Among many defenders of the reformed English Church in the years after the Elizabethan Settlement (1559), stand a number of lively proponents. One of them is John Copcot (ca. 1547–1590), who spent much of his life in Cambridge, where he eventually became master of Corpus Christi College in 1587, on the recommendation of Lord Burghley. Another is the well-known John Whitgift (ca. 1532–1604), Elizabeth’s archbishop of Canterbury from 1583. Closely aligned with Whitgift is Richard Bancroft (1564–1610), who succeeded Whitgift at Canterbury (1604). And finally, even as preaching at Paul’s Cross was nearing its end in the Laudian years, we meet the little-known, but estimable Mark Frank (1612/13–1664). All of these men held similar beliefs about obedience, hierarchy, and the episcopacy, regarding it as necessary for a strong and unified church, and all urged their doctrinal views in sermons at Paul’s Cross.

Let us first consider John Copcot, whose Paul’s Cross sermon of 1584 is a typical example in defence of the Elizabethan Settlement against its Puritan detractors, and a condemnation of the disciplinarians. While Whitgift was addressing the boldly abusive Marprelate tracts with help from the strenuous invective of Richard Bancroft, Copcot appeared at Paul’s Cross in 1584 to answer the Counter-poison, also of the same year. This was a work probably by Dudley Fenner (c. 1558–1587). Fenner, a protege of Thomas Cartwright, was an outspoken advocate of the ‘godly ministry.’ He urged that the government of the church belonged to all people, and that they should choose from among themselves their own ministers.

Copcot is answering Fenner’s attack on a convocation sermon that Copcot had given on 1 Tim. 5:17. His Paul’s Cross sermon is long—over

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2 Most of Fenner’s attack deals with the eldership, with verse 17 giving the admonition: ‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.’
18,000 words, including many marginal notes that cite numerous authorities. The sermon was never printed; and the only known manuscript copy is in the Lambeth Palace Library (MS 374), likely made by an unidentified scribe soon after the sermon was preached. It was probably circulated, just as another Copcot sermon (not at Paul's Cross): ‘It goeth from hande to hande amongst those who delight in it.’

Copcot’s sermon is on Psalm 84 (85): 1 (‘A Psalm for the sons of Korah’): ‘Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.’ This text is little explored, except implicitly, and it disappears in the elaborate discussion that follows. Copcot is concerned in the early part of his sermon with the right translation and transmission of scriptural texts. Concerning scriptural integrity, Copcot charges the Church of Rome with linguistic mismanagement and mangling—notable qualities of the ‘Rhemish’ bible. Consequently, ‘the Romanistes joyne with Christe diverse thinges which God never commaunded and yet require them, with that rigor that they deny, many may be saved without them. Therefore they corrupt the gospell’ (128r).

Copcot quickly moves to a discussion of faith and works, carefully distinguishing Roman claims from appropriately ‘reformed’ views. They say that we have no merit of our own, and Copcot elaborates:

Our workes and the merits of Saynctes are necessaraye to merite righteousnes, salvation and everlastingge life. ... But there is neither lyne nor letter in the whole Bible which either wholy or in parte attributeth any deserte of redemption, of justification, of salvation, and our eternall inheritance to the worke of any Saint or Angell. ... Our naturall corruption is suche so longe as here we live, that it doth staye and pollute all that which we doe by his grace, so that it is imperfect, and not accepted of God, but in Christ, who covereth our imperfection when we cleave unto him by a true faithe (128r).

Copcot now addresses the sacramental deficiencies of Rome, where the cup is denied, where baptism is sullied by many additional ‘inventions,’ such as exorcism, oil, and salt. Nevertheless, the Church of Rome is still the church of God, even though it is not a ‘true’ church. For such a church, we must look to the reformed church in England. Copcot is happy to assert that

Wee maye be accused for want of discipline ... but he that with a single eye looketh into the estate of our Churche shall finde as good discipline, as

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