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Charles II's Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions, 1681–1684: A Reconsideration

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This article dissents from the classic analysis of the 'commission for ecclesiastical promotions' (1681–4) offered by Robert Beddard in 1967. Rather than acting as a powerful 'instrument of tory reaction', in the hands of a 'reversionary interest' of lay and clerical 'Yorkists' dedicated to changing the political hue of the upper ranks of the clergy, in reality it functioned as 'an instrument of personal rule' for a king who had not surrendered his own interests to those of his heir presumptive. Its political impact is queried with evidence from the start of James's reign that emphasises the immediate sense of crisis felt by many bishops.

It is a remarkable historiographical fact that an article published in 1967 by a young historian just two years after completing his doctorate, and which addressed an apparently minor royal commission of brief duration, has proved an enduring foundation for scholarly interpretation of a crucial decade in English history. Robert Beddard's work on the 'commission for ecclesiastical promotions' of 1681–4 still reads well today as a powerful argument based on impressive archival labours. For Beddard, this commission directed ecclesiastical patronage to men of unblemished 'Yorkist' credentials, clerics loyal to James duke of York, as selected by

CSPD = *Calendar of state papers domestic*; HMC = Historical Manuscripts Commission; *ODNB* = *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. In quotations from manuscripts, interpolations are reproduced in angular brackets; expansions in square brackets.

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commissioners who 'without exception, represented the *avant-garde* of the Tory Reaction'.[1] In particular, Archbishop William Sancroft – the focus of Beddard's doctoral thesis – and his lay allies Henry and Laurence Hyde, earls of Clarendon and Rochester, achieved near hegemonic control of senior ecclesiastical appointments and promotions, 'vastly strengthening the Yorkist party in the hierarchy'.[2] This was not a minor matter of 'small change' patronage.[3] As Beddard rightly noted, in the early 1660s the nascent Carolean regime had attached huge importance to such preferments, recognising the extent to which the hierarchical national Church and the divinely-sanctioned monarchy stood or fell together.[4] Such care over ecclesiastical appointments recurred in the wake of the trauma of the Exclusion Crisis: 'Preferment became, in the right hands, a means of turning the Whig tide and of shoring up the defences of the establishment.'[5] Criticising the earlier work of Edward Carpenter, Beddard's overall argument was that the commission of 1681–4 was no mere administrative exercise for the distribution of 'routine preferment', but a vital part of a wider 'reversionary interest': 'It opened wide the doors for the Yorkist invasion of the Anglican hierarchy; a fact of supreme importance for the proper understanding of Church and State relations before the Revolution of 1688, and beyond.'[6]

This interpretation has proved highly influential, not least after Beddard reproduced an abbreviated form of it in his contribution to what was the best collection of essays on the Restoration period throughout the 1980s.[7] Leading scholars of several generations have absorbed Beddard's analysis into their own accounts, which have in turn ensured that even those unfamiliar with the original article have become accustomed to its argument as part of the warp and woof of the wider fabric of Restoration historiography.[8] It has thus become part of the core description of the

1 R. A. Beddard, 'The commission for ecclesiastical promotions, 1681–84: an instrument of Tory reaction', *HJ* x (1967), 17. Although what follows represents a critique of this article, in common with all other scholars in the field I am deeply indebted to Beddard's various fundamentally important works on Restoration Church and State.

2 Idem, 'William Sancroft, as archbishop of Canterbury, 1677–1691', unpubl. DPhil diss. Oxford 1965 (unfortunately this thesis is not available for consultation in the Bodleian Library), and 'Commission', 40.

3 R. W. Hoyle, 'The masters of requests and the small change of Jacobean patronage', *EHR* cxxvi (2011), 544–81.

4 Beddard, 'Commission', 11–13. See also Ian Green, *The re-establishment of the Church of England, 1660–1663*, Oxford 1978.

5 Beddard, 'Commission', 14.

6 Ibid. 40 (criticising Edward Carpenter, *The Protestant bishop, being the life of Henry Compton, 1632–1713, bishop of London*, London 1956, 50).

7 R. A. Beddard, 'The Restoration Church', in J. R. Jones (ed.), *The restored monarchy, 1660–1688*, Basingstoke 1979, 173.

8 To cite just two of the most significant monographs for successive generations of scholars see G. V. Bennett, *The Tory crisis in Church and State, 1688–1730: the career of*

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early 1680s as a period of 'Tory reaction', and, more specifically, as a period in which James duke of York came to exert huge influence during the run-up to his reign. Only a few scholars have offered dissenting voices from the Beddardian line.[9] The present article will offer a more extensive reinterpretation of the commission for ecclesiastical promotions, one that stresses the centrifugal rather than centripetal political forces at work in this period, before concluding with the broader significance of this reevaluation for our understanding of the nature of Charles II's 'personal rule' and the role of the Church hierarchy at the start of the reign of James II. Overall, this will involve building on the broader redefinition of the Carolean 'Tory reaction' evident in recent scholarship in two respects. First, the recognition that there were many strands of loyalist opinion between 1681 and 1685: emphasising a 'Yorkist reversionary interest' is insufficiently nuanced when seen in the light of the deep-seated loyalty most Tories felt towards the rule of law and the Church of England as by law established.[10] Important as the royal succession was, it needs to be seen within a matrix of broader constitutional and religious issues. Secondly, despite the significant advances that Tory laity and clergy made in terms of local office-holding and the persecution of Protestant nonconformists, this period remained characterised by vibrant partisan politics.[11] Only the brilliancy of the political colours on show during the Exclusion Crisis and the Revolution of 1688/9 have made the last years of Charles II seem monochrome by comparison. Acknowledging how contested political life remained in the early 1680s allows for a different perspective on ecclesiastical patronage during the period of the commission, one that does not rely on teleological or

Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, Oxford 1975, 6, and John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689*, New Haven–London 1991, 80–1, 86–7. Bennett was Beddard's doctoral supervisor, and set out the gist of his student's forthcoming argument in an influential essay: 'William III and the bishops', in G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (eds), *Essays in modern church history in memory of Norman Sykes*, London 1966, 104–31 at pp. 105–7.

9 Most notably D. R. Hirschberg, 'The government and church patronage in England, 1660–1760', *Journal of British Studies* xx (1980–1), 122–3, but also John Miller, *After the civil wars: English politics and government in the reign of Charles II*, Harlow 2000, 292 n. 77, and Grant Tapsell, 'Laurence Hyde and the politics of religion in later Stuart England', *EHR* cxxv (2010), 1427–8.

10 Tim Harris, 'Tories and the rule of law in the reign of Charles II', *Seventeenth Century* viii (1993), 9–27, and *Restoration: Charles II and his kingdoms, 1660–1685*, London 2005, 419–22.

11 Paul D. Halliday, *Dismembering the body politic: partisan politics in England's towns, 1650–1730*, Cambridge 1998, ch. vi; Gary S. de Krey, *London and the Restoration, 1659–1683*, Cambridge 2005, ch. vii; Grant Tapsell, *The personal rule of Charles II*, Woodbridge 2007, chs ii–iii and passim.

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two-dimensional assumptions about how political life functioned during the 1680s.

From the outset it must be stressed that no analysis of the 'commission for ecclesiastical promotions' can be definitive. As Beddard scrupulously noted in 1967, the documents generated by the commission are 'largely formal', 'imperfect' and 'are simply records of the kill rather than the chase'.[12] Although the secretary of the commission, William Blathwayt, was a formidable generator of bureaucratic records in other contexts, no discrete body of minutes or proceedings for 1681–4 appears to have survived, a contrast to the better known and more controversial ecclesiastical commission created by James II later in the decade.[13] Perforce this requires any analysis to be built around the patchy evidence surrounding a relatively small number of specific appointments: Beddard's work mainly considered four consecrations of bishops, four translations of bishops up the greasy pole of the hierarchy, and – in a 'summary conspectus' – ten promotions to deaneries.[14] Although it would be rash to deny that small numbers of influential appointments could have a major impact on the character of an early modern government, in this case the numbers involved are very small indeed. Furthermore, an extensive reading of the core archive available for historians of the Church in this period – Sancroft's correspondence[15] – reveals a more contested and less homogeneous world of ecclesiastical appointments than that presented by Beddard.

Having initially set out to analyse the composition of the commission, I will go on to question the nature and importance of its work. It will be argued that it was not a major instrument of change in the Church of England. Indeed, far from representing an ultra-loyalist 'Yorkist' redoubt, the episcopate was, from the very beginning of James's reign,

12 Beddard, 'Commission', 19. (See the relevant chronological volumes of the *CSPD*, via indexes *s.v.* 'ecclesiastical preferments'.) For some of the processes and complexities of ecclesiastical patronage in post-Reformation England see Rosemary O'Day, 'Ecclesiastical patronage: who controlled the Church?', in Felicity Heal and Rosemary O'Day (eds), *Church and society in England: Henry VIII to James I*, London 1977, 137–55, and Kenneth Fincham, 'William Laud and the exercise of Caroline ecclesiastical patronage', this JOURNAL li (2000), 69–93.

13 G. A. Jacobsen, *William Blathwayt: a late seventeenth century English administrator*, New Haven 1932; J. P. Kenyon, 'The commission of ecclesiastical causes, 1686–1688: a reconsideration', *HJ* xxxiv (1991), 727–36 (based on a careful reading of the minute book kept by William Bridgeman: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson D 365); Jacqueline Rose, *Godly kingship in Restoration England: the politics of the royal supremacy, 1660–1688*, Cambridge 2011, 251–67.

14 Beddard, 'Commission', 31–4.

15 See, especially, Bodl. Lib., MSS Tanner 36 (1681–2), 35 (1682–3), 34 (1683–4) and 32 (1684–5), and outlying documents in other Tanner volumes including MSS 41, 46, 103, 129–31, 143–4, 150, 155, 158 and 282.

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preparing to defend the Church against the threat of a Catholic king's likely policies.[16]

I

How did the commission for ecclesiastical promotions come into being, and who manned it? Beddard has meticulously traced the rather protracted creation of the commission: a first version (27 February 1681) consisted only of Sancroft and Henry Compton, bishop of London, and was revoked on 9 July 1681; a second version (21 July 1681) featured the same prelates, but also three laymen, George Savile, earl of Halifax, Laurence, viscount Hyde (later earl of Rochester), and Edward Seymour; and a slightly enlarged final version (12 August 1681) added John Robartes, earl of Radnor, to the list of lay commissioners.[17] This is a curiously stuttering start to a commission said to have had 'from the start a definite political complexion'. In the absence of any clear evidence about Charles's motivation in establishing the commission we can only speculate. In the preamble to the first warrant, the king piously proclaimed the need to ensure 'that the most worthy & deserving men, be favour'd and preferr'd according to their Merit'. This may be construed as a criticism of the existing arrangements for the distribution of ecclesiastical patronage by the crown, with Beddard citing the need 'To stop the unseemly press for dignities and dispensations at Court', notably via the secretaries of state. He speculates that the straw that broke the camel's back may have been the success of the Lord Privy Seal, Arthur Annesley, earl of Anglesey, in soliciting the deanery of Exeter early in 1681 for his son Richard. This had been accomplished without Sancroft's knowledge, and objections could be raised both to the spiritual accomplishments of Annesley *fils*, and to the political reliability of Annesley *père* – characteristically described by Beddard as succumbing to factious (in other words, Whiggish) politics 'in his dotage'.[18]

In the absence of more precise evidence about the reasoning behind Charles's motives in establishing the commission it is impossible

16 For the partisan political significance of the episcopate in the previous decade see Mark Goldie, 'Danby, the bishops and the Whigs', in Tim Harris, Paul Seaward, and Mark Goldie (eds), *The politics of religion in Restoration England*, Oxford 1990, 75–105.

17 All references to and quotations from Beddard in this paragraph and the next come from 'Commission', 14–17.

18 Anglesey's diary for the period shows his marked alienation from crown policy, and meetings with or sympathy for a number of Whig politicians, but it still remains striking that he did not lose the privy seal until August 1682: BL, MS Add. 18730, fos 85–111, with the loss of the privy seal at fo. 98: 'The Lord be praised I am now delivered from Court snares.'

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categorically to reject Beddard's series of inferences. But more needs to be said about the composition of the commission, which may in turn reflect light backwards onto its creation. Having initially (rightly) conceded that the commission's emergence 'was of a piece' with the king's 'general policy, the division of ministerial authority', and offered comparisons to the Treasury and the Admiralty both being put into commission, Beddard goes on to make the major claim that the ecclesiastical commissioners 'without exception, represented the *avant-garde* of the Tory Reaction'. This is surely dubious. Even in its first incarnation, when it consisted of the two powerful churchmen, Sancroft and Compton, it would be hard to claim any great meeting of minds. Although described by Beddard as 'the Cavalier bishop of London', Compton was far from being the royal brothers' favourite prelate. Many observers thought that James was one of the key reasons why Compton had not been raised to the archbishopric of Canterbury after the death of Gilbert Sheldon in 1677, since the duke was infuriated by the bishop's zeal to educate James's daughters in the Protestant faith and his unconcealed hostility to Catholics at court and in London generally.[19] Charles had been so antagonised by Compton's anti-Catholic grand-standing that he dismissed him from the privy council in January 1679.[20] Although Compton was magnanimous enough to offer Sancroft the use of his Whitehall lodgings when the latter became archbishop, and although he moderated his stance with regard to James in 1680, Compton was not the most obvious 'Yorkist' to set in harness with Sancroft as part of an ideologically-motivated commission – other more suitable bishops could certainly have been found.[21] His appointment is more likely to have been based on his very senior position within the hierarchy – a bishop of London usually acted as the metropolitan's delegate in bureaucratic and administrative matters within the Church[22] – and physical proximity to the organs of central government in the metropolis.

19 Andrew Coleby, 'Henry Compton', *ODNB*; Carpenter, *Protestant bishop*, 37–42, 45–6.

20 Carpenter, *Protestant bishop*, 45–6.

21 MS Tanner 40, fo. 171; Coleby, 'Henry Compton'. Mews of Bath and Wells (described as a 'Yorkist' by the inhabitants of Bath: Andrew M. Coleby, 'Peter Mews', *ODNB*), Crewe of Durham (who was very close to James: Margot Johnson, 'Nathaniel Crew', *ODNB*), and Lloyd of Peterborough (of whom more at p. 750 below) would all have been more politically acceptable bishops on the commission than Compton, at least in the sense of promoting a 'reversionary interest'.

22 Notably in Compton's case for the religious census of England in 1676: *The Compton census of 1676: a critical edition*, ed. Anne Whiteman with the assistance of Mary Clapinson (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History n.s. x, 1986), pp. xxiv–xxv.

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Nor can the laymen who were parachuted into the commission in July and August 1681 be said to have brought ideological coherence with them. The sincerity of Hyde's commitment to James's interests cannot be doubted: the duke's brother-in-law had endured vociferous criticism in and out of parliament for his vehemently expressed loyalty to the heir to the throne, his great patron.[23] Seymour was also a man unafraid to oppose Whig politics and politicians, though in practice it is impossible to tell whether he actually acted as a commissioner: Beddard notes, *en passant*, that his signature was not attached to any of the extant reports and recommendations.[24] But if two of the laymen can be accommodated within Beddard's model, the other two cannot. Beddard presents Radnor and Halifax as having moved from earlier critical stances to wholesale support for the king's government. The evidence for Radnor's outlook in the early 1680s is extremely limited and partly depends on Roger North's bland retrospective description of Radnor as 'a good English lord' who 'did the king very good service'.[25] Earlier in life, though, he had been a Parliamentarian in the 1640s, and remained a proponent of tolerationist religious policies after the Restoration.[26] During the life of the commission, intolerant churchmen in Wiltshire in the early 1680s were anxious that their efforts to cleanse the government of Poole might be stymied by Radnor, who 'the ffriends of the Kings enemy there depend uppon'.[27] Even if in later life he sought publicly to distance himself from Presbyterianism, Radnor's career as a whole left him by the 1680s a man of ambivalent and uncertain views, and next to no broader influence, still less significance as a totem of Toryism.

For his part, Halifax had undoubtedly moved closer to the king in the face of growing Whig extremism in 1680–1, but the extent to which that placed him within the '*avant-garde* of the Tory Reaction' must also be questioned. Although James did indeed express friendship and gratitude for Halifax's anti-exclusionist activity in the House of Lords,[28] their relations were built on sandy foundations. The memoirs of Halifax's client Sir John Reresby show him frequently complaining about James's malign

23 Tapsell, 'Laurence Hyde', 1418, 1426–7; W. A. Speck, 'Laurence Hyde', *ODNB*.

24 Beddard, 'Commission', 38 n. 132. As Beddard also observes, Seymour withdrew from court in a sulk in Sept./Oct. 1682 after failing to be made lord privy seal in succession to Anglesey.

25 Cited in Beddard, 'Commission', 19.

26 Anne Duffin, 'John Robartes', *ODNB*.

27 Anthony Ettrick to 'my lord', n.d., MS Tanner 129, fo. 122. Although undated, the letter refers to Archdeacon Woodward: Robert Woodward became archdeacon of Wiltshire in 1681: Clergy of the Church of England Database, person ID 60953: http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp, accessed 13 Aug. 2011.

28 Beddard, 'Commission', 18.

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influence in government, culminating in March 1682 when he told the heir to the throne to his face that unless he returned to the Protestant fold he would be 'a guarison that one could noe longer defend'.[29] Such sentiments were aggravated by Halifax's lengthy and convoluted feud with one of James's leading clients, Laurence Hyde, precisely at the time when both men were members of the commission.[30] In the course of 1684 he managed to get Hyde 'kicked upstairs' to the lord presidency of the council, thereby losing his powerful fiefdom at the Treasury. Had Charles not died in February 1685, Hyde would have fallen through one of the worst trap-doors in early modern political life: exile to the lord lieutenancy of Ireland.[31]

So much for a coherent and ideologically-driven body of commissioners.[32] Beddard bolstered his case by emphasising the contributory role of other satellite figures, men connected to the commissioners by ties of kin, patronage and friendship. Particular emphasis was placed on Sancroft's links with 'his intimates' among the 'lay "Yorkists"'.[33] Much of this is unexceptionable in general terms. Henry Hyde, earl of Clarendon, was Laurence Hyde's older brother, and the two were undoubtedly close both personally and politically. They socialised regularly, and were seen to cooperate throughout the 1680s, with Clarendon perceived as especially influential with the clergy of the established Church, notably through close ties to Sancroft.[34] Problems emerge when such general positions are given precise significance in relation to the commission. Clarendon's beliefs and connexions could surely have been harnessed better within a commission that really was intended to give an ideological edge to clerical

29 *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby*, ed. Andrew Browning, with a new preface and notes by Mary K. Geiter and W. A. Speck, London 1991, 212, 244, 258. For the difficult relations between Halifax and James at this time see also H. C. Foxcroft, *The life and letters of Sir George Savile, bart., first marquis of Halifax*, London 1898, i. 303, 351–3, 357–8, 375, 379, 399–407, 415–16. In striking contrast to the voluminous attention that Foxcroft devoted to foreign policy and court intrigue, Halifax's place on the commission is noted only in passing in an appendix (vol. i. 436–7).

30 For a fuller account of this rivalry see Grant Tapsell, 'The life and career of Laurence Hyde, earl of Rochester, *c.* 1681–*c.* 1686', unpubl. MPhil diss. Cambridge 1999, 38–42, and Foxcroft, *Life and letters*, i. 379–88.

31 *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby*, 329, 342; Foxcroft, *Life and letters*, 420–36; Ronald Hutton, *Charles II: king of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, Oxford 1989, 429–45; J. R. Jones, *Charles II: royal politician*, London 1987, ch. viii.

32 Beddard emphasises that the commissioners were all also members of 'the inner sanctum, the committee of intelligence', though he is scrupulous enough to note the significant fact that Sancroft and Compton only attended 'occasionally': 'Commission', 18 and n. 29.

33 Ibid. 24–5.

34 Speck, 'Henry Hyde', *ODNB*; Tapsell, 'Laurence Hyde', 1422–3, 1442–3, 1445.

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appointments, rather than being left to a nebulous position outside. He would certainly have been a figure closer in sympathy to the clergy than Halifax, whose anti-clericalism was very thinly veiled.[35] Nor does Beddard's emphasis on the role of Dr Francis Turner as a key clerical 'intermediary' between the dedicated Yorkists inside and outside the commission prove his case. Although evidently a rising man within the church hierarchy who was well-known to both Hyde brothers, this was not always for the best reasons: he had, very significantly, been chaplain to their sister, Anne, at the time when she converted to Catholicism.[36] Bitter memories of this might help to explain why the Hydes were 'kept in the dark' during the course of what Beddard otherwise sees as 'very cryptic … high-flying Yorkist diplomacy… concerted between James and Sancroft' that failed to get Turner appointed dean of Westminster in 1683.[37] This is not to deny Turner's continued success in turning up truffles of patronage, but rather to pour some necessary cold water on a narrative of unbroken and tight connection with other members of Beddard's 'reversionary interest'.

Overall, when viewed sceptically and without prior assumptions, the commission's coherence and character becomes doubtful. And the biggest puzzle of all may well be why such a hybrid lay/clerical body was deemed necessary in the first place. Two alternative courses of action would simply have been to bolster scrutiny of candidates for clerical promotion through the normal channels within the secretaries' office – a far from insurmountable task bearing in mind that the most active secretary during this period, Sir Leoline Jenkins, was a card-carrying churchman of unimpeachable credentials.[38] Alternatively, a purely clerical commission more obviously under the control of Sancroft – or both archbishops – could have been created. This would have avoided the evident danger of lay interference in church appointments that someone who reverenced the memory of Archbishop Laud and his vision of a strong and self-sufficient Church as much as Sancroft could hardly have been expected to welcome.[39]

35 Grant Tapsell, 'Pastors, preachers and politicians: the clergy of the later Stuart Church', in Grant Tapsell (ed.), *The later Stuart Church, 1660–1714*, Manchester 2012, 81–2.

36 Paul Hopkins, 'Francis Turner', *ODNB*; Tapsell, 'Laurence Hyde', 1425, 1427–8.

37 Beddard, 'Commission', 28.

38 Alan Marshall, 'Sir Leoline Jenkins', *ODNB*. For Jenkins's continued involvement in lobbying for ecclesiastical patronage see, for instance, *CSPD, 1680–1*, 509; *CSPD, 1682*, 57.

39 Hirschberg, 'Government and church patronage', 122. For Sancroft's known 'veneration' for Laud's memory see MS Tanner 38, fo. 116.

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II

So far I have suggested that the composition of the commission for ecclesiastical promotions does not tally with any clear-cut presentation of it as 'an instrument of Tory reaction' designed along 'Yorkist' lines. What then can be said of the commission's impact? For the purposes of analysis we can examine in turn the broader perception of the commission in contemporary news culture, and the specific responses of clerics.

A paradoxically very significant feature of the commission is how little comment greeted its creation. A handful of diarists and letter-writers recorded its formation within the normal run of political chronicling, but most did not, notably the well-connected churchman John Evelyn.[40] It is remarkable how few contemporaries passed a judgement on the commission's composition or purpose, even three otherwise keen and critical whiggish observers of the political scene. Gilbert Burnet failed to record the existence of the commission in his *History of my own time* despite his usual habit of decrying any evidence of the clergy's support for James's succession. It is at least as puzzling that the superbly well-informed London-based Presbyterian chronicler of public affairs, Roger Morrice, was extremely vague and inaccurate in his few bland comments about the commission.[41] This is odd for such an unrelentingly negative commentator on the politics of the 'hierarchists',[42] precisely the kind of Tory zealots in Church and State that Beddard's reading of the commission suggests to be its natural constituency and whose promotion was its alleged *raison d'être*. Narcissus Luttrell merely noted without comment a single instance of an ecclesiastical appointment being referred to the commission.[43]

The key group of people who did take note of the commission were, quite naturally, those clerics who were eager for promotion. If part of the intention behind creating the commission was 'To stop the unseemly press for dignities and dispensations at Court', then the experiment can only be judged a failure.[44] The cacophonous bleating of the eager clerical

40 BL, MS Add. 4107, fo. 35v (Viscount Weymouth's diary); *CSPD, 1680–1*, 427 (newsletter to Roger Garstell of Newcastle); HMC, *Seventh report*, 496 (Verney manuscripts); *The life and times of Anthony Wood.*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford Historical Society, 1892), ii. 549. Evelyn would later dwell on the activities of the 1686–8 commission: *The diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E. S. de Beer, Oxford 1955, iv. 519–20, 524, 590, 596, 599.

41 *The entring book of Roger Morrice*, gen. ed. Mark Goldie, Woodbridge 2007–9, ii. 286.

42 See the acute comments of Mark Goldie ibid. i, *via* index, *s.v* 'hierarchists'.

43 Narcissus Luttrell, *A brief historical relation of state affairs from September 1678 to April 1714*, Oxford 1857, i. 126. Like Evelyn, Luttrell did frequently refer to the 1686–8 commission: at vol. i. 383, 384, 385, 390, 392, 402, 403, 405, 406, 407, 408, 410, 422, 423, 424, 427, 428, 429, 431, 450, 455, 456, 466, 469.

44 Beddard, 'Commission', 16.

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flock seems scarcely different in volume and tone during 1681–4 to what it was before. To take one particularly egregious example, an inveterate place-seeker like Laurence Womock barely skipped a beat in his pursuit of preferment after the creation of the commission, continuing incessantly to emphasise his exertions as a published polemicist.[45] Clerics were still infuriated if they were 'outstript … in the Race of Loyalty' by those whom they considered less deserving than themselves, since 'men value us, as we are valued by o[u]r Superiours'.[46] Anxious bishops continued to fear that their dioceses would be 'ravisht by … violent Suitors, & the Pastorall staff … defiled by coming into such hands' without constant vigilance from Sancroft.[47] Others carefully praised the king's stated purpose in establishing the commission – the promotion of able and deserving men – in the context of recommending their own candidates.[48] Lay peers and other power-brokers did not cease peremptorily to press the claims of their clients.[49] Beddard is right to say that 'Yorkist' had contemporary resonance as a marker of political loyalty; indeed, at least one clergyman sought to recommend himself to the commissioners by describing himself in precisely that way.[50] In general, though, the reasons that clerics presented in support of their claims to preferment remained the familiar generic ones of preaching or writing in favour of obedience to the crown; of the hostilities that such loyalty had provoked from disaffected neighbours; or straightforward economic need at a personal and familial level.[51] Overall, it would be hard to claim that the profile of successful applicants for favour was much different during the existence of the

45 For Womock advertising his merits before the commission's existence see MS Tanner 38, fos 14, 82; and during its existence, MS Tanner 36, fo. 88; MS 34, fos 121, 136; MS 32, fo. 110. Although Sancroft's replies were generally warm (for example, MS. Tanner 32, fo. 112) it is striking that Womock's ultimate reward was about as unappetising as the archbishop could have found: the bishopric of St David's. Womock's over-eagerness had prompted at least one angry archiepiscopal rebuke: MS Tanner 34, fo. 190.

46 Dr John Nalson to William Sancroft, Ely House, 14 July 1683, and Dr Laurence Womock to [Sancroft], 27 Aug. 1683, MS Tanner 34, fos 80, 121.

47 William Lloyd, bishop of St Asaph, to Sancroft, 28 Sept. 1683, ibid. fo. 163.

48 For instance, Pearson of Chester: MS Tanner 144, fos 34, 36. The exceptionally divisive ultra-Tory cleric, Thomas Pierce, also flattered the commission in print whilst currying favour during his bitter campaign against the bishop of Salisbury, Seth Ward: [Thomas Pierce], *A vindication of the king's sovereign rights*, London 1683 (Wing P 2208), 20; Rose, *Godly kingship*, 139–40; Jon Parkin, 'Thomas Pierce', *ODNB*.

49 For instance, MS Tanner 36, fo. 117 (Sir Leoline Jenkins); MS 35, fo. 13 (earl of Arundel); MS 34, fos 36 (earl of Lindsey), 63, 90 (earl of Danby; see also BL, MS Add. 28053, fo. 269), 100 (duke of Albemarle), 108v (duke of Beaufort).

50 Beddard, 'Commission', 24 n. 61, citing North's *Examen*; MS Tanner 158, fo. 42.

51 For some typical examples see MS Tanner 36, fos 70, 123, 199; MS 35, fo. 19; MS 34, fos 21, 24, 36, 63, 105, 163, 195, 268–9; MS 32, fos 60, 69, 85.

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commission to what it had been in earlier periods.[52] Well-connected, active, loyal, and frequently shameless clerics gained promotion just as they usually had before: there was never a shortage of 'vain' men willing to 'gape' for advancement.[53]

Furthermore, on several occasions the primate's views were trumped by those of the king whom the commission was supposed to be advising. As Beddard scrupulously notes, three of the ten appointments to deaneries during the period of the commission's existence prove exceptions to any sense of Sancroftian control. In particular, he explains away into insignificance Richard Thompson's promotion to the deanery of Bristol in 1684 on the twin grounds that this 'came near the end of the Commission's life' – a remarkably teleological argument: how were the members of the commission to know this at the time? – and that Sancroft's opposition was based on Thompson's uncertain doctrinal beliefs and erratic personal behaviour, rather than any doubts about his zeal for the Stuart cause.[54] This is unconvincing. The numerous reports that Sancroft received about Thompson's ultra-Tory attitudes within the bitterly fractured city of Bristol made it starkly clear that his appointment would damage the king's service in one of the most important cities in the realm.[55] Thanks to the work of 'great' and 'active' friends at court, the king insisted on his appointment none the less, much to Sancroft's annoyance, 'peremptorily' sending word through one of the commissioners that Thompson should be chosen.[56]

These sceptical comments about the impact of the commission may be extended by considering how its demise was reported and understood.[57] Once again, a striking feature is how few contemporaries commented on the change, and how bland and uninformative most of those few comments were. The duke of Beaufort and Sir Robert Southwell both learned merely that the commission was being voided and that in future ecclesiastical preferments would be disposed of at the committee for foreign affairs.[58]

52 A point well made by Hirschberg, 'Government and church patronage', 122–3.

53 Lloyd to Sancroft, 3 Jan. 1682[/3], MS Tanner 35, fo. 159.

54 Beddard, 'Commission', 34.

55 For Thompson's convoluted tale, see MS Tanner 35, fos 45, 93, 126r–128v; MS 34, fos 81, 280r–v; MS 32, fos 7–8, 46. For the Bristol context see Jonathan Barry, 'The politics of religion in Restoration Bristol', in Harris, Seaward and Goldie, *Politics of religion*, 163–89.

56 Sancroft to William Gulston, bishop of Bristol, Lambeth House, 5 Apr. 1684, MS Tanner 32, fo. 16.

57 For the (uninformative) revocation of the commission see *CSPD, May 1684–Feb. 1685*, 155 (26 Sept. 1684).

58 Bodl. Lib., MS Carte 130, fo. 22v (extracts of privy council letters to Beaufort); Philip Madoxe to Robert Southwell, Whitehall, 29 Sept. 1684, Bodl. Lib., MS Eng. letters C 53, fo. 92. For a similar report see *Correspondence of the family of Hatton, 1601–1704*, ed. E. M. Thompson (Camden n.s. xxii–xxiii, 1878), ii. 50.

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Scarcely any explanations for the commission's demise can be found. One writer offered the implausible notion that after personally appointing the dean of Guernsey to a wealthy living on the mainland, the king 'broke his Commission' because the commissioners had generally 'neglected to prefer men' as meritorious as the dean.[59] We are left with the sense of a commission that had aroused remarkably little consideration, even in otherwise well-informed circles, at both its inception and demise.

A telling exception to this general lack of interest came from one of the most significant figures within the Restoration Church. John Fell, bishop of Oxford, has generally been lionised by Beddard as a pillar of the Tory-Cavalier interest, not least as the dominant churchman in the University of Oxford during the Restoration era.[60] Yet Fell's comments after the fall of the commission are briskly dismissed by Beddard as being 'defective' in their understanding of the real political situation.[61] Fell offered Sancroft his opinion in very blunt terms:

> Now that the king has superseded the commission for the disposal of Ecclesiastical preferments; it seems a season for your Grace to interpose, and recover that trust w[hi]ch was usually, & can only decently, and for the advantage of the Church, be vested where the goverment of it is placed. The lord keeper would think it hard, if a Judge should be made, or a Serieant calld, and not by him. If your Grace do not assert your self herein, I pray be pleasd to consider, what kind of distributions will be driven at.[62]

Fell was a veteran observer of religious politics, and was no stranger to matters of patronage and promotion thanks to his experience as a royal chaplain and as dean of Christ Church, the most socially exclusive Oxford college.[63] The urgency of his tone is unmistakable, and his emphasis on the need for 'decency' within the government of the Church strikes an authentically Laudian note that would not have jarred with the archbishop's own views. Indeed Fell's reference to the lord keeper's powers of patronage was surely not accidental: he very closely echoed bitter comments that he must have known Sancroft had offered in the summer of 1681. At that time the archbishop had been furious that Lord

59 Christopher Hatton to Lord Hatton, Guernsey, 3 Dec. 1684, Northamptonshire Records Office, FH4327.

60 See particularly R. A. Beddard, 'Restoration Oxford and the remaking of the Protestant establishment', and 'Tory Oxford', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *Seventeenth-century Oxford*, Oxford 1997, 803–906 (*via* voluminous index entry) and, 'Christ Church under John Fell', *Christ Church Annual Report* (1976/7), 28–34.

61 Idem, 'Commission', 38.

62 John Fell to Sancroft, 12 Oct. 1684, MS Tanner 32, fo. 159r–v (largely cited at Beddard, 'Commission', 38). Fell's words form a postscript to a long, angry letter about the machinations of pluralists in Oxfordshire.

63 Vivienne Larminie, 'John Fell', *ODNB*.

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Chancellor Nottingham had secured the appointment of his chaplain, John Sharp, as dean of Norwich, an appointment welcomed by leading Norfolk Whig power-brokers like Sir John Hobart. As Sancroft told the bishop of Norwich, Anthony Sparrow, in the course of a chilling rebuke for his 'Reservedness' in not acting more decisively, the Lord Chancellor would have taken it 'very ill if we sh[oul]d have oppos'd him in mak[in] g a Judge, or a Serjeant, & if we had succeeded, would have born the Affront w[i]th less patience, than (I thank G[od]) I do'.[64] The archbishop's capacity to dominate clerical patronage does not seem to have been assured in 1681 or in 1684, while the sordid realities of ecclesiastical place-seeking and patronage appear to have changed relatively little.

The sheer murkiness of the commission is ultimately its defining characteristic. The distribution of lesser ecclesiastical positions remains very hard to trace, though an instance of Hyde's candidate failing to gain a living in Hertfordshire is suggestive of on-going struggles between patronage brokers.[65] Did the remit of the commission extend to church appointments in Ireland? The official terms of the commission referred merely to oversight of appointments within 'the Church' and lacked any geographical specificity: some clerics in Ireland petitioned the commission as a whole, or else individual commissioners, for favour.[66] Even the commission's name was unstable: though Beddard used ecclesiastical 'promotions', contemporaries usually referred to the commission for 'preferments' (the standard word in official documents), and sometimes 'matters', or 'affairs'.[67]

III

Bearing in mind all these caveats about the composition and character of the commission, what remains is to raise questions about the significance of its medium-term impact. How did the 'reversionary interest' allegedly created by the commission within the church hierarchy react to the accession of James in 1685? Beddard ended his article by stating that the political impact of the commission was 'a fact of supreme importance for the

64 Sancroft to Anthony Sparrow, Lambeth House, 18 June 1681 (draft), MS Tanner 36, fo. 52. For the complex local and central political machinations at play in this instance see also fos 39, 52v. The archbishop had evidently wished to appoint a local man who would actually reside and be active in the cathedral.

65 *CSPD, 1682*, 600.

66 MS Tanner 36, fos 128, 135, 137, 139, 149, 178 (all concerning filling the vacant bishopric of Derry), 158 (a deanery), 202, and *CSPD, 1680–1*, 651 (recommendations for various bishoprics).

67 *Correspondence of the family of Hatton*, ii. 50; Bodl. Lib., MS Carte 130, fo. 22v; Luttrell, *A brief relation*, i. 126.

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proper understanding of church and state relations before the Revolution of 1688, and beyond'.[68] Yet this view must be placed in the balance next to considerable evidence of alarm and disquiet within the episcopate at the accession of the first openly Catholic ruler of England since Mary Tudor.[69] Indeed, some of the clearest evidence of this unease comes from the pens of those whose careers prospered thanks in part to their rapport with William Sancroft.

Just eight days after Charles's death, the archbishop of York, John Dolben, sought to stiffen Sancroft's resolve for what he clearly believed to be a likely struggle ahead: 'you must now pr[e]pare for Trouble, God of his Goodnesse enable you to goe through it'. He promised to 'be guided by y[o]w', since Sancroft was so much closer to the centre of events and had a greater immediate understanding of what was imminent: 'things will be full of dang[e]r. I confesse I know not what to propose. God Almighty Guide & assist yo[u]r Grace, & in y[o]u this Poore church w[hi]ch depends soe much on you'.[70] Two things are immediately striking about these words. The first is how early in James's reign they were written. They came long before the disputes over Catholic officers being retained in the army that prompted James to bring the second session of the 1685 parliament to an abrupt end.[71] Secondly, they were penned by one of those bishops translated during the life of the commission. Dolben had been advanced from Rochester to York in 1683, and Beddard emphasised his long record of Cavalier loyalty – which included fighting for Charles I, and being wounded at Marston Moor – and the fact that the commissioners' decision 'placed a dedicated Tory in charge of the other province'.[72] Dolben was certainly an extremely active archbishop, and one who provided a strong pastoral lead in the north.[73] But as his words to

68 Beddard, 'Commission', 40.

69 For Fell of Oxford's anxiety in 1685 about the Church of England's difficult strategic position under James see Grant Tapsell, 'Introduction: the later Stuart Church in context', in Tapsell, *Later Stuart Church*, 4.

70 John Dolben, archbishop of York, to Sancroft, 14 Feb. [1685], MS Tanner 32, fo. 222. Dolben hoped that something 'to the advantage of our Com[m]on christianity' could be accomplished in the next convocation – a rather desperate hope, bearing in mind the post-Restoration impotence of convocation: Norman Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker: aspects of English church history, 1660–1768*, Cambridge 1959, 41–4.

71 Tim Harris, *Revolution: the great crisis of the British monarchy, 1685–1720*, London 2006, 97–100; Scott Sowerby, 'Tories in the Whig corner: Daniel Fleming's journal of the 1685 parliament', *Parliamentary History* xxiv (2005), 167–73, 196–200.

72 Beddard, 'Commission', 20 (emphasis is additionally placed on Dolben's closeness to two generations of the Hyde family), and also his 'The character of a Restoration prelate: Dr John Dolben', *Notes & Queries* ccxv (1970), 418–21.

73 See the fine *ODNB* entry by Andrew M. Coleby, who none the less incorrectly dates the beginnings of Dolben's disillusionment with James's regime only to the autumn of 1685.

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Sancroft make clear, loyalty to the monarchy did not mean that Dolben was blind to the problems created by James's accession.[74]

Even more striking is a letter that Sancroft received from William Lloyd, bishop of Peterborough, in early May 1685. Lloyd was one of Sancroft's closest allies on the episcopal bench, acting as a clerical disciplinarian in Peterborough and subsequently Norwich, conducting a visitation of Canterbury diocese on Sancroft's behalf in 1682, and later being trusted by the deprived archbishop with his authority by proxy over the nonjurors after Sancroft's retreat from Lambeth to Suffolk in the early 1690s.[75] Lloyd told Sancroft that he had met with Compton in order to agree on what it was fit for the bishops to do in the imminent session of parliament: 'it was the Interest, as well as the creditt & safety of the B[isho]ps, to be unanimous in there votes'. The two bishops had differing ideas as to how best to achieve this, Compton bullishly arguing that Sancroft should convene all the bishops then in London at Lambeth *en bloc*. Lloyd feared that this might look too clearly like organising resistance to the crown, and render them vulnerable to a *praemunire*.[76] Instead he convinced Compton that it would be best for the bishops of the southern province to attend Sancroft one by one so that 'any kinde of hint from y[ou]r Grace would make the B[isho]ps of y[ou]r Province intirely unanimous'.[77] By any measure this was an extraordinary consultation. Neither Compton's activity within the commission from 1681 to 1684, nor Lloyd's closeness to the archbishop, did anything to dampen their zeal in defence of the Church under a Catholic king. Such discussions help to put in context Compton's celebrated criticisms of royal policy in parliament in November 1685, and defence of the Test Acts. On that occasion it was widely noted that when Compton finished his speech in the House of Lords, all the other bishops in attendance stood to indicate their agreement.[78]

It is also worth emphasising the barely coded warning comments that were offered to James in 1685 by Sancroft himself. The primate's response

74 Beddard, 'Character of a Restoration prelate', 420 and n. 21.

75 Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, reformation and reform, 1660–1828: archbishops of Canterbury and their diocese*, Oxford 2000, 276; Stuart Handley, 'William Lloyd', *ODNB*. Lloyd was one of Sancroft's most frequent correspondents: Alfred Hackman (comp.), *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae pars quarta codices viri admodum reverendi Thomae Tanneri...*, Oxford 1860, 1005–8.

76 For forensic discussion of this issue see Rose, *Godly kingship, via* index s.v. '*praemunire*'.

77 William Lloyd, bishop of Peterborough, to Sancroft, Acton, 2 May 1685, MS Tanner 31, fo. 52.

78 Coleby, 'Henry Compton'. Compton would, of course, go on to be suspended at James's behest, and then to be one of those who invited William of Orange to invade England: Grant Tapsell, 'Immortal seven (*act.* 1688)' [group entry online], *ODNB*: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95260, accessed 2 Aug 2013.

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to James's apparently spontaneous declaration at his first privy council that he would preserve the established Church was an open letter of thanks that was initially pretty commonplace: 'It hath ever been accounted ye distinctive character of ye establish'd Church, 'tis her Glory, & her holy Boast, yt she hath ever been allwaies Loial, to her Kings, even in ye greatest Trials.' But its striking continuation has not been sufficiently noted. In case anyone thought that he was merely referring back to the 1640s and '50s when he wrote of 'ye greatest Trials', Sancroft made clear that these had also seemed likely to recur upon James's accession as a Catholic king. When Charles II's death suddenly seemed imminent

> We could not but think, yt at such a Time as this is, we should have <had> much (very much) to ask of yo[u]r Ma[jes]ty; & to beg it upon o[u]r Knees w[i]th the same Earnestness, w[i]th w[hi]ch we would petition for o[u]r Lives, if they were All in Question.

Instead James's apparent promise to preserve the Church of England was characterised by Sancroft as 'th[a]t admirable Declaration; w[hi]ch we ought to write down in Letters of Gold & engrave in Marble'. Even without the necessary gold and marble, the archbishop told James that all members of the Church of England would 'treasure' the declaration in their hearts 'as the greatest Foundation of Comfort, w[hi]ch this World can afford us in o[u]r pr[e]sent Condition'.[79] 'Our present condition' was a step up from 'the greatest Trials', but it was hardly a ringing endorsement. A more astute reader of the political runes than James would have discerned the message: a Catholic king would need to tread carefully to avoid stumbling over the ideological trip-wires that surrounded the Protestant Church-State.[80] Some of those who have been described as 'Yorkist' prelates were in practice very quick to start planning for the worst in 1685.

IV

The evidence presented here suggests that the case for the commission as a thorough-going 'instrument of Tory reaction' whose activity was 'Yorkist' in nature is much weaker than has generally been supposed. What then was its purpose? Two explanations – which are not at all incompatible – present

79 MS Tanner 32, fo. 214: 'To the King. Febr. 7th 1684[/5]'. For the context, see Harris, *Revolution*, 41–3.

80 For Turner's implication that the Protestant succession was safe in the form of the king's daughters, Mary and Anne, see his unprinted sermon on the 'Thanksgiving Day for the Victory over the Duke of Monmouth's Rebells 1685': Bodl. Lib., MS Rawlinson E 8, fo. 141.

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themselves. The first was offered three decades ago by D. R. Hirschberg. Rather than signifying a tightening of patronage on political or ideological grounds, the creation of the commission may have represented an effort to improve administrative efficiency by removing hordes of grasping clerical petitions from the secretaries' office.[81] This would fit with broader understandings of the 1680s as a period of increasing rationalisation in different parts of government, notably the Treasury under Laurence Hyde.[82] It is also likely that Beddard was right at the outset of his article when he noted the king's tendency to divide ministerial power and oversight in the post-Danby era.[83] This latter point deserves to be expanded and emphasised. The overall character of Charles II's personal rule in the period between the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in March 1681 and his death in February 1685 differed from that of his father during the 1630s.[84] Power was not to be exercised by clearly recognised minister-favourites like Laud and Strafford working in close co-operation with a like-minded monarch. Instead, it was to be assured by the king manipulating ministerial rivals. Partly because he was sometimes a victim of this trend, the marquess of Halifax understood the situation with unusual clarity. The king

> had back stairs to convey informations to him, as well as for other uses; and though such informations are sometimes dangerous (especially to a Prince that will not take the pains necessary to digest them), yet in the main that humour of hearing everybody against anybody kept those about him in more awe than they would have been without it.[85]

No matter how useful he had been in the past, any minister who lacked an adequate appreciation of this insight could not survive. As Ronald Hutton has acutely observed, Charles II's duplicitous nature often left him playing the role of a 'monarch in a masquerade', deceiving those apparently closest to him.[86]

These strictures applied even to a figure as prominent as the king's own brother. Overly impressed by James's success in being recalled from internal exile in Scotland in 1682, historians have been too quick to search for a 'reversionary interest' in 1681–5, during what we now know to have been the last years of Charles II's life. In teleological terms, Charles died in February 1685, and therefore ministers in his twilight

81 Hirschberg, 'Government and church patronage', 123.

82 C. D. Chandaman, *The English public revenue, 1660–1688*, Oxford 1975, 247, 251–2; Tapsell, 'Life and career of Laurence Hyde', 19–27.

83 Beddard, 'Commission', 14.

84 Tapsell, *Personal rule*, esp. pp. 9–13.

85 Mark N. Brown (ed.), *The works of George Savile marquis of Halifax*, Oxford 1989, ii. 494.

86 Hutton, *Charles II*, ch. xvi.

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years must have been jockeying for position in the next reign. Charles certainly endured periods of illness during these years that were unusual in the life of a man known for his vigorous good health. Yet there is comparatively little evidence to suggest that many of his subjects were expecting James to succeed to the throne as early as he did, and far more to establish the level of surprise and shock when Charles did die at the age of fifty-four in February 1685.[87] Seen without the benefit of hindsight, one of the most significant features of the early 1680s was how preoccupied the king was with preparing for a future on Earth rather than in heaven. In particular, Charles was engaged on the most ambitious building programme of the whole reign: a vast planned palace at Winchester that may have been intended partly to emulate, rival or reflect the magnificence of Louis XIV's Versailles.[88] It is telling that the architectural plans for this palace make clear that the king intended to maintain his capacity privately to hear information from different sources via different staircases within the complex.[89] James would have been in little doubt about his brother's fickle temper: had Charles not died when he did, James would have had to depart unwillingly northwards once more to act as High Commissioner at a new Scottish parliament.[90]

In sum, rather than being 'an instrument of Tory reaction' dedicated to furthering James's interests within the Church, the commission for ecclesiastical promotions is more likely to have served as an 'instrument of personal rule' designed purely for the king's benefit. The existence of the commission committed the king to nothing: he was not bound to the commissioners' recommendations, and evidence survives that in some instances the king sent recommendations to his commission, rather than the other way round.[91] Such royal direction exploited the fact that the commissioners whom Charles had chosen to appoint were internally divided: certainly he was not above ensuring that senior clerical positions did not go as Sancroft wished, as the example of Richard Thompson has already shown.

Rather than deliberately creating an instrument that would benefit his brother's interests – still less those of the Church of England – Charles seems most likely to have been playing the game of divide and rule that was such a marked feature of much of his reign. By creating a specific royal commission advising on ecclesiastical promotions, Charles utilised

87 Tapsell, *Personal rule*, 191.

88 Anna Keay, *The magnificent monarch: Charles II and the ceremonies of power*, London 2008, 203–4; Simon Thurley, 'A country seat fit for a king: Charles II, Greenwich and Winchester', in Evelyn Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart courts*, Stroud 2000, 226–35.

89 Brian Weiser, *Charles II and the politics of access*, Woodbridge 2003, 52.

90 Hutton, *Charles II*, 441–2; Foxcroft, *Life and letters*, i. 423 and n. 7.

91 See, for instance, Charles's recommendation to the commissioners in support of John Nalson: MS Tanner 103, fo. 247.

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the powers inherent within the royal supremacy during a period of improving political and financial fortunes for the crown. When Halifax's membership of the commission led to his being criticised for trying to step into Thomas Cromwell's shoes as a kind of vicegerent in spirituals he knew how to react: he laughed.[92] He evidently realised the extent to which he remained at the mercy of his royal master. Levity would no longer be an option by 1686 when James II created another ecclesiastical commission, this time more explicitly to manage and discipline an established Church with which he was not in communion.[93] In this way, although the commission for ecclesiastical promotions was not 'Yorkist' in a reversionary sense during 1681–4, it nevertheless existed as a pallid forerunner of much greater royal interference in the Church later in the decade.

92 *Memoirs of Sir John Reresby*, 232.

93 Kenyon, 'Commission of ecclesiastical causes', 727–36; Rose, *Godly kingship*, 251–67.

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