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Brett Usher. *William Cecil and Episcopacy, 1559-1577.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. xix + 246 pp. $84.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7546-0834-9.

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The Making of Elizabethan Bishops

As an Associate Editor of Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Brett Usher oversaw all the entries for the Elizabethan hierarchy, a task for which he was well fitted through his own research. He has already challenged the usual assumption that the queen was opposed to clerical marriage *per se* and disliked the elevation of married clergy to the episcopal bench.[1] Here he approaches the religious settlement of 1559 and the construction of a national Protestant church through the techniques of prosopography. Who were the men who served as bishops under Elizabeth as Supreme Governor–what was their education, outlook, and previous experience? How were they chosen, and who were the patrons who helped them into office, when others, apparently equally well-qualified, were passed over or in some cases declined to serve? Usher follows the pioneering work of Felicity Heal in focusing on financial administration rather than on doctrine or the politics of preaching. He has exploited the Exchequer Composition Books (E334 in the British National Archives at Kew) and the accompanying E337 Plea Rolls. These key documents record the complex financial negotiations between a man's emergence as a bishop-elect (after the queen signed and sealed the conge d'elire empowering a cathedral chapter to "elect" him, a mere formality) and his subsequent installment as one of the bench of twenty-six English and Welsh diocesan bishops in the House of Lords. One detailed appendix gives a comprehensive summary of the transactions between the Exchequer and the thirty-nine men who became bishops between 1559 and 1577. A second appendix attempts to assess the Crown's revenues during episcopal vacancies, when diocesan income went to the Exchequer, and from first-fruits, the royal tax levied when a bishop moved into his new diocese. From these apparently narrow fiscal sources, much can be learned.

The approach pays off exceptionally well in the early chapters analyzing the 1559 settlement and its aftermath. To Sir William Cecil's dismay, it emerged that only one of Mary Tudor's bishops, the obscure ex-monk Anthony Kitchin of Llandaff, was willing to serve Elizabeth. This made for many problems, since the government needed to install bishops in dioceses as quickly as possible. The new Protestant church would have little hope of success in the localities if it lacked leaders. Moreover, the bishops were supporters of the young queen not merely in their clerical capacity, but also as members of the powerful county and regional landed elites whose role in upholding the incoming regime would be vital. Detailed scrutiny of Cecil's three successive lists of possible bishops, written between June and October 1559, reveals a complex interplay of factors. Elizabeth herself apparently refused to accept some of Cecil's candidates, including the great Bible translator and Edwardian bishop Miles Coverdale; his strong links with Geneva probably reminded her of John Knox and his ill-timed *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.* Coverdale remained jobless until given a London parish in 1564. The queen's choice for Archbishop of Canterbury was Matthew Parker, a former chaplain of her mother Anne Boleyn, but he proved so reluctant that he even penned a letter of refusal. Other men on

Cecil's lists followed Parker in striking a tough bargain. They forced the Crown to give up its hopes of using the 1559 Act of Exchange to transfer valuable diocesan properties to the Exchequer in return for the grant of much less lucrative sources of spiritual income. In addition, their hesitation in accepting appointment made it clear that the Crown could not realistically hope to press for heavy payments of first-fruits. Lord Treasurer Winchester was forced to moderate his harsh fiscal policies and his chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Walter Mildmay, devised a more conciliatory approach to the new bishops. All these negotiations make it plain that Winthrop Hudson's influential thesis that Cecil smoothly wheeled an intellectual group of his old university friends, the "Athenians," into positions of ecclesiastical power, must be discarded.[2] The successful candidates included too many Oxford graduates, too many lawyers, and too many men who gained office after Cecil's preferred choices had failed to secure royal approval, to be grouped together as a Cecilian "Cambridge connection." In addition, Lord Robert Dudley, future earl of Leicester, was emerging in 1560 as the queen's favorite and his patronage seems to have been more important than Cecil's in several significant appointments.

However, if there was no Cambridge connection, Usher argues that Cecil had a coherent policy in dealing with the episcopal bench. He believes that the principal secretary was seeking further evangelical reform, and hoping to remodel the English church on continental lines with salaried superintendents rather than bishops. It is true that men in Cecil's circle devised such plans, and Cecil himself commended something similar to the Scottish Lords of the Congregation. His highly educated wife Mildred was a more radical Protestant than he was, and it is a pity that Usher never mentions her considerable influence, particularly when emphasizing Cecil's immediate sympathy with Protestant married clergy and their growing families. Cecil's high view of marriage was intimately linked to his high esteem for his own wife.[3] However, the Exchequer material on which the book is based can only be used inferentially, not directly, to point to Cecil's views. Leading authorities such as Patrick Collinson have read Cecil's position very differently. So it is a pity that the properly cautious treatment of Cecil's position in the early chapters tends to give way later to assumptions that these were his clearcut objectives.

Usher promises a second volume entitled *Lord Burghley and Episcopacy, 1577-1598*, which will presumably amplify his thesis. This first book is a significant contribution to our knowledge in rewriting much of the standard account of the Elizabethan settlement and its aftermath, one of the key periods in English history. It immediately becomes required reading for all historians of the Elizabethan church, and the sequel will be eagerly awaited.

Notes

[1]. Brett Usher, "Queen Elizabeth and Mrs Bishop," in*The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) [ed. note: reviewed on H-Albion, `http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=261291082026922.`]

[2]. W. S. Hudson, *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of religion of 1559* (Durham: University of North Carolina, 1990).

[3]. Pauline Croft, "Mildred, Lady Burghley: the Matriarch," in *Patronage, Culture and Power: the Early Cecils 1558-1612*, ed. Pauline Croft (London: Yale, 2002). [ed. note: reviewed on H-Albion, `http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=254771088656381.`]