

**“HE MUST BE DESPISED’:
HOSTILITY TO MINISTERS IN
EARLY MODERN CAMBRIDGESHIRE”**

by
Jana Pisani

In *The Country Parson* (1632) poet and minister George Herbert discussed the relationship between the Anglican clergyman and his parishioners. In Chapter XXVIII, entitled “The Parson in Contempt,” Herbert wrote that all ministers realize “the generall ignominy which is cast upon the profession,” and that this profession ensures that “he must be despised.”¹ He went on to say that such hatred of the ministry had always “been the portion of God his master and of God’s Saints his Brethren, and this is foretold that it shall be so still until things be no more.”² Herbert recommended that in order to reach his parishioners spiritually, however, such hostility must be overcome by using “a courteous carriage and winning behaviour,” as well as firm discipline.³

Herbert was correct in his assumption that the clergy of England had experienced antagonism on the part of the laity, a problem which, though not uncommon before the Henrician period, had become widespread enough during and after the Reformation that both the Crown and the Church attempted to arrest it on numerous occasions. In his injunctions of July 1547, Edward VI commanded the laity of England, who were often heard to “uncharitably contemn and abuse priests and ministers of the Church,” to begin to “use them charitably and reverently for their office and ministration’s sake, and especially all such as labor in the setting forth of God’s holy word.”⁴ The Elizabethan royal injunctions of 1559, worded similarly to the Edwardian injunctions, also commanded that the abuse of clergy stop. Nearly a half-century later the 1605 metropolitan visitation articles of Archbishop Bancroft again asked about lay abuse of the clergy. Article thirteen questioned whether anyone in the various parishes had “quarrelled or stricken, or used any violence unto, or with, your minister or any other in the church or churchyard.”⁵ The visitation articles of the Calvinist Archbishop Abbot of Canterbury from the

year 1616 asked the same question but included another query, “or have (any) disturbed the minister in time of divine service or sermon; or have libelled or spoken slanderous words against your minister, to the scandal of his vocation.”⁶ Obviously, lay hostility toward the clergy, whether verbal or physical, was perceived as a problem in the Early Modern period by both the Church and the Crown.

But considering the fact that perception and reality are often different, several questions remain. How extensive was anticlericalism toward the clergy, what caused it, and how often did it lead to physical violence? A number of recent historians of Early Modern England have attempted to answer these questions, leading to some fascinating if not opposing conclusions. Arthur Geoffrey Dickens, for instance, claims that anticlericalism had been growing in England since the fourteenth century, and that it was created not among Protestants but among Catholics unhappy with the caliber of their clergy.⁷ Dickens has suggested that this anticlericalism is one of the reasons why the Reformation came about relatively easily in England. Christopher Haigh, on the other hand, has dubbed anticlericalism “a convenient fiction” created by historians to explain the English Reformation.⁸ He implies that most people were in fact contented with their parish clergy until the Reformation, when the prestige of the ministry in general and its changing status led to the decline in their reputation. Haigh states that anticlericalism “was not a cause of the Reformation; it was a result.”⁹ Like Haigh, Rosemary O’Day’s thorough study of the clergy between 1558 and 1642 looks at the issue of how the status of the minister changed with the coming of the Reformation. She considers the questions of how they were chosen and ordained, their educational background, their economic status, and the extent to which they created a ministerial community after the Reformation, describing the development of a vocation and professional status among the clergy.¹⁰ In terms of the clerical relationship with the laity, O’Day claims that their new status isolated the ministers from their parishioners, leading to possible problems between the clergy and the laity. Conversely, Peter Marshall’s recent examination of the influence of the Reformation upon the priesthood studies the changing role of the parish clergy both in spiritual and in personal terms.¹¹ Marshall finds that the transformation of the clergy and the resultant

loss of spiritual power led to a probable increase in anticlericalism throughout England and certainly created a “conspicuous diminution of the status and prestige” that the priesthood held prior to the Reformation.¹² In an attempt to reconcile these views concerning anticlericalism, Christopher Marsh suggests, in his study of the primary historiographical issues of the English Reformation, that the levels of anticlericalism in 1600 were not much different from those in 1500. While he admits that the status of the clergy had indeed changed with the Reformation, he notes that the minister was still enthroned upon the metaphorical pedestal and “life on top of it was still something of a balancing act.”¹³

What most of the above-mentioned studies have not done is examine an entire diocese for an extended period of time. The majority end either with the death of Elizabeth or begin with the reign of James I. Few have focused upon the question of how religion became a divisive issue within the parishes, especially between the clergy and the laity. Except for the problem of tithing or broader discussions of anticlericalism, lay-clerical relations have received scant attention. Moreover, the little work that has been done on the subject rarely uses the church court and visitation records as primary sources. An examination of visitation presentments for the diocese of Ely and its surrounding fenland, including the county of Cambridge, from 1549 to 1623 offers an excellent case study of parish events in England during and after the Reformation that illuminates the influence of theological differentiation on lay-clerical relations. An analysis of the presentments indicates that hostile lay-cleric relations stemmed from a number of factors. The professionalization of the clergy, the role of the clergy as disciplinarians, religious developments in Puritanism and Arminianism, and perceptions of clerical immorality served to alienate parishioners.

Records of the church courts clearly show the hostility that could develop between ministers and their parishioners through presentments of lay people who ridiculed or verbally (rarely physically) attacked their clergymen. The visitation records for the diocese of Ely between 1549 and 1623 list 123 total cases of verbal abuse of ministers, 81 of which occurred in the period between 1561 and 1600 (an average of two per year), and the remaining 42 in the years from

1601 to 1623 (an average of 1.8 per year). Given the many thousands of people who lived in Ely's 152 parishes from 1549 until 1623, open hostility was, therefore, not a serious problem.¹⁴ However, it must be remembered that the cases presented to the courts constitute an unknown fraction of the actual hostility between the laity and the clergy. Verbal and/or physical abuse of a clergyman was punishable by excommunication, probably leading most parishioners probably to hide their thoughts in order to stay out of trouble.

What caused the relatively few presentments for anticlericalism as seen in the records for the diocese of Ely? Unfortunately, in many of the cases there is no way of knowing the reason behind the conflict. For instance, in a presentment from 1608 accused Alice Skillinge of Mepal of cursing her minister and the parish churchwardens by announcing to them that she wished that "the meate & drinke they eate might goe up & downe there bellyes as men do to harrowe."¹⁵ While Skillinge must have been angry for some reason, no justification for her outburst was listed in the records.

However, in other presentments from the diocese it is possible to determine at least partial causes of the hostility documented in many of the cases. In a few instances, for example, hostility within lay/clerical relationships appears to have stemmed from the personality or behavior of the parishioner. In seven of the 123 cases, the layperson who abused his or her minister was apparently a malcontent who was brought before the court on a number of other charges, suggesting a decided lack of sociability. John Baxter of Ickleton, who was brought before the metropolitanical visitation of 1592 for speaking against his pastor, was one such person. Baxter was also charged with neglecting to take communion for two years, keeping his wife from services, and being a drunkard as well as a "monstrous" swearer, brawler, fighter, quarreller, and railer.¹⁶ A similar example is provided by John Nicholas of Little Wilbraham, reported in December 1602 for verbally abusing his minister without cause.¹⁷ At the same visitation, Nicholas also was described as an adulterer, a sorcerer and a reviler of his neighbors who continually created discord amongst them.¹⁸

Tithing rarely emerges as a source of conflict in the visitation records for the diocese of Ely, primarily because civil suits were not typically brought up at the visitations. Therefore, in only two

examples from the visitation records did a tithe dispute brought to court by a pastor lead to verbal abuse by a parishioner. In 1611 Mary Bushe, wife of Thomas of Littlington, was presented to the episcopal visitation for abusing her minister verbally.¹⁹ The reason for Mrs. Bushe's anger was a dispute with the minister over tithe apples. The second tithe conflict, which produced two instances of disparagement, involved Henry Fawxe (or Faux), the vicar of Sutton, a man who was often involved in disputes with his parishioners and churchwardens. In 1616 one of Fawxe's parishioners, John Kinge, physically shut the vicar out of the church and urged other members of the congregation to do likewise. He also called Fawxe a liar who should not be believed. Kinge himself was charged, in turn, with trying to set the other parishioners against Fawxe. At the visitation, however, Kinge mentioned that no one should pay Fawxe tithe milk, suggesting that his problem with the minister was not a spiritual issue but an economic one.²⁰

What, therefore, led most often to anticlericalism in the diocese of Ely in the decades following the Reformation? The visitation records of the diocese suggest that three situations were particularly divisive in the post-Reformation period: clerical discipline of a layperson; differences of religious belief; and clerical immorality, particularly among "godly" ministers who were expected to be moral examples for their communities. All three of these situations involved the change in duty or status for the post-Reformation minister who was becoming increasingly a disciplinarian, preacher, and moral example.

Hostility Caused by Clerical Discipline of Alayperson

Both prior to and after the Reformation parish clergy had disciplinary jurisdiction over the laity in the areas of sexual behavior, marriage, drunkenness, blasphemy, defamation, tithing, conduct in the church and the churchyard, and religious belief and practice.²¹ Though the pre-Reformation priest was certainly expected to discipline his wayward laity when necessary through auricular confession, his post-Reformation counterpart was required to take a much more active role in keeping the members of his flock in line. Ministers in early modern England were required to admonish the churchwardens weekly to fulfill their responsibilities, and with those same churchwar-

dens they were to make presentments to the church courts and visitations of parishioners who did not behave as the church required. The ministers were also responsible for enforcing penances, suspensions, and excommunications, and for turning back from communion anyone who had not performed a required penance or who was not in charity with his or her neighbors. In addition, some ministers, especially Puritans, undertook direct private or public chastisement of those parishioners whose conduct seemed particularly troublesome.²²

It was inevitable that the requirements imposed by the Church of England upon its ministers to report the misbehavior of their parishioners would create some degree of tension in lay-clerical relations. Ministers were placed in an extremely difficult situation when they were simultaneously exhorted to be good and gentle shepherds, leading their flocks through loving persuasion, but at the same time ordered to be stern superintendents of lay conduct who were expected to hand over any malefactors to the church courts for trial and punishment. In *The Religion of Protestants*, Patrick Collinson wrote that the minister who “castigated the sins of his people, and denounced them to the bawdy court,” might have been just what the Church desired, and might have been an excellent preacher, “but was certainly no friend to his parishioners.”²³ The visitation records of the diocese of Ely prove this to be true.

The minister’s correctional role not only made him seem like an interfering enemy to those being corrected but also placed him in league with authority.²⁴ As such, this made him a likely target for lay abuse. The visitation records show that this situation in which lay people disparaged their minister because he had attempted to correct them occurred thirty-two times. Over a quarter of all cases of anticlericalism, therefore, concerned the issue of clerical discipline.

One of the disciplinary duties of the post-Reformation pastor was that of maintaining order within the church during services. Whereas in the medieval and early Tudor periods the laity were allowed to move around and even speak quietly with their neighbors during services, with the Elizabethan religious settlement parishioners were now expected to sit quietly and listen attentively, all the while respecting the fact that they were in God’s house.²⁵ When they neglected to do so, their pastor was required to point out their poor behavior, which

sometimes led to conflicts. In 1593 Marcus Marshall of Thetford was found by his minister, Mr. Hitche, quarrelling with another man in church just after evening prayer. Marshall told the other man to go hang himself, and when Hitche asked him to remember where he was, Marshall answered in anger that he had never cared for Hitche and that if the minister did not like what he was saying he could either cover his ears or leave the church. Instead, Hitche responded by personally reporting Marshall for his harsh words. Marshall was never punished for the deed, however, because he died soon after, and the case was subsequently suspended.²⁶

In a similar case, John Smith of Arrington was rebuked by his minister from the pulpit for causing a commotion in church during services. Smith responded by speaking to the vicar, Samuel Utlie (or Uttley), “divers unsemely speaches,” for which the minister brought him before the visitation of 1600.²⁷ Smith was presented to later visitations between 1600 and 1603 for other faults, including fornication, for not taking communion (though at the time he said Utlie would not allow him to do so), and for verbally abusing the minister again.²⁸

Ministers were required to maintain order not only in the church but also in the churchyard, as several Edwardian and Elizabethan proclamations required. Unfortunately, a few laymen considered the churchyard to be common property and treated it as such. When the laymen were no longer allowed to do so, they often became verbally or even physically abusive to their pastors. When Thomas Robinson of Wisbech St. Peter drove his swine and cattle into the churchyard for feeding in 1593, undoubtedly with the idea of saving some money, his vicar, Matthew Champion, attempted to stop him.²⁹ Robinson responded by using some colorful language to the minister, thereby ensuring himself a place on the bill of presentment. In a similar though much more serious case from 1600, Edward Dayle of Harlton was presented to the metropolitical visitation for laying “violent hands” upon parson William Pentlowe in the churchyard. Dayle had attempted to store his hay in the churchyard and when the minister tried to remove it, Dayle flew into a rage, struck Pentlowe, and tore his “band.” This netted an instant excommunication for Dayle.³⁰

As part of their disciplinary duties post-Reformation pastors of

the Church of England were also expected to turn away from communion anyone who did not live in charity with his or her neighbors, had not performed required penances, or did not know the tenets of the Anglican faith. This penalty was a humiliating experience for the person who had been rejected, since it occurred before the entire congregation during the sacrament; therefore, this situation frequently led to denunciation of the minister. Keeping a layperson away from communion was at the minister's discretion, so parishioners who were turned away may have believed he was picking on them or disliked them personally. For instance, an incident in 1591 involved the pastor of West Wrattling who angered one of his parishioners, Gilbert or Robert Wolward, by not allowing him to take communion at Easter. The records document that Wollard responded by asking vicar John Seikes, "Are you a man of the church that shoulde be a man of peace? You are more like to raise a rebellion."³¹ The case of Thomas Buntinge of March is more vivid. Buntinge was reported in 1593 for having spoken slanderous words against the minister of March that included dubbing him "horemaster," and informing him that he should be driven out of town. What generated such wrath was the fact that the parson had not allowed Buntinge's daughter to receive the communion and afterwards had words with her husband over the matter.³²

When lay members of the Church of England misbehaved and were brought before the church courts, they could be given a penance to perform. These penances were often highly public, such as that for adulterers, which in the diocese of Ely as well as other areas of England required the sinner to kneel before the congregation to confess his or her misdeeds while wearing a white sheet.³³ It was the duty of the local minister to enforce such penances against what might be an angry and certainly humiliated parishioner. In such cases the pastor took the brunt of hostility which in reality should have been directed against the church courts. John Byrd of Hinton was presented to the visitation in 1577 for "intruding himself" into the congregation even though he was under the censure of suspension for not performing an earlier penance, which meant that he was not allowed to attend church services.³⁴ To make matters worse, Byrd spoke "evell" of the minister there for trying to implement the penance in the first place.

Byrd was essentially swimming against a disciplinary current and was sinking deeper by verbally abusing his minister. In a similar case in 1579, John Tayler of Stanton St. Michael made “undecent and unseemly” speeches to Parson Howgrave, informing the minister that he would see him hanged before he would do any penance.³⁵ Tayler had been found guilty of adultery with Mistress Isabell Pyckrell, wife of Robert.³⁶ However, he was apparently unwilling to endure the embarrassment of penance for adultery, even if it meant angering his minister and making matters worse for himself with his vilification.

Ministers sometimes faced hostility from parishioners when they participated as required in the preparation of the quarter bills to the visitations by reporting the names of people in the parish who had committed misdeeds. Those named were certainly disgruntled at being mentioned, because it meant the expenditure of time and money, and included the possibility of a public penance. One such displeased parishioner was Margery Hawkins of Cottenham. In July of 1594, Margery, wife of Thomas, was brought before the visitation for railing against the minister and the churchwardens.³⁷ She had informed them that they were all busybodies who were not fit to hold any office. Apparently what had angered Margery so greatly was the fact that these same men had presented her husband in the spring visitation for allowing people to play “slide groate” in his home during Easter week, as well as for telling the curate that he was not fit to be a minister.³⁸

Similarly, in 1593 John Algood Sr. of Parson Drove was presented for mocking his minister, Christopher Tuny, in an alehouse on New Year’s Eve. What he said or did is unclear, but it is known that what led to the ridicule was the fact that the minister had asked Algood’s son to recite the articles of belief when he went up (perhaps as a godfather) to accompany a child being baptized.³⁹ Tuny’s actions were required by law, so Algood should not have been upset. Perhaps Algood was angry because his son could not say the articles of belief and was, therefore, publicly embarrassed. Perhaps his son did not agree with the Articles of Faith and therefore did not wish to say them. Either way, Algood was also presented, perhaps by pastor Tuny, for working in his hayfields during service time as well as for allowing his pigs to defile the churchyard, suggesting that he may

have already disliked Tuny for interfering in his life.⁴⁰

Because Puritan ministers felt strongly that they were responsible to God for creating a moral Christian community on earth, they were particularly aggressive in attempting to control any misconduct among their parishioners. It is not surprising that some lay people believed Calvinist expectations of appropriate lay behavior were unreasonably high or that the ministers were acting in a self-righteous manner. In 1599, for example, Clement Martin, well-known Puritan pastor of Tydd St. Giles, brought congregant John Rowe before the metropolitical visitation for being a “badd liver and an evill offender.”⁴¹ Rowe responded to Martin’s presentment by telling him that he was just as wise, honest, and as good a man as was Martin was. In 1600 the Puritan minister of Leverington, Richard Bowler, turned away John Baylye, gentleman, from receiving communion for reasons unknown. Baylye responded angrily by advising the parish churchwardens in front of the entire congregation that, “You putt me from the communion, but you suffer a whoremaster to minister the communion.”⁴² Perhaps being ejected from the sacrament was especially humiliating for a man of Baylye’s social position. But like John Rowe, Baylye apparently resented being corrected by a man with a “holier than thou” attitude. Interestingly enough, Bowler was later presented to the visitation for fathering his niece’s child, though the niece subsequently admitted that she had been “entysed to saye so” and that the child was by someone else.⁴³ It would be interesting to know who urged Bowler’s niece to make such an accusation, because that allegation could have earned the minister a great deal of trouble and even likely deprivation from office.

Hostility Stemming From Religious Differences

Although its importance declined after 1600, religious belief, especially Puritanism, became a primary issue in cases of lay-clerical hostility during the 1580s and 1590s. Only a few parishioners from the diocese of Ely were charged with anticlericalism based upon their own Puritan belief. In 1582, Gilbert Greene of Sutton was overheard saying that his minister was a “knave” and a “palterer,” adding, however, that “soe are a greate manye more of these preach-

ers and professors of the gossell knaves and Raskalls.”⁴⁴ Though it sounds as if he was critical of preaching, which Puritans typically were not, Greene also spoke abusively against the episcopacy, which suggests that he may have been a Presbyterian who did not accept the organization of the church hierarchy at that time. According to churchwardens in 1605 Joan Browne, widow of Duxford St. John, had “used our Minister uncharitable.”⁴⁵ It seems, however, that the widow generally disliked the clergy because they were a part of the Church of England, which she claimed was “devellishe, corrupt, superstitiouse, and unlawfull and repugnant to the Scriptures.”⁴⁶ The widow Browne seems to have been a strong Calvinist.

In a more common pattern, the Puritan persuasion of the minister led to conflict with his moderate or traditional parishioners. In 1596 parishioner Simon Baines of Harston was brought before the metropolitanical visitation for openly proclaiming that men must not believe what ministers preach, for there are “no worse cutthroates than ministers are when they be married.”⁴⁷ Baines also said that the “Scripture men be as very knaves as any be in England wheresoever they be.”⁴⁸ It sounds as if Baines was speaking directly against Puritan ministers, who certainly might be considered “Scripture men,” though it certainly may also be the case that Baines was a Catholic who resented priests who were married. This is particularly interesting since Harston’s minister at the time was Edward Williams, a Puritan who was presented at subsequent visitations for, among other things, refusing to wear his surplice and burying a child without benefit of using his communion book.⁴⁹ Baines’ dislike of “Scripture men,” therefore, apparently came out of having one as his incumbent.

Thomas Streacocke, vicar of Barton from at least the late 1570s until 1605 or later, was charged throughout his career with a variety of offenses which illustrate his Puritan belief. Streacocke was reported for not wearing his surplice, not giving instruction in the catechism, not reading the injunctions or the Homilies, and not permitting hymns to be sung during services.⁵⁰ The fact that he was presented at all suggests that some in his parish were unhappy with his practices. Streacocke was also charged in 1596 with quarrelling in the churchyard with parishioner Matthew Fan after insinuating that Fan had been visiting Richard Elmer’s wife in Elmer’s own home.

Streacocke told Fan that if he had come into his home as he had into Elmer's, he would have thrown Fan out without his head or at the very least would have given him a "knave's mark."⁵¹ Streacocke also alienated another parishioner, Anne Bower, who disliked the Puritan so much that she called him "damn god" and refused to attend church in Barton any more.⁵²

In a similar case, John Hayward, rector of Coton from 1607 to 1651, was charged in 1608 and again in 1615 with preaching without a license as well as not giving instruction in the catechism and missing weekday and holy eve services. He was probably a Puritan, especially since he was able to hold his benefice until his death in 1651.⁵³ Parishioner Edmund Riddinge of Coton seemingly did not like having a Puritan pastor because he was brought before the episcopal visitation of 1610 for saying that "We had a good parson before (in) Mr. Cragge & we had good chere of him, and nowe we have a pipe of tobacchoe."⁵⁴ While it is uncertain what he meant by the comment concerning a pipe of tobacco, it is clear that he resented having a minister who was not permissive of "good chere."

Several ministers in the see apparently drew antagonism because they preached doctrines which their parishioners regarded as erroneous. For instance, in October of 1577 Lawrence Myller of Burrough Green was charged with verbally abusing vicar Francis Garthesyde by telling him that he should be teaching God's word but instead was teaching "knaverye."⁵⁵ The court commanded him to ask Garthesyde's forgiveness. Unfortunately, Myller did not explain what that "knaverye" was. Garthesyde certainly had excellent credentials for preaching—he received his Masters degree from Christ's College in 1566, and his Bachelor of Divinity from St. John's in 1576. He had also been a university preacher in 1571.⁵⁶ The fact that he graduated from St. John's in 1576 is intriguing, because St. John's was at that time heavily influenced by Puritanism. It may be, therefore, that Garthesyde himself was a Puritan, which is why his preaching was a source of conflict for the more traditional Myller.

The case of Richard Bowler, vicar of Leverington sheds further light on the situation. At Easter 1581, layman William Acres informed the churchwardens that Bowler had preached such a sermon during Lent that "was not mete for a man to here," and told them that if this

style of preaching continued, Bowler would be pulled out of the pulpit like a “rascal”.⁵⁷ Bowler, who had attended St. John’s College at the same time as Francis Garthesyde, was a well-known Puritan in the diocese. He had been reported to the visitation in January 1581 for several types of neglect, such as not wearing the surplice, not making the sign of the cross at baptisms, and not christening a child brought to him.⁵⁸ He was presented again in July of 1598 for still refusing to wear the correct “ornaments” during prayer and the communion service.⁵⁹ His various presentments indicate that William Acres was not the only person in Leverington who was unhappy about having a Puritan minister, because if the churchwardens had concurred with Bowler’s ideas, they could probably have found ways to avoid presenting him.

As previously noted, a number of the Puritan ministers of the diocese of Ely experienced anticlericalism from their parishioners who disagreed with their preaching and other practices. However, this anti-Puritan hostility tends to diminish after 1600, perhaps as more people became acclimated to Protestantism in its “hotter” form. But what about Arminianism, the religious movement of the early seventeenth century which was anti-Calvinist and stressed ceremony, religious ornamentation, and the sacrament?⁶⁰ Arminianism was not popular among most of the laity of England, who saw it as a return to Catholicism. Yet, the visitation records for the diocese of Ely provide little evidence of hostility against Arminian ministers located in local communities such as Sawston. Though the reasons are vague, it may mean that late-Elizabethan Puritanism was a much more divisive force than was Arminianism in the 1620s and 1630s, or it may just be an indication that Puritan ministers are easier to locate in the sources. Unfortunately, the visitation records end in 1623, the time during which Arminianism was emerging. But some hostility against Laudians must have been developing among the laity, because by the early 1640s over fifty pastors were deprived of their benefices in the see of Ely for having been supportive of the Arminian innovations. As Margaret Spufford has said of Laudian ministers in Cambridgeshire, “These shepherds did not lead their sheep; they were frequently bitten by them.”⁶¹ One example from a few years later suggests how hated some Arminian ministers were in the see of Ely,

however. John Manby, rector of Cottenham beginning in 1635, was deprived of his benefice in 1643 and he and his family were literally thrown into the street. When Manby was reinstated to the benefice seventeen years later at the Restoration, his daughter described the animosity the family encountered, even from little children, one of whom stabbed her in the head with a fork.⁶² Though it is not noticeable in the records, Arminianism, like Puritanism before it, must have led to anticlericalism as well.

Clerical Immorality as a Source of Hostility

The late medieval English church had expected its priests to serve as moral examples to their parishioners. John Mirk's fifteenth century clerical manual *Instructions for Parish Priests*, for instance, exhorted priests to live chastely, and avoid sexual intercourse, drunkenness, cursing, and gluttony, among other things.⁶³ Bishop Reginald Pecock of Chichester wrote a manual of religious education called *The Reule of Crysten Religioun* (1443) which concurred with that of Mirk by suggesting that the good priest was a moral example to his parishioners.⁶⁴ This idea continued after the Reformation, as seen in the Elizabethan royal injunctions of 1559, which demanded that the minister should "excel in all other in purity of life, and should be examples to the people to live well and Christianly."⁶⁵ Naturally, the Puritans, who were so committed to expunging sin from the world, considered integrity to be one of the primary qualities of a good Puritan minister. Whenever a pastor acted immorally, his parishioners, who were certainly under his disciplinary thumb, were often furious that he did not behave in the expected manner. The laity clearly considered that immoral ministers were not living up to expectations. However, even though they opposed the alleged misconduct on the part of the clergymen, the courts were still prepared to punish any lay people who used offensive words against their ministers.

Several examples illustrate the strength of feeling evoked by clerical immorality. Rector Simon Nappe of Sutton was presented in 1564 for "evil living" with a woman named Joan Lucas.⁶⁶ The affair was apparently well-known to parishioner Richard Randes, who informed Nappe that "thou shalt be hanged like a whoremonger knave," for which he was charged at the same visitation.⁶⁷ In a similar case in March 1639, parishioner Joan Mathews of Histon St. Andrew had

been overheard to say many slanderous things about the clergy of the Church of England. Specifically, she railed against vicar John Slegge, calling him “a blackcoatly rogue” and saying that ministers such as him deserved to be hanged. Mathews’ assessment of Slegge was apparently justified, for Slegge was ejected from his benefice some time before 1647 because he “Never served the cure himself, since he killed the man at Chesterton: takes all the profits and gets young scholars to read prayers and to preach. The churchwardens dare not displease him.”⁶⁸ Obviously Slegge’s parishioners and parish officers were afraid of the man who was not a loving shepherd, but a murderer.

A few ministers performed so many acts of misbehavior that they drew widespread hostility from their parishioners. Henry Fawxe, the vicar of Sutton from 1592 until 1617, was presented to the metropolitical visitation of 1615 for several religious faults, including missing services, neglecting to church new mothers, and performing churchings in the wrong spot in the chapel.⁶⁹ He was also charged with being a “backbiter and slanderer of his neighbors,” a gossip, and a creator of discord, which gives some evidence of his personality, at least in the eyes of his parishioners, who told the churchwardens that they were afraid to approach him because he spoke roughly to them. When the churchwardens informed him that he would be presented for all these offenses, vicar Fawxe angrily told them that he wanted to help write the visitation bill, perhaps hoping to remove his own name. Several of the more disgruntled parishioners of Sutton spoke unseemly words about him, for which they were presented.⁷⁰ One of these was Richard Gunton, thought by the churchwardens to be a Puritan, who spread two unnamed libels against minister Fawxe.

Yet despite his seemingly poor relationship with his parishioners, Fawxe remained in office at Sutton until his death in October 1617, at which time he was buried in the parish cemetery.⁷¹ In the Church of England there was no simple way to evict a minister who was disliked by his congregation unless he did something that was bad enough to warrant deprivation from office, such as murder or heresy. The patron of each benefice had control over who became the minister, and the patron would be unlikely to make a new choice willingly because it would be embarrassing and might involve a great

deal of work. Even the minister concerned could not leave without the patron's (or the bishop's) permission and if he did so, he might have a difficult time finding a new benefice since his reputation would have been blackened. Hence, unworthy incumbents like vicar Fawxe often remained in their situation to the frustration of their parishioners.

Under some circumstances the laity, if pushed far enough by clerical incompetence and neglect, might push back. Robert Christian, vicar of Caxton, was brought before the episcopal visitation of 1619 for a number of offenses, including drawing his knife on a parishioner, adultery, not taking communion, and not catechizing the youth.⁷² However, the most revealing statement came in response to the presentment that he neglected to lead the perambulation. Christian argued that he was afraid to lead the perambulation because he had fallen out with the community. He feared that they might do violence against him if he was in the middle of a large group of parishioners. Christian certainly did not behave like an ideal clergyman, and therefore his congregation probably did not feel that he needed to be treated with much respect.

The Ely evidence makes clear that the commonly held assumption that ministers who held Puritan religious views not only attempted to impose high moral standards on their parishioners but acted godly in their own personal lives is too simplistic. Some ministers certainly did fit that pattern, but others apparently accepted certain characteristically Puritan religious positions while still leading immoral or at least socially disruptive lives. Such men in the diocese of Ely may have triggered especially intense hostility because of the apparent gap between their demanding theological position and their inappropriate conduct. One such figure was pastor John Christian of Coveney. In the early 1580s Christian was presented to the metropolitanical visitation for numerous offenses, including reading prayers incorrectly, interpreting the Scriptures for himself, neglecting to teach the catechism, and not reading the Injunctions, all common Puritan actions. Yet, Christian was also charged with allowing his fifteen-year old son to say service in his absence, committing simony to gain his benefice, and permitting his hogs to root up graves in the churchyard. Worst of all was the fact that he was an "unquiet" man who had slandered one of his parishioners, John Amye, by telling him, "Yowe made the

Acte at your owne pleasure.”⁷³ Apparently his actions angered some of Coveney’s parishioners: Jarrett Anderson and Nicholas and Alice Brigges were unable to receive communion at Coveney because they were not “in charity” with Christian.⁷⁴

Christian even brawled in church with one of his parishioners, William Wattes, whom he called “horemasterlye knave” along with other similar insults. Wattes responded to the attack by personally presenting the incumbent for refusing to christen children, which might also be an indication of Christian’s Puritanism, and was overheard to tell the incumbent that he was “an arrante knave, & more fitt to be an hoggard then a curate.”⁷⁵ Another member of the congregation, Edmund Russell, echoed Wattes’ feelings when he told Christian, “Thowe arte a knave and a thefe.”⁷⁶ If Christian was indeed a Puritan as it seems, it may be that his verbally abusive attempts at creating godliness in his parish caused so much hatred that his words had the opposite of their intended effect.

Another such case involved John Stenton, vicar of Steeple Mor-den, who was presented for several offenses by his churchwardens. Stenton was first reported in late November 1590 for preaching without a license, for neglecting to procure monthly sermons, and for not reading the Homilies.⁷⁷ The charges of preaching without a license and neglecting to read the orthodox Homilies may indicate that he was a Puritan, since often Puritan clergy tried to avoid passing on Church of England theology. However, churchwardens also alleged that he had committed adultery with parishoner Richard Tomson’s wife. When churchwarden John Geve warned him to end that relationship immediately, Stenton not only refused but threatened Geve for doing his duty. A couple of months later, in January 1591, Stenton was brought before the visitation again, this time for dicing and carding in the local alehouse as well as giving instruction in the catechism so frivolously that those learning it said they disliked him. He was, more significantly, presented for quarreling and scolding in the church with the churchwardens who reported him.

Richard Fison, curate of Ely Holy Trinity, got into trouble not only with his churchwardens but with a group of parishioners as well. In the mid-1590s Fison’s parish officers presented him for a great many infractions, several of which suggest that he was a Puritan. He refused to wear his surplice or make the sign of the cross in baptisms;

he neglected to announce the feast days, as was his duty, nor would he read the Gospel during marriage ceremonies, believing it to be “a thinge not materiall.”⁷⁸ At the same time, however, Fison was charged with playing cards and tables all night long both in alehouses and in his own home, and with fighting with his wife Gillian, all actions not typically associated with the Puritan clergy.⁷⁹ The churchwardens’ presentments for February 10, 1594 described Fison as being unlawfully placed in the benefice, and as “a veri contentiouse man, livinge Idelly not applynge his bookes, hauntinge Alehouses & unlawfull games amongst the poorer sort of people,” and stealing from the poor through these games. Further, the churchwardens charged Fison with making a special pulpit for himself without permission, which the curate had placed nearer to where the women sat than the men.⁸⁰ Fison also brawled with his own parish clerk, Lancelot Tucke, in the church. Most disturbing, he fought with a man over cards in the local alehouse, becoming so out of control that he stabbed the man in the thigh.

Fison’s parishioners apparently tired of his violence, his neglect, and his forming what they called an “evill ensample of all the parishe.” The parishioners rebuked Fison after he had refused to perform a burial service.⁸¹ His response was to throw down his book and leave the church. The laity of Ely Holy Trinity also expressed their dislike for him by a sort of silent protest; that is, many of them refused to attend church or receive communion from Fison. This expression was most obvious in the case of Robert Ayers who after being admonished for not attending church informed the churchwardens that he would never go there again.⁸²

Yet another variety within the range of problems religious belief could cause occurred in 1596 in the community of Waterbeach and involved some fascinating forms of traditional popular culture. The churchwardens of Waterbeach had been reported in February of that year by their vicar, Thomas Paine, for answering the visitation articles incorrectly.⁸³ Their church needed a new Bible, and one of the questmen, William Walton, had been caught carrying corn on the Epiphany, but neither of these problems had been presented. Two months later, vicar Paine himself was presented by his churchwardens for not reading the Homilies as required, saying services incorrectly, and spending time in an alehouse when he should have been performing a burial

service.⁸⁴ The first two issues may indicate that Paine had Puritan sympathies, especially since he was presented at later visitations for neglecting to procure the monthly sermons from an established (licensed) preacher and for refusing to teach the catechism.⁸⁵ Paine's response to the first charge against him was that the windows in the church, which were the prerogative of the churchwardens, were so dirty that he could not see to read the lessons and the Homilies. This was obviously an insult to the abilities of the churchwardens who had presented him. It cannot be proved that the vicar had been brought to court by his churchwardens in retaliation for their own presentment, but it is clear that Paine felt some resentment against them for reporting his misdeeds. Interestingly, several parishioners from Waterbeach were charged a few years later with putting vicar Paine "on a cowl staff" for being beaten by his wife, which was a traditional form of popular social ridicule for inversions of conventional gender roles.⁸⁶ At the same visitation, several other parishioners were charged with dancing the Morris dance, suggesting, like the cowl staff incident, that Waterbeach contained a strongly conservative element.⁸⁷ Having a Puritan minister in such a traditional community may have exacerbated the hostility.

Conclusion

The Reformation had a positive impact upon the clergy of the diocese of Ely. In 1556, approximately forty-eight percent of the Ely clergy were university graduates or had some university training.⁸⁸ By 1600, nearly all incumbents in the diocese had some university training, and sixty-seven percent were university graduates.⁸⁹ In addition, thanks to the influence of Bishop Richard Cox, by 1600 nearly all of the Ely ministers were resident in their parishes.⁹⁰ This suggests that, as Rosemary O'Day has indicated for other areas of England, the clergy of Cambridgeshire had developed a professional status, a true vocation. This situation may well have served to alienate them from some of their parishioners but there were other factors as well.

What also may have led to their alienation, as this article has suggested for the diocese of Ely, was their increased status as disciplinarians, the religious developments of Puritanism and Arminianism, and the problem of clerical immorality in an age in which they were expected to be paragons of moral virtue.

1. George Herbert Palmer, ed., *The English Works of George Herbert, Volume I: Essays and Prose* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), p. 289.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor Royal Proclamations Volume I: The Early Tudors (1485-1553)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 402.
5. Edward Cardwell, *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1834), republished 1966, p. 104.
6. Ibid., p. 178.
7. A.G. Dickens, 'The Shape of Anti-clericalism and the English Reformation,' in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. E.I Kouri and Tom Scott (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
8. Christopher Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation,' in *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. Christopher Haigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 56-74.
9. Ibid., p. 74.
10. Rosemary O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession 1558-1642* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979).
11. Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
12. Ibid., p. 232.
13. Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding Their Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
14. Reviling of ministers was relatively rare in other parts of England as well—see, for instance, Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 68, Table 2; Ronald A. Marchant, *The Church under the Law: Justice, Administration and Discipline in the Diocese of York 1560-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 219, Table 32; Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 246, Table 3.9.
15. EDR B/2/29, fol. 139r.
16. EDR B/2/12, fol. 23v.
17. EDR B/2/18, fol. 174v.
18. Ibid., fols. 174r-v.
19. EDR B/2/31, fol. 84v.
20. EDR B/2/33, fols 96v, 98v, 99r.
21. For further discussion of the disciplinary role of the pre- and post-Reformation clergy, see Jana S. Pisani, "The Religious Responsibilities of the Parish Clergy and the Laity in England, 1540-1640: A Case Study of the Diocese of Ely" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1994), pp. 214-220.

22. Though the value of using the term “Puritan” has recently come into question, I am continuing to use it as a phrase referring to someone who dislikes those rites from the Church of England which retain Catholic influences (kneeling at the name of Christ or making the sign of the cross), who emphasizes the efficacy of sermons, and who believes in the need for a personal, active piety.

23. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 105.

24. Rosemary O’Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession 1558-1642* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1979), p. 199.

25. Pisani, “The Religious Responsibilities,” pp. 224-225.

26. EDR B/2/14, fol. 160r.

27. EDR B/2/17, fol. 155v.

28. EDR B/2/18, fols. 51v, 229r, 239v.

29. EDR B/2/15, fol. 27r.

30. EDR B/2/17, fol. 196r.

31. EDR B/2/13, fol. 70r; EDR B/2/11, fol. 110r.

32. EDR B/2/14, fol. 30v.

33. Pisani, “The Religious Responsibilities,” pp. 216-217.

34. EDR D/2/10, fol. 11r.

35. EDR D/2/10, fol. 242r.

36. *Ibid.*, fol. 235r.

37. EDR B/2/13, fol. 74v.

38. *Ibid.*, fol. 63v.

39. EDR B/2/15, fol. 15v.

40. EDR B/2/15, fol. 14v.

41. EDR B/2/15, fol. 102r.

42. EDR B/2/15, fol. 165r.

43. *Ibid.*, fol. 171r.

44. EDR B/2/10, fol. 22r.

45. EDR B/2/25, fol. 8v.

46. *Ibid.*

47. EDR B/2/13, fol. 134v.

48. *Ibid.*

49. EDR B/2/16, fol. 102r., EDR B/2/22, fol. 45r.

50. EDR D/2/10, fol. 5r; EDR B/2/11, fol. 122r; EDR B/2/12, fol. 25r; EDR B/2/13, fols. 151r, 171r; EDR B/2/17, fol. 83v; EDR B/2/25, fol. 1r.

51. EDR B/2/13, fol. 171r.

52. EDR B/2/11, fol. 45r.

53. EDR B/2/29, fol. 54r; EDR B/2/33, fol. 42r.

54. EDR B/2/31, fol. 63v.

55. EDAR D/2/10, fol. 82r.

56. *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. II, p. 198.

57. EDR B/2/10, fol. 5v.

58. EDR B/2/10, overleaf.

59. EDR B/2/15, fol. 114v.

60. For excellent discussions of the tenets of Arminianism, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 164-176; and Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People: The Church and Religion in England 1529-1689* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

61. Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 316.

62. Anthony Fletcher, "Factionalism in Town and Countryside: The Significance of Puritanism and Arminianism," in *Studies in Church History, Volume 16: The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 295.

63. Gillis Kristensson, *John Mirk's AInstruction for Parish Priests@* (Lund Studies in English, 1974), p. 68.

64. Reginald Pecock, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. William Cabell Greet (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1927), pp. 322-325.

65. Walter Howard Frere, ed., *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, vol. 3 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910), p. 11, no. 7.

66. EDR B/2/4, p. 96.

67. EDR B/2/4, p. 95.

68. *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. IV, p. 89; the quotation comes from Archbishop Laud's visitation of 1638.

69. EDR B/2/33, fols. 93v, 94r; *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. 2, p. 127.

70. EDR B/2/33, fol. 96v, 98v, 99r.

71. *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. II, p. 127.

72. EDR B/2/37, fols. 54v-55v.

73. EDR B/2/10, fols. 58v-60r, 94v. It would be interesting to know whether this man was related to the equally destabilizing Robert Christian who served in Caxton a generation later.

74. *Ibid.*, fols. 59v-60r.

75. EDR B/2/10, fols. 94r-94v.

76. *Ibid.*, fol. 95r.

77. EDR B/2/11, fols. 62r-63v.

78. EDR B/2/14, fol. 65r.

79. EDR B/2/14, fol. 192r. Gillian Fison, his wife, quarrelled with the churchwardens, calling them "villaines, knaves & theeves" numerous times.

80. U.L.C. Add. MS 6605, 109.

81. EDR B/2/14, fols. 65r, 171r, 190r, 192r.

82. EDR B/2/14, fol. 193v.

83. EDR B/2/13, fol. 163v.

84. *Ibid.*, fol. 175v.

85. EDR B/2/16, fol. 30r., EDR B/2/29, fol. 113v.

86. EDR B/2/18, fols. 158v-159r; see also the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

87. Ibid.

88. Felicity Heal, "The Parish Clergy and the Reformation in the Diocese of Ely," in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vol. 66, p. 154.

89. Ibid., p. 159.

90. See Pisani, "The Religious Responsibilities," pp. 320-321; Bruce Galloway, *A History of Cambridgeshire* (Chichester, England: Phillimore & Co., Ltd., 1983), p. 65.