

Nothing significant can be said about Francis Bacon's religion or his theological disposition without serious consideration of the historical context of religion in Reformation England. Above all we must recognize that this was an era of religious turbulence which produced a remarkable diversity of thought and doctrine, especially by the time that Bacon came on the intellectual scene. This turbulence and diversity has been strongly reflected in the scholarly literature dealing with the history of religion in early modern England. A.G. Dickens, who produced a very highly regarded survey of the English Reformation in 1964, wrote the following in his revised edition of 1989:

An ever growing Niagara of books and articles on the English Reformation has poured down upon us since 1964, when the first edition of this book was published.... My aim during the last three years has been to sift this huge mass of new information and criticism, an assignment as tough as any I have confronted during more than fifty years of historical writing. Yet even if I were privileged to continue my revising for a further three years, I might still fail to keep pace with the ever-accelerating productivity of my colleagues, both in Britain and in the United States.¹

Of course, every book and article in the flood of literature mentioned by Dickens represents a particular position in the accompanying debates. If one of the foremost scholars of the field can regard merely keeping up with the field as such a daunting task, it is hardly surprising that Bacon scholars have been reluctant to try and make sense of this seemingly separate field. It will not be possible within the scope of this present treatment to give a proper overview of English religion in Bacon's day either by outlining what we know regarding how it was perceived at the time, or by surveying subsequent scholarly developments.² Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider

¹ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. (first American publication of the revised edition of 1989.) p. 9. Regarding the status of Dickens' work in the field see the historiographical introductions of several major works: Christopher Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation Revised*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987. pp. 1ff.; Nicholas Tyacke, ed., *England's Long Reformation: 1500-1800*, London, University College London Press, 1998. p. 4; and Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998. pp. 13ff.

² A coverage of both does exist and it has been praised by Dickens (ibid.). It is Rosemary O'Day's historiographical survey, *The Debate on the English Reformation*, London and New York, Methuen, 1986. This is an invaluable introduction to the historiography of the English Reformation from the sixteenth century proper up to the state of the field in 1985.

some of the features of the field which are indispensable for understanding the context of Bacon's writing and which have not been fully taken into account in past treatments of Bacon.

Puritanism, an Identifiable Category

Among the developments in the scholarship of Reformation England none is more germane to the study of Bacon than the debate over a common working definition of "Puritan." Given the frequency with which Bacon is either characterized as a Puritan or associated with them in a significant way,³ it is important to address the question of what a Puritan actually was, and in so doing to recognize that any scholarly consensus on this question has been hard won.

The basic problem of puritanism is nothing new to scholars. Writing in 1903, H. Hensley Henson demonstrated that the problem of a working definition of puritanism was one which was present even in the sixteenth century. Henson quotes from a tract of 1622 in order to expound the way in which, even in the Reformation era, the threefold categorization of "Puritan, Protestant, and Papist" was subject to shifting interpretations. As the nature of the religious environment at the time is our central concern in this chapter, this piece of primary material merits some extensive consideration. The author of this tract cleverly uses verse to juxtapose the ideal categories from what, to his way of thinking, they have come to represent. The poem begins as follows:

Time was, a Puritan was counted such
As held some ceremonies were too much
Retained and urged; and would no Bishops grant,
Others to Rule, who government did want.
Time was, a Protestant was only taken
For such as had the Church of Rome forsaken;
Or her known falsehoods in the highest point:
But would not, for each toy, true peace disjoint.
Time was, a Papist was a man who thought
Rome could not err, but all her Canons ought
To be canonical: and, blindly led,

³ These will have been cited in my "introduction" wherein I survey the Bacon scholarship on the question of Bacon's religion.

He from the Truth, for fear of Error, fled.
But now these words, with divers others more,
Have other senses than they had before:
Which plainly I do labor to relate,
As they are now accepted in our state.⁴

In the perception of the anonymous author of the tract, these definitions, which were doctrinal as much as political, became infused with new political implications during the early Stuart era.

Henson summarizes this author's opinion: "The Puritan is opposed to Spain, a hater of corruption in Church and State, regular and exact in his religious duties, an independent member of parliament, not to be frightened by courtiers out of his ancestral liberty."⁵ The Protestant, by contrast is "all that the Puritan is not, a servile royalist, an opponent of the reformed cause on the continent, a supporter of every established abuse in Church and State, a time server, an Erastian, and an unprincipled place hunter."⁶ A few verses from the actual poem are worth reproducing here, as they further clarify the anonymous author's own view:

A Protestant is he that with the stream
Still swims, and wisely shuns every extreme;
Loves not in point of faith to be precise;
But to believe as Kings do, counts it wise:

· · · · ·
A Protestant is an indifferent man,
That with all faiths, or none, hold quarter can;
So moderate and temperate his passion
As he to all times can his conscience fashion.

· · · · ·
His character abridged, if you will have,
He's one that's no true Subject, but a Slave!"⁷

In spite of the fact that the longer version of the poem *per se* does not let the Puritan get off scot-

⁴ The tract is entitled *The Interpreter, wherein three principal Terms of State, much mistaken by the vulgar, are clearly unfolded*. It is presented as quoted in H. Hensley Henson, *Studies in English Religion in the Seventeenth Century*, London, John Murray, 1903. p. 12. The full poem was also consulted, as it is found in Sir Charles H. Firth, ed., *Stuart Tracts: 1603-1693*, Westminster, Archibald Constable and Co., Ltd., 1903 pp. 233ff. I found Henson's interpretation and summaries of this tract to be accurate.

⁵ H. Hensley Henson, *Studies in English Religion in the Seventeenth Century*, London, John Murray, 1903.. p. 13.

⁶ Henson, *Studies in English Religion in the Seventeenth Century*, London, John Murray, 1903. p. 13.

⁷ *ibid*.

free (he does not always make the best decisions for the nation), it should be clear that the author has a distinct bias in favor of that which is contemporarily called a “Puritan,” as the freedom loving and noble Puritan is distinguished from the groveling Protestant. It should not be surprising that the Papist comes off still worse. As Henson puts it: “It needs no saying that he is destitute of any redeeming virtue, but it is worth noting that the anti-nationalist aspect of Romanism is paramount. He is a tool of Spain and the slave of the Pope, ceaselessly at work against the interests of his own country.”⁸ Writing at the turn of the century, Henson allows the opinions of the tract writer to stand unqualified. Subsequent scholarship has made us more sensitive to the idea of an author’s bias, however, and some note must be made of that here. The author is clearly marching down the ladder from best to worst, as he sees it, and hence his definitions, or “interpretations,” as he calls them, cannot be allowed any measure of objectivity. The tract is polemical. The names “Protestant” and “Papist” are charged with invective. The threefold categorization is common enough for the audience of his day that the writer does not need to explain that differences exist between these groups, but how he chooses to define the categories is based upon his dislike for the latter two groups and is of limited value for analyzing the actual contours of the religious scene at this time. With regard to Puritans we know from this tract that they were distinct, that their own definition had been modified through time, and that in the author’s opinion what had remained the same about them was their nobility and their wholehearted dedication to the truth and the proper observance of religion. We do not have a clear definition of “Puritan.”

The association of this categorization scheme with invective led Charles and Katherine George, in 1961, to question whether there was any value the category of “Puritan” at all. Citing a number of historical examples of the use of the term by Bishops Laud, Chaderton, and Neile, as well as King James and statements made among the Judges of Assize, the Georges contend that

⁸ *ibid.* pp. 13-14.

the word “Puritan” could mean any number of negative things:

It may mean that the individual or group described is an enemy to be vilified, a political opponent, a decrier of dancing on Sunday, an adversary of the Canons of 1604, a hypocrite in business transactions, a pompous ass, or a subverter of all things English and a general factionalist.⁹

The Georges conclude: “Before the Revolution the term [Puritan] was almost invariably pejorative, and if one knows the circumstances surrounding its use, one may easily enough understand why the word is used and what is communicated by that use.”¹⁰ Some support may be given to this position by the fact that a number of individuals who were considered “Puritans” during their lifetimes objected to the label, including Thomas Cartwright, who was denounced by Archbishop Whitgift precisely because he held the non-conformist beliefs which are often called “Puritan” by historians.¹¹ The Georges prefer the term “Protestant” and their study is dedicated to establishing a viable doctrinal definition for what a Protestant was prior to the Revolution, and arguing that the only truly valid distinction in this era is between Protestant and Catholic. The study has merit as a useful generalization, for there were doctrinal similarities among the vast majority of non-Catholics at the time, and recognizing what was commonly believed by them is of great help in gaining a feel for the era. But the Georges, when they reject the term “Puritan,” have been overly selective with their sources. It is not surprising that known opponents of Puritanism in the government, such as conformist Bishops, Judges, and the King, should use the term pejoratively. Neither should we be surprised that someone like Cartwright, who was denounced by the Archbishop of Canterbury and imprisoned for his beliefs, should object to the

⁹ Charles H. George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation: 1570-1640*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1961. p. 6

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ On Cartwright’s own objection to the term see John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press. 1964. p. 1. On his uncomfortable position before Whitgift, see Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: the troubled life of Francis Bacon*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1999. pp. 78-79, for a brief account of the beginning of Cartwright’s troubles with Whitgift, and the more comprehensive discussion of Cartwright’s career and incarceration in Patrick Collinson’s, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967. pp. 243-244, 403-30.

terms used in his denunciation. But we have already seen the term used positively by the author of the tract mentioned above, who, notably, used not only the term “Papist” but also the chosen term of the Georges, “Protestant” pejoratively. Similarly, when sir Amias Paulet was assigned to guard Mary Queen of Scots he was favorably described as, “a gentleman of an honourable family, a Puritan in religion, and very ambitious.”¹² It is easy enough to see that a different selection of sources could be chosen to challenge the essential reason for the rejection of the term “Puritan” by the Georges. It became fairly common for subsequent writers on the subject of Puritans and puritanism to begin their treatises with a rejection of the opinions of the Georges.¹³

Nevertheless, their book is a healthy reminder that the use of terms must be qualified by the often invective nature of the context. By showing the common threads among Protestant thought at this time they also highlight just how diverse Protestantism could be without clear lines of division.

In 1964, John F.H. New examined the doctrinal differences between Puritans and “those generally satisfied with the Church’s doctrine, organization, and ceremonial,” called, for convenience, “Anglicans.”¹⁴ Unlike the Georges, New recognizes what was obvious to the writer of the tract, that there is a legitimate doctrinal distinction to be made here. There was a movement in England that was known as “Puritan,” whether they embraced the title or not, and they had a distinctive theological perspective and agenda. If it was not at all times and in all places the same, it was still distinctive and clearly recognizable. New allows a doctrinal definition to emerge through the course of his study of the differences between the Puritans and their fellow Protestants. In his conclusion he sums up what he regards as a proper doctrinal distinction:

¹² Find a better locus for this quotation, currently it’s coming from Jardine and Stewart, p. 41.

¹³ See J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976. pp. 2ff. (find some others)

¹⁴ John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press. 1964. p. 2.

Anglicanism separated God from natural man by placing Him above human nature, while at the same time joining God to man through the activity of free justification. Divine perfection, in other words, was both contiguous with man and divided from him. God could elevate man to Heaven by offering grace through the sacraments of the Church. Puritanism, on the other hand, assumed that grace and nature were two theaters of one Divine plan, each distinct and yet each involved with the other, incommensurate realms held in dialectical tension, inextricably entwined, wrestling in the universe and in the souls of men.¹⁵

New's discussion has not been widely incorporated into the literature dealing with the Puritan problem, possibly because the theological nature of his study leaves him short on concrete answers pertaining to the era. Such a definition is by its very nature only useful to distinguish between the theologians of either group. Their followers would be unaware of the significance of such a difference, though they could easily see the results of this theological difference as they were manifested in the respective behavior, dress, and forms of worship. In other words, we may still ask just *how* an Anglican and a Puritan could tell each other apart in everyday life, while recognizing that this difference is detectable in the formal theology of each group. Bacon and his literary circle, however, were intellectuals engaged in the theological discourse of their day. They were aware of the theology behind the outward differences. Thus New's theological distinction applies to our study where it would not be useful to those concerned with a broader social perspective. Furthermore, New has based his distinction specifically on how the Puritan and the Anglican differed in their perception of the relationship between God and creation. This strikes at the heart of the matter of Bacon's own perspective. New's distinction reminds us that in Bacon's day God and nature could not be cleanly separated, for the relationship of God to his creation was a central question for all varieties of Christian theology, no matter how the different the answers may have been.

¹⁵ John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press. 1964. pp. 103-104.

The insights of the Georges and John New provide us with a valuable dialectic which can aid our understanding of religion in Bacon's era. On the one hand, the Georges demonstrate that the diversity of Protestant religious thought at the time did not necessarily lead to conflict between clearly defined parties. On the other hand, New reminds us that irreconcilable theological concepts were, in fact, competing in the arena of pre-Civil War England, and that the politically charged conflicts over religion, such as those between the Puritans and those who were opposed to them, were not without a genuine basis in doctrine. However, this dialectic can only serve as prolegomena to the actual study of Bacon in the context of his circle. Theologically oriented works such as these strive to make sense of religious parties and groups by establishing the most valid possible generalizations -- doctrinal minimums which allow us to use categories, as best we can, to describe what we are studying. However, in the study of individuals, such as Bacon and his associates, generalizations are of very limited value. A general statement which begins "Protestants believed," or "Anglicans believed," will always be proven wrong in the particular cases of any number of individuals who are associated with these groups. In the literature dealing with Francis Bacon, the generalizations of theology have too often been allowed to overshadow the historical evidence of Bacon's own writing in context. This has resulted in the categorizations we have already noted in the introduction, according to which Bacon has been labeled a Puritan, an Anglican, a moderate, and so forth. Any of these may have some merit, but they really say very little about what he personally believed, and reveal nothing about how those beliefs influenced his thought and writing. Most of these labels have been hastily applied. Bacon himself advises us to move from the specifics, very slowly, toward the larger context.¹⁶ When we apply this aspect of Bacon's method to the individuals in the Bacon circle, carefully considering them first as individuals, it will be much easier to recognize their place among the varieties of religious thought in early modern England. New's work, especially, will prove

¹⁶ Cf. *Novum Organum, Aphorisms*, bk. 1, aphorism 19. (Spedding, v. 1, p. 245, English: v. 8, p. 71)

valuable in this process of contextualization. As we will see, New's distinction has real interpretive value when it is applied to Bacon's circle and to Bacon himself, particularly in dispelling notions that puritanism was a strong influence. Although these individuals espoused many different theological and intellectual currents of the Tudor and Stuart world, New's work presents real obstacles to associating Bacon or his circle with puritanism.

Patrick Collinson has largely emerged as the champion of the Puritan question, and his writings, along with his particular perspective, have come to form a basis for consensus in the field. This may be attributed to the particular care with which Collinson addressed the subject, neither allowing a preconceived taxonomy to govern his work, nor denying the applicability of the term "puritan" to a particular type of religious experience and outlook in Reformation England. In Patrick Collinson's landmark treatment of the subject, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, "puritanism" is acknowledged to be just as "loosely defined" and "widely dispersed" as the various uses of the appellation at the time would indicate.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the course of the Elizabethan era Collinson discerns the rise of a "puritan movement" with a discreet and recognizable agenda, that would manifest itself both within the Church of England and in English politics. One of the primary difficulties, in addition to the diachronic change in definitions that the tract writer had noted at the time, is that the agenda of the Puritans never was stated positively, but rather in terms of that which it opposed or rejected. The following excerpt from a recent collection of essays summarizes this point of Collinson's and bears witness to his prominence in the field:

...the [puritan] movement never really existed as an independent, free standing entity. For much of its history it was an oppositional, agitational movement, frequently in conflict with the secular and ecclesiastical authorities or with those many sections of local society which did not share its ideals. As such, it was only one component of a set of fluid and dynamic polarities, a fact which has prompted Patrick Collinson to warn that 'there is little point in constructing elaborate

¹⁷ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967. cf. p. 29.

statements defining what in ontological terms Puritanism was and was not, when it was not a thing definable in itself, but only one half of a stressful relationship.'... To a very large degree, therefore, both the nature and extent of puritanism were determined by the changing environment within which it existed, so that, as Patrick Collinson has once again pointed out: 'No laboratory bench taxonomy of religious types and tendencies in pre-revolutionary England will serve if it sticks labels on isolated and inert specimens and fails to appreciate that the very terms themselves are evidence of an unstable and dynamic situation.'¹⁸

It would be unfair to read this as asserting that there was nothing that puritans actually stood *for* rather than against. Indeed, those within the movement stood for a great many things, but the movement was, at any given time, most clearly united by that which it opposed. Elaborate church ceremonies and any of the trappings of the Roman Catholic liturgy were on this list of things objectionable throughout the existence of the puritan movement, but we cannot allow this to be the only entry, lest we mistakenly think, as some opponents at the time did, that puritanism is mainly about external forms. Collinson agrees with New that the doctrinal basis behind puritan objections must be recognized as separating puritans and their opponents as well. Through the course of Collinson's treatment in *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* Calvinism emerges as the most common doctrinal foundation of the movement.¹⁹ This is not surprising, given the common scholarly recognition that the roots of Elizabethan puritanism lie primarily with those exiles from the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary who took refuge in Geneva, Basel, Zurich and other Reformed areas.²⁰ This should not be construed as suggesting that the puritan movement looked uncritically to Calvin and Geneva, or any other continental source, for guidance. There are numerous examples where it seems that Calvin would have been

¹⁸ In Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales [ed.], *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996. pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967. cf. pp. 36-37, 52-53.

²⁰ On the Marian Exiles themselves see Christina H. Garrett, *The Marian Exiles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1938. Specifically in relationship to the rise of the puritan movement in more recent scholarship, see Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: a Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1965. pp. 92 ff., and Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967. pp. 24, and 52-53 for concrete examples.

considerably more permissive and irenic in practice than certain puritans on specific issues. But the very fact that their opponents appealed to Calvin in an attempt to quiet them and end the debate is evidence that the movement held Calvin in very high regard. We may note that was only with reluctance that Cartwright, when confronted by Whitgift, admitted that there were issues on which he and Calvin would disagree.²¹ For this reason it would be better to say, in some ways, that the puritan movement was Reformed in theology, associating it with the branch of Protestantism of which Calvin was the most prominent figure, rather than suggest a specific allegiance to Calvin.²² To properly distinguish between set and subset, we must follow Collinson and avoid conflating English Calvinism and the puritan movement in any way. There were plenty of English Calvinists who differed from their Puritan contemporaries either in emphasis or degree. Another reason Whitgift quoted Calvin against Cartwright is that Whitgift was a Calvinist himself, as were the majority of English theologians at the time.²³ But the puritan movement was essentially concerned with getting Reformed theology right, both in doctrine and practice, and there were many issues of Reformed theology and practice where the Puritans felt that the institutional church was coming up short. This brings us to another important aspect of the Puritan identity, its fundamental and vehement anti-Catholicism. Protestant though Elizabeth's Church of England was, it was still, for the Puritan in her reign (as it would be in the reign of James), far too Catholic. To this extent, the old definition of Trevelyan still has applicability among the more recent scholarship of Puritanism: Puritanism

²¹ *ibid.* cf. pp. 72, 104. We may also note that these differences were usually matters of casuistry, the practical application of the doctrines themselves, rather than differences of doctrine proper, as is the case of Cartwright on page 104.

²² Collinson is not concerned with such a subtle systematic distinction, but remains content with simply avoiding calling the puritans "Calvinist." But this distinction is important if we wish to keep Calvinism in perspective. Calvin gave Reformed theology practical expression in Geneva, and a degree of doctrinal definition which it had not achieved under previous theological leaders. In theological circles to this day, "Reformed theology" and "Calvinist theology" are treated as essentially coterminous when referring to the later sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

²³ Cf. A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 382.

was, “the religion of all those who wished either to purify the usage of the established Church from the taint of popery, or to worship separately by forms so purified.”²⁴ In other words, Puritans were those English Calvinists who believed that, on any number of issues, the established church had simply not gone far enough in rejecting Roman forms and religion and adopting the fullness of Reformed theology. The puritan movement took a stand on these issues because they felt them to be of critical importance. As we will see, when we consider both the fact that the core of puritan doctrine was Reformed theology, as well as the issues on which the Puritans felt it necessary to take a stand, there will be no reason to associate Bacon’s personal theology with the Puritans.²⁵

The consideration of the topic of puritanism is significant to this present study not only because of the common association of Bacon with the puritan movement, but also because the complexity of the Puritan question reflects the complexity of the era itself. That “Puritan” and other such labels exist at all, Collinson tells us, is “evidence of an unstable and dynamic situation.”²⁶ We are dealing with a period of religious history that defies the systematization of simple categories. The puritan movement, though nebulous and changing, is unique in English protestantism at this time in that it may be identified and bounded even as well as it has been. For this reason puritanism has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly writing, while so many other features of the Tudor and early Stuart religious scene have not.

“Anglicanism”

Scholars in this field are especially cautionary about the common practice of applying anachronistic categories to different people or trends in an attempt to simplify the situation. Labels such as “latitudinarian,” “evangelical,” and “Anglican” are problematic because they either

²⁴ As quoted in: A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 368.

²⁵ (the specifics of Bacon’s personal beliefs will be explored through the examination of the Instauration writings which comprises chapter 2. Bacon’s place on puritan issues will be discussed below.)

²⁶ See footnote 18, above, for citation.

belong more properly to the ecclesial situation of a later time, or they can easily be confused with their meanings in later disputes. While New discusses the dogmatic differences between “Puritans” and “Anglicans” he does so only after explaining in his introduction that he recognizes that the boundaries of puritanism are a matter of debate and the use of “Anglican” at all is a matter of necessary convenience to separate those Protestants who were not Puritans from those who were.²⁷ There was no such thing as an “Anglican” in the modern sense of the term, but there were those Protestants who did not share the objections and concerns voiced by the Puritans regarding the established institutional religion. J. Sears McGee gives a very concise definition which parallels New’s use of the term Anglican:

Thus the term ‘Anglican’ may be used to describe those who under a series of labels (each with its own validity and nuances), associated themselves with the Elizabethan Settlement in ecclesiastical policy as interpreted and enforced by Archbishops Whitgift, Bancroft, Laud, and Sheldon and who defended the special relationship between the monarchy and the episcopacy for which Charles I fought and died.²⁸

“Anglicanism” then, has often been used, with qualification, as a convenient label for the vast theological expanse of those who were neither Puritan nor Papist, nor associated with the small, self-defined Anabaptist sects of the time. The complexity of the era has prompted social and cultural historians of Religion to arrange the various theological and ecclesiological positions of the time along a spectrum or continuum, with Roman Catholicism at one end, Puritanism at the other, and the “Anglicans” occupying the middle ground and being, to varying degrees, closer to one end or the other as individuals.²⁹ This pattern of thinking meshes well with the tendency even

²⁷ John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press, 1964. pp. 1-3. See also Collinson’s reluctant use of the term, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967. pp. 26ff.

²⁸ J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976. For his particular time period Bacon fits this definition quite well. We may note, however, that this says little to nothing about the dogma of “Anglicans,” as this was far too diverse.

²⁹ See Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1981. pp. 3ff. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967.p. 26; and Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998. p. 212-13.

in the Tudor and Stuart eras to refer to conformity to the Elizabethan Settlement as a *via media*, avoiding the dangers of either extreme.³⁰ This is not an idea without merit, for there must be a sense in which, as Christopher Marsh points out, the common people of England at the time felt trapped between two such extremes.³¹ However, it can be a misleading idea, especially when considering individuals as we are doing in this study. The actual diversity of theology and belief at this time cannot be so easily forced onto a line, but would be more appropriately plotted in a plane at least, if it is possible to graph such things at all. The examples of Edward Sackville and Lancelot Andrewes serve to illustrate this point.

Problems with the Continuum

In an essay on Edward Sackville, the fourth Earl of Dorset, David L. Smith has explored some of the difficulties that arise when we attempt to analyze an individual, especially one of the ruling and intellectual elite, according to the categories of the continuum.³² While Bacon and Sackville are very different individuals with different religious dispositions, Smith makes a number of important points which will apply equally well to our examination of Francis Bacon.³³ The difficulty with the Earl of Dorset is that during his lifetime he “was called everything from a puritan to a papist -- and other things besides.”³⁴ Dorset himself never kept a diary or made a convenient public announcement in which he said, definitively, what his own religious convictions were. While some scholars have argued that looking to the will of an individual will

³⁰ The anonymous tract writer of 1622 describes the “Protestant” in exactly these terms, “A Protestant is he that with the stream Still swims, and wisely shuns every extreme; Loves not in point of faith to be precise; But to believe as Kings do, counts it wise:” op. cit. fn.4. above.

³¹ Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998. p. 212-13.

³² David L. Smith, “Catholic, Anglican, or puritan? Edward Sackville, fourth earl of Dorset, and the ambiguities of religion in early Stuart England.” in: Donna B. Hamilton, and Richard Strier, [eds.], *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England: 1540-1688*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. 115ff.

³³ Edward Sackville (1590-1652) was slightly later than Bacon. Being thirty years younger he was close in age however to Bacon’s younger friends and members of his literary circle, such as William Rawley (1588-1667) and George Herbert (1593-1633).

³⁴ David L. Smith, “Catholic, Anglican, or puritan? Edward Sackville, fourth earl of Dorset, and the ambiguities of religion in early Stuart England.” in: Donna B. Hamilton, and Richard Strier, [eds.], *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England: 1540-1688*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 115.

help determine his true allegiance in religion, Dorset's will is thoroughly ambiguous. His preamble was a moderately Calvinist statement of faith, his executors were Roman Catholic, and his bequests were made "to wife, children, and staff" and were "apparently not determined by religious considerations."³⁵ In the Star Chamber Dorset made a number of statements in behalf of religious toleration, but these, according to Smith, do not reflect a "personal credo," but a "wider concern to preserve order" in the realm.³⁶ Lack of clear statements of personal belief should not be construed as suggesting that Dorset did not have deep religious convictions, but they do "mean that we have to look in other, more private, places."³⁷ Among other places in which Smith looks he considers the domestic chaplains which were retained by Dorset since, "a lay person would regularly experience his/her chaplain's services and sermons."³⁸ Smith finds it important, however, to distinguish between chaplains who may have been retained because they had close personal contacts with Dorset's family and those which the Earl may have selected more freely. Smith determines that Dorset possessed what Peter Lake has called a "conformist cast of mind" in which he could avoid extremes and tolerate "a plurality of belief within a broad national church."³⁹ With no further evidence Smith is unable to say anything more definitive concerning Dorset's personal beliefs, noting in regard to his general position of conformity that, "people of quite contrasting opinions could claim to be 'conformists' in early Stuart England."⁴⁰ We are fortunate that there is more evidence for Bacon's personal beliefs. We will also have to look in "other places" than where previous scholars have looked, but these will not necessarily be more private: they will include the very public corpus of writings which Bacon intended for the *Instauratio Magna*.

In addition to the type of issues which make it difficult to place a figure like Sackville

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 117.

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 118.

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 121.

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 122.

³⁹ *ibid.* pp. 127-28.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 128.

neatly on the continuum, there are the issues raised by examining someone like Bacon's friend and mentor, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes. Nicolas Lossky has shown that although Andrewes considered himself anything but a Papist, his theology was not typically Protestant either.⁴¹ Andrewes was informed almost entirely by his own reading of the Church Fathers, and his theology was shot through with ideas which, while common enough in Eastern Orthodoxy, are neither Protestant nor Catholic. Andrewes could have a great deal of sympathy for the Puritan focus on personal faith, while insisting upon the necessity of Catholic liturgical forms and the Apostolic Succession. However, he was not governed by Western categories or systematic theology, and so he could also have a radical doctrine of free will which would have been condemned by Catholic and Puritan alike. Andrewes will be considered in greater depth later, as he was a key figure in Bacon's literary circle. For now, it is important to note that neither Andrewes himself nor his authoritative sources can be understood in simple taxonomical terms like "Catholic" or "Protestant." Allowing puritanism and Catholicism to stand as the ends of the spectrum is reasonable when analyzing how the Elizabethan settlement was received in society, because this does reflect the idea of compromise that was perceived in the settlement at the time. However, it is misleading if it is meant to represent the actual theological climate of the time. There was considerably more on the theological table of early modern England than Calvin's *Institutes* and the *Summae* of Aquinas, and the questions were much more complex than asking how these two systems should be balanced. Theologians, and intellectuals generally, had before them a smorgasbord of ideas and theological influences that would mix and blend as they were taken up or ignored, assimilated or rejected.

The difficulty with the continuum applies especially to the so-called *via media*. It is true that the majority who were neither Catholic nor Puritan favored, like the Earl of Dorset, a

⁴¹ Nicolas Lossky, *Lancelot Andrewes, the Preacher (1555-1626)*, [tr. Andrew Louth], Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

political compromise which would permit tremendous theological breadth. Peter Lake's 'conformist mind' is a strong historical trend at this time, especially in the Bacon circle. But lack of adherence to clear partisan agendas should never be confused with being a theological "moderate" or not being concerned with the pressing issues which divide Christianity. While Puritan and Papist each knew his respective truth, others, less clearly partisan but equally devoted, sought it out. Indeed, they worked it out with rigorous method and genuine reverence for the new edifice that they were constructing: a theology composed of truth, not polemic. Above all, this effort was not considered by these thinkers in terms of "a compromise" as it has come to be remembered in modern texts. They had firm convictions, though not homogenous ones, and some latitude was necessary for good order in the realm. This latitude did not have to include those who were clearly in error, such as the Roman Catholics, and for many, such as Whitgift, there was no room for the "troublemakers," the divisive Puritans. While there are enough similarities in the theology of those who were neither Puritan nor Papist for New to legitimately discuss a general "anglican" theology as it was emerging, Collinson rightly characterizes the era as "unstable and dynamic," marked by political turmoil and ideological diversity.

Sources of the Turmoil and Diversity

The religious situation in England was truly unique for Europe. Much of the turmoil and diversity of England at the time can be understood as what must happen when a Catholic King and "Defender of the Faith" finds it suddenly necessary to break with the Church of Rome for reasons other than religion. In comparison with the Reformation on the continent, the English Reformation was carried out backward: the break with Rome led, and the theology necessary to justify that break and establish a new ecclesial order followed.

It is important to note that what set the English Reformation apart was not that it was an

act of state rather than Church.⁴² At some point, the Reformation was always an act of state, as the decree of the ruler was necessary to safeguard the existence of non-Roman Christianity everywhere. The famed *cuius regio ejus religio* of the Peace of Augsburg was in many respects not an innovative idea, but an acknowledgment of the way things had been going since Elector Frederick of Saxony gave Luther his protection. In the Scandinavian countries, as in England, the Reformation occurred through specific decrees of Kings. Throughout Scandinavia the Reformation occurred from above, and for reasons which were far from purely religious.⁴³ But in these countries the doctrinal choice was clear: Roman doctrine was being rejected in favor of the doctrine of Lutheranism, as clearly stated in the Augsburg Confession and the mass of writings streaming northward from Wittenberg. Subscription of the Augsburg Confession meant adoption of the Lutheran package *in toto*. In the Palatinate and those parts of Switzerland that adopted the Reformed faith the theological formulations were also clear, though a single normative statement, or set of statements such as the Lutheran Confessions, were often lacking early-on. The distinction between Lutheran and Reformed was established along specific doctrinal lines by the reformers themselves, and although the idea of confessional subscription did not function so rigidly in the Reformed lands, conformity to Reformed doctrine was expected. Geneva adhered to the doctrine of Calvin, after some early disputes, and those who did not adhere were welcome to leave (with some exceptions, of which Servetus is the most notable). There was no clear doctrinal agenda, however, when Henry VIII broke with Rome.

In some measure, the King himself had blocked the possibility of confessional unity in England. Henry's actions up until 1536 were designed to transfer decision making power from

⁴² There is an unfortunate debate within the historiography of the English Reformation over whether the Reformation was primarily an act of state or a religious development. For a summary of the basic ideas involved see J.F. Davis, "Lollardy and the Reformation in England" in: *The Impact of the English Reformation: 1500-1640*. [Peter Marshall, ed.] London, Arnold Press, 1997. pp. 37-52. Without opening the argument more than necessary, the contention in this essay is that all reformations were both acts of state and religious if they succeeded at all.

⁴³ This basic narrative is neither difficult nor disputed. For a brief account which balances political motives with the religious interests of the Lutheran movement see Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era 1500-1650*, New York, MacMillan, 1954. pp. 235 ff.

the Roman Catholic authorities to himself. The Ten Articles which were forwarded in 1536 as a doctrinal statement were ambiguous by design, and left room for both Catholic and Lutheran interpretations, though between a Lutheran and a Catholic, the Catholic probably would have been the more comfortable with them, given their interpretation of Sacraments and Tradition. Rather than a positive doctrinal statement, A. G. Dickens writes that “they might rather be used to exemplify our English talent for concocting ambiguous and flexible documents.”⁴⁴ In the *Bishops’ Book* of the next year, the doctrinal position is still more Catholic, but subscription was never enforced, and Henry “used it instead to test the theological appetite of the nation.”⁴⁵ While the break with Rome encouraged the development of nascent Protestant movements in England, and these movements were fueled by the appearance of Protestantism which came with the dissolution of monasteries and the seizure of Church property, Catholic doctrine was not particularly discouraged, beyond the question of allegiance to Rome. The replacement of Catholic Bishops with Lutheran Superintendents and the enforced subscription of the Augsburg Confession which made it possible for Scandinavian kings to obtain rapid uniformity had no parallel in England. The wholesale adoption of Wittenberg’s pattern of doctrine and liturgy which occurred under the Kings of Sweden and Denmark was not possible for Henry, not the least because he had distinguished himself early-on as an enemy of Luther, but there were other reasons. Alec Ryrie has recently summed-up Henry’s problem with a Lutheran solution which would have brought swift uniformity:

As [Basil] Hall has argued, the king’s suspicion of Lutheranism in general, his loathing of Luther in particular, and his heartfelt attachment to his own authority guaranteed that the English Church would remain beyond Wittenberg’s sphere of influence. Henry’s reformation was, as Richard Rex has recently emphasized, ‘its

⁴⁴ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 200.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

own thing, folly to Catholics and a stumbling block to protestants.’⁴⁶

Throughout Henry’s reign, the Church of England remained a church without a doctrinal identity.

The long-term effect was to allow a tremendous doctrinal diversity to develop.

The Thirty-Nine Articles

It is fairly common in theological circles to hear the Thirty-Nine articles forwarded as an agreement which provided genuine stability and unity to the Church of England.⁴⁷ While this is true, as far as it goes, this stability and unity should not be confused with any great degree of doctrinal uniformity. Rather than uniformity in doctrine the Thirty-Nine Articles should be recognized as allowing and establishing tremendous doctrinal latitude within the official Church during this era. The accession of Elizabeth and the actions of Queen and parliament up through the Act of Uniformity of 1571 did establish the Church of England as genuinely Protestant, and the official adoption of the Thirty-Nine Articles at this time (in 1562 by Convocation and by Parliament in 1571) was the part of that stabilizing chain of events which addressed doctrine directly. However, it has been often noted that the most remarkable feature of the Thirty-Nine Articles is their ambiguity, which stems partly from the mixture of Lutheran and Calvinist

⁴⁶ Alec Ryrie, “The Strange Death of Lutheran England” in; *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 53, n.1 (January 2002). pp. 66-67 Ryrie is summarizing the otherwise elaborately stated opinion of Basil Hall, “The Early Rise and Gradual Decline of Lutheranism in England 1520-1660” in: *Studies in Church History: Subsidia* ii, 1979. 104, 110. Ryrie also points out, in his article, that any tendency toward Lutheranism as a settlement among the English protestants themselves was thwarted both by reaction against the king driving Protestant divines toward a more radical position, and by the complicating factor of native Lollardy. (85-92) Without Lutheranism being imposed from above, there was already too much diversity among the anti-Roman Catholics themselves for ‘Lutheran moderation’ to be a real option.

⁴⁷ Get Bray’s “Creeds, Councils and Christ” in on this, as well as his 1994 source collection. Dickens is also of this opinion apparently -282. My discussion especially seeks to qualify the image of the Articles presented in popular text-and-reference books such as Carter Lindberg’s, *The European Reformations*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996. pp. 322 &327 and *The Oxford Illustrated History of England* (cite)

sources in their composition.⁴⁸ While genuinely Calvinist in the wording of articles on Predestination and the Lord's Supper, there is no requirement that these articles be interpreted according to Calvinist doctrine. Attempts to refine the meaning of the Thirty-Nine Articles by incorporating the Lambeth Articles and rendering the interpretation to be unequivocally Calvinist were rejected both by Queen Elizabeth and, later, King James. With careful reading, the Thirty-Nine Articles themselves could be, and were, interpreted from almost every Protestant Angle. The Thirty-Nine Articles are themselves ambiguous enough to have been embraced by both a thorough-going Calvinist, Archbishop Whitgift, and a thorough-going anti-Calvinist, Archbishop Laud.⁴⁹

Another reality of the Elizabethan Settlement was that it neither would be, nor could be, thoroughly enforced. Neither Elizabeth, nor Lord Chancellor Burghley were interested in tactics that would be seen by her subjects as religious persecution. The only group which could claim ill-treatment under Elizabeth by the end of her reign would be the Roman Catholics, and action was only taken against them when it was clear that Roman Catholics were actively working to subvert the realm.⁵⁰ The bottom line of the Religious Settlement, including the Thirty-Nine Articles, was not doctrinal uniformity, but national unity and the concern of Edward Sackville, an

⁴⁸ Philip Schaff summarizes very well what Cranmer had done in developing his original forty-two articles from which the Thirty-Nine Articles are taken: "The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, as revised under Elizabeth (1563 and 1571), are borrowed in part, verbatim, from the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the Württemberg Confession of 1552, but are moderately Calvinistic in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and on predestination." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910. pp. 45-46, fn. 1) The Articles to which Schaff refers, 17 and 28 for predestination and the Lord's Supper respectively, are the only loci where Calvinism is clearly articulated at all. See David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: a Sourcebook*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996. pp. 64 & 67.

⁴⁹ on Laud see especially New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640*, Stanford California, Stanford University Press. p. 75. The term "Anti-Calvinist" I take from Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, 1590-1640*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987. Tyacke rightly recognizes that the appellation of "Arminian" to men like Laud is not entirely accurate. (Look up anything else as needed, make sure your right about Laud.)

⁵⁰ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 382.

orderly and peaceful realm.⁵¹ In application, attempts at forcing uniformity could easily backfire on the local level, leading Bishops to turn a blind eye to religious diversity rather than cause a reaction against their policies.⁵² King James continued Elizabeth's policy of promoting a broad and tolerant Protestantism.⁵³ For King James, just as for Queen Elizabeth, theological squabbles were the lesser threat, and alienating large numbers of his subjects the greater. It would only be in the reign of Charles I, and after the Archbishopric of Laud, that the consequences of forcing controversy underground would be manifest.

The 39 articles lacked the normative control of the Augsburg Confession among the continental Lutherans, where ministers were often removed for any disagreement with the document, and hence the Articles failed to achieve that level of confessional unity. Similarly, they lacked the common popular assent and enforceable authority of the *Institutes* and the *Heidelberg Catechism* in the Reformed lands. England's religious diversity was beyond the point where it could still be reined-in with a demand for confessional subscription. However, the ambiguity of the Thirty-Nine Articles served the agenda of national unity well, while recognizing that the Church of England was too diverse for rigid doctrinal unity. The doctrinal ambiguity of the Religious Settlement also served the members of Francis Bacon's literary circle, who, as members of the intellectual elite engaged and considered the full range of theological and

⁵¹ Robert Manning writes at the conclusion of his local history of the effect of the Settlement in Essex, "Whether one looks at it from the national level or from the local level, compromises and opportunism pervaded every aspect of the Elizabethan religious settlement. The guiding principle of the Elizabethan religious settlement was the determination to preserve the unity of England against the threat of foreign invasion and against the corrosive effect of transcendental ideologies." (*Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex: A study of the enforcement of the Religious Settlement, 1558-1603*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1969. p. 272.)

⁵² See the discussion in Robert B. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex: A study of the enforcement of the Religious Settlement, 1558-1603*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1969. See also Chapter Six of Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1450-1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1976. pp. 124 ff. Cross argues, "The Queen never abandoned her goal of a totally comprehensive Church, but her churchmen's efforts to carry out her wishes led quickly to the appearance of dissent and even separation among conservatives and radicals alike." p. 124. This may be a bit overstated, as Elizabeth even in Cross' account did not push the issue when opposition appeared to be fracturing the Church, but her discussion does demonstrate that doctrinal uniformity was, as a rule, sacrificed for unity.

⁵³ Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1450-1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1976. p. 153.

intellectual influences before them, and often embraced ideas which were far from the norm.

Elements of the English Religious Scene

So what was actually available for consideration by the theologians and intellectuals of Bacon's era? Nicholas Tyacke emphasized the dominance of Calvinism throughout English society at this time, and this is a crucial first ingredient. The intellectual and theological world of Francis Bacon was a Calvinist world in which the non-Calvinists were a significant minority.⁵⁴ We may accept this statement with the same caveat that was applied to Puritanism earlier, namely that "Calvinist" here is used as a cover term for Reformed theology.⁵⁵ However, Calvinism must not be allowed to overshadow the host of other trends and influences in Tudor and early Stuart religion. Tyacke also makes it perfectly clear that non-Calvinists did exist. The ideological influences which led to an "overthrow of Calvinism" in 1625 were not truly "Arminianism" at all, but are to be sought in the wide variety of thought present among the non-Calvinist minority in England prior to 1625.⁵⁶ All of the main trends in continental Protestantism can be found in the English literature from this period. Lutheranism, for all of its well-documented death as an option for unifying the Church of England, remained influential as a

⁵⁴ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, 1590-1640*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987. pp. 1-2, 7, and as a *leit motif*, or perhaps a *cantus firmus* theme throughout.

⁵⁵ On the issue of Tyacke's use of "Calvinist" and "Calvinism" see Sean F. Hughes, "The Problem of 'Calvinism': English theologies of predestination c. 1580-1630. in: *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: a Tribute to Patrick Collinson by his Students*, [Susan Wabuda and Carol Litzenberger, eds.], Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998. pp. 229 ff. Peter Lake's assessment that too much emphasis has been placed upon predestination (p. 230) is probably correct. However, Tyacke's argument cannot be discarded when it bears the weight of the evidence. He has demonstrated that his assessment of the dominance of Calvinist doctrine is in step with the assessment at the time, and with what was being taught at the seminaries, and that it was confronted with an anti-Calvinist, indeed, an anti-Reformed movement that triumphed with Charles I and especially Laud is hardly disputable. Recognizing with Hughes that there were many varieties of "Calvinism," or Reformed theology at work clarifies, but does not change, the basic pattern of events, or the fact that however they differed from one another, the majority of clergy regarded *themselves* as sympathetic with Calvin in the later Tudor era.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, 1590-1640*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987. On the "overthrow of Calvinism" see p. 8. On the ideological sources for this overthrow see p. 4, and chapters 1-4: it is clear that the anti-Calvinist movement in England was gaining momentum long before the writings of Arminius were ever published. Tyacke does not actually identify the ideological sources themselves.

package of theological ideas throughout our time period.⁵⁷

Anabaptism is also commonly recognized as a component of the diverse English religious scene in this era. Exponents of the radical reformation of the continent, the Anabaptists, began emigrating to England soon after Henry broke with Rome. Some of the first immigrants were met with the same reaction they were receiving on the continent and were promptly burned in St. Paul's churchyard. At no time were the Anabaptists accepted by the official Church of England, and they were the constant target of authorities both in the Church and State who resented their separatism as much as their radical doctrines.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the English environment proved to be considerably more hospitable to Anabaptists than most areas of the continent, if for no other reason than that the irenic policy of the Elizabethan Settlement precluded them from being rooted-out wholesale as they were in genuinely Lutheran, Calvinist, or Catholic lands. England served as something of an incubator for Anabaptism. The movement continued underground, and various ideas of anabaptist association floated through the English intellectual scene rather freely before England's own native Anabaptists would emerge to complicate the strife of the English Civil War.⁵⁹ For the sake of understanding the doctrinal climate of Early Modern England it is as important to recognize the Anabaptists for providing the various parties of the Church of England with the unifying influence of having a common enemy as it is to consider their actual

⁵⁷ Little work has been done on this issue, other than to acknowledge the presence of Lutheran influences. Basil Hall's article make it clear that the decline of Lutheranism was gradual and never complete. Basil Hall, 'The Early Rise and Gradual Decline of Lutheranism in England 1520-1660' in: *Studies in Church History: Subsidia* ii, 1979. (find this again for page numbers) See also the only major work on the subject, Henry Eyster Jacobs', *The Lutheran Movement in England*, Philadelphia, G.W. Frederick, 1890. esp. pp. 343 ff. Jacobs makes it clear that the question of Lutheran influence is clear, and preferable to asking after whether this or that individual was a "Lutheran." The Thirty-Nine Articles left plenty of room for all but the most dogmatic Lutherans to fit nicely into non-Calvinist corners of the Church of England. (Look for support on the English reaction to the Thirty Years War as well.)

⁵⁸ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. pp. 262-68. The Anabaptists were the one group other than Roman Catholics clearly excluded by the Thirty-Nine Articles. This was Cranmer's design when he wrote the forty-two articles. *ibid.* p. 281.

⁵⁹ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second Edition, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 23. Note the influence that Dickens describes of Anabaptism upon the development of religious toleration, for example, on p. 379. See also, Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (discuss/cite this)

contributions to English thought.

Of course, apart from Calvinism, the most active and direct continental influence was that of the Roman Catholic Church. Reclaiming the island lost to the Papacy was a special project of the Jesuit Order during this period, and its effect is not only to be measured in the number of actual converts to the Roman Church, such as Bacon's close friend, Sir Tobie Matthew. The continued presence of Roman Catholic voices contributing to, and challenging, the intellectual discourse of Reformation England led the significant figures such as Lancelot Andrewes and Bishop Laud to be very concerned with questions of the continuity of the Church, the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, and generally, the danger of throwing out the baby of Christian Tradition along with the bath water of Roman abuses. Novel and consistent answers had to be found for the challenges of the Jesuits such as "Where was the true Church before Luther?" and, "How can those who do not repent of schism be saved?"⁶⁰ Thus the continued Catholic presence served both as a motor for intellectual activity, and an influence upon the development of "high-church" thinking within the Church of England.

English religion, and especially English Protestantism, however, cannot be understood simply in terms of continental developments. English theology was always marked by a uniquely English synthesis. Lollardy, in particular, had become thoroughly mixed-in with English Protestantism by 1540.⁶¹ Although after Wyclif himself it was less of a doctrinal position and more of what Alec Ryrie has aptly termed an "amorphous body of native heresies" Lollardy

⁶⁰ The first question is a common challenge of the Jesuits, particularly in Lutheran lands on the continent. Though it was apparently also found in England, as the tract *Luther's predecessours, or, An answer to the qvestion of the Papists : where was your church before Luther?* attests. (London, Felix Kingston, 1624.) The second question is one raised by Tobie Matthew himself in his tract, *Charitie Mistaken*, London, 1630. (Reprinted in facsimile in the volume, *English Recusant Literature: 1558-1640*, London, The Scolar Press, 1975.)

⁶¹ There is little reason to argue with three basic points made by A.G. Dickens that: 1) Lollardy survived as a movement until the Reformation, 2) Lollardy prepared the way for Reformation doctrine in England, and 3) Lollardy was quickly supplanted as a movement once the Reformation was underway by "Protestantism" generally. However, Lollard doctrines were not the same as those of continental Protestantism, and were, as Ryrie argues, as much of an obstacle to Lutheranism as an aid to its reception in England. cf. Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England" in; *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 53, n.1 (January 2002). pp. 79-85.

profoundly influenced the development and direction of English Protestant thought, and added to the complexity of the theological landscape of Reformation England.⁶² By the time of Bacon Lollard doctrines could no longer be cleanly separated from broader Protestant discourse, and hence Lollardy *per se* is of very limited use in analyzing the theology of the Bacon circle. However, the incorporation of Lollardy into the theology of the English Reformation is an important reminder that the contours of English theology were never completely contiguous with continental theology. From Pelagianism through Lollardy the Island had earned a reputation for unique theological opinions long before the Reformation era. In the Reformation Wyclif and his movement became icons of English theological distinctiveness, and contributed to the justification of England continuing to go its own direction theologically.⁶³ If the lack of theological definition of Henry's break with Rome permitted the rise of theological diversity in England, the cultural icons of Wyclif and Lollardy encouraged a type of experimental thinking which only added to that diversity. England did not have to conform to prepackaged ideas in the Reformation any more than it had in the past.

Broader Trends

All of the above elements of the diversity of the religious environment of Tudor and Stuart England are commonly identified in textbooks and scholarly writing dealing with the era. They are nothing less than specific parties or movements in religious history and are thus easily identifiable. It is not nearly as common for scholars to discuss broad trends that had a significant

⁶² Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England" in; *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 53, n.1 (January 2002). p. 79. As Christopher Harper-Bill has pointed-out, attempts to make Lollardy into a well-defined or cohesive belief system have done so by looking at only a very narrow time-period around 1400. (Christopher Harper-Bill, "Dean Colet's Confirmation Sermon and the Pre-Reformation Church in England" in: *The Impact of the English Reformation: 1500-1640*. [Peter Marshall, ed.] London, Arnold Press, 1997. pp. 21-2.)

⁶³ Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, for example, uses Wyclif and Lollardy precisely to establish the priority and distinctiveness of English Protestantism, (cf. William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1963. pp. 162-9, 241) On the distinctiveness which Lollardy added both to English doctrine and to Protestant self-perception in England, as well as on the role of Wyclif and the Lollards as symbols of a prior, and indigenous, national Protestantism in England see Alec Ryrie, "The Problem of Legitimacy and Precedent in English Protestantism, 1539-47." in: *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* [Bruce Gordon, ed.] Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996. v. 1. pp. 78-92.

impact upon the religious thought of the period, such as the recently-emerged fascination with the Hebrew language and Old Testament studies, or the influence of the Greek Church Fathers which were rediscovered by the Humanists, most of which only came into publication during Bacon's lifetime. This is unfortunate, for many of the differences separating late medieval from early modern thought are based on developments such as these. It is reasonable to believe that many of the past debates in the field of early modern English religion could have been clarified or even resolved if the issues had been expanded beyond taxonomy (what is a Puritan, who was a Calvinist, etc.) to include contextualizing the theological issues of the day within these broad trends. The ability to read Hebrew, for example, was not confined to any religious movement or denominational group within early modern Europe, but it had a profound effect upon early modern theology across the board, and certainly affected the course and outcome of the theological disagreements of the time. Lutheran and Calvinist theology were both forged in part from the study of the Old Testament in Hebrew and the details of the doctrinal statements of Luther and Calvin cannot be fully understood without recognizing this. We will consider four such general trends, starting with two which have received very little scholarly attention: the growth and development of the field of patristics at this time, and the rise of Hebrew and Oriental language studies. These trends comprise an important, though often neglected, foundation for two others which have received considerable attention, but have not been well incorporated into the field: the early modern interest in hermeticism and alchemy, and the role of

the belief in Providence and the coming of a special providential age.⁶⁴ More such trends could be identified and probably should, in a more comprehensive discussion of early Modern religion and theology, but these have specific application to the question at hand. While these four trends shed light on the religious environment of the era generally, they are of particular importance to the study of Francis Bacon and his literary circle, who were, to one degree or another, intimately involved with these trends as they appeared in Tudor and Stuart England.

The Recovery of Patristics

Along with other aspects of the Renaissance movement the fourteenth century saw what Charles Stinger has called a “renaissance of patristic studies.”⁶⁵ Thanks to the efforts of the humanists, the writings of the Christian theologians of the first seven centuries, both Latin and Greek, were gradually recovered and made public.⁶⁶ Over time, as more and more ancient authorities came into circulation, this dealt a serious blow to the method of medieval scholastic theology. The internally consistent logical formulae of scholasticism were at odds with the

⁶⁴ I have labeled this last concept carefully. While there were many adherents to Millenarianism and the imminent fulfillment of the Johannine Apocalypse, these must be fit into a broader context of belief in the immanent, or recent, coming of a special age of God’s dispensation toward man, which is not necessarily strictly Millennial or Johannine in structure, though it could often be termed apocalyptic. This is a point necessary to make because within the field of Millennial studies a strict definition is often operative which holds, in the words of Howard Hotson, “Millenarianism, strictly defined, is the expectation that the vision described in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation of a thousand-year period in which Satan is bound and the saints reign is a prophecy which will be fulfilled literally, on earth, and in the future.” (“The Historiographical Origins of Calvinist Millenarianism” in: *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, [Bruce Gordon, ed.] Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996. v.2. p. 160) As we will see in our discussion on the belief in a providential age, there are some significant problems with this definition if it is applied to the sixteenth and *early* seventeenth centuries.

⁶⁵ Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977. p. 83 ff.

⁶⁶ Occasionally there is some confusion in early modern historical circles regarding the meaning of “Church Fathers.” The time frame of the first seven centuries, stretching into the eighth or ninth in the East, constitutes the “Patristic Era” and is essential to defining who is or is not a “Church Father.” The coincidence with the ecumenical councils of the unified church is not merely coincidental. (cf. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Westminster, MD, Christian Classics, 1984. v.1 pp. 1, 10-12) This was the conventional understanding operating in classical theology already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though it was quite common for Protestants to end the Patristic era a bit earlier, in deference especially to the first four Ecumenical Councils which were considered authoritative by them, and in exclusion of the seventh, which, whatever the status of the fifth and sixth, was considered spurious.

theological method, and often the doctrines, of the ancient authorities.⁶⁷ Of course, this did not pose a difficulty for the humanists themselves who saw little worth in scholastic method anyway. Erasmus, who stands at the apex of humanist theology, valued the Greek and Latin Fathers precisely because they demonstrated that medieval scholasticism was a novelty. To return to the true *vetus theologia*, the original theology of Christianity, scholasticism had to be abandoned, according to Erasmus.⁶⁸ By the time of the Reformation the interest in the expanding corpus of the Fathers had proceeded so far that the debates of the Reformation are saturated with continual citations of the Greek and Latin Fathers. Among Catholics and mainline Protestants alike, it is difficult to find a scholarly theological work from the second half of the Sixteenth or the Seventeenth century which does not place tremendous weight upon the opinions of the early Church Fathers.⁶⁹

The impact of the recovery of the Fathers upon Europe's intellectual terrain extended far

⁶⁷ Regarding the preceding decline of patristic theology in the middle ages, especially of the Greek Fathers, see Stinger (*Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977.), pp. 84-93. Stinger also explains concisely how the clash between scholastic theology and the patristic sources came about: "The Fathers, Augustine especially, remained for the late Middle Ages the authoritative sources of Christian doctrine. But the purpose and method of theological inquiry in scholastic thought departed sharply from patristic assumptions, and the scholastics ceased to immerse themselves in patristic writings. Systematic treatment of doctrine through Aristotelian logic and philosophy supplanted the patristic emphasis on Scriptural exegesis." (p. 93) Although the fathers, especially Augustine, remained authorities, in the course of the twelfth century they were simply no longer consulted in the practice of theology. It was within the ranks of the scholastics themselves, particularly the Augustinians, that the practice of patristic citation was renewed as a means of supporting scholastic doctrine. (pp. 95 & 97) Petrarch was the first to disregard the assumptions of medieval scholastic theology entirely and look directly at the Early Fathers themselves. In doing so the inherent inconsistencies between patristic and scholastic theology clearly emerged. (pp. 97 ff.)

⁶⁸ On Erasmus' concept of the importance of the *vetus theologia* see the discussion of Istvan Bejczy in, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2001. esp. pp. 24-32, 104-5, 108-17, and 192-4. While many treatments of Erasmus have considered his quest to restore the *vetus theologia*, Bejczy is really the first to reconcile two seemingly conflicting tendencies in Erasmus, namely his commitment to restoring the true theology of antiquity and his conviction that a true golden age, theological or otherwise, never existed. Essentially, Bejczy's conclusion is that Erasmus was not interested in repristinating a pure past, but in using the past to get the future right. The Patristic era was not ideal, but it is the point of departure to which theology must return if the errors of the middle ages are to be rectified. (p. 192)

⁶⁹ I do not count the Anabaptist sects, or other programs of the "Radical Reformation," among "mainline Protestants." Nowhere were they the sanctioned state religion, and, as numerous Lutherans and Calvinists noted at the time, they were almost always quite small, self-defined, and lacking in doctrinal cohesiveness. Socially and culturally the sects were marginalized, and hence, not "mainline."

beyond the study of theology proper. The reemergence of the Fathers, and the Greek Fathers in particular, provided Western Europeans with a new field of Christian perspectives that yielded significant contributions to topics as diverse as civics and cosmology. The humanist movement found in the Fathers Christian authorities who themselves lived in classical antiquity, and were thus uniquely situated to justify and guide the humanists' use of pagan classical sources, especially in such non-religious areas as civics and rhetoric.⁷⁰ The "renaissance of patristic studies" also provided Galileo with a wealth of support for his claim that the physical structure of the Cosmos was not to be determined by the passages of Scripture which had been used against him by Jesuits supporting a Geocentric system.⁷¹ In addition, the Greek Fathers reintroduced a profoundly Platonic form of Christian theology to the West which would have a significant influence on both the cosmology of humanists such as Pico, and, more generally, on discussions of the place of man in the universe.⁷²

However, the recovery of the Greek Fathers also constituted a crisis in Roman Catholic theology which was formed along the rift between scholastic and humanist. After a period of some seven hundred years without significant influence from the Christian East, a door was opened to a separate Christian culture which had to be interpreted and incorporated into the western Christian identity if the important doctrines of the continuity of the Church and the

⁷⁰ A point made by Deno Geanakoplos in regard to Basil the Great, particularly, in *Constantinople and the West: Essays on the Late Byzantine (Paleologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. pp. 285-87.

⁷¹ See Galileo's "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" for his theological defense of his position. Galileo makes extensive use of Augustine and Jerome throughout this work as the unassailable authorities of the West, but his argument also benefits from his access to Tertullian and (pseudo) Dionysius. Had Galileo been able to use the Greek Fathers the points made through Augustine and Jerome would have been further supported. (Maurice A. Finocchiaro [trans. and ed.], *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989. pp. 87-118.)

⁷² On the first topic, little has been done, though Charles Trinkaus has raised the issue and it warrants more attention. See *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. v. 2 pp. 507ff. Trinkaus has discussed the latter topic in considerable depth. See esp. v. 1 pp. 179-199, on the idea of the dignity of Man in the Patristic and Medieval Traditions and in Petrarch, and v. 2 pp. 459 ff. Doctrines such as the Greek understanding of *Imago Dei*, and the salvific concept of _____s had a profound effect upon the humanist understanding of man's place in the universe. See also Trinkaus' article on "The Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man" in: *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973. v. 4 pp. 136-147.

consistency of its message were to be maintained. The humanists contended, to varying degrees, that scholasticism had erred and humanist method could rectify the situation. By looking critically at both Eastern and Western Fathers, a *consensus* of the ancient authorities could be identified which constituted the true basis of Christianity in the age of the united Church. The relative merits of scholastic theology could be measured against this patristic consensus.⁷³ Non-humanists were faced with a more daunting task of forming a synthesis between scholastic and patristic theology. While not impossible, an acceptable synthesis took time, as is demonstrated by the eighteen years that the Council of Trent spent mostly in wrestling with issues of just such a synthesis.⁷⁴ Before such theological compromises could occur, however, a significant number of theologians had concluded that the gulf between late medieval theology and the purer theology of

⁷³ It is important to remember that the humanists were not united on the issue of what was wrong with scholastic theology, nor on the issue of the degree to which scholasticism had erred. It was not *what* the consensus of the fathers was that united humanists but its importance. Traversari, the pivotal figure in the revival of Greek patristic studies in the West, saw the Greek Fathers as restoring a proper focus on piety and spirituality that was lacking in the late medieval Church. He did not believe that the authority of the Fathers constituted a reason to reject the basic doctrinal formulations of scholasticism. Both Valla and Erasmus, as counter examples, believed a more thorough reconstruction of theology was necessary. Erasmus, in particular, was able to lay the entire burden of the moral and theological decline in the West at the feet of scholasticism, thus he is something of a high water mark of criticism of scholasticism by Catholic humanists. (On Traversari and Valla see Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977. pp. 199-202. On Erasmus, see Istvan Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2001. pp. 62-103.)

⁷⁴ I do not agree with the characterization of the Council of Trent as being essentially a rejection of patristic theology, as Stinger concludes. (*Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977. pp. 226-227.) Certainly, the official sanction given to Thomism severely limited the freedom which the Humanists had once enjoyed in entertaining patristic (especially Greek) ideas, but the authority of the Fathers is retained by the Council, and their doctrines are carefully syncretized with late Medieval theological understandings. Patristics has been ascribed an untimely death by Stinger in Protestant circles as well, and this must be qualified, especially in light of the prominence of the Fathers in Bacon's England. While it is true that "many Protestant theologians began to return to dialectics to analyze the orthodox creedal formulations of the Augsburg Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism" this does not necessarily imply a rejection of Patristic theology. On the one hand, a significant number of theologians, such as Lancelot Andrewes, showed no interest whatever in returning to dialectic method. On the other hand, even those theologians who have often been singled-out for their rigid adherence to systematic categorization and dialectic, are usually the victims of a convenient though inaccurate stereotype. Johann Gernard, for example, is often cited as the true systematizer of Lutheran Dogmatics, but convenient categories are simply a starting point for Gerhard as he addresses what he regards as the errors of both the Papacy (systematically laid-forth at Trent) and the systematic response to Catholicism of the Reformed. The tidiness of Gerhard's dialectic seldom lasts beyond the introduction to a topic. By the end of the discussion catalogues of patristic opinion dominate as Gerhard finds his final answers most often in a "Consensus of the Fathers." (See Gerhard, Johann, *Loci Theologici*, {ed. Preuss}, Berlin, Gustav Schwalitz, 1866.)

the Early Church was simply too great, and the unity of Western Christendom was lost.

Protestantism, from its inception, and no less in Bacon's day, shared with Erasmus the concern for recovering the *vetus theologia*, or theology of the ancient Church. If the theology of the early centuries of Christianity could be identified, then all of the errors of medieval scholasticism, and, for the Protestants, of the Papacy generally, would be clearly seen for the accretions that they were. The Church could then recover its original, and proper, theological emphasis and move forward from there.⁷⁵ The Greek Fathers, which were problematic for the Catholic adherents of scholastic theology, were a new arsenal for Protestants engaged in identifying Catholic error and supporting the break with Rome, though the Latin Fathers received equal attention, and the Patristic Era functioned as a unified authority for early Protestants.⁷⁶ (The significant differences in theological perspective between East and West in the early centuries of Christianity were at this time only emerging as an issue.) Closer to the fountainhead of Christianity, the Fathers were purer in their theology, and hence an important key to understanding when and where the Roman Church went wrong. But they were also studied positively, as sources which, as the Protestants saw it, gave clear precedent to Reformation

⁷⁵ In this emphasis Erasmus' perspective was close to that of the Protestants. It explains why both Erasmus and the Protestants were not overly disturbed by disagreement among the Church Fathers, after all, theirs was not a perfect age either, just much better than the medieval era. Both Erasmus and the Protestants felt free to reject what they saw as being in error in the Church Fathers, while otherwise relying upon their authority to support reforming agendas. It is an error to see Protestantism as concerned with the simple repristination of the early Church, rather than incorporating what was good (or at least not bad) from the medieval era and moving forward. (Istvan Bejczy suggests as much in regard to the difference between Erasmus and Luther. *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2001. p. 192.) Erasmus and the Protestants differed from one another in the same way that the Protestants differed from each other, namely, in where the lines of what should be kept and what discarded were to be drawn.

⁷⁶ Consider the appeal to Greek Patristics as it functions in Protestant apologetics such as the *Examination of the Council of Trent*, of Martin Chemnitz, and Johann Gerhard's *Loci*. (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, [tr. Fred Kramer], St. Louis, Concordia, 1971. Gerhard, Johann, *Loci Theologici*, {ed. Preuss}, Berlin, Gustav Schwalitz, 1866.) This may be seen as part of a larger Protestant appeal to the Christian East, which included apologetic references to the continued existence of Eastern Christianity as evidence that the Papal claim to unity and hegemony was invalid. See, for example, Balthasar Meisner, *Ein Catholische Antwort zu dem Ketzerische Frage des Jesuwider*, in: *Zwei Hochnuetzlicher Buecher wider das Papstthum*, Leipzig, Friedrich Lanckschens Erben, 1697. A more interesting example, for our purposes, is a small book put out by Puritans with the very revelatory title: *Differences in Matters of Religion between Eastern and Western Churches. Wherein the Romane Church may see her selfe charged with as many errours as shee falsely layeth to the charge of other Churches in Europe*. ("Gathered by Irenaeus Rodoginus," London, Augustine Mathewes, 1625.)

theology and provided necessary insight into the original nature of Christianity. Thus the study of the Fathers was a central occupation of Protestants across Europe, and they were largely responsible for the development of Patristics as a discreet field of academic theology.⁷⁷

The common Protestant concern for patristic authority must qualify our understanding of the meaning of the famous *sola scriptura* principle among early Protestants. For mainline Protestants such as the Lutherans and the Calvinists the “Bible” was never the sole authority. It was the sole *absolute* authority, or the sole *infallible* authority. It was the authority by which other sources and authorities were to be measured and judged, but authorities such as the Fathers were highly regarded and contributed greatly to the doctrinal formation of Protestantism.⁷⁸

Among Protestants of Bacon’s era, a theological argument was seldom considered complete without extensive reference to the opinions and decisions of the Early Church upon a subject.⁷⁹

Just how much authority the Fathers were allowed on any given issue was another matter. In Lutheran and Reformed lands, where there was an established doctrinal agenda for the

Reformation, the Fathers were allowed to support the Lutheran or Reformed doctrines, but were rejected when they conflicted with the stated doctrines and confessions of their respective

branches of Christianity. Hence, the Lutheran Martin Chemnitz makes use of both Basil and

⁷⁷ Quasten traces the earliest name of the field, *Patrology*, to the Lutheran Johann Gerhard, in 1653. It is interesting in Quasten’s account that his argument that this was not a *new* field in the Renaissance and early modern period requires him to return to examples from the Patristic era itself. (*Patrology*, Westminster, MD, Christian Classics, 1984. v.1 p. 1)

⁷⁸ In classical Lutheran dogmatics this is the distinction between the *norma normans*, or that authority which is absolute, vs. the *norma normata*, or that authority which is itself circumscribed or governed by the *norma normans*. Scripture alone is the *norma normans*, while various types of tradition, including doctrinal writings and confessions from all periods of church history, are among the *norma normata*. Martin Chemnitz, in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, lists eight levels of “traditions” seven of which constitute, to one degree or another, genuine authority for the Lutherans, the first of which, Scripture, stands as the source of all truth, and the others are the stream which flows from that source. ([tr. Fred Kramer], St. Louis, Concordia, 1971. v.1. pp. 223-307) While this is the only major Protestant divine to enumerate the operative hierarchy of tradition, it is evident that similar hierarchies are operative in works such as Calvin’s *Institutes*.

⁷⁹ For examples consider: the *Catalogue of Testimonies* appended to the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* of 1580 (*Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis, Concordia, 1921. pp. 1105-1149.) , Note also the study document put out by the theological faculty of Leipzig on the Church’s historic understanding of the role of the clergy, *Vom Beruff und Enturlaubung der Prediger*, (Anthology, unlisted editor) Giessen, Nicolas Hampelius, 1608. and from England, Bois, John, *Veteris interpretis cum BEZA aliisq; Recentoribus Collatio in Quatuor Evangeliiis & Apostolorum Actis*, London 1640.

Epiphanius to support his defense of Lutheran doctrine against the Council of Trent, but both are rejected when their statements run afoul of the Lutheran Confessions.⁸⁰ Obviously, according to Chemnitz, these Fathers were already guilty of Romanist errors. Similarly, although Chrysostom is among Calvin's favorite Fathers to cite in support of the Reformed view of the Sacraments, he carefully distances himself from those passages in Chrysostom's writings which clearly refer to the Lord's Supper as a "sacrifice."⁸¹ What was pure in the Fathers and what was part of the imperfections already present in the early Church was determined by the established agendas of the Lutherans and the Reformed.⁸² The Fathers could speak with tremendous authority, unless they were as mistaken as the later Papists about certain issues. In England, where the Reformation had no such clear doctrinal agenda, the Fathers could be, and often were, given much more weight. Jean-Louis Quantin, in an article surveying the reception of the Fathers in seventeenth century Anglican theology, portrays England as more focused upon Patristic theology than any location or group on the continent, and England was recognized for this Patristic emphasis at the time. Isaac Cassaubon saw England as a refuge from both Catholicism and continental Protestantism where he would be free to follow the theology of the ancient church. Because of England's interest in, and freedom to follow, patristic theology, seventeenth century London became a powerhouse for the production and publication of critical editions of

⁸⁰ In Chemnitz' *Examen* he uses Basil and Epiphanius to make the very Lutheran point that doctrinal formulations are derived from the words of Scripture, though they need not be confined to Scriptural wording. However, within the same discussion Chemnitz rejects these Fathers when they make the very Roman Catholic point that there are also important unwritten traditions in the Church. (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, [tr. Fred Kramer], St. Louis, Concordia, 1971. v.1. p. 257, for the use of these fathers for support, and pp. 287 and 267 for the rejection of the authority of Epiphanius and Basil respectively.)

⁸¹ Cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.18.11 While Calvin carefully does not mention Chrysostom by name in connection with this "error" it is clear from the Chrysostom laden context that he has Chrysostom clearly in mind. The locations in Chrysostom of which Calvin would have been thinking are helpfully cited by the editor of the Westminster edition of the *Institutes*. ("Westminster edition:" [tr. Ford Lewis Battles] Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960. v. 2. p. 1439, n 19.)

⁸² See also Stinger regarding the use of the Lutheran doctrine of Justification as a guideline for reading the fathers among Melancthon and his associates. (*Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977. p. 227.)

the Church Fathers.⁸³ One theologian who gave the Fathers a great deal more authority than was condoned by continental Protestants was Lancelot Andrewes, who often sided with the opinions of the Fathers over those of the Reformers. English theologians such as Andrewes were free to discuss Apostolic Succession and the authority of Tradition in ways that were theologically precluded on the Continent. This would have a lasting impact upon the doctrine and practices of the Anglican Church.

The tremendous concern for and interest in patristics in early modern England is attested by the great number of patristic sources to be found in the Bodleian Library from its inception.⁸⁴ It seems that nearly everyone who was in any way attached to the intellectual circles of Tudor and Stuart England was somehow engaged in reading the Fathers. Bacon himself almost never refers to the Fathers directly, humbly leaving the discussion of theology to theologians, but he was surrounded by academic friends who were immersed in patristic study, two of whom, Andrewes and John Selden, were among the leading scholars in the field in his day. Bacon's own mother, Anne, had learned Latin and Greek and was familiar with the Fathers, and a translation by her sister Margaret of St. Basil's sermon on Deuteronomy 15.⁸⁵ But while Bacon's mother had turned to the Fathers within the doctrinal constraints of a decidedly Puritan agenda, Bacon's literary associates were more liable to consider and develop uniquely patristic doctrines pertaining both to the way of salvation and the concept of God and creation. This, in turn, would influence Bacon's understanding of the purpose and role of natural philosophy.

Despite the numerous and far reaching effects of patristic texts in the early modern period, we lack a body of scholarly literature which deals with the impact of the recovery of the

⁸³ Jean-Louis Quantin, "The Fathers in Seventeenth Century Anglican Theology." in: Backus, Irena (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1997. pp. 987-1008.

⁸⁴ cf. the first printed catalog of the Bodleian Library: James, Thomas, *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Publicae quam vir ornatissimus Thomas Bodlanius Eques Auratus in Academia Oxoniensi nuper instituit; continet autem Libros Alphabetice spositos secundum quatuor Facultates* Oxford, 1605.

⁸⁵ Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: the troubled life of Francis Bacon*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1999. p. 25.

Fathers upon Western European thought. The landmark volumes of essays edited by Irena Backus in 1996 have gone a long way toward “opening the field” as she intended, but the studies therein are introductory at best, and the publication of these volumes primarily highlights the failure of earlier scholars to properly address these issues.⁸⁶ In monographs we have been limited to either discussions of a very narrow focus dealing with the impact and use of patristic theology in the writing or work of an individual, or discussions of parallel topics which nevertheless have a something to do with the “renaissance of patristic studies.”⁸⁷ When dealing specifically with the reception of the Greek Fathers in the West, the field narrows still more. The topic of the use of the Greek Fathers in Western Europe is especially worthy of serious scholarly consideration because it is insufficient to merely recognize *that* Greek philosophy and theology impacted the West through the reading of the Fathers. Important issues are raised by asking *how* the West read the Fathers. The West read the Greek Fathers with concerns and assumptions which were far removed from the cultural context of the Fathers themselves, and hence western thinkers often used the Fathers to draw conclusions which would have been foreign to the intent and understanding of the early Christian East. When considering the influence of Patristic thought upon Francis Bacon and his literary circle, we must bear in mind that we are dealing not with the

⁸⁶ Backus, Irena (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1997. Note the intention of “opening the field” in her introduction, v. 1, p. xi. While her intent was to ensure that the focus was on patristic theology, some essays fall short of the mark, as, for example, Manfred Schulze’s essay on Luther (v. 2, pp. 573 ff.) which traces how Luther interpreted and understood certain ideas and heresies from the early church rather than considering the influence of the Fathers upon his thought. Schulze dismisses any serious use of the Fathers by Luther and closes his essay, trusting that Luther’s negative comments about Erasmus suffice to show that he discounted patristics. (This does not help explain the Patristic theology which has been clearly identified in Luther’s writings by Gustav Wingren, Tuomo Manermaa and others in the field of Luther studies.) More work, and in some cases, work of a much higher caliber, needs to be done.

⁸⁷ Stinger’s work on Treversari comes closest to a direct look at the overall reception of the Fathers in the Renaissance, but his interest is still Treversari and he ends his general coverage when a proper context for Treversari has been achieved. (Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1977.) Charles Trinkaus’ massive treatment of humanist thought, *In Our Image and Likeness*, takes patristic influence into account, but his work has not been followed in this area. Other than these two books, biographical works such as Istvan Bejczy’s treatment of Erasmus, which includes a consideration of his use of the Fathers, are more typical. (Istvan Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2001.)

Fathers themselves, but with a syncretism of Patristic writing with early modern issues and concerns.

The Recovery of Hebrew

Another important intellectual development in this era has received even less scholarly attention, namely the Christian rediscovery of the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Scriptures.⁸⁸ This trend had profound effects upon Christian theology and the Christian world view in the early modern era. At stake was the meaning of two thirds of the Christian Scriptures, and there were, again, profound implications for natural philosophy as well as theology, particularly since the creation accounts of the book of Genesis were involved.

The Christian interest in Hebrew among the Protestants of Bacon's era is best understood as a desire to recover the original sense of the Old Testament through a return to the sources. As with nearly every project designed to recover lost knowledge by a return *ad fontes*, the blossoming of the Christian interest in Hebrew in the early modern era had its beginning among the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, and in particular with Giannozzo Manetti⁸⁹ and Pico della Mirandola. Manetti was led to the study of Hebrew, and the project of making new translations of parts of the biblical text in order to clear up some confusion over the meaning of

⁸⁸ Fortunately for this study the only serious contender for a worthy overview of the topic happens to be a book which has as its primary focus the rise of Hebrew studies in Tudor and Stuart England: Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. Jones is writing at least partly in response to the call issued decades earlier by Israel Barroway for serious consideration of the topic of Hebrew studies among Christians in England, given the subsequent cultural importance of developments such as the King James Bible ("Toward Understanding Tudor-Jacobean Hebrew Studies" in: *Jewish Social Studies*, v. 18, n.1 (January 1956). [Offprint]) Jones' work remains the only answer to that call. Thus, Jones' text serves as the main secondary resource for consideration of this topic.

⁸⁹ G. Lloyd Jones does not give particular place to Manetti, but focuses entirely on Pico as the father of Christian Hebraism. Based upon the discussion of Manetti by Charles Trinkaus, however, I believe that including him in the narrative gives a more properly balanced view of the motivations of the Humanists. (Cf. G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 19 ff., and Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. v. 2 pp. 578 ff.)

the Vulgate Old Testament.⁹⁰ Between Manetti and Pico, Pico was by far the better Hebraist.⁹¹ For Pico, however, the interest was not in recovering the original meaning of the Scriptures, but first a “scholarly and cultural interest in rabbinic literature,”⁹² followed by an intense interest in the mystical writings of the Jewish Cabbala, to which Pico was introduced by his Jewish teachers. Pico was fascinated by the promise of secret magical power and the recovery of a lost ancient wisdom in the Cabalistic writings.⁹³ Thus the motivations for studying Hebrew among the humanists were double: a concern with Scripture on the one hand, and with arcane magical knowledge on the other. The latter interest was also the main motivation for Pico’s greatest disciple, Johannes Reuchlin.⁹⁴ On the other hand, Biblical study was the sole motivation of the Dominican Sanctes Pagninus, perhaps the greatest hebraist of the next generation, who undertook a new translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew in 1524, arguing that the ancient sources used by Jerome were admitted by Jerome himself to be unreliable, and that the Church now had access to the resources to do a better translation. In spite of the inherent criticism of the Church’s official version of the Scriptures at a time when Protestants were busy criticizing the same, Pagninus’ work received praise and sanction from Popes Leo X, Adrian VI, and Clement

⁹⁰ This is at least ostensibly his motive. There is reason to believe, however, that Manetti felt that he could improve on Jerome. (Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. v. 2 pp. 584-85.)

⁹¹ Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. v. 2 p. 508.

⁹² G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. p. 19.

⁹³ G. Lloyd Jones writes of Pico and the Kabbalah: “His Jewish teachers introduced Pico to the Kabbalah, the secret meaning of the Written law revealed by God to the elect in the distant past and preserved by a privileged minority. Kabbalistic teachings fall into three main categories. First, they contain doctrines about the relation between God and creation based on Neoplatonic and Gnostic schemes of emanation. In this way they try to explain the immanent activity of a transcendent God. Second, they contain messianic and apocalyptic doctrines of a more specifically Jewish character. Finally, they offer techniques of spiritual exegesis which are intended to enable the reader to discover profound spiritual significance and hidden meanings in the most trivial passages of Scripture.” and in the Kabbalah Pico “believed that in it he had found an original divine revelation to man which had been lost. He regarded it as authoritative because he accepted the claim of the Jewish mystics that their writings were based on a secret tradition that went back in oral form to biblical times.” (G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 21 & 23.)

⁹⁴ Reuchlin met Pico in Florence in 1490, and had there taken up Pico’s passion for the Kabbalah. (G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. p. 23.)

VII.⁹⁵ In spite of the weight of the Papal imprimatur behind Pagninus' work, the study of Hebrew was suspect among the Roman Catholics of the early sixteenth century, and not only because of the less than wholesome interest in the Cabala which often motivated it.

As with the reading of the Greek Fathers, the intellectuals of the Christian West who undertook the study of Hebrew were entering into a separate cultural tradition, and they came to it laden with the early modern concerns and biases which would shape and color what they found in the Hebrew Scriptures. But in the case of the study of the Old Testament in Hebrew, there was yet another complicating cultural factor: the Christian scholars who undertook it had to rely entirely upon the theologians of another religion in order to carry it off. The keepers of the Hebrew language were Jewish, and the Hebrew texts to which the Christian scholars turned were the product of generations of rabbinic transmission, and a pre-packaged rabbinic interpretive tradition came along with them. Because of the need to rely upon Jewish sources, the study of Hebrew was by far the most controversial humanist undertaking to Roman Catholic theologians. Scholars who pursued the discipline were in the midst of a constant debate. Critics of the study such as Johannes Pfefferkorn, himself a converted Jew, roundly decried practitioners such as Reuchlin as the polluters of the true faith. While Pfefferkorn and his Dominican associates stoked fires with Hebrew texts, Reuchlin found his fellow humanists often reluctant to join him in an unqualified defense of the study of Hebrew.⁹⁶ Even among those who generally supported the study of Hebrew there was a concern over just how much a Christian scholar could trust or rely upon rabbinic commentaries or the cabbala.⁹⁷ Finally, there was a pervasive attitude among

⁹⁵ G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. p. 40.

⁹⁶ See the discussion of the Reuchlin/Pfefferkorn affair in Jones. Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 26-36 The tremendous complexity of the issues involved, ranging from the varying degrees of anti-Semitism involved to the ambivalent attitude of Erasmus, all add into the point that the endorsement of Hebrew as a field of study was far from settled in the Roman Church at this time.

⁹⁷ Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. Note the concerns of Erasmus, p. 31.

those not directly involved in the controversy over Hebrew that regardless of the fascinating insights which Hebrew might offer, the study of Hebrew could only be of limited usefulness. For many, Hebrew had some value as a missionary and apologetic tool for the conversion of the Jews, but there could be no real point in redoing what Jerome had gotten right in the first place.⁹⁸

Objections to the study of Hebrew were almost non-existent among the Protestants, who were not at all convinced that Jerome should have the last word on the Old Testament. The study of Hebrew meshed well with the Protestant concern for getting the interpretation of the Scriptures right, and reforming the Church around the proper sense of the Sacred Text. Thus the study of Hebrew by Christians came into its own among the Protestant movements. G. Lloyd Jones summarizes the Protestant interest in Hebrew:

The Renaissance had attempted to highlight the importance of Hebrew for the Biblical exegete; the Reformation emphasized it still further. It was the Reformation which gave the study of the language among Christians its true significance by providing it with a definite goal: namely, a serious and impartial understanding of the Holy Scriptures freed from the mediaeval hermeneutic. Since the dissemination of vernacular versions of the Bible based on the original texts was high on their list of priorities, Hebrew scholarship came to play an increasingly important part in the educational pattern of the leading Protestants. If the principle of 'Sola Scriptura' was to have any real meaning, scholars had to be trained to cope with the Bible in the languages in which it was first written.⁹⁹

The study of Hebrew took off in Protestant centers of learning such as Wittenberg, where Reuchlin's precocious nephew, Philip Melancthon, taught, and Basel, which was turned into a center of Protestant Hebrew studies by Sebastian Münster, and later Oxford and Cambridge. The reliance upon Talmudic interpretations, or rabbinic authority generally, however, was still very much suspect among the Protestant scholars. Luther, for example, was thoroughly convinced of

⁹⁸ This, for example, is the objection raised by Leonardo Bruni to Manetti. See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. v. 2 pp. 578 ff. See also Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 25, 26.

⁹⁹ Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. p. 56.

the value of Hebrew, but was equally convinced that rabbinic exegesis had no place among Christians.¹⁰⁰ Calvin was cautiously ambivalent about the value of rabbinic sources.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Sebastian Münster's approach drew heavily upon the rabbis of all eras as authorities in Old Testament interpretation, although he much was criticized for this.¹⁰² Münster's work was particularly influential upon English Hebraists, and this ensured that rabbinic sources were also available for consideration in England.¹⁰³ However, this should not be understood as suggesting that all English Hebraists necessarily shared Münster's view of the appropriateness of rabbinic sources, for Calvin's negative-leaning caution was more common.

As a result of the simultaneous rejection of Jerome and the rabbis as proper interpreters of the Hebrew text, there was a prevailing sense among the Protestants that the true Old Testament theology, the true meaning of the original text, was currently being recovered in its fullness. As a result, there was a great deal of variation, and even some genuine fluidity, in Protestant Old Testament exegesis which was lacking in that of Roman Catholics or Jews. (One profitable avenue for research into the rise of Hebrew among early modern Christians would be to consider the divisions among Protestants according to their varying readings of the Old Testament, or principles of Old Testament interpretation.) Whatever the proper interpretation of the Old Testament was, the key to obtaining it was the Hebrew language.

Concerned as Bacon was with the study of Creation, the question of how the first chapters of Genesis should be understood is critical to understanding Bacon's religious assumptions in the writings of the *Instauration* corpus. But these are by no means the only sections of the Old Testament upon which Bacon drew to form the theological underpinnings of

¹⁰⁰ Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 56-66, esp. 59-60 on rabbinic exegesis.

¹⁰¹ Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 76-77, 78-79.

¹⁰² Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. pp. 44-48.

¹⁰³ Jones, G. Lloyd, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: a third language*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983. p. 48

his project. Bacon turns to the prophets, the Psalms, and the histories of the Old Testament throughout his writings in order to establish the foundation of his work and impress its urgency upon his audience. Indeed, the entire *Instauratio Magna* can be regarded as constructed around Bacon's own unique reading of the Old Testament, facilitated by the unsettled state of Protestant Old Testament interpretation at the time. Bacon himself had no ability in Hebrew, but it is significant that he had among the most common readers of his *Instauratio* corpus two of the preeminent Hebrew scholars of their respective generations in England, Lancelot Andrewes and John Selden.

Hermeticism, Alchemy, and the *prisca theologia*

The rediscovery of Greek patristic literature and the rise of the study of Hebrew both facilitated another important trend: the incorporation of hermetic and alchemical traditions (including cabbalism) into the intellectual fabric of the Christian West. It is not the interest of this study to examine the influence of hermeticism and alchemy *per se* on the thought of Francis Bacon and his contemporaries. That is a subject which continues to be handled by a small army of competent scholars. It is very much in our interest, however, to weave these influences back into the context of early modern religion from which they have unfortunately become dissociated.

Since the landmark work of Paolo Rossi there has been a common scholarly agreement that hermetic and alchemical traditions were influential upon the development of Francis Bacon's thought.¹⁰⁴ However, beyond this point the issue becomes muddled by a lack of consensus on the nature and degree of influence which these traditions had upon Bacon's method and program. The situation was complicated by a much larger debate over the role of Hermeticism in the rise of science generally, which was precipitated by the claims made by Francis Yates in her book, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.¹⁰⁵ The subject of Bacon's scientific thought wound up in an

¹⁰⁴ Rossi, Paolo, *Francesco Bacone: della magia alla scienza*. [tr. Sacha Rabinovitch] London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968. The work was originally published in 1957.

¹⁰⁵ London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

unfortunate position at the center of that debate.

In an earlier book, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Francis Yates had brought-up the influence of hermeticism upon astronomy and cosmology, but had ascribed a definite *terminus ad quem* to the influence of hermetic tradition on science, namely, when Isaac Casaubon demonstrated in 1614 that the hermetic writings were not truly the ancient documents that they were supposed to be.¹⁰⁶ In *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* Yates breathes life back into the Hermetic tradition and states that it did, in fact, continue to have a great influence on science through the secret society of the Rosicrucians which spanned the European continent and was dedicated to perpetuating the hermetic and alchemical philosophy of experimentation. In this second book Bacon is portrayed as the English manifestation of a parallel secret movement keeping the hermetic and magical tradition of John Dee alive. Bacon is bolstered by a hot and cold running relationship with his Rosicrucian counterparts, whom he both respects and regards as too extreme. Bacon is particularly secretive about his own hermetic and alchemical ties because of the politically unstable environment of the Stuart Court and the disfavor into which his philosophical progenitor, John Dee, had fallen.¹⁰⁷

While a fascinating story, Yates' basic understanding of Bacon, along with her buildup of the prominence of the Rosicrucians, is very close to pure conjecture. Her book elicited a harsh reaction from many members of the scholarly community who, among other things, seemed to feel that she had laid a lot at the feet of a convenient secret society which we can know little to nothing about.¹⁰⁸ More particularly, there was a strong reaction against the emphasis which had been placed on hermeticism up to that point. Scholars such as Robert E. Westman and J.E.

McGuire dug in their heels and insisted that much of the influence which had been ascribed to the

¹⁰⁶ Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964. pp. 448-9.

¹⁰⁷ The full story is chapter ix of *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. pp. 118-129.

¹⁰⁸ See Floris Cohen's discussion, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. pp. 171-2.

hermetic tradition in the rise of science should be entirely rethought.¹⁰⁹ Among the most vocal and influential critics of Yates was Paolo Rossi, who had, in his own influential and careful study, first demonstrated the connection between Bacon and the magic traditions. In particular, Rossi objected to the reduction of scientific method to an aspect of the hermetic tradition, when much more was involved.¹¹⁰ Rossi was expressing what was evidently a fairly widespread concern that early modern science was becoming eclipsed by the alleged occult interests of the scientists. The strength of the reaction, however, was unfortunate. For even if most of Yates' conjecture is unhelpful to those concerned with demonstrable connections, she was addressing the very real issue that hermeticism and magical traditions lasted far longer than Casaubon's work on the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The influence on Newton in particular can not be denied.¹¹¹ In Bacon scholarship the fallout of the debate on hermeticism and the rise of science has been a bifurcation of the field into those who continue to work on establishing the alchemical and hermetic influences upon Bacon's philosophy,¹¹² and those who do not. In the latter category it is not uncommon to see scholars reverting to the basic point of Rossi: that there was an initial influence of magic upon Bacon's method, but that he quickly moved beyond it to genuine scientific thinking.¹¹³ The issue may lose some of its fire, however, if we consider the magical and alchemical elements in Bacon in light of the theological climate which permitted, and to some

¹⁰⁹ See the Clark Lectures of 1974. Westman and McGuire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution*, Los Angeles, UCLA, 1977. Westman is concerned with reexamining the supposed influence of hermeticism upon Bruni's cosmology, and McGuire seeks to show that hermeticism is not required for Newton's science.

¹¹⁰ H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. p. 180.

¹¹¹ H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. p. 175.

¹¹² That there are such influences, and that they were not entirely displaced by "science" is clear from the studies of scholars such as Stanton Linden ("Francis Bacon and Alchemy: The Reformation of Vulcan." In: *Journal of the History of Ideas*; Oct.-Dec. 1974, v35, n4, p547 (14)) and Graham Rees ("Francis Bacon's Semi-Paracelsian Cosmology and the Great Instauration." In: *Ambix*; July 1975, v22, n2, p81 (20)).

¹¹³ This is where Zagorin comes down, and Floris Cohen seems most comfortable with giving Rossi his due and moving on as well. (Perez Zagorin, *Francis Bacon*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998. pp. 40 ff. H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. pp. 179-81, 293-296.) See Rossi, *Francesco Bacone: della magia alla scienza*. [tr. Sacha Rabinovitch] London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968. pp. 22-35.

degree encouraged, the consideration of these occult or esoteric trends.

It is possible that the reaction against Yates' work was the more vehement because she allowed too much of the perplexing strangeness that the modern thinker feels when confronted with these 'occult' topics to remain in her discussion of the early Modern world. Understood properly, these trends were not as strange or irrational as they seem to us today. Many people were drawn to Hermeticism, alchemy, and the Cabbala, and many more rejected them in the strongest terms, but for the most part they were not accepted or rejected for reasons which would resonate with us today. Negative reactions on our part are most likely due to the fact that these trends contradict what we now believe to be true about the world as a result of our scientific perspective. In the early modern period these traditions were rejected because they were seen to be incompatible with the orthodox religion, as the critics understood it. When Hermetic and alchemical ideas were embraced it was because their proponents truly believed that they were entirely compatible with, and even complementary to, the Faith. Giordano Bruno is a notable exception, but he is notable precisely because his rejection of the Faith was exceptional. For almost all others, Christianity was the ultimate measure and test of all new ideas. All ideas in the seventeenth century were theological in their implications, if not in their very nature. That there was such a profound difference of opinion over whether Hermeticism and alchemy were acceptable, and just how much of these traditions could be accepted, is a further testimony to the tremendous turbulence and diversity of early modern religious opinion. What was at stake in the consideration of hermeticism, alchemy, and natural magic was not merely how the universe was conceived, but how God was understood to interact with the Universe to keep it going. Thus when Ficino rediscovered the *Corpus Hermeticum* he believed that he had found a true source of the *prisca theologia*, the ancient and pure theology.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Stephen McKnight, *The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom: A Reconsideration of Historical Consciousness, 1450-1650*. Columbia and London, University of Missouri Press, 1991. p. 27.

Stephen McKnight has addressed the issue of occult traditions in the early modern period by suggesting that while one trend of early modern theology was toward God's "radical transcendence," another trend, represented by the *prisca theologia* formed an "immanentist theological tradition."¹¹⁵ McKnight's approach has a distinct advantage in that hermeticism and its associates never become divorced from their theological context. The recovery of this supposedly ancient body of otherwise lost wisdom was very much in keeping with the idea recovery of lost learning that was driving the humanist movement in the Renaissance. That important theological works could suddenly be recovered was not shocking, it was common, as our discussion of the recovery of the Fathers has shown. There is a kinship between Ficino's notion of a *prisca theologia* and Erasmus' concern for the recovery of the *vetus theologia*. That the material of this *prisca theologia* should be accepted as genuine Christian source material was a matter of real debate, however. Its proponents such as Ficino were assisted somewhat by the fact that the attitude of the Church Fathers toward the *Corpus Hermeticum* was ambiguous, and could be seen as quite positive. But proponents of the *prisca theologia* were assisted far more by the fact that the Greek Church Fathers in particular held the same platonic and neo-platonic views of an immanent God which are found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and which are the basis of alchemy itself. "Immanentism" was not confined to the *prisca theologia*, but had a solid pedigree in genuine Christian writings. The recovery of Hebrew had opened many new doors, as well, and it was not obvious to men like Pico and Reuchlin that the pious writings of the Cabbala which seemed compatible with the Faith, and were written in the very language which the Holy Spirit had used for the Old Testament, should not be mined for all that they had to offer. Opponents, such as Isaac Cassaubon, focused on the inconsistencies between the *prisca theologia* and an established understanding of orthodox theology, while between proponents and opponents many considered this body of ideas and embraced that which was found to be acceptable to the

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 3.

Christian worldview, even if the tradition itself was far from pure.

In this context, the question of Bacon's reliance upon hermetic and alchemical traditions may be reintroduced without fear of overstating the relationship. For we can see in Bacon's writings clear marks of the influence of the *prisca theologia*, and it is difficult to find evidence of a complete rejection of these ideas. In the *Instauration* writings we see a mind wrestling with just how useful and compatible the occult traditions are when exposed to the light of rational and theological scrutiny. In examining the context of Bacon's theologically charged literary circle we can see both the immanentism and the theological openness which permitted Bacon to wrestle with these concepts in the first place. While these trends were far from the approved direction of the Church of Rome or the Church of England, they were not at this time seen as inherently contradictory to the Faith, and many of the sharpest minds of Early Modern Europe were also far from our own offhand rejection of the "pseudo-sciences." Those who seriously considered the merits of hermeticism, alchemy, and natural magic in early modern Europe, usually syncretized the ideas therein with their Christianity. The key question in regard to Bacon, for we know that he seriously considered these ideas, is the degree to which he syncretized and consequently felt free to incorporate them into his natural philosophy.

The Widespread belief in a Providential Age

Multi Pertransibunt et Augebitur Scientia (Dan. 12:4.) This is the Biblical reference which appeared on the Frontispiece of Bacon's *Instauration Magna* in 1620. Charles Webster has shown that this verse had significant millenarian implications for the Puritans who would inherit Bacon's scientific agenda.¹¹⁶ This raises an interesting dilemma, for while Bacon's followers were clearly interpreting this verse according to millenarian presuppositions, the secondary literature on

¹¹⁶ Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform 1626-1660*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1975. pp. 9 ff.

Bacon rarely even considers any millenarian tendencies in Bacon himself.¹¹⁷ One obvious solution to this dilemma would be to suggest that millenarianism and the Baconian program were simply two trends which met and mingled in the years leading up to the Civil War. There can be no denying that this did happen.¹¹⁸ However, the manifest similarities between the coming golden age of the millenarians and Bacon's own coming age of man's recovery of dominion suggest that more can and should be said.

The silence on the subject of Bacon and millenarianism is most likely due in part to the difference in focus between scholars writing on the thought of Bacon and those writing upon the social and cultural phenomena of early modern millenarianism and apocalypticism. Almost all of the literature dealing with millenarianism and apocalypticism as trends in the early modern period is primarily concerned with popular movements and groups as subsets of a broader society.¹¹⁹ To recognize these groups and movements as distinct from the rest of early modern society these scholars make use of very narrow and specific definitions of "millenarianism" or "apocalypticism," and confine themselves to very narrow aims. Howard Hotson uses a fairly typical example of a narrow definition: "Millenarianism, strictly defined, is the expectation that the vision described in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation of a thousand-year period

¹¹⁷ Complete silence on the subject is most common in treatments of Bacon's thought, though there are what might be called "partial" considerations of the topic. In his recent book, Stephen Gaukroger notes that Bacon's view of the restoration of man's dominion over nature is markedly different from the millenarian idea of a coming golden age, while Katharine Firth and Charles Whitney, as we will see below, both note the affinity between Bacon's thought and popular apocalyptic or millennialist trends. (Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. pp. 77-78.)

¹¹⁸ Charles Webster, being concerned with matters other than Francis Bacon's own thought and writing, is careful not to go beyond the obvious conflux of these trends. Hence he begins his discussion: "At the inception of the English Revolution two themes were brought together which had come to assume particular importance among English Puritans. The first was millenarian eschatology and the second, belief in the revival of learning." *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform 1626-1660*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1975. p. 1.

¹¹⁹ A survey of this literature reveals that the judgment of Margaret Jacob on the subject in 1973 is still fundamentally true: "When historians have dealt with seventeenth-century English millenarianism they have invariably focused on the political ideologies and religious aspirations of the radical sectaries." (Margaret C. Jacob, "Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century" in: John W. Yolton [ed.], *Philosophy, Religion and Science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Rochester New York, University of Rochester Press, 1990. pp. 493 ff.) There are, however, an increasing number of exceptions to that rule, as Jacob herself was beginning to notice.

in which Satan is bound and the saints reign is a prophecy which will be fulfilled literally, on earth, and in the future.”¹²⁰ While authors dealing with apocalypticism are not as prone to forging narrow definitions most still operate with them. While they allow “apocalyptic” to be broadly defined, their interest remains focused on those movements and groups who were obsessed with the literal reading of the book of Revelation and the imminence of the eschatological events described therein.¹²¹ The interest is still, centrally, Johanine apocalypticism and eschatology. One evident difference between millenarianism and apocalypticism is that the former has a distinct interest in the idea of a literal “thousand year period.” However, in the practice of historians this distinction is not always observed. While such definitions are useful in social and cultural history, they can never be entirely true to the history of the source material for the movements and groups discussed, the ancient apocalyptic writings themselves. The Apocalypse of John itself was just one text from a much broader and older tradition of apocalyptic, which permeated the cultures of the Biblical authors and is present, to one degree or

¹²⁰ “The Historiographical Origins of Calvinist Millenarianism” in: *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, [Bruce Gordon, ed.] Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996. v.2. p. 160

¹²¹ Richard Bauckham, for example, begins with the broadest possible definition of apocalyptic, but soon moves to in depth discussions of Revelation and the literal descent of the New Jerusalem, etc. (*Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century apocalypticism, millenarianism, and the English Reformation*, Sutton Courtney Press, 1977. cf. pp. 14-6 and the ensuing course of the discussion.) Katharine Firth and Paul Christianson are two other examples of the same trend. (Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain: 1530-1645*. Oxford University Press, 1979. Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the Reformation to the eve of the Civil War*, University of Toronto Press, 1978.) While other Biblical texts are also considered “apocalyptic” (Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, etc.) the trends being described involve a Johanine reading of these texts as well. Christianson made a commendable effort to separate the definitions of “apocalyptic,” “millennialism,” “millenarianism,” etc. (p. 6) but the subject of his book remains limited to a certain interesting pattern of literal interpretations of John and common ideas from Daniel.

another, throughout the received books of the Christian Canon.¹²² Very few early modern millenarians used Revelation 20 as their sole *sedes doctrina* for their expectation of an imminent golden age. This was a theme which was recognized throughout the Scriptures, as different individuals emphasized different parts of this tradition a wide variety of millenarian and apocalyptic thought developed, only some of which became the foundation for specific groups or movements. A strict and universally applicable understanding of the terminology involved in millenarianism/apocalypticism is not possible, because the movements and ideas themselves are not rigidly bounded. The definitions must always be tailored to the concerns of the historian, and those who are dealing with individual intellectuals are best served by recognizing the breadth of influence which apocalyptic and millenarian ideas have had. The narrow definitions which delineate millenarian groups and their leaders, or which identify a trend toward a specific type of apocalypticism in early modern society, can often obscure the very real variations of apocalyptic thought which were unique to individuals such as Bacon.

Margaret Jacob noted already in 1973 that studies were beginning to emerge which set aside narrow governing definitions and identified “millenarian beliefs and speculations” of individual intellectuals who were commonly considered “social conservatives” and who were not

¹²² To be clear, within the scholarly writings which deal specifically with apocalyptic tendencies in the eras of Second Temple Judaism and the early Christian era, apocalyptic is a literary genre with many characteristic features of which the eschatological speculation which primarily interests scholars of early modern apocalypticism and “millenarianism” is just one example. An operative list of such features may be found in E.P. Sanders, “The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses” in: Hellholm, David (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1983. pp. 456-7. See also the useful comments on early Christian manifestations of apocalypticism by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Wayne A. Meeks in the same volume (pp. 295 ff., and 687 ff. respectively.) The actual extent of apocalyptic influence on early Christianity can be much better appreciated, however, from the studies in Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (eds.), *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1989. As we will see, if read with the idea of a new age of earthly restoration in mind, the Apocalypse of John is just one Biblical source for this doctrine, and it was by no means necessary to consult it at all to support a coming ‘golden age.’

associated with radical millenarian groups and movements.¹²³ The findings of these studies supported observations that Jacob herself had made and led her to conclude that “millenarianism was more widespread than has generally been assumed.”¹²⁴ Her definition of “millenarianism” however, was remarkably broad, potentially including any expectation of a golden age instituted by God.¹²⁵ As the association with an actual “millennium” is optional in Jacob’s definition, it would probably be preferable to speak of a particular kind of widespread “apocalypticism” and reserve “millenarianism,” “millennialism” and “chiliasm” for those varieties of apocalypticism which are connected to a coming age of a thousand years.

Francis Bacon has yet to be the subject of the type of study which Jacob describes. However, in two important studies with other foci, the apocalyptic currents of Bacon’s thought have been noted. Katharine Firth, in her survey of Apocalypticism in Reformation Britain, was primarily interested in examining a broad Johanine cultural trend, but she also took care to consider how intellectuals fit in with or related to, that trend. In looking specifically at Bacon, she identified a certain tendency toward apocalyptic in his thought, though not of a variety which could be clearly identified with the millenarianism which Webster describes. In terms of the

¹²³ “Very recent scholarship, however, has brought to light the millenarian beliefs and speculations of such disparate social conservatives as Richard Baxter, Isaac Newton, and Thomas Hobbes.” Margaret C. Jacob, “Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century” in: John W. Yolton [ed.], *Philosophy, Religion and Science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Rochester New York, University of Rochester Press, 1990. p. 493. Jacob is referring especially to work on Hobbes by J.G.A. Pocock, work on Richard Baxter by William Lamont, and the works on Newton’s religion by L. Trengrove and Frank Manuel.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Because of its applicability to Bacon’s own thought, Jacob’s definition is worth reproducing *in toto*: “Millenarianism simply means a belief in an approaching millennium or earthly paradise, an event foretold in the Scriptural prophecies, and in turn capable of being predicted either by specially enlightened saints or by cautious and exacting scholarship. This new state of human existence would be instituted by divine intervention. The dates of its arrival, the method chosen by God for its enactment, the beneficiaries in the ‘new heaven and the new earth,’ the joy or fear induced by the contemplation of this fundamental alteration in the human condition--on these important aspects of millenarianism we readily admit enormous differences among seventeenth-century believers....Furthermore, the millenarian vision of churchmen placed the church, and not simply the saints, as triumphant in the ‘new heaven and the new earth.’ In the millenarian paradise, and consequently in the historical process that would lead to its creation, the church and the more powerful and prominent members of its laity would lead the nation and finally the world along the stable and peaceful course preordained and guided by providence.” (Margaret C. Jacob, “Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century” in: John W. Yolton [ed.], *Philosophy, Religion and Science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Rochester New York, University of Rochester Press, 1990. p. 494)

broader “apocalyptic tradition Francis Bacon would be classed as a cautious moderate.”¹²⁶

Charles Whitney took a far more direct look at the question of millennialism and Bacon’s thought and suggested a far stronger tendency toward millennialism. Whitney made the important point that in the sixteenth century the books of the early Church Father Irenaeus of Lyon, entitled *Contra haereses*, were published and widely distributed.¹²⁷ This is especially significant since the last five chapters, long suppressed by Church authorities, is an extended chiliastic (or millennialist) treatise and these were included in the versions to which Bacon and his circle had access.¹²⁸ The reemergence of the complete *Contra haereses* was significant, Whitney noted, because it lent Patristic support to a shift in attitude toward the millennium that was taking place in English culture.¹²⁹ Bacon’s works, according to Whitney, must be placed within this millennialist context as representative of the increasing belief in an imminent restoration or

¹²⁶ Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain: 1530-1645*. Oxford University Press, 1979. p. 205-06. The bottom line for Firth is that some form of synthesis of the Baconian program and millenarianism by later thinkers (some form of the “obvious solution” mentioned above) is the best explanation of the situation which Webster describes.

¹²⁷ Irenaeus is the most significant potential influence on Bacon, but he is not the only patristic source to have entertained the idea of an earthly ‘golden age’ as a thoroughly orthodox idea. See Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, London, Routledge, 1997. p. 53; and Michael St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context*, New York, Garland, 1992. pp. 76-79. While Irenaeus is often called “millenarian,” he may not have been interested in a literal thousand year term. Seldom was Jewish or early Christian apocalyptic concerned with being too *literal* about anything in regard to the eschaton. I have some doubt about just how literally Irenaeus meant his own speculations to be taken by his readers. Regardless, however, of how “literal” the thousand years was understood to be by Irenaeus, or, even less likely, the writer of the New Testament Apocalypse, there was a doctrine of a literal “thousand years” which set apart certain groups in the medieval and early modern periods. For Irenaeus’ own words see Grant, pp. 176-82. The scenario of a restored world is central to Irenaeus’ thought, the actual numbers seem incidental.

¹²⁸ As with most aspects of the Patristic impact upon Early Modern Europe, the influence of the publication of all five books of Irenaeus’ *Contra haereses* upon the development of millenarian speculation among intellectuals has yet to be examined. Whitney is not correct when he ascribes to Erasmus a “more complete text” of Irenaeus than was present in the middle ages. (Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986. p. 44.) Erasmus’ text still lacked the critical last five chapters. The first to include them was the edition by Fuardenti in 1575. This, and its subsequent editions through 1596, was actually the most influential version of *Contra haereses*, and it was Fuardenti’s work, according to publication date, which was represented in the Bodleian collection. (Cf. the critical history of the text transmission in Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca*, Paris, 1844 ff. v. col. 1208 ff. and the 1605 Bodleian catalogue, James, Thomas, *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Publicae quam vir ornatissimus Thomas Bodladius Eques Auratus in Academia Oxoniensi nuper instituit; continet autem Libros Alphabetice spositos secundum quatuor Facultates* Oxford, 1605.)

¹²⁹ Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986. pp. 44, 50ff. See Webster’s mention of Irenaeus as well. (*The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform 1626-1660*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1975. pp. 20-21.)

transformation of the world. However, in regard to Bacon proper, Whitney has other interests, and he does not pursue the millenarian or apocalyptic connection further. With the qualification, again, that “millennialist” is probably not the ideal word for what he is describing, Charles Whitney has seconded Margaret Jacob’s argument that the expectation of an imminent “golden age” was not the exclusive property of a radical fringe, but was a dominant theme of the thought and literature of early modern England.

Useful as they are, social and cultural histories of millenarian movements and trends of apocalyptic thought can obscure the fact that the specific movements and trends being considered are but elements of a much broader trend. It is too easy, for example, for the modern reader of these histories to forget that the early modern critics of millenarian sects were themselves steeped in a culture of apocalyptic expectation and speculation, and held ideas which we would recognize as very similar to those which they were denouncing in the sects. Central to the apocalypticism of the early modern period was the belief in a providential age. Throughout early modern Europe there was a widespread belief that a special age had or would soon come upon them in which momentous changes, wrought by the hand of God, would transform the world, and to one degree or another, such an age was foretold in the Scriptures. This belief in an important and glorious providential age was pervasive among Protestants especially, who saw the Reformation as the threshold of just such an age.¹³⁰ It was also a concept which was informed by the tremendous political changes which were taking place in early modern Europe. The emerging sense of

¹³⁰ The images used in Reformation polemic make the apocalyptic significance of the Reformation vividly clear (see Charles Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, Cambridge University Press, 1891. throughout). Consider also the discussion of Jaroslav Pelikan “Some uses of Apocalypse in the Magisterial Reformers” in C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittrich (eds.) *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984. pp. 74-88. Margaret Jacob has made a similar observation. (Margaret C. Jacob, “Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century” in: John W. Yolton [ed.], *Philosophy, Religion and Science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Rochester New York, University of Rochester Press, 1990. p. 494) For Catholics, who interpreted the Reformation differently, the sense of an imminent change was neither so pervasive nor so positive, though among Catholics as well there was a widespread expectation that God would soon deal with schisms and restore the unity of Christendom. Also consider the more overt forms of Catholic millenarianism discussed in Karl A. Kottman (ed.), *Catholic Millenarianism: from Savonarolla to the Abbé Grégoire*, Dodrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

national identity in Europe was enmeshed with ideas of divine favor or disfavor, and the common belief that God was raising-up a particular chosen people for His special work. This was an age when the Providential hand of God was beginning to operate within the bounds of nations. The sailing of the Armada, to the Spanish, was “God’s obvious design,” while the English saw the obvious design of God in its failure.¹³¹ In Bacon’s own writing as well as that of his literary circle, there can be found the conviction that Britain, her King, and her people, were set aside by God for a particular glorious destiny.

All of the members of Bacon’s circle entertained their own scripturally informed ideas of just how God was acting in the world and just what he intended for England in the imminent Providential Age. Bacon’s own vision of what was to come was highly developed, undergirded with Biblical ‘evidence,’ and considerably more specific in detail than a mere vague belief in British destiny. As Charles Whitney has suggested, Bacon’s thoughts on this subject are, by his own admission, a key motivating factor in his Instauration program, and hence his unique apocalypticism may be regarded as an essential part of his intellectual legacy. While this essay is concerned primarily with Bacon as an individual thinker, Bacon is its subject precisely because of the impact which his writings have had upon later generations of thinkers and ultimately upon the formation of Western culture as we know it today. Bacon stands as the fountainhead of Baconianism, his own movement, and future research could be profitably turned toward discussing the unique inherent apocalypticism of Baconianism.

Conclusion

The focus of this discussion has been to highlight important features of early modern English religion which are essential to understanding Bacon and his circle in their proper context. What is important for understanding Bacon is that a unique constellation of religious and

¹³¹ After the death of Mary Queen of Scots Philip’s ambassador in Paris wrote that it was “God’s obvious design” to use him and give him the kingdoms of England and Scotland. (P. Gallagher and D. W. Cruikshank (eds.), *God’s Obvious Design*, London, 1988. pp. vii, 167.)

cosmological ideas came together in his era, and particularly among the members of his literary circle, which informed and permitted the development of Bacon's program for the restoration and advancement of the sciences. The features of the religious context which I have emphasized provide a platform from which we may examine how Bacon and his circle fashioned their own theological positions in an environment of tremendous, though not limitless, diversity. Identifiable landmarks such as Puritanism, Roman Catholicism, the Church Fathers and Calvinist doctrine can help us place Bacon and those immediately around him in a discernible context, but Bacon himself, and most of his literary circle, took advantage of the liberty which a general atmosphere of latitude and tolerance offered. In the next chapter we will place Bacon into the context of the people around him, family and literary associates, and examine how Bacon and his circle both promoted and benefited from the diversity of the Tudor and Stuart religious environment.