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Reforming 'the Sacred':
Standardization of Church Space
in Laudian England
(1633-1641)

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Introduction

Charles I (r. 1625-1649), as king of England and head of the Church of England, saw it as his duty to God, his kingdom, and his people to create a standardized doctrine for the Anglican church. Undertaking the remainder of the unification that his father, James I of England (r. 1603-1625), VI of Scotland (r. 1567-1625), had started during his reign, Charles had loyal, authoritative church officials to carry out reforms to every diocese in England, Scotland and beyond. In his royal proclamation in 1628, Charles announced his visions for bringing peace and unity to the Church of England.¹ In the introduction of the declaration, he states

being God's ordinance, according to our iust title, defender of the faith, and supream governour of the Church, within these our dominions, wee hold it most agreeable to this our kingly office, and our owne religious zeale, to conserve and maintaine the Church committed to our charge in the unity of true religion, and in the bond of peace.²

Only a few years into his reign, Charles demonstrated a strong zeal to craft a church for all. In the years to come, Charles and the bishops of the Church of England would oversee various reforms that would both be successful and create controversies. And yet, these woes would all be for sake of unifying a broken church and birthing a new form of Anglican sacredness. In the 1630s and 1640s, under the authority of Charles I and his archbishop, William Laud, attempts at developing a stronger theological identity and unification of the Church of England began through standardization of sacred space in church with particular emphasis on the physical space, including the use of communion table or altar, the placement of such important furniture, and the addition of rails.

¹ "Royal declaration for the peace of church, 1628-9" in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. 2 edited by Kenneth Fincham, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 33-34.

² "Royal declaration," 33.

The Church of England's formation is rooted in King Henry VIII's (r. 1509-1547) desire to break apart from the Roman Catholic Church in order to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Thus, the Church of England became its own entity with its own core values. Britain's monarch became the head of the church. Slowly, the church deviated from its Catholic heritage. Many changes to make the church more Anglican occurred under Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603). In efforts to humble churches and erase Catholic influences, statues and other depictions of saints were defaced, altars were replaced with communion tables, and elaborate stained glass became plain glass panes.³ Catholics became a minority in the kingdom as Anglicanism became the standard. Other Christian groups practiced leading to lack of cohesion in the practices of the church around the kingdom. Unifying church reform, and eventual controversy, gained more momentum under Elizabeth's successor, James I/VI who sought to bring together the practice of the Church of Scotland, which was Presbyterian, and those of the Anglican Church of England.

This task left incomplete upon James's death, his son Charles I made it one of his priorities to continue the unification of the Church of England. However, Charles I had other problems. In attempts to avoid civil war and interference from his government, he neglected to convene Parliament for eleven years beginning in 1629 and ending in 1640. Many Whig historians of the nineteenth century would name this period the Eleven Years Tyranny, but the period has since been dubbed by modern historians the Personal Rule.⁴ Thus, many of the decisions to reform the church were made without consulting Parliament and parliamentary members were outraged over the imbalance of power. Without the cooperation of the king, the situation became increasingly tense, and the country soon divided between supporters of the

³ See figures 1 and 2 in the appendix for the visual differences between the altar and communion table. The altar generally was large and intricately designed, while communion tables were much simpler and often only draped in a cloth.

⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 12.

monarchy and supporters of Parliament. Civil war broke out in 1641, and over the course of eight years, Charles gradually lost support. In 1648, the kingdom's highest court charged the king with high treason, tried him, and found him guilty. On a scaffold outside Charles's main London residence, Whitehall Palace, he was executed in public in January 1649. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the political climate in which these church reforms were pursued was incredibly tense as public support for the monarchy dwindled from the 1630s into the 1640s.

In addition, it is essential to address the significance of William Laud as Charles I's archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to 1641. Many historians attribute this period and the church reforms specifically to Laud's influence, hence dubbing the period and reforms "Laudian." Since Laud held the second highest church position under the king, he had immense influence in deciding what the theological identity of the Church of England would be and how to enforce this theology. In fact, he was incredibly involved in the process, based on evidence from many of his personal works as well as the visitation articles and injunctions he completed himself that have survived to the present. His involvement in reforms and his particular preference for Arminianism are significant in understanding the approach to sacred space during his tenure as archbishop.

To provide a foundation for understanding sacred space, this paper will begin with a general approach to Christians' interpretation of sacred space using the work of Mircea Eliade, followed by historians Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, and Emily Winerock who built upon his conclusions about sacred space and connected them to specific concepts of the early modern English world. In addition, some discussion of the political background of Charles I's reign and a general discussion of seventeenth century church reform from historians Kevin Sharpe and Ian Atherton will bring together the abstract ideas of sacred space in the 1600s. Following the overall

framework for sacred space, the main religious groups in England in the 1620s, 1630s and 1640s and their practices will be discussed in detail to understand the contrasting perspectives on Christianity and sacred space that Charles I and William Laud were trying to unite.

Sources such as church records, visitation articles and injunctions, sermons, personal writings of church officials and architectural drawings, provide information about what kinds of church reforms were expected to be implemented. A visitation article for the Chichester diocese from Bishop Richard Montagu in 1628 particularly demonstrates and traces the changes seven years later using Laud's injunctions for the same diocese from 1635. Primary source analysis reveals that the placement of the communion table and the addition of the communion rail were the reforms which received the most debate and controversy. These primary sources depict the struggle of achieving a cohesive identity by redefining sacred space throughout parishes across England.

While not ground-breaking, this research adds to current research and understanding of religion in early modern Europe. Understood through the framework of both secondary research as a foundation on sacred space and contesting religious ideas in seventeenth-century England, the primary sources from the people who worked to strengthen the Church of England and those who opposed the reforms demonstrate that sacred space was used by Charles I and William Laud to standardize and unite the Anglican church under one theological identity.

A Brief Historiography of Sacred Space

Historians studying church spaces have been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Mircea Eliade's groundbreaking work from 1961. Though philosophical in content, Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* delves into Christian definitions of what is

sacred and its opposite, the profane.⁵ At its most basic, “the sacred” is anything beyond the human experience; it is divine in nature – meaning that in more “primitive” religions, a rock could be sacred, while God the incarnate as Jesus Christ is sacred in the more complex Christian faith.⁶ According to Eliade, “the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from ‘natural’ realities...[and] shows itself as something wholly different from the profane.”⁷ In essence, “the sacred” is juxtaposed with what Eliade calls “the profane,” with humans understanding the world through these two lenses.⁸ A religious man desires to be enveloped in the sacred which holds all that is pure, powerful and holy, while the profane world holds nothing but evil, sin, and death. As religions became more intricate, sacred spaces became a sanctuary away from the profane world. Even within these sacred spaces layers of sacredness and sanctity would exist.

In Christianity in particular, the church became this necessary holy place. According to Eliade, the door of the church becomes a portal into the sacred world, into a room filled with God’s spirit and people; simultaneously, it symbolizes the threshold into which the profane world cannot enter.⁹ It divides the two, and while symbolic, also creates a physical barrier. In Eliade’s discussion of Christianity, only within this sacred enclosure is communication with God possible.¹⁰ For the religious believers, space is not homogenous – it gets broken up.¹¹ Different spaces amount to different levels of sacredness; for instance, one experiences increasingly sacred space from the street to the churchyard to the pews to the altar space. The example Eliade uses

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1959), 10.

⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 13.

⁷ Eliade, 10-11.

⁸ Eliade, 14.

⁹ Eliade, 25.

¹⁰ Eliade, 24.

¹¹ Eliade, 20;

comes from Exodus 3:5 which says “‘draw not nigh hither’ says the Lord to Moses; ‘put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.’”¹² Therefore there are differentiations between significant sacred spaces and those without structure or significance.

In the context of a church, a break in the homogeneity is depicted through the imagery of a church door separating the sacred and profane worlds.¹³ Beyond the church walls lies temptation and any and everything that makes a believer stray from God. When one steps into a church, one becomes surrounded by other believers and the Holy Spirit. The importance of this sacred space is based on an individual believer’s fixed point of orientation. Christians are grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who was sent to earth to save humanity from sin.¹⁴ All good things come from believing in him and as such, the non-religious, in the eyes of Christians, are lost in the natural, profane world devoid of holiness and freedom from sin. Becoming one with their orientation, Christians thus found sanctity in the church as defined sacred space.

In further studies of post-Reformation England, Will Coster and Andrew Spicer have built on Eliade’s concepts of “the sacred” to discuss the different layers of sacred space. Coster and Spicer mention in their introduction that what is most striking about the study of sacred space is the lack of study on it.¹⁵ The anthology following this introduction includes essays covering a wide range of early modern European interpretations of sacred space. They also suggest precisely what this research focuses on – the “modification” of sacred space after the Protestant Reformation.¹⁶ Even more importantly, these redesigned sacred spaces were not black

¹² Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane*, 20.

¹³ Eliade, 21.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Coster and Spicer, “Introduction,” 1.

¹⁶ Coster and Spicer, 5.

and white, sacred and profane, but defined in zones, or layers, of “the sacred.”¹⁷ Additionally, Coster and Spicer touch upon is that these reforms meant to draw new meaning from sacred space and were not simply means of exerting power through the Church of England.¹⁸ As a relatively new form of Christianity and ecclesiastical authority, the Anglican church desired to derive its own meaning from the new ideologies it formed and to create its own identity.

The sacredness of church space also reached beyond the interior as Emily Winerock discusses in her work about dancing in churchyards.¹⁹ Her research involves cases of controversy involving dancing at the chapel in Dundry, Somerset, and she remarks that these cases also highlight whose decision it was to determine what was sacred space – the clergy or parishoners.²⁰ Winerock’s research is valuable because it gives an insight into the controversy between the laity and clergy. In addition, Winerock uses her research to illustrate the different layers of “the sacred” within the entity of the church. In her work, the churchyard holds a different significance than the ground beyond the church, the interior of the church, or even from the space for the clergy beyond the nave.²¹ The complex issue of determining what was “sacred” and “profane” often resulted in creating different layers of “sacred” inside and outside of the church.

The symbol of the holy and unholy became the cathedral and a central part of reformed Protestant Christianity in England, as Ian Atherton asserts in his article.²² Diarmaid MacCulloch agrees with Atherton and uses Westminster Abbey as the leading example of “choral and ceremonial tradition,” Anglicanism drew nearer to Catholic practices – engaging with theatrical

¹⁷ Coster and Spicer, “Introduction,” 8.

¹⁸ Coster and Spicer, “Introduction,” 15.

¹⁹ Emily F. Winerock, “Churchyard Capers: The Controversial Use of Church Space for Dancing in Early Modern England” in *The Sacrilization of Space and Behavior in the Early Modern World* edited by Jennifer Mara Desilva, Ashgate Publishing: 2015, 233-256.

²⁰ Winerock, 235.

²¹ Winerock, “Churchyard Capers...” 250.

²² Ian Atherton, “Cathedrals, Laudianism, and the British Churches” *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 896.

services than Calvinist ones – in which listening to sermons dominated services.²³ Seen as the mother churches, cathedrals set the example for all other smaller parish churches around the country; therefore, it was key for polices to be implemented successfully into cathedrals because smaller parishes would most definitely follow suit.

Creating a unified Church of England started with Charles I as presented by leading historian in the field of early Stuart England, Kevin Sharpe. In Sharpe's book *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, he offers insight into these conflicts on doctrine and church reform in the Laudian period through the lens of Charles I and his thoughts on religious reform. He spends an entire chapter on the reformation of the church and Charles's relationship with Laud. In this chapter, he states that Charles believed in order of the church and placed great emphasis on "uniformity of worship."²⁴ His evidence for this assertion comes from a report by Bishop Wren of Ely and chaplain to Prince Charles who noted the young man's "'affections for upholding the doctrine and discipline and the right estate of the church.'"²⁵ Wren also noted that he had more confidence in Charles than in his father, James I.²⁶ This observation suggests that Charles found it most important to be disciplined in the correct doctrine of the church, rather than implement his own thoughts on his faith into the church. Sharpe, along with Julian Davies, tends to hold the traditional view of Charles, especially in regards to his policies regarding placement of communion tables. In a case presented to Charles in 1633 over this matter in St. Gregory's parish

²³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 80.

²⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 277.

²⁵ Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, 279.

²⁶ Ibid.

in London, Sharpe and Davies claim that Charles, not Laud, advocated for railing communion tables and placing them in exact positions in churches across the kingdom.²⁷

The most debated and controversial physical standardization to English churches resulted from railing communion tables and altars. Kenneth Fincham's goal in his article about restoring altars and the eventual railing of them is to claim that Laud was the driving force of these alterations rather than Charles I.²⁸ Many church officials involved in dioceses across the country often looked to Laud for approval in cases of railing altars. Although, railing altars was strongly enforced by all parties, there were no specific rules for requiring parishioners to come up to the rails for Communion.²⁹ For example, Richard Montagu, a bishop for the Chichester diocese, enforced the railed communion table, but found no reason to make parishioners approach the rail for communion since "he observed 'no lawe, articles, advertisements, canons [or] injunctions'" requiring this.³⁰ However, the consensus among church officials tended to conform to the changes of railing the altars and communion tables. Regardless of who had the authority to implement the changes in the Church of England, to Davies and Sharpe, the purpose remained the same – to unify the church in doctrine, practice and belief through standardizing sacred spaces through physical restructuring of the church. But not all religious groups agreed upon how sacred space was defined, and many found great issue with the Laudian reforms.

Historical Context

²⁷ Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625-1641* (Oxford: 1992), 205-50; Sharpe, 333-45.

²⁸ Kenneth Fincham "Restoration of the Altars in the 1630s" *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (2001): JSTOR, 919-940.

²⁹ Fincham, "Restoration of the Altars," 941.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

It is important to understand why unification of the Church of England under one doctrine seemed to be so essential; therefore, a discussion of the beliefs, practices and public perceptions of the various religious groups in England – Catholics, Arminians and Puritans – is necessary. Many English Catholics continued to practice their faith and did not convert after the Reformation in the 1500s. Catholic practice primarily consists of the seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The Eucharist, or communion, which was the center of a lot of controversy regarding Laudian reforms, involves each member of the church approaching the priest at the altar to receive the holy bread and wine as a way to attain God's grace. In addition to the communion and hearing mass, Catholics were also expected to go to confession regularly with their priest to atone for their sins.

The male clergy was in charge of performing the sacraments, presiding over mass; preaching, and they made up an established hierarchy under the pope in Rome. Clergy were expected to be celibate and never marry. Despised by most Protestants in England for perceived corruption underneath the theatrics and stained glass, Catholics were believed to be the real enemy of the Church of England.³¹ The papacy was seen as a foreign power and was one of the reasons King Henry VIII broke from the Church of Rome in 1547. However, due to Charles I's marriage to a French Catholic, named Henrietta Maria (1609-1669), Catholics were often given more protection under the law than they had been in previous years. With many of the Laudian reforms seeming too Catholic for many of England's moderate Anglicans and Puritans, these groups feared that Henrietta Maria had a lot of influence over her husband's decision making.

³¹ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

For many staunch supporters of the Church of England, Catholicism signified the “other.” Evil and devilish popery could only be found in Catholicism, while Anglicanism presented a beacon of hope and goodness. As with many issues in history, there must be a scapegoat, a group to blame, and in this instance the Church of England predominantly blamed Catholics for evil doings, despite the evidence of loyalty to the crown that Michael Questier presents. Despite the hatred against them, “many Catholics actively contested the anti-popish canon [and] they vigorously protested their loyalty to the sovereign...they claimed that their refusal to conform to the Elizabethan settlement of religion was a matter of conscience only.”³² Bringing England’s Catholic roots together with its new Protestant majority would certainly be deemed a challenge.

In stark contrast and on the complete opposite side of the spectrum were the Puritans. Staunchly Protestant and inspired by the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564), Puritans favored preaching and studying the Bible over theatrics and the sacraments. They felt preaching and discussing sermons at home through family worship was the key to salvation.³³ Their relationship with God was the most important aspect of their lives.³⁴ In addition, Puritans preached in the vernacular language (as opposed to Latin masses) so parishioners could understand the sermons and study the Bible on their own time.³⁵ Puritans kept the sacrament of communion but considered the bread and wine merely symbolic.³⁶ Finally, much unlike Catholics and other Protestant sects, Puritans wholeheartedly believed in predestination – the notion that God determined who would go to heaven at birth – which also linked to their

³² Michael Questier, “Catholic Loyalism in Early Stuart England” *The English Historical Review* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1132.

³³ Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 44, 66.

³⁴ Doreen Margaret Rosman, *From Catholic to Protestant Religion and the People in Tudor and Stuart England*. Taylor and Francis, 1996. ProQuest Ebook Central, 61.

³⁵ Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 56.

³⁶ Rosman, *From Catholic to Protestant Religion*, 57.

preference for preaching the Word as much as possible so those who were called to hear it, could.³⁷

Puritans, of all England's religious groups, remained the most politically involved and held positions in Parliament under Charles. In fact, they were the ones primarily opposed to Charles's marriage to Henrietta Maria. Fears of Charles being a closet Catholic were very real to many Puritans. They believed he was "a kind of Trojan horse to usher in popery and tyranny," with his wife pulling the strings in the background, according to modern historian Nicholas Tyacke.³⁸ Theologically, Puritans "hated such 'popish' remnants in the Prayer book as surpllices, signing with the cross in baptism, and kneeling at communion."³⁹ Incredibly outspoken in Parliament, in the press, and in public, Puritans faced plenty of persecution for not conforming to the new reforms, leading some to flee the country for the North American colonies. Popular images of Puritans during this period depicted them as "earnest, narrow-minded people [and] disparagers of normal human pleasures."⁴⁰ Despite this perception, according to Doreen Rosman, it was thought that Puritanism fostered diligence and hard work which reinforced Protestant work ethic.⁴¹ Still, Puritans often rejected the new canons of the Church of England and were difficult to appease.

Another religious group common in the mid-1600s were the Arminians. A leading figure for the Arminians since the 1620s, William Laud identified most with Arminian theology and

³⁷ Rosman, *From Catholic to Protestant Religion*, 57.

³⁸ Nicholas Tyacke, "The Puritan Paradigm of English Politics, 1558-1642," *The Historical Journal* (Cambridge University Press: 2010), 540.

³⁹ Tyacke, 544; "prayer book" is in reference to the Book of Common Prayer, which was introduced in 1549 by Edward VI. It includes the complete liturgies for daily and Sunday services in English. It was revised in 1604 under James I. Another major revision was issued in 1662 after the civil wars, protectorate period and restoration of the monarchy, which remains the version used by the Church of England today.

⁴⁰ Rosman, *From Catholic to Protestant Religion*, 61.

⁴¹ Rosman, 63.

would try to implement it into his reforms. Inspired by Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1559/1560?-1609), Arminians believed they were the “true guardians of [the Church of England’s] traditions.”⁴² Many rejected Calvinists’ insistence on preaching and instead focused on reinstating “the older...concept of the Church as the body of God on earth, preserving its liturgy and ceremonies.”⁴³ Arminians also believed that the grace of God was available to all men, played down predestination, and used altars instead of communion tables.⁴⁴ In Laud’s own words, he felt the altar itself was “the greatest place of God’s residence upon earth...yea, greater than the pulpit.”⁴⁵ They accepted the Roman church as the true – though admittedly corrupt – church and wanted Catholics and Protestants to get along.⁴⁶

The Arminian’s mixture of acceptance of religious ceremony in the sacraments, a Catholic idea, and rejection of predestination, a Calvinist idea, seemed to Laud to be the best theology to bring into the Church of England in an attempt to appease Puritans and Catholics. Michael Questier states that “the English Arminians’ emphasis on ‘a new source of grace freely available in the sacraments,’ was intended primarily to balance ‘their rejection of the arbitrary grace of predestination.’”⁴⁷ In such attempts, concerns surrounded “altars and private confession before receiving communion.”⁴⁸ This move to incorporate Arminian theology and practice appeared to most everyone to be appealing to Catholics and bringing “popery” into the Church of England. Nearly all religious sects despised the shift to Arminianism, making the efforts to

⁴² Roger Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Pearson: 2005), 305.

⁴³ Lockyer, 307.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lockyer, 307-8

⁴⁷ Michael Questier, “Arminianism, Catholicism and Puritanism in England in the 1630s,” 56.

⁴⁸ Questier, 56.

reform the church very difficult. Definitions and values of sacred space differed and one blanket reform across the kingdom would not make everyone happy or lead to the desired, unified result.

‘The Sacred’ as Physical Space

The cathedral as a space and structure were transformed to display the Church of England’s unified practices and theology. According to Ian Atherton, the cathedral was “the Trojan horse by which Laudianism was introduced into the English church.”⁴⁹ Under Laud’s authority, he wanted to bring the “bewtie of holiness” into cathedrals and parish churches across the kingdom.⁵⁰ At this juncture, Laudianism and Arminianism ideals were dovetailing. This Arminian idea sought to beautify the physical space of churches through decorative details and ceremonial services.⁵¹ Though Arminian churchman thought this beautification would bring unification, moderate Anglicans and Puritans valued the Elizabethan status quo of plain Protestant services.⁵² Prior to Laudianism, the cathedral did not have a prominent place in Protestant and Puritan ideology; for in these sects, faith was of the utmost importance, not the extravagance of theatrical ritual and imposing architecture.⁵³ The Reformation had stripped cathedrals of anything reminiscent of Catholicism – stained glass, altars, and depictions of saints – but with Laudianism, cathedrals were once again becoming beautiful, elaborate structures. The Church of England would become a symbol of the true religion via the cathedral, free of the Church of Rome, but keeping many of its practices. Even before being appointed archbishop of

⁴⁹ Ian Atherton, “Cathedrals, Laudianism, and the British Churches” *The Historical Journal* (2010): 895-918.

⁵⁰ Susan Guinn-Chipman, “Contesting Religious Space: Alteration and Reaction in Stuart England” in *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 95.

⁵¹ Susan Guinn-Chapman, “Contesting Religious Space,” 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Atherton, “Cathedrals, Laudianism, and the British Churches,” 896.

Canterbury, Laud began implementing these reforms as seen in the Gloucester Cathedral Act book. According to its records, Laud attempted to,

to re-establish the majesty, power, and standing, not only of cathedrals, but also of the whole church: protecting the place of the church and clergy in society, particularly from lay depredations; refurbishing the fabric of ecclesiastical buildings; raising the economic standing of church and clergy; increasing the dignity of services; restoring the position of, and honour accorded to, the altar.⁵⁴

With the cathedral the model through which the reforms would begin to standardize the church, smaller parish churches across the kingdom were expected to follow suit.

On a local level, the Archbishop of York, Samuel Harsnett (1629-1631) documented the inconsistency of church practices, regarding the sacredness of the interior, in a set of orders to the York diocese in 1629. In these orders, Harsnett required the diocese to follow four new orders that would regulate church services in matters of appropriate dress and behavior.⁵⁵ He addressed the issue involving some men covering their heads during the service, which he deemed to be highly disrespectful to both God and His Majesty: “young men misled by the example of their elders, do sit covered with their hats on their heads, neither regarding the holinesses of the house of God, nor the greatness of the divine Majesty, which is to be worshipped with fear and reverence.”⁵⁶ In Christian scriptures, it is considered disrespectful for a man to wear a head covering according to Corinthians 11:7, which states “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God.” The elders were meant to set an example for the younger parishioners, so when they grew old themselves, the tradition could be passed to future generations. Harsnett’s notice of the inconsistencies in York’s

⁵⁴ *Gloucester Cathedral Chapter Act Book*, 1616-1687 ed. Suzanne Eward (Gloucestershire Record Series, 21, 2007), 27-28.

⁵⁵ “Archbishop Samuel Harsnett’s orders for York diocese, 1629” in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. 2 edited by Kenneth Fincham, (Boydell Press: 1998), 35-36.

⁵⁶ “Archbishop Samuel Harsnett’s orders for York diocese, 1629,” 35.

dioceses was not an isolated incident. Prior to the tenure of Laud as archbishop of Canterbury, other disparities in religious practices in other parts of England had been recorded in the late 1620s.

More specifically, the initial changes and controversies came from the new placement of the communion table or altar in a north/south position along the eastern wall of the chancel and railed to separate the clergy from the laity.⁵⁷ In particular, bishop of Chichester, Richard Montagu's (1628-38) visitation article for the Chichester diocese from 1628 highlights the largely controversial issue of the communion table. According to Kenneth Fincham, the placement of the communion table became a heavily debated topic in the 1630s, but prior to the promotion of Laud as archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, the rules for communion table placement remained a bit loose.⁵⁸ In Montagu's section of articles regarding the church, its ornaments, and its sacred utensils, Item Three asks "have you a convenient, and decent communion table placed conveniently as it ought, with a carpet of silke, or some other comely stuff to bee layd upon it in time of divine service, and a cleane linnen for the time of communion?"⁵⁹ The significance of this statement lies in the phrase "as it ought" simply because later in the 1630s, church officials would take great issue with communion tables that had not been placed "at the upper end of the chancell, and shall stand north and south..." as archbishop Laud stated in his injunctions for the Chichester diocese in 1635.⁶⁰ Since Montagu's document is

⁵⁷ Guinn-Chapman, "Contesting Religious Space," 96. Many cathedrals are oriented with the chancel in the east with the choir seating on the northern and southern walls. The significance of the eastern orientation and the holiest parts of the church being in the east part of the chancel are due to the idea that Christ had died facing west and will resurrect in the east.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Fincham, "Restorations of altars in the 1630s" *The Historical Journal* (2001): 919.

⁵⁹ "Bishop Richard Montagu's Visitation Articles for Chichester Diocese, 1628" in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. 2 edited by Kenneth Fincham, (Boydell Press: 1998), 26.

⁶⁰ "Archbishop William Laud's Injunctions to Parochial Clergy during his Metropolitan Visitation, 1634-7" in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. 2 edited by Kenneth Fincham, (Boydell Press: 1998), 108.

a visitation article, the data contained within it is merely a record of the Chichester diocese's practices in 1628. Bishops would visit each parish in their dominion every one to three years and take note of their practices. In contrast, Laud's injunction seven years later required the diocese to implement those particular canon laws.

In a 1632 plan for a church in East Knoyle, Wiltshire, Christopher Wren Sr. (1589-1658) -- father of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral in London -- showed the transition to the new table placement. As seen in Figure 3, some pews and benches were placed in the chancel "in a 'choir-wise' position" along the north and south walls as was the intention.⁶¹ However, some pews occupied the chancel facing east, which could have prevented parishioners in the nave from seeing clearly.⁶² In addition, it is unclear whether the placement of the communion table in this plan is where it remained; according to Susan Guinn-Chapman, a twentieth-century historian named Nigel Yates concluded the table was "permanently set in the centre of the chancel."⁶³ The early 1630s marked the Church of England's transition period; in this decade it was not yet certain what stance was going to be taken on communion table placement.

The same year of Laud's appointment as archbishop, a council brought before Charles I forth the issue of "communion table" placement in St. Gregory's church and desired it to be "placed alter-wise, in such a manner as it stands in said cathedral [St. Paul's] and mother church, as also in other cathedrals and in his Majesty's own chapel."⁶⁴ By placing it "alter-wise," the

⁶¹ Susan Guinn-Chapman, "Contesting Religious Space: Alteration and Reaction in Stuart England" in *Religious Space in Reformation England* (Pickering & Chatto: 2013), 107.

⁶² Guinn-Chapman, "Contesting Religious Space," 107.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "An order of council for placing the communion table in St. Gregory's church, London, 3 November 1633," ed. Cardwell, *Documentary Annals*, vol. 2 quoted in *English Historical Documents*, ed. Barry Coward and Gaunt, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 294.

communion table was set “from the middle of the chancel” – the space around the altar, including the choir and the sanctuary – and at the east end of the church.⁶⁵ This distinction was essential because the discussion involves the placement of a “communion table,” which in most Protestant denominations was not as grandiose as a Catholic altar; however, both are for performing the sacraments – specifically communion. This distinction between the altar and the communion table and resulting preference for the communion table indicates that the Church of England sought to devise a new meaning for the Eucharistic liturgy. The petition to implement these changes in St. Gregory’s church based on the example of St. Paul’s reiterates the notion of cathedrals as mother churches. However, the detail of placing it “altar-wise” should not be glossed over.

The importance of “the sacred” to Laudian church reform is further expanded upon by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer in which they note that is important to differentiate between the church space as “*domus dei*,” containing the presence of God, and the church as the “*domus ecclesiae*,” acting as a house or “a vessel to contain worship.”⁶⁶ This concept will be especially important when considering the changes made to the meaning of the Eucharist and whether Communion rites signify a symbolic ritual of Christ’s sacrifice, God’s presence in the church (consubstantiation), or the bread and wine is a transformation of the body and blood of Jesus (transubstantiation). The distinction – transubstantiation reminiscent of Catholicism and consubstantiation being more Anglican – would factor into Laudian reforms and the stance the Church of England would take on how sacred they wanted this sacrament to be. Since parishes

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, “Introduction: the dimensions of sacred space in Reformation Europe” in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* edited by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, Cambridge: 2005, 1.

across England differed on this important detail, Laudian reforms sought to standardize the sacred practice for the whole kingdom.

Returning the table to its “altar-wise” pre-Reformation location, theologically affirmed the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation – that Christ was really present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.⁶⁷ Elizabeth I’s injunctions had allowed parishes to move the tables about as they wished; some felt that they were best placed in the nave so the congregation could best hear the ceremony.⁶⁸ When the communion table had been in the nave, it suggested that the Eucharist was merely symbolic and there was no holy presence.⁶⁹ In addition, the purpose of the Reformation was to make Christianity more accessible to the public. Catholic masses performed in the east end of the church with parishioners only able to hear them from the nave. The choir and a large stone screen often separated the east part of the chancel from the nave. By bringing the communion table closer to the nave, parishioners could be more active participants in the services.

However, these tables, not being easy to move, often never left the nave; if left without a rail, they were often soiled by dogs and used for unholy purposes.⁷⁰ For the sake of uniformity, Laud decided to keep the communion table in its pre-Reformation location in the east part of the chancel and railed.⁷¹ The rail was a physical barrier created to separate the laity from the clergy. Parishioners would approach the rail for communion and kneel before as the priest or minister placed a plate under the chin of the laity to prevent the bread and wine from falling on the floor

⁶⁷ John Campbell, “The Quarrel over the Communion Table” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Historical Society of the Episcopal Church: 1971), 173-183.

⁶⁸ Campbell, “The Quarrel over the Communion Table,” 175.

⁶⁹ Campbell, “The Quarrel over the Communion Table,” 174.

⁷⁰ Campbell, “The Quarrel over the Communion Table,” 174.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

or touch the unclean laity. With the rail, the communion table or altar was protected from “pollutions” and “to keepe of dogs.”⁷² More importantly, as discussed by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, the rail added another layer of sacred space within the church. It was a space for the clergy only; laity was not allowed beyond the rail. The re-installment of the rail and the reintroduction of Catholic ideals meant religion, under the Church of England’s new theological identity, would be less accessible to the public. Both the placement in the east end of the chancel and addition of rails stripped away the ability to participate more in services that the Reformation had provided many Christians.

In order to inspire the next generation of men serving the Church of England, many of whom were educated at Oxford and Cambridge universities, it was strategic to model university chapels on Laudian principles. In the university chapel at Peterhouse, Cambridge, the altar had incredible decorative detail and “liturgical elaboration” that did not exist before the 1630s.⁷³ It was the hope that these young men, upon graduation, would go into their respective parishes to implement and preach Laudian ideology based on their experiences at university. Young ministers and clergy would be more enthusiastic about preaching and therefore more willing to follow the churches new laws rather than existing preachers who were forced to change.

According to Laud’s “Articles to be Enquired of within the Diocese of London,” there was still no clear enforcement and communion tables or altars could be placed the church’s convenience;⁷⁴ by 1637, Laud began enforcing placement of the table in the east end of the

⁷² “Archbishop William Laud’s Injunctions to Parochial Clergy during his Metropolitan Visitation, 1634-7” in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. 2 edited by Kenneth Fincham, (Boydell Press: 1998), 108.

⁷³ Graham Parry, “Church Music” in *Glory Laud and Honour: The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation* (Boydell Press: 2006), 167.

⁷⁴ Corroborated by Julian Davies in *Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625-1641*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 45.

chancel with rails and north-south facing choir seats; in 1641, 208 of 232 parishes complied with Laud's injunctions, all.⁷⁵ Based on these statistics, it appears the Church of England was close to achieving their goal of uniting and forming a stronger theological identity. Yet those twenty-four parishes that had not complied by 1641 are significant. Civil war broke out in 1641 and the unraveling of Laudian reforms began. It was the end of the brief Counter-Reformation in England as Puritans and other Protestant groups began taking back their churches.

The Puritan Response

Puritans, in particular, found what they considered the new theatrics in Sunday services to be quite appalling because their doctrine focused not on the rituals, but on their relationships to God. And the Church of England had begun making these heinous rituals religious law in the 1620s and 1630s. For example, a sermon by Robert Wilkinson, called *The Jewell for the Eare*, in which he spoke on the subject of church being the place to hear God, not see Him. It was originally published in 1593, but was continuously reprinted into the mid-seventeenth century. In his sermon, he quotes Romans 10:17: "faith commeth by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."⁷⁶ According to Puritan doctrine, the church was meant to be a place to hear God's Word and pay one's respect to the Almighty. It was not a place for town gossip or general conversation between parishioners. Puritan ministers said that churches were sanctuaries, a place for reflection and silent, individual conversations through God, His Word, and weekly sermons. Thus, "ecclesiastical canons restricted disturbances near or in church...records show these were enforced."⁷⁷ Controlling these disturbances would have been a way to create layers of sacred

⁷⁵ Guinn-Chipman, "Contesting Religious Space," 105.

⁷⁶ Robert Wilkinson, *Jewell for the Eare*, (London: Payver, 1610).

⁷⁷ Laura Fitzinger Brown, "Brawling in Church: Noise and the Rhetoric of Lay Behavior in Early Modern England" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 4 (2003): JSTOR, 957; these canons involved all churches, Anglican, Catholic, and Puritan. It was the beginning of standardization.

space. As Emily Winerock mentioned in her research, dancing and singing in the churchyard was forbidden. The church being a place to worship God, unnecessary, unholy noises became unacceptable.

The Church of England's attempts to develop a more cohesive theological identity received great amounts of criticism – especially from Puritans. Most famously a Puritan preacher, Peter Smart preached harshly against the changes to the church on 27 July 1628 at Durham Cathedral in northern England. In *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral at Durham*, he says “nay the sacrament it selfe is turned well neare into a theatricall stage play that when mens minds should be occupied about heavenly meditations, of Christs bitter death and passion... [instead] their eares are possest with pleasant tunes, and their eyes fed with pompous spectacles.”⁷⁸ With great dismay, Puritans witnessed, in Smart's words, the “bringing in Altars in stead of Tables, Priests in stead of Ministers; proprietary sacrifices in stead of Sacraments” and saw their services transformed into works of art – a show that did not rely solely on God's Word but rather on outrageous costumes, altars, and performances by the clergy.⁷⁹ Smart justified Puritan ideology by drawing from scripture and the teachings of Christ himself. He states that “he [Christ] ordained two Sacraments and left to his Church liberty to make Laws and Canons, for order and comeliness agreeable to his word.”⁸⁰ However, in the Laudian period, Smart felt that changes to the church reflected too much of the Catholic church and that popish clergy were not “content with that simplicity which pleased the Apostles [and] would neede [to] adde Ceremony to Ceremony.”⁸¹ Certainly based on these accounts, the changes divided the kingdom rather than unifying it. However, this is only one account from a minority group that leaned very

⁷⁸ Peter Smart, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Durham* (London, 1628).

⁷⁹ Smart, 9.

⁸⁰ Smart, 7.

⁸¹ Ibid.

much Protestant. This sermon provides insight into a contrasting view of the church, the services it gave its people, and differences in the what was valued as sacred.

Therefore, Laudian reforms which sought to unify the kingdom under one doctrine found itself at odds with a prominent minority. What is sacred to one is not sacred to another, and in the 1630s it seemed that the Puritans' ideas on "the sacred" would not prevail. As Charles I's support decreased dramatically into the 1640s and civil war broke out in 1641, Parliament, which was made up of quite a few Puritans, began to reverse some reforms implemented by Laud. For example, in 1644, Parliament banned the use of organs in church services.⁸² Puritans and moderate Anglicans in Doncaster who had experienced strict application to the new religious reforms in the 1630s quickly reverted back to their plainer Protestant services after the bishops left or were removed.⁸³ As mentioned earlier, twenty four parishes around England had not complied to Laud's injunctions in 1641. Initially, it appeared that Laud was successful at rapidly uniting the church in a short period – less than 10 years – and the reforms reached a concise stance on Christianity for the Church of England; yet, implementation suffered setbacks as a result of too many groups of Christians coexisting at once, among other factors.

Conclusion

Christianity in Pre-Reformation England was far less diverse than Post-Reformation. The majority of the population were Catholic; even though practices might have differed based on region, each parish was held to the same standards and canons coming from Rome. Heretics existed but were a small minority. Upon the break from the Catholic church in 1547, English

⁸² Graham Parry, *Glory, Laud and Honour: The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation*, (Boydell Press: 2006), 214.

⁸³ Claire Cross, "Religion in Doncaster from the Reformation to the Civil War," in *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500-1640*, ed. Patrick Collinson and John Craig, (Macmillian Press: 1998), 60.

Protestants derived inspiration from Protestant movements in continental Europe, which resulted in several Protestant groups forming in England. Post-Reformation, the country predominantly comprised of Anglicans, Calvinists, also known as Puritans, and Arminians, with some remaining Catholics. Due to the increasing diversity, it became more important for each sect of Christianity to identify their beliefs – what is called confessionalization. The emphasis on confessing one's Christian values and practices developed after the Reformation.

Anti-Catholic sentiments also embedded themselves into Post-Reformation English society. The English perceived the pope and Catholic clergy to be corrupt, and did not want the pope as a foreign power intervening in English affairs. Soon, Catholics became the enemy of the Church of England. Charles I's marriage to the French Catholic, Henrietta Maria, resulted in suspicion of the king and his possible intentions of bringing Catholicism back to England. Certainly, as evidenced by the research in this paper, the reforms he and William Laud tried to implement were too Catholic for many Protestants. In essence, this short reformation period could be considered a part of the Counter-Reformation.

Complex in nature, the reformation of the Church of England's sacred spaces and theological identity under Laud failed to be fully implemented. Not only was Charles trying to make changes to the church, but he was also suffering from strained relationships with Parliament. Charles, tired of relying on Parliament's advice, failed to convene his government for eleven years, except only when the king needed money. Another reason for the deterioration of the relationship between king and government resulted from the implementation of controversial church reforms. Parliament felt that Charles had overstepped his bounds as sovereign for issuing new religious law without consulting his government. In the 1640s, these relationships finally gave way to civil war – monarchy versus Parliament. Both Charles and

William Laud were targeted for their involvement in reforming the Church of England. By order of the House of Commons, Laud was impeached for high treason and arrested in December 1640. Tried and convicted of treason in 1641 and imprisoned at the Tower of London, Laud was executed in 1645. In 1648, Charles I was also put on trial for high treason, and in January 1649, he was executed outside Whitehall Palace in London.

In essence, the Laudian reforms are an example of the difficulties that come from trying to unite a diverse nation under a specific set of canons. From little communities outside of London, like Chichester, to larger communities with more Anglican influence, such as York, and even to communities with larger populations of Puritans, like Durham, the challenges that Charles and Laud encountered in trying to bring these communities together proved difficult. With each village, town, and city defining sacred space differently, tying all of them together under one interpretation of sacred space also proved to be impossible. To one community, railing in the altar or communion table screamed of popery. To another, it seemed wise to do so in order to prevent filth from the numerous dogs that wandered about the church. Overall, Laudian church reforms did their best to bring forth a strong, unified Church of England through the regulation of sacred space but failed as a result of too many perceptions of sacred space throughout the kingdom. To the modern reader, these reforms may seem unnecessary, or the controversy over them may seem outrageous; but the early modern English lived and breathed their faith. Without it, they lacked an identity and a relationship with the divine. Their backlash against these reforms demonstrates a resolve so strong that they would not give up their own meaning of sacred space for the sake of the kingdom.

The larger significance of Laudian England and the brief period in which the Church of England wanted to develop a stronger, unified identity comes from the Reformation and the

political factors of the age. Protestants had only been in England for about eighty years when Charles was crowned in 1625. The suspicion of the pope and Catholicism as a whole was still fresh. Protestants were still forming their own religious identities. The divine right of kings was still a prominent among royal families across Europe, but due to enlightenment principles, absolute monarchs found themselves losing support from governments, nobles, and the people. Charles overstepped his authority and neglected to consult Parliament on church reform. The deterioration of their relationship divided the country, drew Charles's attention away from enforcing new canon law to the war, which allowed parishes to resume their services as they wanted them conducted. With the execution of Charles, England entered into a period without a monarchy, called the Protectorate (1649-1660). A third civil war broke out in the 1650s and Charles I's son, Charles II (1630-1685) restored the monarchy in England in 1660. Another revision of the Book of Common Prayer, used to dictate Anglican services, was revised in 1662; it is the version used by the Church of England in the present day. Sacred space in churches was not the only aspect used to standardize the Church of England, and there are plenty of other avenues through which historians can study the Laudian reforms. This case study of ecclesiastical history in mid-seventeenth century England adds to a broader discussion of sacred space in early modern Europe and attitudes of religious identity in the Post-Reformation world.

Appendix



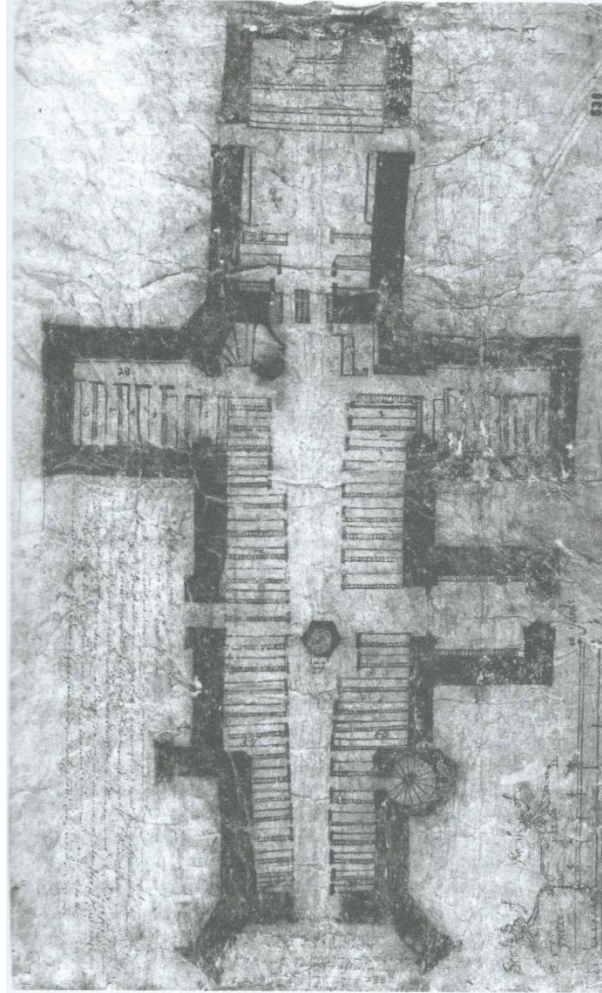
Figure 1 Communion Table at Canterbury Cathedral

<https://ims.canterbury-cathedral.org/viewpicture.tlx?containerid=1146&pictureid=8036300>



Figure 2 Altar at Westminster Abbey

<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/victor-bruce.-9th-earl-of-elgin>



*Figure 3 Plan of East Knoyle, St. Mary's in
Religious Space in Reformation England by Susan Guinn-Chipman, pg. 108
from the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives*

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