

Anglican Rites of Consecration and
the Delineation of Sacred Space, c. 1689–1735.

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ABSTRACT: Between 1712 and 1715, the Convocation of the Church of England attempted to replace the existing informal orders used for the consecration of churches, chapels and churchyards with a single uniform rite. While these efforts have been associated with the erection of the Fifty New Churches to provide for the populous and expanding suburbs of London and Westminster, the discussions actually arose out of the political divisions between the bishops and the lower house of convocation. The efforts to establish an official order of consecration was also a response to the changed ecclesiastical climate that followed the Toleration Act of 1689, which allowed for the registration of Dissenter chapels. The Established Church found its religious hegemony threatened and the particular status of their places of worship, achieved through consecration, challenged. The Church responded to the criticism of their existing forms of consecration by reforming the liturgy as well as demonstrating the historical and legal basis for the practice. The sermons preached at the consecration or reopening of these churches provided a further opportunity for the clergy to justify the ceremony as well as to draw comparisons between these churches and Dissenting meeting-houses.

In 1712, 1714 and 1715 the convocation of the Church of England considered ‘a form for the consecration of churches, chapels, churchyards or places of burial’. The measure was an attempt to establish a uniform liturgy for dedicating places assigned for worship as well as the interment

of the dead. Although the Catholic rite of consecration together with the belief that a particular place could be more holy and sacred had been rejected at the Reformation by Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and other reformers, from the early seventeenth century onwards services were held at the inauguration of new chapels and churches.¹ As the Church of England had not adopted a particular form of consecration as either part of the Elizabethan Settlement or at the Restoration, the bishops performed the rite using one of several orders composed during the course of the seventeenth century.²

Although historians have been aware of the discussions in convocation at the end of Queen Anne's reign regarding the consecration of churches, little attention has been paid to the circumstances that gave rise to them and their context. Some have linked the interest in consecration with the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, which was established by Parliament in 1710 to increase ecclesiastical provision with the rapid urban expansion of London and Westminster.³ It has been argued that this building programme provided the impetus for the Church's efforts to establish a uniform form of consecration.⁴ The order composed in 1712 did include a prayer thanking God for the response of the Queen and Parliament to 'the spiritual wants of the people, by appointing this and many other churches to be erected and dedicated to thy worship and service'.⁵ This rite was published by Thomas Lewis in *An Historical Essay upon the Consecration of Churches* (1719), who argued that it had been 'compiled chiefly for the consecration of the new churches'.⁶ In spite of the connection that has been drawn between the construction of these new churches in London and Westminster, the attempt to establish a uniform order needs to be considered as part of the broader discussion about the nature and sanctity of places of worship.

The legalisation of Protestant Dissent in the Toleration Act of 1689 challenged the pre-eminence of the Established Church.⁷ Whereas the parish church had been the principal place of worship within the local community, its pre-eminence was threatened by the licensing and erection of meeting-houses. In remote or jurisdictionally complex locations, particularly in the

northern counties, Dissenters even attempted to appropriate and licence the parochial or private chapels where they had customarily held their services. A thousand meeting-houses had been licensed within a year of the act and this had increased to four thousand by 1710.⁸ Besides the rapid growth of legally-recognised meeting-houses, the Church also faced renewed criticism from the nonconformists over their consecration of churches. This related not only to the nature of the rite but also what this implied or meant in relation to the sanctity or relative holiness of the building. The Church was forced to defend and vindicate consecration from ‘the vile scurrility and wicked scoffs of Dissenting buffoons and Atheists’.⁹

This article will examine the circumstances that led convocation to discuss a uniform order for consecrating churches and chapels during the last years of Queen Anne’s reign. It will also consider more broadly the efforts taken by the Church of England to defend the practice from the criticisms of the nonconformists. This included demonstrating the historical and legal legitimacy of church consecration, together with the reform of the liturgies that had been used during the previous century. The theological implications of consecration and the Church’s understanding of the sanctity of its places of worship was also explored in pamphlets and sermons.

I. Convocation and the Form for Consecrating Churches and Chapels

In March 1712, the bishops informed the Lower House of Convocation that they were preparing a form for the consecrating of churches, chapels and churchyards, which was then passed down the following month to the clergy for their consideration.¹⁰ In granting the royal license for the convocation, the Queen had outlined six items of business for discussion. These had included devising forms or church orders for the visitation of prisoners, as well as for the admission of Roman Catholic converts and those who had relapsed to the Church of England. The license

made no reference to the composition of a form for the consecration of churches.¹¹ The discussions over consecration emerged out of the fractious relations between the bishops and the clergy in convocation.

The lower house of convocation elected in 1710 was dominated by men with High Church sympathies, the principal exponent of these views being Francis Atterbury, dean of Peterborough, who was elected as prolocutor defeating decisively the episcopal candidate. After a decade in which the High Church party had been thwarted by the Whig administration and bench of bishops, Atterbury aspired to work with the newly-elected Tory majority in the House of Commons, to introduce a series of measures that would revive the influence of the Established Church. One of the results of this alignment was the Fifty New Churches Act in 1711. The momentum for reform faded as convocation became fully absorbed in discussing the heretical views of the Cambridge professor William Whiston.¹² Nonetheless, the continued partisan nature of proceedings is evident not only in the minutes of convocation but also from two pamphlets that provided a record of the subsequent session. The first of these was published in 1713, which outlined and justified the actions of the lower house of convocation, with a particular focus on the amount of business transacted. The tract prompted a response and analysis of this version of events by Charles Trimmell, at that time bishop of Norwich.¹³

Renewed tensions between the two houses arose when convocation resumed in December 1711. It focused on whether it was permissible to resume discussing the business outlined in the Queen's original license after the royal prorogation of their meeting in June. Atterbury considered the lower house to be the clerical counterpart of the House of Commons.¹⁴ He therefore argued that like Parliament, convocation could not simply recommence with business from previous meetings, once convocation had been prorogued. In his opinion, it was unlawful to resume ecclesiastical matters, which had to be addressed again from the start (*de novo*).¹⁵ This was not the view of the bishops, who sought to demonstrate the legitimacy for continuing with business after convocation had been prorogued. The upper house used two

precedents to illustrate their argument, the second example related to the attempt to establish a form of consecration in the early 1660s.

Following the Restoration, convocation had considered the consecration of churches as part of their deliberations over the revision and reintroduction of the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁶ On 22 March 1662, the bishops ordered the preparation of a form of consecration, and assigned the task to John Cosin, bishop of Durham.¹⁷ There appears to have been an expectation by some bishops that this might be accomplished relatively swiftly. In June, Robert Skinner, Bishop of Oxford commented that he had hoped a ‘uniform order of consecrating churches and chapels’ might have been completed, so he could have used it at the dedication of chapel in Burford.¹⁸ Cosin presented a text to convocation when it reconvened in May 1663, but it ‘had not been perfectly finished’ so it was returned to the bishop for revisions. The form of consecration was resubmitted in June when it was passed on to be reviewed by the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield, Lincoln, Oxford, and Salisbury.¹⁹ No further progress appears to have been made with the rite. According to a letter sent by Archbishop Sheldon in March 1666, although Convocation had attempted ‘to agree one settled Forme for ye Consecration of Churches or Chappells but something amisse was in ye Draught prepared & it was for ye present layd aside’. Nonetheless, the archbishop expressed the hope that when Parliament reconvened that ‘we will revive it agayne & doe something’.²⁰ There is no further reference to the matter in the minutes of convocation. Cosin, however, may have used his form within the diocese of Durham to consecrate a church in 1668; the surviving service includes the endorsement that it was ‘according to the use of the Church of England’.²¹ It is interesting to note that the Irish convocation also discussed consecration at this time and published its own distinct form in 1666.²²

The discussion regarding consecration demonstrated the bishops argument regarding the continuation of ecclesiastical business over several sessions in spite of the prorogation of convocation. The bishops also sought the advice of the attorney general on this matter. He

initially gave his opinion that convocation could continue to deal with business that had been discussed prior to the suspension of the sitting.²³ However, Atterbury appears to have sought a second opinion from the attorney general wherein he concluded that it was 'it was more safe to begin again'.²⁴

The differing stances of the two houses as to whether the resumption of ecclesiastical affairs after prorogation was lawful created an impasse. As the bishops were 'desirous that our meeting may not be wholly unfruitful', they proposed on 19 March 1712 another issue for discussion.²⁵ According to Trimnell, the upper house 'pitched on' a matter that was 'entirely free from exception, and which seemed to them to be more immediately called for'.²⁶ The bishops suggested that they should address 'a matter that has not been entered upon, which agreeable to her majesty's licence, seems to be necessary, fit and convenient for the honour and service of Almighty God ... viz., a form for the consecrating of churches and churchyards'. The bishops also considered that in view of the establishment of a commission to erect fifty new churches, this was a timely proposal and 'that it may be ready against the perfecting of that good work her majesty has been graciously pleased to recommend to her parliament'.²⁷ The lower house responded positively to this resolution of the procedural impasse:

Being therefore under this difficulty in relation to our proceeding in matters entered upon before the royal prorogation, we are very thankful to your lordships for suggesting to us one head of business particularly useful at this juncture (viz. the drawing up a form for consecrating churches and churchyards) to the dispatch of which we can apply ourselves without any scruple or hesitation. We are desirous of receiving and considering your lordships' thoughts on that subject, and should be glad also to employ ourselves on those other heads of business recommended by the queen, which have not yet been under our, nor as we apprehend, under your lordships' consideration.²⁸

On 2 April, the bishops passed ‘a form of consecrating churches, chapels and churchyards or places of burial ...’ down to the lower house; the source for this text is not specified but it appears to have been based on the order devised by Bishop Cosin.²⁹ Reflecting on the divisions between the two houses, the controversialist Edmund Hickerlingill sarcastically observed: ‘let the wise Convocation decide the controversy [over consecration], ‘tis better employ than bandying pro and con about Addresses to Her Majesty’.³⁰

The order of consecration was dealt with expeditiously by the house of clergy and returned to the bishops with ‘very many amendments, and the addition of one collect for the fifty new churches’.³¹ These represented only minor changes to the wording of the order rather than substantive alterations, which were accepted by the bishops and the order was presented to the Queen in June.³² She responded that ‘this form of consecrating churches comes to me very seasonably. I will order the publishing of it ...’ but the Queen also took the opportunity to remind the churchmen about the business she had recommended to convocation ‘for the interest of religion. I hope at your next meeting I shall have the satisfaction of seeing it perfected’.³³ The Queen approved the form which was then returned to convocation as it was customary for the bishops and clergy not to sign a document before it had received royal approbation.³⁴ There seems to have been some uncertainty about the correct procedures for approving the measure both amongst the clergy and at court. Archbishop Tenison signed the document but left space should it prove necessary to add an endorsement stating: ‘This form of consecrating, etc., hath passed both houses of convocation and so is approved’. The archbishop noted that this form of words had been used by the Jacobean Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Bancroft.³⁵ The crown was similarly unsure about how this liturgical order should be promulgated. The attorney general was consulted, and he gave his opinion that the form should be published through the issuing of a warrant, in a similar manner to the announcement of days of national prayer. He provided the necessary wording for the document which would then have to be signed by the queen and one of her principal secretaries of state.³⁶

In spite of reaching this penultimate stage, this new liturgical rite did not progress any further. In June 1714, convocation agreed ‘to make an humble application to her majesty to show her majesty’s pleasure in relation to the two papers laid before her in the last convocation’, one of which was the form of consecration.³⁷ The Queen received the request ‘very graciously and was pleased to say that she thought it proper that copies of those papers as they stand in the books of convocation should be laid before her’.³⁸ However, the Queen was in failing health and died on 1 August. The matter came before convocation for a final time at the start of George I’s reign, when it was listed as one of the items of business the houses were licensed to discuss.³⁹ The 1712 form was brought before the bishops in July 1715 and further minor amendments were made by both houses the following month.⁴⁰ The form of consecration made no further progress as convocation became embroiled in the debates over the religious views of Benjamin Hoadley, Bishop of Bangor. This controversy led to the prorogation of convocation in 1717 and, ultimately, to the loss of the institution’s deliberative function until the mid-nineteenth century.⁴¹

Although the efforts to establish a uniform rite of consecration emerged out the procedural impasse that resulted from the wrangling over the rights of convocation, it was nonetheless regarded as being a timely measure due to the commitment to erect new churches within London and Westminster. Even though the new form did not receive royal approbation, copies of the rite were published shortly afterwards. Thomas Lewis’s *Historical Essay upon the Consecration of Churches* (1719) included as an appendix ‘A Form of Consecrating Churches, Chapels and Churchyards, pass’d in the Lower House of Convocation, 1712, with a design to have it establish’d among the offices of the Liturgy ... Copy’d from the Journal of the House, and never before made Publick’. Lewis’s text was republished in 1724, together with two sermons, as ‘The Office used at the consecration of St Andrew’s Church in Penrith, March 17 1722’.⁴² There were also manuscript copies of the form for use in the dioceses of London and Winchester.⁴³

As the 1715 form of consecration did not complete all the procedural stages to be implemented by the Church, it was described as ‘a law in embryo’ by Andrew Snape, headmaster of Eton and late vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge. It became a marginal issue in the pamphlet warfare surrounding the Bangorian controversy, particularly in relation to the freedom of the bishops to employ their own forms. Snape argued that the form of consecration was one of several measures that were ready to pass into ecclesiastical law when convocation ‘shall be suffer’d to proceed on such Affairs’. It would mean that arbitrary forms would be replaced by ones that had been prescribed by the Church. In the case of consecration, he argued ‘the Bishop and the Ordinary, at present, use their own discretion; but if ever those unfinished constitutions take place, will be limited to a form of words. But in the mean time, churches are to be consecrated, where occasion requires it’.⁴⁴ The assertion drew the ire of one churchman, John Cumming, who preached against what he called ‘a conspiracy of evil-designing men against the real interests of Christ’s kingdom’ who regarded it as the first step towards introducing other popish measures into the Church: ‘He takes notice of another form upon the anvil, *of the Consecration of Churches*; and that may be followed with other forms of baptising of bells, and consecrating holy water, and holy vestments’.⁴⁵ Snape also faced criticism from White Kennett who had represented the episcopal party in the lower house of convocation, before being enthroned as bishop of Peterborough in 1718.

Kennett argued against the need for a set form of consecration arguing that it was ‘the ancient right and privilege of bishops to prescribe forms of prayer and publick exhortation, analogous to the common faith, within the bounds of their respective dioceses’.⁴⁶ However, ‘this remaining liberty of the Bishops was in the late Queen’s Reign to be controul’d by the Substitution of one common *Form of Consecrating Churches*, prepar’d and approv’d in Convocation’.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the bishop stated that the need for such a form was without historical precedent:

'tis plain our first Reformers thought little of retaining this custom; nor did any of our Protestant Bishops (that we know of) draw out any *Form* for their own Use, till Bishop Andrews, a learned and ritual prelate, in the reign of King James I, who began to love the pomps of religion. However, the Convocation meddled not, and the Archbishops and Bishops seem'd All to agree in this point, that there was no necessity of one stated *Form*, but it might rather be left to the discretion of every bishop, within his own diocese. And I believe, the best churchmen are still of that opinion; while there is no danger of particular bishops exceeding the common custom, and multiplying ceremonies beyond their brethren.⁴⁸

During the seventeenth century, bishops had used their discretion regarding the order of consecration they employed; Archbishop Sheldon had advised the bishop of Oxford in 1666 to consecrate the chapel of University College 'after ye best forme you in your judgment shall choose'.⁴⁹ In spite of his views and the fact that the measure had not passed into ecclesiastical law, Kennett considered the new form to be 'very grave and good' and that it was 'worthy to be taken at the discretion of every bishop, as he shall have occasion to use any such form'.⁵⁰

These brief responses provide an indication of how convocation's attempt to establish a single form of consecration polarised opinion, which is not evident in the formal record of proceedings in both houses. While the bishops may have considered it as a timely measure in view of the ambitions to construct fifty new churches in the capital, as well as a means of overcoming a procedural impasse, the consecration of places of worship remained a controversial issue that divided the Protestant confessions.

II. Criticism of the Consecration of Churches

There had been significant criticism of the consecration of churches even before the attempts to establish a uniform liturgy in the early eighteenth century. Some opponents denounced the ceremony as smacking of popish superstition, while others refuted the notion that it privileged one place of worship over another, particularly the parish church over the meeting-house. In the preface to his *The History of the Consecration of Altars, Temples and Churches* (1706) the dissenting minister James Owen expressed both of these two positions. He condemned the ‘prodigious degree of superstition in the Romish Church’ regarding consecration.⁵¹ The minister also argued:

The Grand Master of Assemblies hath promised that wherever two or three are gather’d in his Name, there he will be in the midst of ‘em (Matt. 18: 20). This promise, which respects all places of religious worship alike is the foundation of our acceptance with God.

The Romanists, who are follow’d by some among our selves, make the consecration of temples and chappels necessary to the acceptable performance of religious worship ...⁵²

The study also included ‘a short view of the state of it here since the Reformation, with an abstract of the forms of consecration in use amongst us’.⁵³

Owen’s history of ‘the consecration of religious places’ presented a detailed survey which was relatively even-handed in its approach. It began with the biblical accounts of God’s presence and the construction and dedication of the Temple by the Jews, the practices of the first Christians and the Early Church to ‘the modern ceremonies and forms of Romish consecrations’. In the latter section Owen reproduced the rite from the Roman pontifical, and he concluded this part with ‘so much of Romish consecrations, which are deservedly rejected by all the Reformed Churches’.⁵⁴ His final chapter, titled ‘Of Protestant Consecrations’, considered the situation after the Reformation with particular reference to the situation in England. He

observed that most churches had ‘no other but the old popish consecrations’ but when Catholicism was overthrown, they ceased to be ‘defiled nests of superstition and idolatry’ but rather ‘lawful places of religious worship’. Establishing ‘the true worship of God thro’ Jesus Christ’ was sufficient to convert these buildings, no further consecration was required. Furthermore, the Reformers had not considered it necessary to institute such rites and ceremonies for the Church of England.⁵⁵ The minister summarised the texts of three post-Reformation English liturgies of consecration, the earliest being Andrewes’s 1620 form, a revised version published in 1703 and the service used by Simon Patrick, Bishop of Ely in 1704.⁵⁶ In his final remarks, Owen outlined ten arguments against the ritual of consecration. These included the fact that there was no basis for it in the New Testament; the sanctity of the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament could not be applied to the present times. The practices of the Jews in relation to dedication were not continued by Christ and the Apostles. Furthermore, it was misplaced to use Solomon’s prayer in dedicating the Temple in present ceremonies nor was it reflected in the actual rituals conducted during the post-Reformation rites. The legitimacy of consecration was also questioned, Owen argued that its basis was not in scriptural but pontifical law. He even suggested that the practice might breach the Act of Uniformity, which had outlawed ceremonies that had not been prescribed; the form of consecration had not been ratified in any statute. The minister did, nonetheless, recognise the significance of places set apart or assigned for religious purposes but denied the efficacy of consecration.⁵⁷ The work therefore provided a measured attack upon not only post-Reformation consecration but also the principles which were seen to underpin the practice.

At the end of Owen’s broad overview, there was a brief assessment of the consecration of the parish church of St Katherine Cree in 1631 by William Laud, at that time bishop of London.⁵⁸ It was an example that was used repeatedly by critics of the Established Church to discredit the practice of consecrating churches and to make associations with the rites of the Roman pontifical. Laud’s consecration of St Katherine Cree had been cited at the archbishop’s

trial in 1644 as evidence that he had introduced into the Church of England ‘innovations in consecrating churches and chappels after the Popish manner’.⁵⁹ Most of these attacks relied on the detailed account of the service, together with Laud’s response to the accusations, which had been published in the second part of John Rushworth’s *Historical Collections* (1680).⁶⁰ While some authors merely alluded to or briefly paraphrased ‘Bishop Laud’s way of consecrating’, others chose to quote at some length ‘the Theatrical Manner’ of the consecration at St Katherine Cree.⁶¹ In August 1720, the newspaper *The Independent Whig* criticised ‘superstitious ceremonies’ and Laud’s efforts ‘to transport Rome to Lambeth’. It provided a précis of Rushworth’s account, which verged on parody in its account of Laud and his ‘pious pranks’ during the service.⁶²

Laud’s actions were also inferred in the unattributed scurrilous verses that recounted the consecration of St Alfege’s church, Greenwich by Francis Atterbury, who had been installed as bishop of Rochester, in September 1718.⁶³ The church had been rebuilt to the designs of Nicholas Hawksmoor after the collapse of the medieval building; it was the first place of worship to be funded by the Fifty New Churches Commission.⁶⁴ Parallels were drawn between Atterbury’s consecration and Laud’s, both bishops were accused of ‘bowing to the East’.⁶⁵ Furthermore questions had been raised as to whether Laud’s consecration of St Katherine Cree was necessary as the church replaced an earlier place of worship.⁶⁶ There appear to have been similar concerns regarding Atterbury’s consecration in Greenwich:

From the Church Door he went with pious intent
To make the Ground holy all ove[r]
But in some peoples Creed there was no great Need
For the place was held sacred before.⁶⁷

According to another account, the service was conducted with some ceremony. The choir of Westminster Abbey, where Atterbury was dean, sang at the service, which was attended by a sizeable congregation of clergy and gentlemen of the county.⁶⁸

Besides castigating Laud's actions at St Katherine Cree in a diatribe against ceremonies, *The Independent Whig* had previously challenged the entire principle of the rite. It attacked the 'Pagan and Popish priests' who had composed 'offices of consecration; the whole end of which was, they pretended, to bestow Godliness on dead earth and things inanimate'. The piece railed against the efficacy and implications of consecrating a place of worship. It condemned 'the assurance of those popish consecrators, who thus impiously pretend to draw down an attribute of the Almighty, and endow with it what spot of earth they please'. It questioned whether this practice made the consecrated place more favourable for prayer than any other location, and what Scriptural evidence there was for that assertion. However, if worship conducted in a consecrated place was more appealing to God, it implied that devotions conducted elsewhere, such as in the home 'ought either to be neglected (as lame and insufficient) or every private house should be consecrated'. The author contrasted 'consecration in Popish and Pagan countries' as 'a needless, empty, superstitious foppery, an evident trick of priestcraft' with the benefits of living in England where 'all this Pagan Idolatry and these Monkish fooleries receive no countenance from our laws ...' This diatribe against consecration of places of worship challenged those who advocated it: 'If consecration signifies anything more than a declaration, that such a place is set aside for the worship of God, I wish it could be explained and proved'.⁶⁹

Some of the issues touched on in *The Independent Whig* had already been the focus of a wide-ranging comparison between the practices of the Established Church and Dissenters. The tract *Lay-Nonconformity Justified*, published in 1716 by the Dissenting minister John Norman, took the form of a dialogue between 'a Gentleman of the Town in communion with the Church of England' and 'his Dissenting Friend in the country'. It covered a number of issues but one of the first to be addressed was that public churches were consecrated for worship unlike meeting-

houses which were sometimes put to 'ordinary and common uses'.⁷⁰ In response, the Dissenter alluded to the recent failure of the Church of England to establish a rite: 'As to the consecration of churches, there being no Form of it in our English Liturgy, I can say but little to it'. After a description of Laud's consecration of St Katherine Cree was rehearsed, the practice was dismissed as being 'too superstitious'.⁷¹

The tract continued with a succinct summary listing the criticisms that were being raised in contemporary debates about the appropriateness and relative sanctity of parish churches over meeting-houses as places of worship:

1. Many of the Dissenting Meeting-Houses are set apart for Divine Service, and never put to any other Uses: and abundance of them are places of as much decency as most of your parish churches.
2. If any of them are made to serve other purposes, besides that of religious worship (as on some occasions they may) I see no reason I have to be out of love with them on that Account, because I remember what our Saviour said: 'The Hour cometh when ye shall neither in this Mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem Worship the Father. But the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him', John 4. 21, 23. 'Men are bid to pray everywhere.' And Christ the great Master of Assemblies hath promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them', Mat. 18. 20.
3. Our Saviour and his Apostles had not fixed places for their religious services but met in private houses &c. as they saw most convenient.
4. The Primitive Christians often assembled in the fields, deserts, ships or inns, as opportunity presented; and when there were settled places for their solemn devotion (as there were in times of peace and tranquillity) they attributed no holiness to them.
5. There were no consecrated temples for three first centuries.

6. Most of the parish churches in England have had no other than Popish consecrations; since which they have been defiled by superstition and idolatry, which our Meeting-Houses never were: So that if you insist on the holiness of places, I believe we have more to say for ours, than you have for yours, tho' one have had the formality of a consecration (such a one as it is) and the other not.
7. May I in all my religious services be found sincere and upright with God, and then where-ever I pay my homage to him, I make no question but I shall be accepted. The place of worship (whether it be this or that) is undoubtedly an indifferent circumstance, and that which commends one rather than another is the conveniency, not the sanctity of it.⁷²

These points illustrate the scope of the arguments that were being deployed in challenging the belief that a consecrated parish church was the place where worship could be conducted. The author briefly examined how on the basis of Scripture and Christ's own injunctions to the disciples that worship should not be confined to a specific location. Christ, the apostles and the first Christians had gathered for religious services in various places. There was no particular holiness assigned to the buildings where they assembled. The practice of the first Christians and the Early Church is contrasted with the 'Popish consecrations' that defined and designated English parish churches as appropriate locations for religious services. Finally, meeting-houses are held up as not only just as decent as churches as places of worship, but as being more suitable for Christian worship as they had not been 'defiled by superstition and idolatry'.

Such criticisms were also expressed in some of the dozen surviving sermons delivered at the inauguration of new meeting-houses or chapels erected by the Dissenters between 1689 and 1735. Preaching at the opening of the meeting-house at Chester in 1700, Matthew Henry observed that 'the best consecration of our place [of worship] *will be to consecrate our selves this day unto the Lord*, Exod. xxxii 29', and asserted that 'whatever disputes there are about holiness of

places, there's none about the holiness of persons'.⁷³ In 1720, John Archer criticised the notion that consecration rendered a particular place as suitable for worship. He condemned the 'very great presumption for any man to pretend by any little tricks and devices of his own, or any other man's devising to convey such an holiness to any particular spot of ground, as that by virtue thereof the Divine Favour should be more confined to it than any other, that is equally convenient for the worshippers, and hath all other qualifications of a place of worship to recommend it to men's use, except that Imaginary Holiness'.⁷⁴ A 'consecration sermon' preached the following year at the opening of the new meeting-house in Oxford similarly criticised those who 'lay too great a stress upon the Holiness of Places [and] are ready to think, that no place, except consecrated by a Bishop, is fit to worship God in'.⁷⁵

These sermons generally avoided focusing on the nature of a particular place of worship but there was an inherent tension in that the occasion prompting their delivery was the inauguration of a new building. The first of three sermons preached at the meeting-house in New Broad Street, London, in 1730 attempted to address this matter: 'Being entred this day upon a new place of worship, I know it is expected that your ministers should take some notice of it' and acknowledged the contribution of the congregation 'to make it convenient and decent'.⁷⁶ However, the sermon then continued:

The best introduction I could think of to our publick service here, is to lead you from the view of the material structure, to that which is vastly nobler, and indeed the proper end of it, that you yourselves may be living temples of God, and may offer up to him those spiritual sacrifices which will be acceptable through Jesus Christ.

The evangelical state leads you off from laying any great stress on 'temples made with hands'; and much enlarges the privileges of the whole community of Christians, beyond the state of the Jewish church with all its pomp and ceremonies ...⁷⁷

Rather than focusing on the material, the ministers placed the emphasis on the spiritual temple formed by the 'lively stones', i.e. the Christian faithful:

Christians are dedicated to the service and glory of God. So was the old temple separated to sacred use and dedicated to God, separated from common used to be the Lord's. And that distinguished it from a common building. Thus Christians are devoted to God, separated from common uses to be the Lord's. But the excellence of the spiritual house consists in this, that Christians dedicate themselves to God. They gave themselves to the Lord. 2 Cor. viii. 5. They voluntarily consecrate themselves, and all they have and are to God.⁷⁸

The sermons concluded by criticising the 'entertaining or expressing an excessive regard to particular places'.⁷⁹

III. Forms of Consecration

The forms of consecration agreed on by convocation in 1712 and 1715 would have established a single authorised service for the dedication of places of worship. Although different forms of consecration were used by the bishops, one of the principal rites was that composed by Lancelot Andrewes', Bishop of Winchester. It was devised for the consecration of the Jesus chapel at Peartree in the parish of St Mary, Southampton in 1620. A version of this form was published in 1659, it was also included in the 1668 and 1672 editions of Anthony Sparrow's *A Rationale upon the Book of Common-Prayer of the Church of England* and the 1684 edition of his *A collection of articles ... of the Church of England*.⁸⁰ These texts include the order of service together with the more specific prayers relating to the consecration at Peartree. These particular details were removed from an

edited version of the form which was published by Richard Tisdale in 1703. The churchman argued that he sought ‘to revive that Heroick Christian Spirit of publick piety and devotion, which was once so visible in this Church’. He went on to claim that there were ‘many devout Christians among us, who are utterly unacquainted with the religious and solemn manner, by which the places they assemble in for Divine Worship are set apart, and consecrated to that sacred service’.⁸¹ However, Andrewes’ form was controversial, partly because of its association with the consecration of St Katherine Cree in 1631. At his trial, Laud had been accused of using the ritual from the Roman pontifical in dedicating the church, he refuted charge by arguing ‘For my Form of Consecration, Bishop Andrewes made it, from whom I desired a copy, and had it, which I observed’.⁸²

In spite of Tisdale’s publication, there was an attempt during the second half of the seventeenth century to move away from the more ceremonial approach employed in Andrewes’ form with all its Laudian associations. Edmund Gibson reflected in his *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* (1713), that the attempts to compose a form of consecration following the Restoration were ‘occasioned as some think, by the offence taken at Archbishop Laud’s manner of consecrating St Katherine Creed [sic.] church in London’.⁸³ As White Kennett noted Andrewes was a ‘ritual prelate’ who ‘began to love the Pumps of Religion’ and this was reflected in his form of consecration, which the controversialist Hickerlingill derided as ‘a Job of Journey-work’, an Irish jig.⁸⁴ According to Kennett: ‘There was so much Tinkling in Bishop Andrewes’s Form that most of the other Bishops alter’d that Form, and made it generally more chaste and grave’.⁸⁵ Although Andrewes’ form of consecration was influential and variations of it were sometimes used by bishops, there were other services in circulation.⁸⁶ Kennett drew attention to the alternative forms, together with other ecclesiastical documents, collated for Archbishop Sancroft by his chaplain, Henry Wharton. This included the forms used at Fulmer (1610), Peterhouse, Cambridge (1632–33); St John’s Leeds (1634) Abbey Dore (1634–35).⁸⁷ Further examples and

copies of consecration orders can be found amongst the papers of Thomas Tenison from the late seventeenth century, some of which were endorsed by the archbishop.⁸⁸

The form of consecration discussed in 1712 and 1715 represented a clear attempt to move away from the ceremonial forms of the early seventeenth century and took place at a time when Laud's ritualistic actions were again being cited by critics of the Established Church. Gibson, who in 1712 was a member of the house of clergy, observed in his codex published the following year, that 'it is to be wished, that the good design, which we meet with in the convocation of 1661 of drawing up a form for consecrating churches and chapels ... were again set-a-foot by the bishops and clergy'.⁸⁹ He was referring to Cosin's attempt to provide an order of consecration following the Restoration. There are three surviving orders from the 1660s appertaining to the bishop, two of which were employed at the consecration of private chapels and a third text may have been that composed at the behest of convocation.⁹⁰ Although these forms drew upon Andrewes' earlier order, Cosin modified and significantly shortened aspects of the ritual. Andrewes' rite included two very lengthy consecratory prayers derived from the bible, the prayers offered by David (I Chronicles 29:10), with extensive additions, and Solomon's at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8: 27, II Chronicles 6: 18). Cosin abbreviated David's consecratory prayer and replaced the additions with an exhortation or address to the congregation and omitted Solomon's prayer altogether.⁹¹ An innovative aspect of Andrewes' form was the perambulation of the church or chapel praying in the places where children were baptised, the holy word was preached, holy communion received as well as where marriages were solemnised and the deceased interred. Cosin retained this part of the service, although the sequence of blessings was altered and, in some cases, lengthened.⁹² This was then followed by morning prayer and a communion service, which included one of the collects from Andrewes' liturgy together with the prayer remembering the church's founder. Whereas Andrewes had placed the sermon before the communion service, it was moved in Cosin's form to after the reading of the Gospel. So, although Cosin had drawn on the bishop of Winchester's earlier form,

the revisions resulted in a shorter and simpler service of consecration.⁹³ Although Andrewes's service was widely used during the seventeenth century, a much simpler liturgy employed in 1607 by William Barlow, Bishop of Rochester also circulated.⁹⁴ A version of this rite, which was subsequently published with the sermon, was used by Simon Patrick to consecrate the chapel at St Katherine's Hall, Cambridge in 1704.⁹⁵

It is unclear whether the text revised by the bishops before being passed down to the lower house in April 1712 was the same as that submitted to convocation in the 1660s. There were certainly similarities between the two, although the revised text was an even more pared back form of consecration. It also appears to have drawn on Barlow's order for an introductory prayer.⁹⁶ The bishops' text lacked the initial consecratory prayers; the service began after the bishop had entered the building with an address to the congregation. Although there was no longer a perambulation around the church, prayers were said relating to the different services conducted in the building. Although Cosin had omitted the prayer relating to matrimony, it was included in this liturgy together with the renewal of baptismal vows to represent confirmation.⁹⁷ The remainder of the service broadly followed that outlined by Cosin together with some of the prayers derived directly from Andrewes.⁹⁸

IV. Legitimacy of Church Consecration

Besides the revision of the rite, a series of early eighteenth-century publications set out the legal and historical basis for the consecration of churches. Edmund Gibson's *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* (1713) was composed 'purely for the service of the clergy and in support of the rights and privileges of the Church'; convocation thanked the future bishop for the 'useful pains' undertaken in compiling the work.⁹⁹ The work included a chapter on the consecration of churches, which opened with two mid-thirteenth century measures that asserted 'The house of

God is separated from common use by dedication'. Gibson then set out 'the rules of common and canon law concerning the erecting and consecrating of churches'. This chapter focused on the legal issues surrounding consecration and the subsequent status of consecrated buildings. It relied primarily on pre-Reformation canon and civil law but it also drew on the opinions of the seventeenth-century jurist Edward Coke as well as the precedents of two religious buildings reconciled in the 1630s.¹⁰⁰ The *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani*, therefore provided churchmen with an outline of consecration, as well as the desecration of these sacred spaces, in civil and ecclesiastical law together with the relevant texts. There is only a passing reference to the contemporary situation, when Gibson referred to the desirability of having 'a grave, decent and uniform method' of consecration and his urging convocation to undertake the task.¹⁰¹

Gibson's definitive statement about the legal status of consecration surpassed earlier treatments of the subject, most notably that made by Edward Coke in his *Institutes of the Laws of England* (1644).¹⁰² The assessment made in the *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* was supplemented in subsequent years by the brief summary of the ecclesiastical law relating to consecration made by John Ayliffe, which sought to contextualise it in relation to the practices of the Catholic Church.¹⁰³ Thomas Oughton's *Ordo judiciorum*, a treatise on the procedures in ecclesiastical law courts had initially been completed in 1713. The second edition published in 1738 had a section entitled 'De Ecclesiis et Capellis', which included a series of legal documents and forms relating to the consecration of churches and chapels. Amongst these were William Laud's liturgy for the consecration of St John's church at Stanmore Magna in 1632 and that used by Gibson at St Dunstan's Stepney in 1729.¹⁰⁴ Gibson's work was also rendered more accessible in a volume 'for the use of students in the universities who are designed for holy orders' composed by Richard Grey. It used the *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* to present a series of questions and answers on a range of matters, including consecration. In response to the question 'Is there any Form of Consecrating of Churches &c provided in the Church of England?', a succinct account was

provided of the passage of the order through convocation in 1712, together with an observation that this form 'has been generally observed'.¹⁰⁵

The history of the rite also came under scrutiny in a range of other works. The third volume of Joseph Bingham's monumental *Origines ecclesiasticae: or, the antiquities of the Christian Church* published in 1711 included a chapter on consecration. While acknowledging the antiquity of dedicating places of worship amongst the Jews, Bingham argued that it did not become established among Christians until Constantine. He continued by discussing the practice in the Early Church and that it was 'the peculiar business of the bishop of the diocese'.¹⁰⁶ Although scholarly with detailed citations, this brief assessment principally focused on the Early Church. A slightly broader survey had appeared the previous year in Thomas Staveley's *The History of Churches in England*, which surveyed the foundation, building and furnishing of places of worship, in the hope that it would cause Dissenters to 'entertain a better opinion of our churches'.¹⁰⁷ A chapter on 'the ceremonies anciently used at the founding, building, and consecrating of churches', briefly discussed the Catholic rite drawing on Durandus' *Rationale Divinorum* and the Roman Pontifical before examining 'the Modern way or manner of Consecration of Churches here since the Reformation'.¹⁰⁸ In the absence of 'any canonical established rites', Staveley touched on the consecration of the church at Fulmer in 1610 by Bishop Barlow, Andrewes' 'excellent form' as well as that drawn up by Convocation in 1661. He noted that as the latter was neither authorised nor published, it was at the discretion of the bishops which form was used.¹⁰⁹

A fuller treatment of the subject was provided by Thomas Lewis' *An Historical Essay upon the Consecration of Churches* (1719). The work was a response to those who denounced the practice as 'popery, conjuring and profaneness' as well as to refute the accusations that it was an attempt 'to introduce into a Protestant Church one of the Roman rites, and the gaudy pomp and superstition of the Papists'.¹¹⁰ This was a much more partisan discussion of consecration than that published by James Owen, and more limited in its scope. The subtitle indicated that the main focus was the consecrations performed by the Jews, heathens and Christians beginning

with the Biblical accounts and then the activities of the Romans. The examination of Christian consecration mainly relates to Constantine and the Early Church with a brief coverage of medieval Church and conciliar decrees relating to England. Although the 1712 form of consecration was included as an appendix, this historical account does not extend further than the Reformation.

V. Consecration Sermons

The significance and purpose of the consecration was discussed in thirty-five sermons published between 1689 and 1735. These had been preached at the consecration of new churches, the reopening of rebuilt or restored buildings as well as at the inauguration of private or university college chapels. All but three of these sermons were delivered during the early eighteenth century, but only one of them pertained to a place of worship erected under the auspices of the Fifty New Churches scheme. Based on biblical texts, principally from the Old Testament, these sermons explored a wide range of themes relating to the character and nature of a place of worship. This included reflections on God's visible presence to the Jews, for which some used the rabbinic term *Shekhinah*, particularly at the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon. While some preachers saw parallels with these earlier manifestations of the divine presence, others drew attention to Christ's promise to be present when two or three were gathered together in His name (Matthew 18:20). Ministers expatiated on what these biblical precedents signified in relation to the holiness and sanctity of churches. They also considered the implications that this had for the appearance and ornamentation of the buildings as well as the appropriate behaviour for those who assembled there.¹¹¹

A detailed examination of this exploration of sacred space and the parish church lies outside the scope of this article but the sermons do provide a justification of their consecration

for religious services. They highlighted the significance of the rite and demonstrated that it was ‘not an idle and empty ceremony’.¹¹² Through this rite a church or chapel became a place of worship, an action which challenged the validity of religious assemblies held in other buildings. Acknowledging the religious differences over the practice, Samuel Hilliard noted that he had decided to publish his consecration sermon so that ‘it may confirm those of our own communion (who are blessed with churches duly consecrated) in having regard to them, and convince such stubborn schismaticks as make no difference between a church and a stable ...’¹¹³ Although these consecration sermons differed there were several common themes which justified the practice while also responding to some of the criticisms made by the dissenters.

Some divines linked the dedication and status of contemporary places of worship with the sacred sites recorded in the Old Testament. In 1714, John Broughton observed: ‘What the temple was to the Jews, as an house of prayer, that is every church and chapel, and duly consecrated place to us Gentiles, but now Christians’.¹¹⁴ Three years later, James Lacy similarly argued that ‘... what the Tabernacle and the Temple were to the Jews, the same is every church and chappel to us Christians, places set apart, and consecrated to the service of God’.¹¹⁵ Several ministers more specifically considered the biblical precedents for consecration and how the appropriation of places for worship was marked ‘with some outward rites and significant ceremonies’.¹¹⁶ Preaching in 1726, Zachary Pearce, and the following year Lewis Stephens, took Genesis 28:18 as the text for their consecration sermons, which recounted Jacob setting up a pillar, anointing it with oil, thereby setting it apart for worship.¹¹⁷ Stephens preached that the consecration of religious places was looked upon ‘as a work of Majesty, and has been performed by some of the wisest and greatest of kings. Solomon was never arrayed in greater glory’ than at his dedication of the Temple.¹¹⁸ The justification for such rites was not confined to the Old Testament; Broughton criticised ‘some Enthusiasts among us, that can see no such obligation in the New [Testament]’.¹¹⁹ Stephens similarly claimed that ‘the like practice has continued down to our days’ from the instances in the Old Testament through to Constantine and the dedication of

the Holy Sepulchre: 'it was practised by the Ancientism, and enjoined by several canons and constitutions of our own Church, which require all churches and chapels to be consecrated, before divine service is performed in them'.¹²⁰ The following year, Joseph Watson preached that these biblical examples of dedication were 'sufficient to vindicate the rite for consecrating churches'.¹²¹

According to Thomas Mangey, the necessity of setting places apart for worship was not just due to biblical precepts; 'the religion of nature taught men the necessity and expediency of approaching the divine worship with reverence and solemnity, and that this would be best done in places devoutly set apart to that and no other business'.¹²² Other churchmen similarly regarded the consecration of churches as being in accordance with the Law of Nature, as it was the general and universal practice of mankind to set apart places for divine worship. Preaching in 1706, Richard Gery asserted that 'It is necessary that the Publick Worship be perform'd in a decent place, set apart for that sacred use. This hath been the practice of all nations, and seems to be grounded on the Law of Nature'.¹²³ Similar sentiments were expressed several years later by Robert Newton. Both ministers argued that the allocation of particular sites for devotion was evident in the temples built by the heathens in 'darkest times of idolatry', the altars erected by the Biblical patriarchs, as well as the Jewish Temple.¹²⁴ It was acknowledged that as 'the solemn worship of God cannot be duly perform'd, without an appropriate place allotted thereto ... we find that all ages, and all Nations of the world, have had their temples and consecrated places for the exercise of their religion'.¹²⁵ Through nature people were taught that 'every thing ought to be done in it's due Place; common things in common places, and sacred things in places that are sacred'.¹²⁶ Even though 'the first religious places were such as nature itself directed', the continued separation was not contrary to the precepts of the Gospel. Even though there was 'no instance of any formal consecration of chapels of oratories in the Gospel; yet Christ maintains the appropriated use of the house of prayer and St Paul insinuates that they are not houses to eat and drink in ...'¹²⁷ The minister Stephen Grigman accepted this argument but preaching in 1728

also argued that this separation needed to be marked ceremonially: ‘The Light of Nature could inform men, that holy actions ought to be perform’d in holy places, distinguish’d from vulgar use by some external ceremony of veneration and respect’.¹²⁸

The inauguration of a church or chapel was also portrayed as a legal transaction through which a place was set apart for religious worship and became the property of God. Samuel Hilliard argued that churches did not possess any inherent sanctity through being places of worship but because their status derived from being dedicated to God’s service and set apart from other uses. These buildings became the possession of God to ‘whose use they are assign’d and convey’d, and from which they are ever afterwards unalienable, thus is Gods peculiar property’.¹²⁹ The owner or founder of a church surrendered the building at the start of the consecration service as ‘a previous renunciation of all civil right and interest is expressly required, that no pretence may be alleged to employ it to any use which is separate from God’s service’.¹³⁰ In 1733, George Baker noted that ‘the founder or proprietor, by motives of piety directed, divests himself of his personal right, and by a formal donation consigns it to the minister of God, who in the behalf of God, takes possession of it, declares it separated from vulgar uses, and assigned to none but sacred’.¹³¹ Two decades earlier John Smith had told the mayor and alderman of Stockton at the consecration of a chapel that ‘your bishop, who comes to you in Christ’s name, to accept this house which you have made and to dedicate to this Presence’.¹³²

The legal separation transacted through consecration had been explored in slightly more depth by John Leng at the new college chapel of St Katherine’s Hall, Cambridge, in 1704. He argued that even though God is the creator, lord and proprietor of all the earth and mankind merely his tenants, some ‘pious persons’ have set apart places for public worship. Furthermore, ‘by their own solemn act and deed they have transferred the right and property from themselves’. God’s acceptance of this property is indicated either by a special revelation or ‘by the intervention of his chief Minister, who thereupon blesses it in his Name, and consigns it to his Use, it becomes God’s peculiar, and is no longer any man’s property’.¹³³ Leng demonstrated

that this transfer of property was in accordance with the principles of civil law. 'The consecration therefore of churches and chappels, is not an idle and empty ceremony but is a legal act of delivering up our property in them to Almighty God, and [for] his sole use and service'.¹³⁴

Preaching at the opening of St George's church, Holborn, in 1706, John Marshall similarly defined 'the solemn episcopal consecration' of the church as being 'the legal dedication' of the building. However, when the sermon was delivered, the church had not actually been consecrated, although the reasons for this were not specified.¹³⁵ Marshall was therefore obliged to address the view that as the church was 'not yet consecrated, nor devoted to God, but remains the private interest of the several proprietors concern'd therein'.¹³⁶ In response, the minister argued that the church had 'a sufficient consecration to entitle it ... to all that decent and reverend regard, which I have asserted to be due to the House of God, and everything which has His Sacred Name instampt upon it'.¹³⁷ The church was sanctified by the Word of God and prayer as well as the celebration of communion. According to Marshall

altho' it be not yet so publickly and authentically devoted, and ratified in due form, as in time we hope it will, by the solemn Act of His Chief Minister, the bishop, yet I have sufficient warrant in God's Name to declare, that He does so far accept of what is already done, of the gift and oblation that has been made ... He will meet us here when we attend upon Him, will favourably hear Prayer and Supplications that shall from hence be presented unto Him, and will be pleased with the worship and service that shall in this place be decently, solemnly, and reverently performed.¹³⁸

Besides providing a justification of the ritual, a few ministers attempted to address the criticisms made about 'the ceremony of consecrating churches', which according to Grigman, was 'misrepresented by some men as popish and superstitious'.¹³⁹ Andrew Trebeck defended consecration arguing that 'if any should unwarily and injuriously charge this sacred institution as

practised in our Church, to savour too much of papal superstition, we may charitably pity their errors and infirmities'.¹⁴⁰ George Baker responded vehemently to the criticisms of consecration, specifically those made in *The Independent Whig*:

We do not however pretend (as the wanton sons of Slander are sometimes pleased to represent it) that any human consecration, by whom soever, or with what solemnity soever, performed, doth or can operate by any virtue of its own, or as a charm or enchantment, to the bringing down or affixing the God of Heaven to any edifice, or place on earth (these were the dreams of the heathens). Nor do we pretend, that all worship is confined, or ought to be directed to any one such edifice above the rest; this was peculiar to the narrow economy of the Jews.¹⁴¹

He also emphasised 'the solemnity of the dedication' and that it was 'free from extravagances of superstition and enthusiasm'.¹⁴²

Ministers defended the Anglican order by attacking the Catholic ritual of consecration as well as criticising the stance of the Dissenters. According to Zachary Pearce, additions had been made to the practices of the Early Church which 'are still practis'd among the papists on this occasion'. He argued that 'it is a science almost to be expert at the form of consecrating a church among them, so many are the ceremonies of it: And they so useless, nay so destructive of true devotion ... they can not produce any defence of them, but what is as ridiculous as the ceremonies themselves and the whole Roman Church cannot excuse the follies committed at the opening of every particular church among them'.¹⁴³

Although Joseph Trapp was reluctant to respond directly to the 'scoffs' and 'wicked and blasphemous expressions' levelled by dissenters, other ministers did defend the practice.¹⁴⁴ Broughton sought 'to expose the gross errors of those Enthusiasts' who condemned the consecration of churches 'together with most other external duties of our religion, and trodden

down the strongest bulwarks of piety, while they made the loudest pretensions to it'.¹⁴⁵ They challenged the objection to having a designated place for worship of 'some late sectaries, who believe all places alike'.¹⁴⁶ Zachary Pearce similarly attacked 'the objections of those Deists and Libertines', arguing that 'this pretended aversion of theirs to settling a place where to worship him, arises from an indisposition to worship him any where, or rather a resolution to worship him no where'.¹⁴⁷

Through these consecration sermons, the Anglican clergy attempted to present a balanced approach that distanced themselves from the ceremonies associated with the Catholic Church together with the perceived popish used by Laud, while also defending their position from what they regarded as the extremism of the Dissenters. The sermons defended the consecration of places of worship, it gave them a legitimacy and status which was not shared by the newly-established meeting-houses.

VI. Conclusion

Although the 1712 form of consecration, and the subsequent revised version of 1715, emerged as a result of the political tensions and procedural impasse that disrupted Convocation in the early eighteenth century, the measure needs to be considered in a much broader religious context. Following the Toleration Act and the registration of Dissenting meeting-houses, parish churches ceased to be the only places where Protestant services could be held. For the Anglican establishment, the consecration and dedication of parish churches for worship underlined their superiority over what were characterised as mean and secular meeting-houses. It was a distinction that was robustly challenged by non-conformists who pointed to the popish character of consecration rites which defined these churches as places of worship.

In the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century, the Anglican Church responded to this criticism it faced by reforming the liturgy of consecration. The ceremonial character of Andrewes' liturgy had been discredited, particularly through its association with Laud's consecration of St Katherine Cree. The orders of 1712 and 1715 therefore represented a significantly pared back liturgy; they retained some aspects of Andrewes' service but sought to eradicate its ceremonial and popish overtones. Alongside these liturgical reforms, the historical and legal precedents for consecration were established in various works. In particular, the sermons preached at the inauguration or reopening of parish churches and chapels covered a range of themes, including the divine presence and appropriate conduct expected of the congregants. They also provided an opportunity for ministers to emphasise the purpose of the act of consecration in establishing a place of worship, which gave parish churches a legitimacy that the meeting-houses lacked.

The failure of either the 1712 or 1715 orders to become recognised as official orders of consecration in the Church of England, meant that there was continued uncertainty into the late nineteenth century regarding the appropriate form for consecrating churches and chapels.¹⁴⁸ By default, the bishops retained the licence to employ what they regarded as the most appropriate form of consecration, just as White Kennett had advocated. Nonetheless, the early eighteenth-century reformed orders devised by Convocation came to be widely used and underscored the status of the parish church over the meeting-house as a liturgically defined place of worship.

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- ¹ See Andrew Spicer, “‘God will have a house’: Sacred Space and Rites of Consecration in early Seventeenth Century England’ in Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (eds), *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 207–30.
- ² Ibid.; J. Wickham Legg (ed.), *English Orders for Consecrating Churches in the Seventeenth Century*, Henry Bradshaw Society 41 (London, 1911).
- ³ Howard Colvin, ‘Introduction’, in E.G.W. Bill (ed.), *The Queen Anne churches: a catalogue of the papers in Lambeth Palace Library of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches in London and Westminster, 1711–1759* (London, 1979), ix–xxi; M.H. Port (ed.), *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: the Minute Books 1711–27. A Calendar*, London Record Society 40 (London, 1986).
- ⁴ Thomas Lathbury, *A History of the Convocation of the Church of England from the Earliest Period to the year 1742* (London, 1853), 444–45.
- ⁵ *The Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation upon Her Majesty’s Gracious Messages and Letters sent to the Convocation ...* (London, 1713), 25;
- ⁶ Thomas Lewis, *An Historical Essay upon the Consecration of Churches* (London, 1719).
- ⁷ See Ralph Stevens, *Protestant Pluralism. The Reception of the Toleration Act, 1689–1720* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018).
- ⁸ Stevens, *Protestant Pluralism*, 19, 131–39; John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (London, 1991), 378.
- ⁹ Lewis, *An Historical Essay upon the Consecration of Churches*, iii.
- ¹⁰ Gerald L. Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation: Canterbury*, 10 vols (Woodbridge, 2005–6), X, 173.
- ¹¹ Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation: Canterbury*, X, 68, 254–55.
- ¹² G.V. Bennett, ‘The Convocation of 1710: An Anglican Attempt at Counter-Revolution’, in *Councils and Assemblies Studies in Church History* 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 311–19.
- ¹³ *The Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation, upon Her Majesty’s Gracious Messages and Letter sent to Convocation. Being the Substance of a Report drawn up by a Committee of the Lower House, Brought into it, and Received by it, July 1 1713* (London, 1713); [Charles Trimnell], *An Answer to a Pamphlet entituled The Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation. Wherein the great unfairness of that Account is laid open, not only from the Books of the Upper, but even from those of the Lower House* (London, 1714).
- ¹⁴ Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England*, 380–82

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- 15 *Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation*, 37–38; Lathbury, *A History of Convocation*, 418; G.V. Bennett, *White Kennett, 1660–1728. Bishop of Peterborough* (London: SPCK, 1957), 82–83
- 16 See Bryan D. Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason. Worship and Sacraments in England and Scotland 1662–c. 1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 7–12.
- 17 [Edmund Gibson], *Synodus anglicana: or, The constitution and proceedings of an English convocation* (London, 1702), Appendix, 106–7; Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, VIII, 316, X, 165–66.
- 18 Letter of Dr Robert Skinner, Bishop of Oxford to Dr Gilbert Sheldon, Bishop of London, 26 June 1662. Bodleian Library, Tanner MSS XLVIII, f. 14.
- 19 [Gibson], *Synodus anglicana*, Appendix, 116–18; Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, VIII, 335, 337–38, X, 165–66.
- 20 Letter of Gilbert Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury to William Paul, Bishop of Oxford, 15 March 1665/6. Bodleian Library, MS Add. C 308, f. 58.
- 21 Wickham Legg (ed.), *English Orders for Consecrating Churches*, 237, 365; John Wordsworth, *On the rite of consecration of churches, especially in the Church of England* (s.l., 1899), 28.
- 22 *A Form of consecration or dedication of churches and chappels together with what may be used in the restauration of ruined churches and expiation of churches desecrated or prophan'd* (Dublin, 1666); F.R. Bolton, *The Caroline Tradition of the Church of Ireland with particular reference to Bishop Jeremy Taylor* (London: SPCK, 1958), 251–320.
- 23 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*
- 24 *Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation*, 38.
- 25 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, X, 173.
- 26 [Trimnell], *An Answer to a Pamphlet*, 39.
- 27 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, X, 173.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 344.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 181–84.
- 30 Edmund Hickerlingill, *Essays concerning* I. *Excommunications in times of popery.* II. *Canon-laws and ecclesiastical tyranny.* III. *Excommunications in these times.* IV. *The writ De excommunicato capiendo.* V. *Sacrilege, Consecrating Churches, and Baptizing Bells.* VI. *Absolutions and excommunications, as meer politick tools, ...* VII. *Probate of wills and administrations, and Spiritual Courts* (London, s.d.). The work is undated but references to convocation suggest that it is later than the proposed date of 1706 or 1707. There was a disagreement between the houses of convocation about the humble address to the Queen in December 1710–January 1711 and they began to consider the consecration of churches in April 1712.
- 31 *Proceedings of the Lower House of Convocation*, 25.

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- 32 Lambeth Palace Library, Con. IX/4 Convocation Papers, 1697–1714, ff. 98–117; Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, X, 192–200, 202, 205.
- 33 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, X, 206.
- 34 TNA, SP 34/21, f. 130.
- 35 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, X, 209, 211.
- 36 TNA, PC 1/2, f. 226; SP 34/37, f. 137.
- 37 Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation*, XI, 61, 62.
- 38 *Ibid.*, XI, 65.
- 39 *Ibid.*, XI, 152, 154.
- 40 *Ibid.*, XI, 161–64, 173–76, 236–41.
- 41 See Norman Sykes, *William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1657–1737*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), I, 141–49.
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