

The Irregular Ordination of John Donne

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Documents in the Archives of the Diocese of London and of Cambridge University shed new light on John Donne's ordination to the priesthood of the Church of England. These documents—three in number—at once clarify and complicate our understanding of the events of early 1615 as a result of which Donne was, in rapid succession, made Deacon and Priest of the Church of England and awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Cambridge University.¹ Donne's ordination turns out to have been highly irregular; proceeding at the direction of King James, it was in violation of the Canons of the Church of England and customary church practice in at least three ways. The circumstances of Donne's ordination thus demonstrate more clearly the pivotal nature of James's role in the shaping of Donne's career in the ordained ministry and his ability as Supreme Governor of the Church of England to influence the behavior of church officials. Yet, as it turns out, James's efforts on Donne's behalf were not without opposition; thus, we will also have occasion to notice the limits of royal power in the early seventeenth century as well as the considerable scope of its operations.

The evidence now suggests that upon Donne's acceding in early 1615 to James's long-standing desire to have Donne pursue a career in the ordained ministry, James put into place a four-stage plan that included, in rapid succession, Donne's ordination, his being named a Royal

¹In working with these documents I am grateful to Zola Packman, North Carolina State University, for translations from early modern Latin; to Stephen May, Emory University, for help with transcriptions from secretarial hand; and to Diarmaid MacCulloch, Oxford University, for help with conventions of religious language in the early Stuart period.

Chaplain, his being granted an honorary DD degree from Cambridge University, and his being given a significant job in the Church of England, specifically the Deanship of a major cathedral. The key element in this plan was, as we will see, the King's long-scheduled visit to Cambridge University, set for early March 1615, in the context of which the King would fulfill his promise. At least initially, little seemed to stand in the way of James's design, though opposition quickly developed within the hierarchy of the Church of England that would delay for six years the completion of James's original plan for launching Donne's clerical career.

Certain facts about Donne's ordination and entry into the professional practice of priesthood seem relatively clear. He was ordained deacon and priest on 23 January 1615, by John King, Bishop of London. He was almost immediately named one of King James's Royal Chaplains, and six weeks later he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by Cambridge University. Yet his first official employment in the Church of England did not come until nearly a year later, when he was named rector of the Church of St. John the Baptist in Keyston, in Huntingdonshire, near Cambridge, on 16 January 1616. He was then named the rector of St. Nicholas, in Sevenoaks, just southeast of London, in Kent, on 7 July 1616. He was then named the Reader in Divinity (or Preacher) at Lincoln's Inn in London on 24 October of that year.

During this time, Donne and his family continued to live in the property rented to them by Sir Robert Drury in Drury Lane, not leaving that residence until Donne was named Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in November 1621 and subsequently moved with his family into the Deanery on the south side of Paul's Churchyard. Donne had, according to Bald,² thought earlier in the fall of 1621 that he would become Dean of Salisbury Cathedral and, in anticipation of that, had resigned his post at Keyston as of 20 October 1621, but when that post did not become vacant, he accepted the appointment at St. Paul's upon the promotion of the previous dean, Valentine Cary, to the post of Bishop of Exeter.

²R. C. Bald's *John Donne, A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) remains the indispensable guide to the details of Donne's life. See especially his chronology, pp. 537–546. For his discussion of Donne's possible candidacy for the deanship of Salisbury Cathedral, see pp. 386–388.

Donne resigned his Readership at Lincoln's Inn in February 1622, but was appointed rector of Church of St. Edmund or St. James, in Blunham, in Bedfordshire, on 18 April of that year.

There are two traditional interpretations of how and in what spirit Donne entered the priesthood. The older one, represented by Izaak Walton in his "Life of Dr. Donne," is that it came as the result of a slowly evolving sense of vocation on Donne's part, urged on by King James and other members of the Court, in which everyone from King James to the court, the clergy, and the academy delighted:

[T]he King descended to a persuasion, almost to a solicitation, of [Donne] to enter into sacred Orders: which, though he then denied not, yet he deferred it for almost three years.

And [finally] declaring his intentions to his dear friend Dr. King, then Bishop of London, a man famous in his generation, and no stranger to Mr. Donne's abilities,—for he had been Chaplain to the Lord Chancellor, at the time of Mr. Donne's being his Lordship's Secretary—that reverend man did receive the news with much gladness; and, after some expressions of joy, and a persuasion to be constant in his pious purpose, he proceeded with all convenient speed to ordain him first Deacon, and then Priest not long after. Now the English Church had gained a second St. [Augustine].³

The second tradition, perhaps best represented by Bald, is that Donne accepted ordination on pragmatic grounds, seeking, with James's support, financial security through a career in the ordained ministry of the Church of England after repeated efforts to gain secular preferment had failed. Indeed, as Bald points out, Donne had originally agreed to ordination in 1613 but delayed any action on his decision because he was encouraged by the Earl of Somerset to believe that a court appointment might be secured at last for him. Only when all Donne's efforts to secure a secular appointment had failed, as had become clear in the fall of 1614,

³Izaak Walton, "The Life of Dr. John Donne," in *Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 46–48.

did he return to his resolve of 1613 and tell the King that he was prepared to accept ordination.⁴

To those who are not purists in assessing matters of human motivation, however,⁵ these two narratives are not completely incompatible. One element they have in common is the role of James I in encouraging Donne to seek orders, for, as Donne wrote to his father-in-law late in 1614, he had "received from the King as good allowance and encouragement to pursue my purpose as I could desire."⁶ The question to be addressed in this essay concerns precisely the nature of that "allowance and encouragement," that is, what, specifically, James had in mind doing to launch Donne's career in the church once he had agreed to take it up.

James clearly had it in his power, for example, to appoint Donne a Royal Chaplain, a post Donne held from shortly after his ordination in 1615 until his death.⁷ This appointment opened to Donne other forms of employment; those appointed as Royal Chaplains could, in addition to their regular jobs, or "cures," hold a plurality of benefices, able to receive appointments to two other parish positions in the church.⁸ Donne received the first of these, as we have noted, when he was appointed by James to be the rector of the Church of St. John the Baptist in Keyston, in Huntingdonshire, near Cambridge, on 16 January 1616. The second was added shortly thereafter when Donne was appointed by the Lord Chancellor to be rector of St. Nicholas, in Sevenoaks, in Kent.

Donne makes it clear that James's promises involved a career in the Church, that is, a position of gainful employment and not just of

⁴Bald, p. 293.

⁵As might be said of those who believe Donne's decision to enter the priesthood of the Church of England represents an act of bad faith, including John Carey, in *John Donne: Life, Mind & Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), and P. M. Oliver, in *Donne's Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (New York: Longman, 1997).

⁶Quoted in Bald, p. 293.

⁷In fact Donne was exercising one of his responsibilities as Royal Chaplain when he preached his last sermon, his "Deaths Duell" sermon, on 25 February 1631, in the Royal Chapel at Whitehall.

⁸Royal Chaplains, in order to qualify for plurality of benefices, needed to have "letters under the sign and seal of the King" to document their status. But no formal record of Donne's appointment has yet to emerge from the Archives of the Chapel Royal.

religious authority. Yet neither of Donne's first two appointments in the Church of England provided substantial incomes, however, with the second yielding less than £14 a year.⁹ The curates who actually conducted worship services and delivered pastoral care in these parishes had to be paid out of these livings, reducing their value even further. Even the post of Reader at Lincoln's Inn only brought Donne £60 a year.¹⁰ More in keeping with Donne's expectations would be the post of dean of a cathedral, either that of Salisbury for which we know he was considered early in 1621 or of St. Paul's Cathedral which he finally was awarded in November of that year.¹¹

Since Donne clearly expected that his ordination would result in financial relief as well as opportunities for professional practice, it seems appropriate to note that all the well-paying full-time jobs at the King's disposal for which we know Donne was considered were cathedral deanships and to observe that over six years passed between Donne's ordination in 1615 and his finally being appointed to a deanship. We need to ask if there were any such possibilities on offer earlier in Donne's career. Here it is worth noting that the subject of a cathedral deanship for Donne emerges in one account of the controversy surrounding Donne's being awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Cambridge University in March 1615. The King arrived in Cambridge on 7 March; there are two accounts of the story, and they conflict. The first is from Walton, which continues the happy tone of his description of Donne's ordination:

That Summer, in the very same month in which he entered into sacred Orders, and was made the King's Chaplain, his Majesty then going his Progress, was entreated to receive an entertainment in the University of Cambridge: and Mr. Donne attending his Majesty at that time, his Majesty was

⁹Figures from Bald, p. 317. This sum of money would be worth less than \$5,000 in today's money, according to historical money calculations conducted at <<http://www.measuringworth.com/>>.

¹⁰About \$16,000 a year in today's money, according to <<http://www.measuringworth.com/>>.

¹¹Chamberlain speculated at one point that Donne was to become the Dean of Gloucester Cathedral, yet another instance of Donne's being linked to ecclesiastical appointments at this specific level. Quoted in Bald, p. 371.

pleased to recommend him to the University, to be made Doctor in Divinity: Doctor Harsnett—after Archbishop of York—was then Vice-Chancellor, proposed it to the University, who presently assented, and expressed a gladness, that they had such an occasion to entitle him to be theirs.¹²

The veracity of Walton's account is of course undermined immediately by his mistake in dating—Donne was ordained in January and the King went on Progress to Cambridge in March, not in the "Summer," and not "in the very same month" of Donne's ordination. We thus turn to the second account, from a letter of John Chamberlain; it describes a very different scenario. Reporting on the King's visit to Cambridge and his request that various honorary degrees be awarded, Chamberlain writes:

Almost all the courtiers went foorth masters of art at the Kings being there, but few or no Doctors. . . . The vice chauncellor and universitie were exceeding strict in that point, and refused many importunities of great men . . . neither the Kings intreatie for John Dun wold prevayle, yet they are Threatned with a mandate which yf yt come yt is like they will obey but they are resolved to geve him such a blow withal that he were better be without yt.

Indeed the Bishop of Chichester,¹³ Vice Chancellor, hath been very stiff and carried himself very preemptory that way, wherein he is not much to be blamed, being a matter of more consequence than at first was imagined.¹⁴

Notice the differences—in Walton's account, Samuel Harsnett, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, is "glad" to help Donne to the degree; in Chamberlain's account, the Vice-Chancellor is "exceeding strict on that point and refused many importunities of great men" in opposing the awarding of Donne's degree.

¹²Walton, p. 50.

¹³Samuel Harsnett.

¹⁴Chamberlain, *The Chamberlain Letters: A Selection of the Letters of John Chamberlain Concerning Life in England from 1597 to 1626*, ed. Elizabeth McClure Thomson (New York: Putnam, 1965), pp. 164-165.

Perhaps Harsnett's eventual promotion to the post of Archbishop of York in 1629 softened his views of Donne's candidacy in retrospect; in any case, Donne's degree was finally awarded but not until after the King and his party had left Cambridge. Chamberlain writes, on 30 March, "John Donne and one Cheke went out Doctors at Cambridge with much ado after our coming away, by the King's express mandate, though the Vice-Chancellor and some other of the heads called them openly *filios noctis et tenebriones*,¹⁵ that sought thus to come in at the window when there was a fair gate open." I have yet to be able to determine the meaning of the reference to "a fair gate" being open to Donne for a degree, unless, of course, the Vice-Chancellor is suggesting that Donne could have gotten his degree from Cambridge without a fuss had he applied through proper channels rather than through having the King insist he be given one.

In any case, according to Chamberlain's account, the awarding of Donne's degree was the King's idea which was met with serious resistance from the university's administration and faculty (a resistance that turned out, according to Chamberlain, to be "a matter of more consequence than at first was imagined"), requiring, finally, that "express mandate" from the King for it to be granted. There is also the matter of the promised "blow" the Cambridge folks are "resolved to geve him" if the King forces their hand by issuing a Royal Mandate ordering them to award the degree. I assume that the "him" referred to is Donne, since to write of giving the King a "blow" might open Chamberlain to a charge of treason had his comments become known to the wrong persons. If the "him" does refer to Donne, Chamberlain suggests an arena in which a "blow" might be delivered, specifically involving future employment of Donne in the Church, as dean of a cathedral. Chamberlain writes, "But the worst is that Donne had gotten a reversion of the Deanery of Canterbury, if such grants could be lawful, whereby he hath purchased himself a great deal of envy, that a man of his sort should seek *per saltem*¹⁶ to intercept such a place from so many more worthy and ancient divines."

The post of Dean of Canterbury Cathedral was not vacant at this time, although its current occupant, Thomas Neville, Dean from 1597–1615, would die later that year, on 2 May 1615. Neville was succeeded as

¹⁵"Shadows and sons of night."

¹⁶"At a leap."

dean not by Donne, as we know, but by Charles Fotherby, who was dean from 1615–1619 and who in turn was succeeded by in 1619 by John Boys. Bald thinks that Chamberlain here has picked up a specious rumor, for “no such grant was, or could ever have been made,”¹⁷ yet Bald agrees with Chamberlain that Donne’s entry into the Church was viewed with “suspicion,” with the feeling that Donne was using the arts of the courtier to “Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold.”

Given the complexity of interpretations of what happened relative to Donne’s career in the Church during his and James’s visit to Cambridge in 1615, this is a good time to turn to the record of these events to see what light they might shed. Indeed, one of the points made by Bald is that, as far as Bald knew, no record existed of Donne’s having been awarded a degree, honorary or otherwise, from Cambridge University. According to one contemporary account, Donne’s degree was awarded by Trinity College, but no record of it exists in Trinity’s Archives.

Happily, the record of Donne’s degree was always where it should have been, in volume E of Cambridge’s Grace Books, the official lists of degrees awarded by the university,¹⁸ on page 220, in the left column of names, about two-thirds of the way down the page, under the heading “Degrees in Theology made by the King.” Four names are inscribed: those of Young, Cheeke, Donne, and Derham.¹⁹ Three points need to be made. One is that Chamberlain’s account is correct, though partial; he mentions Donne and Cheke as having received doctorates but does not

¹⁷Bald, p. 309.

¹⁸This record of Donne’s degree in Cambridge University’s Archives was exhibited at the University Library in 1972 as part of an exhibition of materials in honor of the 400th anniversary of Donne’s birth and was duly reprinted in the catalogue of that exhibition. For an image of this page from the Grace Books, see fig. 1.

¹⁹Ckeke was, according to *DNB*, William Cheeke, BA Magdalene College, Oxford, better known as the author of several books of Latin, Greek, and English anagrams. Young was perhaps John Young, the son of James’s tutor and a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College who did receive a DD from Cambridge in this time frame and was named dean of Winchester in 1616. Derham was perhaps Roger Dereham, who—according to the *Alumni Cantabrigienses*—was a Fellow of Peterhouse and rector of several parishes in Leistershire and Cambridgeshire (d. 1638).

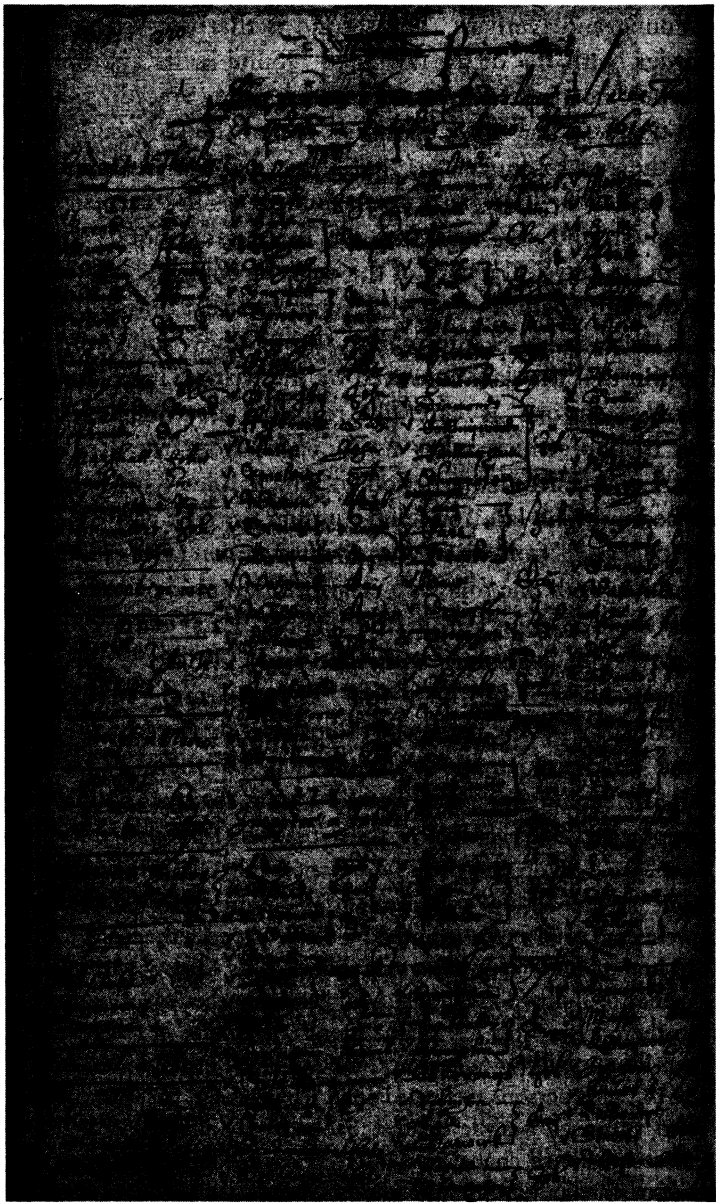


Fig. 1. Page 220 of Cambridge's Grace Book Epsilon (1615). Donne's name appears toward the end of the first column. Image reproduced by the kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

include Young and Derham. The second is that the list itself seems in perfect order, with the degree awarded Donne in its appropriate place, among other doctoral degrees conferred, and preceding the list of Bachelors degrees. The third, of course, is that the University has chosen to reflect the royal connection, that these degrees were “made by the King” and not of the University’s own doing. It is in this designation that the tension around the awarding of Donne’s honorary doctorate is preserved in the physical record of the degree’s being awarded.

With this observation we may be reminded that one value of archival research is the recovery of information through how something is written as well as through the data conveyed by the writing itself. In the case of ordinations, each one is carefully recorded in the Register of the ordaining Bishop, which takes us to pages from the Register of the Bishop of London from the period in which John King was Bishop of London, beginning in late 1614 and running through early 1615.²⁰

These pages are from the *Liber Ordinationum 1578–1628*, the Book of Ordinations; each one follows a clear orthographic pattern that quickly teaches us what to expect from the records. Each entry consists of an opening paragraph beginning with the word “Ordines” inscribed boldly on the page, followed by the words “Diaconi” and “Presbyteri,” again boldly inscribed, with the names of the ordinands in each category, along with some brief information about each of them. The “Ordines” paragraph, in each case, gives details about the ordination ceremony itself. A representative example of these reads as follows:

The sacred and general ordinations immediately following were conferred and celebrated by the reverend father lord John bishop of London in the great chapel or its oratory within his manor of Fulham in County Middlesex, on the day of our lord in the present fifth day of the month of March in the year of our lord according to the reckoning of the Church of England 1614, with persons to be ordained having been first examined and approved on the nearest Sabbath day preceding in the aforementioned chapel by Master William Peirce, professor of sacred theology, John and Henry Mason, bachelors of sacred theology, and <> Needham, master of arts, priests assisting the

²⁰For images of these pages, see figs. 2 and 3.

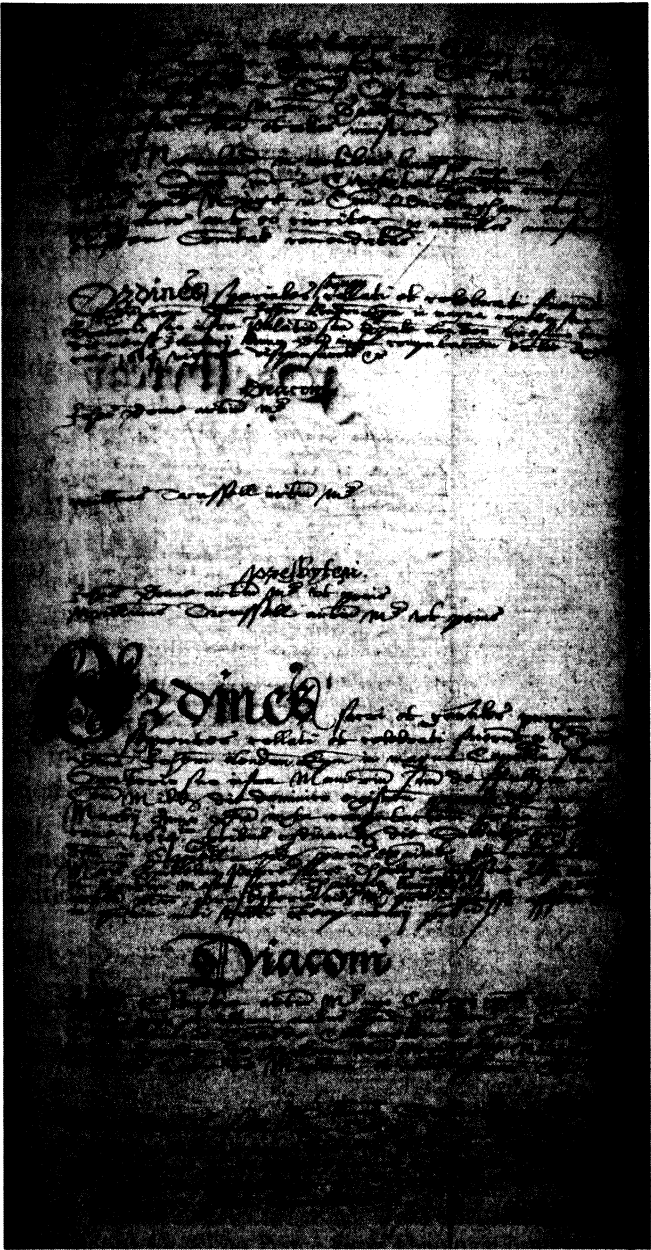


Fig. 2. Page 196 from *Liber Ordinatonium 1578-1628*. Image reproduced courtesy of the Guildhall Library, City of London.

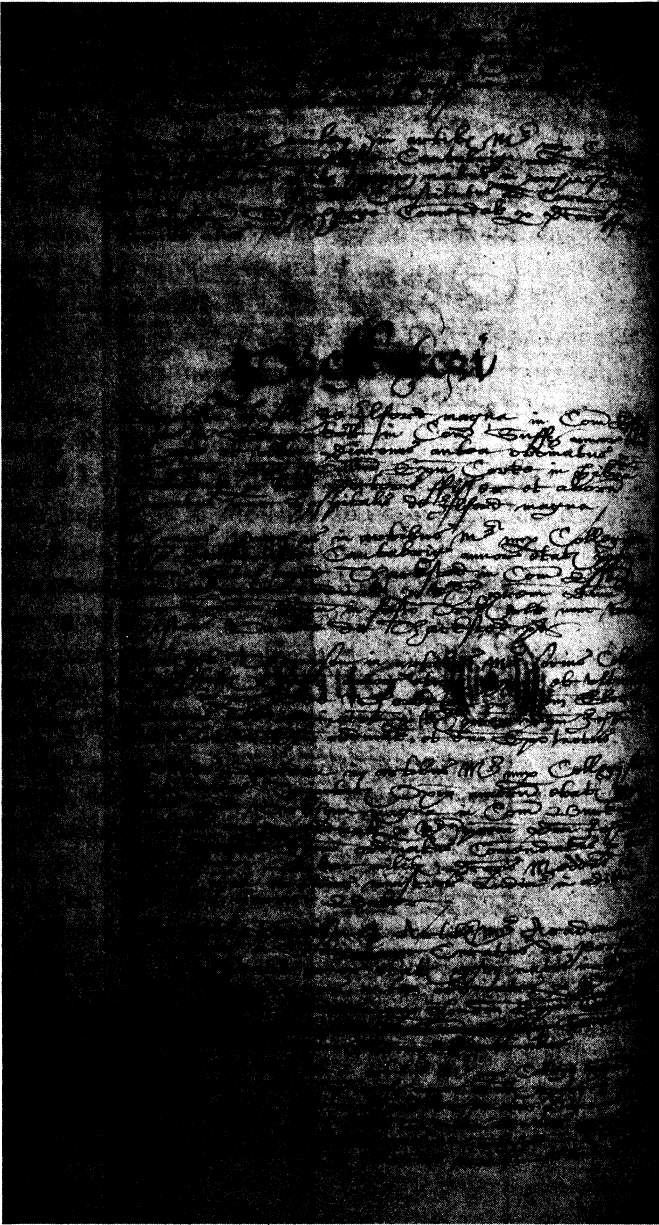


Fig. 3. Page 197 from *Liber Ordinatonium* 1578-1628. Image reproduced courtesy of the Guildhall Library, City of London.

reverend father in the foregoing (examinations) in the presence of me, Robert Kemp, notary public.²¹

Of the ordinands we are told about their origins, their educations, their links both personal and professional to the occasion, and sometimes their future occupations in the church. We are also told that the ordinands passed examinations prior to their ordinations "in the presence of me, Robert Kemp, notary public."

Thus, we are told that John Clerke, ordained deacon on the above-described occasion, held a Master of Arts degree from Christ College, Cambridge, was 25 years of age, had been born at Malden in Essex, and had been appointed as curate of Cold Norton in Essex by "Master Hawden of Malden, Master Wright of Northhampton, and Master Cooke of Malden." We are also told that John Vawer, ordained to the priesthood on 5 March 1615, was 25 years of age "or thereabouts," born at Bristow, held a Master of Arts degree from Oxford, and was "well known to our Lord Bishop."

This pattern is repeated, page after page; it speaks of order, predictability, design. It reflects observation of professional practices and structures established by the Canons of the Church of England and observed year in and year out by bishops and clergy in the regular and ordinary routines of Church life. Among them are the stipulations that ordinations in the Church of England are not to take place when or wherever, but in fact on specified days according to a routine spelled out clearly and emphatically in the Canons. According to Canon 31 of the Constitutions and Canons of 1604, in force when Donne was ordained,

²¹Translation of the following passage: Ordineis sacri et generales proximi sequentes collati et celebrati fuerunt per Resdum premi Dmne Iohem London Epm in magna Capella sive Oratorio suo infra Nlauerium suum de Fulham in Com Midd die dominico existeum quinto die menss Martij anno Dium iuxta computac oem ecclie Anglicane 1614 to partibus ordinandus die Sabbathie prox preteaden in Capella predus [praedictus] prius examinatus et comprobatus et Mrio [Magisterio] Guilelmo Peirce facre Theologie professore Iohen Baccha et Henrico Mason sacre Theologie bacchis et [blank] Needham artium Mro, Presbyteris eids Rxdu pri in permisso assisteum in puntia mei Roberti Kemp notarij pub co.

No Deacons or Ministers be made and ordained, but onely upon the Sundayes immediately following . . . Ember weekes, . . . and that this bee done in the Cathedrall or Parish Church where the Bishop resideth, and in the time of divine Service, in the presence not onely of the Archdeacon, but of the Deane and two Prebendaries at the least.

In 1614–1615, the Ember Weeks were:

September 18–24—Sunday for Ordination September 25
 December 11–17—Sunday for Ordination December 18
 February 27–March 4—Sunday for Ordination March 5
 May 29–June 3—Sunday for Ordination June 4

Further, Canon 32 specifies that

No Bishop shall make any person of what qualities or gifts soever, a Deacon and an Minister, both together upon one day. . . . Not that always every Deacon should be kept from the Ministerie for a whole yeere when the Bishop shall find good cause to the contrary: but that there being now foure times appointed in every yeere for the ordination of Deacons and Ministers, there may ever be some time of trial of their behavior in the office of Deacon, before they bee admitted to the Order of Priesthood.

In other words, Bishop King should have ordained Donne in St. Paul's Cathedral. Donne's ordination to the diaconate should have taken place on Sunday, 5 March 1615; his ordination to the priesthood should have taken place no sooner than 4 June 1615, after he had gone through "some time of trial of [his] behavior in the office of Deacon."

The Bishop of London's Register of Ordinations tells, in the case of Donne, a very different story. On the pages recording the ordinations in the relevant years, beginning with the ordination of 25 September 1614, the pattern we have observed is carefully followed. It is followed for the Register of Ordinands for the ceremony of 18 December 1614, followed, two pages later, with the list of Ordinands for 5 March 1614/15, followed by the list, two pages later, with the comparable list for the ceremony that took place on 4 June 1615. Now, if one looks in the middle of the page, between the section for 18 December and the section

for 5 March, one will see the word “Ordines” again, with a large “O” but in a size and style very different from what goes before it and what follows after it. And, under that timid “Ordines,” one finds the by now familiar words “Diaconi” and “Presbiteri,” again written in a script much smaller than any other examples in the book. Under each heading we find the same two names repeated—“John Donne” and “William Trussell”²²—together with their degrees—“artium Mr”—Master of Arts. And that’s it.

We are told

Special ordinations following were conferred and celebrated by the reverend father lord John, bishop of London, in his great chapel or Oratory within his episcopal palace in London, the twenty-third day of the month of January in the year of our lord, according to the reckoning of the Church of England, 1614, on the strength of a dispensation.²³

“On the strength of a dispensation,” what we are looking at is a break in an organized pattern of recording names of ordinands which should serve as a sign that something unusual is being recorded here.²⁴ Careful attention to the Canons make clear that not one but two things are amiss; the first is that the ceremony took place on a date other than the dates specified by the Canons for ordinations. This is not a Sunday (23 January 1614/15 was a Monday), nor is it the Sunday after the winter Ember week, which in 1614/15 was 5 March. Nor was Donne ordained

²²William Trussell, a gentleman of Middlesex, attended New College, Oxford, and received his BA in 1608 and his MA in 1611. He was later vicar of Milborne Port in Somerset and rector of Weeke in Hants. See *Alumni Oxoniensis*.

²³Ordines speciales sequen collati et celebrati fuerunt per Ri[char]dum prem xum [pmm?] Iohem London[em/um] Epm [Episcopem?] in magna capella sive Tratorio suo infra Palatium suum Epale London vicesimo tertio die menss Ianuarij Anno Dium iuxta computacem eccli [ecclesiasticum?] Anglicane 1614 vigore dispensationis’ &c

²⁴Given the timing of his decision to seek ordination in the fall of 1614, it is unclear to me why he was not ordained deacon with the rest of the regularly scheduled ordinands in 18 December of that year. This is yet one more detail that points to the peculiar character of Donne’s ordination.

in St. Paul's Cathedral; he was ordained in the Chapel of the Bishop's Palace, next door to the Cathedral.

The second thing that is amiss is that Donne was ordained both deacon and priest on the same day, technically a *per saltum* ordination, an ordination "at a leap," to the orders of both deacon and priest on the same occasion, to use the term that Chamberlain repeats in his letter from Cambridge, noted above. Such an ordination was in direct violation of Canon 32, which states that under no circumstances is one to be ordained deacon and priest on the same day, and requires that a period of months—from at least one Ember Week to the next—elapse between ordination to the diaconate and ordination to the priesthood.

The person whose job it was to record ordinations in the Bishop's Register—who was accustomed to doing a grand job with the calligraphy—here recognized that the ordinations of Donne and Trussell were irregular both in their date and in their timing and resisted giving them the same kind of calligraphical treatment he was accustomed to giving people ordained according to the Canons of the Church. One presumes that Donne, together with Trussell, was ordained irregularly at the direction of King James, that he was the source of the "dispensation," that he as Supreme Governor of the Church of England could get around the procedures specified in the Constitution and Canons of the Church if and when he saw fit and if the Bishop was cooperative, as John King clearly was. But at least one someone—Bishop King's scribe—noticed, and recorded his unease in the manner of entering these ordinations into the official Register.

My guess is that Trussell was enlisted to give the occasion more legitimacy. The question must arise, of course, why ordain Donne and Trussell in January, since a regular time for their ordination was on the horizon, coming up in early March, on 5 March to be precise. My suggestion, of course, is that James had a plan for Donne and that plan included James's Progress to Cambridge, scheduled for early March, at which the King would insist that Donne be given an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree, for which he needed to be ordained previously.

But what about employment for his new priest and Chaplain? James had promised Donne that if he would agree to be ordained the King would take care of him. Which brings us back to John Chamberlain's report that Donne had obtained "a reversion of the Deanery of Canterbury," i. e., had been promised that he would be the next Dean of

Canterbury Cathedral. Bald says this not only didn't happen but could not have happened, but several facts add some credence to the rumor. First of all, in March 1615 the current Dean of Canterbury was in Cambridge along with Donne and King James; in fact, he was Thomas Neville, who had been Dean of Canterbury Cathedral since 1597, but who had also served as Master of Trinity College since 1593. James knew Neville; in 1603, Archbishop Whitgift chose Neville to travel to meet James in Scotland and convey to England's new King the united greetings of the clergy of England on his accession.

The existence of an ongoing relationship between James and Neville is supported by the fact that James stayed at Trinity College as a guest of Neville's during his Visitation to Cambridge in 1615; during that period, we are told, Neville kept open house for the royal party at Trinity lodge, extending lavish hospitality. Thus James had every reason to know that Neville was a very sick man in the winter of 1615; the accounts of James's visit to Cambridge say that Neville was prevented by palsy from waiting personally on the King, but before his departure James visited Neville in his apartments, and personally helped Neville to rise from his knees, observing that "he was proud of such a subject." This was perhaps the last time they saw each other, for Neville died at Trinity lodge on 2 May 1615.

Even though it was clear from Neville's health that a new dean of Canterbury Cathedral would need to be appointed soon, James of course did not appoint Donne as dean when they were all together in Cambridge, nor did he appoint Donne to this post when Neville died two months later. He instead appointed one Charles Fotherby, who had been Archdeacon of the Diocese of Canterbury for twenty years—a classic example of a "worthy and ancient divine" whom Donne would have been leaping over had James appointed him to the post instead. James also passed over Donne for this job when it again became vacant in 1619, then appointing one John Boys, another long-time priest of the Church of England. James ultimately gave Donne a plum job—Dean of St. Paul's—but Donne had to wait six years and amass a more substantial resume as a priest—to get it.

James's success—and difficulty—in fulfilling his promise to Donne to help him make his way in the world of the clerical profession suggests both the extent and limitations of royal power in the early seventeenth century. James was able to have Donne ordained on short notice by the

Bishop of London in January 1615 and to name him immediately as a Royal Chaplain. James had more difficulty—though he was ultimately successful—in getting Donne an honorary DD degree from Cambridge, but he had to exercise clear royal authority to get that job done; personal requests by the King and his party were not successful and the King had to issue an official royal mandate to get the University, grudgingly, to award the degree.

One cannot of course rule out the possibility that Bald is right, that Chamberlain in referring to the possibility that James intended Donne for the post at Canterbury was simply reflecting court speculation about the King's plans for Donne in the context of its stay at Trinity College where the current Dean of Canterbury's illness was common knowledge. If so, however, we are left with the problem of reconciling Donne's clear expectation that his complying with James's wishes to be ordained would result in a position in the church sufficiently significant and lucrative to compare favorably with the kinds of posts Donne sought in the secular world and address his financial needs with the fact that such a post did not materialize for Donne until 1621, six long years after his ordination.

Because Donne believed that James would provide for him if he entered the ordained ministry and because the king enabled Donne to be ordained quickly, then appointed him a Royal Chaplain and secured for him the academic credentials for high office in the church, I believe that James did intend Donne for a Deanship, and failed to secure it, at least for the time being. James's mind seems to have been working along these lines, if the career path being followed at the same time by John Young, the son of Peter Young, James's old tutor, is at all instructive. Young's name is, like Donne's, on the Cambridge list of Doctor of Divinity degrees "made by the king," and Young went on to become Dean of Winchester in 1616. Unlike Donne, however, Young had the kind of academic background, with his BD from Sidney Sussex College, not to arouse such objection. The rising tide of ill will created by the King's heavy-handed efforts on Donne's behalf, reflected in the scribe's treatment of Donne's ordination in the official records of the Bishop of London, perhaps including the absence of any record of Donne's appointment as Royal Chaplain, but certainly growing with the reaction of the Cambridge faculty to the King's request for Donne to have an honorary degree in divinity, suggest that Chamberlain is perceptive when

he writes of the envy of Donne's peers and their desire for retaliation, to "give him such a blow withal that he were better be without yt."

The process of stopping Donne's appointment as Dean of Canterbury may have started with the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, who at the time was Samuel Harsnett, who like the Dean of Trinity College was double-dipping, for he was also serving at the time as the Bishop of Chichester. According to Chamberlain, Harsnett was very upset at the King's demand that Cambridge give Donne the honorary DD. His church connections may have enabled him to maneuver so as to block the King's intentions to complete his plans for Donne by appointing him Dean of Canterbury Cathedral upon the (surely long-anticipated) demise of Dean Neville.

It is certainly the case that the faculty and administration at Cambridge did not forget the King's effort to manipulate their system for granting degrees. The Archives of Cambridge University contain a fascinating letter from James to the University which is the third document I want to put before you; it does not seem to be in any collection of James's letters that I have been able to consult.²⁵ Dated 17 December 1624 (ten years after the King's mandate to grant Donne his DD degree, and "given under our signet, at our court in Trinity College," the King acknowledges that by granting "letters mandatory for the admission and creation of divers doctors," he "never intended to hinder the honours of our University, or wrong the members of the same," but he is "credibly informed that the chief glory thereof . . . will be obscured by such proceedings." The King then says something a bit extraordinary for a king to say to his subjects: we "do . . . authorize and command you, our chancellor, vice-chancellor, and *caput senatus* . . . that at all times hereafter when as we shall be pleased to grant our letters or warrants mandatory or dispensatory for the admitting any person to any degree in our said University, that then you . . . do utterly forbear to admit or create any such persons, until they and every of them have put in sufficient caution to the use of our University for the due keeping of all such exercises, and performing of such matters, as are required for their several degrees. . . . These our letters shall be your sufficient warrant, any

²⁵For an image of this letter and a complete transcription of it, see the appendix to this essay (p. 101).

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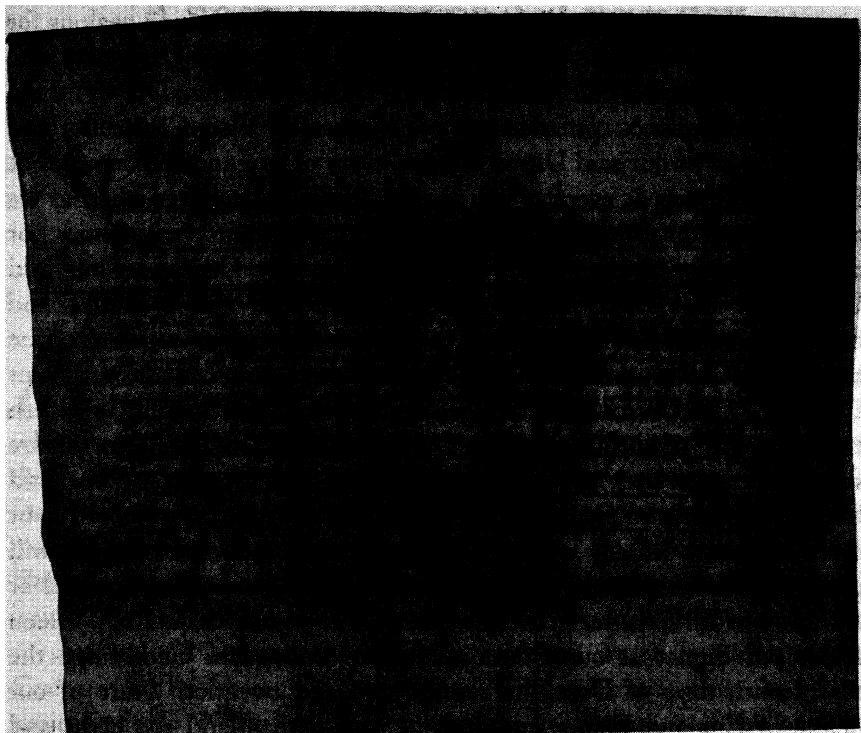
command or authority to be hereafter granted to the contrary notwithstanding."

This is a remarkable concession on James's part of a striking interchange among the King, the University of Cambridge, and the Church of England regarding the extent as well as the limits of royal power. It seems clear that in this interchange we have yet another example of James's personal generosity as well as his sense of his power as King to override the structure of rules, customs, and practices regulating professional career paths in the Church of England; James thought that he could ignore objections to his plans for Donne's career, but ran into sufficient opposition in carrying out his plans for Donne to change his direction—first, in having to force Cambridge to give Donne a degree rather than simply suggest or encourage it and then in being thwarted in his plan to give Donne Neville's job at Canterbury.

Here, the use of archival materials clearly deepens and enriches our understanding of the data that tells us what happened in the past; what is written as well as how it is written gives us clues as to the meaning of that data. Donne's ordination turns out to have been far more complex an affair than either Walton or Donne's subsequent biographers have claimed. Donne's career in the church got off to a far more difficult beginning than we have realized and now must be considered from that point of view. What signs, we must ask, does it show of the effects of that envy that Chamberlain reports among Donne's new professional colleagues in the Church?

North Carolina State University

Appendix

Image and Transcription of Item from
Cambridge University Archives, fol. 64.²⁶

James by the grace of God king of England Scotland France and Ireland defender of the faith etc. To our trusty & well loved Chancellor, Vice: Chancellor Regents and nonRegents of our University of Cambridg and to every of them greeting. **Whereas** hertofore at the earnest petitions of many of our Chaplins and other our loving Subiects, wee have bene pleased to grant our Letters Mandatory for the admission and creation of divers Doctors By which our favour (though we never intended to hinder the honours of our University or wrong the members of the same) yet we

²⁶Image of Cambridge University Archives Lett. 11B A30 reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

are credibly informed that the chiefe glory thereof at their usual & solomne Comencements wilbe obscured By such proceedinges, our yonge Students shalbe deprived of many learned exercises, which are the best meanes of their instruction. And that by these meanes the waye is opened for those persons which have neither learnyng to deserve nor meanes to mayntaine the dignity of their degrees. Wee being zealous for the mayntenance of the Honor and dignity of our said University and desirous to prevent the like inconveniences hereafter Do by these presents authorise & comande you our Chancellor Vice: Chancellor and *Caput senatus* of our said University and every of you and the deputies & Successors of you & every of you that at all times hereafter when as we shalbe pleased to grant our Letters or warrants mandatory or dispensatory for the admitting any person to any Degree in our said University: that then you & every of you and the Deputies and Successors of you and every of you doe utterly forbear to admit or create any such persons until they and every of them have put in sufficient Caution to the use of our University for the due keeping all such exercises and performing of such matters as are required for their severall degrees they desire by the Statutes & customes of our said University within such convenient tyme, as you shall think fit, or his or their occasions (if any of them shalbe employed in our service) will permit. These our letters shalbe your sufficient warrant, any comand or authority to be hereafter granted to the contrary notwithstanding. Giuen under our Signet at our Court in Trinity College in Cambridge the seventeenth daye of December in the two and twentieth yeare of our reigne of England France and Ireland, and of Scotland the eight and fifteth.