



Butler University  
Digital Commons @ Butler University

---

Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

---

1995

## 'Conformists' and 'Church Trimmers': the Liturgical Legacy of Restoration Anglicanism

John D. Ramsbottom

Butler University, [jramshot@butler.edu](mailto:jramshot@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers)



Part of the [European History Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ramsbottom, John D., "'Conformists' and 'Church Trimmers': the Liturgical Legacy of Restoration Anglicanism" *Anglican and Episcopal History* / (1995): 17-36.

Available at [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch\\_papers/714](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/714)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@butler.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@butler.edu).



## “Conformists” and “Church Trimmers”: The Liturgical Legacy of Restoration Anglicanism

by John D. Ramsbottom

The attention paid to religion in recent accounts of Restoration England has had the refreshing result of adding complexity to the traditionally one-dimensional image of the established Church in this period. No longer is “Anglicanism” seen as synonymous with the reactionary creed of country gentlemen. Further research has even revealed fissures in their apparently monolithic opposition to dissent.<sup>1</sup> Historians have also scrutinized the church’s devotional life, discerning a wide spectrum of styles and customs. As one observer has summarized it, “the religious experience of the vast majority who were nominally Anglicans was hardly uniform.”<sup>2</sup> Many parish congregations were mixed—they comprised “partial conformists,” who attended weekly services but who also participated in a range of other activities, some of them illegal.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the diversity of lay opinion in the parishes, bishops faced the fact that many clergymen

---

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Barry, “The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol,” and Newton E. Key, “Comprehension and the Breakdown of Consensus in Restoration Herefordshire,” both in *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, ed. Tim Harris, Paul Seaward and Mark Goldie, (London, 1990); Tim Harris, “Was the Tory Reaction Popular? Attitudes of Londoners towards the Persecution of Dissent, 1681–6,” *London Journal* 13, 2 (1988), 106–120. In fact, the latest study of the Cavalier Parliament locates the most vociferous supporters of the church’s ecclesiastical monopoly among a small circle of courtiers rather than among “Anglican” back-benchers. The Commons were ambivalent about the persecution of dissent, and in the countryside the new penal statutes were often enforced only half-heartedly. P. Seaward, *The Cavalier Parliament and the Reconstruction of the Old Regime, 1661–1667* (Cambridge, England, 1988), chap. 7, esp. 163; Anthony Fletcher, “The Enforcement of the Conventicle Acts, 1664–1679,” in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Shiels, Studies in Church History, 21 (London, 1984), 235–46.

<sup>2</sup>Tim Harris, review of John Spurr, *Restoration Church*, *American Historical Review* 97, 5 (December 1992), 1519.

<sup>3</sup>John Spurr summarizes the evidence in *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, 1991), 198–201. See also Donald A. Spaeth, “Common Prayer? Popular observance

themselves had misgivings about the restored liturgy. A significant number who had served under the Cromwellian regime remained in their cures after 1662.<sup>4</sup> Historians frequently cite the deliberate moderation of Richard Kidder, vicar of St. Helen's Bishopsgate and later a bishop, who chose to administer communion to parishioners who refused to kneel rather than "sending them to the Non-conformists." The incumbent of the notorious Puritan enclave of Banbury followed the same custom.<sup>5</sup>

Given the persistent difficulty of enforcing uniformity one might question whether the parish churches shared any common identity, at least in practical terms. The present study argues that this apparent inability to regulate clerical conformity and lay devotion provoked an unexpectedly strong reaction in the church after 1680. Following the Exclusion Crisis, a new breed of less accommodating prelates sought to reaffirm the distinctive features of Anglicanism by rejecting any compromise with what they viewed as nonconformity. With the growth of this "sacramentalist" movement, the reign of James II takes on additional significance as a milestone in the development of Anglican worship. The Glorious Revolution is commonly seen as

---

of the Anglican liturgy in Restoration Wiltshire," in *Parish, Church and People, Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. S. J. Wright (London, 1988), 125-51; Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1450-1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1976), 229-31. Compare John D. Ramsbottom, "Presbyterians and 'Partial Conformity' in the Restoration Church of England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43, 2 (April 1992), 249-70.

<sup>4</sup>I. M. Green first stressed the persistence of Commonwealth clergy after 1662. (*The Reestablishment of the Church of England, 1660-1663*, [Oxford, 1978]). Spurr has added further particulars (*Restoration Church*, 42-49, 184-90). Ralph Josselin, minister of Earl's Colne, is often cited as an example of a Commonwealth conformist who consistently escaped punishment under the new regime.

<sup>5</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 207; Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, England, 1987, 68. According to the churchwarden at Banbury, the minister was guilty of several offenses, including not wearing the surplice and "suffering those who please to be admitted to the Receiving of the holy Communion (sitting—a pretended custome)." *Churchwardens' Presentments in the Oxfordshire Peculiars of Dorchester, Thame, and Banbury*, Oxfordshire Record Society Series, vol. 10 (1928), 218-21. I owe this reference to Dr. Bart Blankenfeld. A recent survey of the situation in the Southwest finds that "Puritan deviations from Anglican norms in performing the liturgy remained as prevalent within the Church after the Civil War as before." Jonathan Barry, "The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in *The Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter, England, 1991), 89.

a defense of the Protestant religion against the threat of a Catholic monarch—which it was—but it also marked the failure of an alternative vision of the established church itself.

## I

Clerical nonconformity in the Restoration church had at least two related aspects. On the one hand, hundreds of ministers who had served under the Cromwellian regime retained their benefices after 1662. Such men might rightly be suspected of entertaining reservations about the restored liturgy yet, as in the oft-noted case of Ralph Josselin, might never be effectively silenced.<sup>6</sup> But the persistence of “Commonwealth conformists” into the new era was only part of the problem. Hand in hand with the vagaries of some clergy went a strain of lay independence that had only been exacerbated by the civil wars. In attempting to bring both order and piety to their dioceses, Restoration bishops faced an unenviable task. They were obliged to negotiate among different factions within the local community, heeding not only the “loyal Anglicans” but also lay-people who occupied the margins of parish life, at least in terms of conformity.

The number of “Commonwealth conformists” varied sharply from one region to another.<sup>7</sup> I. M. Green, who coined the term, originally calculated that they comprised between 45% and 50% of the Winchester and Canterbury clergy by 1663. In Bath and Wells diocese, despite the hostility of the restored bishop, William Piers, the figure approached one in five. In the diocese of Chichester, however, the proportion of parish livings occupied by men who had served under Cromwell amounted to only 13% in 1663–4.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 188–89.

<sup>7</sup>Green, *The Reestablishment of the Church of England, 1660–1663* (Oxford, 1978), 224. Compare the figure quoted by Spurr for Warwickshire and Devon, 46% and 62% respectively (*Restoration Church*, 46). But information is not available concerning the disposition of every benefice during this period, and since a change of incumbent was more likely to be recorded than mere continuity, the figures we possess probably overstate the degree of turnover. Nor should clergy who merely attended university under the Puritans necessarily be included, as they were by Green.

<sup>8</sup>John Ramsbottom, “Puritan Dissenters and English Churches, 1630–1690” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1987), 101–3.

Some holdovers from Commonwealth days were unrepentant Puritans. One of the most conspicuous offenders was Robert Jago, vicar of Wendron and Helston in Cornwall from before the Restoration, who was prosecuted by the bishop in 1664. Jago had made a show of his nonconformity, boasting of his extempore preaching and, when tendered the prayer book, averring that he would “first choose to suffer fire and faggott then make use of it.” He had also declared that private religious meetings were legal “for any persons whatsoever to any number whatsoever . . . to hear the exhortation of any persons whatsoever,” a direct contradiction of the Conventicle Act.<sup>9</sup> Jago, moreover, appears to have enjoyed the support of Sir William Godolphin, a prominent gentleman, which made the job of censuring him ticklish.<sup>10</sup> Following a brief suspension and imprisonment for seditious words, he conformed sufficiently to be invited to preach in Helston, and he later gained an address from the town’s magistrates in his behalf.<sup>11</sup>

In other cases, principled nonconformity shaded into mere negligence, which amounted to the same thing in the eyes of staunch Anglicans. Until his delinquency came to light, however, a Commonwealth conformist might remain unmolested in his parish for years. Thomas Wood, rector of Hayes in Kent since at least 1652, was summoned into consistory court nearly two decades later at the instigation of James Burbage Maxey, a local gentleman. The charges stemmed from his reluctance to travel to church to read weekday service during the foul winter months between Michaelmas and Lady Day.<sup>12</sup> Wood confessed that he had omitted prayers on weekdays and in Lent, since “there are but few or none that will come to Church to heare them.” Even when Wood was present, however, his performance was inadequate. Mrs. Maxey complained that for a month at a time she had

<sup>9</sup>16 Car. II, cap. 4 (1664), *Statutes of the Realm*, V, 516–17.

<sup>10</sup>Devon Record Office, Chanter 57 (episcopal patent book), fol. 65 order concerning Jago, 17 February 1663/4; PR 519 (1), John Pannecke to Francis Cooke, 19 September 1677.

<sup>11</sup>Devon Record Office, PR Basket A, 2471 (Jasper Phillips to Francis Cooke, 1670?); CC 178, Box 197, articles dated 1680 against Robert Jago. Jago remained in the cure, a controversial figure in the eyes of nonconformists as well as the bishop. (A. Tindal Hart, *The Curate's Lot*, London, 1970, 89).

<sup>12</sup>Court of Arches, *Scott v. Wood* (1672), Ee 3, fos. 722–24, Eee 4, fos. 620, 659–666v.

not heard a sermon but “only a part of the service.” Because of Wood’s neglect, the parishioners were ignorant of the Anglican rites; several of them had asked Mrs. Maxey what the litany was.<sup>13</sup>

But the legal position of the Commonwealth conformist was sufficiently ambiguous to enable him to hold out even against the wishes of the local squire. Despite the evidence, Wood’s detractors lost their case in the consistory court and brought an appeal to the Court of Arches. By this time, Wood had gathered witnesses who averred that he was “an Orthodox minister, an observer of the rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England, and one who was troubled . . . for observing the same in the time of Rebellion.”<sup>14</sup> He also claimed immunity under the law, maintaining that if he were really guilty of “Inconformity or irregularity . . . which he doth no way confess but utterly denye,” such offenses were “abolished [by] the Act of 12 of this King for ministers the benefitt whereof this respondent imploreth.”<sup>15</sup>

Nor did bishops always act as uncritical allies of the Anglican gentry in such situations. Henry King, who was restored to the see of Chichester in 1660, faced a dilemma when the inhabitants of Wivelsfield lodged a complaint against the local squire, Mr. Thomas More.<sup>16</sup> According to their petition, they had not had a minister for three years because More had withheld the necessary allowance. The bishop questioned More about this, noting that as a result of the vacancy, “children and servants, wanting instruction in the grounds and principles of religion . . . have been forced to wander into other parishes.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Eee 4, fos. 662, 663–63v, 666v.

<sup>14</sup>Ee 3, fo. 724, Eee 4, fo. 620v.

<sup>15</sup>The reference is to 12 Car. II, c. 17, An Act for the Confirming and Restoreing of Ministers (1660), which allowed all clergymen possessed of a living on 25 December 1659 to continue in place, provided they would conform. *Statutes of the Realm*, V, 242–45.

<sup>16</sup>The dispute is outlined in R. W. Blencowe, “Extracts from the Parish Registers and other Parochial Documents of East Sussex,” *Sussex Archaeological Collections* [SAC] 4 (1851): 258–64 and F. E. Sawyer, “Proceedings of the Committee for Plundered Ministers,” SAC 36 (1881): 47–8.

<sup>17</sup>SAC 4, 259–60.

Confident of backing from the hierarchy, More responded that the dispute had arisen during the “late sad times,” when the parish had chosen “a Presbyterian jack-maker, drummer and maltman in turns.” The most recent incumbent, one Thomas Higson, had left in 1657 when More deprived him of the tithes. An individual Anglican gentleman’s insistence on conformity, however, did not automatically coincide with the wider interest of the establishment.<sup>18</sup> In 1661, the bishop had told the churchwardens of Wivelsfield to “get whom they would” to fill the vacant living. Ultimately, after further consultation with the bishop, More regained control of the advowson in exchange for increasing his contribution to the stipend from £20 to £30 per annum. The parish was to add enough “as may encourage a man of parts to live amongst them.”<sup>19</sup> But this *ad hoc* solution was strictly limited in effect. Mr. Higson, whom squire More had so decisively rejected as unorthodox, went on to hold two other livings in the diocese.<sup>20</sup>

The ministry of a man like Higson might also shield parishioners whose practices would otherwise have come under suspicion. One charge against Abraham Bull, for example, was that he held private meetings in the homes of his parishioners, to discuss “the sermons he had publicly preached in the parish church . . . and to examine them thereupon.”<sup>21</sup> At Nunney, in Somerset, the incumbent, Gracious Franklin, was “soe little verst in the booke of Comon prayer that he could scarce fine out anything unless the Clarke did looke it out and

---

<sup>18</sup>SAC 4, 260–63.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 263. The opposition to More originated with some of the most prominent parishioners, including Thomas Godman, son of the churchwarden who had brought in another illicit preacher when the bishop “bid them get whom they would.” (SAC 4, 262–3). The Hearth tax returns of 1662 and 1664 show Edward Godman, gent., rated at nine hearths, just below More himself. M. J. Burchall, ed., *Sussex Hearth Tax Assessments, 1662 (Lewes Rape)* Sussex Genealogical Society, Occasional Papers 3 (1980); Public Record Office, E 179/ 158/15 (1664).

<sup>20</sup>Willington and Selmeston. (John and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 1922.) A scholar at Caius College, Cambridge, Higson evidently did not take a degree before being admitted to the chapelry of Uckfield, Sussex, in 1657. (Lambeth Palace Library, Lambeth MS. 998, fol. 85).

<sup>21</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 186, citing P. W. Jackson, “Nonconformists and Society in Devon, 1660–1689,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Exeter, 1986, 82–92). Devon Record Office, CC 178 Complaints about Clergy, Box 195, Hittisleigh, Bull’s answers, 6 March 1670/1.

turne downe a leafe for him." Franklin, a defender of presbyterian order during the Interregnum,<sup>22</sup> seldom administered Communion—"it was against his conscience to do it"—and had never worn the surplice until admonished by the bishop.<sup>23</sup> When Franklin was brought again before the consistory in 1670, it was alleged that he often neglected the cure altogether. On these occasions, some parishioners "had gon to [private] meetings." Since Franklin's return, however, they had come back to Nunney, evidently preferring his ministry to permanent schism. So long as he did not absent himself completely, Franklin's deviations from the liturgy were tolerable to church-goers who valued preaching above ceremony. Parishioners seeking more regular Communion were forced to search elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

That such factions could exist undetected for so long was thanks in part to administrative inefficiency. But that inefficiency was the inevitable consequence of a system of ecclesiastical law that depended on laymen who might themselves be disaffected. In Leicestershire, for example, none of the four ministers charged with nonconformity during the Restoration period was suspended. One incumbent, though guilty of "gross violations of the Anglican rubrics," was saved by a testimonial from influential parishioners.<sup>25</sup> In 1669, it was revealed that churchwardens at the chapel of Aston in Cheshire had installed a minister who was neither a university graduate nor in holy orders. Together with "some few their associats . . . contrary to the will and

---

<sup>22</sup>Franklin was vicar of Doultling during the Civil War, when he was involved in a debate with a neighboring Independent minister. See F. Freeman, *A brief description of a conference . . .* (London, 1647) and G. Francklin, *A soft answer to Captain F's passionate book . . .* (London, 1648); Margaret Stieg, "The Parochial Clergy of the Diocese of Bath and Wells, 1625-1680" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1970), Appendix III.

<sup>23</sup>Somerset Record Office, D/D.Cd/93 (Depositions), *Davis con Franklyn*, November (?), 1670.

<sup>24</sup>Despite all these offenses, Franklin remained in the parish until 1691 (Stieg, "Clergy," App. III). The parishioners who occasionally attended private meetings apparently frequented the church at Nunney in spite of the fact that there was an established conventicle of some 100 "presbyterians" in the adjacent parish of Frome (Lambeth Palace Lib., Tenison MS. 639, survey of conventicles, 1669).

<sup>25</sup>J. H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts: the Leicestershire Experience* (Urbana, Illinois, 1978), 25-6.



good likeinge of the best sort of the Inhabitants,” the wardens even built this interloper a new pulpit.<sup>26</sup>

## II

In an important sense, then, the standards governing worship were set not so much by the bishop as by the most outspoken churchgoers in the parish. Nevertheless, this paradoxical situation had a theological justification. So long as the Church of England represented itself as truly national in character, it could not regard any of the laity as irrevocably lost. Some parishioners were no doubt unhappy with the liturgy, but that did not mean that they had withdrawn from the life of the local church. The authorities were no less prepared to discipline the clergy for spurning nonconformists than for humoring them. Thus, as late as 1686, the curate of Warrington found himself cited by the bishop’s court for refusing the Eucharist to two churchwardens, whom he suspected of being dissenting “spies.” Perhaps William Smith was, as the curate alleged, “a preacher in a Tub [who] kept Conventicles in his House” — but he nonetheless demanded to receive the sacrament at Christmas.<sup>27</sup> Alongside its necessary concern with politics, the church remained the religious institution of last resort; herein lay its distinctive mission.

As a result, even conformist incumbents could be trapped between the expectations of the church courts and the demands of their parishioners. The canons exposed ministers to action by any layman who might plausibly claim to be part of his flock. In 1664, for example, several men brought suit against the vicar of Croydon, William Clewer, and, upon receiving an unfavorable verdict, pursued an appeal in the Court of Arches. Clewer was cited for a variety of infractions, ranging from not wearing the surplice — he maintained that it was too short — to not reading the Thirty-Nine Articles until two years

---

<sup>26</sup>Cheshire Record Office, EDC. 5 (1669), no. 11. When there was no service at Ashton, the churchwardens failed to frequent the adjacent church at Runcorn, “at least during the reading of the Comon prayer.”

<sup>27</sup>Cheshire R. O., EDV. 1/64 (correction book, October 1686), fo. 20v.

after his induction.<sup>28</sup> The parish clerk also recalled several occasions when Clewer had neglected to bury the dead or had come late to Sunday worship, which had obliged him to set two additional psalms “to keepe the people from going out of the church.”<sup>29</sup>

In this instance, the authorities gave weight to the testimony of church-goers whose allegiance to official Anglicanism was doubtful. Several of Clewer’s accusers were embroiled in tithe disputes with him. One of them, Richard Baldwin, who had not received Communion since Clewer’s arrival, admitted that he would sometimes “goe to other Churches that are neerer.”<sup>30</sup> More important, according to another witness, Baldwin was “as hee himselfe confessed & as is commonly reported a nonconformist.”<sup>31</sup> Although he “doth now come to heare Comon prayer,” Baldwin clearly occupied the margins of the parish, in more than one way.

Clewer’s own curate, who often conducted the service himself, testified to the parishioners’ taking offense at Clewer’s neglect. This points up the vulnerability of incumbents in their accustomed reliance upon substitutes to perform parish duties. In 1671, Thomas Carew, the vicar of Plymstock, Devon, discovered that his own curate was “an *utrinque*-tarie companion, if not altogether nonconformist.”

They [the parish] all affect Mr King well [he reported] because he little regards canonicall obedience for he is a man that reades the comon prayers of the Church but once a moneth & weares the Surplasse seldom.<sup>32</sup>

By inviting lay people to gather in his house, King had also taken more liberty “than he ought to have done by the lawes”; at one such

<sup>28</sup>Court of Arches, Depositions Eee 1, fos. 734–46v, 764–76; Eee 2, fos. 72v–6v, 78–80.

<sup>29</sup>Eee 1, fos. 735, 737. In February 1666, Clewer secured a former churchwarden at Croydon, now a merchant in Hastings, to testify that he had read the articles in 1660 (Eee 2, fos. 79–v).

<sup>30</sup>Eee 1, fo. 744v.

<sup>31</sup>Eee 1, fo. 742v. Eee 2, fos. 74–75. Anna Barnard also testified that Baldwin had taken a hand in ousting an earlier vicar of Croydon “who was notoriously known to be a conformable man” (Eee 2, fo. 74).

<sup>32</sup>Devon R. O., Moger PR 519, Plymstocke (1671), (1) Thomas Carew to Lord Bishop, 11 January 1670/1.

gathering, Carew noted, King had “call[ed] the laudable orders of the church in question.”<sup>33</sup> Mr. Carew apparently had genuine cause for concern. As he understood it, one of the churchwardens had returned from a meeting with the bishop and told the people that King was appointed to preach at the cathedral, “so that if my Lord did approve then of his doctrine & Method of teaching, he would confirme him in this cure & putt me out.”<sup>34</sup>

As John Spurr has put it, “at some point the clergy’s pandering to such lay pressure becomes indistinguishable from partial conformity or even compliance with Nonconformity.”<sup>35</sup> But, here as elsewhere, the implications go beyond the connivance of the resident clergyman with the people. In some cases, bishops themselves appeared to be yielding to popular sentiment. Even though he steadfastly adhered to the prayer book, Mr. Carew could not rest secure in the support of his ordinary. In fact, rigid conformity might be seen as a liability in an incumbent, tending to drive laymen into separation. At the very least, bishops might view strict orthodoxy as a secondary consideration in preferring clergy.

Particularly in areas of the country where the church’s influence was already tenuous, the misdemeanors of a resident incumbent could go unpunished so long as he made earnest efforts to reclaim the lost sheep. In 1664, for example, certain inhabitants of the vast north Staffordshire parish of Leek complained of “nonconformity and disorder” in the conduct of their vicar, George Roades. Replying to Bishop John Hacket, Roades denied the charges, protesting that he had “publickly and chearefully” assented to the Act of Uniformity. He went on to refute specific accusations, confidently if not wholly convincingly. “My usual practice is to read the first and second service, the lessons, the Epistle and Gospel appointed for the day. . . . [T]hough not every Sunday Yet I dare say I have not omitted the

---

<sup>33</sup>Devon R. O., Moger PR 519, Plymstocke (1671), (1) Thomas Carew to Lord Bishop, 11 January 1670/1. Carew was able to muster only four signatures on his own petition to the bishop. Moger PR 519, Plymstocke (2) 16 January 1670 [1], (3) Carew to Cooke, 18 January 1670/1.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., (3). In this somewhat desperate letter to the diocesan registrar, Carew enclosed a “small token of my love.”

<sup>35</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 206.

Letany 3 Sundayes these twelve Months.” As to his alleged offense of administering the sacrament to some who received it sitting, he stated only that “this is more then I know and I am as like to know it, if so, as another.”<sup>36</sup>

Roades emphasized that he had been diligent in seeking out alienated members of the parish. As a result, he claimed, “very many have Come to the Book of Common Prayer early and Constantly after so many yeares declaring against it and turning their backes upon it.” In the end, Roades seems to have depended upon the bishop to excuse his lapses in conformity. He did continue in the parish until 1698—which might be seen as a sort of punishment in itself—but he escaped any action to suspend or deprive him.<sup>37</sup> On reflection, Bishop Hacket was probably thankful to have a dedicated pastor in such a remote setting, where Quakers formed a considerable presence. Moreover, Hacket was tolerant of mild departures from conformity within the church. When he was criticized for permitting the congregation in Lichfield cathedral to sing a psalm instead of listening to a choral anthem, he responded that the establishment “must gain souls to Christ by all means that are lawful. Too much rigidness brought our late confusions upon us.”<sup>38</sup>

Thus to discipline the Anglican clergy leniently was to lessen the risk of alienating their wavering parishioners from the church. Even the more ambitious goal of “reducing” nonconformists to parish worship was possible, though it might not be shared at the local level. This conclusion is suggested by the career of Charles Sumptner,

---

<sup>36</sup>Roades to [John Hacket], Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, 14 March 1663/4. Bodleian Library, Tanner MS. 131, fo. 9 Roades said he would welcome an episcopal visitation “into our barren parts,” in the hope that his congregation “might heare and see that some Reverend Fathers of the Church did owne and conferme what I did preache and practice.”

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*; *Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records, 1530–1680*, N. Landor, ed., *William Salt Archaeological Society, Historical Collections* (1915), 148–49.

<sup>38</sup>Tanner MS. 131, fo. 13, quoted in *Victoria County History, Staffordshire* 2:61. Hacket is an interesting example of a bishop who was willing to conciliate “tender consciences” while treating all other dissenters with suspicion. In 1660–62, he had tried unsuccessfully to win several Puritan ministers to conformity before depriving them. On the other hand, he recommended sending spies into the congregations of partial conformists among the clergy (J. J. Hurwich, “Nonconformists in Warwickshire, 1660–1720,” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970); Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 189.

a Commonwealth conformist who found a living in Wisborough Green, Sussex, after the parish had lacked a “settled minister” for nearly two years. Sumptner soon faced a series of charges drawn up at the instance of Henry Harriden, the local gentleman. Harriden stated that he had brought a copy of the Act of Uniformity to church “of purpose to examine whether Mr Sumpner did read his assent and consent” to it. Not only did Sumptner fail this test but, according to Harriden, he also made alterations in the liturgy that struck Harriden as suspect: “Instead of the words lighten our darknes he did read it lighten our dark harts And in reading the letany when he should have prayed for the coming of the holy Ghost he prayed for the Coming of our lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>39</sup>

The efforts to have Sumptner removed never succeeded; he was still vicar of the parish two decades later, although he continued unpopular with strict conformists. For example, the churchwardens took offense when, after they had urged Sumptner to present certain residents for not coming to hear common prayer, he responded that “then he would present all the parish.” In fact, Sumptner’s ministry at Wisborough Green, although too evangelical for the taste of some, appears to have ensured the attachment of many “partial conformists” in the neighborhood. It was said that “divers presbiteryans and other ill-affected persons to the present government came out of several remote parishes to heare the sayd Mr Sumpner’s sermons.”<sup>40</sup>

In other poorly served regions, the church’s need for resident ministers abetted the survival of godly attitudes among the laity to a degree that obscured the boundary between orthodoxy and dissent. James Whiteing, the Restoration incumbent of Ubley, Somerset, took full advantage of the nonconformist tendencies within his congregation. He never read the whole service, using “onely some few prayers, what he pleased, to give some of the parish content.”<sup>41</sup> When

---

<sup>39</sup>West Sussex R.O., Ep I/11/17 (depositions), fo. 1. Two other witnesses informed the court that Sumptner had not bowed at the name of Jesus before being admonished to do so by the bishop; thereafter he had “performed some small reverence by nodding with his head onely.” (Ibid., fos. 3–3v.)

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., fos. 2–2ʷ.

<sup>41</sup>F. Weaver, *Somerset Incumbents* (Bristol, 1889), 296; Somerset R. O., D/D/Cd/93, *Davis on Whiteing*, October 1670, January 1670/1.

he began inviting “strange preachers,” however, at least one conformist layman protested. On one Sunday in 1670, Whiteing was obliged to defend the visitor in the pulpit, declaring “he was a friend of his and he would justify both him in preaching and the parishioners in hearing him.” Soon thereafter, Whiteing’s misdemeanors, including frequent absence and failure to wear the surplice, came out in court. Along with this, the fact emerged that Ubley church had already been the scene of an illegal conventicle earlier the same year, for which Henry Stubbes, the teacher, had been convicted at quarter sessions.<sup>42</sup>

Stubbes himself, though ejected from the lectureship at Bath and Wells, was a moderate divine; he subsequently exercised his ministry in the parish of Horsley, Gloucestershire, where “he us’d some part of the Liturgy, not regarding the Censure of the Rigid [nonconformists].”<sup>43</sup> In fact, the interest of the church in promoting lay piety seemed to conflict with the insistence of Parliament upon punishing dissent, expressed in the recent renewal of the Conventical Act. When the authorities attempted to punish Stubbes’s hearers at Ubley, who numbered some 200, several of them were able to appeal their conviction successfully on the grounds that

the conventicle was held on a Sunday morning at the time of divine service, and many of them came upon the ringing of the bell, as usually, not knowing anything to the contrary but that the minister of the parish or some other lawful minister was to officiate.<sup>44</sup>

In this corner of Somerset, the prosecution of nonconformity had become problematic at best. But the conditions that undermined uniformity—the mixed character of the clergy, the resistance of laymen, and the needs of clerical provision—were not peculiar to any single region. Speaking of the church’s predicament in this era, one scholar has remarked that its “apparent unity was to a certain

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.; Somerset R.O., QS 1/125, 1 (1), Memo., 27 July 1670.

<sup>43</sup>A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934). This parish had gone without a minister for several years, owing to its small stipend of £8.

<sup>44</sup>*Quarter Session Records for the County of Somerset, Vol. IV, Charles II, 1666–1677*, M. C. B. Dawes, ed. (Somerset Record Society, 34, 1919), 101–2.

extent a facade, carefully kept up by that handful of bishops who really ran the church.”<sup>45</sup> Judging by the hybrid character of actual parish worship, we might even conclude that they were obliged to sacrifice uniformity in order to preserve a semblance of unity.

### III

During much of the Restoration period, we are told, division and dissidence marked the stance of the church’s adherents.<sup>46</sup> In the face of abuses against the canons and liturgy, loyal clergy could only bewail the weakness of the church. The response of Dr. George Hickee, dean of Worcester, was typical: upon learning that the likely successor to his parish had baptized children in private, he exclaimed, “I pray God these disorders among the clergy may never come to the knowledge of our adversaries.”<sup>47</sup> In the early 1680s, however, a new generation of strongly conformist clergy gained numerous lay allies. Together, these self-proclaimed “true sons” of the church went on the attack, portraying the nonconformity of moderates among the clergy as a threat to the entire establishment.<sup>48</sup> “The typical ‘Church-Trimmer,’” one conformist tract asserted,

esteems all our Church-usages indifferent little Trifles, not to be contended for. . . . He seldom reads the publick Prayers, but Preaches World without end: He hates a Cross in his Heart, and values not the sign thereof in Baptism at a brass Farthing; two Guineys will purchase him to leave it out: He allows no more of a Real Presence in the Sacrament, than at his own table . . .<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Tim Harris, *AHR* 97, 2 (Dec. 1992), 1519.

<sup>46</sup>Mark Goldie, “Danby, the Bishops and the Whigs,” in Harris et al., eds., *Politics of Religion*, 75–105, especially 75–81.

<sup>47</sup>Hickee to Sancroft, 26 June 1686, Tanner MS. 30, fo. 65. Mr Gatford, he said, “will subvert the discipline of the parish [Alvechurch, Wo.] which he knows, I have taken so much care, and paines to bring to perfection.”

<sup>48</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 207 ff. Mark Goldie, in a review of Spurr, maintains that “the term ‘High’ Church was available by late 1670s, and by that stage the purged universities were producing controversialists deeply at odds with the compromises of the earlier years.” *JEH*, 44, 2 (April 1993), 320. The term “sacramentalist” is employed here in order to emphasize the liturgical aspects of this reaction.

<sup>49</sup>*The Character of a Church-Trimmer* (London, 1683), brdsde.

This attitude was echoed by the author of *Parish Churches Turn'd into Conventicles* (1683), purportedly an Anglican priest, who lamented the fact that “in very many places” the clergy did not present the “excellent liturgy” of the church “whole and intire without mangling and curtailing it.”<sup>50</sup> He especially objected to the practice of some ministers who neglected to read the service of Communion at the altar, even when no Eucharist was to be celebrated. Such transgressors, he noted, offered various excuses for their knowing violation of the canons, and the problem could ultimately be traced to bishops who dispensed with the rubrics in order to respect local usage. Nonconforming clergy, he said, took such lenity to be “a tacit Declaration that the Supreme Power doth not desire his Law should be obey'd in this particular.”<sup>51</sup> The writer strenuously rejected the final plea of these offenders—that of popular opposition.

You say that the People are not pleased with it, otherwise you would very willingly go up to the Altar or Holy Table, but if you should, the People would go out of the Church, and perhaps come no more. In good time! Must the Orders of the Church hang upon so slender a Thred, as the liking or disliking of an ignorant Multitude?<sup>52</sup>

In short, these controversialists identified and condemned precisely the influences that had allowed some clergy to perpetuate a broad variety of devotional styles and customs within the Church.

Simultaneously, a group of Anglican clergymen, led by Denis Grenville, dean of Durham, began pressing for the restoration of the “ancient religious custom” of the church, especially a more frequent celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>53</sup> Grenville denounced ministers who had moderated the liturgy “for fear of keeping [people] from their

---

<sup>50</sup>[Richard Hart], *Parish Churches Turn'd into Conventicles* (London, 1683), 3. This tract was subsequently attributed to a High Churchman among the laity rather than a cleric. (O. V., *Parish Churches no Conventicles*, 1683, 2). The work had allegedly been in progress for some twelve years; the real author was identified as one Mr. T. A., Barrister of G. B., Essex. O. V. himself sympathized with the clergy who “with the allowance of their Superiours, for Peace sake, and Edification, comply with the general Practice, as comporting with the Spirit and End of the Law . . .”. (Ibid., 12–13.)

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 8–9, 14.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 16. The author concluded with praise for the “pious Example” recently set by men like William Sherlock by introducing ceremonial into the cathedrals and universities. “I pray God increase their Number” (22).

<sup>53</sup>Spurr (*Restoration Church*, 364–66), stresses the activity of Bishop Lloyd of Norwich.



Churches, or driving them out of them.”<sup>54</sup> By the mid-1680s, this “sacramentalist” program was making headway, both in London and in provincial dioceses, notably those of Ely, York, and Norwich, where Laudian bishops had held forth prior to 1642.

It appears that parish clergy, perhaps inspired by the high church reaction at court, undertook a campaign against liturgical deviation in their own localities.<sup>55</sup> The vicar of Sandwich, Kent, already engaged in a struggle against the Whig corporation of the town, chose summer 1683 as the moment to repair the chancel of his church “in a very decent manner.”

The communion table [he reported] is placed under the East wall, where formerly it was not, on an ascent of five steps with a comely rail before it. . . . I always read the Communion Service there.<sup>56</sup>

Diocesan surveys of church fabric and furniture bear out the impression of increased activity during the 1680s.<sup>57</sup> In some parishes, communion rails had been missing since the Restoration; although reported in earlier visitations, these defects had not been remedied. In the diocese of Worcester, visitations in the 1680s revealed several parishes where rails had only recently been placed around the table and two where they had been “set by” elsewhere in the church.<sup>58</sup> In 1683, the churchwardens of Westham, Sussex, were formally

<sup>54</sup>Grenville, *The Compleat Conformist, or Seasonable Advice concerning Strict Conformity* . . . (London, 1684, first preached Epiphany 1682), 23–4.

<sup>55</sup>A point supported by Julian Davies, who remarks that after 1673, with the withdrawal of Charles II’s Indulgence, “conservative interests sought to consolidate Anglicanism purged of nonconformity.” (*The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625–1641*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 4, and note 8.) The local evidence of this reaction, however, seems clearest after 1680.

<sup>56</sup>CSPD, Charles II, 1683–4, 88. In 1684, just as Exclusionists were being ousted from the Bristol city county, Tories there set about “installing organs and other high anglican fittings.” (J. Barry, “The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol,” in Harris et al., *Politics of Religion*, 178.)

<sup>57</sup>A survey of 143 parish churches taken in the Isle of Ely in 1685 showed some 20% in default with respect to the communion table or rails. CUL, Ely Diocesan Records, B/2/59a, fos. 15–40 (October 8, 1685). Several parishes had been presented for the same defects in earlier years: e.g., Barton (fos. 18, 27); Swaffham St. Mary (fo. 20); Hinxton (fo. 30); Fulbourn All Saints (fo. 33v); Impington (fo. 5).

<sup>58</sup>HWRO, 2058:807, fo. 3; 2584:802, fos. 2, 5; 2289:807 [churchwardens’ presentments], 22 (iii), 12 (viii).

ordered “*ad Circumcludend altare, Anglice*, to rayle in the Communion Table.” At nearby Ringmer, the accounts show that rails were put up at about the same time. In easternmost Sussex, at least thirteen parishes had not made their tables proper as late as 1685, but episcopal visitors secured compliance in all but one soon afterward.<sup>59</sup> By 1686, indeed, Bishop Turner of Ely was able to commend his clergy for the “pleasing Accounts [received] from many places of the Care already taken, not onely to keep up those Fabricks, but to make them Decent.”<sup>60</sup>

This effort to “beautify” the churches and to restore the authority of the canons was strongly reminiscent of official policy in the Caroline church under Laud. In this climate, little sympathy was expressed for dissident laymen within the church or for ministers who tried to keep them there. Harking back to the parlous 1640s, Dean Grenville warned that “the Nonconformity of the Clergy hath a second time been like to prove our ruin.”<sup>61</sup> As if to ensure orthodoxy in the pulpit, he proposed a cycle of sermons during the church’s high festivals that would supplant the afternoon and week-day lectures that still existed in some cathedrals.

Such a course of sermons [he observed] will preach up the Church of England as much as some Lectures have preached it down [by restricting] that Liberty, which has been taken by Preachers in their choice of Subjects, and preaching as well as praying, according to their own Fancies and Humors.<sup>62</sup>

Two observations can be made regarding this renewed offensive against diversity within the church. On the one hand, its chances of success should not be minimized. In the circumstances of James’s

<sup>59</sup>West Sussex R. O., Ep/II, 9/29, fos. 33, 78; PAR 461/1/1/6, fo. 2; EpI/26/2A, inspection tour of 1685, *passim*.

<sup>60</sup>Francis Turner, *A Letter to the Clergy of the Diocese of Ely* (Cambridge, 1686), 10. The places now complying included Dry Drayton, notorious for its Puritan past, where in the 1660s the Communion table was still located in the body of the church. The 1685 survey, however, noted no defects in the parish. (Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 362; Ely Diocesan Records, B/2/59a, fo. 31). It is interesting that Turner’s second visitation, in 1686, made no specific mention of Communion rails. (*Articles of Visitation*, 1686, 1.)

<sup>61</sup>Grenville, *Compleat Conformist*, 15.

<sup>62</sup>Grenville, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Durham* (London, 1686), A. 2v, 17.

reign after 1687, there is reason to think that a higher style of ritual would have been accepted in many parish churches as the price of Anglican security under a Catholic monarch. Even dissenters did not always avail themselves of James's Declaration of Indulgence to separate from their parish churches, largely, it seems, out of concern for Protestant unity in the face of popery.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, during the century following 1688, the established church continued to display a wide variety of devotional styles and customs. In some dioceses, including several strongly affected by the "sacramentalists," evidence of liturgical ceremonialism survived. As measured in parishes across the country, high churchmanship "did not go out with the Non-jurors, nor even with the Hanoverians."<sup>64</sup>

Had "sacramentalist" reforms been more widely extended to parish churches, the character of the Church of England might have been profoundly altered. Many laypeople, particularly those who had remained for the sake of the preaching alone, would have opted for dissent. As one observer noted, persecution "doth alienate the Minds of Multitudes. 'We are not (say they) provided for, nor must we provide for our selves; Good Conforming Preachers dare not encourage us to go to them; and if we are received with better Welcome there, they are suspected to be as bad or worse than the Nonconformists.'"<sup>65</sup>

To the "sacramentalists," the likelihood of driving some partial conformists wholly out of the church was not to be compared with the danger of continued nonconformity inside it. In a letter to Archbishop Sancroft, written just weeks before William of Orange invaded, Bishop Turner expressed his fear of moderates among his colleagues.

---

<sup>63</sup>Ramsbottom, "Presbyterians," 266.

<sup>64</sup>F. C. Mather, "Georgian Churchmanship Reconsidered: Some Variations in Anglican Public Worship 1714–1830," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, 2 (April 1985): 255–83. Mather's wide-ranging research focuses in part on the frequency of "double" services on a given Sunday; the regional variations point to the greater provision for resident clergy in urban as opposed to rural areas. But in Mather's findings about the use of "high church" elements in worship in the mid-1700s, Durham, Norwich, and Ely figure prominently (259–60). This continuity could very well represent the tradition established by Caroline bishops in these dioceses and carried on by the Restoration "sacramentalists." Even Mather notes "survivals" at the other end of the spectrum; in one Essex village "which contained only two families of dissenters," church-goers absented themselves if no sermon was preached (273).

<sup>65</sup>Edward Pearse, *The Conformist's Fourth Plea for the Nonconformists* (London, 1683), 15.

It grows every day plainer to me that many of our divines, men of name and note (I pray God there be not some bishops with them in the design) intend upon any overture for comprehension (when time shall serve) to offer all our ceremonies in sacrifice to the dissenters, kneeling at the sacrament and all.

Turner forecast “another evil day (besides this which is upon us); and the best provision against it would be this, to gather, and, as it were, incorporate the very very many that sit loose but not averse from us, by putting them into this way of regular devotion.”<sup>66</sup> In short, he proposed a full-scale political campaign to shore up the foundations of high churchmanship.

Ultimately, the “evil day” surpassed even Turner’s fears. In fact, he and the other high church bishops probably overstated the willingness of the gentry to cooperate with an Anglicanism so reminiscent of Laud, not to mention with popery itself.<sup>67</sup> The outcome of James’s remaining on the throne is, of course, imponderable. But it is a point worth underscoring that the Glorious Revolution ended not only the king’s plans for Catholic toleration but also the work of men like Grenville. Prominent high church prelates balked at publishing the Declaration of Indulgence—Sancroft, Lloyd and Turner could not join in plans for tolerating Catholicism—but they also refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary.<sup>68</sup> As a consequence, the “sacramentalist” party did not regain its direct influence at court; William’s appointments to the episcopal bench were moderate Tories. Although Convocation subsequently stifled the proposal to revise the prayer book in order to comprehend more dissenters,

---

<sup>66</sup>Turner to Sancroft, 3 September 1688, Tanner MS. 28/121. quoted in E. Cardwell, *A History of Conferences and other proceedings connected with the revision of the Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford, 3d edition, 1849, repr. 1966), 404–405.

<sup>67</sup>For instance, James’s Ecclesiastical Commission now appears to have interfered in matters of lay patronage in much the same way that Laud proposed to do. J. P. Kenyon, “The Commission for Ecclesiastical Causes, 1686–1688: A Reconsideration,” *The Historical Journal* 34, 3 (1991): 727–36.

<sup>68</sup>William Lloyd (Norwich), John Lake (Chichester), Francis Turner (Ely), and Thomas Ken (Bath and Wells) were all associated with the movement to increase frequency of Communion. All four became non-jurors, along with Denis Grenville and George Hickes.

this was not a victory for the high churchmen but rather a confirmation of the Restoration *status quo*.<sup>69</sup>

If the accession of William and Mary reaffirmed the Protestant identity of the church, however, it also set the pattern for future conflict within the Anglican “*via media*.” On the one hand, by halting the progress of the “sacramentalists,” the Glorious Revolution forestalled a serious effort to reimpose uniformity. On the other, Convocation adjourned without considering a revision of the canon law, which might have strengthened clerical discipline.<sup>70</sup> After 1689, friction between “high” and “low” expressions of the liturgy became a recurrent theme, with neither side emerging as dominant. Many of the same issues that vexed the Restoration bishops—ceremonies, episcopal authority, and the role of the laity—would figure prominently in later disputes involving the clergy. In 1874, during the controversy over ritualism, the archbishop of York still worried that the Church of England might be “deposed from her high position and the national trust withdrawn from her, simply because it is impossible to determine who or what she is.”<sup>71</sup> In a sense, his fears had been realized two centuries earlier.

John D. Ramsbottom is associate professor of history Social Science Division Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville, Missouri.

---

<sup>69</sup>Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 379; G. V. Bennett, “Conflict in the Church,” in *Britain After the Glorious Revolution, 1689–1714*, ed. G. Holmes (London, 1969), 161; Cardwell, *History of Conferences*, 434–58.

<sup>70</sup>Bennett, “Conflict,” 162.

<sup>71</sup>Debates in the House of Lords, 20 April 1874, Hansard, ser. 3, vol. 218, 807.