

BOOK REVIEW

Nigel Aston and William Gibson (eds.), *The Anglican Episcopate 1689–1800* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2023), pp. xiv + 368, 12 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-78683-976-3, e-ISBN 978-1-78683-977-0.

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This book seeks to provide a comprehensive reassessment of the eighteenth-century Anglican episcopate, in the context of current scholarship, a task not undertaken since Norman Sykes' *Church and State in England in the XVIIIth Century* (1934). The editors have written extensively about eighteenth-century English and European episcopacy and have assembled a distinguished group of contributors to provide thirteen essays under four headings: the politics of Church and State, the episcopal role, 'cultures' (comprising wives, intellectual life and the arts), and Anglican bishops beyond England.

The introduction sets the historiographical framework seeking to take a median path in the current debate between 'pessimistic' and 'optimistic' approaches to eighteenth-century Anglicanism. However, sometimes a somewhat judgemental attitude towards bishops appears, for example the editors in their essays dwell on the old criticisms of ambition, 'good' marriages and political partisanship. However, they point out that the episcopacy was a meritocracy although, while most were sons of the 'middling sort', fathers who were 'glovers, ironmongers, brewers and tanners' were more likely to have been prosperous members of urban elites, giving their sons access to grammar schools and universities, than artisans. Essays by Ruth Paley on the episcopate in national politics, G.M. Ditchfield on bishops and the monarchy, Colin Haydon on bishops and their dioceses, Daniel Reed on bishops and patronage, Robert Ingram on bishops and eighteenth-century intellectual life and Matthew Craske on bishops and the arts, particularly the founding of the Royal Academy, helpfully throw much new light on the episcopal role. They help us to understand better the complexities of a bishop's role, and the nature and working of patronage. Ruth Paley's evidence about the relatively modest attendance in the House of Lords, leaves one wondering what they did during their time in London in the annual six months or so of parliamentary sessions. Colin Haydon's detailed accounts of visitations suggests they may have spent much time analysing and digesting their clergy's visitation returns. Some must, as Professor Ditchfield shows, have spent time as members of the royal household attending at court, Some bishops must have given time to the offices they held *in commendam*, to fund their diocesan

duties, as deans of St Paul's and Westminster and incumbents of Westminster and City parishes. Ruth Paley's appendix 'Episcopal Incomes during the Eighteenth Century' (p. 365) provides an important starting point for exploring episcopal finances, as well as helpfully explaining the frequent translations of bishops.

Bishops of Welsh dioceses are further rehabilitated as conscientious and sympathetic to Welsh-speakers. The challenge of being a Church of Ireland bishop is well described: Some were dutiful, some were not. Why they did not promote the use of Irish, the language of the people, is not discussed. The complexity of the disestablished Scottish episcopate and the creation of a new polity is helpfully explained. There is a useful discussion of relations with Huguenots and Gallican professors in France, and Moravians and John Wesley's superintendents and the establishment of an episcopate in the new United States. However, there is no mention of the important links with North German Protestants including the Hanoverian connection, and the English bishops' frustrations in achieving a colonial episcopate in British North America until 1785.

These essays are a useful addition to the increasing number of studies of religion in the eighteenth-century. They provide important insights into how the establishment worked and related to localities. It would be good if they stimulate further work, for example on how episcopal finances worked, bishops' participation in the various moral panics that the nation's immorality would precipitate judgement in the form of defeat in the intermittent wars with France, and for bishops' collaboration especially in defence of orthodoxy, and against Jacobites, papists, and non-jurors, and concessions to dissenters and Quakers. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic thwarted the editors' intention to invite the contributors to participate in a colloquium to exchange ideas in person. That would have avoided some of the duplications between the essays.

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