

## THE RESTORATION OF ALTARS IN THE 1630s\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *The nationwide campaign to erect railed altars in the 1630s has always been seen as a central feature of the Laudian reformation of the Church. Recently some scholars have denied its close association with Laud and Arminian sacramentalism, and have proposed that the policy originated with Charles I, to be reluctantly endorsed by his archbishop. As for its enforcement, Julian Davies has identified at least five variants which were implemented in the dioceses. This article argues instead that Archbishops Neile and Laud were centrally involved in the introduction of the railed altar, and that they oversaw the imposition of a single altar policy, with only Williams of Lincoln briefly championing a variation on it. Differences did emerge, however, over where communicants should receive, since this had not been prescribed by authority. Charles I, on this reading, was not the driving force for change, although he clearly came to support it.*

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It is widely accepted that rising tensions over religion in the 1630s helped to precipitate a political crisis in 1640 and civil war in 1642. Fears of popery and innovation were generated by the growth of court Catholicism, the dominance of the Laudian interest in the ecclesiastical establishment, and the character of officially sponsored reforms. Among the most controversial of these changes was the restoration of altars in parochial churches. The requirement that communion tables be permanently moved back to the east end of chancels, placed altarwise and railed in, represented the most dramatic alteration in church interiors since the upheavals of the mid-sixteenth century. The pattern of worship incorporated these changes: some parishioners were encouraged or compelled to resort to the rails to receive communion, and were urged to bow towards the altar on entering or leaving church. At the altar some ministers read the ante-communion or second service, and at the rails churched women. These reforms were often contested as illegal, popish, and divisive, leading to challenges through the ecclesiastical courts, most famously by the churchwardens of Beckington in Somerset, to presentments to grand juries at the assizes, and to a pamphlet war between supporters and critics of the railed altar, until it was condemned in the Long Parliament and finally proscribed in the Commons' order of September 1641.

The meaning and authorship of the restoration of altars form part of a

\* I am grateful for the comments of Nicholas Cranfield, Richard Cust, Andrew Foster, Peter Lake, and Nicholas Tyacke on an earlier draft of this article, and for the remarks of the anonymous referees.

broader debate about theological developments in early Stuart England. Nicholas Tyacke's view that the railed altar symbolized the centrality of the sacraments to English Arminianism has been challenged by Kevin Sharpe, George Bernard, and others. They deny any necessary connection between doctrine and ceremony, suggest that a traditional and neutral concern with decency and order drove the campaign for railed altars, and indeed dispute the existence of English Arminianism.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, Julian Davies accepts Tyacke's view of radical change in the 1630s, but sees it springing not from Arminianism but from a union of 'Laudianism' and 'Carolinism'. Railing in of communion tables articulated the sacramental and sacerdotal concerns of Laudians as well as royal pretensions to divine right kingship through inculcating respect for the 'throne of presence' in each church. Davies, like Sharpe, sees Charles I rather than Laud as the instigator of major religious changes, including the railed altar, during the 1630s.<sup>2</sup> The restoration of church fabric and furnishings, stimulated by the royal proclamation of 1629 and the national campaign launched in 1631 to repair St Paul's cathedral, provides another context in which to place the erection of altars. Historians are beginning to appreciate the extent of church repair in James I's reign, as often undertaken voluntarily by parishioners as imposed upon them by the authorities, though such work can be distinguished from Laudian alterations both in its detail and in the ideals of the 'beauty of holiness' which underpinned them.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 199–202; K. Sharpe, *The personal rule of Charles I* (New Haven, CT, 1992), ch. 6, esp. pp. 275–92, 333–45; G. W. Bernard, 'The church of England, c. 1529–c. 1642', *History*, 75 (1990), pp. 183–206, esp. p. 204; see also I. M. Green, '"England's wars of religion"? Religious conflict and the English civil wars', in J. van den Berg and P. G. Hoftijzer, eds., *Church, change and revolution* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 102–7, esp. p. 105; C. Hill, 'Archbishop Laud's place in English history', in his *A century of change and novelty* (London, 1990), p. 72. Tyacke has replied to his critics in 'Anglican attitudes: some recent writings on English religious history, from the reformation to the civil war', *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996), pp. 139–67. See also J. Eales, 'Iconoclasm, iconography and the altar in the English civil war', in D. Wood, ed., *The Church and the arts* (Studies in Church history, 28, 1992), pp. 313–27.

<sup>2</sup> J. Davies, *The Caroline captivity of the church: Charles I and the remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625–1641* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 205–50; Sharpe, *Personal rule*, pp. 279–85, 335.

<sup>3</sup> A. Foster, 'Church policies of the 1630s', in R. Cust and A. Hughes, eds., *Conflict in early Stuart England* (London, 1989), pp. 201–2; I. Archer, 'The nostalgia of John Stow', in D. L. Smith, R. Strier, and D. Bevington, eds., *The theatrical city* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 33–4; J. Merritt, 'Puritans, Laudians, and the phenomenon of church-building in Jacobean London', *Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), pp. 935–60, esp. pp. 956–9; P. Lake, 'The Laudian style: order, uniformity and the pursuit of the beauty of holiness in the 1630s', in K. Fincham, ed., *The early Stuart church* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp. 161–85; K. Fincham, 'Episcopal government, 1603–1640', in *ibid.*, p. 74; J. P. D. Cannon, 'The poetry and polemic of English church worship, c. 1617–1640' (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1998), chs. 1–2; D. MacCulloch, 'The myth of the English reformation', *Journal of British Studies*, 30 (1991), p. 14. See also G. Yule, 'James VI and I: furnishing the churches in his two kingdoms', in A. Fletcher and P. Roberts, eds., *Religion, culture and society in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 182–208. The impact upon parishioners of the restored altar has been largely neglected, though now see D. Cressy, 'The battle of the altars: turning the tables and breaking the rails', in his *Travesties and transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 186–212.

To do justice to these and related themes will require a book-length study.<sup>4</sup> Here the more modest intention is to test the views of Davies, and to a lesser extent those of Sharpe, on the immediate origins, authorship, and enforcement of the railed altar. Both Davies and Sharpe have questioned the view of most contemporaries, echoed by many historians, that Archbishop William Laud and his close allies were responsible for introducing and enforcing these changes. In November 1633, this interpretation runs, Laud engineered a test case before the privy council over the location of the communion table at St Gregory-by-St Paul's and, with the king's backing, imposed the railed altar across the province of Canterbury through his metropolitanical visitation which started the following spring.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Davies and Sharpe maintain that the St Gregory's case settled little beyond the principle that ordinaries should determine the position of communion tables within their jurisdictions. The chief enthusiast for the railed altar was not Laud but Charles I, seconded by the hawkish Bishop Wren, with the archbishop following where they led and subverting the changes when he could.<sup>6</sup> Davies also offers the first detailed account of the introduction of the railed table in the dioceses and peculiar jurisdictions of England and Wales, based on an analysis of records, primarily court books and churchwardens' accounts, from more than fifty archives. From this he argues that there was no one 'altar policy' but Laud's metropolitanical order and four distinct variations upon it. Many bishops (including Laud himself in Canterbury diocese) failed to observe all four elements in the metropolitanical order, which were to move the table to the east end of the chancel, there turn it 'altarwise' in the position of the medieval altar so that its short ends faced north and south, and enclose it with a rail, to which communicants should come to receive the sacrament. Only two diocesan bishops followed this to the letter; eight others enforced all but reception at the rails; another ten only required the rail around an east-end table; while Juxon at London did not demand the altarwise position, and Williams of Lincoln merely ordered the erection of rails round the table.<sup>7</sup>

Davies's view of Charles I as the initiator of altar policy and its enforcement in the dioceses will be scrutinized here. It will be proposed that there are major methodological and evidential problems about accepting his interpretation, and that a fresh assessment of the same evidence, together with some additional sources, provide a radically different view of the authorship and character of Caroline altar policy.

<sup>4</sup> I intend to write such a book with Nicholas Tyacke, to be entitled *Altars restored: the changing face of English religious worship, c. 1559–1700* (Oxford, forthcoming), the first fruits of which is this article.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Heylyn, *Cyprianus anglicus* (London, 1668), p. 285; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud, 1573–1645* (London, 1940), pp. 151–3; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 199–203.

<sup>6</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 205–50; Sharpe, *Personal rule*, pp. 333–45.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218–50. Davies has a sixth category, relating to bishops who did not use their judicial authority to impose the railed altar, but as this is not a distinct variation on the metropolitanical order, merely a failure to enforce it, it is not discussed here (*ibid.*, p. 218).

## I

Let us begin with what Davies calls ‘the metropolitical order’, consisting of the four requirements listed above, which is his ‘base-line’ against which to judge the differences between official and diocesan approaches to altar policy across both the southern and northern provinces. This was issued during Archbishop Laud’s metropolitical visitation of twenty dioceses in Canterbury province between 1634 and 1637.<sup>8</sup> Davies does not cite any one source for the order, and the only official record we have is preserved not in the archiepiscopal archives but in those diocesan records which summarize the instructions or charges given by Sir Nathaniel Brent, Laud’s vicar-general, during the metropolitical visitation. These survive for the dioceses of Gloucester, Chichester, and Norwich in 1635 and London in 1637. All are similar and that for Gloucester, for example, states<sup>9</sup> ‘That the communion table be sett at the upper end of the chauncell northe and southe and a rayle before it or round aboute it to keepe it from annoyance by Bartholomewe day next and to certifie thereof the nexte courte day after.’ In other words, it demanded an east-end and railed altar, but there was no official requirement for communicants to come to the rails. It is true, as we shall see, that this latter practice was encouraged by Brent and others, which produced much contention and parochial friction, but it was never formally part of the metropolitical order. Thus Richard Montagu as bishop of Chichester (1628–38) enforced the railed altar but not receiving at the rails, since as he observed ‘no lawe, articles, advertisements, canons, injunctions’ required this, and he did not even encounter the practice until his translation to Norwich in 1638. He was not alone in turning to Laud and the king for clarification on whether or not reception at the rails should be enforced.<sup>10</sup> This correction of Davies’s ‘base-line’ raises a serious question mark over the robustness of his model of five variations of altar policy.

Davies also argued that the metropolitical order was devised for the southern province of Canterbury in March 1634 and was then adopted in the northern province of York.<sup>11</sup> In fact York province led the way, well before March 1634, with Laud eventually following suit, probably as late as 1635. The first widespread enforcement of the railed altar occurred in the northern province, in the wake of Archbishop Neile’s metropolitical visitation in 1632–3 of York, Chester, and Carlisle dioceses. As early as June 1633, a minister living outside York complained to John Winthrop of Neile’s reforms, which included ‘setting tables altarwise’. No formal order appears to be extant, but visitation and court records allow us to reconstruct the requirement that communion tables be

<sup>8</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 215–18.

<sup>9</sup> K. Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles and injunctions of the early Stuart church* (Church of England Record Society, 2 vols., 1994–8), II, pp. 108–9; Norfolk RO, DN/VSC 2/3B (unfoliated: 7 Apr. 1635).

<sup>10</sup> Lambeth Palace Library (LPL), MS 943 p. 626; Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, p. 218; William Laud, *Works*, ed. J. Bliss and W. Scott (7 vols., Oxford, 1847–60), v, pp. 342–3, 360.

<sup>11</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 214–18, 208 n. 16.

moved to the east end of chancels, turned altarwise, and enclosed with a rail. At York commissioners viewed churches and ordered pews to be made uniform, floors to be flagged and communion tables to be railed in, and the response of churchwardens was monitored in the Chancery court.<sup>12</sup> Similar orders based on church surveys were also issued in Chester diocese, and were repeated in 1634 during the triennial visitation of Bishop Bridgeman, smarting from his humiliating troubles in 1633 and anxious to be seen co-operating with his superiors.<sup>13</sup> Though no records survive for the metropolitan visitation of Carlisle, we may deduce that the same changes were enforced there. In his annual report to Charles I in January 1634, Neile stated that his visitors to Chester and Carlisle dioceses had ‘scarce found in any place, that the communion table was placed in such sort as that it might appeare, it was any whitt respected’ and added that orders had been given to rectify this. Thus several months *before* November 1633, when the privy council gave judgement over the St Gregory’s case, the railed altar was being erected in three dioceses in the province of York.<sup>14</sup>

Events moved more slowly and fitfully in the southern province. Here the systematic introduction of railed altars only began after the St Gregory’s hearing, led by Bishop Piers in Bath and Wells diocese, armed with a copy of the privy council’s judgement, to be followed, in 1634, by Wright at Coventry and Lichfield and Dee at Peterborough. Contrary to Davies’s claim, there is no clear evidence that Laud issued his own order the same year.<sup>15</sup> His metropolitan visitation of twenty dioceses in the southern province took place between 1634 and 1637, but it appears probable that such an order was not issued until 1635, during the second wave of these visitations. A visitation charge survives for just one of the seven dioceses visited by Laud’s vicar-

<sup>12</sup> *Winthrop papers, volume III, 1631–1637* (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1943), p. 127; Borthwick Institute, Chancery AB 25 pp. 28–9, fos. 125v, 130v, 137r–8v; HC CP 1634/12. For Neile’s alleged support in 1633 for a tablewise position, see n. 35. Neile’s early moves in York diocese have been noted by Foster in ‘Church policies’, p. 204, and by Tyacke in *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 200, 202. According to the deposition of William Stackhouse, an eye-witness at the debate during the privy council’s hearing of the St Gregory’s case, Neile stated that he and Bishop Buckeridge allowed tables to stand in the middle of the chancel during time of communion. This is difficult to reconcile with the diocesan evidence, unless churchwardens were allowed to remove the table from behind the rails; but given the fact that the account implies that Buckeridge was still alive in 1633 – he died in 1631 – and dates from after 1640, it is possible that Stackhouse’s memory was faulty or that he misunderstood what Neile was saying (Public Record Office (PRO), SP 16/499/42).

<sup>13</sup> Borthwick Institute, V.1633/CB 2A fos. 93v, 97r, 118v, 160v, and passim; British Library (BL), Harl. MS 2103 fo. 81; Cheshire RO, EDC 5 (1635) nos. 20, 108; P20/13/1 (St Mary on the Hill, Chester, Churchwarden’s accounts 1536–1689), *sub* 1633; B. Quintrell, ‘Lancashire ills, the king’s will and the troubling of Bishop Bridgeman’, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 132 (1983), pp. 67–102.

<sup>14</sup> PRO, SP 16/259/78. Neile’s metropolitan visitation did not extend to Durham or Sodor and Man.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 216–18, 221, 225–6, 234–5; Somerset RO (SRO), DD/CC/13324, pp. 201–2.

general, Nathaniel Brent in 1634 – namely Lincoln – and is very similar to those of 1635 and later, except there is no reference to the relocation of parochial communion tables. We also possess Brent's detailed instructions of 1634 on the rearrangement of furnishings in Boston church, in the same diocese, and recently vacated by the puritan John Cotton. Nothing is stated about the communion table, in a church which was most unlikely to have contained a railed altar. Moving to the west country, we have William Whiteway's summary of Brent's charge at Dorchester, in Bristol diocese, in July 1634, but again there is no reference to the communion table.<sup>16</sup> The diocesan court books tell much the same story.<sup>17</sup> Indeed in August 1634 one of Laud's commissaries seems to have approved the erecting of seats along the east wall in the parish church of Puddletown, Dorset, an arrangement which from 1635 was officially discouraged as incompatible with a communion table placed at the east end of churches.<sup>18</sup> The first record of a general order on the communion table occurs during Laud's visitation of seven dioceses in the summer of 1635, and was repeated in subsequent visitations.<sup>19</sup>

The early activity in the northern province, and Laud's belated adoption of similar measures, raise some intriguing questions. Why had Neile decided to act unilaterally in 1633, and with what justification? Was Neile rather than Laud the principal architect of altar policy, and was Laud indeed half-hearted

<sup>16</sup> Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, pp. 106–7; LPL, Laud's register, I, fo. 129; *William Whiteway of Dorchester: his diary 1618 to 1635* (Dorset Record Society, 12, 1991), p. 147; see also Wiltshire and Swindon RO, D5/19/39 fo. 20r (another summary of Brent's charge). Brent's report to Laud of 1634 makes no mention of moving and railing in of parochial communion tables, while those in and after 1635 do (PRO, SP 16/274/12, 293/128, 351/100).

<sup>17</sup> At Bath and Wells, some churchwardens reported on the railed altar, indicating earlier pressure from the bishop, Piers, who headed the list of commissaries and may have used the visitation to inquire about the adoption of his order (LPL, Laud's register, I, fo. 107r; SRO, D/D/Ca 297). On three occasions elsewhere, commissaries ordered the communion table to stand altarwise at the east end, and on a fourth at the east end, but since none of the four mentions a rail, this was evidently not the order promulgated the following year (Leicestershire RO, 1D 41/13/61 fos. 13r, 82r, 100v, abstracted in A. P. Moore, 'The metropolitan visitation of Archdeacon [sic] Laud', *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*, 29 (1908), pp. 488, 507, 511; Berkshire RO, D/A2/c.77 fo. 81v). To judge from a petition of 1640, Brent insisted that parishioners at Ketton, co. Rutland, receive at the rails which, since this was issued under the 'seal of the court', appears to be specific to that parish and not part of a general order (PRO, SP 16/452/98). In December 1634 Brent ordered that the communion table at Rochester cathedral be moved and railed, to bring it in line with the arrangement in most other cathedrals: Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *Appendix to 4th Report*, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> Dorset RO, PE/PUD CW5/1,2; Wiltshire and Swindon RO, MS 873/86 (a pew-plan of 1637, for which reference I am indebted to Steven Hobbs); Yule, 'James VI and I', p. 200; *pace* Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 225. Here seats were placed on the east, north, and south sides of a table railed on four sides: rails around the communion table, usually placed longways in the chancel or nave, had been erected in many parishes long before the 1630s (Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 209) and Puddletown represents a very late pre-Laudian arrangement of a 'communion room'.

<sup>19</sup> Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, pp. 107–9. In some dioceses where the order is not extant – such as St Asaph – reference was later made to it in visitation articles and injunctions: *ibid.*, p. 174. For Laud's enforcement of the order at visitations to Canterbury (1637) and Lincoln (1638), see below, pp. 15, 17.

in his support for the changes? From the later 1620s we can trace Neile's mounting opposition to the conventional placing of the communion table standing east–west in the chancel or church. As bishop of Winchester (1628–32) he ordered the communion table in the cathedral to be removed to the east end, and, under attack in the parliamentary session of 1629, wrote that he believed an altarwise position to be 'the most convenient manner of the placing it'.<sup>20</sup> Though this was primarily a reference to Winchester cathedral, the principle was applicable to parochial churches. In December 1629, no doubt as a response to MPs' criticism, Neile hoped that a royal declaration might remove 'the scruple which some now a dayes make of the placing of the communion table'.<sup>21</sup> His prototype of a railed altar was probably that devised by his predecessor Bishop Lancelot Andrewes in the chapel at Winchester House, Southwark, which Neile inherited on his appointment to the see in 1628.<sup>22</sup> In the summer of 1632, as newly installed archbishop of York, Neile joined Laud in High Commission to condemn the erection of pews east of or above the communion table in parish churches, and pursued the issue at his visitation of York diocese later that year, when officials from several parishes admitted that they had seats eastward of the communion table.<sup>23</sup> But we should note that there is no evidence of Neile pressing for railed altars in the parishes of Winchester diocese: why did he wait until his translation to York? Part of the answer lies in the complicated history of the emergence of parochial altars during the period 1627–33, which still needs further research; but one explanation would be that the north was a familiar stamping-ground for Neile, where he had been bishop of Durham for more than a decade (1617–28) and there had presided over the transformation of the cathedral's liturgy and furnishings, including the erection of a stone altar. At least one of his protégés, Francis Burgoyne, had placed the communion table altarwise at the east end in his cure of Bishop Wearmouth prior to Neile's departure for Winchester and, it was alleged in 1628, 'this example of Mr Burgonie many parish churches else are reported to follow'.<sup>24</sup> Lacking explicit royal sanction for so major a change, Neile may have felt more confident in initiating the policy in the conservative north, where his godly critics were a beleaguered minority, than in Winchester

<sup>20</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 214; Dean and Chapter Library Durham, Hunter MS 67, no. 14, p. 20. I am grateful to Dr Foster for this latter reference.

<sup>21</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 210; Bodleian Library (Bodl.), Rawl. MS A 127 fo. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, *Works*, ed. J. P. Wilson and J. Bliss (11 vols., Oxford, 1854), xi, pp. xcvi–ix and illustration; N. Tyacke, 'Lancelot Andrewes and the myth of Anglicanism', in P. Lake and M. Questier, eds., *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560–1640* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 24–7.

<sup>23</sup> S. R. Gardiner, ed., *Reports of cases in the courts of Star Chamber and High Commission* (Camden Society, n.s., 39, 1886), pp. 282, 297, 302, 312–13; Borthwick Institute, V.1633 CB 1 fos. 167v, 175r, 190v, CB 2 fo. 429r. Andrew Foster was the first to argue for the significance of these High Commission cases over seating: 'A biography of Archbishop Richard Neile, 1562–1640' (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1978), pp. 184–5.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Smart, *The vanitie and downe-fall of superstitious popish ceremonies* (Edinburgh, 1628), sig. \*3i.

diocese, close to the metropolis and the court. It may be significant that in his annual report to Charles I in January 1634, describing his metropolitical visitation, Neile alluded to rather than expatiated on the relocation of parochial communion tables, even though the St Gregory's ruling had, by that date, provided some retrospective warrant for his actions.<sup>25</sup>

To emphasize Neile's importance is not necessarily to diminish that of Laud, not least because the two were long-standing and intimate allies. Contrary to Davies's view of Laud as an unwilling agent in enforcing Caroline altar policy, a good case can be made that he was an early and enthusiastic advocate of the railed altar and that he may have delayed issuing a general order for the southern province until 1635 in the hope of securing a royal injunction for it. The fullest account we have of the privy council hearing over the St Gregory's case indicates that Laud alone argued for a permanent altarwise communion table placed at the east end, and it was he who opposed Charles I's suggestion that the location of the table at the administration of communion could be left to the discretion of the minister and churchwardens of each parish. The eventual decision upheld the altarwise position in this case, but vested the authority to determine the matter in the hands of the ordinary, which opened the door to a variety of practices.<sup>26</sup> Thus the judgement hardly sanctioned a uniform policy across either province, which would obviously override the autonomy of the ordinary. That Laud envisaged a royal injunction for the railed altar, of the sort proposed by Neile in 1629, would be entirely characteristic of the political style of the Caroline supremacy, in which the king authorized major initiatives, such as the proclamation on the decay of churches in October 1629, the instructions on preaching and much else in December 1629, and the book of sports in October 1633, usually after consultation with his leading bishops and divines, headed by Laud. Knowing full well how controversial an order on the railed altar would be, ever anxious to hide behind the skirts of royal authority, and mindful that a royal directive would stiffen the weak legal basis for the policy, Laud had every incentive to seek Charles's endorsement. Indeed, critics of the railed altar after 1635, among them the churchwardens of Beckington, and Bishop Williams in his tract, *Holy table, name and thing*, were quick to point out that it did not rest on any direct order from the king.<sup>27</sup>

This impression of royal hesitancy is confirmed by other sources. In 1629 Charles had invited episcopal comments on the revival of the Elizabethan injunctions, but (assuming he saw it) then ignored Neile's recommendation for a royal declaration endorsing the position of the altar at the east end of chancels. At the St Gregory's hearing Charles declared 'his dislike of all

<sup>25</sup> PRO, SP 16/259/78.

<sup>26</sup> PRO, SP 16/499/42; S. R. Gardiner, ed., *The constitutional documents of the puritan revolution* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 103–5; Tyacke, 'Anglican attitudes', p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> BL, Harl. MS 1219 fos. 9–12; John Williams, *The holy table, name and thing* (London?, 1637), pp. 32–5; William Prynne, *A quench-coale* (Amsterdam, 1637), p. 177.



innovation' and initially was prepared to uphold the Elizabethan injunction of 1559, which sanctioned the removal of the table into the chancel for the celebration of communion, though, as the judgement reveals, he was persuaded to accept a permanent altarwise position in this instance.<sup>28</sup> The development of his views thereafter is obscure. An exchange of letters between Laud and Williams early in 1634 reveal that the king had repeated his view, voiced at the debate on St Gregory's, that the table should be in the chancel rather than the body of the church at communion time, but had made no reference to an east-end or altarwise position within the chancel. In February 1634, at least, there is no sign that Charles was pressing for a railed altar.<sup>29</sup> Davies has identified an undated document in state papers, entitled the 'king's injunctions on divine service', which urges that parish churches establish a railed altar, at which communicants receive. The injunctions are not just undated, but are also anonymous, and in draft form, and cannot be regarded (as Davies does) as clear evidence of the king's views; rather they surely represent a position paper in a debate at the highest level.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Laud's metropolitanical order appeared under his name rather than the king's is hard to reconcile with Davies's claim that Charles was 'the essential draftsman' of Caroline altar policy. It appears, therefore, that by 1635 Laud's lobbying had earned royal approval, but evidently not a royal injunction, for the railed altar. Only in and after 1636 do we have clear evidence of Charles's endorsement of the railed altar in parochial churches.<sup>31</sup>

Thus it is possible to revise Davies's claim that Laud's metropolitanical order was cooked up in March 1634 by a combination of the king, Bishop Piers, and Matthew Wren.<sup>32</sup> Piers was a junior bishop, resident in his diocese and not a major figure at court, and Wren, though clerk of the closet, was not yet even a bishop. Piers, it is true, submitted reasons in favour of a railed altar to Laud in March 1634 but there is no evidence that his views reached the king and the only copies we have of the document survive in the papers of its author, Piers, and its recipient, Laud.<sup>33</sup> Davies's case for Wren is based on reading backwards from his undoubted enthusiasm for the altar after 1635. By contrast Neile and Laud were both privy councillors and archbishops, and present at the privy council ruling over St Gregory's. Neile's initiative over the railed altar in his metropolitanical visitation was, in effect, endorsed by the judgement on St Gregory's, after some vigorous advocacy by Laud, since it acknowledged the authority of the ordinary, which Neile had been exercising as visitor; and his example was subsequently imitated by Laud across the southern province. The

<sup>28</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 210; PRO, SP 16/499/42; Gardiner, ed., *Constitutional documents*, pp. 103–5; William Prynne, *Canterburies doome* (London, 1646), pp. 87–8.

<sup>29</sup> Laud, *Works*, v, p. 321, vi, pp. 350–1; PRO, SP 16/499/42. For a different reading of these letters, see Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 213–14; Sharpe, *Personal rule*, pp. 334–5.

<sup>30</sup> PRO, SP 16/474/60; Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 21, 215.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 21, 234, 247–8. Charles issued his order for the railed altar to be adopted at Coventry on progress in 1636 not 1635 (*pace* *ibid.*, p. 21).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15. <sup>33</sup> SRO, DD/CC/13324, pp. 201–2; LPL, MS 943 pp. 475–7.

immediate origins of Caroline altar policy seems to rest largely in their capable hands.

## II

If we turn now to the enforcement of the railed altar by suffragans in both provinces, Davies argues that many bishops evaded the full demands of the metropolitan order. Led by Laud himself in Canterbury diocese, they pressed for the communion table to be relocated at the east end of the chancel and there railed, but did not insist that the table be turned altarwise. They condoned, therefore, communion tables standing east–west or tablewise rather than north–south or altarwise, so that the altarwise position was ‘almost universally disregarded by the courts and parishes alike’.<sup>34</sup> Let us now consider the evidence in favour of this proposition.

Davies maintains that bishops in eleven dioceses required communion tables to be moved to the east end but did not press for an altarwise position there.<sup>35</sup> For five of these eleven – Bangor, Llandaff, Oxford, Rochester, and Worcester – the diocesan records are so exiguous that we cannot be certain what was happening. Davies’s case here relies on churchwardens’ accounts and, in the case of the two Welsh sees, also on modern guides to church furnishings.<sup>36</sup> Though churchwardens’ accounts record the cost of erecting rails or returning certificates of compliance, they rarely reveal anything about the repositioning of the communion table, since no money need be spent when a communion table was moved to the end of the chancel and turned altarwise.<sup>37</sup> Extant accounts for these five dioceses do indeed disclose little about the position of the table. Nevertheless, for one of these dioceses – Oxford – there is other evidence to suggest that the local bishop, John Bancroft, was observing Laud’s full order. It is suggestive that in 1640 one of Bancroft’s chaplains was accused of having quizzed ordinands during the 1630s on their views on the altar, and we also know that in 1635, the same year as Bancroft’s triennial visitation, the table was turned altarwise in St Martin’s church in the city of Oxford.<sup>38</sup> This, of course, might merely reveal the preferences either of the

<sup>34</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218, 243.

<sup>35</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 218. A twelfth diocese (briefly) was York, where Neile ‘did not introduce the north–south position until after 1633, whereas the east-end position was introduced the year before’ (ibid., p. 208, n. 16). Davies here misreads the evidence: the Chancery court books clearly state that in and after 1633 communion tables were to be placed ‘close up to the east end of the church side waies’ (Borthwick Institute, Chancery AB 25 fo. 130v, 21 Oct. 1633; see ibid., fos. 125v, 137, 221r; AB 26 fos. 26r, 29v, 33v, and passim).

<sup>36</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218, 232, 233 and n. 135, 242. The same point about inadequate diocesan records also applies to Bristol and St David’s, where Davies claims, on the basis of churchwardens’ accounts and surviving rails, that the altarwise position *was* enforced (ibid., p. 225).

<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, churchwardens’ accounts mention that the table was moved, but very rarely disclose its new position (for an example, see below n. 45), or else record the shortening or replacement of the table.

<sup>38</sup> Bodl., MS Top. Oxon c 378 p. 314; L. B. Larking, ed., *Proceedings, principally in the county of Kent ... 1640* (Camden Society, o.s., 80, 1862), p. 87; Oxfordshire County RO, PAR/207/4/F1/1 (St Martin Oxford churchwardens’ accounts 1540–1680), p. 173.

individual incumbent – in this case the zealous Laudian, Giles Widdowes – or his parochial vestry, but that it was probably part of a wider diocesan campaign is indicated by the public praise Bancroft received in 1639 from Richard Gardiner, a canon of Christ Church, Oxford, who observed that ‘heretofore the evangelicall altar was plac’d so incongruouously throughout the whole diocesse that a proselyte might easily mistake it for a secular table, or common boord: now it hath that exact position, which is consonant to the primitive times’.<sup>39</sup> Since a standard defence of turning the communion table altarwise was to distinguish ‘the Lord’s board’ from an ordinary table or ‘common boord’, we may be confident that Gardiner is referring to the erection of altars in Oxford diocese.<sup>40</sup>

Bishop Bridgeman of Chester is also credited with enforcing only an east-end position, a claim based solely on churchwardens’ accounts.<sup>41</sup> Diocesan records, which Davies did not examine, reveal that from 1634 Bridgeman demanded that tables be turned altarwise, and inserted the order into his visitation articles for 1637.<sup>42</sup> The relevant clause reads:

Whether is your communion table within your church or chappell incompassed with a decent raile: and is your communion table removed long waies to the chancell wall and set close thereunto, and no forme or seat above the communion table or betwixt it and the uppermost wall of your chancell, and are the seats in your chancell made sidewise or chancelwise; if the said order have not bene in every particular performed, and the names and surnames of those persons through whose default it hath not bene performed?

Davies relies on churchwardens’ accounts, supplemented by one *liber cleri* or visitation call book, to make the same case for Winchester diocese.<sup>43</sup> The *liber cleri*, for Walter Curle’s triennial visitation there in 1636, contains a handful of references to railing in the communion table, and since there is no run of *ex officio* court books for the years 1635–40, Davies’s claim that ‘the courts enforced neither receiving at the rails nor the altarwise position’ is unproven.<sup>44</sup> However, Daniel Featley’s recollection that as rector of Lambeth he had to

<sup>39</sup> Richard Gardiner, *A sermon concerning the epiphany, preached at the cathedrall church of Christ in Oxford* (Oxford, 1639), sig. A3i. Davies was apparently unaware of this dedicatory epistle.

<sup>40</sup> See Bishop Neile’s comment that the communion tables placed east–west ‘stand as in alchouses’ (*Commons debates for 1629*, ed. W. Notestein and F. H. Relf (Minneapolis, 1921), p. 51), and the similar sentiments of Dean Winniffe and Canon King of St Paul’s cathedral in their original ruling over St Gregory’s (BL, Add. MS 28273 fo. 136; a translation of another copy is in *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 6 (1874), p. xiv), and of Bishop Piers in March 1634 (LPL, MS 943 p. 475, printed in A. Robinson, ‘Laudian documents’, in T. F. Palmer, ed., *Collectanea II* (Somerset Record Society, 43, 1928), p. 190).

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218, 235, n. 146.

<sup>42</sup> BL, Harl. MS 2103 fo. 29; J. Maltby, *Prayer book and people in Elizabethan and early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 139–41; *Articles to be considered on ... through out the diocesse of Chester, in the trienniall visitation of ... Iohn ... lord bishop of that diocesse, for this present yeere of our Lord, 1637* (London, 1637), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 233. The relevant visitation call book is no. 33 not, as cited in n. 132, no. 32.

<sup>44</sup> For the years 1633–40 the surviving records of the consistory court at Winchester contain instance act books, two *liber cleri* (for 1633 and 1636), and one office book (Hampshire RO, 21M65/C1/36), which is a list of churchwardens facing excommunication in 1636–8.

withstand considerable pressure, including threats and citations, both from Curle's chancellor and the archdeacon of Surrey to turn his communion table altarwise is a suggestive example of what may have been a concerted campaign across the diocese.<sup>45</sup>

In other four dioceses – Canterbury, Coventry and Lichfield, London, and Peterborough – Davies bases his claim on a literal reading of entries in the court records themselves. Whereas the act books in some dioceses, such as Salisbury and Chichester, explicitly refer to positioning the communion table 'altarwise' or with its ends facing 'north and south', the entries in these four dioceses simply state that the table should stand at the east end. Thus, for example, in 1635 the churchwardens of Great Clacton in Essex were ordered 'to sett up their communion table to the upper end of the chancell and to make a convenient and handsome rayle about the same', which Davies takes to mean that the precise positioning of the table, whether altarwise or tablewise, was not enforced.<sup>46</sup> This may be an unwise inference. Thus visitation articles for Archdeacon Newell of Buckingham inquired in 1637 whether the communion table was 'placed at the east end of the chancel' which, on inspecting the archidiaconal records, turns out to mean altarwise at the east end.<sup>47</sup> Clearly we need to explore the likelihood that an order in these four dioceses for an east-end location was shorthand for east end *and* altarwise.

Peterborough diocese under Bishop Francis Dee (1634–8) provides a useful starting point. Dee is the first bishop known to have asked in his visitation articles if communion tables were railed in at the east end of chancels. A clause in his set for 1634 asked whether the communion table was 'placed conveniently at the east end of the chancel of your church or chappell, and is it so cancelled in and kept as not to be prophaned'? Given that churchwardens' presentments were based on these articles, it is unsurprising that the Peterborough court books echo these phrases of 'cancelled in' at 'the east end' of the chancel.<sup>48</sup> The rub, of course, is in the meaning of 'east end'. In 1637 Dee repeated the clause in his visitation articles that year, and at the same time issued a commission to inspect the fabric and furnishings of churches in the diocese. Robert Woodford of Northampton recorded in his diary for 31 August 1637 that 'there is a generall visitation of churches in this diocesse, by some of worsere sorte of

<sup>45</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 233; Daniel Featley, *The gentle lash, or the vindication of Dr Featley* (London, 1644), p. 10. The churchwardens' accounts state that the table was moved in 1635, but do not indicate its position: *Lambeth churchwardens' accounts, 1504–1645*, III, ed. C. Drew (Surrey Record Society, 44, 1943), p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218, 220–1, 227–32, 234–5; Berkshire RO, D/A2/c.77 fo. 153r; West Sussex RO, Ep.I/17/25 fo. 303v; Essex RO, D/ABA 7 fo. 61r.

<sup>47</sup> PRO, SP 16/375/54: *Articles to be enquired of within the arch-deaconry of Buckingham, at the visitation of the arch-deacon there this present year 1637* (London, 1637), sig. A2r; Buckinghamshire RO, D/A/V 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Articles to be enquired of throughout the whole diocesse of Peterborough: in the first visitation of ... Francis ... Bishop of Peterborough. Anno dom. 1634* (London, 1634), sig. A2v. The clause was repeated verbatim in his set for 1637. Northamptonshire RO, Peterborough diocesan records, CB 64, pp. 1–105, CB 65 fos. 125v–73r.

divines ... to observe the standing of the tables whether altarwise or not and to set them so'. The records of the survey confirm this. Some commissioners were armed with a list of six questions, the third of which asked if the communion table was placed altarwise. At Cold Higham, for example, it was reported that 'the table is not placed altar wise according to my lords articles', and twelve other parishes were reported for the same fault.<sup>49</sup> It is possible, of course, that Dee was belatedly insisting on communion tables being set altarwise, but this is highly unlikely. That all but thirteen parishes already had their table placed altarwise by 1637 was surely in response to earlier orders, for in a diocese such as Peterborough, dominated by godly ministers and patrons, it seems implausible that communion tables would have been turned without direct instructions. In all probability, Dee had been enforcing an altarwise position since 1634, implied within the wording of his visitation articles and the terse entries in the Peterborough court books.

A similar argument relates to Coventry and Lichfield.<sup>50</sup> Here the court books refer more often to the erection of rails than to moving the communion table,<sup>51</sup> though the fullest order we have is for two major churches in Coventry, St Michael's and Holy Trinity. This was drawn up by the chancellor in August 1636 and states that the tables in both churches be 'removed up close to the east wall of the chauncells', which were to be built up with an ascent of three steps.<sup>52</sup> We possess the churchwardens' accounts and vestry minute books for Holy Trinity. The churchwardens' accounts detail the cost of these changes which amounted to over £32 but, as usual, tell us nothing about the position of the table. However, the minutes of discussions in the vestry in 1641 about reversing these changes state that the table had been placed 'alterwise' on the command of the chancellor, and 'the seting the table alter-fashion and raying the stepes was as we conceive an innovation'.<sup>53</sup> Thus on the one occasion that we can penetrate the phraseology of the official record, we find that 'east end' or 'east wall' contains within it 'altarwise'. This would confirm, too, the claim in a libel of about 1635 that Wright was actively encouraging the 'hie aulter' to be erected in parish churches.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> New College Oxford, MS 9502 (unfol.); Northamptonshire RO, Peterborough diocesan records, church survey book 5, fos. 33r, 46r, 47, 50v, 53v, 103r, 105r, 106v, 107r, 120r. See also J. Fielding, 'Arminianism in the localities: Peterborough diocese, 1603–1642', in Fincham, ed., *The early Stuart Church*, p. 105.

<sup>50</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 234–5. Darren Oldridge, *Religion and society in early Stuart England* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 47–8, provides another, useful, reading of developments in this diocese. His distinction between Bishop Wright's orders for rails prior to 1635, and for 'new directions' on relocating communion tables after 1635, may be sharper than the evidence allows.

<sup>51</sup> Lichfield Joint RO, B/V/1/55 pp. 100–47; B/C/3/15 (unfol.: 10 Feb. 1636); B/V/1/57 (unfol.: 3 June 1636); B/C/3/16 (unfol.: 11 May 1638).<sup>52</sup> PRO, SP 16/330/40.

<sup>53</sup> Warwick County RO, DR 581/46 (Holy Trinity Coventry churchwardens' accounts 1620–1726), sub 1636, DR 581/64 (Holy Trinity Coventry vestry order book 1603–94), fos. 70v–1r.

<sup>54</sup> Staffordshire RO, Q/SR/217 (Staffs Quarter Sessions, Epiphany 1635), no. 29. Two parochial pew-plans survive for the diocese in these years, and it is surely significant that both show the table altarwise and at the east end: Shropshire Records and Research Centre, P105/3372/ChF/2 (Ellsemere, 1638); Derbyshire RO, D2426A/P1/9/1 (Hayfield, 1638).

The records of London diocese present the same problem. Robert Aylett, Juxon's commissary for Essex and Hertford, was the first diocesan official to press for change, and from April 1635 his court books mention moving the communion table to the east end and there railing it in. Yet this was the official who as Laud's commissary in Leicestershire in August 1634 had ordered that the communion tables in two parishes be moved back to the east end *and* turned north–south.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps we are dealing not with an inconsistent commissary so much as an inconsistent method of recording. Later orders in London diocese are still more cryptic: at Juxon's triennial visitation in 1637 it was ordered that communion tables be railed, but no mention was made of their location at all!<sup>56</sup> In the city of London, the drive to erect rails occurred in the winter of 1637–8, following Juxon's visitation.<sup>57</sup> Parochial records for St Dionis Backchurch, for example, indicate that the chancel and rails were altered at precisely this time; in the early 1640s both the petition against the incumbent there, Bishop Warner, and the churchwardens' accounts, refer to the table as an altar.<sup>58</sup> In 1641 Edward Finch, vicar of Christ Church, was accused of worshipping the altar in his church, which he replied was set up by 'command at a public visitation', which may well be a reference to Juxon's visitation of 1637.<sup>59</sup> The clearest evidence comes from All Hallows Barking, whose incumbent, Edward Layfield, faced accusations in November 1640 of provocative ceremonialism, including the charge that he had converted the communion table into an altar. A counter-petition was presented by thirty-four leading parishioners, which alleged that 'the communion table was placed as it now standeth by special command from the ordinary in writing'. The vestry minute book suggests that they were right, for it records a decision of 6 August 1637 to move the table 'according to an order whose coppie is heere under written', and the churchwardens' accounts list over £40 spent on raising the height of the chancel floor by one step, re-erecting rails and decorating the table.<sup>60</sup> In other words, it seems that in London, too, Juxon was conforming with Laud's metropolitanical order, and here too 'east end' implied 'altarwise'.

Central to Davies's wider case about Archbishop Laud's half-hearted support for altar policy are the records of his own diocese of Canterbury. Here,

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 227; Essex RO, D/ABA 7 fos. 53r ff; Moore, 'Metropolitanical visitation', pp. 488, 507; and see above, n. 17. Aylett's part in the metropolitanical visitation of 1634 was confined to Leicester archdeaconry (LPL, Laud's register, 1, fo. 120r).

<sup>56</sup> Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, p. 183.

<sup>57</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 9537/15, 9583/1 fos. 22r, 29v, 58r.

<sup>58</sup> PRO, SP 16/493/28; Guildhall Library, MS 4215/1 (St Dionis Backhouse churchwardens' accounts 1625–1729), pp. 55, 69.

<sup>59</sup> *An answer to the articles preferd against Edward Finch, Vicar of Christ-Church* (London, 1641), pp. 1, 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Commons' Journals*, II, p. 35; PRO, SP 16/503/111 (the counter-petition); All Hallows Barking, RR/C1/1 (vestry minute book 1629–69), fo. 20r (the order itself is not actually entered here); RR/D1/1 (churchwardens' accounts 1628–66), fos. 107r–8r. A copy of the counter-petition, with fewer signatories, is inserted in the vestry minute book between fos. 25v and 26r; whence printed in *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 2 (1864), pp. 142–3.

Davies avers, Laud could allow his personal preferences full rein and permit east–west communion tables – in contradiction both of his own metropolitical order elsewhere and of his public attack on the tablewise position in his speech in Star Chamber at the trial of Burton, Bastwick, and Prynne in June 1637.<sup>61</sup> Davies draws attention to the relatively late date – 1637 – that a modified version of official policy was enforced in Canterbury diocese, three years after it was first introduced in his metropolitical visitation, as evidence of Laud’s remarkable forbearance. As we have seen, however, Laud’s order was probably not devised until 1635, after his primary visitation of Canterbury was over, and he evidently waited until his next visitation there, in 1637, to circulate and enforce the policy. The Canterbury court books, as Davies observes, only explicitly required an east-end position for the communion table.<sup>62</sup> Yet a contemporary statement from Sir Roger Twysden suggests that this phraseology may have incorporated the altarwise position. Twysden lived in East Peckham parish in west Kent, within the archiepiscopal peculiar of Shoreham deanery. In 1637 the communion table at East Peckham was removed to the east end of the chancel on the orders of Laud’s visitor, Dr Ryves, and as Twysden noted, ‘as many more in this diocesse of Canterbury and peculiars were about that tyme likewise remooved to the toppe of the chauncell and set altar wise with rayles about the table’.<sup>63</sup> Given that Laud’s officials were enforcing change in Canterbury diocese at precisely this time, it may be that the full metropolitical order, not a modified version of it, was being imposed there.

Davies also draws attention to ‘additional diocesan instructions’ for Canterbury in a letter which Laud sent to Brent, who produced it at Laud’s trial in March 1644.<sup>64</sup> According to one concise version, it ordered the removal of the communion table to the east of the chancel, close to the wall, ‘east and west, or north and south’. A fuller account cited by Davies occurs in William Clarke’s manuscript of the trial, but the transcription contains a series of gaps at crucial points making it too fragmentary to be conclusive.<sup>65</sup> It reads:

*Salutem in Christo.* I am informed that in the parish church of Maidston which is a very populous place the comunion [ ] which cannot butt bee a scandall to many devout and well minded people. These are therfore to require you [ ] upper end of the chancell, and there sett [ ] a decent raile to bee made before and att each side of the same that soe it

<sup>61</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 229–32, 245–6; Laud, *Works*, vi, pp. 60, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 231; Canterbury City and Cathedral Archives (CCCA), Dcb/J.X.5.7, X.6.9–11, Y.6.4, 6, Z.4.6 fos. 73r ff.

<sup>63</sup> BL, Add. MS 34163 fo. 131r; C. Waters, *Parish registers* (London, 1883), p. 76; LPL, VH 56/1 fo. 4r. In 1640 it was reported that the table at East Peckham stood ‘alterwise’ (Larking, ed., *Proceedings*, p. 132).

<sup>64</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 231 and n. 119; see also Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 203.

<sup>65</sup> HMC, *The Manuscripts of the House of Lords*, xi (new series), *Addenda, 1515–1714* (1962), p. 398; Worcester College Oxford, MS 71 (unfol.: 22 Mar. 1644). The letter is headed ‘Rigden’ (probably Croydon) ‘Febr 9 1635’.

may bee kept from the abuses [ ] if you will distinctly putt in practice in all other places [ ] Gods grace, and rest your loving freind, W: Cant.

Clarke records that Laud readily agreed that this letter was genuine, while Brent deposed that he had informed the parishioners that ‘noe difference should bee [made] whether they should sett itt north or south or east or west’ and elsewhere took this for ‘the forme of direction’. While the evidence lacks coherence, it does not necessarily mean that Laud *via* Brent was approving an east–west position. More plausibly, Laud was acknowledging ‘the indifferency’ of the position, whether altarwise or tablewise, as a way of making the observance of the former more palatable, a point he later made in his speech in Star Chamber in 1637.<sup>66</sup> Alternatively, if Laud *was* in fact sanctioning a tablewise position, why did he not make this a major plank of his defence at his trial?<sup>67</sup> It would have perfectly fitted Laud’s broader claim there, that he was merely the executor not author of unpopular policies, which he could have demonstrated with reference to his own partial enforcement of the railed altar in Canterbury diocese; the fact that he did not do so, and made no mention of this exchange with Brent in his own account of the trial, suggests that there was no personal subversion of official policy to invoke.

We may conclude, therefore, that the order to remove tables to the east end included turning them altarwise, which was sometimes explicit in court records, at other times implicit. In some dioceses, this is demonstrably the case, and in others, the most persuasive reading of the evidence. Conversely, with the notable exception of John Williams, there appears to be no corroborative evidence that bishops condoned or encouraged the tablewise position. The formulae of court books and Laud’s letter to Brent are too ambiguous to bear the whole weight of this interpretation advanced by Davies.

The approach of Bishop Williams of Lincoln, Davies’s fifth category, appears to be the only clear evidence of a deliberate variation on the metropolitanical orders.<sup>68</sup> At his triennial visitation of August 1635 Williams ordered that communion tables in the diocese be railed in, but he did not specify where the tables should be placed, so that churchwardens were free to leave them standing, tablewise, in the lower chancel.<sup>69</sup> The judgement on St Gregory’s in 1633 and the metropolitanical orders of Neile and Laud contradicted his own earlier and widely publicized determination of the Grantham case in 1627,

<sup>66</sup> Laud, *Works*, vi, p. 59.

<sup>67</sup> Tyacke, ‘Anglican attitudes’, p. 162.

<sup>68</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 218, 235–9.

<sup>69</sup> Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, p. 127. One suggestive example of how ministers and parishioners interpreted Williams’s order are the four-sided rails, dated 1635, which survive at Lyddington church in Rutland, within the peculiar of the dean and chapter of Lincoln, and therefore subject to Williams’s visitation. The enclosure was spacious enough to allow the table to stand east–west and was probably erected well away from the east end; the incumbent, Robert Rudd, seems to have been an inveterate nonconformist and was prosecuted by High Commission in 1639. PRO, SP 16/420/16; G. W. O. Addleshaw and F. Etchells, *The architectural setting of Anglican worship* (London, 1948), p. 129, provide a misleading plan of the arrangements in the church.



where he had opposed an east-end and altarwise position and had maintained that the table could be brought down into the chancel or the body of the church at the celebration of communion.<sup>70</sup> His directive of 1635 was a carefully calculated attempt to distance himself from the Laudian order currently being issued elsewhere in the southern province without deliberately crossing it, and could be justified by reference to the St Gregory's ruling which, though it sanctioned the railed altar in that particular case, also upheld the ordinary's right to settle such matters. Williams's alternative order did not last long. It was quickly undermined by several of his archdeacons, on resuming their authority once the episcopal visitation was over. In Buckingham archdeaconry, as early as October 1635 the churchwardens of Stony Stratford were warned to rail in the table 'according to the lord bishops injunction' and place it north-side at the top of the chancel; similar orders followed for other parishes in the archdeaconry.<sup>71</sup> At Leicester, Archdeacon Warr's articles for Easter 1636 asked if communion tables were railed in at the east end of the chancel which, as other court proceedings make clear, included the altarwise position.<sup>72</sup> It is no coincidence that the official principal to both archdeacons was Sir John Lambe, Laud's Dean of the Arches. Even in Bedford archdeaconry, entrusted to Williams's chaplain John Hacket, an altarwise position seems to have been recommended.<sup>73</sup> Following Williams's suspension and imprisonment in 1637, Laud assumed responsibility for the diocese and in 1638 conducted a visitation. The court books suggest that each parish had to certify that they possessed a railed altar.<sup>74</sup>

A re-examination of the diocesan evidence suggests that the five-fold model proposed by Davies is unsustainable. The metropolitanical orders of Laud and Neile did not include the requirement that communicants receive at the rails, and their instructions for the erection of a railed east-end altar in parochial churches were observed by suffragan bishops in both provinces, with the notable exception of Williams at Lincoln. This is not to say they were always enthusiastically enforced: ordinaries such as Hall of Exeter did not push for these changes though they did not openly defy them. As Heylyn noted, 'it was believed by many, that they had well complied with all expectations, if they did not hinder it, but left the ministers to proceed therein as best pleased

<sup>70</sup> The Grantham ruling is printed in Williams, *Holy table*, pp. 62–5.

<sup>71</sup> Buckinghamshire RO, D/A/V 3 fo. 114v, D/A/V 4 fos. 43v, 81v, D/A/V 15 fos. 1r, 2r and passim.

<sup>72</sup> Leicestershire RO, 1D 41/4 XVIII/106–8, 1D 41/18/9 fos. 18r–43v.

<sup>73</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 237; Bodl., Cherry MS 2 fo. 129r. There are no Bedford archdeaconry office or visitation books extant for the 1630s, which might have revealed whether or not Hacket was enforcing this position.

<sup>74</sup> Lincolnshire AO, Vj 30, fos. 147, 182v and passim; St Michael Lincoln 7/1 (churchwardens' accounts 1625–80), fos. 24r, 29r. Several churchwardens' accounts show expenditure on rails in 1635–6, following Williams's order, and in 1638–9, which suggests that the communion tables were moved to the east end and rails re-erected around them: Bedfordshire RO, P.88/5/1 (St John Bedford churchwardens' accounts c. 1616–1709), fos. 28r, 31r, P.44/5/2 (Shillington churchwardens' accounts 1605–66), pp. 115, 131. See also Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, p. xxi.

themselves'.<sup>75</sup> The passivity of some diocesan administrations did not extend, however, to a systematic modification of provincial orders on the altar.

### III

Where parishioners should receive communion became a controversial issue in the 1630s. In many post-Reformation parishes communion seems to have been distributed to parishioners in seats constructed on three or four sides of the table, placed east–west in the centre of the chancel. In other parishes, parishioners received in their seats in the nave or gallery, or else left their pews and communicated at or near the table, sometimes kneeling on a frame which surrounded it.<sup>76</sup> In short, practice was very varied and any change was likely to be contentious. The metropolitical orders of Neile and Laud contained no explicit injunction that parishioners receive at the rails, though it appears from the record of a conversation between Laud, Lambe, and Brent in October 1641 that on Laud's instructions Brent encouraged this practice on his visitations in the southern province. If ministers were unable to entice parishioners up to the rails then they could take the sacrament down into the chancel and distribute it there.<sup>77</sup> As Davies notes, Laud was aware that compulsion would probably provoke disputes between parishioners and their minister and that there was no legal warrant for it beyond the injunction in the prayer book to 'draw near' to the table to receive communion. In his view, 'the people will best be won by the decency of the thing itself'.<sup>78</sup> On this issue, at least, we find a genuine range of approach by bishops, primarily because Laud's flexibility opened the way for a variety of interpretations.<sup>79</sup>

Davies has persuasively contrasted Laud's moderate attitude with the aggressive line taken by Juxon, Towers, and above all Wren, who prosecuted and even excommunicated those who would not receive at the rails. But it scarcely does justice to the complexity of Laud's position to suggest that he

<sup>75</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 239–40; Heylyn, *Cyprianus anglicus*, p. 313.

<sup>76</sup> This is a vast and neglected subject, warranting further research, but see Yule, 'James VI and I', pp. 192–200; Tyacke, 'Lancelot Andrewes', pp. 20–1; Ephraim Udall, *Communion comlinessse* (London, 1641), sig. A3r–iv; Bodl., Tanner MS 314 fos. 110r, 150r; PRO, SP 16/503/1111.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 216; PRO, 16/485/1118. It is possible that Brent's recommendation was perceived as an order by those who approved of the practice: Richard Drake, Laudian incumbent of Radwinter, Essex, claimed in 1641 that he only gave the sacrament to those coming to the rails in accordance with Brent's 'order' of 1637, though at the time he was attempting to fend off accusations of illegal ceremonialism (Bodl., MS Rawl. D 158 fo. 46v).

<sup>78</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 215–16, 248; Laud, *Works*, v, pp. 342–3.

<sup>79</sup> The scope for episcopal initiative is well illustrated by Richard Montagu's order for Norwich diocese of 1639, which required communicants to form rows in the chancel, with only those at the front 'neere or close unto the rayles'. However, any who refused to receive at the rails 'as if it were impious, or at least superstitious to come ther' would be compelled to do so. Montagu's intention was to settle parochial tensions caused by his predecessor Wren's policy of compulsion and avoid unseemly movement of communicants between nave and chancel during the administration, by following the 'auncient traditions' of the primitive Church. LPL, MS 943, pp. 625–6, 631–4, the latter printed in Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, pp. 218–21.

‘never enforced’ this practice.<sup>80</sup> As early as 1632, while still bishop of London, Laud ordered the godly parish of St Mary Aldermanbury to enclose its table with a rail, in part to protect it from profanation, in part also to force parishioners out of their pews and to the railed table where the minister and churchwardens could check whether they knelt, as canonically they were required to do, when they took the sacrament.<sup>81</sup> According to one version of events Laud voiced the same concern at the St Gregory’s hearing before the privy council: leave the table in the middle of the chancel, he argued, and ‘the minister could not so well see who kneeled at the sacrament, and who kneeled not’.<sup>82</sup> Though Laud preferred reception at the rails, kneeling elsewhere in the chancel was tolerable, which informed his instructions to Brent and his own determination of some parochial disputes. In 1639–40 he settled two appeals from the archdeaconry of Huntingdon in contrasting fashion. Parishioners at Welwyn, who had shown themselves to be ‘conformable’, were permitted to receive kneeling in the chancel rather than at the rails, while parishioners at St Ives who had until recently come to the rails but had now refused ‘upon a humorous disposition to molest the curate and the whole parish’ were to be urged ‘by fair persuasions’ to revert to their former practice. In each case, Laud was guided by the ordinary, Archdeacon Holdsworth, who understood the parochial context of each dispute.<sup>83</sup> However, if we accept Davies’s claim that the best guide to Laud’s personal views are his actions in Canterbury diocese, then it is revealing that he seemed to be tougher here than elsewhere. At Laud’s second visitation to Canterbury diocese in 1637, Brent ordered the ministers there to remain within the rails when they distributed the communion, an order reiterated by the consistory court in the months following the visitation, and he also required churchwardens to provide

<sup>80</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 215, 231, 246; for Towers, see also Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, pp. xxiv–v, 155–6.

<sup>81</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 9065E/1 fo. 118; see also Fincham, ed., *Visitation articles*, II, p. 82. The summary of Laud’s order does not address the table’s location. About the same time, Laud backed the wish of parishioners of Ware, Herts, to erect a rail with a bench so that communicants might receive at the rails (PRO, SP 16/261/298).

<sup>82</sup> Prynne, *Canterburies doome*, pp. 87–8, based on the depositions of three witnesses. I owe this reference to Leonie James.

<sup>83</sup> PRO, SP 16/370/6, 417/31, 442/84, 138, 444/79, 445/22; Laud, *Works*, VI, pp. 478–9 n. n. Davies’s claim that ‘Laud’s latitude most clearly reveals itself’ in his judgement on the Walkern case is questionable: Laud’s response that the petitioners should perform ‘what they have here undertaken’ is ambiguous, and may well mean that they should fulfil their offer to receive thereafter at the rails (PRO, SP 16/370/6.I; Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 249). The case at Welwyn (April 1639) was well publicized, but whereas Laud had allowed communicants to receive ‘kneeling in the chancel’, his order was misreported by Edmund Rossingham, the newsletter writer, to have sanctioned reception in pews, an apparent reversion to a common pre-Laudian practice, which may explain why Robert Woodford, in London in May 1639, could record the rumour that Laud had ‘renounced’ his part in bringing communicants to the rails. The Welwyn judgement, too, probably lay behind the claims of the jury at the Chelmsford assizes that summer that ministers who refused to administer beyond the rails were contradicting Laud’s order. PRO, SP 16/418/41 (printed in W. Urwick, *Nonconformity in Herts* (London, 1884), pp. 622–3), 427/30; BL, Add. MS 11045 fo. 14r; New College Oxford, MS 9502 (unfol.: 16 May 1639).

kneeling boards round the rails for use of communicants.<sup>84</sup> Though these directions were not backed by widespread prosecution of defaulters, Laud had made his expectations very clear.<sup>85</sup>

From his survey of both provinces, Davies concludes that ‘the issue of receiving at the rail was so controversial that few bishops enforced or pressed it’ and ‘few church courts’ introduced it.<sup>86</sup> This underestimates the number who enforced it, and underplays the encouragement that others gave to the practice. Alongside Davies’s trio of Juxon, Wren, and Towers, we can identify Dee of Peterborough as another vigorous enforcer of reception at the rails. In his survey of 1637, he inquired about whether or not parishioners came to the table to receive and prosecuted some ministers for failing to enforce this.<sup>87</sup> Subordinates to bishops were sometimes as zealous: Walter Walker, commissary for Bedford archdeaconry in the late 1630s, prosecuted both the minister and some parishioners of St Paul’s Bedford, the first for not staying within the rail at the administration, and the second for disobeying his order to resort there.<sup>88</sup> The official for the dean and chapter of Lincoln ordered ministers to present all who refused to come to the rails as ‘delinquents’ and, as Davies shows, Lambe also used the archdeaconry court of Leicester against ministers who offered communion away from the rails.<sup>89</sup>

Some bishops only used prosecution in the face of a clear nonconformist challenge, as is evident from several cases in the northern province. In York diocese in 1637 two parishioners of Attenborough were presented for refusing to obey their minister and leave their pews to receive communion at the rails, and were ordered to do so. After repeated problems at St Peter’s Nottingham where the congregation continued to receive communion sitting in their pews, including parishioners from elsewhere who wished to avoid kneeling, Chancellor Easdell ordered the ministers of all three city churches only to administer to those who knelt at the rails. The following year, forty-three parishioners from St Peter’s were charged with failing to receive at Easter, since they refused to kneel at the rails.<sup>90</sup> Bishop Bridgeman faced a similar problem at St Michael’s Chester in about 1637. On learning that many parishioners were accustomed to receive in their pews so that the minister could not discern who was kneeling,

<sup>84</sup> CCCA, Dcb/J Z.4.6 fo. 127r (printed in Fincham, ‘Episcopal government’, p. 80) and *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 231; see also CCCA, Dcb/J X.7.2 fos. 36, 58v, 60; Laud, *Works*, v, p. 362.

<sup>86</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 247, 311.

<sup>87</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Peterborough diocesan records, church survey book 5, II, fos. 6v–14r, CB 63 fo. 381v; PRO, SP 16/393/92.

<sup>88</sup> House of Lords RO, Main Papers, 5 Aug. 1641. No court books survive from the later 1630s to indicate whether or not Walker prosecuted other ministers and parishioners. See also PRO, SP 16/469/52, an extract, dated 7 Oct. 1640, from the Bedford court books and not, as the calendar states, a case before High Commission (*pace* Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 261 n. 59).

<sup>89</sup> PRO, SP 16/452/98; Davies, *Caroline captivity*, p. 238.

<sup>90</sup> Borthwick Institute, V.1636 CB 2 fo. 506v; Reg. 32 fos. 33, 35v; Nottingham University Library, Nottingham archdeaconry records, A 45 fos. 168r–71v; R. A. Marchant, *The puritans and the church courts in the diocese of York, 1560–1642* (London, 1960), pp. 67–8, 195, 198.

Bridgeman ordered that all were to come to the rails at the administration of communion.<sup>91</sup> Reception at the rails thus became a new device to tackle a long-standing dispute over kneeling at communion.

Another episcopal strategy was to eschew prosecution but, like Laud, urge that communicants come to the rails. In his visitation articles at Rochester in 1638 John Warner asked if the communion table was ‘decently rayled in whereby the communicants may receive the holy sacrament kneeling in a humble manner’, which implied rails with kneeling boards. The fragmentary records for the diocese mean that we cannot scrutinize whether or not Warner acted on his inquiry.<sup>92</sup> In the archdeaconry of Buckingham Robert Newell’s articles for 1637 asked whether the rail is ‘so made with settles or kneeling benches, at the foote or bottom thereof as the communicants may fitly kneele there, at the receiving of the holy communion’ and the courts, under the eye of Sir John Lambe, official principal, then ensured that they were constructed.<sup>93</sup> Churchwardens’ accounts in Oxford diocese indicate that the rail was erected following Bancroft’s visitation of 1635. The fact that three parishes in the city of Oxford simultaneously purchased communion mats around the rails suggests that Bancroft also encouraged reception there.<sup>94</sup>

Thus a variety of means were used in the 1630s to encourage reception at the rails, ranging from use of the coercive powers of the courts in some jurisdictions to orders and directions, the provision of kneeling boards and prosecution of nonconformist offenders. The suggestion that many parishioners were encouraged or compelled to come to the rails underlines the widespread impact of the restoration of altars in the parishes, which affected patterns of worship as well as levels of parochial finance needed to pay for furnishings; it also helps account for the violent reaction in 1640–1 when across the country rails were pulled down and destroyed.

#### IV

Although the restoration of altars has a complex earlier history, going back to the earliest days of the Elizabethan church, this study of developments in the 1630s has suggested that Archbishops Neile and Laud are central figures in the emergence and enforcement of a national policy. Neile led the way, imposing

<sup>91</sup> Cheshire RO, EDC 5 (1640), no. 60. Though the document is ascribed to 1640, it is endorsed as ‘1637’ in a contemporary hand, and may be Bridgeman’s order of 27 November 1637 mentioned in the churchwardens’ accounts (P65/8/1, St Michael Chester churchwardens’ accounts 1558–1678, *sub* 1637–8 and 1638–9).

<sup>92</sup> *Articles to be enquired of within the diocese of Rochester in the first triennall visitation of ... John, Lord Bishop of Rochester* (London, 1638), sig. A2v.

<sup>93</sup> PRO, SP 16/375/54: *Articles to be enquired of within the arch-deaconry of Buckingham ... 1637*, sig. A2r; Buckinghamshire RO, D/A/V 4 fo. 108r, D/A/V 15 fos. 7v, 11v, 12v, 16v, 17v; PRO, SP 16/395/54 fo. 96v.

<sup>94</sup> Oxfordshire County RO, PAR/211/4/F1/3 (St Michael at the Northgate churchwardens’ accounts 1601–59), p. 29; PAR/213/4/F1/2 (St Peter in the East churchwardens’ accounts 1600–40), p. 19; PAR/207/4/F1/1 (St Martin Oxford churchwardens’ accounts 1540–1680), p. 173.

the railed altar in the northern province in 1633, and his example was followed, after the St Gregory's hearing in November 1633, by a small number of bishops in the southern province and, belatedly, by Archbishop Laud himself. Manoeuvrings at court and the wish to enlist the king's support is a safer explanation of this delay than Laud's alleged cool support for these changes. One policy was observed in both provinces, with the exception of a minor variation briefly championed by Williams of Lincoln. Diversity of practice did occur over where communicants should receive the sacrament, precisely because the matter had not been determined by either metropolitan. Davies has demonstrated that Laud took a more moderate line on this latter issue than some of his subordinates, especially Wren, though this amounted to a difference over methods not ends, and there seems few good grounds for dislodging Laud from a central position in the formulation and execution of altar policy. Indeed, the set of orders that he and Neile had compiled and enforced in the 1630s were given canonical status in canon seven of 1640, with the recommendation that all communicants 'draw near and approach the holy table, there to receive the divine mysteries', which, in line with Laud's actions in the 1630s, fell short of an absolute requirement to receive at the rails.<sup>95</sup>

The finding that Charles I was not the architect of altar policy, though he was to become a vigorous supporter of it by the later 1630s, casts doubt on Davies's broader claims about the coherence and significance of Carolinism. If he is right that the elevation of the table was 'a visual and mnemonic means of impressing a greater respect for his pretensions to divine right', and if 'the rail stood at the heart of Charles' programme of "restoring" uniformity and order within Church and Commonwealth', then 'Carolinism' was at best a late and relatively uninfluential product of Laudian reforms in the mid-1630s.<sup>96</sup> In any case, to compress the complexities of Charles's outlook and actions – a conscientious and active supreme governor, anxious both to reform and to avoid innovation, by turns impulsive or uncertain of the best way forward – into an ideology of 'Carolinism' looks unhelpful and it may be that we are better served dispensing with the term.<sup>97</sup> Laudianism, by contrast, emerges in this article as politically potent, and its ideological mainsprings invite further research. A reassessment of Charles I's rule as supreme governor, assisted by a powerful Laudian interest, is long overdue.

<sup>95</sup> G. Bray, ed., *The Anglican canons, 1529–1947* (Church of England Record Society, 6, 1998), pp. 569–71.

<sup>96</sup> Davies, *Caroline captivity*, pp. 206, 21.

<sup>97</sup> See also the comments of Tyacke, 'Anglican attitudes', pp. 158–9; I. Atherton, *Ambition and failure in Stuart England: the career of John, first Viscount Scudamore* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 78–9; A. Milton, "'That sacred oratory": religion and the chapel royal during the personal rule of Charles I', in A. Ashbee, ed., *William Lawes (1602–1645): essays on his life, times and work* (Ashgate, 1998), pp. 84–5. For the suggestion that, from an Irish perspective, 'Caro-Laudianism' is a better description of the religious policies of the 1630s, see A. Capern, 'The Caroline church: James Ussher and the Irish dimension', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 57–85.