Faith of Our Fathers

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Popular Culture and Belief in Post-Reformation England, Ireland and Wales

Edited by

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THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS:

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALFRED ALLEN AND JAMES STRINGER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The study of popular culture has been an abiding preoccupation of historians and literary critics for many decades, not just in the British Isles but elsewhere too.[1] New perspectives and interpretations continue to be advanced, not least by those who have extended the earlier historiography to encompass a better understanding of gender and patriarchy.[2] In 2001 Northumbria University hosted an international conference on Popular Culture and Religion which brought together scholars from as far afield as the Americas and Australia as well as from various parts of Europe.[3] Then and since, historians have wrestled with the problems of definition and the difficulty of charting changes in popular culture over time. It was Peter Burke who first mapped the popular culture of pre-industrial European society by using broadsides and chapbooks to uncover the rituals and attitudes of ordinary people, and attempts by elites to modify behavioural patterns in line with their own view of the world. His work set the tone of the historiographical debate and prompted new lines of enquiry.[4] Barry Reay's edited collection on English seventeenth-century popular culture centred largely upon the attitudes of the middling sorts and complemented Burke's European survey.[5] Notwithstanding the expansive remit of Burke

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[1] In 1978 Peter Burke's work on European popular culture drew upon the groundbreaking studies by Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Keith Thomas and others. See P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 1978; revised edn. Cambridge, 1994).

[2] Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: class, gender and history in cultural analysis, 1730 to present* (Cambridge, 1989); T. Harris, 'Problematising Popular Culture', in T. Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 13.

[3] Popular Culture and Religion Conference, Northumbria University, Newcastle, 12–14 July 2001. A follow-up conference was held at Northumbria in June 2002.

[4] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. See also Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: an interpretation of early modern Germany* (London and New York, 1997); Martin Ingram, 'Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 47–88.

[5] B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in the Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1985, 1988).

and Reay's studies, and those which followed, much remained to be uncovered. In the mid-1990s Tim Harris drew attention to the need to find new and more appropriate sources for exploring a culture that was inadequately documented and frequently privatised.[6] His collection of essays set a new agenda that was more concerned with issues such as gender, religion and literacy which he believed had either been 'insufficiently explored or were in need of fresh examination'.[7] Recent commentators have agreed that the binary model, which distinguished between elite and popular culture, was a crude and unhelpful distortion, and have elected to stress the diversity and richness of popular cultures.[8] This has been a valuable development which has enabled scholars to acknowledge the control often exercised by ordinary people and to correct earlier misconceptions that cultural values were imposed unproblematically from above.

Religious beliefs largely shaped popular cultures and rituals, and this has impacted in varying degrees on the historiography.[9] For Christianity to retain its hold over the faithful the 'Godly community' had to be preserved at all costs.[10] The pressure to control popular customs was increasingly heightened in the post-Reformation period as puritan ideals took centre stage.[11] Even after Puritanism was displaced by a new religious ethos,

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[6] Harris, 'Problematising Popular Culture', pp. 3, 6.

[7] Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England*, p. x.

[8] Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England, 1550–1750* (London and New York, 1998); J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: popular culture in England 1750–1900* (revised pbk edn. Stroud, 1999).

[9] For examples, see R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: the ritual year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994); Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: essays in honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), particularly ch. 3; M. Ingram, 'From Reformation to Toleration: popular religious cultures in England 1540–1690', in Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England*, ch. 5; K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: ritual, religion and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997); S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c.1880–1939* (Oxford, 1999).

[10] Euan Cameron, 'The "Godly Community" in the Theory and Practice of the European Reformation', in W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds), *Studies in Church History, 23: voluntary religion* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 131–53.

[11] For example, see P. Collinson, *Godly People: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983) and his *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: religious and cultural change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1988); John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689* (Basingstoke, 1998); J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Some Puritan influences on the Anglican Church in Wales in the

which gave rise to a plethora of nonconformist movements, godliness still secured the individual's place in respectable society. As the eighteenth century progressed religious belief was challenged by the rise of anticlericalism and, according to Jose Harris, by 'creeping secularisation' in the nineteenth century.[12] Nevertheless earlier belief systems proved remarkably resilient; many people clung more fiercely to their old religious practices as they were buffeted by the dislocating effects of economic and social change. In some parts of Britain and Ireland these insecurities occasionally spilled over into sectarianism, largely in response to the perceived threat of migrant cultures.[13]

This collection is an attempt to illuminate the nexus between religion and popular cultures after the Reformation. It makes no claim to be exhaustive for the chronological remit would render this impracticable. Rather, it offers new insights thematically via a selection of diverse contributions. These are differentiated by period and geography with a view to encouraging, as others have done before, an understanding of the complexity of popular cultures and the array of factors which determined how they were expressed over time.

The Reformation has to be considered a defining moment, not only for its long-term impact on the religious confession of the people but also in terms of its cultural manifestations. As already noted, Reformation historians have been at pains to complicate an earlier model which emphasised an absolute separation between elite and popular religious beliefs.[14] What Ethan Shagan and others have shown is that there were

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early seventeenth century', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, new series, 2 (2002), 19–50; James Innell Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter: a study in Puritan theology* (Carlisle, 2003).

[12] Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: a social history of Britain, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 150–79. See also Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation, 1800–2000* (London, 2000).

[13] For examples of sectarian divisions see John Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century', in G. J. Cuming and D. Baker (eds), *Studies in Church History, 8:* p*opular belief and practice* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 213–27; P. J. Waller, *Sectarianism and Democracy: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981); Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1914* (Dublin, 1991); Steven Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880–1939* (Buckingham, 1993); Donald M. MacRaild, *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting: the Orange Order and Irish migrants in northern England, c.1850–1920* (Liverpool, 2005); Terence McBride, *The Experience of Irish Migrants to Glasgow, Scotland, 1863–1891* (Lampeter, Queenston and Lewiston, 2006).

[14] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*; Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (London, 1975); Patrick

greater levels of accommodation and compromise on both sides of the divide.[15] Even those who believed religion had little to offer them were reluctant to cut themselves off from the 'ritual community'. Rites of passage were community events as much as religious ceremonies. While the clergy were accorded an official role in managing the ceremonial aspects of baptisms, marriages and burials, the presence of the wider community also served to legitimise the process. Inevitably changes in ritual practice following the Reformation were highly contested, especially where the Church actively sought to exclude from the rites of passage those who had been excommunicated. The clergy, however, did not always succeed in exerting their authority, particularly over cultural practice.

Maddy Gray's study of ritual space highlights the inherent contradictions between post-Reformation dogma and its practical implementation by individual ministers, serving in isolated parishes such as Bedwellty in seventeenth century south-east Wales. Her chapter explores popular attitudes towards Christian baptism and burial. Wales, Gray informs us, was 'notorious in this period for its religious conservatism' and the clergy struggled to persuade parishioners to give up their attachment to the 'hen ffydd' (old religion). The continued use of relics, candles and rosaries, as well as the practice of 'churching' women, were viewed as particularly problematic. The Rev. Lewis James who took up his appointment in Bedwellty in 1633 emerges as a man torn between a changing belief system and the unchanging needs of a community which looked to him to provide not only spiritual leadership but the certainty of salvation in an uncertain world. Economic constraints played a significant part in determining what he could and, more importantly, could not do. With a stipend of just £10 per annum and a family to support he needed to retain his position, and he could not do that without the backing of his parishioners.

Eryn White's chapter on the Welsh Church in eighteenth-century Wales also reflects upon the importance of rites of passage which held both 'a traditional and superstitious meaning for many people'. Most of all, however, she highlights the multi-functional role of the clergy and the

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Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English society 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: traditional religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), and his 'The Long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism and the multitude', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation 1500-1800* (London, 1998), pp. 33–70.

[15] Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge and New York, 2002).

church in the community. While parishioners were quick to criticise those clergymen who neglected their duties, whether in failing to officiate at baptisms and burials, or denying spiritual support to the dying, they appreciated the way that ministers and curates provided charitable relief to the poor and education for the young. Even when challenged by dissenters from the seventeenth century onwards, 'y fam eglwys' (the mother church), as White infers, 'remained one of the central institutions in Welsh communities'. Parish churches and churchyards were not just sacred space, but the ideal place for the community to assemble, celebrate and play. To a large extent the immediate community assumed ownership of their parish church and accessed it on their own terms, without necessarily feeling obligated to attend divine service on a regular basis. White notes that the clergy were increasingly less than assiduous about pursuing non-attenders or insisting upon churching women, suggesting that the old relationship between minister and congregation had been recalibrated. She illustrates this by recounting an assault in 1756 on the curate of Coedcernyw in Monmouthshire by the churchwarden and clerk who objected strongly to his interference in the financial management of the parish. If this seems to indicate that the old hierarchy was being breached, it is also worth noting that the seating arrangements inside the church, whereby social status was visibly and emphatically displayed, were always robustly defended, if necessary by resort to consistory courts. Opponents of the Established Church would later argue that these ambiguities represented a genuine dissatisfaction with the modes of religious worship, but as White demonstrates this is far from the truth. Rather it reflected the easy familiarity between church and people.

Few would argue that securing a good death, via the ministrations of a caring clergy whose job it was to help the individual to find their way to salvation, lay at the heart of the relationship between church and people. As the concept of purgatory and prayerful intercessions on behalf of the departed were no longer acceptable, devout Protestants were presented with a stark choice between heaven or hell. Inevitably, in this climate of uncertainty, the people set greater store by the pronouncements of Divines and other educated commentators. Clark Lawlor's contribution uses the example of Dudley Ryder, a nonconformist, to explore changing ideas about Christian death in the early modern period. His interdisciplinary work draws from religious, literary and medical sources in order to elucidate popular and elite views on the *Ars Moriendi* – the art of dying well – which first appeared at the end of the fifteenth century. There were competing Protestant discourses concerning whether consumption was 'a good or bad disease for the devout Christian'. In the eyes of popular

divines, such as the seventeenth-century physician Thomas Fuller, a slow wasting disease or consumption provided the invalid with time to prepare for death and to reconcile themselves with God and their families. Not everyone agreed. Lawlor singles out Jeremy Taylor and his 1651 text *Holy Living and Holy Dying* which 'exposed the foolishness of desiring a consumptive death'. Taylor considered these popular attitudes undesirable. He brought much needed 'medical realism' to a discourse strongly influenced by romantic ideas and acute anxieties about eternal salvation. Ryder's positive response to his consumptive illness was strongly informed by the writings of Fuller and Sir Thomas Browne, as well as seventeenth-century poets which led him to believe that dying would be a 'soft' and easy transition, rather like going to sleep. Lawlor envisages Ryder as imagining himself 'making a dramatic exit to everlasting glory'. These popular and elite engagements with death and disease did not disappear, and were revisited during the evangelical revival.

The religious revival which encompassed Europe and north America in the eighteenth century can be attributed in part to the impact of charismatic preaching by individuals, such as John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Howel Harris and Daniel Rowland. It also drew strength from post-Reformation anxieties, which destabilised the old relationships at the heart of orthodoxy and encouraged the spread of alternative religious movements. As David Ceri Jones and Edward Royle have shown the evangelical revival quickly took root in Wales and England as part of the 'trend towards the democratisation of Christianity'. Although there was much that was distinctive about revival in these two countries, both authors stress that these shifts need to be viewed in their trans-national and trans-Atlantic contexts. Jones' study of Welsh Methodism focuses upon Whitefield, 'the first evangelical celebrity', who made the most of improvements in communications and travel. Whitefield and Harris first met in Cardiff in March 1739 and thereafter collaborated closely on the alignment of English and Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. Harnessing print culture they launched a periodical, *The Weekly History*. This created 'a public space' in which conversion narratives and testimonies of faith could be shared by the international Methodist community. Women particularly benefited from access to the journal and used the letters page as a forum for self-help. These early Methodists made many personal sacrifices and suffered hostility for their religious beliefs and their attacks on popular pastimes. Yet during the political instability of the mid-1740s they became model subjects of the British state. Thereafter, as Linda Colley claims,

Protestantism is held to have been a unifying force in the wake of the wars with France and Spain.[16]

Both Jones and Royle emphasise the fellowship network between Methodists in Britain and elsewhere in the world. Royle seeks to establish the importance of regional studies, 'not to test a generalisation . . . but, rather, to contribute an interpretation rooted in a specific and limited geographical context, which can then form a part of the mosaic which makes up the national picture'. He posits that while religious revival in the early eighteenth century swept the western world from Moravia to Massachusetts, an explanation is to be found in the interaction of general factors with local circumstances. By 1800 Yorkshire was one of the strongest centres of the Evangelical revival, and Royle offers this as a good case study to illuminate the social, economic and religious context in which dynamic personalities were able to effect a religious transformation. Key factors in the revival were the widespread dissatisfaction with existing religious provision, the considerable support advanced by some wealthy and influential members of eighteenth-century society, and the impact of charismatic preaching on scattered rural communities. In the Vale of York some of the livings were so impoverished that the clergy were unable to provide both morning and afternoon services. Parishioners who wished could easily find an additional Sunday service, but this 'did not build up parochial loyalty'. In the event the 'less formal and restrained services' of Methodist meetings proved an attractive alternative.

Methodism may well have been the most popular form of nonconformity in the eighteenth century, but it was not the only choice available to those who were disaffected with the Established Church. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) which emerged in the aftermath of the mid-seventeenth century civil wars in the British Isles attracted many adherents, particularly in the north of England but with communities throughout Britain, Ireland and the Americas. An important distinguishing feature of Quakerism was that the Friends abjured *all* notion of a paid ministry, insisting that there was no need for an intermediary between God and the people. Richard Allen and James Gregory examine different aspects of Quakerism and the attitudes to popular culture. Both stress the importance of print culture to the Society as it developed and changed. The recourse to print was not simply a propagandist strategy. For a religious group, which set so much store upon private contemplation and exposition of belief, testimonies and diaries assumed particular

[16] L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992).

significance. It is fortunate that a considerable percentage of these private and public documents survive for they enable us to access a hidden world of religious struggle and revivalism.

Allen's study throws the spotlight on the intransigent views of John Kelsall jnr, an eighteenth-century diarist and clerk of the Dolobran meeting in Montgomeryshire. Kelsall scorned the rise of popular consumerism in Britain and sought to persuade the wider community of the spiritual and moral benefits of the simple life. Yet, as Allen observes, even Kelsall was unable to distance himself completely from what he regarded as a decadent society. As an intellectual he frequently courted the attentions of the affluent elite in his desire for cultured conversation. This did not prevent him from exposing the superficial values of the world about him and promoting a moral reformation.

As with other religious groups generalisations often mask important differences. Gregory's study of the White Quakers in Ireland is a case in point for this small but vocal mid-nineteenth century sect in Dublin, Waterford, Clonmel and Mountmellick exhibited characteristics that bore little resemblance to mainstream Quakerism elsewhere. He breaks new ground for this group has been little studied. Their origins can be located in the erosion of the Quaker code of discipline and tendency towards worldliness. A handful of leading Irish Quakers, such as Joshua Jacob and Abigail Beale, set out to provide an alternative vision notably in their journal *The Progress of Truth*. This schismatic group proved to be highly controversial not least because they embraced 'communism in property, and the alleged abandonment of marriage'. Gregory explores the way their ideas were rejected by Friends and the wider population, and concludes that 'resistance to constructive change and the fear of open discussion remained a feature of the Society'.

The desire to publicly proclaim and celebrate religious belief was a common impulse, both before and after the Reformation, but such displays could be a source of conflict as well as community solidarity. Joan Allen's analysis of the St Patrick's Day festival in north-east England considers the way that the event was politicised in the second half of the nineteenth century as the campaign for Home Rule gathered momentum. The overwhelmingly Catholic confession of the region's Irish migrant population meant that there was rather less sectarian conflict and little friction associated with high days and holy days. The political overtones of the St Patrick Day festival was challenged by the Catholic clergy who were anxious to distance themselves and their congregations from Fenianism. But nationalist politics was not the only source of friction between the Catholic Church and the festival's organisers. In many areas

of major Irish settlement the Catholic hierarchy sought to counter the claim that the Saint's day was just an excuse for excessive drinking and immoral behaviour. More focus was placed on attendance at special masses and on the *Corpus Christi* procession as a way of demonstrating the respectability and religiosity of the faithful. Although the temperance lobby achieved some success in providing an effective counter culture the propagandist opportunities of the festival were too important to be denied. The indoor meeting, which was the centrepiece of the Tyneside celebrations, was dominated by political speeches and fundraising for the nationalist cause.

The political and religious life of Ulster is the focus of James MacPherson's study. He examines the impact of the 1908 Papal decree *Ne Temere*, which insisted that children born of a mixed marriage should be brought up as Catholics, during the crisis over the third Home Rule bill. He anchors his analysis around a particular piece of evidence, the extraordinary McCann marriage case *c*.1909 which ruled that the children should be removed in accordance with the decree. This controversial judgement is held to explain why women were subsequently drawn into Unionist politics in order to preserve their domestic safety and autonomy. The Protestant community of Belfast were demographically dominant, and yet still insecure about their position and the threat that Home Rule represented. This emotive case appeared to suggest that their fears were not ill-founded and Protestant women were galvanised into direct action. This chapter demonstrates the interaction of gender and popular belief at a time of great political change in Ireland.

The problems encountered by Church of England clergymen appointed to serve the hitherto neglected coal communities of County Durham is the focus of Robert Lee's study. This new mission presented significant challenges as the incumbent minister struggled both to settle into an unfamiliar environment and to liberate 'the uneducated mind from the fallacies of popular culture'. The responsibilities of 'parochial leadership' were substantial for the popular literature of the time attested to the rowdy, rough culture of northern coalfield communities. As it turned out, the capitalist culture which defined British society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was viewed as a much greater threat than the old semi-pagan pastimes of old. These difficulties were compounded by endemic migration which undermined the clergy's desire to inculcate bonds of religious and social solidarity. While the popularity of 'parish entertainments' seemed to suggest that a reformation of manners had been wrought, such improvement was far from uniform or stable. During the miner's strike of 1892 Lord Londonderry's bank inspector was 'rough

musicked' as he returned home and Lee provides plenty of evidence that a popular culture 'red in tooth and claw' continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. Inevitably, church attendance suffered as leisure opportunities proved more attractive to those who worked hard all week, and while the clergy railed against the dangers of alcohol they were also wary of the fanaticism of the teetotallers.

As this collection of essays has shown in other periods and for many diverse communities, conflict not harmony typifies the transitions in popular culture and religion. If a reformation of manners was detectable the evidence suggests that the people exercised their own free will in accepting or rejecting changes to their cultural and religious life.

CHAPTER ONE

RITUAL SPACE AND RITUAL BURIAL IN THE EARLY MODERN CHRISTIAN TRADITION

MADELEINE GRAY

The Civil War and Commonwealth registers of the parish of Bedwellty, in the hills of south Wales, contain several entries for the burials of children described as *filii abortivi*. The word *abortivi* is possibly being used here to mean 'premature': this is the sense in which it was used in the Latin translation of the Bible, when St Paul was said to have described himself as *abortivum*, 'one untimely born'.[1] Equally, the word has also been used to denote a still-birth. An entry in the Bedwellty registers in 1650 refers to twins, one of whom was born alive and baptized, while the other was described as *abortivus* and buried.[2] These infants were, therefore, unbaptized but were still recorded in the burial registers and were presumably buried in consecrated ground with at least some of the rituals of the church. The same register of burials also contains occasional entries for children explicitly categorised as unbaptized. Such descriptions are rare in the extreme.[3] The right of the unbaptized to burial was one of the

[1] I Cor. 15:8.

[2] Gwent County Record Office (hereafter GCRO), Cwmbrân, D/Pa.14.104.

[3] Will Coster, 'Tokens of innocence: infant baptism, death and burial in early modern England', in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead: death and remembrance in late medieval and early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 266–87 suggests that the term 'chrisom child' changed its significance in sixteenth-century England from 'child dying between baptism and churching of the mother' to 'child dying before baptism'. The evidence is based on correlation of births and burials in one English parish and though fascinating is probably inconclusive. Nevertheless it suggests an ambiguity of approach to the

bones of contention in the Church of England between the Elizabethan Settlement in 1559 and the Restoration of 1660. The elucidation of these entries in the Bedwellty registers can therefore tell us a great deal about the renegot-iation of admission to, and exclusion from, the ritual community in the early modern period. From an anomaly in one parish register, the burial rituals offered to these children unfold into a consideration of the meaning of the sacraments in the post-Reformation Anglican Church, changing concepts and perceptions of ritual space, and the complex and often contested relationship between 'official' and 'popular' religion – two very problematic terms.

The history of parish graveyards has been studied from a number of perspectives: archaeological, demographic, literary, artistic and even ecological. Protestant reformers attempted to separate the dead from the spiritual community of the living,[4] and nineteenth-century public health reformers tried to do the same for the physical remains of the dead. Nevertheless, in many settlements, church and chapel graveyards survive as ritual spaces at the heart of the community, delimited from the space of the living by only the most permeable of boundaries, a low wall or fence over and through which the space of the dead can be seen and entered. These graveyards are one of the most distinctive ritual spaces in the western European tradition. They are in fact part of a concentric series of sacred spaces: the church enclosure of the early medieval tradition, the churchyard and the church building itself, then the chancel, the sanctuary, and finally the altar where the most holy of ritual activities took place. Each of these sacred spaces was deliberately consecrated with rituals laden with symbolic meaning. This pattern of concentric sacred spaces can be paralleled in many other traditions. The distinctive feature of Christian tradition is the location of a ritual burial space at the physical heart of the living community. This tendency is so fundamental that settlements have moved to be nearer the burial places of holy people. The ritual community of medieval Christianity was thus extended to include the dead as well as the living, an extension which was reinforced by the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and the emphasis on the validity of prayers to saints and prayers for the dead.[5]

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burial of the unbaptised in a large upland Yorkshire parish (Kirkburton in the West Riding) which is arguably similar to Bedwellty.

[4] Craig Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead* (New York, 1999), especially pp. 46–54.

[5] An extensive literature on this topic is summarized in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 327–37.

Churchyards are now used almost exclusively for burial. In many communities, separate cemeteries have been provided for this purpose, and burial in the actual churchyard is seen as a privilege, a mark of social esteem or status within a particular church. In this sense burial in the ritual space of the churchyard is an honour similar to that of burial within the church itself. The medieval churchyard had a much wider range of functions. Many churchyards contained 'crosses' in the form of pillars elaborately carved with depictions of the Crucifixion, and occasionally accompanied by the Virgin and Child, the Last Judgement, and a complex array of saints. These could be seen from outside the churchyard and linked the mysteries of the inner sacred space of the church, with its wealth of iconographic decoration, to the secular space outside. They depicted the central Christian mystery of the Crucifixion as the hinge between sacred and secular, between the ritual space of church and churchyard and the space of the world.[6] The churchyard was also host to a wide range of activities. In addition to burials, there were ritual processions, open-air sermons and meetings, as well as more secular functions such as church ales, traditional games and even commercial activities. It was in many ways the central meeting space for the community, and this could lead to disputes. The contested nature of the churchyard became paradoxically more acute in the period after the Reformation, when those reformers who challenged the fundamental concept of sacred space were also attempting to restrict the 'profane' use of the churchyard and to prohibit the entertainments which took place there.[7]

The ritual space of the graveyard is defined by the ceremonies enacted within it – the initial act of consecration and the subsequent rituals of burial according to the liturgy of the Church. There is thus a relationship between ritual space and ritual community. However, this relationship was also defined by the means used to exclude people, or to admit them only under certain proscribed circumstances. The right to burial in consecrated ground was not automatic in the medieval and early modern church, nor was it unproblematic. Restrictions on burials were the subject of conflict, and, as far as can be deduced from the records, disputes mostly arose

[6] M. Gray and E. Martin, 'Images of the Crucified Christ in Medieval Gwent', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, New Series, 3 (2003), 1–22.
[7] David Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50 (1999), 464–97.

because of different folk traditions and official, orthodox perspectives.[8] Yet it can be surprisingly difficult to establish what the official orthodoxy was. This becomes even more complex in the post-Reformation period in England and Wales. The incomplete nature of the English Reformation, the many compromises and accommodations which had to be made in order to secure a religious settlement acceptable to the majority of the people, bred a reluctance to define legal restrictions too precisely. It is nevertheless crucial to establish what constituted the official legal framework. Whether or not it was accepted in every detail at parochial level, this was the framework within which opposition and renegotiation had to function. It is not possible to assess the significance of the entries in the Bedwellty parish register, and the nature of any pressure which may have been brought to bear on the incumbent, without detailed knowledge of the constraints within which he operated.

Membership of the ritual community of the medieval church was based on the sacraments. In one sense, the body of the individual Christian was itself considered to be a sacred space, imbued with rituals of consecration and differentiation. This concept of the body as sacred was reflected in the wish of the Christian for burial in holy ground, ground which had been consecrated by the burial of holy people. The traditional Catholic concept of the Church as including the dead as well as the living was symbolised by the funeral ritual; the bringing of the body to a consecrated churchyard at the centre of the inhabited space, and the offering of prayers and masses for the salvation of the soul.[9] As a result, there were extensive restrictions on burials in consecrated ground. Those who died as excommunicants, ritually cut off from the spiritual community, were denied religious burial rites, as were those who died guilty of unabsolved mortal sin. Suicides were also considered to have placed themselves outside of the ritual community and its spatial equivalent because they had defied God's plan for themselves. The church lawyer Gratian in his *Decretum*[10] stated that 'those whose sins have not been forgiven should not be assisted by the holy place after death'; if sinners are buried in consecrated ground, 'the holy ground will not free them but rather accuse them of the sin of

[8] For this and the following paragraphs I am indebted to a discussion on the medieval-religion online discussion group in April 1998, archived at http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A1= ind9804&L=medieval-religion.
[9] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 368–9.
[10] Compiled in *c.*1140 and first printed in Strasbourg in 1471.

presumption' at the Last Judgement.[11] Of interest to archaeologists, who like to consider evidence for continuity of use in ritual spaces, is the fact that Gratian also instructs that the bodies of *pagani* and *infideles* be removed from a church before it is dedicated.[12] A church or churchyard which had been polluted by the burial of the body of an excommunicant had to be ritually purified with holy water.[13]

Sinners were considered to have removed themselves from the ritual community, and therefore did not qualify for burial in consecrated ground. Based on John Cassian's fourth-century prohibition, medieval canon law also excluded those who had never been ritually admitted to the community of belief, namely those who had not been baptised.[14] Folk custom went further than canon law in excluding not only the unbaptised and stillborn children but even women who died while pregnant, since the foetus within them was not baptised. The orthodox argument of the Christian Church was that as a pregnant woman had access to all the other sacraments she should be buried in consecrated ground. Nevertheless, women who had died in childbirth and even women who had died before they could be 'churched' or ritually purified after the birth process were sometimes buried in unconsecrated ground.[15]

The burial of the unbaptized is thus an example of how folk belief was less accepting than official doctrine, although, as so frequently happened, this was mediated in actual practice. For the medieval church, baptism was the one sacrament which could be administered by the unqualified and even by a woman. The traditional Catholic belief is that sacraments work *ex opere operato*, by their own inherent power, and irrespective of the limitations of the person administering them. In the case of baptism, Thomas Aquinas, whose views may be considered authoritative, went so

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[11] *Decretum* C.13 q.2 c.16–17: I am grateful for this and the following references to Stephen Allen of the University of Notre Dame, largely drawn from his unpublished paper at the 1997 Kalamazoo conference, 'Pollution and Community: Church Burials in Later Medieval Canon Law'.

[12] *De cons.* D.1 c.27–28.

[13] According to a canon of Innocent III, in the *Liber extra*, 3.4.70. See Allen, 'Pollution and Community'.

[14] For Cassian see J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus* (221 vols. Paris, 1844–55, 1862–4), XL, p. 573. I am obliged to Wyn Thomas for this reference.

[15] Burchard of Worms criticized this practice and even insisted on penance for those responsible for it, in the *Corrector* XIX: 5. I am indebted to Nancy Caciola of the University of California for this reference.

far as to claim that even an unbaptised person could legitimately baptise a child *in extremis*.[16] Midwives were therefore able to baptise the newborn by claiming that the child had been born alive and had lived long enough to be baptized, and would even baptize unborn babies whose lives were in danger. In northern France and the Channel Islands, women who had died in childbirth could be churched by proxy, a friend of the dead woman standing in for her during the ceremony.[17] Yet there was continuing unease in some folk traditions about the burial of the unbaptised. Anne O'Connor's *Child Murderess and Dead Child Traditions* records a number of European societies in which treading on the graves of unbaptised children was thought to bring disaster, from the contagion of 'grave-merels' or 'grave-scab' to the Irish tradition of the 'hungry grass' which grew on the unmarked graves of unbaptised children and caused starvation if trodden on.[18]

The Protestant Reformation heralded, among other things, a change in the concept of the ritual community. The implications of the doctrine of 'salvation by faith alone' implied the breaking of the link between the living and the dead. The intricate medieval tradition of prayers, masses and offerings for the souls of the departed was declared to be futile. Death for the Protestant was now a final separation: the living could not communicate with the dead, nor could they assist their passage to salvation. This was symbolised in Protestant Germany by a return to the practice of burials on the outskirts of larger settlements, endorsing Luther's argument that the burial ground should be a place of quiet retreat which symbolised the removal of the dead from the world of the living. This change in the location of burial grounds was regarded as highly significant. Inevitably Catholics argued against it, defending the centrality of the churchyard in the community and the importance of the place of the dead in everyday life.[19]

The Reformation also brought about changes in attitudes to the sacraments and their importance. Luther was far from clear about the meaning he attached to the sacrament of baptism. On the one hand, he

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[16] *Summa Theologica* part 3, q 67 articuli 3–5, citing texts from Isidore of Seville, Augustine, Pope Nicholas and Pope Gregory II. I am grateful to Bill East for this reference.

[17] This is drawn from the medieval religion online discussion group. See n.8.

[18] Anne O'Connor, *Child Murderess and Dead Child Traditions* (Helsinki, 1991), pp. 37, 70.

[19] For example, the Leipzig burial controversy of 1536 is provided in Koslofsky, *Reformation of the Dead*, pp. 54–77.

viewed baptism as a physical channel through which the gift of faith could be imparted. God, he observed, had 'desired that by [baptism] little children, who were incapable of greed and superstition, might be initiated and sanctified in the simple faith of his word'.[20] He described baptism as a more important sacrament than the Eucharist. It was regarded as 'incomparably greater' because 'the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it'.[21] On the other hand, in spite of what he maintained about the importance of baptism, Luther did not in the last analysis regard it as vital for salvation. His thoughts on this are summarized in a fascinating little pamphlet, 'Comfort for women who have had a miscarriage', which arose out of his own pastoral concerns. In this work he suggested that the mother's love for the dead child would secure all that was necessary for its salvation, without the actual rite of baptism being conducted:

> Because the mother is a believing Christian, it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer . . . Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcized on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God willed to be their God? God (they say) has not limited his power to the sacraments, but has made a covenant with us through his word.[22]

What Luther is saying here is not, of course, that the sacrament of baptism was meaningless. Rather, he suggests that in extreme cases the bestowal of the sacrament's blessings could be effected through prayer and faith, without the physical act of the pouring of water. The infant thus becomes an accepted member of the ritual community on the basis of the mother's love which, in such circumstances, assumes an almost sacramental quality. Reformers in the Calvinist tradition viewed baptism more as a public covenant which acknowledged the child to be a member of the Christian community of faith. Baptism could not procure salvation, but it was still a recognition of membership of the ritual community.[23]

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[20] Jaroslav Pelikan et al (eds), *Luther's Works* (55 vols. St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1955–1986), 36, p. 57.
[21] Ibid., 40, p. 23.
[22] Ibid., 43, pp. 245–50.
[23] For example, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, p. xiv, in John T. McNeill (ed.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols. London, 1960), II, p. 1465.

The Protestant Reformation in England and Wales was a compromise between the ideas of the more radical reformers and the traditionalism of a large number (possibly a majority) of the population. Nevertheless, the Church of England was broadly Calvinist in its theology. According to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the basic statement of belief hammered out in 1571, sacraments were to be regarded as 'witnesses and signs of grace' which were only effective for those who received them in a proper frame of mind. The only valid baptism was public baptism 'in the face of the church', while private baptism, especially as administered by midwives, was disapproved of.[24] In practical terms, the Protestant settlement in England and Wales meant changes in the services of the Church. The earlier restriction on the burials of the unbaptised, and those who were identified as excommunicants and suicides, was temporarily removed. This has obvious implications for our understanding of the way in which the Church of England interpreted the significance of baptism and the nature of the ritual community. Notwithstanding the emergence of more tolerant attitudes, in practice new and lesser burial rites for the unbaptised were introduced. Bishop Barnes of Durham, for example, instructed his clergy to teach their parishioners that

> if any infant die without public baptism first to it ministered, that the same is not to be condemned or adjudged as a damned soul, but to be well hoped of, and the body to be interred in the churchyard, yet without ringing or any divine service or solemnity, because the same was not solemnly professed and received into the church and congregation.[25]

It ought to be remembered that Barnes was operating in a theologically conservative climate. His instructions are a delicate attempt both to negotiate the contradictions in post-Reformation thinking on the nature and privileges of the ritual community, and to reconcile the official doctrine with traditionalist thinking.

An attempt was made in the ecclesiastical legislation of 1603–4 to reintroduce some restrictions on the right to burial in consecrated ground and with the full rituals of the Church. Canon 68 stated:

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[24] The Thirty-Nine Articles are found in a number of old editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. A convenient modern text is reprinted in M. A. Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Leicester, 1991).

[25] Quoted in David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: ritual, religion and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1999), p. 114.

> No minister shall refuse or delay to bury any corpse that is brought to the church or churchyard (convenient warning having been given him thereof before) in such manner and form as is prescribed in the said Book of Common Prayer.[26]

It then goes on to identify the certain exceptions to ecclesiastical law. Thus, those excommunicated for serious crimes 'where no-one can testify to their repentance' and suicides were once again explicitly barred. If this was an attempt to clarify matters, it failed. At the 1604 Hampton Court Conference, Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, defended baptism by midwives:

> the state of the infant, dying unbaptised, being uncertain, and to God only known; but if he die baptised, there is an evident assurance that he is saved; who is he that having any religion in him, would not speedily, by any means, procure his child to be baptized, and rather ground his action upon Christ's promise, than his omission thereof upon God's secret judgement?[27]

The popular response to this official standpoint can be read in the records of the church courts. We cannot assume that there was any sort of homogenous or unified 'popular' belief, any more than that the official line was coherent. There is evidence of complaints in the church courts against ministers who preached that the actual ritual of baptism did not matter, who refused to baptise children privately (though there were always suspicions that this was due more to laziness than to conviction) and who would not accept baptism by midwives. On the other hand, there were just as many complaints against traditionalist ministers who preached that children who died unbaptised were damned and refused to read the burial service over them. The concerns of the ordinary members of the congregation seem to have been local, personal and essentially pastoral. The increasing emphasis which the Church placed on the sacraments in the 1630s seems mainly to have affected attitudes towards the Eucharist, but there is little evidence of any overt change in thinking about baptism, or of any change in popular attitudes towards the burial of the unbaptised.[28]

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[26] Sir Robert Phillimore, *The Ecclesiastical Law of the Church of England* (2nd edn. London, 1895), p. 669.
[27] Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 114–15.
[28] Ibid., pp. 101–23. See also the numerous references in Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

One of the first decisions taken by Parliament after the outbreak of Civil War in 1642 was to summon an assembly of suitable reformed clergy, the Westminster Assembly (1643–1652), to debate the reform of religious practice. This produced the Westminster Confession (1646) and an alternative Prayer Book, the *Directory of Public Worship*, based largely on John Knox's Genevan service book of 1556, the *Book of Common Order*. The *Directory of Public Worship* has no order of service for the burial of the dead:

> When any person departeth this life, let the dead body, on the day of burial, be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public burial, *and there immediately interred, without any ceremony*.[29]

There was no need even for the presence of the minister, though Knox's *Book of Common Order* did suggest he might turn up if convenient, advising that he 'goeth to the church if he be not far off and maketh some comfortable exhortation to the people touching death and resurrection'.[30] This was intended as a final separation of the living from the dead. Ironically, though, it also left space for the continued, if clandestine, use of the rituals of the former Established Church.

It is within this context that the significance of the 1650 entry in the Bedwellty parish register must be assessed. In order to do this the attitudes of both the community and the incumbent clergyman, Lewis James, must be appraised.[31] The pre-industrial parish of Bedwellty was the largest in Monmouthshire and one of the largest in south Wales: over twenty-five square miles of rough mountain and steep river valley, with only a little good farmland. The parish church was centrally placed but it was still eight or nine miles from the farms at the northern extremity of the parish. Parishioners from the eastern part of the parish had to cross a steep valley and the fast-flowing river Sirhowy to reach the parish church, and so far as is known, there were no bridges there before the eighteenth century.[32]

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[29] F. Procter and W. H. Frere, *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1949), p. 161 (my italicisation added for emphasis).

[30] W. D. Maxwell, *John Knox's Genevan Service Book, 1556* (Edinburgh and London, 1931), pp. 161, 164.

[31] For more detail of both than it has been possible to include here, see M. Gray, 'The Clergy as Remembrancers of the Community: Lewis James, Curate of Bedwellty 1633–67, and the Civil War Clergy of Monmouthshire', *Monmouthshire Antiquary*, XVI (2000), 113–20.

[32] Joseph A. Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire* (5 vols. London, 1904–1933; Cardiff, 1993), *V: The Hundred of Newport*, ed. M. Gray (Cardiff, 1993), p. 146.