

The Cultural Revolution in 16th-Century England

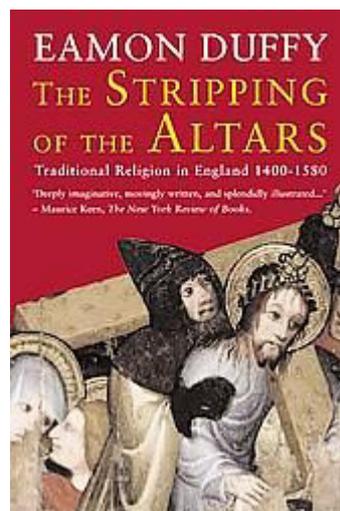
by **Murray N. Rothbard**

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Murray N. Rothbard sent this memo on September 24, 1993, to several friends, including Catholic publisher Neil McCaffrey.

This is to alert you all to what the Protestant reviewer refers to several times as a "splendid" new Catholic book. It is Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (Yale Univ. Press, 654 pp.). [See *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 23.] I was fascinated and greatly moved by the reviewer's account of the book, and you all know much more about the topic, and should like it all the more.



The book is a revisionist study of the purging of the Catholic religion by the Anglican Reformation. The orthodox view has been that the Catholic faith had been dying out among the public, e.g. because the vernacular was not being used. Duffy shows that, on the contrary, the masses loved the old faith and what they lacked in language was made up for by the processions, pageants, images etc., as well as sculpture, and also that when the vernacular came in it supplemented the Latin. The first part of the Duffy book examines the old religion and the public's devotion in detail. The second part shows how the old religion was systematically stamped out and destroyed, by the use of the State apparatus, with the assistance of the fanatical Anglican reformers; the State, and its "Visitations" from the bishops, led by fanatical reformers such as Cranmer, Latimer, et al., managed in fifty years to destroy even the memory of the old faith in the minds of the masses, and to replace it with devotion to Anglicanism. Brutally, images were destroyed, lights in front of images were outlawed, ceremonies as creeping to the cross were outlawed, wall paintings were whitewashed and altars stripped. The reformers were interested in purging the "idolatry" of "image

worship." State injunctions issued the prohibitions: in 1538, the burning of lights in front of images was prohibited, pilgrimages were condemned and the Angelus bell silenced; in 1547, churches were ordered stripped of all images, relics, and paintings as "monuments of feigned miracles, idolatry and superstition," and parish processions outlawed.

All this reminds me of the Cultural Revolution in the U.S., beginning with the New Deal and continuing now with Clinton's Health Great Leap Forward. The sad part of course is that, all too often, Cultural Revolutions do work and stamp out the memory of the Old Religion, or the Old Republic. Fight!

Historically, of course, the English Reformation was crucial in engendering a fanatical anti-Catholicism in England from that day on, and in the British colony of North America. In a sense, then, we still haven't recovered from the first Cultural Revolution, in 16th-century England.