Title: The Ecclesiastical Identities of Puritan and Nonconformist Clergy, 1640-1672

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Abstract: This thesis is a study in the evolving ecclesiastical identities of the Puritan/Nonconformist clergy between 1640 and 1672. It will supplement the historiographical definition of Nonconformity and argue that a shift towards a 'soft' denominational identity more accurately represents Restoration Nonconformity. It will show how particular ecclesiastical tendencies crystallised in the 1640s as Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Baptist identities. However it will demonstrate that individual ministerial identities were not fixed. Clerical identities shifted and blended, adapting to the circumstances within the Puritan/Nonconformist movement as well as those forced upon them from without. The demarcations between Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists were often blurred. Using data gathered from a Nonconformist ministerial database the thesis will substantiate an observable tendency during the Restoration for some former Presbyterians to shift towards a Congregationalist/Baptist identity. It will provide evidence that, in the absence of a classis system, many pure Presbyterians progressed to a Presbyterian/Congregationalist or even Baptist identity as documented by the 1672 licenses. It will track the evolution of Nonconformist ministers by way of dated identity markers based on primary source self-identification including: attestations, confessions, trier, classis, and ejection records, clergy associations, and ministerial licenses. It will discuss a variety of possible motivational factors allowing for observable clerical identity migration across denominational lines. These include an educational emphasis on an irenic view of ecclesiology, intermittent cooperation during the Commonwealth and Protectorate, the formation of ecumenical pastoral associations and the enforcement of penal laws charging ministers with sedition should they not conform. In addition, this thesis raises questions about Edmund Calamy’s list of ejected ministers and the 1669 Episcopal Returns, both of which lead historians to underestimate the number of nonconformist ministers active during the Restoration era, which in turn complicates the assessment of ecclesiastical identities, thereby creating a distorted picture of Nonconformity in the Restoration.

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The English clergy wore (or were meant to wear) traditional vestments, including the surplice and cope, whereas most other Reformed clergy wore plain academic robe. When the next wave of Puritan agitation arrived in the 1570s, it was bolder and more far-reaching. Once again, though, it came from within the establishment, as a Cambridge divinity professor, Thomas Cartwright, gave a series of lectures calling for the government of the church to be remodelled along the lines of the New Testament church. Puritans, dissenters and nonconformists now became the establishment, and they were determined to remake the Church of England. This is a vital point, easily missed. exercised the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the crown, and passed acts requiring that Parliament be held every three years and that the king's chief minister be executed. The Puritan government – initially governed by the Long Parliament from 1640 to 1648, followed by the Rump Parliament from 1648 to 1653, and later led by Cromwell [21] as Lord Protector from 1653 to 1658 – ushered in a very restrictive era called the "Puritan Revolution" (or "the Cromwellian Persecution" [22]). In 1640, Cromwell was a member of Parliament from Cambridge and from the beginning he was a firebrand, taking up extreme positions - he was an outspoken critic of the Bishops and one of the first to call for the established church to be pulled up "roots and branches". In a book titled Shakespeare, Puritan and Recusant, published in 1897, author Thomas Carter makes a convincing argument that the apparent troubles brought on the Shakspeare family beginning around 1576 were due neither to Catholicism nor debt, but to John Shakspeare's adherence to the radical Protestant line. In other words, John Shakspeare was what in the 1590s would be described as nonconformist or dissident. In other words, he was the opposite of what we've been told. Although this may leave a few problems unresolved, it makes a lot more sense than the Catholic theory.