical strategy, but, in implying that

121. TNA, SP 83/5 fo.35, Laurence Tomson to William Davison, 2 Feb. 1577/8.

122. *Correspondence of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, during his Government of the Low Countries, in the Years 1585 and 1586*, ed. John Bruce, Camden Society, orig. ser., xxvii (1844), pp. 253–4 (Leicester to Walsingham, 30 Apr. 1586).

123. TNA, SP 52/10/62, fo. 122r, note by Cecil of a council meeting on Mary's marriage with Darnley, 4 June 1565; SP 12/98/2, Burghley to Walsingham, 3 Aug. 1574.

124. BL, Lansdowne MS 102, fo. 10, Burghley to Hatton, 15 Mar. 1587.

125. On Hatton, see, for example, Burghley's reproach over his dealings with the crypto-Catholic Cambridge don Richard Swale: Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 336–7. On Fortescue, see a paper mentioning some of Fortescue's contacts in the clandestine Catholic underworld, in which Burghley has noted the real name of all the participants except Fortescue himself: *Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers ... Second Series*, ed. Morris, p. 373.

126. Lake, *Bad Queen Bess*.

Elizabeth's regime was not irremediably opposed to them, Catholics may well have been making a truthful point.

V

This article has sought to make the case that religious conservatives were a force to be reckoned with in Elizabethan politics, that Elizabeth took and heeded counsel from them, and that this can help explain some of the surprisingly conservative policies pursued by a regime supposedly dominated by forward Protestants. These conservatives were not a cohesive 'party' or 'faction', and did not necessarily all agree with or even like each other—just as Burghley, Leicester and other Protestants did not always agree on everything, as Adams indeed acknowledges.¹²⁷ Arguably, however, the dividing line was that the keen Protestants were committed to a Protestant future for England, come what may, whereas the conservatives were not.

In pursuing policies, conservatives were not always successful, but neither were the Protestants. Of the two political episodes which have been most closely studied in recent years, the Anjou match and the 'monarchical republic' interregnum plan, the former was a failed initiative by conservatives and the latter was an unsuccessful Protestant proposal, vetoed by the queen.

All of this means that historians need to be more careful about assuming Lord Burghley was all-powerful, or that Elizabethan politics was played out purely between Elizabeth on the one hand and Burghley, Walsingham and Leicester on the other. As we have seen, there were important episodes where the advice of Burghley was rejected. Although deeply trusted by the queen, he had to make his case like all the others, and was often rebuffed. Likewise, when Elizabeth wished or was persuaded to push policy in a direction disliked by strong Protestants, she used more conservative councillors as her agents, as the role of Hatton in the fall of Grindal and the shift in church policy in the late 1570s shows.¹²⁸ Indeed, there was always a risk that, in seeking to advance their programme, the forward Protestants would overplay their hand and be outflanked by those whose conservative instincts were closer to the queen's. This came close to happening in 1569, when a group of conservative councillors sought to exploit Elizabeth's desire for a settlement with Mary, and her caution about Cecil's actions regarding the Spanish treasure ships. The queen was (or was believed to be) susceptible to other counsel, which might have led to the overthrowing of Cecil and his cronies. The Protestants were certainly

127. Adams notes, for example, that Burghley and Leicester might disagree over a prospective Elizabeth–Leicester marriage, over foreign affairs or over church matters—all policy questions of the highest importance: 'Favourites and Factions', p. 286.

128. Lake, 'Two Episcopal Surveys'.

outflanked when their hand-picked archbishop, Grindal, overstepped the mark, and Hatton moved in to become the queen's purveyor of acceptable bishops. Similar reversals might also have arisen out of the Anjou match, when the reluctance of the council to agree to the plan apparently led Elizabeth to consider appointing four Catholics to her council to provide her with political support.¹²⁹

We should not assume that 'the regime' was a single, univocal entity. It is easy to describe a political initiative as being the work of 'the regime' or 'the government', but it may often be more accurate to see it as the brainchild of particular councillors who succeeded in persuading the queen, quite possibly against the wishes of other councillors. The fall of Grindal and the interregnum plan both fit well into this model. Indeed, new research by Catherine Chou suggests that the interregnum plan of 1584–5 faced open opposition from within the regime even as it was being devised.¹³⁰ We should perhaps regard Burghley, Leicester, Walsingham and their allies as forming a closely allied Protestant grouping *within* the regime, rather than as constituting *the regime*.¹³¹

The Protestants within government were usually more powerful, but they were not all-powerful. Many of the conservatives' schemes (such as the Habsburg and Valois marriage plans) came close to success, but often the Protestants were simply better politicians. Furthermore, the conservatives tended to lack effective leadership, and they were hindered by their or their associates' Catholicism being both illegal and associated with foreign powers (just as the forward Protestants could be embarrassed by the excesses of their Puritan clients). It is also true that the Catholics suffered more casualties—in the form of exile, ended careers or executions—than the Protestants ever did: only Grindal,

129. The four were the earl of Northumberland, Viscount Montague, Sir William Cordell and one other, possibly Sir Thomas Cornwallis. This is very imperfectly documented, but there are at least four reports from sources on both sides of the religious spectrum—from the French ambassador in England; the papal nuncio in Paris; Charles Sledd, a government spy reporting gossip among English Catholics in Rome; and William Fuller, a Puritan minister who, presuming on an acquaintance with the queen pre-dating her accession, wrote to the queen in 1585 about how, in January 1580, 'divers Anti-christians were like to be made privie Counsaillers': Read, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, ii. 21; Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, pp. 173–4, 253 n. 92; Bossy, 'English Catholics and the French Marriage', p. 7; *Miscellanea: Recusant Records*, ed. C. Talbot, Catholic Record Society, liii (1961), p. 229 (I owe this reference to Michael Questier); *The Second Part of a Register, being a Calendar of Manuscripts under that Title Intended for Publication by the Puritans about 1593, and now in Dr William's Library, London*, ed. A. Peel (2 vols., Cambridge, 1915), ii. 62. See also Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, pp. 154–5. Doran suggests, in view of her harsh words against him, that the queen may have contemplated dismissing Walsingham: *Monarchy and Matrimony*, p. 174.

130. C. Chou, "'One that was no Furtherer of this Devise': (Manufactured?) Opposition to the "Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I", *Parliamentary History*, xxxvi (2017), pp. 273–97. I am very grateful to Dr Chou for sending me a draft of her article.

131. Cf. John Bossy's description of them as a 'Protestant party': *Under the Molehill*, p. 71.

and perhaps William Davison and Francis Knollys, truly incurred significant penalties.¹³²

Elizabethan politics, I have argued, involved significantly more conflict and disagreement than historians currently believe, even if this conflict was not organised on factional lines. Elizabeth's ministers were not necessarily all committed to the same ends. In the event of a succession crisis caused by the queen's death, would Hatton or Buckhurst automatically have supported the candidate proposed by Burghley or Leicester? Might Mary Stuart have had a party within the council? We cannot know, but such questions should not be dismissed entirely. All this underlines the importance of detailed research on the day-to-day, year-to-year course of events over a very long and eventful reign; the cross-currents, reverses and ups and downs of different individuals, groupings and policies call for the sort of close attention that studies of political culture, however valuable, tend to oversimplify or blur.

Conflict was not necessarily constant nor vicious; Adams is right that the tone of Elizabethan politics was generally cordial. Many important issues did not split councillors on religious lines; Cecil, for example, supported the Habsburg match in the 1560s because of the need for an heir, and Hatton opposed the Anjou match, probably because he feared it might undermine his own standing with the queen.¹³³ Even where they did disagree, councillors usually fell in behind official policy once the queen had made a decision. Co-operation was often sincere and effective; the conduct of the long and difficult war against Spain is a case in point, since few Englishmen, whatever their religious persuasion, can have hoped for defeat. It seems possible, however, to identify broadly consistent lines of distinction between policies favoured by conservatives and those preferred by forward Protestants. These included, in the case of the former, a Catholic marriage for the queen, caution about intervention in war overseas and the repression of Puritans; for the latter, support of foreign Protestants, the death of Mary Stuart, the rigorous prosecution of Catholics and tacit support for Puritanism.

Nevertheless, recent research into debates such as the fall of Grindal and the Anjou match has revealed the depth of the conflict which could break out at times. Internal cordiality within the regime broke down quite regularly, and in any case, a veneer of politeness and co-operation among senior politicians often conceals significant tension, as demonstrated by the most cursory study of modern political parties or cabinets. Patrick Collinson, in his last book, wrote that, while 'faction'

132. Davison was made the scapegoat for the despatch of Mary, Queen of Scots' execution warrant, while Knollys's outspoken support for Puritanism led to his marginalisation as a councillor late in life: S. Adams, 'Davison, William (d. 1608)', *ODNB*; 'Knollys, Sir Francis (by 1512–96)', in Hasler, ed., *House of Commons*, ii. 414.

133. Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, pp. 74, 80–2, 87–8, 91, 95, 98, 172–3.

was out of fashion in Elizabethan historiography, 'there can be no doubt that a coalition of persons and interests concerned, amongst other things, with restricting the power of Elizabeth's favourite of favourites, the earl of Leicester, and advancing a conservative religious agenda, made political headway in the mid 1580s'.¹³⁴ Indeed, Adams accepts an element of conflict between keen Protestants and anti-Puritans, an observation that takes on new significance if, as this article has argued, anti-Puritans were much more closely linked to Catholics than is often realised.¹³⁵

The model of Elizabethan politics suggested here has potentially significant implications. There could be serious disagreement within the governing elite, in which one side might on occasion mobilise against another, sometimes win and sometimes lose. This was a process in which Elizabeth herself, not Burghley or Leicester, was at the centre of politics, managing a variety of different sources of advice and agents of policy. It also problematises (or rather places in context) the concentration in recent years on such themes as the monarchical republic, the British problem and the men of business, since all of these were largely Protestant concerns. If we stop seeing the forward Protestants as the only people who mattered, then these themes recede somewhat, and we have the opportunity to look afresh at other strands of policy-making, such as dynastic legitimacy, the role of the nobility, the potential for toleration and reconciliation with Rome, or anti-Puritanism.

There are also a number of important broader consequences relating to the religious climate within England as a whole. If there were defenders (or non-persecutors) of Catholics at the highest level, this changes our picture of the condition of English Catholicism. The tendency has sometimes been to see Catholics as powerless victims of the regime, yet their ability to call upon support from privy councillors and other powerful people qualifies this. We can see Catholics or their representatives as political actors, not merely as oppositional commentators or hapless victims of state oppression. Such a reframing also contributes towards a more sophisticated analysis of the important and neglected question of how and why it was that some Catholics suffered terribly under Elizabeth, while others survived and prospered.

Revising our perception of the Elizabethan regime has implications for understanding the broader sweep of post-Reformation politics, in that many of the arguments about the influence of Catholics and conservatives, and the incorporation of a range of religious attitudes within government, can be echoed for both earlier and later periods. Henry VIII's advisors after the break with Rome were often deadly

¹³⁴. The fact that Collinson situates this in a section commenting, among other things, on the appointment of John Aylmer as bishop of London in 1577, suggests that this period could also be extended backwards somewhat: Collinson, *Richard Bancroft*, p. 54.

¹³⁵. Adams, 'Eliza Enthroned?', p. 71.

rivals; even Edward VI's and Mary I's councils included diverse strands of policy and opinion. There are yet more obvious comparisons with the reigns of James I and Charles I, whose counsellors included numerous people with strong Catholic leanings. In the case of James, one can cite the ascendancy of the Howards (Henry, earl of Northampton, effectively an open Catholic, and Thomas, earl of Suffolk), Edward Wotton and Thomas Lake.¹³⁶ It is a striking fact that, at the moment when Lord Monteagle brought Robert Cecil his warning note about the Gunpowder Plot, the Secretary was sitting down to supper with three Catholic or crypto-Catholic earls: Worcester, Northampton and Suffolk.¹³⁷ In Charles's reign, men such as Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel, Secretary Cottington, Francis Windebank and the earl of Nithsdale were significant, as was the ambiguous figure of the duke of Buckingham.¹³⁸ Both James I and Charles I had Catholic consorts, and, while Queen Anne was not a major political player, Henrietta Maria certainly was. James and Charles pursued policies which historians tend to regard as having been out of the question for Elizabeth, such as alliances or marriages with France and Spain, or diplomatic relations with the papacy. Elizabeth's contemporaries in Scotland, France and Austria all provide further examples of governments periodically encompassing elements of religious diversity. Furthermore, many of the arguments and dynamics described in this article were played out in microcosm within the broader circles of the Elizabethan regime. In the counties, conservative and more radical elements within the governing classes contended to achieve dominance.¹³⁹

Great strides have been made in recent years in understanding the post-Reformation English Catholic community. This article has argued that groups which fell between open Catholicism and hot Protestantism, and were thus able to participate in legitimate politics, deserve closer historical attention. Catholics, crypto-Catholics and conservatives retained various forms of access to the political process. Later historians, from the seventeenth century onwards, often tried to portray Elizabeth I as a Protestant heroine, not least in comparisons unfavourable to the Stuarts. Yet the evidence suggests that, just as

136. L.L. Peck, *Northampton: Patronage and Policy at the Court of James I* (London, 1982); Loomie, 'Jacobean Crypto-Catholic'; R. Lockyer, 'Lake, Sir Thomas (bap. 1561, d. 1630)', *ODNB*.

137. M. Nicholls, *Investigating Gunpowder Plot* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 6–7.

138. R.M. Smuts, 'Howard, Thomas, Fourteenth Earl of Arundel, Fourth Earl of Surrey, and First Earl of Norfolk (1585–1646)', *ODNB*; P. Hunneyball, 'Cottington, Sir Francis, 1st Bt. (c.1579–1652)', in Thrush and Ferris, eds., *House of Commons*, iii, 689–95; B. Quintrell, 'Windebank, Sir Francis (bap. 1582, d. 1646)', *ODNB*; J.R.M. Sizer, 'Maxwell, Robert, First Earl of Nithsdale (b. after 1586, d. 1646)', *ODNB*; R. Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592–1628* (London, 1981).

139. D. MacCulloch, 'Catholic and Puritan in Elizabethan Suffolk—a County Community Polarises', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, lxxii (1981), pp. 232–89; Smith, *County and Court*; R.B. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex: A Study of the Enforcement of the Religious Settlement, 1558–1603* (Leicester, 1969).

Elizabeth's personal religious and policy inclinations frustrated and disappointed her hot Protestant councillors, so too her wider regime was not quite as Protestant as the Protestants themselves might have wished.

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