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How did the Anglican Reformers Understand Episcopacy?

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This article explores the understanding of the episcopacy by church leaders in England in the years after the Elizabethan Settlement up to, but not including, Richard Hooker. There were fascinating and heated debates about whether church order was a secondary matter, and what (if any) pattern could be discerned in the early church.

Substantial change to church polity was central to the experience of Reformation in many parts of Europe, but in England traditional episcopacy was not seriously threatened until the 1640s. There was, nevertheless, a considerable variety of opinion about it within the spectrum of Anglican reform after the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. There was a general consensus among Anglican Reformers when it came to Reformed soteriology and the rejection of the papacy, but with respect to church governance some maintained conformity to the 1559 Settlement, some looked for a presbyterian reordering, while others came to articulate a *iure divino* position on episcopacy. To complicate matters still further, these positions were on a continuum where, as Collinson put it, "the ultimate extremes of colour are clear enough, but the intermediate tones merge imperceptibly."[1]

For our purposes we will limit ourselves to the thirty-five-year period from the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 to about 1594, just after the emerging avant-garde conformists had consolidated their new *iure divino* position on episcopacy. We will divide this period into three sections, which will give us a glimpse of the different positions held in the later sixteenth century. It will also help us see the general theological movement among people in the church who—whilst very similar on doctrine—took up opposing positions on how the *ecclesia Anglicana* ought to be governed. These three sections are 1559 to 1572, 1572 to 1587, and 1587 to 1594.

[1] Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27.

1559–1572: Defending the Elizabethan Settlement

The conflict surrounding the "great matter" of Henry VIII, had rested in part on who, exactly, was the head of the church in England. For Henry, and thus for the theologians surrounding him, the answer had been clear: he was. As a result, the Reformation in England began, at least from the government's point of view, from the notion that the divine right to rule, both in the church and in the state, fell to the one appointed by God to rule the nation—the "godly prince." Scarisbrick argues that sixteenth-century scholarship had convinced people "that kings had been called by God to be his vicars on earth and endowed by him with the sacred duty of nursing the spiritual as well as the temporal lives of their subjects;" what Sykes calls "the veritable *shaliach* of God Almighty."[2] This was not to confuse what was God's with what was the prince's for, as Avis argues, "the things of God, according to evangelical theology, are the inward and eternal things: all else, being outward and temporal, must be Caesar's."[3] The notion of the godly prince was used by the Anglican Reformers to drive through their policy of reforming the English church, and became a distinctive mark of the English reformation.[4] For Henry, this meant his replacing the Pope as the "Supreme Head" of the Church in England—what has been termed caesaropapism—resulting in the entire ecclesiastical establishment becoming wholly dependent upon the king.[5] By the time of Elizabeth's reign, this royal supremacy was no longer regarded as a personal attribute of the prince but as something belonging to the whole body politic and exercised by the queen-in-parliament.[6] Whilst the queen resisted this development, conformists increasingly stressed the prince's responsibility for the outward forms of the church, and played down any suggestion that the queen on her own—that is without parliament—could determine doctrine.

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[2] Scarisbrick quoted in Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 132; Norman Sykes, *The Church of England and Non-Episcopal Churches in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Essay Towards An Historical Interpretation of the Anglican Tradition from Whitgift to Wake* (London: SPCK, 1948), 4.

[3] Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 132.

[4] Richard A. Norris, "Episcopacy," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes and John Booty (London: SPCK, 1998), 334.

[5] Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, 161.

[6] Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, 163.

Under Elizabeth I, the "godly prince's" role was to "rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal" so that—as the Reformed theologians of Switzerland understood it—the church could focus on its main tasks of preaching and administering the sacraments. To see that the Church of England under Elizabeth was Reformed in its doctrine of the church, one need to look no further than the beginning of Article XIX: "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered."[7] What is immediately noticeable about this article, in terms of the question before us, is the lack of mention of bishops. This is strange, given that since at least the time of Cyprian (d. 258), theologians had maintained that the catholic Church was united to, and under the authority of, the local bishop. By the twelfth century the Church took this a stage further in requiring recognition of, and submission to, the Bishop of Rome. Thus the medieval Church—and the contemporary Roman affiliated churches—had, and continued to define a church by its bishop (consecrated by a succession of bishops going back to the apostles).

Article XIX eschews such a theology, and instead uses language which is virtually identical to Article VII of the Confession of Augsburg (1530), and Calvin's definition in Book IV of his Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559).[8] Whilst the consecration of Parker in 1559 may have outwardly conformed to the practices of the pre-Reformation church, the Reformers surrounding Elizabeth, at least, did not share the pre-Reformation understanding of episcopal and priestly succession, or of its necessity for the church.[9] Indeed John Pilkington, Bishop of Durham (1561–1576), could say a 'succession of good bishops is a great blessing of God, but because God and his truth hangs not on man nor place, we rather hang on the undeceivable truth of God's word in all doubts than on any bishops'.[10] As Article XIX makes clear, what is constitutive of the

[7] Gerald Bray, ed., *Documents of the English Reformation 1526–1701* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1994), 296.

[8] Norman Sykes, *Old Priest and New Presbyter: The Anglican Attitude to Episcopacy, Presbyterianism and Papacy Since the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 8.

[9] On Parker's consecration see B.M. Hamilton-Thompson, "From the Reformation to the Restoration," in *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and the Doctrine of the Episcopacy*, ed. Kenneth E. Kirk (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957), 397; on early Reformers theology see Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 102.

[10] Quoted in Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 28.

church is the preaching of the Gospel and the orderly administration of the sacraments; this is what made a church truly catholic. What then was the conception of episcopacy in this reformed church, since bishops were not seen to be "of the essence" of the Church?

Church Order Under Godly Princes

The 1550 Ordinal begins, "It is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons"; a position echoed by Jewel his 1564 defence of the English church from attacks by papal sympathisers.[11] Given that the early Reformers regarded church polity as "evident" they had little reason to justify their position. Furthermore, and in contrast to most of the Continent, the English Reformation was being carried out by the monarch through the legal structures of the church, and thus by the bishops themselves. As a result, many of the English Reformers saw no contradiction between reformation and episcopacy.[12] They therefore spent less time on justifying the existence of bishops, and more time describing what bishops ought to be doing. Bishops were instruments under the Crown, and thus were compatible with the Reformed definition of a church seen above. It was the bishop's responsibility to ensure that "the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered."[13] More than this, the bishops were expected to be preachers themselves, as the consecration service made plain beginning: "Give grace, we beseech thee, to all Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, that they may diligently preach thy Word" and, later, they are asked by the Archbishop, "Are you determined out of the same holy Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge." Finally in closing, prayers are said to "endue him with thy holy Spirit" so that he can fulfil his office through "preaching thy Word."[14]

Whilst, in the medieval church, bishops had largely been administrators and advisers to the Crown, Jewel placed much more emphasis on the fact that "we require our bishops to be pastors, labourers, and watchmen."[15]

[11] John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England*, ed. John E. Booty (New York: Cornell University Press, 1963), 24.
[12] Norris, "Episcopacy," 333.
[13] Norris, "Episcopacy," 334.
[14] See B. Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 644–651.
[15] Quoted in Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 163.

Succession, by the laying on of hands, had been replaced by the Reformation assertion that preaching and teaching the apostles' faith was true succession. The Reformers then, not only had a different theology of the place of bishops within the church, but also a different understanding of the role which the bishop was meant to perform (ensuring order not sacramental succession). With different emphases on the bishop's role, it had been speculated by some, including John Ponet earlier Bishop of Winchester (1551–1553), who oversaw English congregations during the Marian exile, that the very word "bishop" ought to have been replaced with that of "superintendent"; but, perhaps influenced by a more traditional-minded Queen, the word "bishop" remained.[16]

For the early conformists then, church order had been relegated to an issue of indifference (*adiaphora*), a widespread Protestant position which Collinson describes as a moderate view "to which the whole protestant world would have subscribed."[17] As a result, conformist Reformers were happy to say that foreign churches could make alternative arrangements. So long as the presbyterian churches on the continent preached the Word and properly administered the sacraments, then the early conformist Reformers accepted them as genuine churches; indeed they even accepted the ministry of their presbyters in England. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the quite vague Article XXIII:

> It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.[18]

Here there is no mention of *who* has the "public authority" lawfully to call, send, judge, and choose the ministers for the church. This article may well have been left vague, so that episcopal order would not be forever required in England, nor would foreign churches, ordered in other ways, be offended by the English church constitution. But whilst conformist Reformers were accepting of a variety of orders overseas, it was not the same in England. *Foreign* churches could decide on their order, but there remained a very clear understanding in the minds of the early conformists

[16] Sykes, *Old Priest and New Presbyter*, 14.
[17] Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 102.
[18] Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation 1526–1701*, 297–298.

that the decision in England had been taken, and the English church was episcopally ordered. What then of the grouping arguing from *within* the English church for a presbyterian order of government?

Presbyterian Objections

Particularly under Edward VI, Cranmer hoped for an entirely reformed Church which would be a beacon to the Continent. Many Protestant dissenters had fled to Geneva and Zurich under Mary's rule, and had sat at the feet of Calvin and Bullinger. With Elizabeth's accession, and the queen's seeming Protestant leanings, many returned to create a 'new Jerusalem'. As a result, amongst the vast majority of the Protestant elites there was a surprising agreement on doctrine, with large numbers of the queen's counsellors, newly-made bishops, and educated laity opting for a Reformed theology. Where fault lines existed, they were over ecclesiology, and the Settlement of 1559 caused these to be exposed. Many hoped that the Settlement was a first step on the road to a perfectly Reformed church, and awaited what they assumed would be the second and final stage, the reform of church order. As a result of this assumption—one which was widely held in England—those who believed in a Scriptural call for a presbyterian polity were, to a greater or lesser extent, prepared to wait. In the meantime, criticism was levelled at the practice and worship of the church, including the bishops' standard and style of living. For "many of the Elizabethan bishops enjoyed incomes which set them alongside the wealthier gentry and nobility in the social scale, barely recognisable as reformed pastors to eyes grown accustomed to the bourgeois values of the Swiss and Rhineland ministers."[19] All this changed in the early 1570s when presbyterian Protestants began to lose confidence in the government's willingness to complete the reformation which they sought. They found it easy to blame the bishops for all the abuses—seeming and real—which they saw in the church. John Field, writing in 1571, could criticise the previous generation of presbyterians saying:

> A great reproof it is to all the learned, who have made much ado about shells and chippings of popery, but that which beareth up Antichrist chiefly […] the awful ministry of word and the right government of the Church, … matters of far greater weight and importance than ceremonies […].[20]

[19] Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 42–43.
[20] Quoted in Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 101.

For these "hotter" Protestants the Scriptures were clear on church polity, and because God had ordained the rule of elders or presbyters, action needed to be taken. Whilst they continued to believe in the divinely appointed "godly prince"—it was treacherous to think otherwise—the prince's job was to enact that which was plain in Scripture; she could ordain nothing else. Here then was the beginning of an ecclesiological distinction which would separate brethren who were otherwise theologically similar.

1572–1587: Debating the Admonition to Parliament

By 1572 a new generation, which had reached maturity under Elizabeth's reign, had become disillusioned at the failure of their predecessors to reform further, and in this they were encouraged by Calvin's successor Beza.[21] Political events would continue to play their part as Roman sympathisers sought to take advantage of the queen's weak position at the beginning of her reign, and many of the laity maintained affection for the old religion. Following the Rising of the North (1569), the excommunication of the queen by Pope Pius V (1570), and the Ridolfi plot to place Mary Queen of Scots on the throne (1571), the government took action, including a requirement for all clergy to swear to the Thirty-Nine Articles and the use of the Book of Common Prayer. In response, John Field and Thomas Wilcox wrote their Admonition to Parliament (1572) laying out their case for further reform, whilst criticising the problems they saw inherent in the church and its Prayer Book, upping the presbyterian rhetoric and producing the "first full-scale assertion of *iure divino* presbyterianism in print in England."[22] What followed was a series of replies written first by the conformist John Whitgift, and followed by the presbyterian Thomas Cartwright, both of whom were Reformed Calvinists, but were increasingly far apart on what Scripture said, and how clear it was, on church order.

In order to understand these two positions better, we will focus on four points of controversy put forward by Cartwright and answered by Whitgift. These four points were not new, and many in previous generations had thought and even argued them. Rather, the Admonition Controversy

[21] Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1988), 26; Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, 123.

[22] Peter Lake, "Admonition Controversy," in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation (Vol. 1)*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.

demonstrated the willingness of a new generation of presbyterians to criticise the Settlement openly and consequently risk imprisonment.

Cartwright's Complaints

First, Cartwright argued the presbyterian position that Scripture was clear on church order: that this order was rule of the local church by a plurality of elders with authority given them, through election, by the people; and that, far from being an *adiaphoron,* this order was normative for every church. Cartwright argued from reason that a plurality of elected elders made sense for: "the greatness of the charge that is committed unto the ministers […] it is very dangerous to commit that to the view and search of one man."[23] This followed with a demonstration from Scripture (Acts 6) that a plurality of elders was always God's plan. As a result of this "clear speaking" of Scripture and reason, Cartwright argued against church order as an *adiaphoron*, going as far as to assert that "it is no small part of the gospel, yea the substance of it."[24] He was also very happy to criticise anyone who thought otherwise, saying to Whitgift:

> you, which distinguish between these, and say that the former, that is matters of faith, and necessary to salvation, may not be tolerated in the church […] but that this later, which are ceremonies, order, discipline, government in the church […] prove yourself to be as evil a divider as you showed yourself before an expounder.[25]

Second, Cartwright claimed that relying on the witness of the early church was dangerous, for the Antichrist had always been at work building what became the Church of Rome: "the foundations thereof being secretly and under the ground laid in the apostles' time.[…] And, being a very dangerous thing to ground any order or policy of the church upon men at all."[26] This was an attack on the conformist strategy of looking to the early church to emulate the choices of those closer to the Apostles when Scripture was deemed not to be clear. Since the episcopal order had been evident from the earliest times of the Church, the presbyterians had to explain why, if Scripture was so clearly on their side, the Church had from

[23] Quoted in John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift, D.D., Archbishop of Canterbury*, Parker Society Edition, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1851), 1:300.
[24] Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 27.
[25] Quoted in Whitgift, *The Works*, 1:181.
[26] Quoted in Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:181.

very early on ignored this order; their answer was the work of Antichrist from the inception of the Church.

Third, Cartwright argued that the fact that the English Church had reformed its doctrine, whilst commendable in itself, was not enough if it did not deal with the hidden doctrines of papalism which still remained embedded in it. Cartwright highlighted the inequality of ministers as one of these "papal" doctrines which, if it were not removed, would lead the church back into error. "Once the principle of imparity had been accepted, the basic drives of human ambition and greed, exploited by Antichrist" would cause the errors of the Roman church to flood back in.[27] The rule of Antichrist was the risk being taken in allowing the hierarchy of ministers, and thus bishops, to remain in the English church whatever other Reformed doctrines it currently held to.

Fourth, Cartwright said that what was needed was a criterion by which issues thought to be *adiaphora* could be weighed; Cartwright argued for "the need to edify the brethren, avoid offence, maintain order and comeliness and respect the glory of God."[28] Given the recent history of papal ceremonies and church order in England, what was done in the contemporary church had to refute the old errors and teach the new doctrines. Cartwright argued:

> to bring a stick which is crooked to be straight, we do not only bow it so far until it come to be straight, but we bend it so far until we make it so crooked of the other side as it was before on the first side, to this end that at the last it may stand straight […] it is [thus] dangerous for us that have been plunged in the mire of popery to use the ceremonies of it.[29]

When, therefore, it came to church government edification played its part in Cartwright's attack. An educated and edified laity were far better judges of who should be an elder in their church than one man many miles away:

> God be praised, there are numbers in every church that are able to be teachers unto most of the chancellors, in any matter pertaining to the church, and are able to give a riper judgement in any ecclesiastical matter than the most part of them can.[30]

[27] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 44.
[28] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 19.
[29] Quoted in Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:442–443.
[30] Quoted in Whitgift, *The Works*, 3:273–274.

Such election of (and teaching by) godly men was, to Cartwright's mind, far better than "the tyranny and ambitious power which oppressed and overlaid the church of God" in the form of bishops.[31] Reformed teaching might be official church doctrine, but with a popish, even anti-Christian church order, the church was denying "the effect and virtue thereof."[32]

These four issues—the Scriptural witness to presbyterian polity, the use of the early church, outward ceremonies, and edification—along with others, caused Field, Wilcox and Cartwright to risk their freedom for their beliefs, and for those of many like-minded people. At this point in 1572, then, we can say that there was a presbyterian position, held both by the previous generation, and increasingly vocally by a new and upcoming generation of Anglican reformers, that believed bishops to be an unscriptural and popish imposition upon the church. Such an imposition, based only on the bad example of a tainted early church, not only put the Church in grave danger of being led back into error by Antichrist, but also was an unedifying example to a people who had been formed under the papal error. The conformists, in the form of Whitgift, would not let this go unanswered.

Whitgift's Defence

First of all, Whitgift had to defend episcopacy against the claim that rule by a plurality of elected elders was the clear witness of Scripture. If there had been any temptation to claim a *iure divino* episcopate, Whitgift rejected the notion out-of-hand, and responded to Cartwright's claim of divine-right polity as being "very popish."[33] Rather, Whitgift argued: "I find no one certain and perfect kind of government prescribed or commanded in the scriptures to the Church of Christ."[34] Instead, Whitgift went on the attack, arguing that any claim for a divine-right polity would be usurping the power of the "godly prince," and suggested "that the external government of the church under a Christian magistrate must be according to the kind and form of government used in the commonwealth."[35] This allowed Whitgift, Lake argues, to defend and praise the episcopal form of government whilst not "seeming to unchurch the foreign reformed churches which had abolished government by

[31] Quoted in Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:278.
[32] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 25.
[33] Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 27–28.
[34] Whitgift, *The Works*, 1:184.
[35] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:263.

bishops" or to be seen to claim divine-right for episcopacy.[36] Rather Whitgift was happy to say that "[i]f it had pleased her majesty, with the wisdom of the realm, to have used no bishops at all, we could not have complained justly of any defect in our church."[37] Having made such a minimalist claim for episcopacy, Whitgift goes on elsewhere to argue strongly for an episcopal government.[38] Episcopacy, he said,

> is most ancient in the church, it is confirmed by the best and noblest councils, it is allowed by the best-learned fathers, it hath the pattern from the practice of the apostles (all which hath been shewed before) it is most meet for this state and kingdom.[39]

This was what Lake calls Whitgift's maximum position on episcopacy, and he rightly points out that there is some "tension" between his minimum and maximum position.[40] Whitgift had to be careful that in making such a case for episcopacy, he was not perceived to be making an *iure divino* claim. Overall, it must be said, he managed this delicate balance well.

Second, Whitgift refuted Cartwright's assertion that evidence from early Christians could not be used because of the work of Antichrist in their midst. Whilst he accepted that the Antichrist had been at work in that period, why should "this detract anything from the truth taught in that time?"[41] Attacking Cartwright, Whitgift noted that what the Antichrist had been doing in that early period was sowing heresy and causing schisms, and thus "it behoveth you to take heed how you divide the army of Christ, which should *unanimiter* fight against that Antichrist."[42] Whitgift was happy to assert that the Church remained relatively pure for the first five hundred years, arguing that "[n]either was there any function or office bought into the church during all that time, allowed by any general council or credible writer, which was not most meet for that time, and allowable by the word of God."[43] As a result, the government was right to look to the early church for example and to choose the episcopal order whilst seeking unity around Reformed doctrine.

[36] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 88–89.
[37] Quoted in Sykes, *The Church of England and Non-Episcopal Churches*, 5.
[38] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 89.
[39] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:262–263.
[40] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 89–90.
[41] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:182.
[42] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:182.
[43] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:182.

Third, against the claim that the inequality of ministers was a back door for Antichrist, Whitgift argued from reason that inequality was necessary in every area of life:

> For as superiority and government is necessary in all other states and degrees of men, so is it in the ministry also; for ministers be not angels, nor they are not of that perfection that they may safely be left in their own absolute government.[44]

A hierarchal order was needed to watch over each presbyter, and ensure he guided his flock in line with Scripture, as well as by example, and so there was need of bishops to ensure the greater good of the church. Furthermore, Whitgift returned to his point that the government of the church should reflect the government of the nation:

> that, the one being a monarchy, the other must be a democraty [sic], or an aristocraty [sic]? [Otherwise] This were to divide one realm into two, and to spoil the prince of the one half of her jurisdiction and authority.[45]

For Whitgift, if inequality was apparent in the Scriptures, in the early church, and in the government of that time, why should it not exist in the contemporary church as well?

Fourth, Whitgift sought to counter the accusation by Cartwright that Reformed doctrine was being hindered by unedifying ceremonies and church polity. Relying on the theological understanding of Article XIX, Whitgift argued that "only the Holy Ghost on this sort doth edify by the ministry of the word" and such ministry was given by the English church.[46] Whitgift accepted that orders and ceremonies should not give offence, but argued "who shall judge what is most comely, and the best order? shall every private man, or rather such as have the chief care and government of the church?"[47] God had given authority to the "godly prince" to determine which order was most edifying, and she had decided on episcopacy; and together they determined which ceremonies were edifying. In contrast, Cartwright's position would lead to anarchy as "she

[44] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:262.
[45] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:263–264.
[46] Whitgift, *The Works*, 2:56.
[47] Whitgift, *The Works*, 1:197.

should be compelled to alter the same so oft as any should therewith be offended."[48]

The Admonition debates showed that Anglican Reformers had come to different conclusions about which criteria carried more weight in deciding what was *adiaphora*, which only succeeded in entrenching the two sides in their positions.

1587–1594: The Emergence of Avant-Garde Conformists

Due perhaps to the presbyterian-minded ministers around the queen, Whitgift's "minimum" position had remained at the heart of the establishment's defence of their church order up until the late 1580s. In 1587, however, John Bridges made the first attempt to develop Whitgift's "maximum" position into a *iure divino* defence of episcopal church polity by arguing that episcopal government had been brought about by the apostles, which for Bridges meant, "that we must needs confess that it is of God also."[49] This was in many respects a modest revision, as Thompson has argued, for Bridges conceded that there were other legitimate forms of government, confessing that "we ought neither to condemn or speak or think evil of other good churches that use other ecclesiastical government than we do."[50] For Bridges, however, he was equally clear that the governance of the state by a Christian prince, and the episcopal governance of the church under her, was the order preferred and recommended by God.[51] Such a change in theology was recognised as significant and as novel—for the conformists—by those on the presbyterian side, and indeed welcomed by Walter Travers who saw it as a breakthrough in the debate, for now both sides agreed Scripture made definitive claims on polity.[52]

In many respects such a move seems relatively small, given the ground work which Whitgift had done in his "maximum" position, but it took almost twenty years to take this next step. What seems to account for this breakthrough was, Lake argues, a shift of the theological balance within the upper echelons of the Elizabethan regime with the death of some of her evangelical Protestant councillors (e.g. Leicester, Mildmay and Warwick),

[48] Whitgift, *The Works*, 1:196.
[49] Quoted in Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 91.
[50] Thompson's argument in Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, 127; Bridges quoted in Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 96.
[51] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 100.
[52] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 91.

and their replacement by those with a lower view of presbyterians (e.g. Whitgift and Hatton).[53] This leadership change and the affirmation of the 1559 Settlement coincided with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in August 1588, which was readily interpreted as a vindication of the queen as the servant of God, and of the Settlement which she had brought in. This change in the political culture enabled Bridges and others to continue the general trajectory of affirming episcopacy, and indeed to take the first steps in outlining a *iure divino* defence of it.

In the years immediately following Bridges' sermon, others, including Bancroft, Sutcliffe and Saravia, would push *iure divino* episcopacy to its natural conclusion, and demand that this should be the only form of church government allowed. This avant-garde position, put forward by evangelicals, owed much to their belief that Scripture consistently witnessed to God's ordering of his people. Scripture, they believed, had always modelled the need for hierarchy in a fallen world both in the Old Testament with the leadership of tribes, and the councillors under Moses, and in the new with the differences between the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples, and thus was approved by Christ.[54] Bilson argued that of the four powers given to the apostles (administration of word, administration of the sacraments, power of the keys, and right to impose hands), the first two were given to all ministers but the other two powers where given only to bishops, and only they could rightly claim to be the full successors of the apostles. Such power had been delegated by apostles to certain of their disciples to continue their work after they had gone (Paul to Timothy and Titus). Whilst accepting that the terms 'presbyter' and 'bishop' had been synonymous in Scripture, the important point was that the office which Timothy and Titus had held was essentially the same as that held later by bishops.[55] So long as there was a need for discipline and ordination there would be a need for this Scripturally-authorised role. Sutcliffe would argue that episcopacy "proceedeth immediately from God, men may not alter the same according to their fancies."[56] By 1594 the new conformist position had been established, and whilst this generation continued to accept other polities overseas, this was only *in extremis*, and was certainly not to be copied in more blessed realms such as England.

By 1594, then, episcopacy was confirmed as the favoured model of those in power, though presbyterians continued to hope for reform

[53] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 92–93.
[54] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 94.
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[56] Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, 93–94.

until the Hampton Court Conference in 1604. With the re-establishment of episcopacy after the Restoration in 1660 the episcopal model came to define the term "Anglican" and exclude presbyterians. The Anglican Reformers' concern for a biblical reformation of their church, during the period 1559 to 1594, brought them to a point of thinking about polity reform, but their hesitancy marked the English Church in this area. Under the patronage of a traditionally-minded queen, the ancient episcopal model was preferred, being deemed acceptable by the silence of Scripture and the witness of the early Church, over the novelty of presbyterian models seen in parts of the Continent.

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