
“MARTIN MARPRELATE”

“Martin Marprelate” was the pseudonym of several Puritan pamphleteers, among them Job Throckmorton and John Penry, who attacked the established clergy of the Church of England, and especially the lordly bishops and archbishops, between 1588 and 1593. An answer to an early Marprelate tract was prepared by Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, who of course defended episcopacy as divinely ordained and historically respectable. This answer was called *An Admonition to the People of England* and was written in a dignified style, suitable for a bishop. But Martin was appealing to a popular audience, so he used a colloquial, informal, sometimes scurrilous style. The *Admonition* was signed only by the author’s initials, T. C., perhaps to mislead readers into thinking the author was the prominent Puritan, Thomas Cartwright. But Martin was not deceived, and he played on the Bishop’s name in the title of his reply. “Hay any work for a cooper?” was a common London street cry meaning “Have you any work for a cooper (barrel-maker) to do?” The vituperative character of the language may seem strange to modern readers, especially when the content has to do with religion, but this remained the prevailing style in controversy through the next century and can be observed in some of the prose of John Milton.

From Hay Any Work for Cooper

[CHURCH GOVERNMENT]

Your reasons for the defense of your hierarchy and the keeping out of Christ’s government, used by this profane T. C., are already answered. They show what profane beasts you are. I will here repeat them. But here, first, the reader is to know what answer this T. C. maketh unto the syllogisms, whereby I prove all lord bishops to be petty popes and petty antichrists. I assure you no other than this: he flatly denieth the conclusion, whereas he might (if he had any learning in him, or had read anything) know that every dunstical¹ logician giveth this for an inviolable precept, that the conclusion is not to be denied. For that must needs be true, if the major and minor² be true; he in omitting the major and minor, because he was not able to answer, thereby granteth the conclusion to be true. His answer unto the conclusion is, that all lord bishops were not petty popes, because Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper,³ were not petty popes. They were not petty popes because they were not reprobates. As though—you block, you!—every petty pope and every petty antichrist were a reprobate. Why, no man can deny Gregory the Great⁴ to be a petty pope and a petty antichrist. For he was the next immediate pope before Boniface I, that known antichrist; and yet this Gregory left behind him undoubted testimonies of a chosen child of God. So might they; and yet be petty popes, in respect of their office. Profane T. C.’s first and second reason for the lawfulness of our church government! And what though good men gave their consent unto our

1. Hairsplitting, after Duns Scotus, medieval philosopher.

2. I.e., premises.

3. Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and John Hooper were all bishops and martyrs during the

reign of Mary.

4. Saint Gregory I, Pope 590–604. The following statement about Boniface I is a factual error. He was Pope 418–422.

church government, or writing unto bishops gave them their lordly titles? Are their offices therefore lawful? Then, so is the Pope's office. For Erasmus was a good man, you cannot deny; and yet he both allowed of the Pope's offices since his calling,⁵ and writing unto him gave him his titles. So did Luther since his calling also, for he dedicated his book of Christian Liberty unto Pope Leo X. The book and his Epistle unto the Pope are both in English. Here I would wish the magistrate to mark what good reasons you are able to afford for your hierarchy.

Thirdly, saith profane T. C., page 75, all churches have not the government of pastors and doctors; but Saxony and Denmark have lord bishops.⁶ You are a great statesman, undoubtedly, T. C., that understand the state of other churches so well. But herein the impudency of a proud fool appeareth egregiously. As though the testimony of a silly schoolmaster,⁷ being also as unlearned as a man of that trade and profession can be with any honesty, would be believed against known experience. Yes, but Saxony and Denmark have superintendents; what then? Ergo, lord archbishops and bishops? I deny it. Though other churches had lord archbishops and bishops, this proveth nothing but that other churches are maimed and have their imperfections. Your reason is this: other good churches are deformed, therefore ours must be so too. The king's son is lame, therefore the children of no subjects must go upright. And these be all the good reasons which you can bring for the government of archbishops and bishops against the government of Christ. You reason thus: it⁸ must not be admitted into this kingdom, for then civilians shall not be able to live in that estimation and wealth wherein they now do. Carnal and senseless beasts, who are not ashamed to prefer the outward state of men before the glory of Christ's kingdom. Here again, let the magistrate and other readers consider, whether it be not time that such brutish men shall be looked into. Which reason thus: The body of Christ, which is the church, must needs be maimed and deformed in this commonwealth, because other civilians should not be able to live. Why, you enemies to the State, you traitors to God and his Word, you Mar-Prince, Mar-Law, Mar-Magistrate, Mar-Church, and Mar-Commonwealth,⁹ do you not know that the world should rather go a-begging than that the glory of God, by maiming His church, should be defaced? Who can abide this indignity?

1589

5. "Calling of grace," i.e., becoming a Protestant.

6. Cooper maintained that the "superintendents" in the Protestant churches of Saxony and Denmark were equivalent to bishops and archbishops.

7. Cooper had formerly been headmaster of the Magdalen School, Oxford.

8. I.e., the "government of Christ" or the Puritan system of church government. "Civilians": laymen made rich by the plundering of the monasteries.

9. Names given to Martin Marprelate in Cooper's pamphlet.