

# The Westminster Assembly and 17<sup>th</sup> Century English Radicalism: Resolutions and Reformations

By Clif Daniell

## INTRODUCTION

“Resolutions are easily made but difficult to keep.” Such a statement can be simply verified by examining one’s progress with New Year’s goals or commitments to lose weight and eat healthier. However, it is also true on a larger scale with political or religious institutions. Amidst governmental and social upheaval, on June 12, 1643, England’s Parliament resolved to begin ecclesiastical reforms “as may be most agreeable to God’s holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad; and for the better effecting thereof, and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church of England from all false calumnies and aspersions, it is thought fit and necessary to call an Assembly of learned, godly, and judicious divines.”<sup>1</sup> This was a resolution that from the outset would be difficult to achieve due to the nature of the religious problems in England. It was a statement calling for unanimity in an environment where conflict had become standard fare.

To bring this unity, the polity structure of the church needed to be reconditioned, along with its measures for disciplining pastors and members of congregations. Mechanisms for evaluating prospective ministers required attention, as did the fleshing out of preexisting doctrinal formulations—the Thirty-nine Articles.<sup>2</sup> All of these endeavors posed significant challenges for the Assembly. Yet, the divines were also summoned for the purpose of dealing with “false calumnies and aspersions.” They were charged with responding to, what was deemed, the aberrant views of religious groups like Roman Catholics and Arminians, and more recent ones that, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, began to emerge in England. In the 1630s, a small number of radical religious groups had found their way from the continent into London and the surrounding areas. By the time

the Assembly gathered in 1643, the ground had become fertile for radicalism to sprout with numerous sectarian communities emerging. In the mind of many, they were like gangrene—bringers of death. Given their growth in the 1640’s, and the danger they posed, how did the Assembly interact and respond to 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism? And why did they do so with earnestness and forthrightness? What do the minutes and papers of the Assembly reveal? What do the writings of the divines suggest? This essay will seek to respond to such questions and show: 1. The divines *realized* the serious threat to religious unity that these groups presented. 2. The nature of how the Assembly *opposed* them. 3. And an *explanation* as to why they were adamantly against sectarian groups gaining a foothold in England.

## 1. REALIZATION

By the time of the Assembly, fighting between Parliamentary forces and King Charles I was in full swing. One of the consequences was a breakdown of the religious censorship that had developed in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. Not only did this cause tension between Laudian and Puritan parties, as polemical tracts were passed between the two, but it also allowed ideas that earlier were regarded as heretical to come to the surface of English society. At the outset of the war, there were still repercussions for publicly espousing unorthodox views; however, they were less stringently and widely enforced. Consequently, newfound freedoms were experienced by radical groups, especially

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1. William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly* (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1993), pp. 1–2.

2. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassador’s* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), p. 34–35.

in disseminating their ideas in print. The seemingly chaotic and less-centralized nature of the war allowed for greater circulation of a variety of political, religious, and social perspectives. In 1640, just 22 tracts were published promoting radical ideas. In 1642, one year before the meeting of the Assembly, 2,000 were printed and distributed.<sup>3</sup> As the Westminster Divines gathered on

3. Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), xii–xiii.

4. J.S. Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution," *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. by John Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76–77.

5. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

6. D.R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 393.

7. George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000), pp. 1197–1211.

8. Perhaps a more basic question is, "what is a radical?" Or "what constitutes radicalism?" It's a question that holds much significance for the modern world considering the bombings, shootings, and territorial conquests of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Such actions are often identified as 'radical.' Yet, it is a word that is hard to define. Originally, it referred to the root of something or what was fundamental. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'radicalism' began to be associated with political and social innovation. And today, it is a term applied to people and groups seeking change distinctly different from the status quo. Though the word was not employed as a reference to sectarian movements until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is used by historians to describe earlier individuals and communities seeking political, social, and religious change—like 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism. Contra a more nominalistic understanding of the view of language development and usage, justification for calling 'Protestant groups' (not Roman Catholic nor Orthodox) like Ranters, Diggers, and Familists radical is that there is not another word which better conveys their nature pre-1800. What makes this discussion even more complex is that these various communities identified one another as imbibing radical ideas. This goes to show that history is knotty and messy. For the purposes of this essay, I am using radicalism within the context of mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England to describe different groups that were not only or simply Arminian in their theology or Independent in their polity. I am doing this not to exclude them from the discussion, but to help narrow the focus of this treatment of English sectarianism. To include, Arminianism and Independency, is to bite off more than I can chew. An example would be John Goodwin. Was he a radical? Many said yes given his Arminian and Independent bent. And yet, he vehemently argued against Antinomians, Socinians, and Quakers. For more on this debate see *Radical Voices, Radical Ways*, ed. Laurent Currely and Nigel Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) 1–37; Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England*, xi–xxvi; *Varieties of 17th and Early 18th Century English Radicalism in Context*, ed. Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011) 1–29; John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2006).

9. See, John White, *The First Century of Scandalous, Malignant Priests, Made and Admitted Into Benefices by the Prelates, in Whose Hands the Ordination of Ministers and Government of the Church Hath Been* (1643) and Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God's Ambassadors*, pp. 4–5.

July 1, 1643, aberrant views were continuing to grow. The extent to which is a source of debate. Some have argued that the emergence of sectarianism is overblown with "the vast majority of the population [going] into their own parish churches."<sup>4</sup> Others seem to indicate that England was on the verge of a populist revolt with religious fanatics leading the way.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, a more modest description is best. While most people did attend a local congregation on a weekly basis, nonetheless, radicalism was more freely espoused and embraced, with the documentary evidence from the time representing "the tip of the historical iceberg."<sup>6</sup>

Much of the radicalism that flowered during the 1640's and 50's originated from various strands of continental Anabaptism. They took root during Edward VI's reign and remained largely hidden, until the onset of the Civil War. Yet, there is something distinctly 'English' about some of the sectarianism that flourished on the island. It was not simply a repackaging or re-expression of earlier ideas. Perhaps that was part of the reason why they were growing.<sup>7</sup> However, the fact that these communities were becoming more prevalent leading up to Parliament's summoning of the divines proposes some important questions—who were these radical groups, and what were their views?<sup>8</sup> In response, one could take a systematic method, outlining each. Yet, to do so might lend itself to unnecessary repetition, given the similarities between sectarians like Muggletonians and Socinians. Therefore, a general approach will be undertaken, centered on three distinct and, at times, overlapping areas of thought in 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism.

### Ethical

To the divines gathered at Westminster Abbey, morality seemed to be in decline within the nation. And nowhere did that appear more evident than in London itself. Leading up to their summoning, Parliament had already established a committee to remove ministers in the area whose lives were scandalous. And a few months after, John White, a member of the Assembly himself, catalogued numerous cases of London clergy engaged in womanizing, rape, battery, verbal abuse, misogyny, foul language, and much more.<sup>9</sup> However, the ethical concerns did not stop nor start with ministers. The divines recognized that various groups had emerged, which either diminished the Law's application to the Christian life or dismissed Scripture's teaching on its importance altogether. Such false instruction was having an impact in London and throughout the country. On July 19, 1643, just a few weeks after starting, the Assembly quickly petitioned both houses of Parliament to

declare a national fast for July 21. One reason for doing so was to stress the effect of various ‘anti-Law’ groups.

In connection to this, Parliamentary forces had lost a series of battles against the king during the early summer of 1643. It was seen as a sign of God’s judgment upon the nation, which the Assembly believed, in part, stemmed from an open door to “all Libertinisme and disobedience to God and man,” resulting from the “bold venting of corrupt doctrines.” Moreover, they saw fornication, adultery, incest, and other moral heinousness as particularly prevalent.<sup>10</sup> ‘Ranter’ sectarian communities had developed and were thriving, especially those using biblical categories to twist traditionally orthodox positions. Ethically, their ideals centered on the article, “There is no sin,” because, in their minds, the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law had been abrogated.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they asserted, “There is no such act as drunkenness, adultery and theft in God.... Whatever act soever is done by thee in light and love, is light and lovely, though it be called that act of adultery.”<sup>12</sup> A true Believer was indwelt by the Spirit and was therefore made unable to sin, via a kind of quasi-divinization. For some, this expressed itself in sexual promiscuity. Abiezer Copper provocatively noted, “I can if it be my will, kiss and hug ladies and love my neighbor’s wife as myself, without sin.”<sup>13</sup> For others moral laxity expressed itself in public swearing, even while preaching.

However, another form of Ranterism wholly rejected Scripture, describing it as a “Tale,” a “dead Letter,” and “a bundle of contradictions.” They only used its verbiage polemically in order to validate their anti-commandment practice. The righteous rules of Scripture were seen as “fruits of the curse” with “sin and holinesse [as] all one to God.”<sup>14</sup> Both of the aforementioned expressions of Ranterism were in the purview of the Assembly, as they called for Parliament to set aside time for a national fast. And yet, it seems that neither was the primary ‘ethical target’ the divines were focused upon. Most of the ‘anti-Legal’ sectarians mentioned in the Assembly minutes do not appear to fall into a ‘Ranter’ category. Instead, they were identified as antinomians.<sup>15</sup> In particular, it was a “soteriological antinomianism” that they realized was a problem, because these antinomians placed an emphasis upon the completed work of Christ, which appeared to exclude any form of human activity in the ‘wider doctrine of salvation.’ Essentially, they made justification ultimate—swallowing up any need for sanctification, as mortification and vivification.<sup>16</sup> Part of this line of argumentation stemmed from their belief that the Decalogue was suspended for Christians. The Old Testament was under the administration of the

Covenant of Works, while the New was one of grace, established on the sacrifice of Christ. This left the time from creation to John the Baptist governed by obedience to the Law. Justification was gained through strict adherence to it. Yet, in the Gospel age, it was based on the work of Christ.<sup>17</sup> By extension then, the Law was not needed. Its only purpose was salvific in nature—a means of meriting eternal rest. Since that had been accomplished by Christ—actively and passively—there was really no place for the moral dictums of the Old Testament. In fact, any New Testament passages making ethical demands or providing warnings are only for the unregenerate and should be preached as such.<sup>18</sup> However, antinomians did not press this ‘anti-Law’ spirit to its logical conclusion—unlike the Ranters. They did not relegate morality so far to the sidelines that it was wholly renounced for the Believer. Nonetheless, they did view the “duties of the faith” or even attending to the means of grace, which Reformed Orthodoxy encouraged, as snares leading to legalism. Seeing growth in holiness as evidence of saving faith was identified as

10. “Petition to both houses of parliament for a fast 19 July 1643,” in Calendar of papers of the Westminster assembly, in *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 5 vols., ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5, 9–11. Hereafter, *MPWA*.

11. See Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell’s England*, p. 80. Also, note his discussion of the extent to which Ranterism was actually a movement or just a common set of views held and expressed by many, pp. 75–93.

12. Lawrence Clarkson, *A Single Eye*, pp. 8–12, in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 215.

13. Quoted in Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell’s England*, p. 84.

14. Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 86–87.

15. The word ‘antinomian’ is difficult to define, historically speaking. No doubt, Ranters, to an extent, fall into this category, because essentially, they were ‘anti-law of God.’ Nonetheless, most Ranters were not identified with antinomianism—not by the Westminster Divines and not by those who were known as antinomians. Those labeled as such distanced themselves from the Ranters, because they saw them as going too far, and deemed them as “non-nomianists.” See D.R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England*, pp. 10–72, 454.

16. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2009), pp. 250–251 and Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), pp. 15–18, 52–56.

17. Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, pp. 41–42.

18. Particularly note Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, and her treatment of antinomian John Eaton, pp. 14–20.

Pharisaical enslavement. Believers needed to remember the passiveness of their justification and sanctification. Though they were depraved and utterly lost, Christ had found them. As a result, in their “post-conversion state they were transformed into exalted beings.” Therefore, a perfectionism ‘of sorts’ characterized them.<sup>19</sup> The implications for preaching to the regenerate were that a homiletic which included *simil iustus et peccator* was unbiblical.<sup>20</sup> Instead, proclamation that focused only on *iustificatus fide sine operibus* was necessary.<sup>21</sup> Law and admonishments to the justified in Christ would not motivate holiness, but rather encourage legalism and put them back underneath the Covenant of Works. All that was required for the regenerate was preaching justification in Christ without human activity.

It was these things that caused the Assembly great concern. From their perspective anti-Law teaching, while espousing some things that were true, misapplied the Covenant of Works to include the entire Old Testament administration—disregarding its connection to the Covenant of Grace—and it conflated the *duplex gratia*.<sup>22</sup> Justification and sanctification were so interwoven that good works were not seen as evidences

of saving faith.<sup>23</sup> Their concern was, antinomians, at best, were spreading misguided and confusing teaching, and at worst, they were espousing heresy. The influence of their ideas led the divines to quickly present to the House of Commons a statement of antinomian errors, with Scripture proofs and citations from the Thirty-nine Articles. A few weeks later, on October 10, 1643, the Assembly went even further and petitioned Parliament to suppress their errors and restrict the publishing of their works. In addition, the Assembly itself established its own committee on antinomianism in order to review the literature on the subject, discuss its impact, and recommend appropriate responses.<sup>24</sup> While aberrant views of an ethical nature from sectarians were a major concern for the divines, they were not the only cause for alarm. Other radical groups had emerged and required a response.

#### Rational

The Westminster Divines were aware of the debates surrounding the Synod of Dort. James I had sent representatives to participate in it. The outcome was a thoroughgoing denunciation of Arminian thought. This had implications not just for the Dutch but the English as well. Remonstrant beliefs and practices were deemed unacceptable in most Protestant circles. However, towards the end of James’ reign, Arminianism began to see greater growth, with the king favoring it for diplomatic purposes. His son, Charles I, supported it even more, appointing William Laud to archbishop of Canterbury—a noted Arminian.<sup>25</sup> This caused considerable tension within the nation as a whole and especially in the church. Much of the immediate reasons for the Civil War can be traced along the Laudian/Puritan divide. As the Assembly came to meet in 1643, the conflict between Arminianism and Reformed Orthodoxy was still fresh, but it began to move in a slightly different direction, as a group with connections to Arminianism became established in England during the 1640’s—the Socinians. Generally, their roots lay with the anti-Trinitarian thought that developed in the early Reformation. More specifically, they were connected to Laelius and Faustus Socinus—16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian uncle and nephew anti-Trinitarians. By the time of the Assembly meetings, anti-Trinitarian literature had begun to impact the English religious landscape, with the Socinians being viewed as formidable and destructive. They appealed to ‘liberty of conscience’ as a basis for their views, along with an over-literalistic hermeneutic—all seen through the lens of reason.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, they were largely committed to the use of biblical

19. Specifically, in this way, antinomians shared some of the same views as various Ranter groups. They had been filled by the Spirit of Christ, divinized to an extent—volitionally perfected. The ethical link established here, in part, reveals that antinomianism spawned other groups—like the Ranters—that went further than they did by seeking to dismiss moral boundaries as a whole. See, D. R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, pp. 10–24, 33–38.

20. At once righteous and a sinner. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Terms*.

21. Justification by faith without works. See Muller, *ibid*.

22. *Duplex gratia*, the dual graces of Justification and Sanctification. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, c. XI, §I.

23. Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, pp. 42–64. She also provides other summative and distinctive marks of antinomians.

24. *MPWA*, 5.25–26. For a more detailed description of this committee’s work on antinomianism and that of the Assembly see Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*.

25. During this time, Arminianism in England was less focused on opposing Calvinistic predestinarian and salvific doctrines. (That would change as the 17<sup>th</sup> century progressed. See John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* [Rochester, Boydell Press, 2006], especially pp. 199–232.) English Arminians like Laud largely sided with the Dutch Remonstrants on such issues; however, their expression of Arminianism was more concerned with ceremonial worship, emphasis on the Sacraments, and a high view of the clergy and the liturgy. For the Reformed orthodox of the day, this was not only seen as an attack on what they viewed as orthodoxy and orthopraxy, but also a re-institution of certain Roman Catholic elements. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 513–520.

26. Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, p. 78.

texts to support their arguments, in addition to a budding rationalism.<sup>27</sup> They were bibliicists, who were accused of believing “God and his Word ... no farther than they [could] see reason.” Rationality was their *regula fidei*.<sup>28</sup> They simply wanted to submit themselves to the teachings of Scripture, while using “unbiased reason” to inform and shape their understanding of it, regardless of whether previous generations in Church history agreed with them.<sup>29</sup>

With Scripture and syllogistic principles in hand, Socinians in England pushed against the commonly held doctrines of the faith, particularly the Trinity. Prior to the 1640's, censorship had significantly limited their influence and adherents. However, as the 17<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the effect of their teaching was felt ‘in the pew,’ with an increasing number being charged with moving beyond forms of error, like Arminianism, to unorthodox positions, mainly regarding the divinity of the Son and Spirit.<sup>30</sup> Here, Socinians denied God as three persons. For them, ‘person’ constituted concreteness and separation. Just as the term refers to independent existence for mankind, so also the same should apply to God.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the divine cannot be one essence and at the same time three subsistencies. It was deemed conceptually illogical. Hermeneutically, the passages used in various confessional documents to support the orthodox delineations of *homoousios* and *perichoresis* were understood to be misinterpreted.<sup>32</sup> Applying a strict literalism to biblical texts, they viewed God as one person, identified as the Father. They judged Christ to be purely human, but also elevated him to a mediatorial role between God and man. In their minds, the incarnation was untenable and, more specifically, the hypostatic union un-believable. In addition, the Spirit was simply a “personification” of divine action in the world—“A virtue or energy flowing from God to men.”<sup>33</sup> Of particular note, Socinians affirmed the Spirit as a gift. Moreover, because the Spirit was such, they surmised that divinity cannot be logically true.<sup>34</sup>

The Assembly recognized the danger of these views and repeatedly condemned them, especially as they were taught by Paul Best. On numerous occasions his name appears in the Minutes and Papers of the Assembly and in Parliament's records.<sup>35</sup> Such repetition reveals that the concern the divines had was not only focused on Best, but also on an overly rationalistic and bibliicist approach to understanding Theology Proper and the notion of personhood within the divine. For the Assembly members, the doctrine of the Trinity and its theological and practical implications were under attack, and it was a fight for the soul of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> The triune nature

of the one God would be compromised and biblical revelation as the epistemic ground of religious knowledge and experience would be replaced with reason. Yet, as the Assembly carried on, another category of radicalism was becoming more established—one in some ways contrary to the ethical and rational, and in others very similar.

### Spiritual

During the mid-1520s, the ideas of Thomas Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets swept across Middle Germany and eventually made their way to the Dutch lowlands. There was a ‘Revolutionary Spiritualism’ ushered in by what Anabaptists thought was ‘a new age of the Spirit’ that had come, bringing social egalitarianism, economic equality, and ecclesiastical deconstruction. Fundamentally, these ‘Enthusiasts’ stressed the continuation of divine dreams and direct revelation, while, in varying degrees, neglecting the importance of the Scriptures, Sacraments, and the ministry of the Church. *Solus Spiritus* was their mantra, rather than *Sola Scriptura*. Spiritualists’ emphases began to cross the Channel by the 1570s, as the Family of Love (Familist) emerged in

27. Phillip Dixon *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 39.

28. Rule of Faith. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 251–252. There is some debate regarding the extent to which Socinianism can be characterized by rationalism. See Alan W. Gomes, “Reason Run Amok? The Protestant Orthodox Charge of Rationalism Against Socinus,” in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2013), pp. 551–565.

29. Kelly Kopic, “The Spirit as Gift: Explorations in John Owen’s Pneumatology,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, eds. Kelly Kopic and Mark Jones (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), p. 116.

30. Dewey Wallace, “Puritan Polemical Divinity and Doctrinal Controversy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, p. 219.

31. For Socinians, language regarding God functions in a univocal fashion. There is, then, no real difference between the “way in which ‘person’ is used of God and how it is used of men ... [Therefore] the assertion that God is three ‘persons’ is tantamount to asserting that there are three absolutely separate gods, much as Peter, James, and John are three separate human beings.” See Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, pp. 50–53.

32. See the terms and under “Trinitas” in Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Terms*.

33. *The Racovian catechism, with notes and illustrations; translated from the Latin. To which is prefixed a sketch of the history of Unitarianism in Poland and the adjacent countries Racovian Catechism*, (1605; edited by Thomas Rees, London, 1818), pp. 284–285. See also, Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, p. 41.

34. *The Racovian Catechism*, p. 285.

35. See MPWA, Session 451, 10 June 1645, 3.614–615.

36. Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, pp. 48–64.

England. This group asserted the notion that the inner impressions and leadings of the Spirit should take precedence over the external Word.<sup>37</sup>

By the time of the Assembly, these ideas were part and parcel with certain strands of antinomianism. If the Spirit's indwelling of the Believer made perfectionism a reality, then it was not a far stretch for the same 'filling' to allow for ongoing revelation that even superseded the Scriptures. "Have not I the Spirit, and why may not I write the Scripture as well as Paul, and what I write be as binding and infallible as that which Paul writ?" wrote one Ranter.<sup>38</sup> For the Enthusiasts, the divinized man or woman knew God's words in an 'immediate' fashion through the inner light of the Spirit. An extreme expression of this manifested itself through the Muggletonians who saw Lodowicke Muggleton and John Reeve as the embodiment of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Their words were seen as above Scripture, even at times critiquing and correcting it.<sup>39</sup> A more common display of this 'inner light theology' was found in the teachings of the Quakers. Through people like George Fox and James Nayler, Quakerism spread rapidly during the early 1650s—particularly their focus on the Spirit above the Scriptures. This did not mean that mediated revelation like the Bible was unimportant for life—God sometimes did work through such means. However,

37. For connections between German and Dutch Anabaptism and English Spiritualism see George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, pp. 120–136, 1190–1211, 1289–1311, and Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England*, pp. xviii–xix.

38. Quoted in Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm; A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 173.

39. Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England*, pp. 139–141.

40. Catie Gill, "English Radicalism in the 1650s: the Quaker Search for the True Knowledge," in *Radical Voices, Radical Ways*, pp. 80–81.

41. T.L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 21–26.

42. An explanation of early Quaker views on the relationship between Scripture and the Spirit is difficult to nail down. In part, this is because in the beginning stages of the movement there was great diversity. Over time those perspectives were challenged, so that by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Quakerism's teaching on the 'inner light' became more firmly established. Yet, even early on, it is clear that the Spirit 'inwardly known' stands as superior to Scripture. See Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 34–47, Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm*, pp. 139–175, and T.L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War*, pp. 20–33.

43. Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), pp. 295–297.

44. One could further divide radical teaching along the line of

they insisted on the predominance of immediacy, as they believed was experienced among New Testament Christians. The mystical and inner revelatory work of the Spirit was central. Therefore, they were not so much 'anti-Scripture,' but 'anti-Scripture alone,' allowing for the personal experience of the Spirit to trump all else. As members of the Assembly were looking to their Bibles for instruction and guidance, Quakers increasingly set it aside in favor of 'a turn to within themselves,' where the Spirit was moving each person.<sup>40</sup> It is true that Quakerism was not specifically referenced in the Minutes and Papers—again, it developed in the 1650s and most of the Assembly's work was completed before then. Nevertheless, the spiritualist foundations of Quaker theology were already prevalent, as Parliament called the divines together.

Prior to the 1650's, Fanatical groups were asserting that the Bible was insufficient as the 'rule of faith.' In fact, to see it as such was to become legalistic and 'a slave in Egypt once again.' Turning away from the light within and only obeying the 'Letter,' was to follow in the steps of the Scribes and Pharisees.<sup>41</sup> Yet, as this spiritualist paradigm developed, an inner Christ-and-community-consciousness was their interpretive grid and final authority on religious matters. An experience of the Spirit known within the unity of community was their epistemological foundation.<sup>42</sup> By the time the divines were summoned, Familists and Antinomians were spreading new interpretations of Scripture, and the need to have private revelations. And as their meetings carried on, until being dissolved in 1652, Quakerism's inner-light theology was taking hold.<sup>43</sup> For the Westminster Assembly, spiritualist arguments against the authority of the Word were a repackaging of Roman Catholic polemics contra *Sola Scriptura*—the 'Word alone' is not sufficient—and it shows the nature of what the divines were up against. Ethical, rational, and spiritual radicals were shifting between revolving epistemic grounds—reason and experience—while Roman Catholics/Laudians were often supplementing or substituting the Scriptures for tradition and the magisterium.

The summons that Parliament put forth called for doctrinal and ecclesiastical unanimity. However, the overall religious milieu of England was anything but unified, and this was made even more obvious given the rise and influence of radical groups. The Assembly realized it, and as a convening body and individually, as ministers, they sought to respond to the "false calumnies and aspersions" sectarian communities were spreading.<sup>44</sup> Thus, their recognition of radicalism's impact led to a public opposition of it.

## 2. OPPOSITION

Assembly commissioner Robert Baillie identified England of the 1640s as “democratick anarchie.” Radicalism appeared to be rampant and spreading like wildfire, though, he and other Presbyterians were given to overstatement and sensationalism in describing the extent of the religious landscape of the day. Nonetheless, sectarian groups were increasing in number, influencing the church, and causing varying levels of social disorder.<sup>45</sup> Thomas Edwards’ *Gangraena* (1646), gives an example of this by describing the scope of radicalism in and around London. Edwards classified the various views he chronicled into well over a hundred different categories. Even though he was not a member of the Assembly, many of the divines aided him in his study, read his finished work, and contributed their own treatises on the matter. They and others like them, while at times exaggerating the state of chaos brought upon England by radical groups, did base their assessments upon ‘actual’ or ‘real’ encounters and communications experienced directly, or passed on.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the commissioners gathering at Westminster Abbey realized that fanatical teaching was scorching the land. And, it was “the duty of all compassionate Country-men to contribute the uttermost of their best endeavours for the extinguishing of these unhappie Flames, before the remainder of all our Churches and States be burnt down to ashes.”<sup>47</sup> Individual commissioners, and the Assembly as a whole, took seriously Parliament’s charge to respond to the “false calumnies and aspersions” schismatics and Enthusiasts were promulgating. The problem, as they saw it, was essentially one of ‘liberty.’ Radicals included the word in hundreds of tract titles in the 1640s and 50s. In their minds, the Reformation had brought freedom in thought and practice from traditional religious institutions, which included the Church of England. This encouraged a spirit of ‘open-mindedness’ amongst them that, at least in principle, meant radical views were to be tolerated.<sup>48</sup> However, this was a perspective the Westminster Assembly saw as divisive and dangerous. The divines were keen to emphasize in chapter 20 of the Westminster Confession that the Christian has liberty of conscience, but only in so far as it is consistent with the doctrines and practices of Scripture. To them, ‘the fanatics’ had gone outside the bounds of allowable religious liberty, were destroying the church, and needed to be publicly and ecclesiastically resisted—to this opposition this essay now turns.<sup>49</sup>

## Anti-Antinomianism

In 1644, the Assembly asserted that the ethical liberties being encouraged were constructing an England where “brutish ignorance and palpable darknesse [were] possessing the greatest part of the people in all places of the Kingdome, whereby [they] are utterly unfit to waite upon God in any holy duty.”<sup>50</sup> But even earlier, as discussions on the floor unfolded, the same sentiments were expressed. In a statement from the committee on antinomianism, Thomas Temple noted to the gathered commissioners, “[Anti-legal] opinions open a gap to all manner of licentiousness and strike at the very power of godlynesse.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, while some antinomian ministers may not have encouraged a ‘Ranter-like’ shameful lifestyle, their views on the role of the law in the Christian life logically led to an ‘anything goes’ conclusion. “If Christ [has] fulfilled the law, man [is] not bound to fulfill the law.” In response, Thomas Goodwin commented during session 50 of the Assembly meetings, “[To the aforementioned claim] if Christ fulfilled the law, we are not bound[,] Answer, the same answer as before: not to the same end are we bound; he fulfilled it for Justification.” And other divines continued his train of thought and asserted the law’s importance in sanctification.<sup>52</sup> Christ’s meeting the legal demands of the law did not eradicate the need to obey them.

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ecclesiastical, since many radicals had a low view of the church, given their penchant to diminish the importance of the Word, audible and visible, and its public administration. This will be explored and responded to in subsequent sections of the essay. Additionally, the category of communal could also be used to describe a ‘communitistic bent’ that various radicals expressed, where property was shared amongst all—note the group ‘True Levellers.’ For ecclesiastical and communal distinctions see Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell’s England*, pp. 51–74, 95–115; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 107–150; Jean-Pierre Cavaille “Community of goods: An Unacceptable Radical Theme at the Time of the English Revolution,” in *Radical Voices, Radical Ways*, pp. 41–59.

45. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 34–35.

46. *God’s Ambassadors*, p. 35. But also see Anna Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 169–187. In it, she validates the nature of Edwards’ sources but not necessarily the extent of his descriptions.

47. Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive From the Errors of the Time* (1645), 1.

48. John Morrill, “The Puritan Revolution,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, pp. 67–79.

49. George Gillespie, *A Late Dialogue Between a Civilian and a Divine, Concerning the Present Condition of the Church of England* (1644), pp. 30–32, and Samuel Rutherford, “A brotherly and free Epistle to the patrons and friends of pretended Liberty of Conscience,” in *A Survey of the Spirituall AntiChrist* (1648), a2–c2.

50. MPWA, “Petition to both houses of parliament for a fast 19 July 1643,” 5.10.

51. MPWA, Session 59, 20 September 1643, 2.143.

52. MPWA, Session 50, 11 September 1643, 2.95–97. The Assembly’s

Antinomians like John Eaton and John Saltmarsh went even further by arguing that Christ's justifying work removed the presence of sin in the life of a Believer, because union with a "sow, or filthy swine" was impossible for Jesus. God, therefore, does not "see any sin in any of his justified children," which means there is no need for ongoing repentance.<sup>53</sup> To such antinomian claims, on the one hand, the Assembly's reaction was moderate, in the sense that they desired to affirm the efficacy of Christ's justifying works. Yet, this was not to be done at the expense of sacrificing Scripture's call to sanctifying growth and a life of repentance.<sup>54</sup> In fact, divine Thomas Gataker argued, to do so was to alter the Gospel itself. Christ told his disciples, "Go out into the wide world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. But what Gospel? Or what manner of Gospel was it that they were to preach? The Gospel of life and salvation, upon the condition of faith and repentance, and obedience." For Gataker and the Assembly, this was important because to remove these conditions—faith, repentance, and obedience—was to not only dismiss Scripture's emphasis to pursue holiness, but also to erase God's sanctifying grace in the life of a Believer, as they strive with Christ's energy for mortification and vivification.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Gataker stressed, when Christians do fail, God does, in fact, still see the sin of his children. Yet, he does not consider it as their judge. On the basis

debate regarding justification, sanctification, and antinomianism is complicated and outside the scope of this essay. For a thorough analysis see Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, especially pp. 87–154. More of a summary can be found in Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, pp. 242–292.

53. See John Eaton, *Honey-Combe of Free Justification*, XIII (379), quoted in John Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), p. 243, and Thomas Gataker, *Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted*, 1652, p. 4. See also Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, pp. 14–20, 41–42, 51–52.

54. MPWA, Session 55, 14 September 1643, 2.121–123.

55. Thomas Gataker, *Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted*, 1652, pp. 17–18.

56. Gataker, *Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted*, 1652, p. 19.

57. Gataker, pp. 33–40.

58. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, pp. 240–245.

59. It is interesting to note that many of those who saw antinomianism as 'simply errors' (not heresy) were also a part of the independent faction at the Assembly. The level of 'tolerance' they desired regarding their ecclesiastical views, they seemed willing to extend to some ethical sectarians, because they understood both as matters of religious indifference. Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, pp. 74–76.

60. See Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly*, pp. 65–84. She gives a detailed description of both the Assembly's response to antinomianism and various divines as well.

of love, the Father sent the Son, and Christ was crucified in their place. Nonetheless, God does see it, as their Father, and therefore disciplines them out of affection, when they do not obey. "[God] is like a discreet parent; who though he loves his child dearly, as well when he doth amisse, as when he doth well, yet he is not so well pleased with him ... when he seeth him take some evil course ... yea therefore is he then angry with him, because he loves him; and chastiseth him ... 'as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent.'"<sup>56</sup>

For Assembly members, like Gataker, God's love, then, is the reason for his displeasure with the sins of his people and his discipline of them. In addition, his affection is the Believer's impetus for repentance and obedience, particularly his love shown in Christ. However, antinomians like John Eaton and John Saltmarsh asserted God's love also, and as an expression of it, Christ obeyed perfectly, mortified sin perfectly, and repented perfectly, all for the elect. Yet, the latter two—mortified sin perfectly and repented perfectly—were considered extra-biblical and the byproduct of enthusiastic dreams. Gataker once more, "[Christ] did obey for us; and yet not to free us from obedience ... but to set us a copy, to give us a precedent, that we might tread in his steps."<sup>57</sup> Assembly members affirmed the nature of justification, but they did not allow it to swallow sanctification, and the need for repentance in the Christian life, which is what they believed antinomians were doing.<sup>58</sup> For many of the commissioners, these ethical radicals were teaching damnable opinions that, if allowed to continue, would logically lead to social and moral instability; hence, severe action was called for. Others, however, were unsure. They thought antinomian teaching was, no doubt, dangerous but not necessarily heretical and worthy of civil punishment.<sup>59</sup> This was a debate that ultimately the Assembly never concluded. Nonetheless, individual divines wrote numerous works against antinomians. The Assembly, as a whole, published a summary of their errors. They examined ethical sectarian ministers and candidates regarding anti-Legal doctrines and practices, and they petitioned Parliament to establish its own anti-antinomian committee.<sup>60</sup>

#### Contra-Socinianism

While opposing various moral concerns, the Westminster Assembly was also combating rational ones. By the early 1640s anti-Trinitarian perspectives were affecting England. Much of it was the spread of Socinianism from the continent with some 'home-grown-ness' mixed in. Traditional Socinian thought was summarized through the Racovian Catechism, which

was translated into Latin and found in England by 1609. It asserted the uni-personality of God and the unreasonableness of Trinitarian language. They understood the term ‘person’ in a univocal fashion, which meant that whatever is said regarding personhood with man is also true of God. Since a human can’t be said to exist in a ‘multi-personal’ manner, neither can God. Even more so, they were strict bibliocists who, because they did not see the words of traditional Trinitarianism in Scripture, considered it simply as another addendum of the Roman church that must be ‘reformed out’ from the faith. The anti-Trinitarian Paul Best claimed that the Trinity was “a mystery of iniquity . . . a three headed cerberus.”<sup>61</sup> To support the language of “one God in three persons” was both rationally impossible and functionally tri-theistic. It did not make sense of the nature of individuality. Instead, Best argued that the Father alone was God, with the Son being the divinely created Messiah, and the Spirit the power of God. There was no consubstantiality between them, no coequality, only distinction, division, and difference.<sup>62</sup> By 1645, Best’s doctrines formally came to the attention of the commissioners. Eventually, they called on Parliament to arrest and imprison him due to his false teaching and upsetting of the faith. While he was jailed, a committee was formed to examine his views and convince him of the errors of his thinking. On more than one occasion, Assembly members met with him, attempting to persuade him to recant his views.<sup>63</sup> In the end, it appeared to have no converting impact, as Best remained a Socinian to his death. And yet, given his teachings contra the Trinity, it is no wonder in the minutes of the Assembly that he is spoken of often, and was at times referred to as Paul ‘Beast’ rather than Best.<sup>64</sup>

A fuller treatment of his views and other rational radicals, as well as a more detailed response, can be seen in the works of various divines, but Francis Cheynell’s is likely the most well-known. In 1643, he published *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianism*, and in many respects, it was a call to battle. The fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith was at stake. The Trinity was under attack, and reason was essentially being placed above Scripture and its interpretative principle of “good and necessary consequence.” In fact, there was even a twinge of reductionistic pragmatism, as Cheynell purported “the Socinians would have us deny Christ to be God, that we may convert Turkes and Iewes to the Christian faith: as if the best way to convert men to the Christian faith, were to deny a prime Article of our Christian faith; or as if Jews and Turks would have a better opinion of Christ, if the Christians should deny him to be God.”

Due to the seemingly irrational nature of the doctrine of the Trinity, it should be dismissed to better convert the infidels.<sup>65</sup> Such assertions were justification for why Cheynell appears alarmist in this work. However, in 1650, authorities at Oxford University asked him for a more detailed refutation of Socinianism and a defense of orthodox Trinitarianism—*The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. In it, he rebuffs the univocal usage of ‘person’ and declares that the term should not be applied in the same way to God as it would be to men.<sup>66</sup> To do as the Socinians were was to collapse language distinctions between God and man and base human knowledge of the divine essentially off of reason or experience—‘our’ definition of personhood, human and divine, must completely comport with rationality and be experientially ascertained, making it epistemically precarious. However, for Cheynell and the Assembly, human knowledge of God is fundamentally analogical in nature and, as such, must be revealed from God via the external Word. As a result, Cheynell argued, “a [divine] person is an undivided substance, an understanding substance, a complete, incommunicable, independent substance, which doth not depend upon anything else by way of inhaesion, adhaesion, union, or any other way, for its sustentation,” thus, making the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each ‘persons’ subsisting in one essence [nature] without compound.<sup>67</sup> Cheynell’s affirmations of orthodox Trinitarianism reaffirmed what

61. Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, pp. 39–44.

62. Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, pp. 42–45. Some Socinians saw the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct persons with only the Father as divine. A more English expression of anti-Trinitarianism, like with Best, believed that the Spirit had no individuality, but was simply a force or the activity of God in the world. See how Kelly Kapic unpacks this subject in his article “The Spirit as Gift: Explorations in John Owen’s Pneumatology,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, pp. 113–140, and John Owen, “Of Communion with God,” and “On the Holy Spirit,” in *The Works of John Owen*, 17 vols., ed. by William Goold. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), vols. 2 and 3 respectively.

63. How the Assembly handled Paul Best is an interesting test case that seems to evidence their pastoral concern not only for the sheep being led astray by him (hence, why they encouraged his arrest), but also for the man, himself. The divines were not woodenly engaged in their work. They took their labors seriously but also approached it with compassion. They cared for Best’s soul and pleaded with him to repent.

64. MPWA, Biographical Dictionary, 1.109 and Session 451, 10 June 1645, 3.614–615.

65. Francis Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianism* (1643), p. 19.

66. Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (1650), pp. 61–66.

67. Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, p. 72. See also Phillip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, pp. 56–58.

the Westminster Assembly summarized in chapter two of the Confession, “Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, he reinforced where the Standards said all theology begins—Scripture. Whether dealing with ethical sectarian errors or Socinian anti-trinitarianism, the point the divines sought to make was “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF 1.10). It alone was the final authority—not reason or some other of way of knowing. The irony is, early Socinians would have agreed. They asserted the Scriptures are authoritative and sufficient. Yet, in practice, as they sought to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, their true colors showed forth, revealing their real *principium*. As their catechism states, “Reject every interpretation which is repugnant to right reason,”<sup>69</sup> which included the orthodox teaching of “in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” (WCF 2.3).

The Assembly, on the other hand, recognized the complexity and inexplicableness of divine triunity. However, the commissioners affirmed it, because Scripture declared it. As Cheynall put it regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, “The saving knowledge of God in Christ is revealed by the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures of truth; nay Father, Son and Holy Ghost do all joyne in revealing to us the saving mystery of faith and godliness, that by the grace of Christ, the love of God, and Communion of the Holy Ghost, we may have a glorious fellowship with all three as one God, the only true God.” Long after the Assembly had concluded, divines were still responding to Socinian attacks. In 1691, John Wallis began his work on the Trinity by saying “THE Doctrine of the *Arrians, Socinians, or Anti-Trinitarians,*

(call them as you please, provided you call them not *Orthodox Christians*) in opposition to those who believe (according to the Word of God), That the Sacred *Trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost, are so distinguished* each from other, as that the *Father* is not the *Son, or Holy-Ghost; the Son* not the *Father, or Holy-Ghost; the Holy-Ghost* not the *Father, or Son; yet so United, as that they are all One God.*”<sup>70</sup> Socinian thought would need to be opposed for years, because essentially this was a conflict over epistemic grounds—biblical revelation or human reason. The works of various commissioners and officers of the Westminster Assembly, like Cheynall and Wallis, shed light on a growing concern regarding the preeminence of reason over Scripture and the abandoning of the Trinity—both of which will become more prevalent, as England falls under the spell of the Enlightenment during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For the time being, however, Westminster sought to set forth a contra-Socinian agenda in response to the growth of anti-Trinitarian ideas.

#### Contrasting Pneumatologies

As the Assembly concluded in 1653, a new radical group had emerged—The Quakers. The full effect of their sectarianism would not be felt until after the commissioners were dismissed. This is, in part, evidenced through the lack of attention given to them in the Assembly minutes. Unlike antinomians and anti-Trinitarians, Quakers were not directly identified, nor corporately opposed. Nonetheless, the essence of their spiritualist teaching was addressed. Quaker theology was an amalgamation of various Enthusiast ideas that developed in the 1630s and 40s, which stressed the Spirit’s work independent of and above Scripture.<sup>71</sup> Thus, for them, divine revelation was ongoing. Commissioner Daniel Featley described these Spiritualists this way, “The Scripture is not [their] onely rule of faith, and manners, but that God revealeth his will to his children at this day by visions and dreams: and therefore *John of Leidan*, after he had set himself to sleep, and had dreamed three dayes and nights, when hee awaked, fained himselfe speechlesse and called by signes with *Zacharie* for a table-book, or pen and ink, and there writeth down certaine positions as revealed to him from God, and commanded the preachers to publish them.”<sup>72</sup> Enthusiasts like the Quakers saw the Spirit working in a ‘mediate’ and ‘immediate’ fashion—adding to and superseding Scripture. Private revelations could and should be had in order to establish extra-biblical truth. Their *regula fide* was an inner light, given by the Spirit. Foundationally, the rule for doctrine and life was rooted in the experiential

68. Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter WCF), chapter two. See *The Confession of Faith: the larger and shorter catechisms with the scripture proofs at large...* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855).

69. *The Racovian Catechism*, p. 12.

70. John Wallis, *The Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity Briefly Explain, In a Letter to a Friend* (1691), pp. 1–2. Wallis served the Westminster Assembly as one of the non-voting scribes (1643–1649). See *MPWA*, 1.142–43.

71. For a prehistory leading up to Quakerism see Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, pp. 168–175.

72. Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dip*, (1645), p. 31. Featley only sat in the Assembly through September 1643 because he was accused of treasonously communicating with the king and imprisoned. See *MPWA*, 1.117.

rather than an external Word. The Assembly, however, was adamantly opposed to such views. Westminster Confession chapter 1.1 was clear, “those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people [have] now ceased.” Thus, the inspiration of divine revelation had terminated with the writing of the New Testament. All claims to a supernatural ‘immediate’ word from God were recognized as false. New revelations of the Spirit has ceased because the canon was closed—asserting otherwise would undermine the final authority, necessity, and sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>73</sup> The Spirit’s work was now one of illumination and, according to WCF 1.6, was for the purpose of providing saving understanding and guidance in life and godliness, stemming from a closed canon composed of the sixty-six books of the Bible.

Yet, here is the very point where spiritualists groups, like the Quakers, and the divines differed extensively. The former argued that the Spirit’s operations could, but did not necessarily, include the Scriptures. In fact, to them, God often bypassed the external Word in order to bestow an ‘inner light’ within the individual, with epiphenomena being the existential link between the divine and the individual. Consequently, there was great discontinuity between the Spirit and the Word. The Assembly members, however, saw a fundamental unity between the two. While the Spirit does impress truth upon the soul, it is never independent of Scripture. The Spirit works with the Word, not in distinction to it—applying its truths mediately to the soul.<sup>74</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith 1.10 stressed this point in declaring, “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

It was this last phrase—can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture—that was the point of contention. A standard was needed to resolve religious controversies. For the Spiritualists, the individual experience of Christ, shared in an ‘ecclesiastically unified setting,’ was the criterion used to discern between God’s Spirit, inwardly active, and men’s fancies. To the divines, such ideas divorced the Spirit from the Word, thereby supplanting *sola scriptura* in favor of *sola experientia*—experience over the inspired canon.<sup>75</sup> As the Assembly prolocutor, William Twisse commented concerning the notion of new revelations, they were nothing but “Anabaptist dreams.”<sup>76</sup> Essentially, the Assembly and the Spiritualists had contrasting Pneumatologies, with Scriptures’ authority and sufficiency at stake. The

divines saw the Spirit’s work with the Word as necessary for salvation and growth in the faith. The Enthusiasts, like the Quakers, did not.<sup>77</sup>

The implications of this can be seen in the importance, or lack thereof, both placed on the church’s ordinances—ordained ministry, sacraments, and preaching. Given that less emphasis was put upon the Scriptures by the Spiritualists, the aforementioned were not seen as marks of the church. Instead, the ‘extraordinary gifts of the Spirit’ were substituted for them, and these were gifts that all men and women had access to.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, what need was there for ordained ministry to administer baptism and the Supper? What need was there for a trained and licensed clergy? All had an inner light. Which meant, ecclesiastical structures were functionally levelled and “every sheep was to be a shepherd.”<sup>79</sup> The

73. It is important to note that there was some debate amongst Assembly members regarding the continuation of dreams, visions, and prophecy. They were all in agreement that none of these functioned in an ‘immediate’ fashion, adding to Scripture. However, some argued that these may be used by God concurrently, with some portion of Scripture, giving guidance to the Believer. For more on this see Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation*, especially his conclusion, pp. 285–290.

74. As Quakerism began to grow in the 1660s, Quaker theologians began to interact with WCF chapter 1, showing the nature of their disagreement, in part, lies in the relationship between the Spirit and the Scriptures. Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation*, pp. 173–176.

75. Early Spiritualist movements attempted to ground their epistemic standard in the individual self. However, over time this fractured groups like the Quakers. Thus, a turn to a community-based norming reference for disagreements emerged. At the end of the day that meant, the experience and thought of religious leaders like the Quaker George Fox, became the basis for determining sectarian ‘orthodoxy.’ The Spirit working with the Word was virtually nowhere to be found. H. Larry Ingle, *First Among Friends*, pp. 103–116, 202–204 221–223.

76. William Twisse, *The Scriptures Sufficiency to Determine All Matters of Faith* (1656), p. 6.

77. T. L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb’s War*, pp. 20–33.

78. Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, pp. 93–94.

79. There is no doubt that some were pushed towards anticlericalism given the poor state of the ordained ministry. Many ministers were unskilled and ungodly. The Assembly argued, they were therefore unqualified and needed to be removed from office. However, amongst spiritualist groups, things were taken further, to an ecclesiastical levelling. Within their own circles, the extent of this levelling was up for debate. Since all had an ‘inner light’ could all actually engage in preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, and leading congregations regardless of age, sex, and social, churchly, or educational background? Could women for example? There was even debate regarding the need for a learned ordained ministry among the Assembly members. For more on this discussion see T. L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb’s War*, pp. 82–100; Geoffrey

Assembly however, had an opposing perspective. The Scriptures were central, and, by extension, so were the ordinary means through which it was communicated—preaching and sacraments administered via an ordained and trained ministry. For the divines, an important way to deal with the “false calumnies and aspersions” of sectarian groups was to train up godly, learned, equipped, and ordained men for ministry in preaching and shepherding. Frequently throughout the confession and its catechisms, ministers of this sort are referred to. Larger Catechism question 158 asks, “By whom is the Word of God to be preached?” The answer, “The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.” There was some debate as to the extent that an un-ordained man could minister. However, over time the divines hardened on this point, as radical self-appointed lay preachers effectively spread their ideas. Lay preaching may have been something certain members of the Assembly were in favor of, but it was never formally allowed.<sup>80</sup> It seems that regarding administering the Lord’s Supper there was much less or even no debate. “The Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use; and, to take, and bread the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but, to none who are not them present in the congregation” (WCF 29.3). Only ordained clergy could offer the elements. The Assembly saw ordained ministers as the means by which the Spirit nourished the flock of Christ upon the Word. Instruction was even given in the Assembly’s Directory for Public Worship on ministerial requirements for ordination, their duties once installed, and how to preach the

Scriptures. Additionally, recorded in the minutes and papers are hundreds of men who were examined by the commissioners, regarding these requirements.<sup>81</sup> They, along with the divines themselves, would function like a fence, opposing and keeping out ethical, rational, and spiritualists “false calumnies and aspersions.”

### 3. EXPLANATION

Yet, it must be noted that much has been said in response to the Assembly’s efforts in dealing with 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism. Their assessment of sectarian groups has been viewed as prejudiced, and their treatment of them as harsh. Some have labelled England as a “persecuting state” from 1558–1689.<sup>82</sup> The argument goes as follows—those in power wanted to stay in power and even used religion to do it. Submission, not toleration, was said to be their goal, with persecution the outcome for those who did not. Describing the ecclesiastical setting of the 1640s and 50s one author notes, “The function of the state church was not merely to guide men to heaven: it was also to keep them in subordination here on earth.”<sup>83</sup> This is how the actions of the Westminster Assembly opposing radicalism have been viewed—suppressors of a liberty of conscience.

In support of these assertions, comments from divines like Thomas Case are employed, speaking about sectarians, “they may in good time come to know also ... that it is their birthright to be free from the power of Parliaments and ... of kings, and to take up arms against both when they shall not vote and according to their humours. Liberty of conscience, falsely so called, may in good time improve itself into liberty of estates and liberty of houses and liberty of wives.”<sup>84</sup> Some commissioners even called for the state to bring the sword to bear upon fanatics. Not to threaten them to repent, but to “hinder wolves and grievous foxes” from dragging away the souls of men and women into heresy. Samuel Rutherford commented,

If he draw the sword against adulteries, murtherers, rapt, robberies, even in Saints, and we hope you, at least some of you are of the same minde with us: now spirituall whoredome, perverting of the right wayes of the Lord, Socinianisme, professed and taught to others, even in Saints, to us is worse and more deserves the sword then adulteries: for false teachers are evill doers, and so to be punished with the sword ... and therefore not to be received into any Christian society, house, or Army ... [they] should bee thrust through, wounded and killed, *because they prophesie lies in the name of the Lord*, Zach. 13.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. c. 12.10. all the godly thinke

Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, pp.88–101; Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 100–128, 173; MPWA, Session 84, 20 October 1643, 2.242.

80. Lay preaching was debated by many evangelical Puritans. Some saw the fields ripe for harvest and the laborers few. Therefore, gifted men who might not have obtained the proper ecclesiastical backing were needed. Others saw the danger of lay preachers. Allowing them in pulpits fueled the religious radicalism that collectively the divines were against. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 74–75, 172–173.

81. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 7–8, 77–87, 193–196.

82. John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558–1689* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 12–24.

83. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p. 98.

84. Thomas Case, *Spiritual Whoredome* (1647), p. 34, quoted from Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p.100.

of Antitoleration as a truth of God, they are perswaded of in conscience must stand, when the hay and stubble of Liberty of conscience, *Antinomianisme*, and the like, shall be consumed with fire....<sup>85</sup>

Given statements like these from various commissioners, there is little doubt that at times exaggeration was employed in describing the teachings and actions of radical groups, and they were not always felicitous in their opposition of them. Some of their comments were misguided, severe, and inappropriate. Their responses to radicalism were an over-bearing misapplication of Scripture.<sup>86</sup>

However, from the perspective of the Assembly divines, the kind of religious toleration being advocated in sectarian communities was a scourge. For them, a liberty of conscience that allowed unorthodox teachings to persist and progress was a major factor in bringing about the chaos of 17<sup>th</sup> century England. In London and many other places, religious radicals and lay preachers were increasing in number and influence. It was helping to foster and further a dis-unified nation—not just religiously, but economically, politically and socially. England was divided along various cultural lines—rich and poor, Laudian and Puritan, Cavalier and Roundhead, King and Parliament. And now as commissioners were called to Westminster Abbey in the summer of 1643, another important division was being added to that list—Radicals and Reformed Orthodox. All of this created a worrisome situation. For the Assembly, it was the state of the church that burdened them the most. Commissioner George Gillespie put it this way,

“I know this liberty and Toleration was maintained by the *Donatists* of old and by the *Socinians*, *Arminians*, and *Anabaptists* of late but it hath beene constantly opposed by all that were sound and orthodoxe, both Ancient and Moderne, who have asserted the lawfull use of a coercive power against those things, whereby (though under pretence of conscience) God is openly dishonoured, soules ensnared and destroyed, faith or piety subverted and overthrowne: and further, the compelling of the outward man, though not to the practise of things indifferent (which compulsion I doe not allow) yet to the practise of necessary duties, and to the external use of meanes and ordinances, by which through the blessing of God, men’s hearts and consciences may be savingly affected and wrought upon.”<sup>87</sup>

Essentially, to the divines, sectarians were only making things worse by trying to take Protestantism in a scary

direction—one that resembled the tumultuous nature of the German states leading up to the Peasant’s War. This was a ‘de-reformation’—a going backwards and downwards. An ‘unregulated-by-the-Word’ liberty of conscience would lead to the destruction of all “hope, comfort of the Scriptures, zeale, constancy, and rejoycing in suffering for the truth, for Christ and the Gospel.”<sup>88</sup> The kind of toleration radicals were advocating would bring about a further fragmentation of the country. Which meant, in the minds of Assembly members, protection from radical heterodoxy—both in doctrine and deeds—was of the utmost importance. What they were seeking was “*ecclesia semper reformanda est*”—a church always reforming, but according to Scripture. A furthering of the reformation was what they were after, and 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism was taking it further than they wanted, and thus was destroying what the divines had hoped to bring.<sup>89</sup> To the commissioners,

85. Samuel Rutherford, “A Brotherly and Free Epistle to the Patrons and Friends of the Pretended Liberty of Conscience,” in *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (1648), unnumbered signature “a.” See also, John Coffey, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolution: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 217–218.

86. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 32–33, 171–180, and Anna Hughes, *Gangraena and The Struggle For The English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 401–415, 435–442. It should also be understood that another important reason for the heavy-handed response of some divines was their view of the relationship between church and state. They saw it as appropriate to call for the civil magistrates to punish those holding to unorthodox teaching. Much has, can, and needs to be said about this larger topic. It is outside the immediate scope of this essay. The debates surrounding Westminster and separation of Church and State are extensive. An introduction to the topic can be found in Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, pp. 301–14, and Hugh Cartwright, “Westminster and Establishment: a Scottish Perspective” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, ed. by Ligon Duncan (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005), pp. 181–221. For a presentation of an argument against the divines’ view of tolerance see John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, especially pp. 97–167, and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 98–106.

87. George Gillespie, *A Late Dialogue Betwixt a Civilian and a Divine, Concerning the Present Condition of the Church of England* (1644), p. 32.

88. Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (1649), p. 150.

89. There is little doubt that many radicals also saw themselves as furthering the Reformation. They viewed the divines as not going far enough in changing church and society. John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, pp. 97–98, 108–111, 138–141, 233–234, and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 161–162. The difference lay in the standard to establish and measure reform. For the divines, it was a Reformed Orthodox understanding of Scripture. 17<sup>th</sup> Century English radicalism drew the line of demarcation in differing spots.

the toleration sectarians were after would function like gunpowder. It would blow apart the religious advancements made in Protestant religion.<sup>90</sup> The sort of liberty radicals were calling for would undermine the very foundation of the Reformation—the Scriptures. Anthony Burgess, in a sermon preached to Parliament on September 27, 1643—a day of fasting and prayer—argued that men were setting up other epistemic grounds. Socinian “reason” and Enthusiasm’s “private fancies” made his list. What was needed was more reformation according to the external Word, not a turn in the opposite direction.<sup>91</sup>

The threat of de-formation was one reason for the level of anxiousness that was present as the Assembly initially gathered on July 1, 1643. To combat this, convener William Twisse preached from John 14:18 at the opening ceremonies. The text read, “I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.” Interestingly, he did not choose a passage that spoke about the themes of political victory and religious success, which likely Parliament would have encouraged him to focus upon. Instead, assurance was what he set out to bring to his listeners. England was cracking and unity was needed, and Twisse sought to bring to bear comfort from the Scriptures. The fact that he did underscores the seriousness of England’s religious problems, and the significance of the Assembly’s task to stand against things like the “false calumnies and aspersions” of sectarian groups.<sup>92</sup> The ‘reforming of the reformation’ in England was at

stake. To the commissioners, if radicalism was allowed to spread unopposed, a weakened church would develop, a marginalization of the Bible would occur, and an ‘age of toleration’ would emerge—leading to an anti-orthodox and anti-clerical spirit taking root. The Assembly realized the problems fanaticism was creating. And so, they sought to oppose it, to protect the church and further the cause of reformation, even if at times their manner of doing so was ill-chosen.

Despite the Assembly’s efforts, within 100 years, various aspects of English radicalism did gain a foothold in society. It is always difficult to bring critique upon the complex circumstances of the past, and armchair historians draw often incorrect and insensitive conclusions. Nonetheless, it could be said that in how the Assembly responded to 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism reveals some of its failures. It is not that the divines were without the foresight regarding what would come because of sectarian thinking; rather, it was how they, at times, went about dealing with it. As Chad Van Dixhoorn has asserted, attempts to put in place measures, which would encourage a Reformed Orthodox reformation, for generations to come, either did not materialize or failed to take root.<sup>93</sup> Their inaction and the manner of their interaction with fanaticism spelled doom to the reformation they hoped to further, especially given their overbearing retorts. An 18<sup>th</sup> century United Kingdom, marked by toleration, would look back upon the Assembly commissioners with generally unfavorable eyes. The consequences for their failures are multifaceted and far-reaching. One appears to be that ‘the struggle’ between Westminster and English sectarianism for dominance, in the wider society, went the way of the latter, in the sense that what was ‘radical then’ has become ‘culturally orthodox’ today. In the face of secularism, biblical Christianity is deemed fanatical. The tables appear to have turned.<sup>94</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Amidst political and social turmoil, on June 12, 1643, England’s Parliament resolved to bring ecclesiastical reforms by calling for an Assembly of church divines. Their task was to set a course for England to get out of its religious quagmire. Not only were there Roman Catholic and Laudian influences, but various sectarian groups were forming. Radical religious ideas were taking root and growing, and the Assembly was charged with responding to them. This essay has attempted to categorize and explain the views of some of these communities, while also describing that the divines realized the serious threat their ideas posed to religious unity.

90. Thomas Case, *Deliverance—Obstruction: Or The Set-back of Reformation* (1646), pp. 36–37.

91. Anthony Burgess, *The Difficulty of, and the Encouragements to a Reformation* (1643), pp. 12–13, 24.

92. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 32–38.

93. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors*, pp. 171–177, and John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558–1689*, pp. 1–20, 134–224.

94. It would be historically irresponsible to conclude that Reformed Christianity’s decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century United Kingdom is solely the result of the Assembly’s failures with radicals. Other factors play more significant roles. My point is to show that 17<sup>th</sup> century England was tumultuous, and the divines did not always rightly navigate those stormy seas. Even though their intentions were worthy—continue reforming the reformation—they made mistakes and consequences followed. What should or could they have done differently? That is beyond the scope of this essay, especially given the complex political, religious, and social issues of the day. And would different actions have ensured an alternate conclusion? These are questions for someone else to explore. In short, nothing but the grace of God would have altered things. As it is, the road the divines walked is instructive for us because we often find ourselves not responding felicitously in our highly secularized times. Perhaps, we can learn from those who have gone before us—both in their zeal for biblical reformation and the manner to pursue it.

The nation was already splintered along partisan and religious lines. The emergence of sectarianism was seen as a recipe for further disaster. Additionally, the nature of how the Assembly opposed them has been discussed, revealing the way, both corporately and individually, the commissioners critiqued the doctrines and practices of ethical, rational, and spiritualist radicals. At the heart of their response was an epistemology rooted in Scripture rather than reason, experience, tradition, or the magisterium. Finally, an explanation as to why they were adamantly against groups like antinomians, Socinians, and Quakers has been given. The ‘reforming of the reformation’ in England was on the line. Toleration and a ‘liberty of conscience without Scriptural rails’ would lead to the church falling further off the tracks of Reformation Christianity. A response to radicals was crucial.

Yet, in examining these things, only the tip of the iceberg has been explored. Much more could be said and gleaned from the Westminster Assembly’s engagement with 17<sup>th</sup> century English radicalism. This is especially true in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context where positions seem to have been flipped from what they were in the 1640s and 50s. What was once recognized as orthodoxy in 17<sup>th</sup> century England is now considered ‘radical,’ according to modern sensibilities, and central aspects of the sectarianism of the Assembly’s day are deemed ‘socially orthodox.’ Perhaps continued engagement with the divines, and how they responded, successfully and unsuccessfully, to the ‘fanaticism’ of the 1600s, will provide insight for meaningful interaction between modern equivalents.■

***In Brief: Exhortation to the Five Independent Brethren. Extract from George Gillespie, Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty (1645), 34–38***

*Eighthly*, there is also a great difference between *toleration* and *accommodation*. By *accommodation* I understand an agreement of dissenters with the rest of the Church in practical conclusions, so that if any difference be, it is in their *principles*, not in their *practices*, and so not obvious, apparent and scandalous to people. I had rather go two miles in an *accommodation* (yea as many as the word of God will suffer me) than one mile in *toleration*. For in that way there is no schism, no rent in Israel, but “the Lord one, and his name one.” In this way there is *temple against temple*, and *altar against altar*, Manasseh against Ephraim, and Ephraim against Manasseh, and they both against Judah: a misery from which the Lord deliver us. I do not deny, but if a safe and happy accommodation is possible, such a toleration as I have formerly spoken of, is not to be disallowed. But the accommodation is a more excellent way, and that which is to be rather embraced, yea endeavored for and followed after, according to the apostle’s rule (which Isidorua Pelusiotia did long since observe to be the best and happiest way of putting an end to divisions and dissensions in the Church): *Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing* (Phil 3:15-16).

V. If it is said, *Quorsum haec?* [To what purpose?], what do I conclude from all this?<sup>1</sup> It is to leave this confirmed and sealed truth in the bosom of the High Court and Parliament, and of all inferior Magistrates according to their interest under them, that it is their duty, *without respect of persons, to endeavor the extirpation of heresy and schism, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound doctrine,*

*and the power of godliness, lest they partake in other men’s sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues; and that the Lord may be one, and his name one in the three kingdoms: and to endeavor the discovery of all such as have been or shall be evil instruments, by hindering the reformation of religion, or making any faction or party amongst the people, contrary to the solemn league and covenant, that they may be brought to public trial, and receive condign punishment, etc.*<sup>2</sup> Which as they had great reason to swear and covenant, so now they have greater reason to perform accordingly; and as it is in itself a duty, and we tied to it by the *oath of God*, and *his vows that are upon us*, as straitly as ever the sacrifice to the horns of the altar. So we are to take special notice of the unhappy consequences which follow upon our slackness and slothfulness, in fulfilling that sacred oath, viz. the hindering of uniformity, the continuing and increasing of a rupture both in Church and State, the retarding of reformation, the spreading and multiplying of heresies and sects, while every one does what is right in his own eyes; the great scandal given both to enemies and friends: to enemies, who are made to think worse of our covenant, because we do not perform it;<sup>3</sup> *The Review of the Covenant*, printed at Oxford, upbraids us with this: that heresy and schism were never

1. In the prior section IV, Gillespie outlined distinctions of toleration and accommodation (text updated for spelling, punctuation and usage).

2. Cf. The Solemn League and Covenant.

3. Cf. Gerard Langbaine, *A Review of the Covenant wherein the original, grounds, means, matter, and ends of it are examined: and out of the principles of the remonstrances, declarations, votes, orders, and ordinances of the prime covenanters, or the firmer grounds of Scripture, law, and reason, disproved* (Oxford, 1644), p. 49.

more suffered, and less suppressed in London, than since we swore to endeavor the extirpation of the same: to friends also, who are mightily stumbled by our own promising much, and performing so little in this kind: which the Wallachian Classis in their late letter to the reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster (printed before Apollonius's book)<sup>4</sup> does sadly and seriously lay to our consciences.

### A PARÆNETIC

Before I end, I have a word of exhortation for the five apolo- gists, and such others as shall (I trust) agree with the churches of both kingdoms, not only in one Confession of Faith, but in one Directory for Worship. Methinks I hear them calling on me to say on. Et tu mi fili? [Even you, my son?] said Caesar. And must you also brethren, give a wound to the body of Christ? Do not, O do not involve yourselves in the plea of toleration with the Separatists and Anabaptists. Do not partake in their separation, lest you partake in their suppression. Let us hear no more Paraenetics for toleration, or liberty of conscience: but as many as you will for a just and merciful accommodation: a thing mentioned by that author (p. 3), but not sought after. If you are the sons of peace, you shall be characterized by this shibboleth, you will call for accommodation, not for toleration; for one way, not for two. Let there be no strife between us and you, for we are brethren (Gen. 13:7, 8): and is not the Canaanite and the Perizzite yet in the land? O let it not be told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Ashkelon. Let it not be said, that there can be no unity in the Church without Prelacy. Brethren I charge you by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye awake not nor stir up Jesus Christ till he please (Song. 2:7); for his rest is sweet and glorious with his well-beloved. It shall be no grief of heart to you afterward, that you have pleased others as well as yourselves, and have stretched your principles for accommodation in church government, as well as in worship, and that for the Church's peace and edification; and that the

4. Let your own consciences judge, how heresies of all kinds can pass unpunished, manifold seeds of schisms be spread without control, and prophane doctrines of errors be commonly vented in publick, in that city which by so express, so sacred, and severe an oath hath bound itself in the presence of God to cast out all errors, heresies, schisms, from the house of God. We exhort you therefore in the Lord, and do so seriously in the abundance of charity require you, that you take care to discover a way and means whereby you will endeavor the removal of this lothsome evil of schisms and errors, while the disease is yet curable, from the midst of your nation, of your city. Unless you do timely withstand the spreading gangrene of separatists and unlawful conventicles of schismatics, farewell all sacred discipline of the church, due policy and spiritual government." Letter from the Walahrian Churches "To the Synod of London," in Willem Apollonius, *A Consideration of Certain Controversies at this Time Agitated in the kingdome of England: concerning the government of the church of God* (1645), sixth page.

ears of our common enemies may tingle, when it shall be said, "The Churches of Christ in England have rest, and are edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the joy of the Holy Ghost are multiplied (Act 9:31)." Alas how shall our divisions and contentions hinder the preaching and learning of Christ, and the edifying one another in love! Is Christ divided? says the apostle. There is but one Christ, yea the head and the body make one Christ, so that you cannot divide the body without dividing Christ. Is there so much as a seam in all Christ's garment? Is it not woven throughout from the top to the bottom? Will you have one half of Israel to follow Tibni, and another half to follow Omri? O brethren, we shall be one in heaven, let us pack up differences in this place of our pilgrimage, the best way we can. Nay, we will not despair of unity in this world. Hath not God promised to give us one heart and one way (Jer. 32:39, Ezek. 11:19)? and that Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim, but they shall flee upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the East, they shall spoil them of the East together (Isa. 11:13, 14)? Has not the Mediator (whom the Father hears always) prayed that all his may be one? Brethren, it is not impossible, pray for it, endeavor it, press hard toward the mark of accommodation. How much better is it that you be one with the other Reformed Churches, though somewhat straitened and bound up, than to be divided though at full liberty and elbow room? Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife (Prov. 17:1). Does not the Solemn League and Covenant bind you sincerely, really, and constantly to endeavor the nearest (mark nearest) uniformity and conjunction in religion; and that you shall not suffer yourselves directly or indirectly to be withdrawn from this blessed union and conjunction. I know there is a spirit of jealousy walking up and down. O beware of groundless fears and apprehensions. Judge not, lest you be judged. Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment (Matt. 7:1; John. 7:24). Many false rumors and surmises there have been concerning the Presbyterian principles, practices, designs. Expertui lequor [I speak from experience]. I am persuaded if there were but a right understanding one of another's intentions, the accommodation I speak of would not be difficult. Brethren, if you will not hearken to wholesome counsel, you shall be the more inexcusable. I have in my eye that law of God, Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him (Lev. 19:17). Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Prov. 17:6). Therefore love the truth and peace (Zech. 8:19). Yea, seek peace and pursue it (1 Pet. 3:11).

Consider what I say. The Lord guide your feet in the way of peace. And O that God would put it in your hearts to cry down toleration, and to cry up accommodation!

Amen! Amen!■