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English Arminianism and the Parish Clergy:
A study of London and its environs c. 1620-1640

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the impact of English Arminianism among the parish clergy of London and its environs during the period from c. 1620-c.1640. It looks at the extent to which English Arminianism permeated a sample of clergy and the role of those clergy in promulgating reform throughout the church during the late 1620s and 1630s. In this respect it is less concerned with the operation of diocesan machinery and policy than the extent to which individual clergy related to the church's policies in the period.

Drawing upon data assembled for a sample of 237 parish clergy a comparison is made of the social, educational and career patterns of English Arminian clergy with the whole sample. In general it is concluded that the English Arminians exhibited several distinguishing characteristics. They can be seen as having a distinct professional identity in terms of education and career attainment. They held certain views that distinguished them from the majority of clergy in this study. They were also active in implementing a distinct set of ecclesiastical policies.

Although the rise of English Arminianism has generally been studied from the perspective of the universities, government policy and the church hierarchy, it had a significant impact on parish clergy and within parish communities. This is developed in two streams. Firstly, the published works of the clergy are studied to determine the extent to which a discernible line of 'Arminian' thought can be identified. Secondly, the impact of reforms are traced through the beautification of churches and ceremonial reform, and through the involvement of English Arminian clergy in promoting reforms of parish government and tithes.

English Arminians sought to revitalise the English Church as a national inclusive body, but under a minority banner. In social and professional terms they were drawn from too narrow a circle to have broad appeal. The theological basis of their reforms directly confronted the ideas that had taken root in the English Church since the Elizabethan reformation. Their ceremonialism and clericalism challenged the confidence of a protestant laity, and their efforts to rebuild the power base of the church threatened to undermine lay social and economic power.