

The Question of Dissimulation among Elizabethan Catholics

by

C.M.J.F. SWAN, Esq., Ph.D. (Cantab.),
Assumption University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario

Within twelve hours on 17th November, 1558, two of the main and effective champions of English Catholic orthodoxy died: the royal cousins, Mary Tudor and Reginald Pole. They were, respectively, England's last Catholic queen-regnant and Archbishop of Canterbury. Contemporaries realized that such a circumstance as these all but simultaneous deaths was pregnant with possibilities particularly in view not only of the Protestant Revolt which absorbed the energies of Europe of that day, but also of the character of the new sovereign, Elizabeth Tudor. Nevertheless, it is doubtful if many foresaw that the new reign would finally bring official England down so definitely on the non-Roman side of Christendom. Such a resolution broke a theological tradition of Communion with the Holy See which lasted from the mission of St. Augustine to Kent in 597 until the Henrician Act of Supremacy in 1535; a tradition returned to in 1553-1554, and again severed by the Elizabethan Parliamentary Acts of 1559.

It lies outside the scope of this paper to trace the complicated manoeuvres of the 1559 session of Parliament, and so it must suffice to say that this ecclesiastical revolution was officially accomplished by two Acts: the Act of Supremacy¹ and the Act of Uniformity.² The former substituted Royal for Papal Supremacy in matters spiritual, while the latter concerned the liturgy and replaced the Mass and other sacred exercises of the Roman obedience, according to the Sarum Rite, by a modified version of the Second Edwardine Book of Common Prayer.³ Save for minor changes, and one short break,⁴ this Elizabethan Settlement of Religion, as it came to be known, has remained in essence to this day as the religious expression of official England.

The Settlement was *sui generis* as far as the Reformation as a whole was concerned; and the final break from Rome was, I submit, rather more governmental, parliamentary, and political than national, spiritual, and spontaneous. Nevertheless, this Settlement has exhibited remarkable resilience, so much so that for several centuries now one has taken its presence almost for granted as a part of the English scene.

However, before this Reformed *Anglicana* reached its Laudine apogee during the reign of Charles I, the history of the weening of many of the English from their traditional Church was anything but even. It is the purpose of this paper to examine, briefly, a particular aspect of the attitude of the Elizabethan Catholics to this new dispensation; one which was a conscious compromise and an attempt to include as many within its ranks as possible. At the beginning of the reign, at least, mere external conformity was acceptable to the government for, as the queen herself said in 1569, her subjects were not to,

be molested either by examination or inquisition in any matter either of faith... as long as they shall in their outward conversation show themselves quiet and conformable and not manifestly repugnant and obstinate to the laws of the realm, which are established

¹ I Eliz., c. 1.

² I Eliz., c. 2.

³ For further particulars vide Philip Hughes, *Rome and the Counter Reformation in England*, p. 142.

⁴ During the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, 1649-1660.

for frequentation of divine service in the ordinary churches.⁵

After the prudential mistakes of Mary Tudor in ecclesiastical matters the Elizabethan government hoped that prescribed conformity, steady pressure – short of blood – and the inevitable mortality of the Henrician and Marian Catholic clergy would slowly bring the greater part of the English from a grudging acceptance to a sincere adherence in the Religious Settlement.⁶ The liturgy devised was such that it could be given interpretations acceptable both to the Reformed and Roman schools; as to the theological basis for such a position that was to be formulated later, and, in fact, it is difficult to find a classical expression of the Elizabethan Settlement until Richard Hooker produced his *Anglican Polity* between 1593 and 1597.

To add to the confusion at the beginning, rumours were rife that the pope was quite willing to sanction the new liturgy if the queen would simply acknowledge him as Supreme Head of the Church. The celebrated Elizabethan Jesuit, Robert Persons, claims that these were spread by the queen herself, and one can appreciate the implied inference that all might soon be well between the Crown and the Holy See.⁷ Further, the Acts of Supremacy and of Uniformity of 1559, and the later Act of 1563⁸ made weekly attendance at the Established Church compulsory on pain of various penalties;⁹ and all holders of public office, Members of the House of Commons, ministers of religion, schoolmasters, lawyers, and those graduating from a university were required to take the Oath of Supremacy which declared the queen to be the “only supreme governor” in all spiritual, ecclesiastical and temporal matters, and denied any jurisdiction, spiritual or ecclesiastical, to any, “foreign prince, person, prelate, state or potentate.”¹⁰ The official attitude was quite clear: any public, professional or ecclesiastical career was to be contingent upon the taking of an oath which denied implicitly Papal Supremacy concerning *cura animarum*, while the quiet enjoyment of one’s property and family was to depend upon attendance at the newly arranged liturgy of the State Church. The government envisaged a somewhat inclusive regimen of the body politic.

It should also be remembered that the religious revolution accomplished in 1559 was but the fourth radical change of a similar kind introduced during the preceding twenty-five years. At the least, none under about thirty-two years of age could have had any memory at all of an England in which the Old Religion was not only officially paramount, but also traditionally accepted by the nation at large. During these changes – introduced at the instance of the government – practically the whole country acquiesced, and as an Elizabethan Catholic wag put it, they “ever turned, but never burned.”¹¹ The Catholics who did not conform were few, even if they were to be the illustrious founders of an English Catholic

⁵ A speech by the queen to be read from all pulpits at the time of the Northern Rebellion, 1569; text given in *The Public Speaking of Queen Elizabeth*, edited by George P. Rice Jr., 1951, pp. 130-131.

⁶ William Holt, S.J., *How the Catholic religion was maintained in England during thirty eight years of persecution, and how it may still be preserved there*, 1596. Printed in T. F. Knox, *The First and Second Diaries of the English College*, Douay, 1878, p. 378.

⁷ Robert Persons, S.J., to Agazzari (Rector of the English College, Rome), London, 17th November, 1580; printed in *Publications of the Catholic Record Society* (subsequently referred to as *C.R.S.*), XXXIX, p. 54.

⁸ V Eliz., c. 1. That services in the vernacular were not repugnant, in principle, to English Catholics so long as they were approved by the Papacy, see the reactions of the strict Recusant, Feckenham, last Abbot of Westminster, in Lansdowne MS. XXVII. 36-37: Andrew Perne to Lord Burleigh, 11th May, 1578.

⁹ They ranged from a fine of 12d. a week for non-attendance of the laity to the penalty of death for the third offence for conducting a religious service other than in the prescribed Book of Common Prayer.

¹⁰ I Eliz., c. 1, sec. IX.

¹¹ *ADD.MSS.* 5813 (Cole MSS). “The Falle of Religious Howses, Colleges, Chantreys, Hospitalls, etc.,” by ... Porter, c. 1591, p. 47.

tradition which has come down to the present day: the tradition of More, Fisher, Plantagenet, the Monks of the London Charterhouse, and the like. Nevertheless, they were the exception, and did not exhibit the general Tudor attitude towards the wishes of the ruler.¹²

It will, therefore, not be difficult to appreciate why opinion among the Catholics was somewhat confused as to what attitude should be adopted in the face of the religious changes decreed by Parliament in 1559. Broadly speaking, there were two positions adopted, that of the Recusants, and that of the Schismatics or Church-Papists as they were called. The Recusant¹³ was a Catholic who refused either to attend the services of the Elizabethan Settlement, or to take the Oath of Supremacy, or both. The Schismatic or Church-Papist was one who, while in mind and heart a Catholic, nevertheless dissembled and conformed externally to the legal requirements of attendance at the State Church which thus freed him from the penalties to be incurred for recusancy or nonconformity.

The questions of recusancy and of dissimulation were ever present in Elizabethan Catholicism. The degree of each varied at any given moment, nevertheless one can divide the forty-five years of the reign into about three main periods: 1559-1570, 1570-1590, and 1590-1603. These periods are somewhat arbitrary, but it will be appreciated, such divisions have a rough convenience in historical discussions.

Much has been written on the one hand about recusancy, and on the other hand about sincere conformity, but little about dissimulation in connection with the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion. Consequently, it is about this problem that I should now like to submit for your consideration certain observations which have, I trust, a degree of cogency even if the paper is skeletal and cursory, by its very nature.

Between 1559 and 1570, that is to say from the time that the Acts of Supremacy¹⁴ and of Uniformity¹⁵ came into effect, until the publication¹⁶ of the Papal Bull, *Regnans in Excelsis*¹⁷ – which declared Elizabeth excommunicate and her subjects freed from their allegiance – for that decade dissimulation was almost universal among the Catholics. As Persons some time later told the Rector of the English College at Rome “at the beginning of the reign of this Queen, when the danger of this schism was not well realized, for ten consecutive years practically all Catholics without distinction used to go to their [the Protestant] Churches.”¹⁸ Open resistance was confined, by and large, to those who were confronted with a demand to take the Oath of Supremacy. In direct contrast to the Henrician episcopacy, when the Oath of Supremacy was tendered to the bishops in 1559 all save one refused, and were, accordingly, deprived of their sees and by the end of the year in custody. Practically everywhere, too, the higher clergy stood firm, many of the cathedral dignitaries, the heads of colleges and the senior members of the universities. The few restored religious orders were not less loyal. Besides the bishops, seven deans of cathedral chapters were deprived in 1559, ten archdeacons, seven chancellors, and at least twelve heads of colleges (at Oxford and Cambridge, six each); others, both collegiate heads and fellows, were to

¹² *Lansdowne* MS. VIII. 54 (folio 153): Robert Beaumont, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, to William Cecil, 6th October, 1563. And see also *Egerton* MS. 3048 (folio 146): draft copy of a letter from the Privy Council to the bishops (probably 1582).

¹³ Strictly speaking the term applied to any who refused to conform to the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion, in other words any non-conformist. However, it came to be applied, almost without exception, to Roman Catholics exclusively.

¹⁴ Came into effect on 8th May, 1559.

¹⁵ Came into effect on 24th June, 1559.

¹⁶ This Bull was made public in London by Bl. John Felton who, with great daring, pasted a copy of it on the door of the house of the Bishop of London.

¹⁷ For the text vide Dodds Tierney, *Church History of England from the commencement of the 16th century to the Revolution of 1683 with Notes, Additions, and a Continuation* by the Rev. M. A. Tierney, F.S.A., 1839-1843, III, App., p. ii.

¹⁸ R. Persons to Agazzari, 17th November, 1580, printed in C.R.S., XXXIX, p. 58; and to the same effect vide the autobiography of Thomas Fitzherbert, S.J., printed in Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, 1875, II, p. 210.

follow for similar reasons during the next few years.¹⁹ On the other hand the parochial clergy appear to have been less resolute, but we do not know the exact number who took the Oath of Supremacy. Considerable controversy, therefore, has inevitably arisen over the proportion that accepted the new arrangement. It would seem that well over half – some would say three-quarters – acquiesced.²⁰

Outward conformity, however, should not mislead one as to inward conviction, particularly in view of the fact that many priests continued to say Mass in secret while they celebrated the new liturgy in public,²¹ a fact well attested by contemporaries including Cardinal Allen.²²

The attitude of many of the Catholic laity when attending the new services, however, was hardly calculated to encourage those sincerely devoted to the Reform. While the Protestant service was in progress, some directed their attention to their own Catholic practices such as saying their beads,²³ or reading Our Lady's Primer;²⁴ while others read secular works such as those on *Materia Medica* or the Humanities.²⁵ Some would get up and leave whenever a preacher attacked the papacy.²⁶ Others, when a general communion was enjoined, would find some means to avoid it such as quarreling violently with their neighbour which relationship, according to the Book of Common Prayer, would prevent their reception of the Protestant Eucharist;²⁷ or at Easter, for example, a squire or other person of quality would arrange to receive communion in his own chapel, but would make sure that the cleric who administered to him was not only a Catholic, but also unknown to the local neighbours.²⁸ Some, apparently, would go to the beginning of the service, but would leave before the end;²⁹ and – as one might readily expect – when the Elizabethan officials attempted to force an admission of non-conformity from Catholic barristers, the dialogue between the interrogator and the one to be investigated lacked a certain categorical simplicity. For example, in 1569³⁰ the members of the Inns of Court were to be examined concerning their non-attendance at church, and their diverse answers reflect the subtle genius of the legal mind. However, when all else failed they would take refuge in that silence which

¹⁹ For details concerning the universities *vide* Swan, C.M.J.F., *The Introduction of the Elizabethan Settlement into the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge with particular reference to the Roman Catholics, 1558-1603*, pp. 15 ff, and 50 ff. Thesis of which copies are deposited in the University Library, Cambridge, and in the Library of the Assumption University of Windsor.

²⁰ P. Hughes, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in England*, pp. 144-145; H. N. Birt, *The Elizabethan Religious Settlement*, p. 163; J. H. Pollen, *The English Catholics in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, p. 39 ff. As an example, however, of certain 'stubborn priestes late of the Diocese of Worcester' see the schedule of Popish Recusants submitted to the Privy Council, 1561 (P.R.O. *Dom. Add.*, 1547-1565, No. 45) printed in *Victoria County Histories*, 'Warwick' II.

²¹ While keeping their benefices some, who had preached during the reign of Mary Tudor, refused to do so under the Elizabethan Settlement, *vide* S.P. *Dom. Eliz.*, LX. 71: Visitation of the Diocese of Chichester, 1569.

²² H. N. Birt, *The Elizabethan Religious Settlement*, p. 299.

²³ S.P. *Dom. Eliz.*, LX. 71: Visitation of the Province of Canterbury, 1569.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ MS. No. 2 of the *Lambeth-Selden-Hale Collection* (now in the possession of Prof. H. W. Garrod, of Merton College, Oxford) : Complaint against the Popery of William Marshall, of Merton College, and St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, and others, probably 1562.

²⁶ S.P. *Dom. Eliz.*, LX. 71: Visitation of the Province of Canterbury, 1569.

²⁷ Report of Nicholas Sanders to Cardinal Morone, *vide* T. McN. Veech, *Dr. Nicholas Sanders and the English Reformation, 1530-1581*, p. 33 ff.

²⁸ S.P. *Dom. Eliz.*, LX. 71: Visitation of the Province of Canterbury, 1569.

²⁹ Lambeth MSS. Archbishop Parker's Register No. 1 (folio 321) : Interrogation and answers of William Hall, Fellow of Merton College, Oxford.. 26th May, 1562.

³⁰ S.P. *Dom. Eliz.*, LX. 70.

had been St. Thomas More's last resort, and which on this occasion was exemplified by the claim of Richard Godfrey of Gray's Inn about whom the interrogator noted,

he sayeth that he believeth he is not compellable by the laws to answer this interrogatory; if he hath heard Mass he sayeth he is not impeachable by the laws of the realm as his case standeth.³¹

Among those of academic bent, barristers were not alone in searching for an escape between the Scylla and Charybdis of enforced conformity. We find a complaint³² of about 1562 that some of the better known Oxford Catholic Dons, such as William Marshall, Principal of St. Alban's Hall,³³ and William Hall, an eminent physician and Fellow of Merton College,³⁴ and others of that university were,

bothe by their ill example openlie and also by their whisperinges and conferences prively ... to the godlie disposed a greate offence, to the indifferente sorte no smale stey and terrour, to the papistes a marvelous great harteninge & hardeninge.

The main complaint about the activities of these Papists concerned their casuistical justification for taking the Oath of Supremacy, and other oaths, "against other such matters of religion as they holde by the Romish church to be true." Briefly, the explanation was as follows: all legitimate and binding oaths in matters ecclesiastical and spiritual can only be administered by one acting under papal authority; however, the present Ecclesiastical Commissioners and bishops act under royal authority; therefore, the oaths they administer are neither legitimate nor binding – in fact they are not oaths at all – therefore, a Catholic may take them "with saffe conscience."³⁵

These and less sophisticated reasons were put forward by Church-Papists throughout the reign in an attempt to justify dissimulation despite a series of explicit condemnations of such a practice beginning with that of the Council of Trent in 1562.³⁶ Even the clandestine efforts of the Recusant Dr. William (later Cardinal) Allen between 1562 and 1565 were, apparently of little avail.³⁷ During those years he worked energetically in order to persuade the "Catholikes not to go to hereticall churches"³⁸ both in his native Lancashire, and also in Oxford where he had been the Principal of St. Mary's Hall.

The general atmosphere was one of *attentisme*, practically all the Catholics awaited a turn of events in their favour: the fall of Cecil; the marriage of Elizabeth to a Catholic prince; or the death of the queen from one of her frequent serious illnesses. Conversely, it should also be noted that despite this inertia some 20,000 volumes of different works controverting the Elizabethan Settlement which were written and published in the Low Countries by the exiled Wykamists found a ready market in England during the first part of the reign.³⁹ Indeed, in the opinion of Cardinal Allen⁴⁰ the later renaissance of active Catholicism in England was due in great part to the success of these works in the vernacular. The

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² MS. No. 2 of the *Lambeth-Selden-Hale Collection*.

³³ Expelled for Popery, 1567, *vide* J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 1891-1892 III, p. 975.

³⁴ Expelled for Popery, 1562, *vide* *Alumni Oxonienses*, II, p. 635.

³⁵ Compare the accusation that Anthony Bolney, of New College, Oxford, had said that, 'scribinge [subscribing to an oath] and scribelinge all ys one to me' *vide* MS. *Top. Oxon.*, C. 354 (folio 29): Visitation of New College, Oxford 20th Sept., 1566.

³⁶ *C.R.S.*, II, pp. 61-62; Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion*, 1896, p. 25 ff.

³⁷ *Nicolai Fizerberti de Alani Cardinalis vita libellus*, Rome, 1608, printed in T. F. Knox, *The letters and Memorials of William Cardinal Allen*, 1882, pp. 5-6.

³⁸ R. Persons, S.J., *A Storie of Domesticall Difficulties* (begun 1599 – unpublished), *C.R.S.*, II, p. 62.

³⁹ Thomas Worthington, *Catalogus Martyrum in Anglia, 1570-1612*, Douay, 1614, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Wm. Allen to Everard Mercurian, probably, 1575-1576, printed in *C.R.S.*, IX, p. 65.

government was under no misapprehension as to the danger of permitting such works to circulate in the country. In consequence, the year 1564 saw the first of a series of governmental prohibitions against the importation of this Catholic propaganda.⁴¹

It is impossible to say for how long this passive resistance, combined with an almost universal dissimulation, would have continued had nothing intervened to upset this attitude. However, between 1568 and 1570 four major events took place which changed the situation for the Elizabethan Catholics. The four events were, the founding of the English College at Douay, 1568; the flight of Mary Queen of Scots into England in the same year; the Northern Rebellion, 1569; and the publication of the Papal Bull, *Regnans in Excelsis*, 1570. Of these, probably the last named – the excommunication of the queen – had the most immediate effect in calling a halt to the general dissimulation. By this Bull the pope had now declared war, as it were, upon Elizabeth and for the Catholics the lesson was brought home most forcibly that not everything could be excused in the name of obedience to the law: a choice had to be made.

Consequently, from about 1570 onwards one finds a gradual decrease in dissimulation;⁴² a process much stimulated by the arrival of the Seminarists in 1574 and subsequently. The execution in 1577 of Bl. Cuthbert Maine⁴³ for religion – the first Seminarist so to die – was a tacit admission by the government of the failure of their initial religious policy of pressure short of blood in order to obtain conformity. This stiffening of the religious attitude on both sides led the Protestant authorities to deal more decisively with that expression of *attentisme* so common during the first years of the reign: the collection and hiding of Catholic vestments, sacred vessels, and the like,⁴⁴ “against another Daye.”⁴⁵ Philip Baker, Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, summed up succinctly the reasons why those, like himself, of the Old Religion gathered together these objects of piety when he is reported to have said, “that which hath bin, maye be againe.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, concerted efforts to uncover this “Popish trashe”⁴⁷ were made as, for example, when in 1572 there was burned in the court of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, the collection of, “muche popishe trumpery; as vestmentes, albes, tunicles ... with other suche stuffe as might have furnished divers masses at one instant”⁴⁸ which belonged to Dr. John Caius the Master and re-founder of that house.

The disposing of another collection of, “diverse monuments of superstition”⁴⁹ at All Souls College, Oxford, proved slightly more tedious for the Protestant authorities. In about October, 1565, Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, hinted that they might sell some of their, “superflouse plate wherof there is now no use.”⁵⁰ However, despite a series of letters

⁴¹ For a discussion concerning this literary output by the English exiles in the Low Countries and the reaction of the Elizabethan government, *vide* T. McN, Veech, *Dr. Nicholas Sanders and the English Reformation, 1530-1581*, pp. 99-106.

⁴² *C.R.S.*, XXII, p. 4; by 1575 Burleigh considered that the open Catholics had increased threefold since the beginning of the reign, *vide* T. F. Knox, *Douay Diaries*, p. 98.

⁴³ J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, III, p. 995.

⁴⁴ *Lambeth MSS.* Archbishop Parker’s Register No. 1 (folios 324-325): Articles to be inquired of the Fellows and other Schollers and Officers of Merton College in Oxford, 26th May, 1562, “that ovr Idolls and painted peaces of woode ar reserved as though men hoped for a daie and hidde by our officers in blinde corners And likewise the masse bookes with other church stuffe.”

⁴⁵ *Lansdowne MS.* VIII (folio 152): Complaints of certain Fellows of King’s College, Cambridge, against their Provost, Philip Baker, 1565.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XI (folio 187): Similar complaints against the same, 27th Nov. 1569.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Lansdowne MS.* XV (folio 130): Thomas Byng, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge to the Lord Treasurer, 14th December, 1572.

⁴⁹ *All Souls College MSS.* Letters of Kings, Archbishops, etc., I, No. 29: Matthew Parker and others to the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford, 26th March, 1567.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 27: Same to Dr. Warner, Warden of All Souls College, Oxford, 25th October, [1559-1565].

which became more and more pointed⁵¹ the Warden and Fellows had still not disposed of their popish hoard eight years later. The time for patient pressure was now over, and so on 7th December, 1573, the Queen's Commissioners at Oxford gave a peremptory order that the Warden was not only to destroy the offending objects, but also to appear before them on the following Tuesday with a certificate to that effect.⁵² Similar collections – earnest of the return of the old order – were disposed of at about this time, as for example, at King's College, Cambridge,⁵³ and at Trinity College, Oxford.⁵⁴

During this second period, 1570-1590, dissimulation gradually decreased with the growing activities of the Seminary priests after 1574.⁵⁵ This was particularly so with the renaissance of Catholicism which reached its greatest height from about 1580 onwards. For some years this revitalization of the Old Religion was so successful that the government reacted – almost in desperation – with the celebrated Act of 158: *An Act against Jesuits, seminary priests and such other like disobedient persons*.⁵⁶ By this, the very reception of ordination to the Priesthood by Roman authority was treason *ipso facto* with the concomitant death penalty.

However, our immediate interest is not so much in the increase of recusancy as in the continuation of dissimulation. Despite this resurgence of active and uncompromising Roman Catholicism the practice of attending the State Church still continued for a good many Catholics.⁵⁷ Discussions as to the lawfulness of this habit went on, and we find some interesting accusations made against certain members of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in 1581.⁵⁸ According to these, when a recent General Communion had been ordered by the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Richard Swale, President of the college had defended dissimulation by various arguments. This had been done in the college hall in the full hearing of the undergraduates and other members of the house. The accusations continued to the effect that shortly after this event, some five scholars of the college met together in order to decide whether dissimulation was licit or not. Some maintained that they could receive the Protestant Communion as they regarded it as simply bread and wine; others, however, thought it more prudent to go for a walk in the country during the time of service. In fact there was only one, Thomas Barwick,⁵⁹ who refused to consider dissimulation, and declared himself quite openly as a born and bred Papist. Of his colleagues in this discussion, two arrived together at the English College at Rheims within a year of the complaints: William Flacke, later of the Society of Jesus,⁶⁰ and Robert Sayre who was the first Englishman to enter the Order of Saint Benedict since the collapse of the Marian

⁵¹ John Gutch, *Collectanea Curiosa*..., 1781, II, pp. 274-281: Letters Nos. XXI XXV ranging from 5th March, 1566 to 5th May, 1573.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 281, Letter No. XXVI: The Queen's Commissioners to All Souls College, Oxford, 7th December, 1573.

⁵³ *Lansdowne MS. XXIII* (folios 77-78): The answer of Roger Goad, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, to certain complaints, [May, 1576].

⁵⁴ *Trinity College MSS. Register A* (folio 138): Robert Horne, Bishop of Winchester, to the President and Fellows of Trinity College, Oxford, 19th July, 1570 - in which Horne ordered the destruction of "certaine monumentes tendinge to Idolatrie and popishe or Devills service, as Crasses Sensars and suche lyke fylthie stuffe."

⁵⁵ R. Persons, S.J., *A Storie of Domesticall Difficulties*, C.R.S., II, pp. 61-62.

⁵⁶ 27 Eliz., c. 11.

⁵⁷ From this time until the end of the reign, when speaking of Catholics in connection with the phrase Church-Papist, one includes not only those who had been formally baptized as Roman Catholics when that religion was officially paramount, but also those "well affected" – according to the contemporary phrase – towards Roman Catholicism. Many of the latter subsequently became Recusants either in this reign, or in that of the Stuarts.

⁵⁸ *Lansdowne MS. XXXIII* (folio 91): Certain disorders for the education of youth since the time Dr. Legge hath been Master of our College [1581].

⁵⁹ John Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 1922-1927, I, p. 102.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 147; Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, VI, p. 155.

refoundation of Westminster.⁶¹ A third of this group to enter Holy Orders was Henry Rokewode, later a Seminarist, and the member of a family which in 1595 was returned, in its entirety, as papist recusant.⁶²

This incident is also illustrative of the fact that some of the most distinguished Elizabethan Catholics at one time or another during their lives approved, to some greater or lesser extent, of dissimulation theoretically and, or practically. Leaving aside those about whom we have just spoken, two of the more celebrated would be: the proto-martyr of the Elizabethan Seminarists, Bl. Cuthbert Maine, who for several years acted as a chaplain to St. John's College, Oxford, and while there celebrated the Reformed Services although, "in harte and mind a persuaded Catholike";⁶³ and Bl. Edmund Campion S.J., who similarly had a long conflict of conscience while attempting to hold his various offices at the same university. He even went as far as to receive – against his will – the Reformed order of the diaconate.⁶⁴

The subsequent activities of these and other men like them on the English Mission, as it was called, were to reduce greatly the practice in which they themselves had once indulged. So it was for Gregory Gunnis,⁶⁵ a Marian priest who had dissembled from 1559 until about 1578. During the first part of the reign he had been a chaplain at Magdalen College, Oxford, and then in 1567 became beneficed at Elford in the County of Oxford. However, in 1578 he left that appointment for conscience sake, and for the next six years held no ecclesiastical preferment. In 1584-at the height of the Catholic renaissance – he was sufficiently indiscreet as to state publicly not only that the queen and all her bishops were heretics, but also that he hoped a shrine would be built one day on the site of Campion's martyrdom.⁶⁶ Next year, 1585, Gunnis admitted quite frankly before the authorities that he had ceased dissimulation during the past seven years, and that he was "nowe sorye" that he had ever conducted the services, or celebrated the Eucharist of the Reformed Church. At this examination he further admitted that since the death of Queen Mary (1558) he had preserved in a silver pyx two consecrated hosts which he revered as "the Catholique church doth."⁶⁷

A less complicated, but evidently recurrent attitude⁶⁸ concerning external conformity was reported at this time in connection with the members of a family soon to become well known for its recusancy: Sir John Petre, later Baron Petre of Writtle in the county of Essex.⁶⁹ According to one of his servants, George Elliot, in a confession to the Earl of Leicester, 1581,

the said Sir John had many tymes before perswaded me to go to ye church for fashion sake, and in respect to avoide ye dawnger of ye lawe, yet to keepe myne owne conscience. And then at ye same time, he perswaded me to do ye lyke sayinge I might lawfullie doe it and furder saithe he do you thinke there are not that goe to ye church that beare as good a mynde to godwarde, as those that refuse, yes and if occasion serve wilbe albe to doe better service then they which refuse to go to ye church. Yet would I not for anye thinge wishe you to participate with them eyther in there prayers or communion. And I verlie thincke Sir John althoughe he goethe to ye church dothe not

⁶¹ Venn, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 26; *Cal. S.P. Milan*, I, p. 638.

⁶² *Ibid.*, III, p. 486.

⁶³ Wm. Card. Allen, *Father Edmund Campion and his Companions*, ed. J. H. Pollen, S.J., 1908, pp. 108-109.

⁶⁴ Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion*, 1896, pp. 5-6, 21; J. H. Pollen, *The English Catholics in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 1920, pp. 252-253.

⁶⁵ J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, II, p. 619.

⁶⁶ *S.P. Dom. Eliz.* CLXXIX No. 7 II: The information of Richard Davison, – Arden, and William Whealley before Sir Henry Nevell and William Knollys, Esq., at Henley, Oxfordshire, 8th June, 1584.

⁶⁷ *S.P. Dom. Eliz.* CLXXIX No. 7. I: The examination of Gregory Gunnis, alias Stone, priest, taken before Sir Henry Nevell and William Knollys, Esq., at Henley, Oxfordshire, 8th June, 1585.

⁶⁸ Cf. Bede Camm, *Lives of the English Martyrs*, 1905, II, p. 278.

⁶⁹ Burke's *Peerage Baronetage and Knightage*, 1953, p. 1661.

receive the communion.⁷⁰

Certainly, the last to be deceived by this feigned conformity were the Protestant authorities as, for example, Sir Francis Walsingham – a zealous Reformer and head of a most efficient intelligence service – who urged the Bishop of Chester in 1580 to take adequate steps so that those under his charge, “would be inwardly in heart as conformable as they be outwardly in body.”⁷¹

For many, it would appear, a further turning point in their religious metamorphosis came at the time of the Armada in 1588. England was then faced with an attempted invasion by the champion of Catholicism, Philip II of Spain, and in the minds of many the Elizabethan Settlement and the national cause became identified. According to a prayer ordered by the queen at this time, Elizabeth and her government were identified with the true Gospel and with God’s cause: the Spaniards with, “ye pride of Senacherib and Sisera.”⁷² For many on the borderline between dissimulation and sincere acceptance of the *Anglicana*, the Armada seems to have been the occasion for their change of allegiance. One can say, with considerable certainty, that after 1588 the greater part of the nation supported the new religious dispensation. Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that at about this time, that is to say, just before and after the Armada, the efforts of Seminarists – with the distinguished aid of a few Jesuits – saved English Roman Catholicism from extinction. Among the Recusants during the last thirteen odd years of the reign, a tradition – received from More and Fisher – took definite form, and has continued down to the present day.

Nevertheless, the problem of dissimulation continued to trouble Elizabethan Catholicism, and, for other reasons, the Protestant authorities. Accordingly, Robert Soame, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, wrote to Lord Burleigh in 1592 in order to seek advice about dealing with the, “papistes that comme to church (althoughe not withstanding little better than Seminaries).”⁷³ In Soame’s opinion it was imperative to deal with the Church-Papists, “in the universitie, wher thei have don, and still do much harme in corrupting of youth.” And well might he have been perturbed as the Church-Papist, while theologically quite unreliable, if not a positive danger from the Protestant point of view, nevertheless had placed himself under the protection of the law by attending the State Church. Unless the frequently expressed policy of the Elizabethan government of not making windows into men’s souls as long as they obeyed, was to be violated, there was no way, save time, of dealing with this problem. Yet the presence of these dissembling Papists in a seminary of the Establishment was a scandal for, as Soame said, “theis kinde of papistes ... are that lurke in colledges emongestes vs: more in numbre, and more dangerous, than comenly is thought: and lesse to be tolerated in the vniversitie (in our opinion) then in any part of the land.” Thirty-one years of official control over that university which seems to have been the more sympathetic of the two towards the Reform were not sufficient to rid it of those antipathetic to the *Anglicana*.

If feigned conformity was still to be found at Cambridge, it is no surprise that it exhibited itself in places and areas much more favourably disposed to the Old Religion. This dissimulation seems to have been, in some places at least, as truculent as ever. In 1590 the Rectors of the county of Lancashire complained to the Privy Council⁷⁴ that while some came to Church, once there they walked about, talked, laughed, argued, shouted, and scoffed during prayers. In other places some threw stones onto the church rooves in order to frighten

⁷⁰ *Lansdowne MS.* XXXIII (folios 148-149): A confession exhibited before the Earl of Leicester by George Elliot, 10th August, 1581.

⁷¹ Sir Francis Walsingham to the Bishop of Chester, [31st? July], 1580, printed in J. S. Leatherbarrow, *The Lancashire Elizabethan Recusants*, The Chetham Society, Vol. 110 (N.S.), 1947, p. 94.

⁷² *Harleian MS.* 4240 (folio 17): A prayer for the Queen. 1588.

⁷³ *Lansdowne MS.* LXVI. 114: Robert Soame, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, and others to Lord Burleigh, 4th February, 1592.

⁷⁴ J. S. Leatherbarrow, *The Lancashire Elizabethan Recusants*, The Chetham Society, Vol. 110 (N.S.), 1947, p. 121.

the assembled congregation. Nine years later, 1599, it was still considered desirable to obtain from Cambridge a Queen's Preacher for the county in order to attempt the reduction of Lancashire to conformity.⁷⁵

During the last decade of the reign the Schismatic attitude – one which the Protestant authorities, understandably, found so unsatisfactory – was practised by those many of whom are possibly best described as, *de Catholica fide bene sentientibus*. The future Jesuit, John Brereton, of Weston, Lincolnshire, in 1599 so described his parents who were Church-Papists.⁷⁶ Similar phrases descriptive of parents and others who conformed externally are to be found in other autobiographical declarations which were made upon seeking entrance to the English College at Valladolid. This information, solicited by the college authorities in an effort to exclude spies from the Elizabethan government, is recorded in the *Liber Primi Examinis*⁷⁷ of that house, and it provides a wealth of material concerning the religious attitudes of the English during the latter part of the reign. To conclude the examination of this particular expression of dissimulation let us note a future Jesuit, Guy Holland, of St. John's College, Cambridge, who matriculated pensioner from that college in 1602.⁷⁸ He remained at that university for six years, and then, upon deciding to profess Roman Catholicism openly, went to the Continent and so on to Valladolid where he ultimately arrived on 26th September, 1608. His short autobiography sums up, possibly more tersely than most, the provenance, attitude, and genesis of the theological attitude of this type of Papist when he wrote of himself that he was born,

in agro Lincolniensi parentibus nobilibus et schismaticis ipse a multis annis bene affectus, et anno superiori reconciliatus valedixit Cantabrigin vbi per sex annos studuerat et baccalaureatus gradu est promotus.⁷⁹

As a final observation on the various types of dissimulation practised during the last part of the reign, let us turn our attention to an arrangement which became typical for many Catholic families. By this the father would practise a judicious and occasional conformity so that the recusancy of his wife and family would thereby be somewhat overlooked.⁸⁰ For example, this was so in the family of the future Seminarist, John Smythe, of Ashby Foulvin, Leicester, who left Oxford in 1600 for the English College at Rome;⁸¹ and also Thomas Persall, of Tylsdone, Buckinghamshire, an Oxonian and member of the Inner Temple who died in minor orders at the English College, Rome, in 1601;⁸² and as a final example, John Platt of Buckland, Berkshire, whose Recusant mother always had a chaplain in attendance at her house. This practice had the full permission of his schismatic father, despite the fact that the recusancy of his wife and sons had reduced his wealth considerably.⁸³

To conclude, it can be observed that dissimulation among Roman Catholics was a problem which lasted for the greater part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, that is to say, from the time that the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion came into effect in 1559 until the death of the queen in 1603. This was the reaction of a group raised, for the most part, in the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁶ *C.R.S.*, XXX, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, for example, Thomas Evans, Seminarist, upon entering the college, 1597, pp. 47-48; Walter Cowarne, aspirant Seminarist, similarly, 1604, p. 83; John Roberts, O.S.B., similarly, 1598, p. 49; *et alii*.

⁷⁸ J. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, II, p. 393.

⁷⁹ *C.R.S.*, XXX, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁰ For example, the complaint in 1591 concerning the Justices of the Peace of Lancashire with Recusant wives and families, *vide* J. S. Leatherbarrow, *The Lancashire Elizabethan Recusants*, p. 109.

⁸¹ *C.R.S.*, XXXVII, p. 120.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 120; Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, I, pp. 662-663.

⁸³ *C.R.S.*, XXXVII, pp. 126-127.

pre-Tridentine traditions; a reaction in the face of the severity of the penal legislation against non-conformity, taken together with the particular character of the liturgy of the official *Anglicana*. The probable reasons for this were several, and among the more important, I would submit, one should remember the unsettled state of religion during the some twenty-five years preceding the accession of the queen in 1558; the general attitude common to the whole Tudor period that initiative was the prerogative of the magistrate; and, particularly during the first part of the reign, the expectation among those of the Old Religion that normality, as they saw it, would inevitably return as it had under Mary Tudor.

The reasons for dissimulation at any part of the reign may have been the same – fear of the penalties which followed upon recusancy – but the rationalization or justification of this attitude appears to have taken two forms, at least. Between roughly 1559 and 1570, dissimulation was almost universal, and many learned persons considered that while such a line of conduct was far from ideal, nevertheless, it was justified in view of the severity of the law against those who refused to attend the State Church.

Following upon the Bull, *Regnans in Excelsis*, 1570, and the arrival of the Seminarists, 1574, a contest among those holding to the Old Religion ensued, as it were, between those, on the one hand, who justified their dissimulation on the grounds just mentioned, and those on the other hand who in the spirit of the Tridentine condemnation of 1562 demanded a forthright and recusant attitude. This contest resulted, to a considerable extent, in a victory for the latter, and in a resurgence of open Catholicism with its concomitant growth of recusancy to such an extent that the Elizabethan government became most concerned, particularly in the 1580's. After this renaissance, which guaranteed the continuation of the Old Religion in the country, dissimulation continued during the later part of the reign, that is to say, from about 1590 to 1603, but the reasons for it were to a great extent purely practical. There was little effort to justify it by any means of casuistry as during the first part of the reign. Dissimulation was recognized for what it was: reprehensible and illogical even if, under the circumstances, humanly most understandable; and this attitude continued well on into the Stuart period.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, on the other hand, it should be remembered that from among those whom dissimulation had touched by way of either personal practice, or family relationship, there came many ornaments of Roman Catholicism of this period. To recall but three: Cuthbert Maine, Edmund Campion, and Henry Walpole are obvious examples; all were executed for religion, and subsequently beatified. Further, a most curious fact should be noted about the latter phase of the reign, 1590-1603. This was a period when the hope of bringing England back into Communion with the Holy See had passed from the realms of immediately practical politics; it was a period of disappointment and one following the exultation of the Catholic renaissance of the 1580's. The prospects for those of the Old Religion were not encouraging. Nevertheless, it was during this period that a good number of families who had dissembled up until now finally decided to become Recusant Papists. In this connection there springs to mind immediately the Petres of Writtle and Ingatestone in the County of Essex. They had founded a great part of their wealth on confiscated monastic lands; followed the wishes of their successive sovereigns in the various religious changes of the Tudor period; and then, at the moment when there was every possible encouragement to continue dissimulation, they became Recusant, and so still remain to this present day.

Dissimulation among the Elizabethan Catholics did not, I submit, lead necessarily in one theological direction or another: for many, as events transpired, it was the introduction to complete conformity to the official *Anglicana*; for others, it proved to be the historical preliminary to a Recusant adherence to Roman Catholicism.

⁸⁴ For example vide Hugh Aveling, "The Catholic Recusancy of the Yorkshire Fairfaxes," Part II, *Recusant History* (Continuing *Biographical Studies*), Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 69.