contain gross distortions of the record. One of them holds that the Luther Renaissance arose from Karl Holl’s privilege of being the first major scholar to have full benefit of the Weimar edition (Est. 1883) of the reformer’s writings. This legend reduces Holl to, at best, a “mere scholar,” something he escaped by turning to Luther; and it reproduces, at worst, the treatment of Luther as a new, “third” revelation, through the lens of whose teachings those of Paul and, more distantly, Jesus could once again be regarded as true. Another legend holds that Barth represents the antithesis of what the others, especially the Luther Renaissance, stood for. This is true only at the political level, and only from the rise of Nazism in the early 1930s. During the mid-1920s, when the Dialectical Theology was riding high, Barth fully participated in its lutherocentricity.

Stayer’s excellent book should be read by everyone who studies either the Protestant Reformation in Germany or German culture and politics under the Wilhelms and Weimar. It is intellectual history of the best kind.

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Written by the single hand of the local vicar, Sir Christopher Trychay, who served in office for the fifty-four years between 1520 and 1574, the Churchwardens Accounts of the rural Devon parish of Morebath have served as a unique source for the history and operation of a single parish since they were first published in 1904. Historians familiar with this remarkable document have resorted to it time and again for its insights into parish life, its local colour, and its ample store of apt quotations. But no one yet has given it the extremely close attention provided here by Eamon Duffy. Moreover, no other scholar has seen the document as a subject unto itself, as well as a source for other subjects; or assessed the early Reformation as thoroughly and imaginatively through the experience of a single parish community.

It must be said at once that this is not a conventional “thesis book” as such; nor is it a conventional history of Morebath as reconstructed from this single source. Rather, it is a “pendant,” in Duffy’s own words, to his real thesis book, the magisterial Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–1570 (1992), in which he provided the fullest and most persuasive discussion yet of the tenacity of pre-Reformation religious belief and practice in England. In Duffy’s capable hands, The Voices of Morebath provides ample and extended documentation for many of the perspectives of that larger work.

Before using them as his principal source for other matters, Duffy takes us carefully through the accounts themselves. He shows us how Trychay’s verbose yet meticulous record incorporates the activities, intentions, and very voices of Morebath parishioners. The events and actions recorded thus offer over fifty years
of “uniquely expansive and garrulous commentary on the affairs of a tiny and otherwise obscure rural community” (p. 19).

Rather curiously, Duffy’s discussion of those numerous affairs is not dominated, as the title would suggest, by the question of rebellion. Morebath’s direct participation in the Western Rising of 1549, in which five local youths joined the rebels’ camp, takes up a small part of his tale. More central is his description of the quite remarkable complexity of parish-centred relationships and activities, which bound in constant and evidently harmonious interaction the thirty-three families of this tiny and remote community, and of the impact of Reformation upon them. Virtually every adult parishioner, women as well as men, poorer as well as the better off, and even young men and maidens, had specified roles to play in serving the parish. The familiar point that traditional faith effectively bound the pre-Reformation community by its theological requirements and religious practices is extended here to include the implications of the very widespread responsibility for parish finance and administration. One parish fund even parcelled out the parish flock by giving one or two sheep to a household, with the ultimate proceeds of their wool and meat — meticulously recorded in the accounts — going to the parish.

Duffy thus begs yet again the question of how such an intense loyalty to traditional faith, and all which that loyalty entailed, could give way so easily to the demands of the Reformation. His answer, as one might have guessed from past performance, is that it did not give way as easily as one has assumed. Though, as Duffy tells us, the accounts may reveal very little of the inner religious thoughts of Morebath parishioners, one can little doubt the external signs of local loyalty to the traditional Church on the eve of Reformation, and of steadfast conservatism thereafter. He notes how the Dissolutions effectively caught the parish in the midst of an extensive refurbishing programme devoted to the church building, its furnishings, and devotional paraphernalia. Most telling of all was the very successful introduction into Morebath of the cult of a local Devon saint, St. Sidwell, as encouraged by Trychay himself, along with the visual aspects of that presence. No popular lust for reform here!

All of this and more began to unravel following the 1538 “Injunctions for the Clergy.” This and myriad subsequent demands stripped away both the material possessions and the spiritual functions of the parish. These included the images and furnishings on which generations of Morebathians had lavished such care and attention, along with the sundry endowed funds which had sustained them.

The story of the even more thorough depredations which followed in the reign of Edward, the respite and restorations under Mary, and the reversion to a Protestant regime, albeit at first less stringent than before, under Elizabeth, is of course entirely familiar in its broad detail. Yet it takes on a much more emotive and particular quality when seen from the perspective of Morebath.

These events had their milestones and turning points, and some prove usefully documented in Trychay’s accounts. Duffy leads us to understand, for example, that the Western Rising attracted support not only as a rejection of the new religious
order, but also in protest against the financial demands which the Tudor state made upon the local community in the late 1540s. Those demands included the required purchase of new service books and furnishings, and the sale or surrender of much of the traditional devotional paraphernalia and other parochial possessions—eventually even the church house which had served as a community centre.

In consequence of these losses, and the reduced responsibilities which they effected, a mere handful of the wealthier parishioners — those who could bear the added burdens of office — replaced the nearly complete involvement of the whole adult community in parish affairs. The broad collaborative interaction which had long bound parishioners in harmonious relations, and which had openly included women and adolescents, richer and poorer, now took on a more oligarchic profile. This more concentrated authority, along with what Duffy calls “the coarsening of the social fibre” (p. 185), may have responded more effectively to the increased civil demands made on the parish, but it changed forever the accustomed and broadly egalitarian state of the community.

Duffy’s story affirms that the Reformation constituted much more than a doctrinal event, a change in religious belief and practice. It was nothing less than a seismic upheaval in English society and culture, for parish communities like Morebath and for the nation as a whole. It cannot be understood, as generations of historians have tried to understand it, only from the national perspective. Like all revolutions, we may know it fully only when we know it from below. One wishes that Duffy had been able to test his picture of pre-Reformation peace and harmony against the evidence of recorded litigation, in either consistory or secular courts. Yet this compelling and accessible micro-history of the Reformation brings us closer to realizing the enormous scope and complexity of what once seemed largely a matter of doctrinal legislation and enforcement.

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Robert Love’s religious biography of the young Henri IV, King of France, examines the relationship between individual faith and political action by focusing on a seminal moment in French history: Henri’s conversion to Catholicism in 1593. This act, which brought an end to three decades of religious and civil war, is usually attributed to political and cultural pressures rather than to a personal crisis of conscience. Love firmly rejects such characterizations of Henri as a man of vacillating religious convictions or a political pragmatist who coolly abandoned his Calvinist co-religionists in order to cement his hold on the French throne. Love’s focus on Henri’s conscience provides a welcome complement to traditional political analyses of these events, the most recent being Michael Wolfe’s The Conversion of Henri IV (1993). Although Love ultimately fails to resolve the