

hived off into Legal Theology, a sort of moral ideology formed from the 'religion' of human rights, the moralisation of international relations and wars (Kosovo, Kuwait), and an exultation of humanitarianism that hides the dynamics of domination by military and technocratic bodies and by financial capitalism. It also concerns the hegemony of 'woke' political correctness with its demonisation of canonical works, the sanitisation of history, and the identity politics that divide rather than assemble political bodies. Economic Theology, allied with Legal Theology, and the various techniques of governance which deny and obscure the insights of Political Theology, herald the apparent arrival of a depoliticised and immanent society.

However, argues Preterossi, the political is resurgent. Look at the rise of emergencies requiring exceptional political actions: pandemic, migrant, climate, 2008's financial crash. See the rise of populisms and ideological/religious fundamentalisms. Witness the theopolitics of the war in Ukraine. So there is a need for a deep analysis of the structure of modern politics which acknowledges the unavoidability of the theological-political. There needs to be political structures that can hold back chaos and anarchy but legitimated by collectivities that have ethical-political (not merely moralistic) bonds. We need too a confidence in political cultures that allow for conflict of ideas and interests in a complex, competitive, pluralist environment. And this is politics—the re-enchantment of political imagination and the search for mobilising worldviews (secular or not) that will allow for legitimate organisational forms rooted in collectivities of solidarity that will lead us out of both 'politics as administration' and reactive forms of pseudo-politics like populism. It is seizing the excessive energy that Political Theology evinces. Preterossi's critical analyses and tools are credible and worthy of scrutiny, once one penetrates the prose, although theologically we will have different ideas about the ground of human sociality and what is really excessive to human political formations.

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## **The Visitation of Hereford Diocese in 1397**

**Edited by Ian Forrest and Christopher Whittick  
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In Hereford we are just beginning to consider how we might celebrate the 1350th anniversary of the Diocese approaching in 2026. It was therefore particularly

interesting to read this edition of a key source for the state of Hereford diocese halfway through its long history as possibly the oldest territorial jurisdiction surviving in England within roughly its original boundaries. Forrest and Whittick present an edition of HCA1779, the manuscript record of Bishop Trefnant's visitation of his diocese in 1397, 'arguably the most detailed and interesting record of visitation proceedings to survive from medieval England' and the more so if one knows the places described. Selections from the text were published by a canon of Hereford in 1929–1930 and have been used by historians, some unaware of his selectivity. After many years' work, this is a full scholarly edition for reference.

As many readers will know well, visitation was a key tool of ecclesiastical administration in medieval Europe, whereby a dignitary, either in person or by his officials, sought to set right the deficiencies of churches or other institutions by enquiring for faults and directing what should be done to correct them. The original manuscript now in the cathedral archives is understood to be the actual book which accompanied the bishop and his staff on their nine-week tour of the diocese, into which probably the diocesan registrar entered against each parish the issues raised, and then added the decisions made during the visitation about remedy. Another hand then added further notes of actions taken, in some cases months later, against some cases.

After a full and useful introduction, the text is presented in opposing pages of Latin and English translation, with editorial notes about corrections and uncertainties in reading the Latin placed underneath. The text is of course ordered in the sequence taken by the visitors, which a map in the introduction demonstrates to have been complex. Other sources on Bishop Trefnant indicate that he attended to pressing business in different places at the same time as the visitation, sometimes leaving his officials to carry on in his absence, and this may explain some of the order. But three indexes make easy work of finding places, people and issues.

The matters raised at the visitation were brought by a class of people simply referred to as 'the parishioners' (*parochiani*) although the editors report from other studies that these would usually be leading male householders. They fell broadly into three categories: buildings, ministry and morals. Some part of the church estate, whether the church itself, or the parsonage, or ancillary buildings, was in disrepair, and so the responsible person (the priest for the house and, if rector, chancel, the parishioners for the nave, and sometimes someone else) was ordered to repair it. The priest was failing in some part of his duties, and was ordered to sort it out. And then there are the many cases, some involving clergy, of sexual complaint, that someone is 'fornicating' or 'incontinent' with someone else (the difference is never explained, but the latter perhaps implies cohabitation).

The entries to the last category seem to show the greatest complexity of response. In some cases there is none recorded, perhaps because the parties managed to avoid appearing. In others, one or both deny the offence and are recorded as 'purged' – that is to say, their sworn innocence was supported by a prescribed number (often six) others. This might of course be better evidence that they had six good friends than that they were innocent. But sometimes

penance, often of beating around the churchyard, was prescribed. All this confirms the editorial judgment 'it is not an objective record ... [but] a detailed record of how hundreds of lay persons and clergy sought to use a powerful institution for a multitude of purposes' (p xli). Underlying the whole text can be seen the hierarchical and patriarchal assumptions of the time.

Writing from Hereford Diocese today, it is tempting to send each entry to the relevant parish and ask how much has changed. Certainly, quinquennial inspections, of both churches and parsonages, continue to record dilapidations and prescribe repairs. Complaints, formal and informal, about the ministrations of the clergy come back to the ears of the Bishop, living under the same roof as his predecessors for 900 years, to decide how, or even whether, it is helpful to do anything about them. And as we expand the range of lay ministries at present, worthy middle-aged volunteers are discovered to be cohabiting without marriage, prompting careful decisions about what is allowed and how to contain scandal. Bishop Trefnant and his staff might find themselves quite at home.

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