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Harmes, Marcus K. Bishops and Power in Early Modern England

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[See table of contents](#)

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essays in part 3 provide excellent models for manuscript and print studies of other localized saints.

MARY MORSE
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Harmes, Marcus K.

Bishops and Power in Early Modern England.

London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Pp. 222. ISBN 978-1-4725-0835-5 (hardcover) US\$120.

Reformation and post-Reformation strife was rooted in disagreements about ecclesiastical structures. Handwriting on this front led to troubles between Protestants and Catholics and, perhaps more interestingly, among putative confessional allies. Harmes's book offers to explore a version of intra-confessional strife through an English lens by describing debates about episcopal authority during the Tudor and (mostly) Stuart periods. Though he pays attention to critiques of the episcopate, the author is particularly interested in showing the ways in which a range of political and ecclesiastical figures defended it and its reformist potential.

Except for a more synthetic first chapter, Harmes sticks to a case-study approach based on printed polemical sources. To start, the author summarily describes how a series of important Tudor and early Stuart bishops underscored their roles as reformers within a changing ecclesiastical context while remaining (mostly) subservient to various monarchs. Chapter 2 deals with two early Stuart writers, courtier and historian John Harington and dissenting minister Josias Nichols. They both supported the episcopate as rooted in a reformist tradition, and in the case of Nichols by establishing episcopal dissent as a central feature of the established church. Chapter 3 shows how cases of witchcraft and exorcism were sites of contention about episcopal power. Attacks against Puritan exorcists (who were bitter critics of the episcopacy) by Bishop Richard Bancroft and his allies amounted to a defense of episcopal authority. Chapter 4 takes on the weighty subject of Archbishop William Laud. Harmes surveys attacks against him and his papist ways and his appeals to reformist tradition in self-defence. Chapter 5 deals with how two men during the aftermath of civil war found ways to highlight responsible forms of episcopal rule: Arthur Duck looked to

exemplary episcopal figures—from the medieval church, no less—to that end, and John Gauden looked to various reformist traditions to argue that a limited form of episcopal governance could be beneficial. Finally, chapter 6 surveys debates about clerical dress and examines (partly through visual evidence) how vestments were used to reassert episcopal power during the Restoration.

Harmes's book is rather brief for the complicated subject it examines. At barely 121 pages, one is left wanting much more. To take one example, in dealing with Laudian critiques and responses, the author points out that enemies tried to link the Archbishop to Roman traditions and that in defense Laud clung to precedents set by the likes of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, aside from asserting that traditions were imputed or embraced, the reader will not gain a real sense of what version of papalism Laud was accused of, nor what his appeals to Tudor reforms say about his understanding of good episcopal rule. Missing here and elsewhere are details about the language used by early modern polemicists and a more precise description of how they developed their arguments. We have plenty of conclusions without discussions of how various thinkers arrived at those conclusions, how the reasoning therein reflected the authors' mindsets and beliefs, or how specific discourses/ideologies worked alongside specific polemical strategies employed.

This is a shame because, as the author tells us, the complexity of debates concerning episcopacy is rooted in the ambiguous religious identities of adherents and critics of the religious status quo. These ambiguities are reflected in contemporary polemics that, in a very general way, might be pro- or anti-episcopal, but their significance, and our deeper understanding of these polemics, depends on engaging with nitty-gritty details. Barring precise exposition of relevant texts and precise analysis, we cannot gain a nuanced understanding of contested versions of "episcopal identity" in the early modern period.

Still, Harmes provides summaries of compelling debates that might be of use to non-specialists as a means of orientation. The book also successfully reminds us of the many ways in which history and the notion of tradition could serve polemical ends in early modern confessional/political battles. Though it is unclear that this book is saying anything particularly "new," it nevertheless reminds us that, above all, English reform was unstable.