

**The Myth of Elizabethan Puritan Offensive and
the Level of Learning among ministers
in Ely and Lincoln Dioceses**

Hirofumi Horie

At the outset of Elizabeth's reign, the reformists in the parliament failed to take the initiative in formulating a programme for the reform of the English Church. The failure could be attributed in part to the on-going battle between the moderates within the Church of England, who adhered to theological and liturgical norms expressed in the Second Edwardian Prayer Book, and those so-called "Puritans" who dreamed of rebuilding the church patterned after the best-reformed Swiss churches in Zurich and Geneva. The struggle thus culminates in the renowned mid-1550s disputation in Frankfurt among the Marian exiles, i. e. between the future bishop of Ely, Richard Cox, and intransigent John Knox.

These developments on the Continent obviously left some marks on their effectiveness, or the lack of it, in the first Elizabethan parliament in 1559 when the question on religion occupied the minds of those in the Houses of Lords and Commons. In fact, the Marian exiles, who returned to England in disarray but with a lot of wishful thinking, were in no position to force a more sweeping series of changes in religion at the time. Contrary to the famous thesis of J. E. Neale, the queen and her councillors, most notably William Cecil, were in full control. There existed neither a Puritan platform to speak of in the Commons nor concerted efforts made by Puritans within and outside the Parliament. On her accession, Elizabeth realized the religious settlement in the way she intended, and whatever vacillations there were, were compelled by the conservative Catholics.

That the settlement had been reached according to the way Elizabeth had intended seems to influence the analysis of our next question, namely how the problems in the church were tackled. The foremost among these were perennial ones — pluralism and raising of the learning level among inferior ministers. From the records of the dioceses of Ely and Lincoln, it is

unquestionable that diocesan officials made serious attempts in order to bring about changes on the parish level in spite of various restrictions imposed upon them either by the queen herself or the lay landlords. For instance, in the wake of a royal command for the suppression of the exercises called 'prophe-syings', each diocese started looking for substitutional learning methods. Although no indications of such methods in the diocese of Ely can be witnessed, the register records in the 1570s seem to show that the lack of scriptural knowledge was the major obstacle for admitting candidates to the priesthood.