
Conflicts of Devotion: Liturgical Poetics in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England

Daniel R. Gibbons

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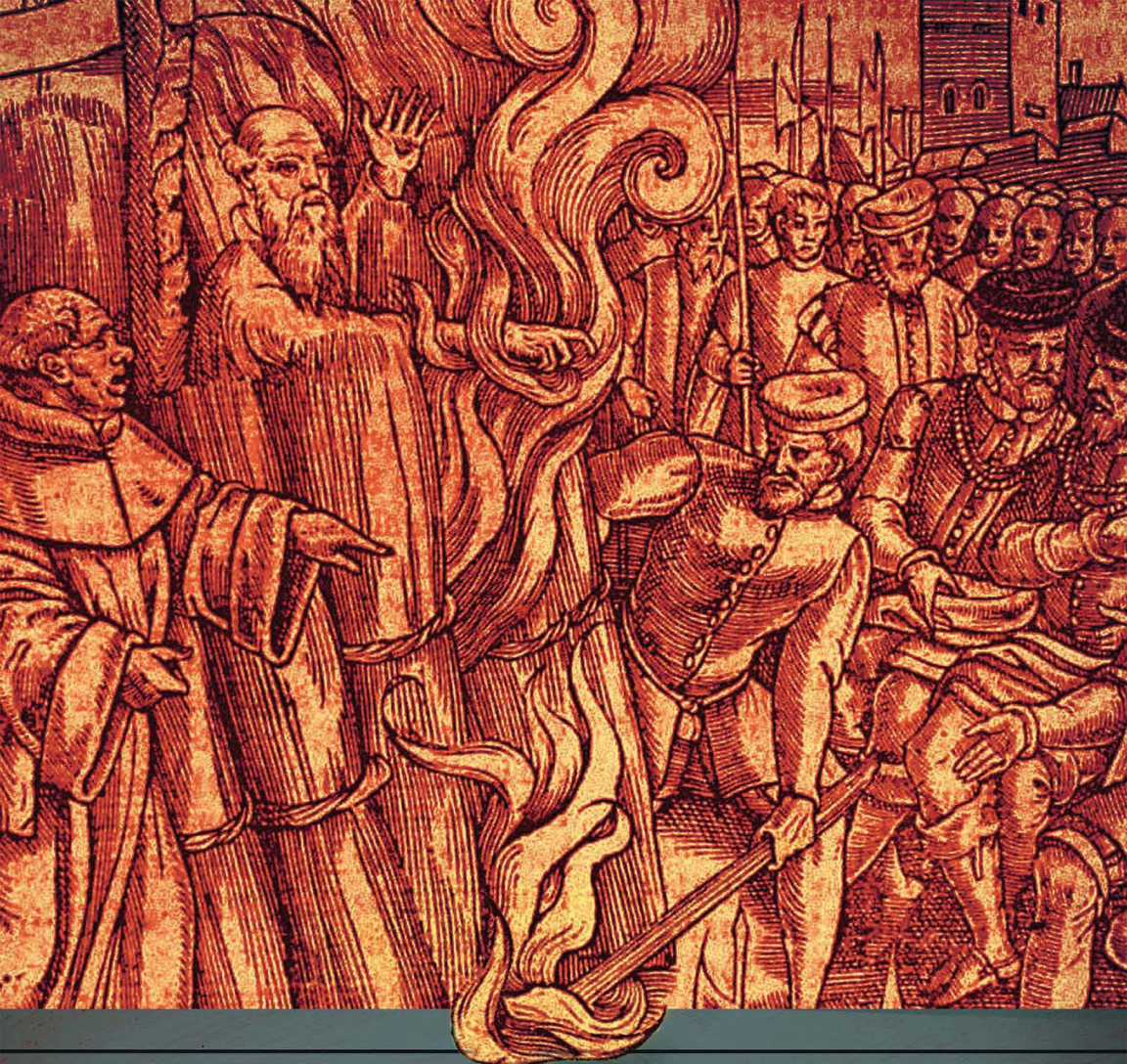
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CONFLICTS *of* DEVOTION

*Liturgical Poetics in Sixteenth-
and Seventeenth-Century England*

DANIEL R. GIBBONS

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Seventeenth-Century England*

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To my parents, my wife, and my sons.

*Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem,
fortunam ex aliis*

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall beleve on me through their word; That they all may be one, as thou Father art in mee, and I in thee, that they also may bee one in us: that the world may beleve that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them: that they may bee one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in mee, that they may bee made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent mee, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

—John 17:20–23 (KJV 1611)

So when one person has said “Moses thought what I say,” and another “No, what I say,” I think it more religious in spirit to say “Why not rather say both, if both are true?” And if anyone sees a third or fourth and a further truth in these words, why not believe that Moses discerned all these things? For through him the one God has tempered the sacred books to the interpretations of many, who could come to see a diversity of truths. Certainly, to make a bold declaration from my heart, if I myself were to be writing something at this supreme level of authority I would choose to write so that my words would sound out with whatever diverse truth in these matters each reader was able to grasp, rather than to give a quite explicit statement of a single true view of this question in such a way as to exclude other views—provided there was no false doctrine to offend me.

—Augustine, *Confessions* 12.31

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Part I. Redrawing the Boundaries</i>	
1 Accommodation and Exclusion: Writing Community in the 1559 <i>Book of Common Prayer</i>	29
<i>Part II. Early Responses—Mourning and Exclusion</i>	
2 Failing Consolation in Edmund Spenser's Elegies	75
3 Robert Southwell's Mission of Mourning	121
<i>Part III. Later Responses—Accommodating the Mystical Body</i>	
4 Reading Communion: Mystical Audience in John Donne's Lyric Poetry	153
5 In or Out? Lingering on the Threshold of George Herbert's <i>The Temple</i>	202
6 Incarnating Mystical Community in Crashaw's English Lyrics	231
<i>Notes</i>	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	296
<i>Index</i>	313

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Introduction

Who will pray with me? Who will mourn with me? Who is my neighbor? During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the population of London doubled, as explorations of the “new world” across the Atlantic reshaped Europeans’ vision of their place in the world, as wave after wave of religious changes swept over England, and as political and religious strife turned Englishmen against each other, knowing who one’s neighbor was could be difficult. This book examines a series of attempts to rewrite English spiritual community by drawing together divided audiences in a common work of liturgy and poetic devotion from the time of Henry VIII up to the middle of the seventeenth century. In the midst of the crisis of spiritual community that erupted during the English Reformation, we can see the flowering of a new liturgical poetics energized by writers’ desires for preservation, negotiation, and extension of spiritual community, a communitarian poetics that developed alongside the increasingly polarizing tendencies of Reformation-era polemical writing.

It would be difficult to deny that Tudor and Stuart England suffered a crisis of community that began with Henry VIII’s break from Rome (and the resulting redefinition of England’s spiritual and political relationship with international Christendom), erupted into uprisings

and social unrest during the reigns of Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, ebbed in the latter half of Elizabeth's reign and during the reign of James I, and finally exploded in the civil wars of the 1640s. Of course, any particular Englishman's sense of the nature of, causes of, and solutions to the crisis depended upon his particular religious and political commitments. However, some kind of extraordinary reconfiguration of English Christians' sense of a spiritual "us" seems to have been felt by nearly everyone—from yeoman to pastor to monarch—during the century and a half after the break from Rome. Some celebrated the change, some mourned it, but few were left unaffected by it.¹

Although they would attribute blame to different causes, Catholics and Protestants alike felt the shocks of social and spiritual discord that were fracturing English Christians' sense of spiritual community in families, parishes, dioceses, the national church, and the notional international body of Christendom.² Perhaps such a sense of crisis was only natural in the uncertain early years of religious change, as the theology of the authorized religion shifted from Protestant to Catholic to Protestant again under Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, and certainly local experiences of it were neither uniform nor static.³ Still, a general sense of fracture persisted well beyond those changes, continuing beyond the end of Elizabeth's relatively stable reign, as the hope for a broad reformed consensus dissipated and opposed confessional categories solidified.

In *The Execution of Justice in England*, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, accused the pope, underground priests, and recusant Roman Catholics of sowing division in England. He defended the Elizabethan government's imprisonment and execution of recusant Catholics as a proper response to treason and fomentation of rebellion. For Burghley, the dissent of Roman Catholics (whom he portrayed as inevitably treasonous after the promulgation of *Regnans in Excelsis*, the papal bull pronouncing the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I) was to blame for the continuing sense of communal fracture in the 1580s.⁴

William Allen, on the other hand, claimed that Catholics were the ones striving for unity and peace while unjust government persecution was in fact responsible for provoking discord and strife.⁵ Whoever was to blame, both sides could agree that something was rotten in the state of England and that religious discord was at the root.

Although the state could, as Burghley argued, employ lethal force to keep religious discord in check, such means were not capable of producing a stable sense of spiritual cohesion among English Christians either locally or at the level of the national church. If such spiritual unity were possible, it would require conversion rather than compulsion. Within the English church, religious reformers composed and promulgated new vernacular prayers and liturgies meant to create a new unity of worship—and thus, eventually, a unified sense of spiritual community—across the whole of England. It is easy to overlook this fact when examining the conflict and fragmentation that accompanied the English Reformation. I do not mean to deny that, as Ethan Shagan has so persuasively argued, early modern claims to moderation that now may generate “cosy connotations of equanimity and reasonableness” were inevitably linked with “coercion and control.”⁶ Yet I do maintain throughout this book that a genuine desire for spiritual communion was at the heart of the poetic participation in the reformation of English religious life that is the primary focus of this study. Desire for a more unified spiritual community led religious writers in England to attempt to remedy what they saw as a debilitating lack of unity among their countrymen and fellow Christians. It was an ambitious undertaking worth attempting to understand on its own terms, even as we continue to examine its unintended consequences.

Late medieval English religion was, in some respects, simultaneously more diverse and more unified than what emerged in the wake of the religious changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Throughout fifteenth-century England, there was a relatively consistent theological and ritual core to the Mass, but the way it was organized and celebrated was not entirely uniform in different dioceses. The official rituals (or “use”) of the Mass changed as one traveled from region to region. Vestment colors and designs, the schedule of readings, the ceremonial movements through the church and at the altar, and even the order and wording of prayers showed different influences and traditions of development in the liturgical uses of different regions. These differences were often relatively slight from a modern perspective and were relatively well regulated by the religious authorities, but the Mass was by no means the whole of ritual life for Christians in the Middle Ages. A fifteenth-century Englishman who traveled out of his

parish for any length of time could not have helped noticing that popular traditions of mourning, religious festivals, favorite local saints, and sometimes particularities of sacred geography and church architecture all led to considerable liturgical variations outside of the Mass—sometimes even from parish to parish in the same diocese.⁷

This state of affairs seems not to have been distressing to most late medieval English Christians, but it was an important part of early reformers' understanding of what they were reforming. As Thomas Cranmer famously put it in his preface to the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, the first full liturgical book in the vernacular that England had ever seen, "And where, heretofore, there hath been great diversitie in saying and synging in churches within this realme: some folowyng Salsbury use, some Herford use, some the use of Bangor, some of Yorke, and some of Lincolne: Now from hencefurth, all the whole realme shall have but one use."⁸ Cranmer's story of the liturgical reformation was a story not of emerging fracture but of a new unity out of earlier corruption, dispersal, and confusion. The First Edwardian Act of Uniformity gave legal teeth to Cranmer's liturgical aspirations, demonstrating the importance of promoting and enforcing religious unity in the reformers' Erastian vision of English religio-political community.⁹

Strict laws, however, could as easily provoke rebellion as promote unity. Citing Aristotle's discussions of community in the *Politics*, Debora Shuger points out that a purely coercive church that did not promote like-mindedness and benevolent friendship could never produce a true or stable community.¹⁰ Peacefully reshaping the religious practices of local communities that had always enjoyed the freedom to maintain diverse traditions of worship, while also inculcating the faithful with the new reformed doctrine, would require new ways of writing liturgy, new rhetorical and poetic approaches to producing shared experiences of worship and devotion suitable for the divided English religious community. I call this new set of approaches *liturgical poetics* in order to highlight the importance of both the poetic character of liturgy—the creative *poiesis* required for its composition—and the liturgical potential of poetry, its capacity to make spiritual communities out of its audiences. In an era when the "mystical body" of Western Christendom was rapidly fragmenting, an attempt to realize spiritual

community might still begin with the creative activity of writing a litany or collect, but the authority and efficacy of new liturgical texts were far from certain for many Christians. Richard Hooker called the *Book of Common Prayer* “a pattern whereby to frame all other prayers,” and many religious poets in England seem to have agreed, even if their understanding of that “pattern” diverged from Hooker’s.¹¹ New challenges to English spiritual community presented new possibilities for poets to reshape their audiences by resisting or supplementing the authorized liturgies. If godly English divines like Cranmer could rewrite the Mass, then why shouldn’t inspired English poets compose new litanies, or even sing new psalms?

The liturgical poetics that emerged in the early revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, while sometimes hotly contested, was deeply influential for the generations that came after. Indeed, the Tudor/Stuart Prayerbook can fairly be said to have had the deepest and most lasting effect on British religious culture of any single liturgical book in English, even into the present day. Timothy Rosendale has persuasively argued that the influence of the vernacular Prayerbook was at least as powerful and persistent as that of the vernacular Bible.¹² I am inclined to agree with his evaluation, and would add that the Prayerbook’s influence was indirectly intensified even as it was refashioned in the rich body of early modern English spiritual literature that employs liturgical poetics outside of a literally liturgical context.

At the risk of putting it crudely, we might say that the new vernacular liturgical texts that emerged during the reigns of Henry VIII and his children provided standard authorized “scripts” for both public and private religious practice for generations of English Christians. They offered a new model of reformed spiritual experience, new ways of confronting death and joining in spiritual communion with one’s fellow Christians. These liturgical texts demanded participation even as they studiously avoided requiring precise theological agreement on many contentious questions. Their carefully crafted rhetoric was designed to produce a new, unified, English and Christian “we” through the performance of vernacular communal rituals. The whole of the vernacular Prayerbook was aligned with this social goal, but I would suggest that the changes made to the rituals for Communion and burial had the

most immediate and profound impact upon English notions of spiritual community. The promise and problems evident in these attempts to rewrite the English church at its most crucial moment of sacramental realization and at its most contested and painful boundary could not help but perplex and inspire English writers who attended or led Prayerbook services—or else paid dearly for their refusal to do so.

Attending to the liturgical poetics of the *Book of Common Prayer* thus offers a useful vantage point for a fresh look at early modern religious writing, bringing into focus the many ways in which English Christians attempted to engage problems of spiritual community generated by the English Reformation. While the writers examined in this book all shared a common goal of promoting spiritual community in their poetry, there is a noticeable shift of emphasis over time from earlier attempts to remediate problems of memory and mourning (as the Elizabethan church sought to settle its turn away from the beliefs and rituals of the past), to later struggles with the boundaries of the church itself (as confessional divisions deepened and as hope for a unified earthly community of Christians waned in the seventeenth century). My study begins with a close analysis of the 1559 Prayerbook's texts for Communion and burial, then turns to examine various forms of liturgical poetics in the lyric poetry of Edmund Spenser, Robert Southwell, John Donne, George Herbert, and Richard Crashaw. In every case, we find writers who struggled against religious fragmentation, who marshaled all of the linguistic force they could to write a way out of the crisis of spiritual community dividing the English and dividing England from the larger body of Western Christendom.

The first chapter focuses on the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*—the liturgical centerpiece of the Elizabethan “settlement”—to illuminate two key rhetorical goals that informed its liturgical poetics: accommodation and exclusion. The first of these, rhetorical accommodation, is exemplified by the language of Eucharistic reception in the Prayerbook's rite for the Holy Communion. The compilers of the 1559 Prayerbook ambiguously combined two conflicting theological discourses in an attempt to make the Holy Communion spiritually palatable to a broad swath of the conformist congregation, in spite of their varying religious commitments. However, the communal and mystical implications of

this rhetoric of accommodation were, in practice, far more interesting to religious poets than the pastoral/political expediencies of the Prayerbook. The second goal is exemplified by the Order for the Burial of the Dead, which seeks to turn the affect of mourners away from the deceased and toward the Christian community in this world. While this rite left more room for traditional passions and practices than many reformers approved of, the general emphasis of the Elizabethan church on instruction of the bereaved—rather than traditional ritual mourning and memorialization—opened a significant gap in English funeral culture just waiting to be filled. The liturgical poetics at work in the 1559 Prayerbook—its strategic deployment of accommodation and exclusion—produced a range of unintended linguistic and spiritual consequences with which literary authors would grapple for at least a century. After the foundational chapter on the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, the study explores the ways in which these rhetorics of accommodation and exclusion are deployed, explored, challenged, and expanded by both Protestant and Roman Catholic writers in England.

The second chapter focuses on Edmund Spenser's major pastoral elegies, *Daphnaïda*, the November eclogue in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, *Astrophel*, and *The Doleful Lay of Clorinda*, in order to illuminate his struggle with the seeming inadequacy of the authorized rhetoric of didactic exclusion in Elizabethan mourning. This chapter argues that Spenser sensed a poetic opportunity in the consolatory insufficiency of the Order for the Burial of the Dead and seized that opportunity by attempting to establish elegiac poetry as the best reformed replacement for the traditional liturgical forms of communal mourning and consolation that had been suppressed by the Elizabethan church.

The third chapter focuses on the English Jesuit Robert Southwell, who found himself on the losing side of the Roman/Reformed divide in Elizabethan England and was executed for his part in the Jesuit mission. Like Spenser, Southwell saw poetic opportunities in the Elizabethan church's spare treatment of mourning and memorialization. Southwell redeployed the rhetorical exclusions of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* in poems designed to preserve and promote traditional habits of religious memorial devotion and traditional attitudes toward the Communion of Saints in audiences far broader than those that could be

reached by polemical theology or his clandestine sacramental ministry in England. Thus I argue that even as tenacious an opponent of the Elizabethan church as Robert Southwell was deeply influenced by the Prayerbook's liturgical poetics.

The fourth chapter shifts the focus from mourning what was lost to attempts at poetic reconstitution of spiritual communion. I begin with a close examination of John Donne's poetic extensions of the Prayerbook's rhetorical accommodation, in which he characteristically harnesses multiple opposing voices to generate bewildering semantic excess. Donne uses this excessive accommodation to produce mystical communities out of the geographically and theologically dispersed readers of his devotional poetry. Examining both his explicitly religious and his ostensibly profane poetry, this chapter argues that Donne's lyrics were both more communitarian and more mystical than literary scholars have tended to recognize. This argument not only offers new insights into Donne's devotional poetry but also seeks to expand our understanding of the communal character of much "metaphysical" poetry.

The fifth chapter demonstrates the anxious oscillation between accommodation and exclusion that structures the introductory sections of George Herbert's *The Temple*. Herbert's book portrays itself as an instrument for quasi-liturgical communal reading practice more explicitly than most of the other works examined in this study. However, it is also far more ambivalent about the possibility of community formation through devotional reading. Especially in the book's framing devices and its treatment of the Eucharist, we can see an important contrast to the literary optimism of the other poets that I discuss. I argue that much that is seemingly contradictory in the opening sections of *The Temple* can best be understood as an anxiously parochial representation of the troubling dynamics of accommodation and exclusion active in the formation and maintenance of an English liturgical community striving to be true to the letter and spirit of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The final chapter explores the ways in which, in spite of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, many of Richard Crashaw's lyrics reflect his spiritual upbringing and ministry within the Stuart church. Crashaw's poetry offers a deeply troubled but ultimately transcendent meditation on the communitarian potential of the rhetorical accommo-

dation authorized by the liturgies that molded his spiritual sensibilities throughout his youth and his time as a priest in the English church. This final chapter sheds light on a persistent hope that liturgical poetics in devotional poetry could heal the deep fractures in the national (and international) community of Christians even as England spiraled toward the civil war that resulted in Crashaw's exile and conversion to Roman Catholicism. Although Crashaw's vision of a unified and tolerant spiritual community was not to be realized in his lifetime, it is a vision worth careful consideration as religious tensions continue to provoke violence in our time.

In each of the liturgical texts and poems included in my study, I find that the same ideas and ways of speaking dividing the soul of England, and thus the audiences of English poets, were reshaped into varieties of liturgical poetics meant to preserve or renew communal spiritual bonds in the midst of that division. As St. Augustine observed in his *Confessions* (in the passage that is the second epigraph to this book), speaking many things to many audiences in a single text is not necessarily duplicitous equivocation but may in fact be prophetic utterance. The attempt to craft a liturgical poetics that could overcome the crisis of community in Reformation England was undertaken in a wide variety of ways by writers who were themselves rooted in, formed by, and committed to the messy business of religious life in an imperfect world. Their writing struggles to find a voice that could reach the divided, and often antagonistic, audiences to whom they were compelled by art and faith to speak.

Much excellent work on the interdependency of religion and literature in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England has emerged in the years since Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti famously pointed out a trend that they described as a "turn to religion" in early modern studies.¹³ They rightly portray the work of scholars like Debora Shuger and Julia Lupton as both a provocation to take religion seriously on its own terms and an exemplar of just how illuminating rigorous attention to the "otherness" of early modern religion (and, as Lupton has emphasized, our own unrecognized entanglements with that "other") can be for literary critics and historians.¹⁴ Shuger's call to focus more scholarly attention on the religious alterity of early modern "gender, sexuality,

class, power, and selfhood” has had such a profound impact on literary studies in the last two decades that, as Gregory Kneidel drily observed, “it is now difficult to find a book on religion and early modern literature that does not engage these questions.”¹⁵ Kneidel’s book “rethinks” the “turn to religion” by focusing on the “Pauline universality” that Lupton placed in constructive tension with alterity criticism. I will not attempt a full survey of the field here, but I will suggest that this tension between alterity and universality is a useful schema for understanding the current state of affairs in the scholarship on early modern English literature.

In the introduction to a recent collection of essays on Shakespeare and religion, Jackson and Marotti again address the “turn to religion,” aligning scholarship focused on alterity with historically focused scholarship and aligning scholarship focused on universality with theoretically focused scholarship. They argue that “both theory-centered interpretation and more distinctly historical scholarship are on the cusp, as it were, of developing a new and surprisingly compatible understanding . . . that challenges the still standard Enlightenment divisions between the religious and the secular, faith and reason, the transcendent and the immanent.”¹⁶ It is not entirely clear whether the convergence observed by Jackson and Marotti is best understood as a deconstructive collapse of binary categories, as a Hegelian approach to dialectical transcendence, or as something quite other. However, I do think that the best recent work on religion and literature has sought to account for both the alterity and the universality of early modern literature in ways that dissolve a clear distinction between sacred and secular.

Some examples published within the year or two before the writing of this introduction will illuminate the diversity of ways in which this work is being carried out. David Loewenstein’s rich study of heresy in early modern literature and culture generally maintains a tight historical focus on the violent potential of early modern anxieties about the boundaries of religious community, but his use of Jean Delumeau’s more general category of “religious fear” and his commentary in the introduction and conclusion ensure that the “universal” implications of his study are never far beneath the surface.¹⁷ Brooke Conti’s *Confessions of Faith* illuminates a series of strange eruptions of autobiographi-

cal statements within polemical writing that both reveal and conceal the incommensurability of Reformation-era spiritual experience with the calcifying confessional categories of seventeenth-century polemics. Her study enriches both our recognition of the strangeness of early modern polemic and our awareness of a nascent “modern” spiritual experience that does not align comfortably with the theological language of the religious establishment.¹⁸ More overtly political and theoretical in its approach, Nandra Perry’s *Imitatio Christi* illustrates both the historical particularity of early modern *imitatio* as a way of life responsive to the spiritual crises of the English Reformation and more universal, humanistic concerns about the limitations of language and the agency of the individual that resonate with twentieth-century discussions of the emergent public sphere.¹⁹ Even more explicitly engaged with the recent surge of interest in “political theology” sparked by the work of Shuger and Lupton is Jennifer R. Rust’s *The Body in Mystery*. Her reexamination of early modern developments in the theology of the *corpus mysticum* clarifies the way in which it was “a primary premodern category of social belonging” while also making a compelling argument for the continuing relevance of a sense of sacramental communion to the putatively secular modern notion of the commonwealth.²⁰ All of these notable recent studies of early modern religion and literature contribute to a growing sense that the “secularization thesis,” which understands early modern literature as displacing religion in a clear step toward the secularization of Western culture, is in need of serious qualification.²¹

Although I did not set out to write a challenge to the “secularization thesis,” my study of liturgical poetics does end up implicitly questioning prevailing narratives of secularization, while also resisting accounts of early modern political theology that pay more attention to systematic theological or political writing than to the aesthetics of religious literature. Whether this book should be considered a study of “political theology” (as influentially defined in the recent collection of essays edited by Graham Hammill and Julia Lupton) or not, I do wish to contribute to the development of a “formal and phenomenological accounting” that can better account for “the successive claims for attention, acknowledgement, resistance, and reform by means of which religion keeps surviving its various modern overcomings.”²²

One important reason why I hesitate to describe this as a study of political theology is that, in spite of the fact that some of the writers discussed in this book have been important to our understanding of political theology, once I move beyond the *Book of Common Prayer* itself the particular aspects of liturgical poetics that I examine here generally aim to escape both politics and theology as such. The poets on whom this book focuses do make use of political and theological discourses, but only as instruments for accomplishing spiritual work that they understood not only to fall outside the horizon of politics and theology, but even to transcend early modern anxieties about signification.²³ Liturgical poetics is, at least for the writers I discuss in this book, a way of doing rather than meaning. It is responsive to the crisis in which “political theology” emerges, but its focus is the making of spiritual community itself. Perhaps this would fall under a broad definition of “political theology” after all, or perhaps in the end it is just what Hammill and Lupton call “religion.”²⁴

Still, I am deeply indebted to scholars like Shuger and Lupton for their work to more firmly situate our understanding of early modern literature, religion, and society within the transcendent horizon presumed by most writers and readers at the time. To fully understand the kinds of community-making language at work in liturgical writing, for example, one must retain a clear sense of the complex interpenetration of the earthly and spiritual communities assumed by early modern Christians. Perhaps the most important *locus classicus* for the relation of heavenly and earthly communities in Christian thought is St. Augustine’s famous discussion of the relationship between the “city of man” and the “city of God.” As he articulated it, there are “two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another.”²⁵ These two cities are “intermingled” but still distinct from one another in both character and ends: “[These] two cities, different and mutually opposed, owe their existence to the fact that some men live by the standard of the flesh, others by the standard of the spirit. It can now be seen that we may also put it in this way: that some live by man’s standard, others by God’s.”²⁶ The simultaneity, or interwovenness, of these two “cities” in temporal and physical terms does

not prevent a clear and crucial recognition of their differences from one another in Augustine's analysis, and neither should it prevent us from acknowledging the reality of the "earthly city," whose ambitions and coercions did play an important part in the formation of English religious culture, while still pursuing a more subtle understanding of the "heavenly city" in which writers like Cranmer, Spenser, Southwell, Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw were attempting spiritually to dwell, and into which they were attempting poetically to clear pathways for those who would read their liturgical and lyrical texts.

This study therefore maintains a strong sense of the ways in which the variety of concerns that play out in early modern spiritual writing may be fully understood only when we take into account the spiritual dimensions of Elizabethan and Jacobean Christians' social experiences. Debora Shuger put it well when she argued that "religion is . . . not *simply* politics in disguise, a set of beliefs that represent and legitimate the social order by grounding it in the Absolute," and that "religious belief is 'about' God and the soul as much as it is 'about' the sociopolitical order. Whether or not one believes in the former two entities, one gains very little by assuming that the culture under investigation did not itself comprehend the essential nature of its preoccupations."²⁷ Like Shuger, I read religious literature not to demystify it or reduce it to mere political ambition or psychological compulsion (though such things likely do play at least some role in the production of most religious literature) but rather to clarify for modern readers—regardless of their own beliefs—the zealously spiritual writing of zealously spiritual persons. This study, while attempting to remain cognizant of the political dimension of religious life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thus chooses to err on the side of what its subjects might have called charity with regard to the sincerity of their belief that religion is prior to politics, both temporally in the life of a person and metaphysically in the order of reality. This includes pursuing the implications of their writing within a conceptual framework that presumes the existence of a spiritual realm that, as the saying goes, "always-already" implicates human beings in its moral, soteriological, and eschatological economies.

Fundamental to the social view of early modern Christianity of nearly all types was the sense that spiritual unity of one kind or another

ought to exist not only among Christians in this world but also among all those who belong to the “body of Christ,” whether they are in this world or the next.²⁸ Although the early modern interest in building and maintaining a sense of spiritual community played out in any number of contexts, from litanies and processions, to nonliturgical preaching, to domestic prayer, spiritual reading, and psalm singing, the most obvious texts for the physical enactment of spiritual society, the communal fleshing out of the “heavenly city,” may be found in the various liturgies that brought English people together—whether willingly or unwillingly—to worship, to celebrate, and to mourn.

For this reason, I begin my study with a close consideration of liturgical texts to identify some of the ways in which spiritual community came to be formulated by Elizabeth’s religious establishment in one of the most ubiquitous religious books of the period: the *Book of Common Prayer*. The focus here is not only on developing a better picture of how religious community was represented in the Elizabethan liturgies but also especially on recognizing some of the most spiritually problematic features of the Prayerbook’s liturgical language in its treatment of two of the rituals most obviously concerned with questions of community: Holy Communion and the burial of the dead. The theological formulations of the Communion and burial language of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* present a set of authoritative responses to essentially communal questions that remained unresolved in English spiritual life during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite countless elaborations of law and doctrine designed to regulate communal belief and religious practice in England.

My research therefore has broad implications not only for the study of early modern literature and culture but also for our understanding of the language and literature of religious community more generally. Reading through the lens of liturgical poetics, my work challenges studies that have underemphasized the mystical concerns of the poetry that emerged out of the fractures resulting from the English Reformation and, in so doing, allows us to recognize what fertile grounds those very social and religious fractures provided for early modern lyric poets determined to revitalize their spiritual communities with songs of consolation and songs of devotion.

In addition to engaging the tension between alterity and universality that has energized much recent scholarship on religion and literature in early modern England, this study engages with a longer arc of scholarship exemplified by an earlier body of literary history and criticism. Two of the most influential twentieth-century approaches to understanding religious literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were exemplified in the work of Louis L. Martz and Barbara Lewalski. Their work may be most usefully distinguished by their opposing emphases on Christian interpermeability and “catholicity” (Martz) and confessional distinctiveness (Lewalski). In some ways, Jackson and Marotti’s interest in the tension between alterity and universality echoes the tensions between the accounts of Lewalski and Martz.

In *The Poetry of Meditation*, Martz sought to demonstrate the relative permeability of religious categories in early modern spirituality by developing more fully Helen C. White’s argument for the powerful influence that continental—and mostly Roman Catholic—spiritual writing had upon religious literature in England.²⁹ While White focused on devotional prose writing, Martz extended the argument to the so-called “metaphysical” poets. Martz placed a great deal of emphasis upon the structures of meditation articulated in devotional manuals like St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, locating similar structures in the poems of a wide range of writers, including poets who were generally not thought of as leaning toward the Catholic end of the confessional spectrum, such as George Herbert. Explicitly challenging Martz’s emphasis upon continental and Catholic sources for English Protestant devotional modes, Barbara Lewalski proposed a model for early modern English poetics informed more by “contemporary, English and Protestant influences than [by] Counter Reformation, continental, and medieval Catholic resources.”³⁰ In Lewalski’s view, these “influences” were characteristically Bible centered and therefore distinctively Protestant. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of whether Lewalski’s assertion that biblicism was primarily the domain of Protestants is accurate (I address some of the difficulties with that argument in chapter 3), we ought to recognize that her attempt to erect clear boundaries between English Protestant poetry and Catholic devotional literature encouraged the flourishing of a more refined body of scholarship

uncovering the breathtaking complexity of aesthetic and religious modes that fall under that seemingly simple category “Protestant”—certainly an important development.

However, in part because of this increasing focus upon the diversity of religious beliefs and practices active in post-Reformation England, it has become clear in the last few decades that attempting to confine religious poets within sharp confessional boundaries often does more to cloud our understanding of their writing than to clarify it. Although relatively few literary scholars have explicitly or trenchantly rejected Lewalski’s model, as I noted above, recent scholarship has tended to be less interested in delineating a single distinctive “Protestant poetics” than in shedding light on the diverse, hybrid, and often conflicted, religious valences of post-Reformation English literature.³¹

As literary scholars’ historical and theological understanding has grown more nuanced, however, new challenges have emerged. Among them is the increasing difficulty of formulating analytical terms appropriate to the divergent modes of belief and practice that influenced religious writers. Problematic terms like *Protestant*, *Catholic*, *Puritan*, and *Anglican* are now generally understood to be much less reliable than was previously assumed. Individual English Christians, and perhaps especially the sorts of Christians who write devotional poetry, do not often fall entirely within a tidy confessional category. Scholars working in the field now tend to maintain a felicitous sense of the messiness that characterized much religious life in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. I would suggest that the careful complication of religious categories undertaken by historians and literary scholars in the last few decades has vindicated Martz’s sense of the porousness of confessional boundaries within the realm of religious literature, but with a somewhat broader sense of the sources and pathways of mutual influence.³²

My study is thus interested in shedding more light on the complicated spiritual tensions and interrelationships at work in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious poetry. I do this by engaging each of the texts under consideration at crucial liminal points where the attempt to negotiate among competing senses of spiritual community gives rise to ingenious appropriations of the languages of theological division in service of communal reconstruction through liturgical poetics.

One might argue that “communal reconstruction” is a naive or tendentious way of talking about what the compilers of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* and the poets examined in this study were attempting to do. In the last decade, along with the more general “turn to religion,” there has been a minor resurgence of interest in liturgy as a proper subject of literary analysis, but the terms of the discussion have often been less positive. Richard Helgerson’s treatment of the Prayerbook as entirely an instrument of coercive ideological power designed to serve the interests of the absolutist state is a strong example of this tendency.³³

Approaching the English Prayerbook with only slightly less suspicion, Ramie Targoff’s seminal *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* issued an important challenge to the typical alignment of Protestantism with the elevation of individuality and interiority over exteriority and collectivity. Targoff argues that late medieval Catholic worship was more individualistic and interiorized than early modern English Protestant worship, which emphasized conscious participation in vernacular ceremonies to replace the highly individualized devotions encouraged in primers for the laity at Mass during the late Middle Ages. Targoff takes a relatively moderate tack with regard to the political character of the Prayerbook, asserting that we ought not to regard it as an exclusively political instrument; however, her approach still emphasizes the ways in which the Prayerbook may be seen as a covert coercive instrument of the Elizabethan religious establishment: “Behind the introduction of a liturgy emphasizing the worshippers’ active participation and consent lies the establishment’s overarching desire to shape personal faith through public and standardized forms.”³⁴ Targoff’s approach is laudable for taking seriously the distinctly spiritual aims of the authors and compilers of the Prayerbook, and especially for noticing the impact of the Prayerbook upon English devotional sensibilities more broadly, but does not account fully for the deep ambivalence about the relationship between private belief and public practice exhibited in many parts of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*.

In *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, Timothy Rosendale addresses this question in his attempt to get beyond reductive depictions of the Prayerbook as an instrument of political or ecclesiastical coercion, arguing that a profound tension between

public and private beliefs and practices is woven into the very fabric of the Prayerbook. Rosendale sees the Prayerbook as embodying, in its very forms and language, a characteristic post-Reformation attempt to negotiate between a felt necessity for public unity and a tentative sense of the desirability of private multiplicity. Rosendale argues that the Prayerbook's attempt to reformulate this relationship between public and private, interior and exterior, "played an important role in reconstituting the terms in which it was possible to think about reading, individuality, and England itself."³⁵ He maintains that the Prayerbook attempts to solve a set of religio-political problems created by the production of vernacular Bibles and that it may serve scholars today as a key to understanding the most important social and spiritual tensions of early modern England, tensions that inform the works of English writers from Sidney and Shakespeare to Milton and Hobbes.

This ambitious attempt to see in the *Book of Common Prayer* both the undisputed fact that, "amid the chaos of contemporary European politics and the burgeoning multiplicity of unruly English individualisms, liturgical form was a creative assertion of temporal, political, and social order" and the less widely recognized fact that "Prayerbook theology and worship . . . allows—indeed, encourages and demands—a crucially individual authority in religious life and activity" is a necessary development in our understanding of the authorized English liturgies' relevance to more obviously "literary" writing.³⁶ If we accept Rosendale's analysis, we must recognize that to study the relationship between the *Book of Common Prayer* and English literature is not primarily to locate linguistic echoes or borrowings of liturgical language and imagery by English writers but rather to analyze the Prayerbook's deeper conceptual and semiotic "matrices" (as Rosendale calls them), or ways of formulating responses to the basic social, spiritual, and linguistic questions of the post-Reformation era, to which the Prayerbook gave seminal literary expression, and in which the writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not help but participate in one way or another.

The most recent major study focused on the literary implications of the English Prayerbook, Daniel Swift's *Shakespeare's Common Prayers*, is even closer to my own approach than Rosendale's insightful study.

Swift's examination of Shakespeare's literary engagement with the *Book of Common Prayer's* rites of matrimony, communion, and baptism understands the Prayerbook as the product of complex social negotiations and the source of both communal identity and spiritual struggle.³⁷ Swift's book exhibits a nuanced literary understanding of the Prayerbook, and it draws persuasive connections between the liturgical texts of the English church and the writing of the greatest dramatist to worship in that church. Swift pursues his study as a focused, historical exploration of Shakespeare's personal fascination with the Prayerbook up to around 1604. The close focus on Shakespeare that is one of the merits of *Shakespeare's Common Prayers* also proves to be one of its limitations, however. Swift's penetrating focus is admirable, but it does limit his discussion of the broader patterns of response to the Reformation-era crisis of community in England. The breadth of this study, while it cannot provide as detailed an examination of any one author, allows us to recognize a broader pattern of developments in the history of liturgical poetics. I hope that this broader analysis will open the ground for even more focused research into the great variety of writers and liturgical texts that have shaped post-Reformation understandings of spiritual community.

One key idea about which Swift and I agree: vernacular liturgical texts did not merely offer a storehouse of felicitous phrases to English writers or a flawed instrument of social control to Elizabethan officials. For Christian audiences, the new liturgies also opened up new ways of thinking and writing about one's place in a spiritual community that infinitely exceeded the boundaries of kingdom or empire. While Rosendale places greatest emphasis on concepts of representation implicit in the Prayerbook, following out their implications into the social and political spheres, I focus more directly upon the textual nuances of the *Book of Common Prayer's* ways of articulating and negotiating divided community in the crucial rites of Communion and burial because the tensions that we find there, rather than producing relatively stable solutions to the social problems of post-Reformation England as Rosendale argues, in fact reflect persistent forms of communal irresolution that the poets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sought to overcome in their literary writing.³⁸

Lyric poems are not usually liturgical in the most literal sense: they are not (for the most part) meant to be used as instructions for the physical and public enactment of religious rituals. However, they are often liturgical in their attempts to generate new shared spiritual practices that bring readers into communal experiences of the divine. Although they are not literally liturgical “scripts,” devotional poems are common scripts for individual performances by readers, who may become through their shared experiences a new kind of community. Thus I would maintain that all of the lyric texts examined in this study are sincere attempts—using relatively noncoercive means—to rebuild a sense of spiritual community that had been damaged by the religious turmoil of the early sixteenth century. This shared literary pursuit of spiritual unity cannot be fully understood by means of empirical documentary evidence but may be glimpsed in the interplay of accommodation and exclusion in poems produced by writers caught up together in, in spite of being divided by, a common set of spiritual problems.

Attention to writers’ ways of imagining their communities structures most of my discussion of both community and audience in the following chapters. My diction here might remind some readers of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, one of the late twentieth century’s most influential studies of the dynamics of power at work in the formation of nationalist communities, but the questions I have in view are rather different from Anderson’s concerns. Anderson is most interested in the development of imperialist and nationalist power structures out of the combination of large social/material shifts such as the decline of privileged textual languages (e.g., Latin) and strong monarchs, or the flourishing of vernacular print and capitalism.³⁹ These are not the concerns of this project, though Anderson and I do share an interest in the ways notional communities emerge and are put to use. While my work does have implications for how we understand the early development of pluralist modes of thinking and writing, the main trajectory of this study is toward a more nuanced examination of spiritual senses of Christian community, spiritual senses that often stand in opposition to nationalist ideologies by proposing a transcendent “us” of which the nation or commonwealth is at best a dim reflection. This

transcendent community was a primary locus of communal identity, individual loyalty, and ethical action with which any emergent nationalism would have to contend.

The texts examined in this study were most emphatically not, however, produced by people who thought of themselves as standing in radical opposition to the political authorities. All of the writers that I will discuss considered themselves to be perfectly loyal subjects of the English monarch—including even Robert Southwell, whose protestations of perfect loyalty to Elizabeth I did not save him from being executed for treason. These writers did not articulate antinationalist or antimonarchical theories but instead attempted to work out ways of engaging their imagined audiences that could sustain religious community in spite of the deepening confessional divides that separated English Christians from one another in spirit, and even (in the case of exiles to the Continent or the Americas) in body.

Implicit in these literary endeavors are the cultural seeds of attitudes toward mourning and religious pluralism that persist even into our own time, though the vines that have sprung from those seeds have often produced fruits that might not have suited the tastes of the writers who planted them.⁴⁰ Literary scholars who are beginning to focus more carefully on the cultural impact of the peculiar ways of representing and shaping spiritual community found in the liturgy and lyrics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are only just starting to be able to discern the complicated lines of influence that liturgical poetics had upon the English imagination. My stake in this newly expanding field is to convey the surprising ways in which much early modern poetry was crafted not only to reflect upon the culture of worship out of which it arose but also to reshape that culture. Most remarkable is how often writers attempted to accomplish that reshaping using the very same threads of language that were dividing them. This book is a close examination of how English Christian writers who were all, in one way or another, religious conformists sought to fill in the gaps left by the radical spiritual shifts of the sixteenth century. Although their beliefs and styles of writing were diverse, they shared a common goal: forging anew the fractured English spiritual community in the fire of poetic devotion.

A NOTE ON CONFESSIONAL TERMINOLOGY

No terms for identity categories will ever be without their problems, but one can hardly write of the Reformation era without adopting some confessional terms. In general, I have tried to use terms that reflect the perspectives that I see at work in a particular text or writer. This means that I have not imposed a single set of terms throughout the whole of this study and have instead adopted a variety of terms with different connotations in an attempt to align the terms of analysis with the attitudes to religious groupings implicit in whichever set of texts I am examining.

When discussing early modern religious writing, one cannot help but encounter the difficulty involved in naming and describing the broad and ever-changing spectrum of confessional groups, modes of belief, and types of religious practice at work in England after the Reformation. As countless historians and literary scholars have argued in the scholarship of the last several decades, commonly recognized terms like *Puritan*, *Anglican*, *Protestant*, and *Catholic* are all problematic because the terms themselves invest one in claims about the religious topography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that are often inaccurate.

For example, *Anglican* in the sense that it is often used today, a sense informed by Restoration-era emphasis upon ceremonialism and *via media* theologies, is not at all an adequate term for the peculiar forms of episcopalian Calvinism that were dominant in Elizabeth's church and still strong in England during the early decades of the seventeenth century.⁴¹ Using the term *Anglican* to describe the official Elizabethan religion is anachronistic enough to distort the subject one is trying to describe. Similarly, *Puritan* was often used as a pejorative term by those who wished to portray more zealous or less traditional Christians as somehow outside of the proper religious community, and thus the use of that term tends to conceal the prevalence of zealous Calvinist beliefs among clearly establishment religious figures such as Archbishop Cranmer.⁴² *Protestant* was a term originally used to describe a particular set of German princes after their opposition to Charles V and only slowly came to be a catch-all term for Western Christians who were not Roman Catholic; thus it could be considered anachronistic. The capitalized term *Catholic*, while neither pejorative nor necessarily

anachronistic, is usually meant to refer to Roman Catholics, even though we ought to acknowledge that one would have been hard pressed to find an English Christian who did not consider himself to be a part of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Diarmaid MacCulloch put it well in his magisterial study of the era: “The word ‘Catholic’ is the linguistic equivalent of a Russian doll. It may describe the whole Christian Church founded two thousand years ago in Palestine, or the western half of the Church which split from mainstream eastern Christianity a thousand years ago, or that part of the western half which remained loyal to the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) after the sixteenth century, or a Protestant European Christian who thought that the Bishop of Rome was Antichrist, or a modern ‘Anglo-Catholic’ faction within the Anglican Communion.”⁴³ Granting the title of “Catholic” only to Roman Catholics in a sense places one in the position of implicitly taking one side in the dispute over the nature of the true church, but the usage is so common on all sides today that it is hard to avoid.⁴⁴ As soon as one begins naming, one finds oneself enmeshed in the very controversies one is trying to describe.

Even the somewhat less loaded and more descriptive terms *traditionalist*, *reformist*, *Reformed*, and *evangelical*—terms that I use at various points in this study—sometimes run the risk of falling into new anachronisms by attempting to avoid old ones. The more closely one examines the positions staked out on the Elizabethan and Jacobean spectrum of beliefs by complicated and contradictory human beings, the less one can hope for terms that will accurately express the relevant similarities among believers without obscuring at least some crucial differences. Thus, in order to avoid confusion as much as possible, I will briefly describe what I mean by the terms for religious groups, movements, and sensibilities that I use in this study, in the hope that my uses of terms will do more to illuminate than to obscure the religious dynamics at work in the texts I am analyzing.

The four most common terms that I use to denote religious groups are *traditionalist*, *reformist*, *Catholic*, and *Protestant*. I generally employ versions of the first two terms in sections focused on texts produced by writers who were not Roman Catholic (who generally employed more subtle terms of difference to distinguish among various

shades of Christianity) and the second two in sections focused on texts produced by writers who were Roman Catholic (who were aware of the various shades of Protestant belief but generally treated them with less precision). However, when the word *Protestant* appears as a non-pejorative self-descriptor in the context of a writer's own work—as is the case with Spenser—I do not hesitate to use it as well. Taking this approach allows my analysis to stand, as much as possible, within the frame of reference active within a particular set of texts, which serves to highlight most clearly the ways of representing or producing community most distinctive of those texts. Thus I even go so far as to use pejorative terms like *papist*, *puritan*, and *heretic* if they best capture the shade of pejorative identification at work in a text. The use of these terms should be taken, not to suggest my approval of their implications, but rather as a means of allowing some descriptive license in cases where it seems necessary to maintain a clear sense of what a writer is attempting to do in a particular poem. Finally, when I use the terms *Protestant* and *Catholic*, I will use them in the common modern way as shorthand for “Roman Catholic” and “Western Christian who is not Roman Catholic.” Most of the terms that I use should be reasonably accurate when considered in their particular contexts and should not require extensive qualification. I will, however, briefly discuss the less common or obvious confessional terms that I employ throughout this study.

The term *traditionalist* is not merely an oblique way of saying “Roman Catholic”; instead, it refers to a region on the spectrum of belief that could be inhabited by people who held a wide variety of beliefs on questions such as the proper authority of the bishop of Rome but who generally retained a significant amount of theological or emotional loyalty to the “old ways”—that is, to the modes of belief and practice characteristic of late medieval English Christianity. Using this term accounts for the fact that, especially in the sixteenth century, one did not need to accede to all of the theological and jurisdictional claims of Roman Catholicism to retain a lively belief in something like transubstantiation, or purgatory, or the efficacy of prayers for the dead. I also use *traditionalist* as an adjective describing any particular belief that might generally be associated with either medieval Christianity or the vision of Roman Catholicism articulated by the Council of Trent.

Thus a devoted and zealous member of the official English religion after 1558 might still be described as holding or expressing “traditionalist” sensibilities on one or more specific questions. This way of speaking is necessary if one wants to avoid erasing the real complexities involved in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian faith, where it was common enough to retain a fair number of “traditional” beliefs, while still clearly aligning oneself with either Reformed or Lutheran beliefs about many fundamental questions.

Similarly, *reformist* is a broad term referring to a region on the spectrum of belief inhabited by people whose trajectory was away from the “old ways” and toward some version of the emergent theologies founded on the writings of figures like Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, and Calvin. I also employ *reformist* as an adjective to describe particular beliefs or attitudes proposed or exhibited by Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, et cetera, but not necessarily severing one from Roman Catholicism. Expressing one or more reformist beliefs or preferences would not necessarily or definitively align one against the “old ways” or Roman Catholicism any more than holding a traditionalist position on, say, the proper vestments for ministers to wear would automatically make one a Roman Catholic. I occasionally use the term *evangelical* to describe a religiously zealous, but not generally politically radical, subset of these reformists. I often use the term *Reformed* to more precisely distinguish between “evangelical” Lutheranism and the theological ground (deeply influenced by but often not identical to Calvinism) that English churchmen from Cranmer to Donne believed themselves (more or less) to share and presumed to be the essential identity of the official religion in England during the reigns of Edward VI, Elizabeth I, and James I.

PART I

Redrawing the Boundaries

CHAPTER 1

Accommodation and Exclusion

Writing Community in the 1559 Book of Common Prayer

Yet because there is no remedy, but that of necessitie there must be some rules: therfore certein rules are here set furth, whiche as they be fewe in nombre: so they be plain and easy to be understood. . . . It is more profitable, because here are left out many thynges, whereof some be untrue, some uncertain, some vain and supertsticious: and is ordeyned nothing to be read, but the very pure worde of God, the holy scriptures, or that whiche is evidently groundd upon the same: and that in suche a language and ordre, as is moste easy and plain for the understandyng, bothe of the readers and hearers. It is also more commodious, bothe for the shortnes thereof, and for the plaines of the ordre, and for that the rules be fewe and easy. Furthermore by this ordre, the curates shal nede none other bookes for their publique service, but this boke and the Bible: by the meanes whereof, the people shall not be at so great charge for bookes, as in tyme past they have been.

And where heretofore, there hath been great diversity in saying and singing in churches within this realm, some following Salisbury use, some Hereford use, some the use of Bangor, some of York, and some of Lincoln, now from henceforth all the whole realm shall have but one use.

—Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's Preface to
The Book of Common Prayer, 1549

If we take Cranmer at his word, we see that he understood *The Book of Common Prayer* as an attempt to produce spiritual unity in a community that had been disordered and divided since long before Henry VIII's break from Rome. Cranmer's winsome description of his new liturgical manual portrays the Prayerbook (and by metonymy the whole of the new religious order of Edward VI's church) as a solution to an old communal problem rather than the imposition of a new ecclesiology. Perhaps these divisions are overstated in Cranmer's Preface. I know of no evidence that many late medieval Christians were seriously troubled by the liturgical diversity Cranmer describes.¹ Whether or not Cranmer's representation of the liturgical situation in England is somewhat disingenuous, even a modern reader can feel the attraction of Cranmer's language of consolidation, simplification, and ease of use. People today may still hold all manner of religious commitments and beliefs, but most tend to value transparency, accessibility, and "user-friendliness." The subtle force of Cranmer's rhetoric is not entirely lost on us, even nearly half a millennium later, but of course every affirmation of one idea risks the exclusion of many others. We might share Ethan Shagan's sense that "moderation could be made to support very different agendas; as a language of control, it was an enormously useful tool for early modern elites to defend and naturalise their various and sometimes contradictory ideological programmes."² Because the word *diversity* now carries positive connotations that Cranmer could not have imagined, we are likely to regard his blithe exclusions of "vaine and superstitious" things with more suspicion than he could have anticipated.

Regardless of how persuasive a modern reader may find Cranmer's justifications of his liturgical reforms, we can see in his prefatory comments a tension between two fundamental rhetorical patterns that framed the basic structure of the English Reformation: accommodation and exclusion. The early reformers could not afford to alienate the vast body of Englishmen who did not yet share their theological convictions and aesthetic tastes, but they also could not afford to tolerate for long the traditional beliefs and practices that, in their view, kept that body of Christians ignorant of the true gospel and yoked in spiritual submission to the false beliefs of the Roman Antichrist. And so began a careful play of accommodations and exclusions, the canny manage-

ment of which was essential to the remarkable success of the English Reformation during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Both accommodation and exclusion are necessary for the formation of any community—some will be “in” and some will be “out”—but the way in which a community manages the boundaries of its “us” by accommodating and excluding determines its character. The placid air of resolving old communal divisions that we find in Cranmer’s Preface belies the alarming new divisions that had begun to emerge during the decades preceding the Preface’s publication—divisions that the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* deepened even as its proponents attempted to produce the liturgical unity Cranmer envisioned. These divisions were neither exclusively political nor exclusively religious, but were the products of the mixed motives of people who, for all of their violent disagreements, would have been united in despising our way of separating religious from political life. In the sixteenth century, politics was (at least in part) a product of theology and personal belief. Separation of church and state in any way other than jurisdictional would have been a repugnant notion to Christians (and pagans) living before the eighteenth century. Although the intermingling of religious and political life was a source of deeply satisfying social unity in times of relative religious stability, in times of religious fragmentation the interdependency of church and state could quickly turn theological arguments into serious threats to the commonweal.³

The array of fine theological distinctions that began to take root in the hearts of English religious and political leaders during this period had intellectual, social, and often all-too-physical effects. While disputes over the Eucharist, predestination, faith and works, and liturgical vestments seem to many twenty-first-century readers like petty squabbles about minor theological details—absurd conflicts like Swift’s egg-cracking debate between the Big-Endians and Little-Endians in Lilliputia—for sixteenth-century English men and women those theological arguments not only were a matter of life and death in this world but carried eternal consequences in the afterlife. Indeed, though most of the disagreements of the Reformation era were generated by competing answers to subtle theological questions, the turmoil that erupted out of those theological disputes during the first half of the sixteenth

century was so grave that it threatened to tear England apart at the seams.⁴ This chapter will examine the role of the English vernacular liturgy in the Elizabethan attempt to manage the social impact of those theo-political disputes by means of rhetorical accommodation in the Communion rite and didactic exclusion in the Order for the Burial of the Dead. These two rituals, both of which are deeply concerned with the renewal of spiritual community and the management of its boundaries, not only are fascinating dramatic texts in themselves but also had profound unintended consequences for the English sense of spiritual community and the poets who sought to reshape and sustain spiritual communities in their verse.

AN UNSETTLING BOOK: THE EMERGENCE AND PROMULGATION OF THE *BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*

Although the history of the “Elizabethan Settlement” and its Prayer-book will be familiar to specialists in early modern English religious history, I will digress from the main argument for a few pages to provide a brief review of the process by which the *Book of Common Prayer* came to inhabit such a central place in English culture. Readers more familiar with this history may proceed directly to the next section of this chapter and pick up the thread of the argument there, while readers less familiar with this history may abide with me to travel over that well-worn historical ground whose topography is necessary background for following the argument of the rest of this chapter and the whole book.

When Elizabeth Tudor acceded to the throne in 1558, intense pressures both abroad and within England made it imperative that a stable transition of power take place and that a stable national identity be re-forged without too much visible internal conflict.⁵ This national identity had to compete with, control, or contain the various unstable religious identities extant among the English in order to secure a relatively unified front against England’s major political rivals, France and Spain. One of Elizabeth’s first projects upon her accession was the uprooting of her half sister Mary’s work to reestablish Roman Catholicism in English law and religious practice.

To accomplish this without provoking rebellion in the more staunchly Catholic north and west of England, Elizabeth's bishops would need to "settle" the major theological disputes in favor of Elizabeth's preferred moderately Reformed religious establishment, but in a way that would allow room for a limited spectrum of private practices and theological opinions on matters that did not present a perceptible threat to the regime. The need for this so-called Elizabethan Settlement led the queen and her supporters to secure the passage of legislation establishing Elizabeth's supremacy over religion in England. Elizabeth's religious supremacy required, in turn, that the monarch's agents hold the power to enforce uniform adherence to the authorized theology in the preaching and liturgy of all English parishes. Key to establishing uniformity of teaching and worship at the parish level was the promulgation of a standard liturgical book for all English churches—the sort of unifying Prayerbook that Cranmer had helped to produce for King Edward VI. Indeed, that same Prayerbook, tweaked to fit the queen's preferences and the pressures of the mid-sixteenth century, turned out to be just what Elizabeth's church needed.

There is no clear evidence that would allow us to determine exactly who was involved in the process of revision that produced the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, or even to suggest how the revision proceeded. Norman Jones offers a series of possibilities, none of which can be excluded by the meager documentation that does exist: "Perhaps the divines met and decided that fewer changes were necessary than were envisaged. . . . Or perhaps it was decided that the book needed so little revision that the committee never met (thus explaining why there is no evidence of any meeting). Or perhaps Elizabeth's conservatism exerted itself in limiting the number of changes she allowed the committee to make. Finally, there is the slight possibility that the committee prepared a revision which met so much opposition in Parliament that it was withdrawn and replaced with the slightly modified 1552 version."⁶ We may not know precisely how the 1559 revisions of the 1552 Edwardian Prayerbook took place, but it is clear that the editors of the authorized Elizabethan liturgical texts were faced with a difficult rhetorical task nearly identical to that faced by Cranmer when he first set out to perform the audacious work of inventing a reformed Christian liturgy

in English. The new liturgy book would need to draw together a geographically and socially diverse audience whose members held widely divergent beliefs about contentious doctrines like the “real presence” of Christ in the Holy Communion and prayer for/to the dead. The 1559 version of the *Book of Common Prayer* engaged this divided audience by means of both delicate accommodations and trenchant exclusions. Whether or not the Elizabethan editors intended the book as a final articulation of Reformed English Christianity, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* did, in fact, institute most of the theological principles, attitudes, and ways of using language that would later come to be seen as characteristic of the Church of England.

What emerged out of the ecclesiastical and parliamentary negotiations of 1559 was a hybrid text that combined elements of various vernacular liturgical texts and the earlier versions of the Prayerbook on which Thomas Cranmer and a number of other English Reformed divines had been working throughout the previous decade.⁷ Doubtless, the rhetorical texture of this hybrid text is marked by the countervailing forces involved in its composition and compilation. However, there is more to be gained from a close study of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* than a historical lesson in the difficulties of theology by committee. One could fruitfully follow the various threads of theology in the Prayerbook to their historical, textual, and political sources, but I am more interested in the immediate implications of the Prayerbook’s language, especially as the hybrid language of the whole final product became an authorized religious rhetoric in England, a way of writing communal worship that would penetrate the spiritual vocabularies of English poets from Spenser to Crashaw.

Although no full vernacular liturgy was issued during Henry’s reign, there had been much work on early drafts of vernacular and reformed liturgical texts and prayers, many undertaken at the king’s order. Any vernacular liturgical or ritual prayers could, in the context of the early sixteenth century, be seen as theologically loaded, not because they were explicitly forbidden, but because of a general sense among traditionalists that the abandonment of Latin in the liturgy or other religious rituals would inevitably be little more than a step down the slippery slope into Wycliffitism, Lutheranism, or other heresies, which were

perceived as inevitably leading to general social and spiritual chaos.⁸ Brian Cummings also speculates that for most Christians in the sixteenth century there may have been a sense that prayers translated out of Latin might no longer be able to produce the spiritual effects they were intended to accomplish (*BCP*, xxiii).

While reformers advanced the idea that prayers whose language could not be fully understood by the one praying were useless, or even impious, traditionalists maintained the usefulness and beauty of the Latin prayers. This defense sometimes relied on a mystical attitude toward divine ineffability. Edmund Shether (a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, who was made a preacher at Canterbury by Cranmer himself but was later prosecuted for his resistance to Cranmer's religious program) articulated an especially pithy version of this argument in his sermon at St. Stephen's, Canterbury, in May 1543: "Some of you say that men cannot pray in an unknown tongue because they understand not what they say. But I say that no man understandeth what he prayeth, as St. Paul sayeth, *nescit homo quomodo orandum sit, sed spiritus hominis docet quomodo orandum sit.*"⁹ What could Shether possibly mean when he denies that one can understand even one's own vernacular prayers? What could one understand better than words proceeding from one's own heart and mind, spoken in one's mother tongue? Shether's claim may at first seem absurd, but its substance becomes clearer when it is placed in the context of a mystical understanding of both the insufficiency of all language and the ineffability of the divine.

We might compare Shether's argument to Emmanuel Levinas's more recent articulation of the false thinking and ethical failure produced by confidence in human notions of the divine. While in other places Levinas criticizes what he considers a displacement of true ethics in Catholic ritual and sacrament, in an essay entitled "Loving the Torah More Than God," Levinas argues for a beneficial sense of the ineffability of the divine not dissimilar to Shether's:¹⁰

But with what lesser demon or strange magician have you therefore filled your heaven, you who claim that it is empty? . . . The God who hides His face is not, I believe, a theological abstraction or a poetic image. It is the moment in which the just individual can

find no help. No institution will protect him. The consolation of divine presence to be found in infantile religious feeling is equally denied him, and the individual can prevail only through his conscience, which necessarily involves suffering. . . . This condition reveals a God Who renounces all aids to manifestation, and appeals instead to the full maturity of the responsible man. . . . It is precisely a word, not incarnate, from God that ensures a living God among us.¹¹

Levinas argues that it is the very sense of God's concealment or incomprehensibility that makes possible the recognition that he is other than the "infantile" images and notions of God that humans tend to create for themselves. If one is thinking "God," one is further from true knowledge of God than a person who is confronted with divine obscurity. Levinas presents a spiritual stance similar to Sheth's in its attention to the limitations of human conceptions of the divine. For him, the best way to really encounter God is thus through the Torah, through texts that are other than God but that, by their very obscurity, constantly remind us of the otherness of God.

While reference to Levinas may help us to find a more modern language by which to approach Sheth's advocacy of linguistic alienation with respect to the divine, we must also recognize what is distinctive about the Christian model of linguistic alienation proposed by Sheth. Sheth's defense valorizes a model of cooperative interiority that relies upon divine involvement in the individual's reproduction of or participation in imperfect prayers, prayers whose divine addressee is best apprehended by starting with consciousness of one's lack of full rational understanding. One has to recognize one's own failure to understand if one is to rely properly on the work of the Holy Spirit to lift up one's imperfect prayers.

Sheth's characterization of the ultimate ineffability of the divine and the insufficiency of human language confounds the typical reformist characterization of traditional religious practices as mere form and exterior piety masking spiritual ignorance, emptiness, or impiety. Indeed, one could extend Sheth's defense of Latin prayer to the conclusion that the real impiety lies in vernacular prayers. He does not say

this explicitly, but it follows from his argument that vernacular prayer denies the need for grace by overvaluing our own ability to speak of eternal things in language familiar to us.¹²

Shether's defense of Latin prayer implies a distinctive vision of the worshipping self. The self is most itself when it remains consciously open to divine activity, when it maintains certain absences in itself out of respect for the divinity who is radically other, yet is intimately involved with the worshipper. In this view, we understand God best when we know that we are not understanding and thus remain more open to his unspeakably mysterious work in and through us. We understand ourselves best when we are constantly reminded of our alienation from the sacred, even in our most pious acts. Shether's mystical defense of his traditionalist affection for church Latin is atypical, but he gives voice to an intuition that many other traditionalists likely experienced but could not or simply did not articulate.

At the other end of the theological spectrum stood those who believed that the obscurity of Latin was not only spiritually counterproductive but also a useful obfuscatory tool for venal clergy who wished to subjugate and deceive their naive congregations. For English reformers (and the whole *sola scriptura* movement, really), the drive to vernacularize rested upon the premise that clear, plain, reliable meanings are available in translations of texts. An attitude like Shether's might not be seen as entirely false (as it is at least loosely based on scripture), but it would likely be dismissed by reformers as yet another papist attempt to mystify and obscure scripture in order to take advantage of the ignorant. The move toward vernacular liturgies began with a licit but untraditional push to legitimize, and eventually to require, communal public prayer in English. Because so much Christian communal prayer is based upon scriptural texts like the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer, vernacular translations of some biblical texts were unavoidable.¹³ The movement beyond piecemeal ad hoc translations for specific liturgical uses into full-scale translations like Tyndale's was intended, of course, to make scripture clear and available to all literate people without clerical mediation. Access to the vernacular Bible would, in turn, plant the seeds of true Christianity in the hearts of the laity and bring about the destruction of the Roman Church and all its deceptions. After all,

the reformers believed that their ideas were supported by the clear and unmistakable testimony of the scriptures, that their interpretations were guided by the Holy Spirit, and that anyone whose faith and reason were not completely compromised by the satanic machinations of the papal Antichrist would, with some thought and prayer, see what they saw when they read scripture. It was not yet clear in the early sixteenth century that there would be no way to reconcile the various readings of the reformers themselves, so evangelical fervor and hermeneutic optimism were the ruling spirits of the day.

I see no reason to believe that Cranmer and his associates were any less hermeneutically optimistic than their reforming peers on the Continent, but like many of them (including Luther and Calvin), Cranmer was not at all naive about the practical difficulties of achieving the ambitious religious and social changes for which he hoped. He was well aware that gradual change would be more successful than wholesale replacement of the old ideas and rituals with entirely new ones.¹⁴ The ignorant masses would have to be weaned slowly of their popish superstitions through gradual liturgical reform and inspired evangelical preaching. Cranmer was, on the one hand, able to entertain the possibility of the genuine reformability of much traditional ritual and prayer and, on the other hand, not averse to drastic revisions if they seemed necessary in order to drive out whatever he considered dangerous superstition or theological perversion.

Cranmer's project of translating key texts into the vernacular actually began long before it would have been feasible to introduce a vernacular liturgy in England, and emerged amid a general tentative movement to introduce more of the vernacular into English religious life. Vernacular primers with English prayers, such as the *Lay Folks' Mass Book*, had been popular resources for private devotion in England for a long time before the Reformation. After Henry VIII's break from Rome, however, reformers made a concerted effort to introduce English into the sphere of public worship. While Henry would not allow substantial revision or translation of the Canon of the Mass, he seems to have been more open to the possibility of allowing revisions and translations of various other religious texts. In 1535, the second edition of William Marshall's *A Goodly Primer in English* included a translated version of

Luther's Litany (1529) with numerous saints added to mask its provenance. This was apparently the first clearly Protestant liturgical text authorized to be published in English. From 1537 to 1540, scriptural readings (under the orders of the archbishop of York), the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments (under Henry VIII's Injunctions of 1538) began to be introduced at Masses. The scripture translations came from the "Matthew Bible" in 1538 and Coverdale's 1539 revision of it, called the "Great Bible."¹⁵ Cranmer's first major "translation" projects, however, avoided tampering directly with liturgy, most likely because he knew how sensitive a point the Mass was for the king. The earliest of Cranmer's known projects was a much-revised Breviary, probably undertaken around 1538. This new Breviary was influenced not only by Marshall's primer and the early Lutheran orders in use in Nuremburg (Cranmer experienced these firsthand in 1532) but also by Cardinal Quiñones's revised Breviary, which had been commissioned by Pope Gregory VII in 1529. In the end, however, Cranmer's Breviary project never came to fruition, in part because of Henry's increasing intolerance of most overtly reformist ideas in the latter years of his reign.¹⁶

In spite of setbacks like this, Cranmer was both patient and industrious. He took his opportunities as they came and made the most of them. In 1543, Convocation ordered that one chapter of the Bible should be read aloud in English at each Sunday or holy day Mass. Cranmer also announced at that time that it was the king's will for all liturgical texts to be revised in order to expunge all things papistical or "superstitious."¹⁷ These reformist victories were followed in 1544 by a key moment in Cranmer's development as a vernacular liturgist. With England on the brink of war with France, Henry ordered that emergency processions be undertaken in Canterbury. This gave Cranmer the opportunity to introduce a new vernacular procession to replace the traditional Sarum forms. His revision included some noticeable simplifications of the ritual (early signs of a tendency that we will see again in his revisions of the funeral rites in the *Book of Common Prayer*), but the centerpiece of his revised rite was the vernacular Litany. This Litany was clearly based on traditional texts, but it deliberately diminished the role of saints (especially nonbiblical saints). Cranmer drew upon sources as diverse as the original Sarum Litanies, the *Commendatio animae*, and William

Marshall's translation of Luther's Litany.¹⁸ Thus, in Cranmer's Litany, we begin to see a unique liturgical style emerging. This distinctly Cranmerian style—a complicated interlacing of diverse voices, the silencing or simplification of what he saw as papistical rituals and prayers, the introduction of Protestant content into traditional structures and forms—would leave its marks on the 1548 Order of the Communion, would emerge clearly in the Edwardian Prayerbooks, and ultimately would provide the material for the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*.¹⁹

After Henry's death and the accession of his young son Edward VI, Cranmer and the other reforming divines seized the opportunity to definitively reshape English liturgical and spiritual life, in part through the production of authorized vernacular Prayerbooks meant to provide a standard liturgy for the whole of England.²⁰ The two major early versions, published in 1549 and 1552, reflect two stages of movement away from the forms and theology of the traditional Latin Mass books and toward the standards of the reformed liturgical manuals that had emerged on the Continent. I do not intend to reproduce here the work of scholars such as G. J. Cuming, John E. Booty, Stella Brook, Diarmaid MacCulloch, and Brian Cummings, whose works provide more detailed discussions of the Prayerbook's various sources and motivations. However, it will be important to note here that the contrast between the theologies implicit in the two Edwardian Prayerbooks reflects a crucial shift in English Christianity.

The 1549 Prayerbook would have been easy enough to read as merely a simplification, condensation, and loose translation of the traditional Latin texts that had been in common use in England for several centuries. Of course, the act of putting the Mass in English was itself remarkable (and offensive to many). It is also true that the production and authorization of a single liturgical book for the whole nation was a fairly untraditional project, both because of the variations that had existed in the practices and customs of different regions and because the common rituals and parts of the Mass had for some time been divided up into various books (including the Breviary, Missal, Manual, Pontifical, Lectionary, Gradual, and Antiphoner). Each of these served a separate liturgical function, but all of them were necessary to properly follow the whole course of daily and yearly liturgical celebrations.²¹

Nevertheless, aside from the controversial fact of its very existence, the 1549 Prayerbook did leave some reason to expect that the core of the traditional liturgy might survive. Much that Cranmer and his fellow reformers found offensive in the medieval rituals was omitted or simplified, but for many contentious matters (the sacrificial character of the Mass, the nature of the Eucharist and the other six sacraments, purgatory and prayers for the dead, etc.), the 1549 Prayerbook retained fairly traditional translations of the Sarum Latin or at least left room for traditionalist bishops and parishes to maintain the appearance that most of the old ways would continue.²²

This mixture of tradition and innovation, unsurprisingly, earned the 1549 Prayerbook strong criticism from both committed traditionalists and committed reformers. On the one hand, while the situation was almost certainly exacerbated by existing economic and social tensions, the negative reaction of traditionalists to the vernacular Prayerbook played an important part in the Western Rebellion in 1549, also called the Prayerbook Rebellion.²³ On the other hand, continental reformers such as Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr were dismayed by the persistence of “papistical” elements in the Prayerbook.²⁴ Although Cranmer defended his work publicly, he also acknowledged that it was not as fully reformed as he wished for it to be.²⁵ The 1549 Prayerbook was intended as a broad and temporary accommodation to the English people’s traditionalism, but such an accommodating spirit could not last long. When the 1552 Prayerbook was issued, the real extent of the changes envisioned by Cranmer and the English reformers became clear.

Although the 1552 Prayerbook could be seen as a revision of the 1549 version, the two Prayerbooks tend to employ ritual forms and vocabularies that place them in rather different positions on the theological spectrum. The 1552 Prayerbook did still retain some traditional rituals and ceremonial forms, but it could no longer be reasonably interpreted as a continuation of the religion of the Sarum liturgies. In brief, the most notable changes included significantly restructured rites for public baptism, Communion, ordination, and burial; the so-called Black Rubric, which carefully ruled out transubstantiation and any kind of adoration of the Eucharist; a Litany that prayed for deliverance from “the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome,” minor but theologically

loaded changes to orders of confirmation, matrimony, and the churching of women; suppression of extreme unction; and the abandonment of most of the traditional vestments, processions, gestures, and chants of the traditional religion.²⁶ All of these changes incorporated or moved toward the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Zwinglian models already in common use among reformers on the Continent. Edwardian divines might have considered the religious practices described in the 1552 liturgies to be the true Catholic faith, but it was a faith that unmistakably rejected much that was essential to the medieval Christianity that produced the Sarum rite. In a word, the authorization of the 1552 Prayerbook sought to make the English church, overtly and unmistakably, in both practice and theology, Reformed.

The 1552 Prayerbook never had much chance to fulfill its intended mission, however. Edward VI died in July of 1553 and was succeeded by his staunchly Catholic half sister Mary (the last surviving child of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon). During her brief reign, the traditional Latin liturgy returned, the liturgical use of the *Book of Common Prayer* was prohibited, and all efforts were made to bring the country back into ecclesial and theological communion with Rome. Like her brother, Mary I did not live long enough to complete her ecclesiastical projects. During the long reign of Elizabeth I, however, England would experience a far more successful attempt to establish the monarch's approved theology and liturgy throughout the whole country.

Without delving too deeply into the question of how, exactly, we ought to characterize the Elizabethan Reformation itself ("top-down" or "bottom-up" or both? Superficial or fundamental? Evangelical or secularist? Idealistic or cynical?), we can recognize that, because her reign was long and relatively prosperous, the cultural programs that emerged out of the "Elizabethan Settlement" laid deep roots in English religious life and, for many, came to reflect the very heart of English national and spiritual identity.²⁷ The 1559 Prayerbook established normative rituals and liturgical language that, for good or ill, could later hardly be dissociated from the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. For many in the later seventeenth century, traditional Englishness was defined by a certain vision of "jolly old England" that valorized the cultural institutions of the second half of the sixteenth century and the

first decades of the seventeenth. As Judith Maltby has shown, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* played a prominent role in the social conflicts of the seventeenth century, especially during the times when English communal identity was most in question.²⁸

The implications of the 1559 Prayerbook for English notions of community are as rich and complicated as the competing theological voices that emerged at various points in the work of Cranmer and his fellow reforming liturgists. In many ways, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* is a slight revision of the 1552 Prayerbook and is much closer to it in language and general theological thrust than it is to the Prayerbook of 1549. However, the revisers of the Prayerbook in the first year of Elizabeth's reign made several changes that reflect the new monarch's need to establish herself and her church as securely as possible while alienating as few as possible. She was committed to the royal supremacy and exclusion of the papacy (without which she would be admitting herself to be illegitimate) and to a Protestantism that would include some form of vernacular liturgy. She seems to have favored the 1552 version of the Prayerbook, but, at least according to William Camden, "concerning the Cross, the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, she had no contemptuous opinion, nor ever spoke of them but with reverence."²⁹ Elizabeth seems to have been content with the theologically Reformed but relatively ceremonially traditional religious practice in which she was raised, and in the first months of her reign she took measures to make sure that the more ambitious reformers, those most likely to push for more extreme revisions of the Edwardian Prayerbook, either did not return from their exile in Geneva or were unable to gather much of a following.³⁰

It is safe to conclude, then, that both Elizabeth's own religious commitments and the exigencies of establishing herself peacefully on the throne contributed to the revisions that shaped the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*. These revisions subdued the overt hostility to Rome that had emerged at several points in the 1552 Prayerbook while still retaining the essentially Reformed disposition woven into it by Cranmer and his collaborators in the time of Edward VI. The Elizabethan revisions established a Protestant church that would definitively exclude purgatory, prayer for the dead, and all sacraments other than baptism

and Communion. The Reformed character of the book is obvious, but it could still accommodate a rather broad spectrum of theological positions on several key questions about which Protestant authorities and scholars could not reach consensus, from vestments and images to Eucharistic theology.

To avoid social fragmentation, Elizabeth needed to produce a convincing vision of the English nation as unified by Christian faith, even if the members of that community were, in fact, divided among various incommensurate modes of Christian belief and practice. The reception of the 1559 Prayerbook was, of course, far from placid. Although Elizabeth's committee did remove explicit condemnation of the pope and notably tempered the 1552 Prayerbook's Reformed Eucharistic theology, the new Prayerbook did little—and really could not do much—to address the substance of the traditionalist discontent that had been central to the 1549 Prayerbook Rebellion and continued to simmer throughout Elizabeth's reign.³¹ Nothing less than restoration of the Latin Mass and papal supremacy would satisfy the most committed traditionalists. At the other end of the religious spectrum, the most zealous reformers, such as the authors of the 1572 *Admonition to Parliament*, reviled the compromises made in 1559, calling for further reform of the “unperfect book, culled and picked out of that popish dunghill, the Mass Book.”³² In spite of heated opposition from both traditionalists and zealous reformers, however, the political success of the project is undeniable. Elizabeth did manage to maintain her church throughout her lifetime without provoking or empowering many credible internal threats to the system she established. If her purpose was to produce a stable national church of which she was the clear head and that could last out her reign, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* seems to have been perfectly suited to her theo-political goals.

Yet there is more to the language of this instrument of “settlement” than meets the eye. Indeed, even at those places in the Prayerbook most overtly engaged in reflection on or production of religious unity, the 1559 version authorizes rhetorical models that complicate questions of community rather than resolve them. This is especially true of two rites vital to the performance of the Christian sense of “us”: the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, and the Order for the Burial of the Dead.³³

In the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, the unmediated fusion of both a traditional and a memorialist formula at the moment of reception creates an unstable locus of semantic excess. This conflict of voices obscures the Prayerbook's Eucharistic theology from communicants at the very liturgical moment when they were expected to assent (at least mentally) to what was being said in order to properly receive Communion. Since the Holy Communion was, for most Christians, a primary sacrament of religious community, this semantic excess could not help but complicate the very question that it seems to have been intended to gloss over: Who does or does not truly belong to the Christian community in England? Who can partake of and participate in the Body of Christ?

On the other hand, in the Order for the Burial of the Dead, we see an inverse rhetorical movement. Closely following the 1552 Prayerbook, the 1559 Prayerbook's Order for the Burial of the Dead was a drastic change from the aesthetically and socially complex funeral rites that had been the norm up to that time.³⁴ The radical simplification of the authorized order deployed rhetorical exclusion, in part to shift the focus of the funeral away from elaborate communal mourning and toward theological instruction, and in part to definitively exclude the whole complex of practices associated with traditional beliefs about the proper relationship between the living and the dead (e.g., purgatory, indulgences, and intercessory prayers) that had structured so much of medieval life and sustained the ecclesial institutions of medieval Christianity. In turning away from the dead, Cranmer's burial rite attempted to correct the well-known abuses of traditional funereal practices by turning the congregation away from the deceased and toward its own spiritual welfare. Compared to the extended psalm singing, processions, and elevated language of the traditional funeral rites, the language of the order is remarkably spare, serving to emphasize the absence not only of the deceased but also of the ritual language of the old ways. These ritual revisions could not help but redefine the Christian community as the new ritual attempted to turn what had been a thin veil between Christians in this world and those in the next into an unbreachable wall of silence.

In both the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper and the Order for the Burial of the Dead, theology and communal identity are intertwined. Thus, to gain a fuller understanding of the conceptual

and communal significance of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, we must turn our attention to the ways in which community is figured in both of those ritual orders. It would be difficult to praise the 1559 Prayerbook for theological consistency or clarity, but something about the ways in which it formulated the mysteries of Christian community was appealing enough to influence not only English Christianity but also Western concepts of community more generally. Through a detailed examination of a few key passages in the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper and the Order for the Burial of the Dead, we will begin to recognize the first shoots of two contradictory spiritual rhetorics, of accommodation and exclusion, that would bear much literary and cultural fruit through the course of the century following Elizabeth's accession.

ACCOMMODATION IN THE 1559 HOLY COMMUNION

Although some scholars have argued that the 1559 Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper contains an unequivocal set of guidelines for interpretation of the theological significance of the Communion, this is not the case.³⁵ A critical examination of the language accompanying the preparation and distribution of Holy Communion in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* allows us to observe numerous instances of semantic multiplicity that correspond to the theological multiplicity of opinion dividing the heart of England's spiritual identity. Of course, as regards the Holy Communion, the heart of the division was in the question of "real presence." Is there such a thing as a "real presence" of Christ in the species of bread and wine at Communion, and if so, what kind of "presence" might it be? The compilers' compromise in 1559 attempted to settle the controversy, not by devising new language to fit a theological consensus, not by restoring the more traditional language of the 1549 Prayerbook, and not by maintaining the trenchantly Reformed tenor of the 1552 Prayerbook, but simply by placing the formulas of the two earlier editions together on the page, fusing them with a comma or period to create a new set of compounds:

The bodie of our lord Jesu Christ, which was geven for thee, preserve thy body and soule into everlastinge life, and take and eate this, in remembraunce that Christ died for thee, and feede on him in thine heart by faith with thankesgevyng. . . .

The bloude of our lorde Jesu Christ which was shedd for thee, preserve thy body and soule into everlasting life. And drinke this in remembraunce that Christes bloude was shedde for thee, and be thankful. (*BCP*, 137)

The first half of each of these statements (“The bodie of our lord . . . everlastinge life”; “The bloude of our lorde . . . everlasting life”) comes directly from the 1549 version of the Prayerbook, which in turn reproduced the language of the Order of the Communion of 1547.

The Order of the Communion had been produced in response to the parliamentary act of 1547 stipulating that the Sacrament should be administered to the people in both kinds (bread and wine) and that the people should be encouraged to receive Communion regularly, rather than leaving it to the priest at Masses celebrated on days other than Christmas and Easter. This Eucharistic formula preserved the traditional diction, syntax, and theological orientation of the language used in the Sarum rite Latin Mass (“Corpus domini nostri ihesu christi custodiat te in uitam eternam”),³⁶ while translating it into the vernacular and including a parallel formula for the reception of the cup (which was not typically offered to the congregation in the Sarum use). The second halves of the new formulas, on the other hand, were retained from the 1552 Prayerbook and point away from transubstantiation and toward memorialism. They are anchored in the scriptural texts that they echo (Matt. 26:26, “Take, eat: this is my bodie”; 1 Cor. 11:24, “Take, eat: this is my bodie, which is broken for you: this do ye in remembrance of me”),³⁷ but they place Jesus’s words in a statement that securely construes the Lord’s Supper as a spiritual feast for the heart rather than a fleshy transubstantiation. However, it is not at all clear whether the text’s quasi-memorialism allows for some sort of spiritual “real presence” in the Lord’s Supper. As far as we can tell, the 1552 language was taken as unambiguously rejecting traditional ideas of Jesus’s physical presence in the consecrated bread and wine, turning

the focus away from the Eucharistic elements and toward the spiritual presence of Christ within the faithful recipient (*BCP*, xxxii–xxxiii). However, we should recall that—at least during the time when he was working on the Prayerbook—Cranmer did believe that such an interior spiritual presence should be thought of as a “real presence” in the Sacrament.³⁸

Putative authorial intentions aside, the precise theological implications of the 1559 formulas were far from obvious. Houston argues that the prayers preceding the institution and distribution of Communion were sufficient to resolve any equivocal phrasing in the distribution, but there is little strong evidence of such resolution, especially from the perspective of the lay participants in the ceremony. Maltby observes that there is some evidence of private ownership of smaller portable Prayerbooks but emphasizes that by far the most common experience of the Prayerbook was in liturgical performance, rather than in a read text.³⁹ Because the “view from the pew” did not for the most part include personal possession of a Prayerbook, a typical parishioner would experience only what was read aloud and enacted during the service. For example, in the prayer prefaced with the instruction “And some time shall be said this also at the discretion of the curate,” we find such admonitions as this: “Our dutye is to render to almighty God our heavenly Father most hartly thanckes for that he hath given his sonne oure Saviour Jesus Christ not onely to die for us, but also to be oure Spirituall fode, and sustenance, as it is declared unto us, aswel by Goddes worde, as by the holy sacramentes of his blessed body and bloud, the which being so comfortable a thing to them whiche receive it worthelye, and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily” (*BCP*, 131). Language like this could as easily be found in a Catholic manual for lay devotion as in a Protestant liturgical manual. Far from clarifying the Prayerbook’s Eucharistic theology, it not only leaves open various shades of memorialism and Protestant “real presence” theology but also still allows the possibility of transubstantiation. A conforming traditionalist could comfortably suppose that the reason for the great gravity that attends proper reception of the Sacrament is the substantial conversion of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. If the bread and wine have not actually become

Christ's body and blood, what grave danger could there be in unworthily consuming a bit of bread and wine? And what worthiness is required for the reception of mere material food and drink?

Equally ambiguous are the prayers preceding the words of institution. For example, in the prayer preceding the institution proper, the priest is instructed to say a prayer containing the following request: "Graunt us therefore gracious Lorde, so to eate the fleshe of thy deare sonne Jesus Christ, and to drinke his bloude, that oure synful bodies may be made cleane by his body, and our soules washed through his most precious bloud, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us" (*BCP*, 136). Again, although this language of eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood does not necessarily require a transubstantiation interpretation of the "real presence" in the Sacrament, it is a very strong gesture away from a purely memorialist interpretation. It could easily be construed as allowing a participant to believe that transubstantiation has occurred. Further, even those parts of the immediate context of the words of institution that are sometimes read as making clear theological distinctions can actually bear a fairly broad range of interpretations. For example, the Prayerbook's declarations that Christ's sacrifice was "perfect" and "sufficient" does not contradict Catholic theology on the Eucharist: "Almighty God our heavenly father whiche of thy tender mercye, diddest geve thine onley Sonne Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the Crosse for our redemption, who made ther (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a ful, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the synnes of the whole worlde . . ." (*BCP*, 136–37). Only if one interprets *perfect* to mean "no longer able to be made present or re-presented," or if one gives a very strong sense to *once* in the phrase "once offered," do words like this contradict a traditionalist understanding of the sacrament of Communion.

Indeed, while it is not unreasonable to argue that Cranmer originally *intended* such statements to contradict what he understood to be Catholic theology, when we see the Council of Trent issuing statements like the following it is difficult to see how a traditionalist would understand the language preceding the words of institution in the way that someone like Cranmer might have understood them:

He, therefore . . . though He was by His death about to offer Himself once upon the altar of the cross to God the Father that He might there accomplish an eternal redemption . . . that He might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice . . . whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, the memory thereof remain even to the end of the world and its salutary effects applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit. . . . And this is indeed that clean oblation which cannot be defiled.⁴⁰

This passage from Trent's discussion of the meaning of the Mass, and especially the Eucharist, places just as much emphasis on the singular perfection of Christ's sacrifice and its sufficiency as oblation and satisfaction for the sins of humanity as does the Prayerbook. The diction is remarkably similar, despite the wide theological gap separating Cranmer from the Council of Trent.

Perhaps a slightly more compelling source of theological clarification may be found in the phrases immediately preceding the words of institution in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*: "Heare us O merciful Father, we besech thee, and graunt that we receiuyng these thy creatures of breade and wine, accordinge to thy sonne our saviour Jesu Christes holy institution, in remembraunce of his death and passion, may be partakers of his moste blessed body and bloude: who in the same night that he was betrayed . . ." (*BCP*, 137). Perhaps if one were disposed to stringently parse the *may* here, it could be understood as introducing a conditional that would be impossible in a traditional Mass.⁴¹ For Cranmer—and most of Elizabeth's divines—the "real presence" of Christ's body and blood was not in the species themselves but in the receiver, and thus an unworthy receiver could not actually be receiving Christ's body and blood. Catholics, however, held that the unworthiness of the minister or the receiver had nothing to do with the nature of the Eucharist. In the Catholic view, if the priest was properly ordained and spoke the words of institution with the intent to perform what Christ performed, then the bread and wine were completely and irrevocably changed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ (thus, to use the precise theological jargon, transubstantiation results *ex opere operato*

[from the work done], rather than *ex opere operantis* [from the worker of the work]). For Catholics, this not only was the clear teaching of Christ himself but also explained why it had always been considered a grave sin to receive unworthily.⁴² So, according to Catholic doctrine, anyone who received the Eucharist at a Catholic Mass was receiving the body of Christ—no “may” or “might” about it. Yet a traditionalist communicant who was not disposed to scrutinize the conditional so carefully, or who was looking for reasons to conform to the Prayerbook service, might just as easily take that prayer to be a simple request for God to accomplish the expected transubstantiation so that the communicants might all then receive Christ’s body and blood. Thus the Eucharistic theology of the Prayerbook remains ambiguous, even if the passage requires a bit more determination to construe it to mean that transubstantiation occurs in the Prayerbook Communion service.

The only section of the 1559 Holy Communion that is close to unequivocal on the question of how to understand the “real presence” in the Communion is the set of instructions to the clergy that come at the very end of the order. Among these instructions is a paragraph regarding the bread to be used in the service: “And to take awaye the superstition, whiche any person hath, or myghte have in the breade and wyne, it shall suffice that the breade be suche as is usual to be eaten at the table, with other meates, but the beste and purest wheate breade, that conveniently may be gotten. And yf anye of the breade or wyne remaine, the Curate shall have it to hys owne use” (*BCP*, 140). Unlike the various prayers and instructions that were to be spoken to or in the presence of the communicants, this instruction to ministers is difficult to read as anything other than a clear instruction against what many saw as the superstitious treatment of the Eucharist in traditional practice. Here the Prayerbook does make it clear that none of its earlier language ought to be taken as endorsing transubstantiation. Anything left over after a Catholic Mass would need to be reserved in the tabernacle or monstrance, or else immediately consumed. Because leftovers were believed to be not mundane bread and wine anymore, but substantially the body and blood of Christ, they could certainly not be left for the later domestic consumption of the priest. The reasonably clear instructions for the domestic use of leftover bread and wine in the 1559 Prayerbook,

however, were not intended to be read aloud to the congregation and so would be available only to the literate minority who actually read the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, not to the majority of everyday worshippers in the pews.

The Injunctions of 1559, designed in part as a legal remedy for the textual ambiguity of the Prayerbook, did little to clarify matters for the laity. Although altars, clear symbols of the sacrificial meaning of the traditional Mass, were to be removed from churches and replaced with a communion table, the Injunctions included the requirement that the “holy table” should be “set in the place where the altar stood” until the actual celebration of Communion, at which time it would be moved out into the chancel. This regulation was yet another theologically ambiguous attempt to placate both reformers and traditionalists. Perhaps even more confusing to the laity was the requirement that English churches use “singing cakes”—unleavened wafers somewhat like those that had previously been used in private Masses—rather than the fine leavened bread that had replaced stamped communion wafers during the time of Edward VI. The use of leavened bread was a clear attempt to repudiate traditional Eucharistic theology. The reintroduction of unleavened bread did not require any particular Eucharistic theology, but it clearly attempted to prevent pastors from using the sacramental elements to directly challenge communicants who might not subscribe to Reformed Eucharistic theology, including even those who continued to believe in transubstantiation.⁴³

Thus, at least from the perspective of most communicants, the legal and textual contexts of the formulas for the distribution did little to clarify what was meant by the sequential pronunciation of two statements with such fundamentally different theological associations. The conjoining of these two Eucharistic formulas was a “yoking of disparates” that introduced diametrically opposed theologies into a single statement. And this statement was no ordinary theological formula. The words of reception, in the context of the Communion rite, constitute a speech act that demands an affirmative—even if unspoken—response of faith from its audience if the audience member is going to receive the Sacrament. But how could any faithful recipient consent to such a paradoxical statement? What would the willing reception of such a sacra-

ment be affirming? A number of interpretive possibilities suggest themselves, but none of them can fully resolve the semantic possibilities of the 1559 Prayerbook's accommodating formula.

Taken as a whole, then, the 1559 Communion rite seems to be pointing in at least two different directions at the same time. It is not sufficient to say that the 1559 Eucharistic formula is really just an early example of a typical Anglican *via media*, because that phrase implies some clear and consistent theological path in the middle of extremes. The rhetorical structure of the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper in the Prayerbook of 1559, in contrast, asks the communicant either to choose a single path and ignore all of the signs pointing in the other direction or to attempt to walk in two opposite directions at the same time. Either the formula says whatever you want it to say, or it says nothing that can be logically defined. Let us call the first approach "conditional reading" (as in "If these words mean what I already believe, then I agree with them and will ignore any signs to the contrary"). Let us call the second approach "mystical reading" (a way of interpreting that allows the unresolved semantic excess of the formula to stand as it is in a state that exceeds human logical faculties but points to some mystical meaning).⁴⁴

If taken in the second way, the compound formula is less a *via media* than it is a *via negativa*. There is no center, no compromised or authoritative meaning that can lay the contradiction to rest. If one attends to it without forcing theological presuppositions upon it, the rhetorical structures of the formulas offer assurance only of what the Communion is not—or, at least, what it cannot exclude. As in the Latin *hoc est corpus meum*, the antecedent of "this" could be taken more than one way by an audience attentive to verbal nuance and unrestrained by the interpretive resolution of a magisterial authority. The communicants, as both audience of and actors in the rite, are left to oscillate between two incommensurable visions of the Eucharist, neither of which is allowed by the formula's rhetorical structure to be exclusively descriptive of the true object of their spiritual "Amen." The audience of the 1559 formula is stuck in a recursive system that cannot be logically resolved. However, a communicant disposed to reading deeply into linguistic obscurities, but with a strong interest in coming to some kind

of resolution, could be driven by the seemingly contradictory formula into an apprehension of the nature of the Eucharist as something beyond logical definition.

Interpreting the liturgical text in this way, one might say that the best thing that can rationally be known about the Eucharist is that it cannot be fully known rationally, at least not within the framework of the most common sixteenth-century Eucharistic polemics. Like the transcendent God of whom the Eucharist is a sacramental sign, the fullest knowledge of it is intimate and experiential, rather than abstract and logical—if such experience is to be spoken of as knowledge at all. If a worshipper who is attentive to language is not to simply disregard the 1559 Eucharistic formula as absurd (and for conforming members of the English church that was not an option), the only option faithful to the reality of the text is to understand it as a gesture at something beyond the grasp of logic. For the language of Communion to signify something knowable, it is necessary to imagine faith as a real but non-rational (or, perhaps more accurately, super-rational) way of knowing. Thus the ambiguous semantic excess of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* had the capacity not only to encourage selective reading but also (like forms of devotion shaped by apophatic theology) to push an attentive audience toward experiences that would elude logical categories, experiences that we might describe as mystical or sublime. This way of knowing by not knowing is best grasped in theological—rather than logical—terms.

There were many influential versions of apophatic, or *via negativa*, theology available in some form to English divines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the well-known works of Pseudo-Dionysius, John Chrysostom, and John of the Cross. To illuminate the way in which the Communion rite of 1559 could suggest a *via negativa* to attentive audiences, however, it will be useful to consider a mystical writer perhaps less familiar to many literary scholars: Nicholas of Cusa.⁴⁵ Comparison with Cusanus's notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or the coincidence of contradictories, not only allows us to see more clearly the possible mystical implications of the 1559 Eucharistic formulas but also illuminates a way of approaching theological contradiction that would be most useful to seventeenth-

century poets struggling to contend with spiritual divisions within their communities, and therefore within their audiences.

In the dedicatory letter to *De Docta Ignorantia* (On learned ignorance), Cusanus explains that, in his view, “the whole effort of our human intelligence ought to center on those lofty [matters], so that the intellect may raise itself to that Simplicity where contradictories coincide.”⁴⁶ Following in the path of Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius, Cusanus’s meditation proposes that God is the absolute Maximum (i.e., that than which nothing greater can exist) and then traces out a series of numerical and geometrical considerations to illustrate his vision of learned ignorance.⁴⁷ For example, he argues that oneness, an attribute that we ought especially to associate with God (the Maximum), is the minimum of number (his mathematics recognized only integers) and simultaneously both the maximum of number and the very ground of number’s possibility, since all counting is ordered toward the ineffable oneness of infinity and each integer beyond one is a unity of multiples in itself.⁴⁸ This coincidence of opposites (i.e., the coincidence of Maximum and Minimum) is difficult to analyze rationally, since it is the ground of ratiocination itself; however, to be thought at all it can and must be “understood incomprehensibly.”⁴⁹

According to Cusanus, reflection on the seeming contradictions involved in “the Absolute Maximum,” “the Minimum,” and oneness, along with numerous other mathematical considerations (e.g., the nature of an infinite line, a circle, a sphere, or a triangle; the relationship between an infinite line and all finite lines; the relationships among plurality, unity, and identity) ought to lead one to what sounds like a relatively unmediated experience of the divine: “If you will reflect upon these indeed lofty [matters], you will be overwhelmed with an admirable sweetness of spirit. For with an inner relishing you will scent, as in the case of a very fragrant incense, God’s inexpressible goodness. God, passing over to you, will supply you with this goodness; you will be filled with Him when His glory shall appear.”⁵⁰ Thus the path to learned ignorance leads, for Cusanus, through the rational contemplation of seemingly insoluble contradictions into a super-rational transcendence of reason. Cusanus’s approach to the *coincidentia oppositorum* is a way of negation, a *via negativa*, that dissolves the impediments

of reason through training in learned ignorance. While Cusanus is careful not to exceed the boundaries of orthodoxy, admitting in several places that reason alone (unaided by grace) is incapable of lifting itself to contemplation of the divine and that limited analogical knowledge is the most to be hoped for with respect to rational knowing in itself, he comes close to implying that humans can have some kind of direct access to the divine by training their reason to attain to learned unknowing.⁵¹ It appears that, in Cusanus's view, the "simplicity" of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is not itself God but the state of the intellect necessary to prepare the ground of the mind for the work of grace.

Entering into such a state of mind—in which a person encounters insoluble contradictories, none of which can fully foreclose the others, and then transcends them by meditating on the insolubility itself—is one plausible response to the semantic excess produced by the accommodating rhetoric of the 1559 Communion rite. While its contradictories involve the historically specific theological associations of Eucharistic formulas rather than mathematical propositions, the 1559 Holy Communion's coincidence of opposites offered a rhetorical artifact that could, if read in the right way, function to dispose the mind toward contemplation of, and perhaps even an experience of, the super-rational through the transcendence of reason.

This is not to argue that the Elizabethan divines responsible for the 1559 Prayerbook were directly influenced by reading Cusanus themselves (not knowing precisely who was involved in the revisions of the 1559 Prayerbook would make such an argument rather difficult) or that they were deliberately producing a *coincidentia oppositorum* in the 1559 Eucharistic formulas. However, Cusanus's treatment of the *coincidentia oppositorum* exemplifies a particular kind of mystical thinking and reading that was extant in the sixteenth century and illustrates an important (if unintended) semantic possibility in the 1559 version of the Eucharistic formula.⁵² Cusanus's way of approaching the unknowable offers a mystical way of reading indeterminacy influential enough for its epistemological and devotional attitudes to be indirectly available to English communicants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, regardless of whether they had studied Cusanus's writing themselves.

The meditative practices associated with theological notions like the *via negativa* and *coincidentia oppositorum* required early modern

Christians to pursue a path through absence or contradiction into an ontologically superabundant center that was radically exterior to common or subjective experience. This extrarational center was, by definition, not fully intelligible by logical means. It could not be known in the cognitive sense but had to be known in a “biblical” sense—as in, dwelt with, encountered intimately, experienced, but never fully comprehended. To properly dwell within this inapprehensible Other, one had to begin to unravel the process of ratiocination and release oneself from the limitations of reason. Reasonable interrogation of contradictions or seeming absences was merely the beginning of the movement down a path toward spiritual access to the radical surplus of infinite being in the divine, an encounter that constituted the apex of mystical experience.

That a linguistic object that offered a possible point of excursion into such nonrational or super-rational mystical experiences would be presented with a fair amount of regularity to all people in England (of all social levels, literate and illiterate) seems a remarkable cultural phenomenon, regardless of whether this function was actually anticipated by the compilers of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* or fully apprehended by most English Christians. Whether they knew it or not, English conformists of all sorts were exposed weekly to a text that could offer a mystical path to an experience of divine superplenitude. This text was encountered at the very moment when, in both the traditional and the new vernacular liturgy, a communicant was understood to be entering most fully into the mystery of Christian community by joining in a common physical or spiritual contact with God himself.

“IN SURE AND CERTAYNE HOPE . . .”:

TURNING AWAY FROM THE DEAD IN THE 1550S

While the semantic openness of the 1559 Holy Communion’s accommodating rhetoric had the potential to produce communal mystical experiences in spite of theological disagreement in the Eucharistic congregation, the rhetorical exclusions in the Prayerbook’s Order for the Burial of the Dead pointedly resisted liturgical production of otherworldly experiences in the congregation of mourners. The 1552 burial rite, which appears mostly unchanged in the 1559 *Book of Common*

Prayer, was intended by Cranmer to liberate the English from what he considered papistical superstitions regarding purgatory and prayer for the dead. At the same time, the burial rite also shifted the focus of mourners away from the deceased and onto their moral obligations to the local, earthly community of Christians—a radical change of orientation in a religious rite that had become as important as, and perhaps even more important than, the Eucharist in the daily lives of many medieval Christians.⁵³

We can see the impact that this radical shift in mourning practices had upon traditionalist English Christians in John Stow's *Survey of London*, which records a series of walks through the London streets of 1603. The *Survey* is haunted by Stow's memories of the old London that had been disappearing during the latter decades of Elizabeth's reign. When, in his *Survey*, Stow turns his attention toward St. Paul's and its environs, he embarks upon a bit of memorial archaeology, recalling the charnel house that had been a notable feature of the cathedral grounds:

Then was there on the north side of this churchyard, a large charnell house for the bones of the dead, and ouer it a chappell of an olde foundation such as followeth. In the yeare 1282. the tenth of *Edward* the first, it was agreed, that *Henrie Walles* Maior, and the Citizens, for the cause of shops by them builded, without the wall of the churchyard, should assigne to God, and to the church of Saint Paule, ten markes of rent by the yeare for euer, towards the new building of a chappell of the blessed virgin *Mary*, and also to assigne fieve marks of yearly rent to a chaplaine to celebrate there.

Moreouer in the yeare 1430. the eight of *Henrie* the sixt, licence was granted to *Ianken Carpenter* (executor to *Richard Whittington*) to establish vpon the said charnel, a chaplaine, to haue eight marks by the yeare: Then was also in this chappell two brotherhoods. *Robert Barton*, *Henrie Barton* Maior, and *Thomas Mirfin* Maior, all Skinners, were intombed with their Images of Alablaster ouer them, grated or coped about with Iron before the said Chappell, all which was pulled downe, | in the yeare 1549. The bones of the dead couched vp into Finsbery field (by report of him who paid for the carriage) amounting to more then one thousand cart loades,

and there laid on a Morish ground in short space after raised, by soylage of the citie vpon them, to beare three milles. The Chappell and charnill were conuerted into dwelling houses, ware houses, and sheades before them for Stacioners, in place of the Tombes.⁵⁴

In this brief dig into the memorial residue adhering to the residences and commercial buildings that remained in his day, Stow uncovers for his readers a palimpsest resonant with the theological, social, and archaeological shifts that had shaken English culture during the centuries preceding his *Survey*.⁵⁵ In the late 1200s, confraternities devoted to the care of souls (i.e., prayers and masses for the dead in purgatory) were reaching the height of their popularity. It was common for the wealthy to establish chantries or fixed stipends to ensure that they and their families would continue to receive prayers from their kin and communities long after their deaths.⁵⁶ The decision to erect a chapel devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary over (or perhaps in) the more ancient charnel house appears to be an offshoot of this flourishing mode of communal intercessional devotion. By the year 1430, we have clear evidence of the integration of urban trade guilds with public devotions like the Corpus Christi plays (the earliest surviving documentary evidence of the Chester and Newcastle plays is from the 1420s, though their origins are likely much earlier).⁵⁷ Stow associates the improvements to the chapel in the 1430s with fraternal organizations, one of which may have been the skimmers' guild (an oddly appropriate guild to have care for a house of bodily remains). And then, coincidentally or not, in the same year as the publication of the first authorized vernacular Prayerbook in England, all ornament is pulled down, the charnel house is evacuated, and the enormous mound of ancestral remains is evicted unceremoniously from the city by the cartload; the remains of the dead are literally thrust out to the margins of the city and the community, like so much offal. The remaining structures are renovated to house the living, and the only tradesmen left to bear witness to the historical residues of the place are the Stationers. As Stow portrays it, with the new Edwardian religious regime, the very physical—to some perhaps a bit too morbidly physical—connection between Christians in this world and the next through bodily remains is aggressively submerged, then erased by

secular commerce, just like the ancestral bones lying somewhere under the “three milles” built on what used to be a part of Finsbury marsh. If the mills were for the grinding of grain, we might even see in Stow’s telling a ghoulish inversion of the Eucharist: instead of bread turning into God’s body, Protestant London has ground the bones of its ancestors to make its bread. At the end of his account, Stow drily calls our attention to the unceremonious, and almost allegorical, relegation of the former site of corporeal ancestral memory beside the city’s religious heart, St. Paul’s, to the world of paper and ink, a world of earthly profit at least theoretically regulated by the authority of the crown.

What better metonym could a nostalgic traditionalist like Stow have found to encapsulate his sense of the communal impact of the great tectonic shifts that had taken place in the time between the reign of Edward I and the reign of Edward VI? For Stow, even fifty years after the fact, the presence of dwellings and stalls produced loud echoes in the deep wells of architectural, theological, and communal absence. The swift gesture of turning away from the dead that Stow assigns to 1549 is resonant with the radical shift in theological and social attitudes toward death and mourning that began to take hold in England in the mid-1500s, a shift that reconfigured English Christians’ understanding of spiritual community in spite of the fact that most never fully accepted the Genevan principles behind the Edwardian religious establishment’s rejection of traditional mourning and veneration of ancestral remains.⁵⁸

In the late medieval world that helped to shape the religious practices of the founders and maintainers of Stow’s absent charnel house, funerals and prayers for the dead not only marked the boundaries between corporeal life and death but also functioned as core elements of English communal life. The veil between the living in this world and those in the next was understood to be thin enough to exist without fully dividing the quick from the dead. Faithful souls that had passed out of this world into the next through bodily death were understood to still be spiritually alive and thus very much part of the Christian community. There was an expectation of mutual support, with the Church on Earth (Church Militant) and the Church in Heaven (Church Triumphant) praying for the Church in Purgatory (Church Penitent), and the Church Triumphant (and possibly the Church Penitent) also pray-

ing for the Church Militant. One church, one community, three sectors or stages in the communal life.⁵⁹

Unless we recognize the power of this vision of the Christian community, a community that understood itself as straddling time and eternity, we may be disposed to reductive readings of the rituals and attitudes that characterized the medieval fascination with bodily death. The English medieval attitude toward ancestral or saintly remains was generally not, as we may sometimes imagine when entering old churches lined with tombs and images of skulls, merely morbidly fetishistic or ignorantly apotropaic. On the contrary, the whole network of symbols, rituals, and prayers associated with the dead was focused on maintaining the cohesion of the community, the presence to one another, of spiritually living beings, both in this world and in the next.⁶⁰

To break from the past and introduce a new vision of the economy of salvation and the nature of the Christian community, a vision that would utterly exclude purgatory and prayers for the dead while also discouraging attempts to communicate with or petition the souls in heaven, Cranmer and the other reformers had to fundamentally alter the way in which English Christians imagined themselves and their community.⁶¹ Like the changes to the Holy Communion, these revisions had to be undertaken in a way that would not provoke the people to outright rebellion—not an easy task when one is setting out to thoroughly reshape the spiritual, communal, and economic habits of a people.

Once again, incremental change characterized Cranmer's strategy in the early revisions of the Order for the Burial of the Dead. Like the vernacular Litany and the other reformed prayers on which Cranmer had been working during the time of Henry VIII, the 1549 Prayerbook's burial rite made limited and ambiguous changes but was still possible to read as a moderate revision and translation of the Sarum rite into the vernacular, taking relatively small doctrinal liberties when compared to the liturgical books produced by most of the continental reformers.⁶² Cranmer's 1549 Office for the Burial of the Dead simplifies the Sarum rituals by substituting three condensed sections (procession, committal, and service in church) for the six extended sections of the Sarum burial service (in the house [vespers], procession to church, service in church [matins and Mass], procession to the grave, committal,

and procession back to church). Rather than trying to produce a distinctive Reformed language of mourning and burial, the 1549 Prayerbook simply goes silent on the whole spectrum of rituals and ceremonies that would have accompanied late medieval funerals. It does not explicitly rule out such ceremonies and customs, but the notable silences and exclusions of its revisions were opening the way toward a new understanding of the place of death and mourning in Christian society. The 1549 Prayerbook's simplification and translation was a short but decisive first step closer to the abolition of all rituals associated with the dead for which many evangelical reformers hoped. And like the 1549 Holy Communion, the 1549 burial rite was soon to be revised yet again.

Indeed, by the time the 1552 Prayerbook was published, Cranmer had reduced the service to a one-part memorial service, all of which was intended to be said at the graveside with little accompanying ritual and certainly no funeral Mass. The whole spectrum of communal rituals, psalm singing, and other observances that had traditionally preceded, accompanied, and followed the burial of a Christian in good standing were clearly excluded. This simplified service, reoriented to centralize the scriptural reading (1 Cor. 15: "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleepe"), was designed to serve as an occasion for the instruction of the congregation in the Reformed understanding of salvation, death, mourning, and the Christian community. Both in form and in purpose, the 1552 order bore little resemblance to the traditional rites of burial and mourning that had played such a central role in English life for many generations.⁶³

In the 1552 Order for the Burial of the Dead, perhaps the most striking change is the unmistakable sense of the absence of the deceased. While the 1549 Prayerbook still contained some prayers for the deceased and some sense of ongoing relations between the living and the dead, the 1552 revision attempted to eradicate all textual traces that might encourage such ideas.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most telling moment in the 1552 rite comes just after the body is committed to the ground. In the 1549 version there is still a clear verbal turn toward the deceased as the priest says, "I commend thy soule to God the father almighty, and thy body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certayne hope of resurrection to eternal lyfe."⁶⁵ In the 1552 revision, the deceased

is referred to only in the third person: "Forasmuche as it hathe pleased almightie God of his great mercy to take unto himselfe the soule of our dere brother here departed: we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certayne hope of resurrection to eternal lyfe."⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, this new language reflects Cranmer's desire to diminish the role of the priest and congregation in the spiritual fate of the deceased and to emphasize God's agency in spiritual matters, but the shift of language accomplished even more than that. Notice that the latter formulation is not an "I" (the priest as a singular agent for the community who has the ability to efficaciously commend the soul to God) directly addressing a "thou," but a "we" (the priest taking on the voice of the plural community able to commit the body of the deceased to the ground, but not to efficaciously commend the soul to God) talking about and acting upon the body of a dear "him" who was but is no longer a part of the "we." Such a subtle shift of pronouns speaks volumes about the 1552 Prayerbook's attitude toward the deceased. In the course of revision, the community's boundaries have contracted, and the ceremony's language subtly marks off the exclusion of the deceased, beloved brother though he might have been, from the present "we" of the social and ecclesial community. Although one might note some vestiges of liminality in the seemingly paradoxical phrase "here departed," and despite significant quibbling on the meaning of the petitionary prayer before the closing collect, there is no doubt that the Edwardian religious establishment intended to utterly foreclose the possibility of efficacious prayer for the dead.⁶⁷

When the Elizabethan Prayerbook was compiled in 1558–59, the 1552 version of the Office for the Burial of the Dead was reintroduced and left mostly as it had been written by Cranmer, who was by that time among those burned by Mary Tudor during her brief attempt to reverse the course of English religious reform. The 1559 version of the Order for the Burial of the Dead retains both the theological attitudes and the language of the 1552 Prayerbook. Unlike the compounding of voices found in the Eucharistic language of the 1559 Prayerbook, the 1559 funeral rite retains the simplicities and silences of 1552.

The funeral ritual in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* is less a ritual of mourning and intercession for the soul of the departed than "an

exhortation to faith on the part of the living.”⁶⁸ In the Reformed theology that prevailed among the Prayerbook’s authors and compilers, the dead were understood to be exclusively within God’s hands and already suffering their damnation or enjoying their glorification, regardless of the works and prayers of the living. It was considered useless, even impious, to try to help them or ask for their help; it was impossible to communicate with them at all. The relatively brief new funeral rite minimized discussion of the particular dead person, focusing instead on new readings meant to inculcate in the living the Reformed understanding of election and salvation.⁶⁹ At least according to the English theological authorities, the stress in the phrase “sure and certain hope” would have to fall squarely on the “hope,” since a soul’s fate could no longer be influenced by her loved ones after death. There was no purgatorial intermediate space that would allow for the postmortem influence of family and community on the fate of the departed. In both the old and new burial rites, hope for the passage of the deceased into heaven would have to rely entirely on God’s merciful activity; however, in the theology informing the 1559 burial rite, God’s saving activity would allow no cooperation or participation by the faithful in this world. While the traditional funeral encouraged the congregation to view the swift passage of the souls of the faithful departed into paradise as conditioned in part on the whole Christian community’s intercessory prayers and sacrifices, the Elizabethan funeral placed the full conditional force on God’s unconditional election, which presumably would already have been evident in the quality of the faith of the deceased.

As in the section of the 1552 burial rite quoted above, the whole prayer at graveside in the 1559 Prayerbook was carefully contained within a conditional: “FORASMUCHE as it hath pleased almighty God of his great mercy to take unto hym selfe the Soule of oure deare brother, here departed . . .” (*BCP*, 172; caps in original). The whole prayer may be approached as a conditional that allows some divergence of readings, depending on one’s theological attitude or one’s attitude toward the deceased. The options here are, however, rather more limited theologically than the broad spectrum of conditional belief allowed by the conflicting connotations of the Eucharistic formulas. “Forasmuche” could conceivably be understood with various degrees

of conditional force, but regardless of how one construed the word, the funeral ritual and the prayers of the faithful could have no influence on the matter. The soul of the deceased had already irrevocably entered into her final state of glory or damnation.

Indeed, the only hint of a possible prayer for the deceased in the whole order is more of a request that God will bring an end to the world swiftly than a plea for divine mercy upon the deceased or a gesture of inclusion:

Almightie God, with whom do live the spirites of them that depart hence in the lord, and in whome the soules of them that be elected, after they bee delivered from the burthen of the flesh, be in joye and felicitie. We geve thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this *N.* oure brother, out of the miseries of thys synneful worlde, beseching thee that it may please thee of thy gracious goodnes, shortelye to accomlishe the numbere of thyne electe, and to haste thy kingdome, that we with thys oure brother, and all other departed in true fayth of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummacion and blisse, bothe in bodye and soule in thy eternall and everlastynge glorie. Amen. (*BCP*, 174)

One could, perhaps, stretch one's construal of this prayer to read "beseching . . . that we with thys oure brother . . . may have our perfect consummacion and blisse" as a prayer that the deceased might be included among the elect. Such a reading would, however, force the passage into a most unconventional reading of "the burthen of the flesh" as venial sins to be purged away before the deceased could enter into God's presence. It would also have to ignore the fact that there is no actual request having to do with the individual deceased. Of course, even if one were to make such a reading, the prayer would still not allow for any real intercession by the congregation, since there had never been any doubt that those who "departed in true fayth" would immediately experience "perfect consummacion and blisse."

A more straightforward reading of the above prayer would be to take it as requesting that those who make up the congregation in this world might be among the elect, while also charitably assuming that

the deceased is already in heaven with the rest of the elect. This way of reading of the prayer reinforces the separation of the deceased from the earthly community, since the prayer expresses a desire for the unification of a thoroughly divided community only possible with the coming of the Kingdom at the end of time. It asks that God will allow “us” to join “them” in the Kingdom and that he will speed the coming of the Kingdom so that all true Christians may finally be joined in one community. Unlike the traditional funeral rite, which emphasized the immanence of the Communion of Saints, the 1559 Prayerbook implies a radical displacement of spiritual communion of the faithful to the end of time.⁷⁰

Of course, Cranmer and Elizabeth’s divines understood that such ritual simplifications and exclusions would discourage traditional prayers and practices based on a sense of closeness to, reliance upon, and responsibility for the departed faithful. It was a tactical blow meant to free the hearts of English Christians from the Roman obedience.⁷¹ Still, the tactical usefulness of the 1559 burial rite does not take away from its theological consistency. In a theological system where there could be no such closeness to, reliance on, or responsibility for the deceased, the most that could reasonably be done in response to death was to use the burial of the loved one as a way of encouraging the faith of the living. From a Reformed perspective, a funeral could at the very most help to prepare Christians in this world for their own inevitable passage into judgment.⁷²

Yet while intercessory prayers were clearly condemned, prayer for the dead as such was never officially condemned by the English church and was even recognized as a pastoral necessity by some church officials.⁷³ Exemplary of the persistent uncertainties about prayer for the deceased in early modern Christian culture is the fact that, although they were purged from the authorized liturgical manuals in England after 1552, such prayers still persisted in popular devotional books, such as the Elizabethan Primer, though altered from their medieval forms or qualified by the surrounding prayers. For example, instead of a straightforward English translation of the traditional prayer for the dead that gave the “Requiem” Mass its title—“Requiem aeternam dona eis domine et lux perpetua luceat eis,” the “Dirige” section of the 1559 Primer contains a somewhat diluted version that prays for “thy people” rather than the

specific deceased person at hand: "Lorde geve thy people eternall rest, and lyte perpetuall shyne on them."⁷⁴ This is followed by a prayer that attempts to regulate the proper usage of what preceded it: "O God whiche by the mouth of S. Paule thyne Apostle hast taught us not to waile for them that slepe in Christ, graunt we beseche thee that in the commynge of thy sonne oure Lorde Jesu Christe, bothe we & all other faythfull people being departed, maye be graciously brought unto the ioyes euerlastyng."⁷⁵ This is a fairly transparent attempt to qualify the traditional connotations of the requiem prayer, and especially to curtail its use in "wailing" for the dead. This passage, however, is followed by two more unambiguously intercessory prayers for the souls of the dead that request inclusion of the deceased in the Communion of Saints. The tension here is indicative of a persistent sense of the efficacy of prayers for the dead and the duty of Christians to pray for them. This sense of social obligation to the deceased lingered on in popular devotional practice even while the Elizabethan religious establishment was working to eradicate this traditional habit from the hearts and minds of English Christians by means of the new funeral rites.

The contrast between the Prayerbook and the Primer illuminates the gap between the official theology of the Elizabethan church and the spiritual habits and affections that persisted outside of official liturgical life. Still, we can see that regardless of any theological uncertainties that might linger within its language and the broader religious culture, the characteristic language of the 1559 Prayerbook's burial rite found its forms in simplifications and significant silences. Although, in some ways, the theological assumptions that inform this rhetoric stem from the same tree as the 1559 Prayerbook's Communion rhetoric, the actual rhetorical models that were authorized in the 1559 Order for the Burial of the Dead are in tension with those found in the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper. While the Prayerbook's Communion rhetoric was driven largely by accommodating semantic excess, its funeral rhetoric was characterized largely by a careful exclusion of rituals, prayers, theological voices, and even souls. These exclusions mark out a collection of silences that spoke volumes.

Perhaps counterintuitively, the silences and negations of the burial rite would be hard to read as the sort of mystical *via negativa* made possible by the 1559 Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

While the devotional negations at work in the writings of figures like Cusanus or the Spanish mystics can help us to make sense of the conflicting voices in the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, such devotional negations seem alien to the rhetoric of the Order for the Burial of the Dead. Its rhetoric is didactic, rather than devotional. The whole of the order was to be said or sung by the clergy only, with no responses provided for the congregation. The priest does not interrupt his speaking with symbolic gestures or acts like aspersion with holy water or signs of the cross. Unlike the traditional Sarum rite, which called for psalm singing during the procession from church to grave and at the graveside, the Order for the Burial of the Dead begins with the priest saying or singing three instructional scriptural passages: John 11:25–26, Job 19:25–27, and a combination of 1 Timothy 6:7 with Job 1:21. The first of these—"I am the resurrection and the life (saith the Lord) . . ."—is excerpted from the story of Lazarus, which allows it not only to directly proclaim the saving power of Jesus but also to allude to the bodily resurrection of Lazarus, and thus to the general resurrection on the last day. The second ("I know that my redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise out of the earth in the last day . . .") explicitly details the bodily resurrection of the faithful. The third ("We brought nothing into this world, neither may we carry anything out. . . . The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away . . ."), however, points toward neither salvation nor resurrection but seems to have been meant to point away from the idea that one's sins can cling to one in the afterlife. Thus the opening passages of the Order for the Burial of the Dead, when taken together, rule out from the beginning any reflection upon purgatorial cleansing of the faithful, avoid reflection upon the heavenly community's activities in the intermediate time between the present and the last day, and direct the attention of mourners toward the immanence of salvation and the promise of resurrection on the last day. Instead of multiple conflicting voices drawing a worshipper toward contemplation of the mystical excess of the divine, the opening of the order draws together several different scriptural voices to all bear theologically unified witness to a Reformed theology of death and salvation, while evacuating the whole spectrum of traditional beliefs and practices that had attended Christian mourning for centuries. All these differences

from the traditional rites only strengthen the didactic mode of the whole ritual, turning funerals from inherently communal liturgical performances into an instructive prayer service, less spiritually dramatic than many sermons.

The Prayerbook burial rite's unflinching focus on the mundane community is almost antimystical, in that it discourages contemplation of and contact with the community of the deceased, focusing the congregation's attention back onto itself rather than onto a spiritual otherworld. The main scriptural reading (from 1 Cor. 15) does contain St. Paul's transcendent description of the resurrection of the body in the last days ("I shewe you a mysterye. We shall not all slepe: but we shall all be chaunged, and that in a momente, in the twynkelynge of an eye, by the last trumpe"; *BCP*, 173), but its rhetorical point (in both Paul's epistle and the Prayerbook) is not consolation so much as instruction in right doctrine and exhortation to moral fortitude: "Awake truly out of slepe and sinne not. For somme have not the knowledge of God. I speake this to your shame. . . . Therefore my deare brethren be ye sted fast and unmovable, alwaies rich in the worke of the lorde, for as much as ye knowe, howe that your laboure is not in vayne in the Lorde" (*BCP*, 172–73).

Drawing its authority from carefully selected scriptural passages such as these, the burial rite is concerned primarily with the inculcation of a closely defined set of Reformed doctrines and attitudes toward death, while making little concession to the beliefs, rituals, traditions, and wills of the generations that traditionalists accused it of excluding from the "we" of the reformed communion of saints.⁷⁶ By rhetorically turning away from the dead in the primary authorized ritual for mourning in England, the Prayerbook of 1559 not only reflected the disdain of its composers for the beliefs and practices of the generations that preceded them but also reshaped the way in which the English people understood their relationships with and obligations to their ancestors. Like the exhumation and evacuation of the former contents of the St. Paul's charnel house, the 1559 Order for the Burial of the Dead fundamentally reordered the cultural topography of English spiritual and communal life, foreclosing—or at least marginalizing—communication between the living and the dead.

Reflecting on its instructions for Communion and burial, we see in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* a set of rhetorical models that were foreign to the traditional English Christianity of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries but that eventually came to be regarded as essential to “true” Englishness. These new models of accommodation and exclusion may have been deployed by the new Elizabethan establishment in 1559 for tactical reasons as much as spiritual ones, but their social and spiritual implications ran much deeper than could have been anticipated. On the one hand, while a compromise seems to have been imagined in the Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, the formula that actually appeared in 1559 could hardly “settle” anything theologically. Its reformulation of the main sacrament of Christian community seems to authorize either an invitation to conditional religious conformity or a most unconventional rhetorical path toward mystical experience that transcends theological definition. On the other hand, the didactic rhetoric of exclusion in the Order for the Burial of the Dead forecloses mystical contact with the heavenly community of saints at the same time that it attempts to purge from the hearts of mourners the traditional sensibilities that would make them yearn for communion with the deceased. Each of these, in its own way, opened up linguistic and spiritual uncertainties that could not be resolved by statutes and proclamations. The various implications of the authorized religious rhetorics of the Prayerbook would be discovered, disputed, and explored in study, pulpit, and press all the way into the reign of James II and even into our own time.

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind as we move forward to examine poetic engagements with those unresolved communal uncertainties is the fact that the Prayerbook’s language reached far beyond the realm of academic theology and into the hearts and minds of even the most common folk, since attendance at weekly services was required by law and most parishes did make use of the Prayerbook in one way or another.⁷⁷ The complicated and contradictory visions of the English community implicit in the Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper and the Order for the Burial of the Dead entered English culture in such a forceful and pervasive way that they came to form some of the basic conceptual and linguistic materials with which the

English people asked and answered questions about death and mourning, communion and community. As Ramie Targoff has so persuasively argued, the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1559 was indeed designed to reshape English religious habits of body and mind from the ground up.⁷⁸ The ways in which it actually did this are anything but straightforward, however. Thus the Prayerbook's models of spiritual community posed difficult problems not only for a pastoral poet like Spenser but especially for pastor-poets like Southwell, Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw. The rest of this study will explore a few of the ways in which these poets developed their own visions of Christian community by deploying, resisting, circumscribing, and amplifying forms of accommodation and exclusion similar to those authorized in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*.

