RADICALLY [IN]TOLERANT:

HOW ENGLISH BAPTISTS CHANGED THE EARLY MODERN TOLERATION DEBATE

Caleb Morell

Dr. Amy Leonard
Dr. Jo Ann Moran Cruz

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ABSTRACT

The argument of this thesis is that the contrasting visions of church, state, and religious toleration among the Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists in seventeenth-century England, can best be explained only in terms of their differences over Covenant Theology. That is, their disagreements on the ecclesiological and political levels were rooted in more fundamental disagreements over the nature of and relationship between the biblical covenants.

The Baptists developed a Covenant Theology that diverged from the dominant Reformed model of the time in order to justify their practice of believer’s baptism. This precluded the possibility of a national church by making baptism, upon profession of faith, the chief prerequisite for inclusion in the covenant community of the church. Church membership would be conferred not upon birth but re-birth, thereby severing the links between infant baptism, church membership, and the nation.

Furthermore, Baptist Covenant Theology undermined the dominating arguments for state-sponsored religious persecution, which relied upon Old Testament precedents and the laws given to kings of Israel. These practices, the Baptists argued, solely applied to Israel in the Old Testament in a unique way that was not applicable to any other nation. Rather in the New Testament age, Christ has willed for his kingdom to go forth not by the power of the sword but through the preaching of the Word. These changes in Covenant Theology challenged the foundation on which religious persecution had been grounded in Early Modern Europe and had important implications in making the idea of toleration more plausible and also, in fact, biblically justified.
The idea of predestination basically prevented the state, through its intolerance, from actually promoting religion... The state's intolerance did not enable it to save a single soul; only the idea of God's honor induced the church to request the state's assistance in suppressing heresy. However, the more the emphasis was placed on the necessity for the minister and all participants in the communion to be members of the elect, all the more unacceptable was (a) every instance of the state's intervention in the processes to appoint new clergy, (b) every appointment to the ministry of students from the university made simply on the basis of completed theological training (which might include someone who perhaps did not belong among the elect), and in general (c) every intervention in the congregation's concerns by the political powers (whose conduct was often not above reproach)...

Calvinist Baptism... drew the consequences from this line of thought with greater consistency than did other congregations... [and] supported even the separation of church and state, because its members were devout Pietists. That is, religious reasons were effective in providing their motivation to uphold the freedom of conscience and, hence, the idea of tolerance...

From the beginning of their existence, the Baptizing sects... have continuously upheld the basic principle that only the elect can be taken into the community of the church. (They have done so more forcefully and with greater internal consistency that the other ascetic Protestant congregations.) For this reason, they (a) repudiated the idea of the church as an institution (Anstalt) offering salvation to all... and (b) opposed every intervention by secular powers. Hence, it was an effective religious reason also in this case that produced the demand for unconditional tolerance...

The first who for these reasons upheld an unconditional tolerance and the separation of church and state was surely [the English theologian and opponent of the Anglican Church] Robert Browne [1550-1663]. He was almost a generation before the Baptists and two generations before Roger Williams [1628-80], the Puritan founder of the colony of Rhode Island and pioneer of religious liberty. The first declaration of a church community in this regard appears to have been the resolution of the English Baptists in Amsterdam in 1612 or 1613: ‘The magistrate is not to meddle with religion or matters of conscience... because Christ is the King and lawgiver of the Church and conscience.’ The first official document of a church community that demanded the effective protection of freedom of conscience from the state as a right was surely Article 44 of the Confession of the (Particular) Baptists of 1644.1


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To the memory of Theodor Wennström (1876 – 1965).
A faithful Baptist pastor in Uppsala, Sweden, and my great-great grandfather.
INTRODUCTION

For think what disaster would ensue if children were not baptized; what would be the final outcome but thoroughly heathenish existence?\(^2\) - Martin Luther, 1530

Toleration is seen by many today as a distinctly modern virtue. Often associated with liberalism, its intellectual origins are often sought in the writings of enlightenment authors such as Voltaire, rationalists such as John Locke or David Hume, or perhaps even more recent authors such as John Stuart Mill. For modern ears, the word harkens ideas of pluralism: the need to accept diverse behaviors and beliefs that we may disagree with for the common good; a kind of *modus vivendi* one might associate with the modern theorist John Rawls.\(^3\) For others still, the idea may connote a refusal to judge. The recognition that no one is superior to another or can say for certain what is right or wrong. Yet for others, toleration may be an implication of relativism, skepticism, or indifference. If one cannot know the truth for sure, how can any claim possibly be worth fighting for, much less dying for? This view of toleration is in turn pitted against and contrasted with fundamentalism, dogmatism, and bigotry, and often associated with religious radicalism. For Martin Marty and Scott Appelby’s *Fundamentalism Project*, “fundamentalism” is characterized as a common trait often associated with religion that is harmful to modernity and


progress.\textsuperscript{4} In a world fraught with religious conflict, global terrorism, and ISIS declaring war on the west, the threat of fundamentalism to toleration seems only too credible.

The great surprise, however, in examining seventeenth-century dissenting English Protestants is that it is in fact “fundamentalists”—radically Biblicist Baptists—who were instrumental in establishing religious toleration and freedom. Unlike today, toleration was far from a popular idea. Whereas toleration now connotes something positive, to many seventeenth-century ears it suggested “a lax complacency toward evil.”\textsuperscript{5} For many, if something was evil, it should be punished, not tolerated. Nonetheless, the idea of civil toleration of religion—not persecuting persons for their religious beliefs—was vehemently advocated by a growing contingent of radical Puritans in the seventeenth-century. In fact, they went as far as to call for the disestablishment of any national church. They did this, not because they were religiously indifferent, skeptical, or non-judgmental (far from it!), but on the basis of their theological convictions. These were the English Baptists.

The purpose of this thesis is to argue that the early-English Baptists changed the seventeenth-century toleration debate by presenting arguments that undermined the basis for a national church and a persecuting state. These arguments centered around a redefinition of the role of the church and of the state. As self-conscious Protestants, their arguments were distinctly biblical. First, the church, according to the Baptists, was not intended by God to be national or inclusive of the entire nation. Rather, the church was to be pure, consisting only of believers baptized upon their profession of faith. This doctrine of believer’s baptism and a regenerate (or “believers’”) church contradicted the prevailing notion of Christendom’s long-standing tradition

of established national churches modeled after the nation of Israel. In the national church model, citizenship was synonymous with church membership along ethnic-nationalist lines and physical descent, as pictured by circumcision and infant baptism. For Baptists, the church was not to be national, but only to consist of baptized believers. Second, the state, according to the Baptists, was not authorized by God in Scripture to judge spiritual matters or persecute alleged heresy, blasphemy, or false religion. For Baptists, the Old Testament laws where kings were charged with punishing false religion and promoting true religion were unique to God’s purposes with Israel and did not authorize civil magistrates to do the same in the present age. The combination of these redefinitions of church and state form the firm foundation for the Baptist’s doctrine of religious toleration.

But both of these arguments, about the nature of the church and the nature of the state, are based on key convictions about the relationship between the Old and New Testament. This is called “Covenant Theology” because it involves defining the nature of the Old and New Covenants and how they relate to each other (see chapter three for a thorough discussion of Covenant Theology). covenant theologia

My project is not to politicize the idea of “Covenant” by comparing or contrasting it with the early-modern idea of a social contract in the way done by Perry Miller, Daniel Elazar, or even Glenn A. Moots’ recent Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology (University of Missouri Press, 2010). I am interested in issues of continuity and discontinuity between testaments as it relates to the issue of authorization of church and state, in a manner similar to Jonathan Leeman’s Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ’s Rule, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016).
adapted the Puritan Covenant Theology of their time to accommodate their practice of believer’s baptism, which was their greatest distinguishing characteristic from other Protestants. But the implications of this adaptation of Covenant Theology also shaped the way they viewed the church and the state. Hence, this thesis will argue that the contrasting visions of the church, the state, and religious toleration among the Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists during and after the English Civil War can only be understood in terms of their respective Covenant Theologies. Disagreements on ecclesiological and political levels were rooted in more fundamental disagreements over the nature of and relationship between the biblical covenants.

In conclusion we see that the Baptists did not argue for religious toleration just because they were a persecuted minority, or because of some inflated view of the human conscience, and much less because of religious indifference or enlightened skepticism.\(^8\) They argued for religious toleration for \textit{all} religions precisely because they were profoundly theologically intolerant, fundamentalist Biblicists, and their interpretation of Scripture demanded radical adherence to its precepts. Their radical theological intolerance informed their radical political tolerance for all religions.

To date, there are two distinct and enormous literatures on this topic. The first relates to the development of religious toleration in England and early modern Europe. The second relates to the political significance of the Puritan idea of “Covenant.” Nevertheless, the pressures of academic specialization have prevented the cross-fertilization of these fields, and a more

\(^8\) On the point that the Baptists did not only seek freedom for themselves, but genuinely thought religious freedom applied equally to all, note that the largely Baptist population of Rhode Island sought religious freedom for all. The Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations of July 15, 1663 explicitly states, “That our royal will and pleasure is, that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anyway molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and does not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments, throughout the tract of land hereafter mentioned.” Cited in Edwin S. Gaustad, \textit{Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America} (Judson Press, 1999), 194.
complete story of the role of the Baptists in the development of religious toleration in early modern England has yet to be told. By drawing on each of these literatures, this thesis attempts to cross-fertilize these otherwise separate literatures to tell the story of how the English Baptists changed the seventeenth-century toleration debate.

The Whig History of Toleration

The literature on the development of religious toleration in early modern England is the most massive of these two literatures, but it can be neatly organized into three camps or “schools.” The first and earliest of these could be called the “Whig history of toleration” (this is linked to the “Puritanism and Liberty thesis” which will be further discussed in chapter four). This school represents all the dangers of teleological narratives that project a sort of “inevitability” in their account. For instance, at over 2000 pages of text, W.K. Jordan’s massive four-volume work on toleration is meticulous in detail, but Jordan consistently secularizes his heroes of toleration, neglecting their theological context and pre-modern elements. Whig historians of toleration often place too much emphasis on the Act of Toleration of 1689 as the landmark of modern toleration and tend to view all preceding elements as progressing toward that predetermined end.

This “Whig history of toleration” also framed the way many twentieth-century historians thought about Puritan Covenant Theology. If for the English, the “liberalism” of 1689 was the telos to which all preceding Puritan history conformed, for the Americans, it was the success of

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11 No one typifies this view as much as Lord Macaulay who says the Act, “Put an end, at one and for ever... to a persecution which had raged during four generations, which had broken innumerable hearts, which had made innumerable firesides desolate, which had filled the prisons with men of whom the world was nor worthy, which had driven thousands of those honest, diligent, godfearing yeoman and artisans, who are the true strength of a nation, to seek a refuge beyond the ocean among the wigwams of red Indians and the lairs of panthers” (Thomas Babington Macaulay Baron Macaulay, The History of England from the Accession of James the Second (Longmans, Green, and Company, 1871), 698.

In his treatment of Puritan Covenant Theology, Miller attempts to connect the theologically significant concept of “covenant” to the idea of “contract” in liberal political theory. Miller argues that Puritan Covenant Theology was an innovation of the seventeenth century to make the harsh doctrines of Calvinism more amenable to human self-interest and individual freedom. These attempts to “rationalize” the world inherited from John Calvin and Peter Ramus, thus led to the basis for American democracy and individualism.

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13 Miller’s theory is essentially one of continuity between the Puritans and the form American democracy developed. His basic theses: 1. The Puritans are significant for understanding the foundations of the American political system; 2. The Puritan idea of “Covenant” is a precursor to the development of an American liberal democracy; 3. The Puritan idea of “Covenant” can outlive its theological “wrapping” and play a significant role today as a secular concept.

14 This mistake of Miller’s is to fall into what is called the “Two Tradition’s Thesis,” which posits radical discontinuity between Calvin and subsequent generations of Reformed theologians. The Two Traditions thesis was first advocated and defended by nineteenth-century theologians Alexander Schweizer, Heinrich Heppe, and Gass who contrasted Covenant Theology with Calvin’s doctrine of predestination. They viewed the teachings of sixteenth-century Rhenish Reformers (such as Boquinus, Ursinus, Hyperious, Olevianus) as a softening of Calvin’s ‘harsher’ doctrines and for various reasons sought to sharply separate his teachings on predestination from his subsequent “followers” use of Covenant Theology, who charted a separate path (Jones, 75).

Perry Miller did the most to expand and apply the Two Traditions thesis to the New England Puritans. In the wake of World War I, Miller sought to redeem the Puritans and overhaul their overwhelmingly negative image, which, by implication, blemished the reputation of his own institution that was founded by the Puritans: Harvard University. Miller presents Puritan Covenant Theology as an innovation of the seventeenth century to make the harsh doctrines of Calvinism more amenable to works-righteousness, human self-interest, and individual freedom. Toward this end, Miller “rehabilitates” (to borrow Marsden’s phrase) central components of Puritan theology. In Marsden’s words, “[In] the thesis that the covenant of grace represented a revision of Calvinism, Miller has created a myth that has been so elegantly presented and widely repeated that it will be difficult to destroy” (Marsden, 105). The doctrine of “legal imputation” of sin becomes a means of externalizing the problem of sin (Miller, 401). The covenant of Redemption becomes a means of further binding God’s freedom (Miller, 405). And Christ’s substitutionary atonement becomes an elevation of man’s natural capacities (Miller, 406). Essentially, Miller attempted—and largely succeeded—in secularizing the Puritans to make them a more attractive and optimistic point of origin for America. The use of the Two Traditions framework, however, is not unique to Miller. B.R. White employs Miller’s thesis to argue that “the Separatists (and later, the Baptists) departed from their Puritan Calvinistic roots by adopting a more conditional view of covenant theology (White, B.R., *The English separatist tradition: from the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). The Two Traditions thesis also found support among theologians who used Calvin as the lens through which to criticize seventeenth-century theology. This group of theologians includes no lesser luminaries than Karl Barth, James B. Torrance, Homes Rolston III, David N.J. Poole, R.T. Kendall, Stephen Strehle, and Mark W. Karlberg. With such powerhouses espousing this point of view, most scholars in the twentieth century were content to “cede all knowledge of things theological to experts trained in that field” (see Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 216). However, growing criticism of this viewpoint emerged in recent
Miller’s work is extensive and the point of reference for all subsequent Puritan studies, whether for good or for ill. Miller was, however, not the first to assert a positive relationship between Puritanism and democracy, as it was a key idea in Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835). Furthermore, in 1932 Andrew McCoughlin traced the system of checks and balances in the American constitution back to principles of Puritan political thought. Nevertheless, since his treatment of the topic is so thorough, most subsequent authors on the Puritans accept Perry Miller’s claims without question.

These ideas live on today in subsequent writings on the Puritans, especially by non-historians, most often political theorists. For most of these theorists, the value and virtue of studying the Puritans is to draw conclusions on what went right or wrong in the American founding and therefore to identify what ought to be done today. Miller’s doctoral student, Edmund S. Morgan agrees with Miller’s basic assumption that the Puritan idea of “Covenant” formed the basis for limited American government. That same year, political scientist Michael Walzer entered the discussion of the implications of Puritan Covenant Theology by attributing

years. At the forefront of the opposition are Geerhardus Vos, Everett H. Emerson, Elton M. Eenigenburg, and Anthony Hoekema (Jones, 78). In what is perhaps the fiercest criticism, George Marsden calls Miller’s treatment of Puritan theology a “subtle trick played on the Puritans themselves in order to win sympathy for them in the mid-twentieth century.” (Marsden, 93). Mark Dever shares Marsden’s assessment of Miller’s work: “Miller’s optimistic rationalism clearly left him puzzled by the Reformed roots of his own New England. Looking back at Calvin, and disliking what he took to be the irrationalism he saw, Miller observed a growing reliance on the confidence in reason in Calvin’s later heirs, particularly among the covenant theologians. (Dever, 216). In fact, reassessing the development of Covenant Theology reveals significant overlap between Calvin and the seventeenth-century Puritans. Studying the Baptists use of Covenant Theology confirms the great diversity in the seventeenth-century and precludes, for instance, reducing John Calvin to the *Institutes* and Covenant Theology to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. For more on the diversity of Covenant Theology in the seventeenth century see Mark Jones’ chapter “The ‘Old’ Covenant” in Michael A G Haykin and Mark Jones, *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

the rise of modern political activism to the Puritans. He presents the Puritans as radical nonconformists who broke with the “old hierarchy” (the “Great Chain of Being”) in the name of order and discipline and developed a political theology to justify this break—namely Covenant Theology. Walzer, however, is not interested in discussing the content of Covenant Theology (he writes “the intricacies of covenant theology cannot be discussed here”) apart from where it helps to advance his thesis that the choice to become a Puritan in seventeenth-century England was the choice to take part in the revolution of the saints.

The contemporary political theorist who has since done the most to develop the political implications of the idea of “Covenant” is Daniel J. Elazar who similarly connects the idea of covenant to American federalism. Even the sociologist Robert Bellah entered the discussion in 1975, arguing that the concept of a covenant can form the basis for social criticism when that covenant is perceived to be broken. The Whig approach to the Puritans continues to influence scholarship today. Though the nature of the relationship may be disputed, few seem to question the existence of a positive relationship between Puritanism and American democracy.

The Revisionist School of Toleration

Miller and those in the Whig school do, however, have their share of detractors. The second camp in this first group, the Revisionist school of toleration, has subverted the Whig historians’ teleological narrative by highlighting the many examples of intolerance in early

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19 Walzer, 166.
20 Walzer, 167.
modern England. Historians such as Blair Worden, William Lamont, and J.C. Davis point out the limits of toleration in early modern England and the absences of protection for non-Protestant minorities. These authors emphasize how the various forms of “freedom of conscience” were applied selectively and in the end fundamentally failed to establish any type of “religious freedom” recognized by modern standards. For example, Doug Laycock talks about “the Puritan mistake” of seeking religious freedom for oneself while denying it to others.\(^{23}\) For Revisionist historians, the theories of tolerance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be viewed in a wider historical lens, rather than as a dramatic break with the past.

In this vein of thinking, in recent years an increasing number of scholars have protested Miller and other Whig-historians’ “secularizing” of the Puritans to make them more attractive to modern audiences. George Marsden, for example, protests that Miller accentuates those aspects of the Puritans that would appeal to a mid-twentieth century audience while neglecting their more unappealing Calvinistic doctrines.\(^{24}\) As the title suggests (“Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans-A Critique”), he posits that Miller’s “rehabilitation” of the Puritans is an attempt to make them a more attractive point of origin for the kind of American democracy we want to see today. Marsden is not alone. In fact, an increasing number of recent scholars have observed that the broad strokes of comprehensive studies of Puritanism tend to ignore important particulars.

Although Miller’s work is a masterful piece of intellectual history, it ignores the names of Puritan authors and overemphasizes the internal consistency of the Puritan movement as though it were a monolithic category.

\(^{23}\) Thanks to Michael Kessler for directing me to this quote in Laycock: “Too many Americans continue to commit modern versions of the Puritan mistake. The Puritans came to Massachusetts for religious liberty, but only for themselves. So far as they were concerned, adherents of other faiths had the liberty to go anywhere in the world outside Massachusetts, and that was quite enough religious liberty for them” (Douglas Laycock, Anthony R. Picarello Jr, and Robin Fretwell Wilson, *Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty: Emerging Conflicts* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 190).

Puritanism: The Difficulty of A Definition

These criticisms of what could be called Miller’s “substantial” definition of Puritanism—making “Puritanism” an ahistorical concept that exists outside of time—warrant asking the important question that Miller neglects to address: what is a Puritan? Miller is extremely vague in his definition. In one place he writes that Puritanism is “an urgent sense of man’s predicament that manifests in piety.” Elsewhere he states, “Puritan theology was an effort to systematize the subjective mood that motivated piety.” Michael Walzer is similarly ambiguous as to what precisely constitutes a Puritan. Basil Hall limits “Puritanism” to those “serious” people in the church of England before 1642 “who desired some modifications in Church Government.” Davies similarly defines Puritans as those “who saw the church as ‘incomplete.’” Each of these definitions though is vague and most unhelpful for any nuanced study. Perhaps the only universally agreed upon definition of Puritanism is H.L. Mencken’s quip that Puritanism is “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy.”

There are several reasons for this difficulty in defining the essential features of Puritanism. First, like most names, the term ‘Puritan’ was originally applied in the 1560’s as an insult—“a satirical smear word”—against those discontented with the then-present state of the Church of England under Elizabeth I. Consequently, any prospect of a continued, uniform...

25 Miller, 4.
26 Miller, 5.
31 For more on Puritanism in Elizabethan England see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: J. Cape, 1967). As Packer has noted, “‘Puritan’ as a name was, in fact, mud from the start. Coined in the early 1560’s, it was always a satirical smear word implying peevishness, censoriousness, conceit, and a measure of hypocrisy, over and above its basic implication of religiously motivated discontent with what was seen as Elizabeth’s Laodicean and compromising Church of England. Later, the word gained the further, political connotation of being against the Stuart monarchy and for some sort of republicanism; its primary reference, however, was still to what was seen as an odd, furious, and ugly form of Protestant religion” (J. I. Packer, *A Quest...*
Puritan identity ended with new labels of “dissenting” and “nonconformists” that captured what they were protesting against—the Church of England—rather than the traits that united protesters.\(^{32}\) Furthermore, the clumsy conflation of English, Scottish and New England Puritans into a single homogenous category, seen in broad studies that portray Puritanism as a monolithic whole, eradicates their subtle differences in time, geography and particular strands of Puritanism.\(^{33}\) Additionally, the emphasis on Puritanism as a primarily political movement ignores their overall emphasis on the renewal of corporate worship and individual piety.\(^{34}\) Finally, the many forms in which dissenters made their common desire for Calvinist reform and spiritual renewal in the Church of England manifest, whether Presbyterian, Congregational or non-separating Anglicans, poses a difficulty in positing “Puritanism” as a single category.\(^{35}\) In light of these difficulties, J.P. Kenyon judiciously warns against misusing the term “Puritanism” and is content to adopt Lawrence Stone’s narrower definition of Puritanism as “a generalized conviction of the need for independent judgment based on conscience and bible reading.”\(^{36}\) However, other historians in the field are less concerned about defining Puritans as anything

\(^{32}\) Likely for this reason the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states that ‘the term ‘Puritan’, which never had a precise use, ceased to be applicable after 1660.” J. P. Kenyon, *Stuart England* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 22.


\(^{34}\) As Carl Trueman notes, “the work of Marxists such as Christopher Hill has attempted to forge a link between the ideology of Puritanism and the rise of the early modern bourgeoisie, thus giving it a more progressive image…” Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007, 16 n. 42. Michael Walzer’s *Revolution of the Saints: The Origins of Radical Politics* is equally susceptible to this critique, where he ignores “the intricacies of covenant theology,” but instead focuses on the “the diligent activism of the saints… [that] marked the transformation of politics into work.” Walzer, Michael, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 2; 167.


narrower than those who sought “a religion ‘purified’ of all the works of Rome.”37 As if to ignore the challenge altogether, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* itself acknowledges, ‘the term ‘Puritan’… never had a precise use.’38 Another author simply “regards the term generally as not very useful.”39

What many of these studies neglect though is that the Puritan movement was at its core a movement concerned with reforming worship. The central common denominator of the Puritans was their conviction that the public worship of churches must be reformed according to the word of God. That is why the Puritans were characterized, and united, by their opposition to the Book of Common Prayer, which then formally ended with Charles II's Act of Uniformity in the so-called “Great Ejection” in 1662 that demanded conformity to the Book of Common Prayer and expelled some 2,000 Puritan ministers from the Church of England, including Richard Baxter and John Owen. From that point onward, the Puritans took the title “non-conformists,” a name denoting from those non-Church of England sects that persisted in England. For the purpose of this thesis, we will consider Puritans as those reformed Protestants in England concerned with reforming the public worship of God according to the Word of God, whether through political or ecclesiastical engagement or separation. Within this overall canopy of reforming worship according to the Word of God, several groups can be identified. For the purpose of this thesis, we will speak of (1) non-separating Puritans who opted to conform to the Book of Common Prayer and sought to reform the Church of England from within, (2) Presbyterians who sought to replace the Book of Common Prayer and the Episcopal hierarchy with a Presbyterian model of church government, (3) Congregationalists or Independents who separated from the Church of

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38 Kenyon, 22.
England in order to form independent congregations, and (4) Baptists who similarly separated from the Church of England, but also practiced believer’s baptism. More discussion of these different groups will come later in the introduction.\(^{40}\)

**A Middle-Way: The Post-Revisionist School**

Third, and finally, in this first group, the post-revisionist school attempts to “temper [the] Whiggish optimist with a dose of revisionist realism” while still reasserting that “unfashionably Whiggish claim that seventeenth-century England did indeed witness a dramatic movement from persecution to toleration and from religious uniformity to pluralism.”\(^{41}\) While toleration could certainly exist before 1689 and persecution would certainly continue to haunt the modern era, as the revisionists argue, the Whig-school is correct insofar as the seventeenth century did, nonetheless, constitute a significant break with previous models of church-state arrangements. If the revisionists reacted against the overly optimistic Whigs, the post-revisionists are reacting against the overly pessimistic revisionists, by pointing to several moments of radical break from the past. First, by the end of the seventeenth century the idea of a state existing without a nationally established church became increasingly feasible, ultimately being incorporated into the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which in 1791 prohibited congress from establishing a national church. Second, the idea of a state with coercive power in matters of religion, entrusted with the duty of persecuting dissenters, became increasingly implausible, as

\(^{40}\) This way of distinguishing between denominations is imperfect since they were not necessarily fixed groups but constantly intermingling and intermixing. Only after the Westminster Assembly ended did the denominational lines begin to cement more clearly. This categorization is, I think, more helpful than other scholars who speak of “Puritans” monolithically. Other scholars attempt to recognize the complexity and variety of “Puritanism” by thinking of it as a genus containing many distinct species. L.J. Trinderud offers three categories of Puritanism: the original, anti-vestment party; the passive-resistance party; and the Presbyterians. See *Elizabethan Puritanism*, Library of Protestant Thought (Oxford University Press, 1971). H.C. Porter similarly offers another type of categorization of Puritans as: the English Separatists; the ‘evangelical Puritans;’ the radical dissenters; and Presbyterians. See *Puritanism in Tudor England*, History in Depth (University of South Carolina Press, 1970). These helpful distinctions highlight the diversity of “Puritanism” and should encourage theorists in Miller’s tradition to reevaluate their sweeping claims.

\(^{41}\) Coffey, 5.
England’s 1689 Act of Toleration exemplifies. The Puritans in general, and dissenting Protestants in particular, chief among whom stand the early English Baptists, played a central role in these developments through their writings and unwavering commitment to religious toleration. It is into this third school that the present work is situated.

Therefore, this thesis aims at a fuller understanding of Covenant Theology by examining its political implications on church and state. It has been widely recognized that the fact that Puritans had different views on the Church and on baptism is the result of a different way of understanding the relationship between the biblical covenants.42 This thesis will take this finding one step further by positing a theory as to how Covenant Theology translates into political theory. With a survey of the literature in view, more can now be said about the argument of this thesis in particular.

A Covenantal Approach to Toleration

It has been observed that early modern political theorists in England defined the nature of and basis for church and state within the framework of biblical history.43 They looked to the Scriptures to understand what the church and the state were respectively authorized to do. Differences in viewpoint about the relative power of each were thus rooted in more fundamental differences in how to interpret the Scriptures. In particular, their differing understandings of the relationship between church and state and their relative authority were derived from the way they related the Old and New Testaments; that is, from Covenant Theology.

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The dilemma for early-modern political theorists was the extent to which they ought to look to the Old Testament or to the New Testament for a model of church and state. In the New Testament, the church and state seemed to have little to do with one another. The early Christians of the New Testament were persecuted and their leaders were executed at the hands of the political authorities. At risk of oversimplification, one might even say that a New Testament model of church and state lacks almost any integration between the two (figure 1). On the other hand, the Old Testament presents a different arrangement of church and state. Although distinct in function, both institutions’ roles are defined according to God’s direct revelation. The Civil Magistrate is called to punish idolatry (Deut. 13, 17; Lev. 24) and is charged with administering the Mosaic Law. Although the priests and kings represented different spheres of authority, nation and church were indistinguishable for the nation of Israel. To be born in Israel meant to be simultaneously a church member and a citizen (figure 2).

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For theoretical purposes, the differences between the Old Testament and New Testament models of church-state arrangement can be charted in two ways. First, the laws of the nation will either have a consensual or conflictual relationship with the ethical prescriptions of the religious authority. I call that relationship consensual if the ethics of the church are reflected in the laws of the state. Otherwise it is conflictual. The second is the extent to which the sources of religious and political authority are integrated. That is, to what extent does their authority overlap or does one possess more authority over the other? The level of integration will be high to the degree that one possesses jurisdiction over the other and low to the extent that their spheres of authority are separate.

Based on these two variables, we can map the relationship between church and state in Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church along a matrix (figure 3). Israel espouses a consensual integrated arrangement of church and state. The New Testament church meanwhile, had a conflictual independent relationship with the civil authorities.

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45 Duffy, Toft, and Shah propose six helpful dimensions. They assert that “Religious authority possesses institutional independence from political authority, and lacks institutional integration with it, to the extent that: (1) no single religious community enjoys primacy or a monopoly with respect to government endorsement, support or privilege. (2) Religious actors within a state (some or all) enjoy the freedom to carry out their most distinctive activities... (3) Religious actors enjoy the autonomy to create their offices and appoint their leadership. (4) Religious actors lack any standing prerogatives over the appointment of state officials or the making of public policy. (5) Religious actors enjoy autonomy in raising, governing, and spending finances. (6) Religious actors enjoy a transnational structure that strengthens their power vis-a-vis the state (Duffy, Toft, Shah, God’s Century, figure 2.1, p. 37.
The challenge for early-modern political theorists was thus to justify their ideal political order based on the available biblical data. In order to do so, they were forced to draw from either Old or New Testament models, or form some integration of the two, and justify their decision based on some form of Covenant Theology; that is on some way of explaining the unity as well as the differences between the Old and New Testaments. The question was to what extent they ought to model the church and state after the Old Testament and/or the New. How one answers this question determines one’s Covenant Theology and thus the desired degree of integration between church and state (see chart 4). These four choices map neatly onto the subjects of this thesis: the contesting political and religious parties during the English Revolution (1642 – 1651).
Unified around a common agreement that the abolition of the Episcopal form of church government was necessary, in the Westminster Assembly (1643 – 1649), 120 of the most illustrious Puritan divines of England and Scotland were charged by Parliament with the task of agreeing upon a religious settlement for England in place of the existing national church. Although primarily a discussion of church government, it also forced them to discuss the proper relationship between church and state. The respective sides taken in these debates over church and state correlated neatly with their respective ways of relating Old and New Testaments. While originally intended to remain an internal discussion between the Assembly and Parliament, the debate over toleration soon spilled over into the public square, erupting into pamphlet wars in which some of the most extensive and thoughtful treatises for and against religious toleration were written. As the years wore on, differing positions on the issue of church and state became more cemented and the lines between contesting parties more clearly delineated.
The Three Main Contesting Parties

First, the Presbyterian faction.\textsuperscript{46} Being the largest and most formidable opponent of royal absolutism during the Civil War, the Presbyterians held the largest sway within Parliament and among the aristocracy of the time. They were the “conservatives,” insofar as they were averse to change and held to tradition. As far as “left-right” distinctions appropriately reflect a liberal-conservative spectrum, the Presbyterian party can be classified as the right-wing of the Puritan Revolution.\textsuperscript{47} They stood for adhering to the National Covenant as outlined by the Westminster Assembly, establishing a national Presbyterian church, and suppressing religious dissenters. While stringent in their opposition to royal absolutism, the Presbyterian party was by no means synonymous with a republican theory of government. After all, God had given the Israelites kings to govern the people in the Old Testament. A monarch that stood for establishing the true religion, far from being reprehensible, was in fact most desirable.\textsuperscript{48} The Presbyterian party espoused a political theology of high integration between church and state. For the purposes of this thesis, and as chapter four will illustrate, they are represented chiefly in the writings of the Scottish Covenanter Samuel Rutherford, the author of \textit{Lex Rex} (1644) and \textit{A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty Of Conscience} (1649).

If the Presbyterians represented the right-wing of the revolution, the Independents stood at the center. Although a much smaller faction, they garnered increasing support from Cromwell’s Army in the mid-1640s. They opposed a nationally established Presbyterian church because they believed in independent congregational church government, which would enable churches to govern themselves without interference from a spiritual hierarchy (This is not to be

\textsuperscript{46} The following description of the Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist factions is loosely based on Woodhouse, 14-18.

\textsuperscript{47} By liberal-conservative and left-right wing I do not have in mind contemporary politics (as in Democrats-Republicans). By conservative I mean maintaining tradition, the status quo, and averse to change and by liberal I mean advocating change.

\textsuperscript{48} See Calvin’s approval of magisterial establishment of the true Christian religion in the \textit{Institutes} IV. xx.
confused for a vision of toleration, however as chapter four will show). Led by a small but powerful group of five “dissenting brethren”—as they were known within the Westminster Assembly—the Independents were the chief opponents to the Presbyterian national establishment. This, however, did not mean that they were “the party of toleration” as Woodhouse and countless others claim. They stood for the civil magistrate’s interference in religion, called for the suppression of heretics, and protested the label “tolerationists” as a vilification cast on them by their opponents. Instead, the form of “toleration” they petitioned for from parliament was a kind of freedom for themselves within the Presbyterian establishment that could be denied to others; nothing like a robust toleration for all religious sects. The Independent’s views on toleration and church and state are exemplified in the writings of the New England minister John Cotton, and two leading Independents at the Westminster Assembly, Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, who published Cotton’s *Keyes Of The Kingdom Of Heaven* (1644) to defend their system of church government against the Presbyterian majority.

To the left of the Independents, came the radicals—the so-called “left-wing” of the revolution: the Baptists. In many ways, this group consisted of former Independents who had adopted believer's baptism and rejected the practice of infant baptism. They rejected the idea of a national church as well as any type of magisterial interference in the affairs of the church, believing religious authority to lie solely within each congregation of a local church. In congregational church government, then, they agreed with the Independents. However, they believed that regeneration (being “born-again” as a Christian) was a prerequisite to the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and as such, they rejected infant baptism and believed that the church covenant extended to regenerate believers only. They argued thus for

49 See Woodhouse, 16.
50 They were called “gathered churches” at the time because they were “gathering” outside of the officially state-sanctioned churches.
complete toleration of religion by the state (with no interference from the state in regards to membership and authority in the local church). At the forefront of Baptists defending toleration was Roger Williams, whose 1644 treatise *The Blody Tenent, Of Persecution, For Cause Of Conscience* remains one of the most well-known and respected treatises for religious toleration in the seventeenth century. It would be wrong though to assume too much distance between the doctrines of the Independents and the Baptists since they disagreed chiefly over baptism and the role of the state in regard to religion. Yet, Independents were hasty to emphasize their dissimilarity with the Baptists, even as the Presbyterians were eager to undermine the Independents’ credibility by highlighting their similarities to the Baptists.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Model Church after the Old Testament</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Model State after Old Testament</strong></td>
<td>Presbyterian Model</td>
<td>Independents</td>
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<td><strong>Do Not Model State after Old Testament</strong></td>
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At the risk of oversimplification, these three groups map neatly onto the same matrix used above (see figure 5). Presbyterians largely sought a mixed national church (consisting of the regenerate and the non-regenerate) modeled after Old Testament Israel, at least insofar as infants were automatically included in the body of the church. And similarly, they sought a state modeled after Old Testament Israel insofar as the state possessed coercive power over religion to punish heterodoxy. The Independents, on the other hand, fell in the middle. While they continued
to practice infant Baptism, they placed more emphasis on the purity of the church than the Presbyterian party and did not advocate for a spiritual authority over the congregation of a local church. On the other hand, they still maintained that the state possessed *coercive* powers in matters of religion as evidenced in the writings of John Cotton and others. Lastly, the Baptists, based on their adaptation of Covenant Theology emphasized the newness of the New Covenant and rejected modeling *both* the church and the state after the examples of Old Testament Israel, both in regard to the inclusion of infants in the church and in the power of the state to persecute in matters of religion.

Behind the above categorizations lies the explanatory thesis of this work that the political theology of a particular denomination during the English Civil War, whether Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptist, was rooted in their way of relating the Old and New Testament, or their “hermeneutic” (method) of interpreting Scripture. Their hermeneutic, whether emphasizing the general continuity or discontinuity between the Old and New Testament shaped the way they thought about baptism and church structure (ecclesiology), whether they emphasized a regenerate (or believers’ only) church or a mixed church of both believers and non-believers. This in turn shaped the way they viewed the relationship between church and state (political theology), whether they favored an integrated or an independent church and state.

**Figure 6:**
**Foundations of Political Theology**

![Political Theology Diagram](image)

- Political Theology
- Ecclesiology
- Hermeneutic

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To summarize, one’s hermeneutic of Scripture shapes one’s ecclesiology, which in turns shapes one’s political theology. This allows us to map out the respective sides of the debate below:

**Figure 7:**
**Competing Models of Integration**

On polar opposite sides of the spectrums are the Church of England-Presbyterian national church model and the Baptist free church model. The Independents find themselves inconsistently in between. Whereas the Presbyterians consistently advocated a mixed-national church modeled after the Old Testament, the Independents argued for a regenerate church model while maintaining magisterial oversight over religion and infant baptism. The inconsistency of the Independents in their political theology is part of the reason they have often perplexed scholars and many have suggested that they were proponents of religious toleration. They were not, however. Only the Baptists maintained a consistent stance on the independence between church and state.
Roadmap for Thesis

Chapter one provides a historical background to the toleration debates of the seventeenth century. It surveys the history of the persecuting state in England from the reign of Henry VIII to the English Civil War, to show that the English persecuting state was founded on a belief that religious unity was needed for political stability and that monarchs possessed the same power as Old Testament kings over religion. Thus, persecution was justified by a doctrine of divine right based on an analogy between present-day monarchs and the Old Testament kings. Nonetheless, English sovereigns were not all-powerful, but remained constantly in need of taxes. As the sixteenth century wore on and discontent within the church grew, coming into increasing conflict with the monarchs, the English Protestants realized that religion could not be dependent on the whims of a sovereign.

Chapter two introduces the early-English Baptists, their origins, early political writings, perceptions, and persecutions. Unlike Anabaptism in continental Europe, the English Baptists originated out of Puritan separatism. Their Biblicism and emphasis on a pure church led to a rejection of infant baptism in place of believer’s baptism for which they were mercilessly persecuted in seventeenth-century England. Over the course of the century, Baptists sought to assure their fellow Protestants of their orthodoxy by issuing pamphlets defending their beliefs and issuing several major confessions of faith. The disruption of the English Civil War gave the Baptists, for the first time, a limited freedom to gather and publish their views. However, this freedom was opposed by the Westminster Assembly, which, together with the help of the Revolutionary Parliament, sought to suppress the Baptists.

Chapter three is the most theological chapter of this thesis and tackles the complex topic of Covenant Theology from the point of view of the Baptists and the Presbyterians. I am arguing that it was disagreement over Covenant Theology that was at the root of differences between the
Baptists and other Puritans on matters of baptism, the church, the state, and toleration. The Baptists disagreed with the Presbyterians that God’s covenant of circumcision with Abraham in Genesis 17 was an expression of the Covenant of Grace. In contrast, the Baptists affirmed that the national, ethnic, and political covenants God made with Israel belonged exclusively to the Covenant of the Old Testament alone, which was then completely fulfilled in Christ. As believers in the New Covenant, those Old Testament precepts, which include the inclusion of infants into the church by birth, a national church, and a state that persecutes religious heterodoxy, thus no longer applied.

Chapter four then compares the writings of three leading seventeenth-century Puritans to illustrate how Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist approaches to church and state and religious toleration emerged as implications of their respective Covenant Theologies. Through the writings of Samuel Rutherford we see that Presbyterians favored an established church with a persecuting state. The writings of the Congregationalist John Cotton demonstrate that while the Independents opposed an established, national Presbyterian church, they did favor a magistrate that persecuted religious heterodoxy. And lastly, by examining the writings of Roger Williams we see that the Baptists alone called for both no nationally established church and for complete religious toleration for all, not because of a lack of religious faith, but precisely because their faith that was so radical in its beliefs. Out of the three, only Baptist Covenant Theology leads to a consistent policy of complete religious toleration.
I

THE PROTESTANT THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PERSECUTION IN ENGLAND (1534-1641) – AN OVERVIEW

The English history affords us fresher examples, in the reigns of Henry the 8th, Edward the 6th, Mary, and Elizabeth, how easily and smoothly the clergy changed their decrees, their articles of faith, their form of worship, everything, according to the inclination of those kings and queens.51

- John Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration

The story of the seventeenth-century English Baptists and the story of the development of religious toleration, are in many ways part of a larger story of state-sponsored, theologically-justified, religious persecution for the sake of religious and political “uniformity.” For well over a century, “the tail wagged the dog” as the English Church followed the religious cues of whatever monarch was in power at the time, vacillating between Catholicism and Protestantism on the whims of a single person. This chapter surveys the history of the persecuting state in England from the reign of Henry VIII to the English Civil War, to show that the English persecuting state was founded on a belief that religious unity was needed for political stability and that monarchs possessed the power of Old Testament kings over religion. Thus, persecution was justified by a doctrine of divine right based on an analogy between monarchs and Old Testament Kings. Furthermore, since monarchs used religion to support their political control,

religious dissent thus equaled treason. Nonetheless, sovereigns were not all-powerful, but remained constantly in need of taxes. As the centuries wore on and dissenting Protestants grew in number and came into increasing conflict with the monarchs, the Puritans increasingly realized that religion could not be dependent on the whims of a sovereign.

**The Protestant Theory of Persecution**

Without a doubt, the year 1644 marked a turning point in the history of the debate over toleration in England. As one historian notes, it was the year “the Augustinian consensus concerning persecution was irreparably fractured.” As the English Civil War (1642–49) raged on between king and parliament, a pamphlet war erupted between the defenders of persecution and its detractors. That year witnessed the publication of some of the finest defenses of religious toleration of the century, arguing for similar conclusions from different angles. John Milton’s *Areopagitica* called for liberty of the Press; Henry Robinson’s *Liberty of Conscience* made the economic case for toleration; Roger Williams’ *The Bloudy Tenent* called for universal toleration for all religions; William Walwyn’s *The Compassionate Somaratane* called for pity for the persecuted sects. And while not defending toleration, the *Apologetical Narration* of Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, William Bridge, and Jeremiah Burroughs challenged the nearly foregone conclusion of an established national Presbyterian Church, making more room for debate over toleration within Parliament and the Westminster Assembly.

This was also a time when every political issue was a theological one. To question the magistrate in religious matters was an assault on the magistrate’s political powers. Under King James I (d. 1625), dissenters who disputed an ecclesiastical canon that demanded an affirmation that the King “hath all ecclesiastical and political power in the gospel age as the Kings of Israel

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52 Coffey, 47.
possessed” under the Old Covenant, were sentenced, imprisoned, and silenced. After all, the Magisterial Reformers’ arguments for religious persecution depended on an analogy between Israel and modern nations. Hence, in the words of one author, “It was only natural that the great toleration debate from the 1640s onwards was to revolve around the relationship between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church.”

The dismantling of persecution, therefore, required addressing the biblical arguments for persecution. The Christian, and specifically Calvinist tradition, had understood Old Testament Israel to be a model for other times and places. Protestant theologians frequently quoted passages, including Psalm 2, (where kings are told to “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way” [KJV]), Isaiah 49:23 (where kings and queens are prophesied to be “nursing fathers” and “nursing mothers” to the church), and the precepts in Deuteronomy 13 and 17 to execute idolaters and blasphemers among them, in order to justify the role of the magistrate in punishing false religion and promoting true religion. For instance, in his commentary on Deuteronomy 20:1-4, John Calvin is clear on the duty of the magistrate in regard to establishing the right worship of God. Martin Luther is no less explicit in his affirmation of the duty of the

53 According to the testimony of John Murton, an early Baptist, “The convocation of Bishops and the rest have made a canon, that whosoever shall affirm that the Kings majesty hath not the same power in causes ecclesiastical, under the Gospel, that the godly Kings of Israel had under the law, let him be excommunicated, Ipso facto.” John Murton, Objections: Answered by Way of Dialogue Wherein Is Proved by the Law of God: By the Law of Our Land: And by His Maties Many Testimonies That No Man Ought to Be Persecuted for His Religion, so He Testifie His Allegance by the Oath, Appointed by Law. (1615), p. 31-32. Note that while this work is attributed to John Murton, its true authorship is unknown. The same statute is found as Canon 2 in the Canons of 1603: “Whosoever shall hereafter affirm that the king’s majesty hath not the same authority in causes ecclesiastical that the godly kings had among the Jews, and Christian emperors in the primitive church, or impeach in any part his regal supremacy in the said causes restored to the crown, and by the laws of this realm therein established, let him be excommunicated ipso facto…” (Canon ii. of Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, agreed upon in the Synod begun at London, anno Dom.1603. Now published for the due observation of them by his Majesty's authority. Printed by John Norton, 1633). Also cited in Phillimore, 8.

54 Coffey, 32.

55 Coffey, 30.

56 “Whence we gather that the worship of God should be by no means passed over in civil and earthly government; for, although its direct object is to preserve mutual equity between men, yet religion always ought to hold the first place” John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses in Calvin’s Commentaries. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), Deuteronomy 20:1-4, p. 100.
magistrate to punish heretics and blasphemers in a sermon on Psalm 82, grounding his conclusions in Leviticus 24.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, any change in the toleration debate would have to come from a new understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testament. And that is precisely what happened. The change in the toleration debate came, not from a group of high-minded skeptics or religious moderates, but from an intolerant group of religious fanatics who “established their case [for toleration] on a contrast between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church.”\textsuperscript{58}

Of course, Protestant theologians such as Calvin and Luther understood there to be differences between the Old Testament and the New, and that Christ’s coming had resulted in changes in the church and how God should be worshipped. The Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries commonly distinguished between these times as “the time of the law, and the time of the gospel” or simply “before and after the coming of Christ.”\textsuperscript{59} Nonetheless, the Deuteronomic law still applied. For example, Calvin explained that the law had “three uses:” (1) to convict the proud of sin; (2) to restrain the wicked; and (3) to remind and aid

\textsuperscript{57} “Heretics of this sort must not be tolerated, but punished as open blasphemers. Moses in his laws commands that blasphemers of this sort, and indeed all false teachers, are to be stoned to death... If he will not keep quiet, then let the civil authorities commend the scoundrel to his rightful master—namely, Master Hans [hangman].” From Luther’s exposition on Psalm 82: \textit{Der LXXXII. Psalm, ausgelebt von Mart. Luther}, Wittenberg, 1530, \textit{Luther's Werke, Erlanger Aushabe}, Bd. 39, pp. 250-258. Of course, there is far more to say about Luther. Without question, Luther did not merely see the church as a tool in the hands of the state, especially earlier in life. As James Estes writes, although “…secular rulers had an obligation to uphold orthodoxy and morality,” Luther was uncomfortable with secular government interference in ecclesiastical and spiritual matters (2; 5). Instead, “Luther steadfastly maintained that the secular office per se entailed no authority whatever in spiritual matters” (6). Peace, Order and the Glory of God (Leiden; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005). Bainton summarizes Luther’s predicament well: 232f: “He [Luther] was on the side of Erasmus in regarding the state as a moral organism, though very much less optimistic than Erasmus as to the possibility of a European peace or of regulating affairs around a conference table. He was closer to Machiavelli’s pessimism regarding human behavior and looked to force more than to persuasion to hold the recalcitrant in check.” Roland Bainton and Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century}, 2nd, Revised & enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 232-233.

\textsuperscript{58} John Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution,” \textit{The Historical Journal} 41, no. 4 (December 1, 1998), 971.

the believer in their fight against sin.\textsuperscript{60} While the ceremonial law of the Old Testament (relating to washings and sacrifices and so forth) has been abrogated and done away with, the moral law of the Old Testament and the judicial law both remained very much in force, the latter having merely changed form.\textsuperscript{61}

Based on historical precedent, the consensus of theologians, and biblical passages such as those mentioned above, Christian kings had typically seen it as their duty to protect true religion and punish false religion. Wrapped up in this assumption were beliefs regarding the relevance of the Old Testament prescriptions to the present day. Namely, that the Old Testament is among other things an instruction manual for kings on how they ought to rule in order to please God. The basic fact is that the New Testament Scriptures have very little to say to rulers \textit{qua} rulers.

Written during a time when Christians were a persecuted minority, considered little more than a sect of Judaism, it was not a dominating question for the New Testament church. Several directives are given for the way Christians ought to relate to civil authorities (1 Peter 2:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:2-4), but unlike the Old Testament, God’s people are in a place of surviving civil government rather than designing it. The question that emerges for any Christian in a place of political power, then, is to what does one look to as a guide for civil government?

The dominant view that emerged was one in which Christian kings and rulers looked to the rights and duties of Old Testament kings as a guide for political rule. This was no less true earlier in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. As one historian writes, “The magisterial Reformation defence of religious coercion had rested foursquare on the analogy between ancient Israel and Christian nations.”\textsuperscript{62} Still later in the seventeenth century, one’s skill as a political

\textsuperscript{60} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.7.6-12.
\textsuperscript{61} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.7.16.
theorist largely depended on one’s ability as an exegete of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, the debates over royal absolutism in seventeenth-century England were largely waged over two Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8. How one interpreted these passages and their relevance for Christians signaled one's side in the royal absolutism-republican political debates. For instance, James I discussed 1 Sam. 8 in The Trew Law of Free Monarchs (1598) and drew the conclusion that it defended due obedience to kings in all things. These texts served as the basis for some of the greatest political debates of the seventeenth century over royal power and were discussed by no lesser luminaries than John Selden (1584-1654), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Milton (1608-1674), James Harrington (1611-1677), and John Locke (1632-1704). Far from anachronistic or irrelevant, these thinkers saw the Old Testament Scriptures as fundamental truths and “vibrant living laws” relevant for contemporary times. The key then to understanding seventeenth-century political theory is to understand how they read the Old Testament scriptures as politically authoritative history. For the Tudor and Stuart monarchs in this period, the Old Testament examples of kings and rulers of Israel exercising authority over

64 Both Deut. 17 and 1 Sam. 8 describe the role of Old Testament kings.
65 See also the debates between John Maxwell, Samuel Rutherford, Sir Robert Filmer, Algernon Sidney. Killeen, 386.
66 Killeen, 386: “What is so interesting about this Protestant apotheosis of the Bible is the interest generated in reading it politically. While political readings of biblical narratives had been around since the patristic period, it was Protestant hermeneutics that played a major role in the renewed interest in the discussion of biblical narratives. If the Old Testament was no longer thought of as the old dispensation, rendered null and void by the new, neither was it seen as only 'a prefiguration of eternal truths'; it was viewed, rather as God's revealed word on a host of matters, especially politics. The laws of the Old Testament were, therefore, not anachronistic features of a primitive and outdated religion, but vibrant living laws relevant to contemporary times” (emphasis mine).
67 By “politically authoritative history” I am borrowing the language of Joshua Mitchell's doctoral thesis, which refers to politically authoritative history as “that history invoked, the implications of which authorize or legitimate a particular political order…” He continues, “My claim is that the political thought of Luther, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau is inexorably bound to the history they invoke... Early modern political thought, in a word, is an attempt to grasp the implications of a politically authoritative history, the horizon of which is, for us, strange, and whose pertinent events establish the standing and identity of humankind as well as the political task at hand.” Not by Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.
spiritual and temporal matters made for the perfect proof texts to justify royal absolutism. The story of persecution in England from 1534 to 1641 is thus in many ways a story of royal absolutism, as monarchs sought to assume royal power, defended by biblical texts.

This chapter provides an overview of the history of the Protestant and Catholic practices of persecution, its evidence, and its effects, up until the English Revolution (1642-1649). The royal supremacy over the English Church resulted in constant changes that frustrated clergy on all sides. There were no easy options for religious dissenters during these centuries. Many opted to leave the country during times of persecution, planning to return and continue the work of reformation when the political climate had changed. Others opted to stay, starting secret, underground churches that operated alongside the state-sponsored Church of England. In the end, the disruption of the English Revolution would draw dissenters out of the woodwork into broad daylight, finally bringing the question of toleration to the light of day.

From Defender to Defector of the Faith: Henry VIII’s Sordid Affair

The world in which Henry VIII died in 1547 could not possibly have been more different than the world into which he was born in 1491. Just after Henry’s first birthday, Columbus would discover the New World. During Henry’s lifetime the printing press would rise in significance, allowing mass production of books and news. Europe would face the existential threat of the Ottoman Empire’s siege of Vienna in 1529. Perhaps more tumultuous than any of these, however, was the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517 a German Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther would propose 95 theses for debate, questioning the practices of the Roman Catholic Church on the basis of the words of Scripture. At the time, Henry could never have imagined the consequences of that event for himself, for England, and for the rest of the world.
England had faced its own attempts at reformation in earlier centuries. John Wycliffe (1331-1384) had promoted the translation of the Bible into English and criticized the luxuries and superfluities of the Catholic Church, for which he was declared a heretic by the Council of Constance in 1414 and posthumously exhumed, his bones burned, and ashes thrown into the River Swift. Years later, William Tyndale (1494–1536) similarly translated the scriptures into English and advocated for a reform of the church, but was captured and executed for heresy outside of Brussels in 1536. His translation of the Bible, however, provided the basis for the Coverdale Bible, which Henry VIII would eventually order to be read in every English parish.

Initially, Henry sided with Rome against Luther’s attempts to reform the church.\(^6^8\) In fact, as thanks for his treatise *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (1521) or *Defence of the Seven Sacraments* defending the Catholic Church against Martin Luther’s *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), Pope Leo X bestowed on Henry the title, *Fidei Defensor* or “Defender of the Faith.”\(^6^9\) However, Henry quickly went from “defender” to “defector” of the faith when his wife Catherine failed to produce a male heir. The Pope, having already given Henry a special dispensation to marry Catherine (his deceased brother’s widow), refused to give Henry an annulment. In a swift series of events, Henry secretly married already pregnant Anne Boleyn in 1533, and the archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, rather than the Pope provided Henry’s much sought-after annulment. Henry’s public declaration of his marriage to Anne constituted not only a divorce from Catherine, but also a divorce from Rome. Pope Leo X promptly excommunicated Henry.

Henry responded in kind by issuing the “Act of Supremacy,” severing all ties with Rome and establishing himself as “the only supreme head of the Church of England, called *Anglicans*

Ecclesia.” The Act of Supremacy also had the effect of making all of Henry’s heirs the head of
the church. It further authorized Henry to “repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other
enormities and abuses...” However, when in 1536, Anne had still failed to produce a male
offspring (Elizabeth was born in 1533, Anne had a miscarriage in 1534 and another miscarriage
of a male son in 1536), Henry accused Anne of adultery and had her beheaded. Immediately
thereafter the 45-year-old Henry married Jane Seymour, one of Anne's maids, who in 1537 gave
birth to Edward, the long-awaited male heir.

Henry’s Religious Reforms

In 1537 Henry began to allow for the publication of English versions of the Bible, in
1539 issuing the “Great Bible.” That same year, he enriched himself by closing Catholic
monasteries and speeding up the confiscation of church lands begun under Cardinal Wolsey. His
actions, however, were far from Protestant. That year, he also issued the “Act of Six Articles”
that year, which became known by Protestants as the “bloody whip with six strings” because of
its harshness. Far from Protestant, it imposed by-and-large Catholic doctrines on the six key
clerical issues of:

1. Transubstantiation,
2. Withholding of the cup from the laity during communion,
3. Clerical celibacy,
4. Observance of vows of chastity,
5. Permission for private masses,
6. The importance of auricular confession.

The act made it a capital offense to deny transubstantiation or to preach against Catholic
doctrines of denying the communion cup to the laity, clerical celibacy, the inviolability of

70 Coffey, 79.
71 “The Act of the Six Articles” (1539), in Gerald Lewis Bray, ed., Documents of the English Reformation
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 222.
72 Bray, 223.
monastic vows, private confessions, and private masses. Protestant bishops, such as Latimer and Shaxton, responded by resigning from their dioceses.

More than “Protestant” or “Catholic,” Henry VIII is more accurately seen as an equal opportunity persecutor of anyone with whom he disagreed. In that sense he could accurately be described as “murderously ecumenical.” For example, in July 1540 he executed three Catholics and three Protestants on the same day.\footnote{D. MacCulloch, “Archbishop Cranmer: concord and tolerance in a changing Church”, in O.P. Grell and R. Scribner, eds, \textit{Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation} (Cambridge, 1995), p. 204. Cited in Coffey, 79.} The pattern (or tradition) of persecution that Henry initiated, he then continued throughout his reign, imposing the “Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance” in 1534 that forced a person to swear that the King was the only supreme governor of the realm, in matters temporal and spiritual, or else face charges of sedition. Without a doubt, Henry’s goal was to shore up political power in the hands of a strong monarch. Whether it was the Pope or Protestant subjects, anyone who opposed his absolutist agenda did so at their own peril.

Ecclesiastical courts also rose in prominence during Henry’s reign. Henry’s act of appointing Thomas Cromwell to serve as his vice-regent “for all his \textit{jurisdiction ecclesiastical within this realm}” could be seen as a consolidation of English ecclesiastical courts.\footnote{J.S. Burn, \textit{The High Commission. Notices of the Court and Its Proceedings} (J. R. Smith, 1865), 13.} That court would persecute religious dissenters for over a century until the English parliament dissolved the High Commission Court and Star Chamber in 1641. Henry’s legacy of interfering in religious matters lived on in his offspring. As England began the excruciating journey of vacillation between Catholic and Protestant rulers for the following century, the one constant factor in this time was an official state policy of religious uniformity in order to consolidate monarchical
power. From Henry onward, coercion-driven religious uniformity became the guiding raison d'État of England’s management of the relationship between church and state.\(^75\)

**Edward’s Short-Lived Reforms**

After his death, Henry was succeeded by the short-lived reign of Edward VI (r. 1547-1553), the son of Jane Seymour. With the same degree of religious interference as his father, and under the careful tutelage of the Protestant Thomas Cranmer, Edward moved the church in a more “Reformed” and Protestant direction, away from Catholicism. As the archbishop Cranmer charged the young nine-year-old boy upon his coronation, “Your Majesty is God's vice-regent and Christ's vicar within your own dominions, and [shall] see with your predecessor Josiah, God truly worshipped, and idolatry destroyed, the tyranny of the Bishops of Rome banished from your subjects, and images removed.”\(^76\)

To see the “tyranny of the Bishops of Rome banished” was precisely what Edward, or perhaps more accurately what his advisors, wanted. The “Book of Common Prayer,” which he had published in 1559, became the means of creating a uniformly “Reformed” and “Protestant” church in the land. Under his watch, church services formerly conducted in Latin were changed to English. Edward revoked his father’s “Six Articles,” thereby rejecting transubstantiation, allowing clergy to marry, abolishing private confessions, and permitting laity to receive both species of communion.\(^77\) As one can imagine, these were disorienting times as definitions of “heresy” and “orthodoxy” fell subject to the whims of the sovereign.

Although executions were fewer under Edward's reign, there was no room for diversity in the church. According to the historian John Coffey,

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\(^75\) Coffey, 11.
\(^77\) “The Act of Uniformity” (1552), in Bray, 281.
The Acts of Uniformity of 1549 and 1552 were intended to begin this process of compulsory reform. They demanded observance of the new liturgy in all parishes... The 1549 Act threatened parish clergy who refused to comply with the loss of a year's income and six months' imprisonment, and a third offence would be punished by a life sentence. Those who spoke against the Book would be subject to the same penalties. The 1552 Act went even further, for although it only imposed ecclesiastical punishments for non-attendance at church, it declared that anyone who attended other forms of service would be subject to imprisonment.78

These were not idle threats. Neither were the victims of Edward’s reforms limited to Catholics.

In the 1550s bishop John Hooper (who would later be executed during Mary's reign) was confined to the Fleet prison for refusing to wear the prescribed clerical dress.79 Edward’s reign, however, would not last long. In the summer of 1553, at the young age of fifteen, Edward’s life would come to an end, and with it, for a time, the era of a “Reformed Protestant” church.

Mary’s Quest to Extirpate Protestantism

While the reforms under Edward demonstrated that “the apple had not fallen far from the tree,” his persecutions and his fathers combined, however, paled in comparison to those of Mary I. Although Henry and Edward had plenty of blood on their hands, Mary stood apart in her extensive use of the death penalty for heretics. The only surviving daughter and heir of Henry’s first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Mary, during her brief reign (1553-1558) earned the sobriquet “Bloody Mary” for her fierce persecution of Protestants. In every way, Mary continued Henry’s legacy of coercion-driven religious uniformity to shore up monarchical control. She restored Catholicism, repealed her father’s “Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance” and all other acts against Rome, re-establishing the supremacy of the Pope in 1554.80 She revived old “Heresy Laws” that had been repealed under Henry VIII and Edward VI, and saw to the execution of hundreds of political and religious opponents. During a time in which every religious question

78 Coffey, 79.
79 Coffey, 80.
80 “The Marian Injunctions” (1554), in Bray, 315.
was a political question, “schism was automatically identified with sedition.” Nonetheless, even excluding the trials based on sedition, the number of executions solely based on heresy is surprisingly high (see table 1 below). While many Protestants fled to the Netherlands in the face of her coronation, those who stayed witnessed the execution of nearly 300 heretics. The persecutions during this period were immortalized in Foxe’s “Book of Martyrs” and played a decisive role in the formation of the Puritan psyche for decades to come.

Table 1: Heresy Executions in England, 1401-1612

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Number Executed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Henry VIII (1401-1534)</td>
<td>c. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward VI (1534-47)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary I (1553-8)</td>
<td>c. 290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth I (1558-1603)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James I (1603-25)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Different religious minorities responded differently to Mary’s persecutions. During that time in England many dissenters fled to Germany, Switzerland, and France, where they gathered English congregations and bided their time. Others, however, joined underground churches gathering in houses called “conventicles,” refusing to attend their parish churches. Others joined conventicles while still attending their parish churches to avoid suspicion. Many of the 800 some Protestant leaders who fled England during the Marian persecutions found themselves in reformed cities such as Frankfurt, Basel, and Geneva. These exiled churches on the continent under Mary's reign naturally developed congregational and independent church polity. That is to

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81 Coffey, 97.
82 Table taken from Coffey, 99.
83 Coffey, 80.
say, they were not subject to any Episcopal or national church government. As such, they were able to experiment and come to their own conclusions about how the church ought to be governed. There was an especially close relationship between the English exiled churches in the 1550s in Frankfurt with Calvin in Geneva.85 “Providentially,” English exiles such as John Knox arrived in Geneva just as Calvin began his series of Sermons on Deuteronomy in 1555 (less than two years after the execution of Michael Servetus by the Protestant Council there) where they would be instructed on the proper role of the Christian magistrate. An excerpt from one of Calvin’s sermons gives an idea of what these English reformers heard:

Here our Lord will have us not only to beware that we harken not to false prophets, but also to root out such pestilent persons utterly. And therein he shows how earnest we ought to be in the maintaining of his honor… [We must be diligent] in purging God’s church from them, that such a plague not be nourished among us… And besides this, such as have the sword in their hand, must provide for it also, and every man to his power must strain himself to keep God’s church from being infected with such poison.86

In Geneva, Frankfurt, and elsewhere, dissenting English Protestants developed ideas of Presbyterian church government, theology, and political theory, which they would bring back and introduce in England.87

Elizabeth’s Not-So-Moderate “Middle Way”

Fortunately for English Protestants, Mary’s reign did not last long. When Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603) came to power she immediately re-established the Protestant church and repealed Mary I’s “Heresy Laws.”88 Nonetheless, the settlement under Elizabeth was far from satisfying to exiled Protestants. Being herself moderate, Elizabeth found it hard to stomach zealous critics, whether Protestant or Catholic. Despite being an era known for its art, poetry, and literature, “the

85 Acheson, 8.
87 Acheson, 7.
88 Coffey, 82.
Elizabethan settlement was anything but tolerant. Elizabeth’s religious settlement was a “middle-ground,” satisfying neither to Catholics nor Protestants. As Hans Hillerbrand has wisely observed, “the point of departure [for persecuting regimes] was always a legal act that one might call a ‘uniformity’ statute.” The goal of “uniformity,” then, under Elizabeth, as under other English monarchs, justified the persecution of dissenters.

Elizabeth followed her father’s legacy of coercion-driven religious uniformity in every sense. In 1559, she quickly revived the “Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance” abolished by Mary, reaffirming the monarch as the “only supreme Governor of the Realm . . . as well in all Spiritual or Ecclesiastical things or causes as Temporal.” According to the “Act of Royal Supremacy” (1559), Parliament affirmed,

That your highness, your heirs and successors, kings and queens of this realm, shall have power by letters patent to authorize such persons as they should think meet, to exercise under your highness, all manner of jurisdictions, privileges, and preeminences, concerning any spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdiction. And to visit, reform, &c. all errors, abuses, &c.

Not only did Elizabeth reinstate herself as the sole and supreme head of the church (again political interference in religious matters) she also gave her politically-appointed bishops temporal authority in religious matters. The Act of Supremacy also enacted “That all archbishops, bishops, and all other their officers, exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction as well in places exempt as non-exempt, within their diocese, should have power to reform and punish all offenders.” This means bishops had the authority to impose temporal punishments for religious offenses.

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89 Coffey, 83.
92 Bray, 322.
93 “The Act of Uniformity” (1559), 332.
Similarly, Elizabeth’s “Act restoring to the Crown the ancient Jurisdiction over the State Ecclesiastical and Spiritual” of 1559 gave her the power to

Visit, reform, repress, order, correct, and amend, all such errors, heresies, schisms, abuses, offences, contempts and enormities whatsoever, which by any manner of spiritual or ecclesiastical power can... be reformed... or amended to the pleasure of Almighty God.  

For Elizabeth, the means of enforcing this religious uniformity was the High Court Commission. Through that same Act, Elizabeth authorized the High Court Commission to “inquire, by all the means they can devise after heretical opinions, books, seditious books, contempts, conspiracies, false rumours, tales, seditious misbehaviors, slanderous words.” Most of all, the Commission was to find those who “obstinately absent themselves from church.”

Originally established as a temporary ecclesiastical court by Henry VIII to enforce the Act of Supremacy (1534), its legality was not recognized until Elizabeth’s Act of Supremacy in 1559. The term “high commission” only gained use after 1570 as Elizabeth transformed the court from ad hoc commissions to a permanent fixture in the English legal system charged with the task of ensuring religious uniformity and punishing dissent. It operated primarily by requiring suspects of religious dissent to take the self-incriminating oath ex officio to testify against themselves. Those who refused were turned over to the Court of Star Chamber. The

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95 Keith E. Durso, No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s-1700s (Macon, Ga.: Atlanta, Ga: Mercer Univ Pr, 2007), 12.
96 Edward Bean Underhill, Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution, 1614-1661 (Society, 1846), 134-135.
97 Underhill, 135.
100 It has been noted that the inclusion of the Fifth Amendment’s right to remain silent is directly influenced by the Puritans opposition to the oath ex officio. The Fifth Amendment states “no person... shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.”
Court of Star Chamber was in many ways the “civil” equivalent of the “religious” High Court Commission. The High Court Commission was largely comprised of bishops, canon lawyers, and prominent laymen, whereas the Court of Star Chamber was comprised of judges and privy councilors. Both consolidated the power of monarchs by settling matters outside of Common Law courts. Both were seen by the Long Parliament as means of royal oppression and were later abolished in the Star Chamber Act of 1641.

Catholics were the first victims of the High Commission Court under Elizabeth. In response to Elizabeth's claims to royal supremacy, Pope Pius V issued the bull Regnans in Excelsis on April 27, 1570, declaring Elizabeth I to be a heretic and absolving all of her subjects from obedience to her. In the words of Pope Pius V:

We, out of the plenitude of our apostolical authority, declare the aforesaid Elizabeth an heretic, and an encourager of heretics. We declare the said Elizabeth deprived of the pretended right to the kingdom above-mentioned, and of all dominion, dignity, and privilege whatsoever; and that all the nobility and subjects of the said realm, who have sworn to her in any manner whatsoever, are for ever absolved from any such oath, and from all obligation of fidelity and allegiance.

The right claimed by Catholics to rebel against heretical kings did not sit well with Elizabeth. For this reason, Catholics were executed under Elizabeth for treason and sedition, not for heresy, often leading observers to underestimate the number of executions under Elizabeth (as seen in table 1 above).

102 Coffey, 85.
104 The actual number of Catholics killed under pretense of “treason” is difficulty to say. John Coffey estimates that “Between this date [1577] and 1603, between 120 and 130 other priests were executed, along with around 60 lay recusants” (Coffey, 89). This, together with other oppressive tactics led one contemporary observer to exclaim, “Catholicism ought not to have survived the reign of Elizabeth I" (Coffey, 87).
Furthermore, Elizabeth’s “Act of Uniformity” in 1559 forbade priests from “willfully or obstinately... us[ing] any other rite, ceremony, order, form or manner” than Elizabeth’s Book of Common Prayer, under threat of penalties.\(^{105}\) For the first offense, priests would lose their benefice and face six months in prison. For the second offense, they would face a year's imprisonment. And for the third offense, they would lose their benefice and face imprisonment for life. Similarly, laypersons that disrupted the religious uniformity would face fines for the first two offenses before facing imprisonment for life. Even stricter, however, was the additional requirement that laypersons attend religious services or face fines. In Coffey’s words, the injunctions of 1559 not only prohibited diverse practice across churches, but also “denied the queen's subjects private space in which to pursue voluntarily alternative forms of worship.”\(^{106}\) For example, even families practicing voluntary family worship outside of the parish church service would face the abovementioned penalties.

As a result, Catholics were not the only ones to suffer under Elizabeth's Commission Court. Puritan Separatists who gathered illegally in their own churches, called “conventicles,” also faced imprisonment, fines, and even death. In this sense, like her father, Elizabeth was an equal opportunity persecutor. According to the historian who compiled the records of the High Court Commission, Elizabeth especially targeted “The lay puritans [who had] abandoned the Churches, and held private meetings for religious worship.”\(^{107}\) The Puritans, during this time, were those Protestants who called for further purification of the church, simplicity of worship, the adoption of reformed Calvinistic doctrines, and the complete abolition of Catholic symbols.

\(^{105}\) The Elizabethan Act quoted in Coffey, 83.
\(^{106}\) Coffey, 83.
They emphasized preaching and the need for personal discipline and purity of life. In many ways, their rallying cry was the same as their Protestant forebears: *Ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei* (“The church Reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God.”)

Elizabeth’s conflict with the Puritans came to a head early on over the issue of what priests should wear during religious services. Known as the “Vestments Controversy,” the issue of clerical vestments had already created some heat under Edward VI. In the 1560s, Elizabeth called on the clergy to wear the traditional garb worn by Catholic priests when performing services. Some members of the clergy refused and organized protests. Not always known for their tactfulness, the Puritan opponents of vestments protested in no shortage of strong language. Nevertheless, the Queen and archbishop Parker insisted on uniformity. According to Parker, vestments were *adiaphora* (Greek for “things indifferent”) and therefore left for human institutions to determine. According to his Puritan opponents, however, vestments were not *adiaphora* and even if they were, matters *adiaphora* should be left to individual conscience, not imposed by an Episcopal system. Many of the Puritan instigators were subsequently deprived of their livings and imprisoned. Finally, in 1572, Puritan preachers and ordained ministers John Field and Thomas Wilcox issued their *Admonition to Parliament* calling for an abolition of the

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109 Commenting on Eph. 5:25-27 Calvin says, “The church is holy, then, in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness…” (*Institutes*, 4.1.17).

110 In one account, Robert Crowley, a prominent clergyman who was one of the Marian exiles in Frankfurt exclaimed that he “would not suffer any such superstitious rags of Rome there to enter” his church. James Gairdner and John Stow, *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles: With Historical Memoranda by John Stowe, the Antiquary, and Contemporary Notes of Occurrences Written by Him in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (Camden society, 1880), 136.

111 When Calvin asserts the Christian’s freedom “in things indifferent” (adiáphoros) in the *Institutes*, he specifically mentions three sources of controversy in his day: “the unrestricted eating of meat, use of holidays and of vestments…” (McNeill, 839). Regarding these, he says: “For here are included all ceremonies whose observance is optional, that our consciences may not be constrained by any necessity to observe them but my remember that by God’s beneficence their use is for edification made subject to him (McNeill, 840). His point is simply that in matters indifferent, Christian consciences ought not to be obligated.
episcopacy.\textsuperscript{112} In response, the High Commission Court sent them to Newgate Prison, the most notorious of English prisons, for over a year.\textsuperscript{113}

Upon the death of archbishop Grindall in 1583, the queen appointed John Whitgift as his successor. Whitgift insisted on an expansion of ecclesiastical courts and prevailed upon the Queen to issue a new Ecclesiastical Commission of forty-four Commissioners with practically unlimited authority.\textsuperscript{114} As part of creating a more uniform church and weeding out dissenters, Whitgift issued a “subscription policy” in 1583 that demanded all ministers take the subscription test of the Eleven Articles. This oath included not only agreeing to follow the Book of Common Prayer, but also affirming that it was entirely without error. This proved too much for many Puritan ministers and many opted for only a conditional subscription.\textsuperscript{115}

Under Whitgift, the power of the High Commission Court expanded significantly. According to the power invested in them by Elizabeth, they were not confined to matters merely spiritual; they had also power to punish “incest, adultery, fornication, with all misbehaviour and disorders in marriage.”\textsuperscript{116} In 1586, Whitgift was able to place limits on printing, allowing the court to censor potentially disruptive writings and even destroy Puritan presses.\textsuperscript{117}

More controversial than any of these issues however, was the High Commission Court’s use of the so-called oath \textit{ex officio}.\textsuperscript{118} According to one historian, “This was an oath administered by the High Commission, whereby the examinant was compelled to confess or accuse himself of

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\textsuperscript{112} Burn, 5.
\textsuperscript{113} Coffey, 94.
\textsuperscript{114} Burn, 10.
\textsuperscript{116} Burn, 11.
\textsuperscript{117} Coffey, 95; Burn, 14.
\end{flushright}
any criminal matter.”  

In such a case there was no accuser, but the commissioners acted as prosecutor and judge in a case, which unlike English Common law, lacked any jury. This was considered highly unconstitutional by many of the Court’s critics. Essentially, the Court could summon someone for questioning—usually a suspected dissenting Puritan or Catholic—without any legal basis, but merely because they were suspected for an offense, and then demand that they take the oath *ex officio*. The oath *ex officio* meant that they promised to tell the complete truth to any question during interrogation or else be found guilty for lying.  

It put suspects in an impossible situation. If they revealed dissenting beliefs or practices while under interrogation, the interrogators would become the judges and the subject would be used as their own witness against themselves. If they refused to answer any questions (as in the famous case of the Puritan Thomas Cartwright), they would be found guilty of contempt of court and imprisoned. It was a no-win situation that was horribly abused by the High Commission Court under Whitgift to crack down on religious dissenters. When Parliament finally questioned the validity of the High Commission Court's practice of the oath *ex officio* in 1592, Elizabeth came down hard on Parliament, forcefully taking the question off the table.  

While unpopular with the Puritan contingent within the Church of England, Elizabeth’s continual interferences in ecclesiastical matters were popular with some of the clergy. In a sermon before Parliament in 1585, archbishop of York Thomas Sandys affirmed the duty of the monarch to “purge and cleanse” the church:

> The first point of kingly service unto God is to purge and cleanse his church. It appertaineth to princes, to magistrates, to them which are now assembled in this

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119 Burn, 27-28.
120 Solt, 113.
121 Burn, 17.
honourable court of parliament, by all good means and laws, to see God’s house made clean; that it may be the house of prayer, and not a den of thieves.122

Archbishop Sandys is simply expressing here the opinion held by many at the time that in overseeing and enforcing uniform worship on the church Elizabeth was simply doing her God-given duty as a monarch.

The Separatist Dilemma

Those who attempted to operate outside of the Church of England faced opprobrium. In the 1570s, dissenting clergymen Robert Browne and John Harrison had developed a theological system that made separation from the Church of England virtually unavoidable.123 Browne insisted that the “gathered church” must be separated from the established church, that communion should be taken by the “godly,” and that the authority of the church in matters of faith, doctrine, and discipline rested with individual congregations. These Separatists were thus persecuted with unequalled zeal under Elizabeth’s reign.

Then in 1593, Parliament issued the “Act Against Puritans,” making non-attendance of the Church of England and the attendance of non-sanctioned services punishable by fines and imprisonments. This act specifically targeted a subset of Puritans such as Robert Browne who became known as “Separatists” because they saw “reform from within” as a lost cause, and thus separated themselves from the Church of England in order to form their own independent congregations.

As the High Commission Court began to punish failures to attend parish churches even more, private “conventicles” (or unofficial religious gatherings) were cracked down on. Although few Separatists were burned, in an age in which religious diversity was seen as

122 Edwin Sandys, The Sermons of Edwin Sandys: To Which Are Added Some Miscellaneous Pieces (Printed at the University Press, 1842), 42.
123 Acheson, 11.
subversive and threatening, Separatism and “Browneism” (named for Robert Browne) were treated as a plague to be extinguished. As Burn records,

Thus persons refusing to go to Church, or frequenting any conventicle, or questioning the queen’s power in ecclesiastical matters, either by printing or writing, were to be sent to prison without bail, and if they would not conform within three months, were to abjure the realm, or else to suffer death without benefit of Clergy.

A brief glance at the records of the High Commission Court in the 1560s reveals how the Court under archbishop Whitgift “persecuted the non-conformists to the utmost.”124 To mention only a few cases, Henry Barrowe (1550-1593), a member of Gray’s Inn in London, was imprisoned on suspicion of Separatism for refusing to take the oath *ex officio*. He was later indicted for his writings in favor of congregational independency and hanged in 1592.125 The martyrologist and Protestant propagandist, John Foxe (c. 1516-1587) was similarly caught up in the vestments controversy. When in 1565 he was called on to subscribe to the order for apparel, he is reported to have taken his Greek Testament out of his pocket and said, “To this I will subscribe. I have nothing in the Church but a prebend in Salisbury, and much good may it do you if you take it from me.”126

124 Burn, 4.
125 All of these cases are cited in J.S. Burn, *The High Commission. Notices of the Court and Its Proceedings* (J. R. Smith, 1865).
126 Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (Harper & brothers, 1843), 98; 131-132. These records from the High Commission Court reveal the diversity of cases they faced and give some idea of the penalties they meted out. Deal, while not the most reliable of sources, gives an account of an interrogation of the High Commission Court of a Mr. White on January 18, 1573 by the Lord Chief Justice (L.C.J in the dialogue). While it should be treated with caution since the documentary source is lacking, it provides helpful insight into the dealings of the High Court Commission:

L. C. J. Who is this?
White. White, a’nt please your honour.
L. C. J. White! As black as the Devil.
White. Not so, my Lord, one of God’s children.
L. C. J. Why will you not come to your parish Church?
Mast. Reg. What if the Queen should command to wear a grey frize gown, would you come to Church then ?
White. That were more tolerable, than that God’s ministers should wear the habit of his enemies.
L. C. J. How if she should command to wear a fool’s coat and a cook’s comb?
White. That were very unseemly, my Lord, for God’s ministers.
L. C. J. I swear by God thou art a very rebel, for thou wouldst draw thy sword, and lift up thy hand against thy Prince, if time served. Take him away.
The brutality of the High Commission Court would continue until it was abolished by Parliament in 1641 during the English Civil War. It continued to serve as an example of political overreach in religious matters in the way it targeted religious and political opponents of Elizabeth, as well as under Charles I. In the era famous for its Shakespearean culture, one is surprised to see the extent of such persecution under Elizabeth. Coffey brings this disparity to light in questioning the rosy picture of England under the “Virgin Queen” often painted in popular histories:

The burnings of Hamont and Cole, Lewes and Kett, are little known, even among historians of Elizabethan England. By contrast, the execution of Servetus in Calvin's Geneva is notorious, and helped to form the image of Calvin as the city's ruthless dictator. In the United States, nineteenth-century history textbooks presented a Calvin guilty of un-American activities, an authoritarian theocrat devoid of warmth or intelligence. Elizabethan England, however, has usually enjoyed an excellent (Protestant) press. This was the colourful Age of Shakespeare, when England flourished under her Virgin Queen.\(^{127}\)

Most disappointed of all in Elizabeth’s reign were the Puritans. For many English Protestants, the drastic contrast between Mary I and her successor, Elizabeth I, prompted millennial expectations that the specially chosen people of God would soon wage war against and defeat the Papal antichrist.\(^{128}\) Understanding themselves to be successors of Israel whose relationship to God paralleled that of the Jews before the coming of Christ, Puritan optimism peaked with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. As historian Edmund S. Morgan writes, many English

\(^{127}\) Coffey, 102.
Protestants believed at the time that “England would lead all nations to the Kingdom of God.”

However, as seen above, Elizabeth’s reforms were far less pervasive than the Puritans had hoped. While her efforts secured an “outward” religious uniformity in England, they fomented internal dissent. By the time James I took over the throne in 1603, the euphoric optimism had quickly cooled to open dissent. But with the arrival of a Scottish-Calvinist king from the Presbyterian north, some still dared to hope for a change in direction.

**The Disappointment of James I and the Policy of “Persuasion and Compulsion”**

Born in 1566, James became James VI King of Scotland in 1567 at the ripe, young age of one. However, he became the first Stuart to assume the throne of England, which he did as James I of England in 1603, following the death of Queen Elizabeth on the 24th of March 1603. James faced competing expectations upon his succession to the English throne. Those persecuted under Elizabeth welcomed his arrival. Zealous Puritans, encouraged at learning James was a devout Calvinist, hoped for a more complete reformation of the church, despite the fact that James had far from pleasant feelings toward Scottish Presbyterianism. Anxious Catholics were hopeful that as the son of a devout Catholic (Mary Queen of Scots), James would grant them toleration. Petitions came from left and right, each party hoping for change of one kind or another. No issue garnered more attention than that of the religious settlement under James.

In many ways, James’ religious settlement was even more moderate than Elizabeth’s. He relaxed the persecution of Catholics and his church provided ample room for Calvinists and Arminians alike. Many, however, were disappointed. By his continuous assertion of royal

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129 Morgan, 9.
130 Arminians are those followers of Dutch Protestant Theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), a student of Theodore Beza’s, who rejected Calvinist soteriology (i.e. total depravity, predestination, limited atonement) in their “Five Articles of Remonstrance,” instead asserting doctrines of general atonement and free will, which were famously responded to and condemned by the Dutch national Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which issued what are now known as the “five-points of Calvinism” in response.
power in ecclesiastical matters, James “dashed Puritan hopes of a real reformation.”\textsuperscript{131} In the Parliament of 1610, complaints were made that ecclesiastical persons were using both the spiritual and temporal swords, and with them also the oath \textit{ex officio}, which James did not abolish, as many had hoped.

Furthermore, James I’s position on toleration was ambiguous at best. In some statements, James I seemed to favor a limited religious toleration. At least, in his address to Parliament in 1614, he declared,

\begin{quote}
No state can evidence that any religion or heresy was ever extirpated by the sword, or by violence, nor have I ever judged it a way of planting the truth. An example of this I take where, when many rigorous counsels were propounded, Gamaliel stood up and advised, that ‘if that religion were of God, it would prosper; if of man, it would finish of itself.’\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

Despite such statements, James was an unequivocal absolutist. As evidenced in his writings on the Divine Right of Kings, he found a biblical basis for his political power over religion in the example of Old Testament kings.\textsuperscript{133} He affirmed that “[The kingdom of the Jews] ought to bee a patterne to all Christian and well founded Monarchies, as being founded by God himselfe [sic].” He pointed to the fact that in the Old Testament “kings were directly Governors over the Church within their Dominions” and they “purged their corruptions; reformed their abuses... destroyed all idoles and false gods.”\textsuperscript{134} For James I, the King was without question responsible to enforce “\textit{custos utriusque Tabulae}” both tables of the Ten Commandments, entailing not only peace with one's neighbor, but also demanding the right worship of God.\textsuperscript{135} This duty of the magistrate

\textsuperscript{131} Acheson, 19.
\textsuperscript{132} Robert Vaughan, \textit{The History of England Under the House of Stuart, Including the Commonwealth (AD 1603-1688)} (Baldwin and Cradock, 1840), 89.
\textsuperscript{133} See James I’s writings, especially \textit{The True Law of Free Monarchies} (1598) and \textit{Basilikon Doron} (1599).
\textsuperscript{134} James I. (King of England) and Johann P. Sommerville, \textit{King James VI and I: Political Writings} (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59, 107, 39. (Cited in Coffey, 31).
\textsuperscript{135} Quoted in Coffey, 31.
to enforce both Tables of the Law was consistent with the teachings of Calvin as well as the teachings of the Divines of the Westminster Assembly.\textsuperscript{136}

The Puritans and other conservative Protestants were far from impressed with James’ reign. The Puritan-dominated Parliament agonized over James’ reluctance to aid the Protestant forces of Europe during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). Moreover, James’ lenience towards Catholics seemed to be mainly tied to his efforts to find a Catholic wife for his son, as the toleration of Catholics in England was a condition from Spain for the marriage of James’ son Charles to Infanta Maria Anna of Spain. Needless to say, this did little to endear him to the Puritans and to the English Parliament.

Whether from disappointment with James I’s reforms or simply the result of different theological convictions, the number of separatist congregations continued to increase under James’ reign. Meanwhile, others continued to follow the path of the Marian exiles and left the country to avoid persecution. John Robinson and John Smythe, along with their respective early separatist churches, emigrated to the Netherlands toward the beginning of James I’s rule.

There was though sufficient room for diversity within the Church of England at this time for semi-Separatist Puritans to remain within the church without much difficulty. The church, however, was not wide enough to accommodate those who denied the Trinity, such as Socinians and Arians. Under James I's watch, Bartholomew Legatt was burnt at Smithfield for Arianism in 1612. And Edward Wightman, “the last person burned for heresy in English history,” was similarly burnt at Lichfield for similar charges of

\textsuperscript{136} Some scholars such as David Little argue that Calvin actually changed his mind on this issue. The “younger Calvin,” in writing his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans in 1531 limited the Second Table to the Magistrate. In his subsequent writings, however, Calvin explicitly affirms the duty of the Magistrate to enforce the commandments of both tablets.
to the “heresies of Arius” and others.137

To conclude, the King’s position on matters of religious persecution can be best summed up in his own words, as articulated in a speech to Parliament in 1620, as one of persuasion and compulsion.138 Similar to his predecessors, James was unwilling to relinquish monarchical control over religion, even if it meant alienating Parliament. In addition, his purported lenience towards Catholics served to kindle the fire of Puritan dissent that culminated in the English Revolution under his son Charles I.

The Brutality of Charles I

Persecution did not wane under Charles I. In fact, it grew worse for dissenters. By the 1630's the great St. Paul's Cathedral of London had fallen into a state of disrepair. In 1633, Charles I issued a “commission concerning the reparation of Saint Pauls Church” and demanded contributions for the cost. Unsurprisingly, fees paid to the High Commission Court for religious offenses were used for the reparations of St. Paul's, leading many to observe that the church was built with the sins of the people.139

137 Coffey, 114-115.
138 “For religion, there are laws enough, so as the true intent and execution follow. The maintenance of religion stands in two points: 1. Persuasion, which must precede. 2. Compulsion, which must follow; for as all the world cannot create a new creature, be it never so little, so no law of man can make a good Christian in heart, without inward grace. Yet it is not enough to trust to a good cause, and let it go alone... But God forbid that I should compel men’s consciences, but leave them to the laws of the kingdom; for the rumour that is spread, that I should tolerate religion in respect of this match which hath been long intreated with Spain for my son, I profess I will do nothing therein which shall not be honourable, and for the good of religion.” Great Britain Parliament and William Cobbett, Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England: From the Norman Conquest, in 1066, to the Year, 1803. From Which Last-Mentioned Epoch It Is Continued Downwards in the Work Entitled: “Cobbett’s Parliamentary Debates”. (T. Curson Hansard, Published by R. Bagshaw, 1806), 1117.
139 Burn, 39. There are almost echoes of Luther’s railings against the way the sale of indulgences funded the construction of St. Peter’s in Rome. One is reminded of thesis no. 50: “Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.”
In 1628, a royal commission authorized the archbishop of Canterbury “to exercise all manner of jurisdictions, privileges, and preeminencies, concerning any spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdiction within the realm.” When William Laud (1573–1645) was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, he embraced this authority with unequaled zeal. Whereas James I had allowed significant diversity within the established church, Laud’s reforms forced ministers to stay and conform or else leave the church. Laud’s strong-handed Arminianism—which among other things involved the denial of the traditionally Protestant and Calvinistic doctrines of God’s sovereign choice in election and of particular redemption—seemed to many to be taking the church in a Catholic direction. He was especially strict in forbidding conventicles or informal gatherings of believers in their homes. He proved unable to distinguish between different degrees of separatism, punishing dissent of any kind with crushing force. Many who had not formerly

140 Burn, 41.
been considered as or considered themselves as Separatists soon found themselves in jail, accused of nonconformity for minor offenses.

As a result, independent churches exploded in number under Charles I’s reign. As Acheson writes, “within fifteen years of James I's death, however, England appeared to be swarming with sectaries, Separatists, and dissenters of all shades of opinion.”¹⁴¹ In 1631, the bishop of Exeter stated that he had heard of the existence of 11 Separatist congregations in London.¹⁴² Henry Jacob is an example of a founder of an early separatist church in London during Charles I’s reign. Despite being a Separatist, Jacob refused to condemn the existing parish churches as “untrue” simply because they consisted of both believers and unbelievers. Although he agreed that they were in a “most dangerous and desperate estate,” he insisted that the presence of unbelievers did not “void the holiness of that whole assembly.”¹⁴³ Jacob’s church became known as the “Jessey congregation,” named after Henry Jessey who was elected their pastor in 1637, after Jacob emigrated to America, and who brought the congregation to Baptist convictions. John Spilsbury was another pastor of an early separatist congregation in London that became Baptist in 1638. Similarly, William Kiffin became an early Baptist minister, having been a part of the Jessey church before becoming convinced of believer's baptism and then leaving to found his own church in 1644.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴¹ Burn, 27.
¹⁴² Burn, 33.
¹⁴³ Acheson, 22.
¹⁴⁴ All examples cited in Acheson, 33.
As a result of these separatists, Laud's Commissioners certainly had their hands full. According to the records of the High Commission Court, on April 16, 1632 it heard a case of parishioners from Hardwick who had supposedly christened a cat, interviewed a certain Dr. Hook on the charge of “purgation in the church of Nettleton,” examined a Francis Litton, “for p-- ---- against a pillar, in St. Paul’s Cathedral” while on the way to being married, and interrogated a Mr. Lattroppe who was accused of holding illegal conventicles, and whose interrogation began with the question “how many women sat cross legged in bed while you preached to them?” All of that goes without mentioning the case of “Mr. Barker the printer,” who was found guilty of two gross mistakes in his printing of the Bible. In his printing Exodus, 20:14, instead of reading “thou shalt not commit adultery,” by dropping the “not” he encouraged exactly the opposite: “thou shalt commit adultery.” As evidence that this was a case of intentionality and not a mere printer’s mistake, his accusers pointed to the fact that in one place the text says “great asse,”
instead of “greatnesse,” not an easily-made typographical error. Mr. Barker was stripped of his printer's license and then died in debtors prison some time later.\textsuperscript{145}

The most scandalous sentence of Charles I's High Commission Court took place in February of 1630 against Alexander Leighton, a Scottish doctor, Puritan, and staunch anti-Catholic.\textsuperscript{146} Leighton had published two books against the Church of England, “Looking Glass of the Holy War” (1624), and “Zion's Plea against Prelacy: An Appeal to Parliament,” published in Holland in 1628. In February of 1630, Leighton was fined £10,000 by the Star Chamber, for these two books and then transferred to the High Commission Court. There he was deprived of his ministry, whipped, pilloried, his ears were cut, his nose slit, his face branded with an S.S. (for “Sower of Sedition”), and lastly he was sent to Fleet Prison for life, a notorious prison on Fleet River in London where prisoners had to pay for food and lodging. This horrid sentence was executed in November 1630, in the midst of frost and snow, in which according to the terms of the sentence he was publicly exposed and punished twice, and the second punishment was inflicted with unrelenting severity after a short interval of only seven days in between, (“his back and face being yet excoriated and disfigured”).\textsuperscript{147} Leighton was later released from prison and compensated by the Parliament in 1640, which by that point thoroughly opposed the excesses of the High Commission Court.

Another controversial account of the High Commission Court under Charles I concerns William Prynne, a prolific writer and opponent of Laud. Prynne was persecuted heavily under Laud for his writings against Arminianism and the episcopacy. Nonetheless, he was no friend of tolerationists and opposed Thomas Goodwin and John Lilburne, instead arguing for stringent

\textsuperscript{145} One of the few extant copies of so called “Wicked Bible” recently sold at an auction at Bonhams for £31,250 (€44,113) on November 11, 2015.
\textsuperscript{146} This account is found in Burn, 55-56.
\textsuperscript{147} Burn, 55.
state control of religion. Even after having been whipped, pilloried, ears cut off, branded with an S.L. for “Seditious Libeller,” and imprisoned, William M. Lamont writes that, “Prynne had no distrust of power or abstract love of freedom. His pamphlet, *The Sword of Christian Magistracy*, is one of the most blood-curdling pleas for total repressive action from the civil authority in the English language.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Presentments for religious offences in the diocese of Canterbury, 1590–1640</th>
<th>Objections to Prayer Book</th>
<th>Refusing Baptism</th>
<th>Going Elsewhere for sermons</th>
<th>Refusing to be churched</th>
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<th>Conventicles</th>
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<tr>
<td>1590-1599</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1600-1609</td>
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<td>1610-1619</td>
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<td>1620-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>1630-1640</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

A study of the proceedings of the High Commission Court in the diocese of Canterbury from 1590 to 1640 reveals the most common cases the court faced (see table 2 above). Clearly, “going elsewhere for sermons” became much more common under Charles I (as well as objections to the Common Book of prayer and the number of conventicles), either indicating an increased dissatisfaction with the Arminian leanings of the established church, or a greater emphasis on enforcement of the law.

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As a result of its abuses, dissatisfaction with the High Commission Court grew in the 1630s and 1640s. Before Laud’s commission collapsed in 1640, Laud himself admitted to the challenges of suppressing dissent even within his own diocese in 1639:

The great thing which is amiss there, and beyond my power to remedy, is the stiffness of divers anabaptists and separatists from the Church of England; especially in and about the parts near Ashford. And I do not find, either by my own experience, or by any advice from my officers that this is likely to be remedied, unless the statute concerning abjuration of your kingdom, or some other way by the power of the temporal law or state be thought upon. But how fit that may be done for the present, especially in these broken times, I humbly submit to your majesty's wisdom, having complained of this often before.150

As Laud’s frustration grew so did the frustration of his detractors. In 1640, Sir Edwin Dering delivered a powerful speech to Parliament, drawing parallels between the High Commission Court and the Inquisition:

With the Papists there is a severe Inquisition, and with us there is a bitter High Commission,—both these, contra fas et jus, are judges in their own cause,—ye therein their Inquisitors are better than our High Commissioners; they do not punish such as practice their religion; but with us, how many poor distressed ministers, nay, how many scores of them have been suspended, degraded and excommunicated, though not guilty of any breach of any established laws.151

Dering is correct in his parallels between the Inquisition and the High Court Commission, both of which operated under a Roman Model of law (contrasted with the Common Law tradition) since the prosecutors were the judges in trials in which defendants testified against themselves. Dering’s speech captures the growing frustration of Parliament at monarchical overreach in religious matters, epitomized in the English Civil War a few years later.

151 Burn, 69.
The Social Disruption of the English Revolution and the Proliferation of Sects

By the time of the English Revolution, Parliament had learned that as long as the political sovereign controlled the appointment of bishops, the reformation of the church would continue to vacillate between Protestants and Catholics, between moderates and radicals. This was not a sustainable way to continue the work of reforming the church. The Laudian reforms woke the church up to the inefficiency and dangers of the Episcopal system of church government. Those Puritans who may have otherwise stayed within the church realized that top-down political reformation within the church was not a feasible route to continue and sustain the reformation in England as long as the monarch controlled it. If the English Reformation would continue, the church needed the freedom to reform. In many ways, the fierceness with which William Laud persecuted the Puritans and other dissenters actually worked to unify these otherwise disorganized movements. Laud’s persecutions forged an unlikely alliance between the radical Puritan Separatists and the Anglican semi-separatists. However, in 1646, with the defeat and execution of Charles I, the practical question of religious settlement could be avoided no longer. It had now become an increasing source of division among the various competing sects, whose visions of church and state remained irreconcilable. It was during these key years, as the question of the future of England’s religious settlement was being openly debated in Parliament, in print, and in the Westminster Assembly, that the idea of religious toleration really began to gain traction.

To summarize this review of religious persecution in early-modern England, it must have seemed to religious dissenters that nothing in the world could be said to be certain, except death and persecution. A long century of persecution had followed Henry VIII’s claims to supremacy over church and state. Meanwhile, zealous reformers increasingly realized that continued reformation was not feasible within the existing church-state arrangement. And then by the time
the English Revolution broke out, the different competing alternative religious arrangements were forced to articulate and defend their point of view in Parliament, in the press, and in parish churches. It was then during this time of great debate that the idea of religious toleration began to gain traction when a coalition of radical Baptists was formed in order to defend what in their mind was the only possible solution to England’s miseries: an institutionally-independent church and a state arrangement with religious toleration for all.
CHAPTER II

“A TURBULENT, SEDITIOUS, AND FACTITIOUS PEOPLE:”
PERCEPTIONS AND PERSECUTIONS OF THE ENGLISH BAPTISTS

Who writ the history of the Anabaptists but their enemies?\(^{152}\)
- Richard Overton (1646)

God's people are, as it hath always been, looked upon to be a turbulent,
seditious, and factitious people.\(^{153}\)
- John Bunyan (1663)

A Petition Denied

Around the year 1613, a group of imprisoned Baptist ministers in Newgate Prison drafted a petition to present to King James I. In the petition, the Baptist ministers sued for relief from the harshness of religious persecution. The petition aimed at a specific case of legal discrimination. Namely, Catholics were being allowed some limited religious concessions that were denied to Baptists and other dissenters. James I allowed Catholics to take an oath of civil allegiance in return for some limited freedom to gather independently and observe their own religious practices. In the petition, the Baptists professed themselves willing to take the same oath in return for similar concessions. They write:

The popish recusants upon taking the oath are delivered from imprisonment, and diverse of us also are set at liberty, when we fall under the hands of the reverend judges and justices. But when we fall in the hands of the bishops we can have no benefit by the said oath, for they say it belongeth only to popish recusants, and not to others, but kept have

\(^{152}\) Wright, 4. Cited in C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 120.
we been by them many years in lingering imprisonment, divided from wives, children, servants and callings, not for any other cause but only for conscience towards God, to the utter undoing of us, our wives and children.  

Penciled at the bottom of the only extant copy of the petition are the words, “rejected by the committee.”

The story of the early English Baptists begins with a sect within the separatist Puritan movement in seventeenth-century England. The early Baptists were English Puritans who had left the Church of England, seeking a more “pure” gathering of believers. More than mere Separatists, however, they were Puritans who disagreed with the practice of infant baptism. They had come to the conclusion that the Scriptures defined a congregation based on regenerate church membership and believer’s baptism.

This chapter outlines the growth and development of the early English Baptists. It documents how Baptists found themselves torn between the effort to vindicate their theological distinctives while simultaneously trying to clear themselves from charges of “Anabaptism” and convince others of their theological orthodoxy. This proved difficult however, and throughout the seventeenth-century the Baptists were associated with the continental Anabaptist movements, accused of “Antinomianism” and compared with Donatists, because their emphasis on the purity of the church.

Furthermore, far from being tolerated during the English Civil War (1642–1649), the Baptists were victims of joint-attacks by Parliament and the Westminster Assembly and misconstrued in pamphlets and newspapers. Nonetheless, throughout the seventeenth century,

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156 The Donatists were a schismatic Christian group in North Africa, formed in 311, who held that the church ought to consist of saints, not sinners and only those living a blameless life. They argued that those Christian leaders who had compromised during the Diocletian persecutions were “tradiiores” and unfit to handle the sacraments. Baptists were sometimes compared by their opponents to Donatists for their emphasis on the purity of the church.
Baptists maintained a consistent witness for religious toleration. Examining the political writings of the earliest Baptists, it becomes apparent that the English Baptists were consistent in making the same arguments for religious toleration ever since their inception. This is equally true for the Arminian-leaning General Baptists and the Calvinist Particular Baptists. Their argument was that the civil Magistrates do not have the authority of Old Testament kings to persecute religious dissenters and punish heterodoxy. This is a Covenantal argument rooted in the doctrine of believer’s baptism (the connection to Covenant Theology comes in chapter three). Thus, these arguments for religious freedom are unique to the Baptists, because they cannot be made without undermining the basis for infant baptism. The Baptist’s conviction of believer’s baptism explains the consistency of their arguments.

**Perceptions and Persecution**

Before discussing the origins of the English Baptists and their role in advocating for religious liberty, something must first be said about the popular perceptions of the Baptists that led to such fierce persecution of them during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Much of this was the result of a perception that the English Baptists were simply another instance of dreaded Anabaptism rearing its ugly head. In fact, at the time, to Protestants and Catholics alike, “Baptist” was an unknown term. Instead, the early English Baptists were known to their enemies, not as Baptists but as “Anabaptists,” a term the Baptists protested as unfairly characterizing their faith and wrongfully associating them with that Radical-Wing of the Protestant Reformation.

To any educated or uneducated ear at the time, the very mention of “Anabaptist” was sufficient to evoke fear and dread. Anabaptist was a derogatory term that literally meant “re-baptizer.” For most parts of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe, to “re-baptize” others or
to be “rebaptized” was a crime punishable by death. The Magisterial Reformers authored dozens of books and pamphlets justifying the persecution of Anabaptists. But it was not just Protestants who demanded their persecution. Perhaps one of the only things Protestants and Catholics agreed upon in the sixteenth century was that Anabaptists did not deserve to live. The title of one author’s book puts it well, “Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant.” In the decades and centuries that followed, “Anabaptist” became the designation for anyone going beyond the Protestant limits set by the Magisterial Reformers. Roland Bainton referred to the Anabaptists as “The Left Wing of the Reformation” and George Huntston Williams coined the phrase “The Radical Reformation.” Writers of the time such as Zwingli and Erasmus referred to them as “Schwärmer” (or fanatics). Although there were many strands of Anabaptism, and many that were peaceful, it was those most radical and eccentric strands that garnered all the negative attention and left them forever tainted in the public’s memory.

For the seventeenth-century English mind, Anabaptism was associated, whether accurately or not, with the fiery figure of Thomas Müntzer (1489 – 1525), a radical preacher and leader in the German Peasants’ revolt (1534-1535). Originally a follower of Luther, Thomas Müntzer soon became one of his chief critics and began to associate with the radical wing of the reformation. As pastor in the town of Allstedt in 1523, Müntzer began violent iconoclasm and soon began to call on his parishioners to take up their swords in active armed rebellion against impious rulers. Luther responded to the Peasants’ appeals, first by asserting that he had no desire to see government denigrated into what he called “mob rule.” “The Devil,” he said, wants

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157 Hans J. Hillerbrand, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism: 4-Volume Set* (Routledge, 2004), 100. Between 1527 and 1530 there were 488 Anabaptists executed in Germany.
160 Hillerbrand, 103.
to “turn us into a mob,” but the Christians must resist.\textsuperscript{162} When things became violent, however, he infamously urged princes in his Against the Murdering and Robbing Hordes of Peasants to “smite slay and stab” the rebellious peasants. Thomas Müntzer died along with an estimated 3,000 peasants at the Battle of Frankenhausen on May 27, 1525.\textsuperscript{163} The close of the Peasants’ War followed shortly thereafter, ending with an estimated 300,000 peasants dead.\textsuperscript{164}

As if Müntzer was not enough, the rebellion of the city of Münster would forever mar the memory of Anabaptists with rebellion, murder, and polygamy. In 1534, a group of Anabaptists took control of the city of Münster, introducing communal ownership of property, polygamy, and executing or exiling those who refused rebaptism. An ecumenical coalition of princes attacked the city, and after an extended siege, defeated, tortured and publicly executed the Anabaptist leaders. The atrocities of Münster could not be forgotten, and for generations to follow the names of Münster and Müntzer would represent the perceived threat posed by early-modern Anabaptism.\textsuperscript{165}

What is more surprising, however, is that not only were seventeenth-century Baptists labeled as “Anabaptists,” but an examination of the records of the House of Commons reveals that they were even more commonly referred to as “Antinomians.” Hence, a typical entry in the House of Commons records in the 1640s reads:

Ordered, That Sir H. Mildmay do prepare and bring in an Ordinance for suppressing the unlawful assembling and meeting together of Antinomians and Anabaptists; and the venting their erroneous and schismatical Opinions…\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{162} WA 17 1, 211, Predigten 1525.
\textsuperscript{163} Michael G. Baylor, The German Reformation and the Peasants’ War: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012), 27.
\textsuperscript{164} Baylor, 29.
\textsuperscript{165} Baylor, 29.
Yet another entry from August 31, 1644 refers to “Anabaptism or Antinomianism” as an almost catchall phrase.\textsuperscript{167} As a matter of fact, in most of the House of Commons’ records, the Baptists are more often referred to as “Antinomians” than as “Anabaptists.” At least, whereas “Antinomianism” is sometimes used by itself to refer to the Baptists, every mention of “Anabaptist” in the House of Commons Records between 1643 and 1648 is accompanied by “Antinomian.”

The term “Antinomian” literally means “above the law,” but it is difficult to know what was meant by that term in the 1640s or why it was leveled with such consistency against the Baptists. A current dictionary (Oxford) refers to Antinomianism as “of or relating to the view that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law.” Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary refers to Antinomians as “One of a sect who maintain, that, under the gospel dispensation, the law is of no use or obligation; or who hold doctrines which supersede the necessity of good works and a virtuous life.”\textsuperscript{168} This is significant because one of the Baptist arguments was that the Old Testament law was not binding on New Testament believers in important ways. Thus, a mistaken and insulting way to characterize this position could have been to label them as “antinomians.”

Or else the term could have merely been an assumption handed down by previous generations. Hans Hillebrand notes that Luther frequently accused the Anabaptists of Antinomianism.\textsuperscript{169} In fact, even bishop Hooper, writing to Bullinger in the mid-sixteenth-century complains of the “antinomianism” of the Anabaptists in their beliefs in a kind of perfectionism

\textsuperscript{169} Hans J. Hillebrand, \textit{Encyclopedia of Protestantism: 4-Volume Set} (Routledge, 2004), 128. See notes on “Antinomianism.”
where regenerated believers would no longer sin.\textsuperscript{170} To accuse the seventeenth-century Baptists of Antinomianism then, could merely be a trope, rooted in sixteenth-century theological writings, repeated by subsequent generations.

\textbf{Perceptions of Baptists in Print and Media}

Popular news and pamphlets only perpetuated these stereotypes and caricatures of the English Baptists. In fact, popular portrayals of Baptists in the 1640s were often vile. One common portrayal of Baptists at the time is that they were simply insane. A pamphlet, entitled “Bloodie newes from Dover. Being a true relation of the great and bloudy murder, committed by Mary Champion (an Anabaptist) who cut off her childs head, being 7,” depicts a mother holding a decapitated child’s bleeding head, having discarded the body, a knife lying on the ground, the

\begin{itemize}
  \item Hooper writes, “The Anabaptists flock to this place and give me much trouble... They contend that a man who is reconciled to God is without sin, and free from all stain of concupiscence, and that nothing of the old Adam remains in his nature; and a man, they say, who is thus regenerate cannot sin.” Walter F. Hook, \textit{Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury: Reformation Period; Vol. 2} (Bentley, 1868), 213-214.
  \item Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) is himself reported to have held that the Baptist’s denial of the validity of infant baptism was worthy of the death penalty (See \textit{The Remains of Thomas Cranmer, Collected and Arranged by H. Jenkyns} (1833), Pref. p.cx. Cited in Underhill, lxx). He also associated the Baptists with Donatists, and wrote “Both to the Donatists and to the Anabaptists, that deny the baptizing of infants: for if it were not written in the word of God, no man ought to believe it, or use it.” (Thomas Cranmer and Henry Jenkyns, \textit{The Remains of Thomas Cranmer} [Oxford University Press, 1833], 232).
\end{itemize}
Without any explanation of cause, the absurd story describes how the “Anabaptist” mother responded to her “Presbyterian” husband’s shock upon discovering the dead child:

Behold husband, thy sweet Babe without a head. Now go and baptize it, if you will, you must christen the head without a body: for here they lye separated.

Another news story from the same time period reveals how the practice of “believer’s baptism” was often characterized by its opponents in sexualized language, being associated by its critics with illicit sexual activities and promiscuity. One woodcut in a tract written against the Baptists in 1645 depicts two male baptizers in the water baptizing several nude women. The author refers to the practice as stripping “stark naked,… men and women together, to their Jordans to be dipt.”

A year later, in October 1646, a similar story in one of the leading weekly newspapers during the English Civil War, Mercurius Civicus, focused on the Baptists’ practice of baptism by immersion. The piece is extremely sexualized and, like many accounts of baptism by immersion at the time, associates the practice with promiscuity. It recounts the story of the “rebaptizing of a woman at Hempstead in Hartfordshire” by the pastor James Browne. In order to “shew the strangeness of the manner, and the madnesse of that Sect,” the article recounts the story word for word as received by them. According to the account, James Browne, a sawyer by trade, described as a “good Protestant,” had recently left the established church in order to become a “preacher and teacher of others, (especially of women).” In September of 1646, he was preaching, as was his custom, regarding the vanities of infant baptism and the need for baptism only once one has “attayned unto a sufficient measure of Faith,” when one Mary Halsey (the

171 Bloody Newes from Dover (London, 1647).
“wife of William Halsey” the author adds) professed herself ready for “rebaptism.” Browne, having examined her regarding her salvation, led her down into the river. Here the author pauses to describe their state of dress:

Browne went down in his leather breeches, in which he used to go to sawing: And the woman went into the water in a pair of linen drawers only to cover her shame; made of purpose for such like uses, the rest of her body being all quite naked. In this water, Browne washed her body all over from top to toe, rubbing her with his hands, as men doe their sheep when they wash them; and so cleansed her from all filthiness.\footnote{Raymond, 389.} 

As if the sexual connotations were not obvious enough, the author writes that once they had exited the water, the Miller of Bourn End who was watching the whole scene from his mill, called out to them that Browne ought to “rub her a little more,” for, he said, “there is I doubt one spot that is not yet made white.”

Popular perceptions of Baptists, however, were not limited to the public sphere alone, but extended even to the political sphere. In two speeches before the House of Lords, Charles I makes mention of the “Anabaptists” as instigators of revolution and social upheaval alongside “Brownists, and Atheists.”\footnote{See ’House of Lords Journal Volume 5: 29 September 1642’, in Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 5, 1642-1643 (London, 1767-1830), pp. 376-377 http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol5/pp376-377; and ’House of Lords Journal Volume 5: 2 March 1643’, pp. 629-631 http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol5/pp629-631 [accessed 13 October 2015].} Nor was opposition to the Baptists limited to the Royalists. In fact, during the Civil War, the Baptists became the object of attack from both Parliament and the Westminster Assembly.

The Separatist Origins of the Early English Baptists

It was within this context of persecution and libel that the early English Baptists originated. However, while the origins of the early English Baptists lie within the growth of separatism under Elizabeth and James I rather than continental Anabaptism, Nonetheless, the
whole affair is still clouded with uncertainty. As one historian notes, “the extent to which Anabaptist ideas directly influenced English dissenters may never be known with certainty.”

Nonetheless, it can be carefully stated that in many ways, the Particular Baptists were merely Puritans who took the essence of Puritanism to its logical extreme. Or, to re-phrase historian Barrie White, if it was but a short step from impatient Puritanism within the established Church to convinced Separatism outside it, then surely it was an even shorter step from frustrated Separatism to a convinced credobaptism (or believer’s baptism).

Separatists’ congregational understanding of the church was deeply at odds with the prevailing notions of the Church of England at the time. As chapter one has shown, for the English monarchs who interpreted God’s covenant as a “Civil Covenant” with England, the Church of England “was almost as inclusive a body as the English State.” That is, it consisted not only of “visible saints” but rather, like ancient Israel of old, of a mixed body of “saints and sinners alike.” In contrast, the Separatists interpreted God’s covenant as a “Church Covenant” with his elect only. It followed by implication that the church was intended to consist solely of “visible saints;” that is, of those truly converted Christians. For many Separatists, “there was no church larger than the number of visible saints that could gather in one meeting for worship,

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177 By “essence” of Puritanism I’m drawing from Ernst Troeltch’s distinction between the church-ideal and the sect-ideal. The Calvinist strand of Protestantism, out of which English Protestantism and Puritanism emerges, he argues, is deeply influenced by the ‘sect-ideal.’ That is, a particular emphasis on the development of a “holy community” in of which all members are regenerated. In such an ideal a tension invariably exists. As the community grows, it becomes more and more difficult to maintain the corporate discipline required by the holy community. This is particularly difficult in the case of a national church. As Troeltsch writes, Calvinism “was obliged to make the bold attempt of constituting its national church as a church of professing believers, and of constituting its unity of church and state as a Christian society in the strict sense of the personal faith and character of each individual member.” (Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated Olive Wyon (1931), pp. 622-3; cf. pp. 578, 593-8. Cited in Woodhouse, 36.)


179 Morgan, 16.

180 Morgan, 16.
[and] that all but saints should be excluded from the church.”¹⁸¹ For the Separatists, separating those elect from the non-elect within the church entailed operating outside of the National Church so that the visible saints governed their respective church and elected their own leaders “congregationally.”¹⁸² The two opposing models of church government could not coexist. The goal of creating “Pure” churches could only be accomplished by bypassing the inclusive and hierarchical structure of the Church of England.

As a result many Separatists left the Church of England to form illegal churches that separated true Christians from the unregenerate. In their definition, the church was an “association of men already converted.”¹⁸³ They thus earned the name “Separatists,” because of their insistence that the church ought only to consist of “true believers.”¹⁸⁴ This was a radical move in their own context, but they took comfort from the example of the early Christian church that frequently gathered in houses and endured persecution. James I’s Act of Conformity in 1604, however, squashed any Separatist plans of independent churches in England.¹⁸⁵ As a result, many Separatists took refuge in Holland and later fled to New England.¹⁸⁶ This number who fled King James I’s Act of Conformity also included the first Baptists. Those who stayed and continued to gather in private churches as well as attending their local parish church are often referred to as semi-Separatists.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Morgan, 16.
¹⁸² Morgan, 16.
¹⁸³ Morgan, 22.
¹⁸⁴ Morgan 17.
¹⁸⁵ Coffey, 112.
¹⁸⁶ Coffey, 112.
John Smyth and Thomas Helwys

The first known Baptist church in England was organized by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys.\(^\text{188}\) Smyth (1570-1612), the early leader of the English Baptists had come under Separatist-Puritan influences while studying for the ministry at Cambridge. He obtained his BA from Christ’s College, Cambridge in 1590, his MA in 1597, and was ordained a minister in the Church of England in 1594. However, becoming disgruntled with the direction of the Church of England under King James I’s rule, Smyth opted to illegally found a church outside of the established church. Due to persecution, Smyth and Helwys opted to leave England for Amsterdam where English expatriates enjoyed greater religious freedom. They had, however, not yet come to Baptist convictions. In Amsterdam, they founded a Separatist congregation in 1608, eventually adopting believer’s baptism in 1609, after which they were generally considered Baptists. Smyth and Helwys, however, soon split over the issue of church leadership, Smyth adopting Mennonite positions.\(^\text{189}\) Thomas Helwys, returned to London as the head of the church after his split with Smyth.

Smyth’s views on baptism and church and state seemed to evolve simultaneously. In fact, Smyth's views on the right of the magistrate to interfere in the church waned at the same time as his views on baptism shifted from infant-baptism to believer's baptism.\(^\text{190}\) In *A Paterne of True Prayer* (1605) the Separatist-but-not-yet-Baptist Smyth upholds the right of the prince to exercise oversight over the church. “God's kingdome is erected,” he writes, “when the Magistrate by law doth establish the worship of God according to the word: and execution is done

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\(^{188}\) The origins of the Smyth-Helwys church paraphrased from Chute, 16-18.

\(^{189}\) The Mennonites were a Protestant sect originating in Friesland in the sixteenth century under Menno Simons that similarly emphasized adult baptism, but rejected military service and public office, instead embracing pacifism. The reader will observe that the distinctions between Mennonite and Baptist were not finely drawn at this time so it is difficult to say when precisely the change in convictions occurred. Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2006), 50.

accordingly.” Even in *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church* (1607) and in *Parelleles* (published in 1609, though likely written sometime earlier) Smyth maintains the supremacy of the magistrate over the church, maintaining “That a Prince hath power in a particular visible church, to punish any wickedness any one has committed and to cause that visible church to assume and practice any truth God’s word teaches.”

Smyth’s change of tone came in 1609. The publication of *Character of the Beast* (1609) evidenced a decided change in Smyth's views of the state as his convictions of believer's baptism strengthened. His strongest statement of full religious liberty then comes in Article eighty-four of his *Propositions and Conclusions* (1612) where he affirms that “the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion.” Instead, he is to punish “only civil transgressions (Rom. xii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience.”

Thomas Helwys (d. 1616) and his wife Joan, became early followers of John Smyth in England around the turn of the seventeenth century. Helwys authored what has generally been considered the most significant publication on religious liberty from this early period, *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity* (1612). The book is a forceful attack on King James I and a simultaneous plea for religious freedom. Smyth posits that “None ought to be punished either with death or bonds for transgressing against the spiritual ordinances of the New

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193 Cited in McBeth, 140. Note that there is some debate over whether this statement belongs to Smyth before or after his conversion to Mennonitism. If before, it may be described as representative as a Baptist viewpoint, although J. Stephen Phillips makes a compelling case that it represents a Mennonite perspective of total separation from society. See “Thomas Helwys and the Idea of Religious Liberty,” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1998), 213-214.
194 Paraphrased from McBeth, 28-29.
Testament,” since the spiritual offences “ought to be punished only with the spiritual sword…” So radical was Helwys' stance on religious liberty that it extended even to Catholics. Regarding “them of the Romish religion,” he writes, “we do freely profess that our Lord the King hath no more power over their consciences than over ours, and that is none at all.” In fact, religious toleration extends even to non-Christians: “let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure in spiritual matters.” Helwys’ stance on religious liberty is unshakeable and unflinching.

Helwys’ argument for toleration is rooted in his exegesis of the Old Testament. Simply put, Helwys repeatedly denied that modern kings possess the same God-given spiritual power as the ancient kings did in Israel. That is because the “Kingdom of Israel was a earthly kingdom” with a physical kingdom and a physical king. The kingdom of Christ today, in contrast, is a “spiritual kingdom” whose only king is Christ. Since Christ alone occupies this role of king, no modern king may usurp his place. Typical of Baptists during this time period is his insistence that the example of Old Testament kings is a theologically invalid basis for persecution now that Christ has come.

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196 Helwys, 69.
197 Helwys, 69.
199 Helwys, 78: “the king cannot have that power (in respect of Religion to God) in the kingdom and over the house and Israel or people of Christ now, that the Kings of Israel had in the Old Testament…”
200 Helwys, 44: “Here is shwon to our lord the King what we know he is not ignorant of, that Christ alone sits upon David’s throne to order it. And we the kings servants show it that the King might not be deceived by deceivers, who would persuade the king that he has the same power over the church of Christ that the kings of Israel had over the church of the Old Testament.” (Language modernized. Italics mine).
**Murton’s Prison Treatises**

John Murton is another early Baptist who is believed to have written two major treatises on religious liberty. Born 1583 in Gainsborough, Murton was part of the separatist orbit of John Smyth. He followed Helwys after the Helwys-Smyth split, returning to London with Helwys in 1612. After Helwys’ imprisonment, Murton took over leadership of the fledgling Baptist church. However, Murton was himself imprisoned by 1613 and likely wrote the treatises of 1615 and 1620 from prison.

The first treatise, *Objections Answered by Way of Dialogue* was written in 1615 and reprinted in 1620. The treatise features a dialogue between an “Anti-Christian” who opposes religious liberty and a “Christian” who is in favor of it, with a brief smattering of comments from a character called “Indifferent.” In it, the “Christian,” representing Murton, argues that “No man ought to be persecuted for his religion, be it true or false, so [long as] they testify their faithful allegiance to the king.” He even goes as far as to insist that Catholics ought to be tolerated. Similarly to Helwys, Murton grounds his reasoning in a distinction between earthly and spiritual authority. “Earthly authority,” he observes, “belongs to earthly kings; but spiritual authority belongs to that one spiritual king who is KING OF KINGS.” Also in a manner similar to Helwys, Murton disputes the assumption of the time that “modern kings possess Old Testament...”

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201 There is some uncertainty regarding whether Murton or Helwys is the author of *Objections*. See Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2006), 45-74. Murton was also the author of a treatise in 1611 “A Proof that God’s Decree is not the Cause of any Man’s Condemnation, and that all Men are redeemed by Christ, and that no Infants are condemned,” which by its title alone reveals his non-Calvinistic leanings.
202 McBeth, 48.
203 McBeth, 48.
206 McBeth, 53.
207 Underhill, 134.
prerogatives over religion.”208 Great danger, he argues, is posed by the reasoning that says “because it was so in the time of the law, therefore it may be so in the time of the gospel.”209 To say so is to “utterly abolish Christ.”

Frequently throughout the treatise, Murton cites a contemporaneous decree that demanded an affirmation that the King hath all ecclesiastical and political power in the present age as the kings of Israel possessed under the Old Covenant:

The convocation of Bishops and the rest have made a canon, that whosoever shall affirm that the Kings Majesty does not have the same power in matters Ecclesiastical, under the Gospel, that the godly kings of Israel had under the law, let him be excommunicated, Ipso facto.210

This ecclesiastical oath from 1603 is protested in many of the early Baptist writings.

Murton’s second prison treatise, *A Most Humble Supplication* (1620) has received more notoriety for the role it played in subsequent debates over toleration between no lesser luminaries than Roger Williams and John Cotton.211 In the introduction to his reply to Roger Williams (1647), Cotton recalls how Williams had sent him a letter “by a Prisoner in Newgate, touching persecution for Conscience sake: and entreated my judgment of it for the satisfaction of his friend.”212 This prisoner was none other than John Murton. According to Roger Williams, the author of *The Humble Supplication* (left unnamed by Williams) was imprisoned at Newgate

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208 McBeth, 51.
210 This is Canon 2 in the Canons of 1603: “Whosoever shall hereafter affirm that the king’s majesty hath not the same authority in causes ecclesiastical that the godly kings had among the Jews, and Christian emperors in the primitive church, or impeach in any part his regal supremacy in the said causes restored to the crown, and by the laws of this realm therein established, let him be excommunicated ipso facto…” (Canon ii. of Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, agreed upon in the Synod begun at London, anno Dom.1603. Now published for the due observation of them by his Majesty's authority. Printed by John Norton, 1633). Also cited in Phillimore, 8. Murton, 31-32.
211 John Murton, *A Most Humble Supplication of Many the Kings Maiesties Loyall Subiects, Ready to Testifie All Civill Obedience, by the Oath, as the Law of This Realme Requireth, and that of Conscience; Who Are Persecuted, Onely for Differing in Religion, Contrary to Divine and Humane Testimonies as Followeth...* (1620).
Prison on religious grounds. Williams writes that left without the use of pen and ink, the author wrote these arguments in milk on paper used as a stopper for his daily jug of milk. These papers were then smuggled to fellow Baptists who browned them over a fire and later published them. The not-yet-Baptist, Roger Williams came across the document and forwarded it on in a letter to John Cotton in New England with his inquiries on the matter of toleration. Based on his changing convictions, and in part on Cotton's reply, Roger Williams thus began to write *The Bloudy Tenent*.  

The main points of Murton’s second treatise are the same as the first: that even in Old Testament times the kings were not free to do as they pleased in regard to religion, but obliged to establish the principles of God’s word; that although the kings of Israel had power over religion, no kings possess that same God-given role now; that Christ alone is the heir to David’s throne, and that those who claim that kings have rights over religion must resort to arguments from the Old Testament alone.

**Leonard Busher**

Leonard Busher was a Baptist exile in Holland, acquainted with Smyth and Helwys, of whom little is known. Busher's only treatise, *Religion’s Peace: Or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (1614) may be the earliest known treatise to in its title explicitly address the topic of

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213 According to Williams, Murton’s defense was the following: “If the Civil Magistrate should command me to believe thus and thus: I should answer him in this manner: Lord, or Sir, look you to your Civil or worldly Government. Your Power extends not so far as to command anything in Gods Kingdom: Therefore, in this matter, I may not obey you. For if you cannot bear that any should usurp authority where you have command, how do you think that God should suffer you to thrust him from his seat, and to seat your self therein?” (Williams, *Bloudy Tenent*, 5)  
214 Paraphrased from McBeth, 55.  
215 McBeth, 40.
liberty of conscience. Although little is known of the author, he seems anything but uneducated. His prose reveals an acquaintance with the original Greek of the New Testament as well as critical commentaries in Latin. Nonetheless, his circumstances were anything but privileged. He says that the reason that Baptists are so derided is that they are “most persecuted; and therefore most poor.”

It is hard to get our daily food with the labours of our weak bodies and feeble hands. How then should we have to defray other charges, and to write and print?

In his treatise, he argues for religious toleration along similar lines as other Baptists. The church, he argues, is not constituted by those “born once” but by those “born again.” Since the “true religion of the gospel is not attained by natural birth,” infants should not be baptized. Instead, Ministers should “baptize in his name such as do believe.” Such that are born-again, are re-born not by the sword or by the state, but by the preached word of God. To use the sword of the state to enforce religion is not only useless and unlawful; it is dangerous because it confuses the world with the church. Instead, he writes that the strongest form of punishment given to the church are the duties of discipline and excommunication, for “no other weapons hath he given to his church, which is his spiritual kingdom.” Even heretics ought not to be burned,

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216 Leonard Busher, *Religions Peace: Or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (London: Printed for John Sweeting at the Angel in Popes-head-alley, 1646). We do not have any copies of the original 1614 edition. The edition I am working with was published in 1646 by the Independent and proponent of religious toleration, Henry Burton.
217 Underhill, 6.
218 Underhill, 72.
219 Busher says, “No prince or people can possibly attain that one true religion of the gospel, which is acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, merely by birth” (Underhill, 15).
220 Underhill, 16.
221 He writes that people are not converted “by persecution, but by the word of reconciliation which [God] hath committed to his ministers.” (Underhill, 17)
222 Underhill, 17.
223 Underhill, 19. “Therefore Christ saith, He that will not hear the church, let him he to thee as a heathen and a publican. He saith not, burn, banish, or imprison him; that is antichrist’s ordinance.”
Murton writes, but at most “to be rejected, after once or twice admonition—that is, cast out of the church.” Therefore, it follows that the church should consist of believers only.

Alongside religious liberty, Busher insists on civil obedience. Busher condemns revolutions and insists on obedience to the king. However, he condemns magisterial interference in matters of the church, for:

Kings and magistrates are to rule temporal affairs by the swords of their temporal kingdoms, and bishops and ministers are to rule spiritual affairs by the word and Spirit of God, the sword of Christ’s spiritual kingdom, and not to intermeddle one with another’s authority, office, and function.

Instead, the magistrate should allow for freedom to dispute matters of religion.

One chief characteristic of Busher’s treatise is frequent references to a true church that is persecuted and scattered in the “wilderness of the world.” It is language that anticipates the

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224 Underhill, 19.
225 “For all good shepherds will divide and separate, and not force, slay, and persecute. For if men and women be found heretics, they shall be separated from the church; but if they be unbelievers, they shall not be joined unto it, until they be converted by the word of God, much less forced” (Underhill, 23).
226 And now, also, I desire those subjects, of what degree soever, that would destroy their kings and governors for difference in religion, to consider, that therein they justify their kings and governors, which destroy their subjects for difference of religion. For as it is sin for kings and governors to destroy their subjects for difference of religion, at the persuasion of their bishops: so is it sin, but in a higher degree, for subjects to destroy their kings and governors for difference of religion, at the persuasion of their bishops and ministers. (41)
227 Busher, 5.
228 “That for the more peace and quietness, and for the satisfying of the weak and simple, among so many persons differing in religion, it be lawful for every person or per sons, yea, Jews and papists, to write, dispute, confer and reason, print and publish any matter touching religion, either for or against whomsoever; always provided they allege no fathers for proof of any point of religion, but only the holy scriptures.” (Underhill, 51)
229 Busher “… the church—should fly into the wilderness for a time, times, and half a time, from the presence and persecution of the serpent” (25). “… persecution was the occasion that the apostolic church was at first scattered and driven into the wilderness, that is, desert places of the world…” (42). “… the apostolic church was scattered and driven into the wilderness, that is, desert and secret places of this world, even by their bloody persecution” (45). “… the apostolic church, called in scripture the woman, hath a place prepared of God in the wilderness…” (45). “… the church, called the woman, and did fly into the wilderness from her persecutors…” (46). “… the apostolic church is continued still in the wilderness and desert of this world;” (47). “… the apostolic church, which is scattered and driven into the wilderness and desert of this world, may be again gathered together, both Jews and Gentiles, into visible and established congregations” (49). “The apostolic church, scattered and driven abroad into the wilderness of this world” (59). “… the church, called the woman, to whom was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness from her persecutors…” (74).
language of Roger Williams, for whom the mistake of persecuting states is to confuse the Garden of the church and the Wilderness of the world.\textsuperscript{230}

**Later Baptist Churches**

In contrast to the earlier Baptists, another group of Baptists emerged in the 1630s and 1640s with distinctly Calvinist leanings.\textsuperscript{231} They remained in line with the Separating Puritans insofar as they enjoyed agreement upon Calvinist soteriology (most significantly, on predestination and definite atonement), congregational ecclesiology (emphasis on a congregationally-governed regenerate church), and an emphasis on personal conversion. This group of Calvinist Baptist churches are often called “Particular Baptists,” in contrast with the Arminian “General Baptists,” to highlight the differences between their views on atonement. It is not germane for the purposes of this analysis to delineate clearly between the early “General Baptists” of the 1600s and the later “Particular Baptists” of the 1640s, a topic that remains murky at best.\textsuperscript{232} Since both groups insisted on believer’s baptism and argued vehemently for religious toleration, they can be compared side by side.

While it remains unclear where and when precisely the Particular Baptists split with the Separatist Puritans, by 1626 the First [Particular] Baptist Church of London had 150 members.\textsuperscript{233} By 1644 the movement gathered seven Particular Baptist churches from around England to publish their common confession of faith in the 1644 “First London Baptist Confession of

\textsuperscript{230} See Williams, *Blovdy Tenent* 95; 126; 241.
\textsuperscript{232} Stephen Wright recently challenges the scholarly consensus that the “General” and “Particular Baptists” were as separated as is assumed and that Calvinism was at the core of their disagreements. He argues instead that the differences only became clear and pronounced in the 1640s. Before then, there may have been significant overlap and intermingling between Calvinist and non-Calvinist Baptists. *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2006)
\textsuperscript{233} Coffey, 113.
By the interregnum there were more than 250 Baptist churches, over half of which were Particular Baptists. Throughout their various confessions they consistently protested the fact that they were “commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists” and attempted to vindicate their theological orthodoxy and consistency with the Reformed Evangelical faith.

As subsequent confessions show, Particular Baptist theology greatly resembled the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) with the exception of disagreement over the meaning and application of baptism, the church, and the role of the state. Baptists diverged from the Westminster Confession by teaching that baptism is an ordinance only to be conferred “upon persons professing faith.” And furthermore, regarding the proper mode of baptism, namely by “dipping or plunging the whole body under water.” The church they defined as the “a company of visible saints, called and separated from the world, by the Word and the Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel.” And, contrary to the views of the Mennonites (another subset of Anabaptists), these Particular Baptists affirmed the goodness of civil government and confessed their allegiance thereunto, with the exception of ecclesiastical ordinances. Regarding the duty to obey civil government in spiritual matters they write that although they will not be “submitting to some ecclesiastical laws, which might be conceived by

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236 Coffey, 113.
238 SLBC, Article XXXIX.
239 Article XL.
240 Article XXXIII.
241 See article XLVIII: “That a civil magistrate is an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; and that all lawful things commanded by them, subjection ought to be given by us in the Lord: and that we are to make supplication and prayer for Kings, and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty. Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13, 14; 1 Tim. 2:2.”
them [the civil magistrate] to be their duties to establish,” they will however “yield our persons to their pleasures” to suffer the consequences of civil disobedience.\(^{242}\) In contrast to the earlier General Baptists, the Particular Baptists held to traditional Reformed Protestant doctrines of predestination and limited atonement.\(^{243}\)

These Baptists must have been zealous in distributing their new Confession of Faith because on January 29, 1645, the House of Commons heard complaints regarding two Baptist ministers who were “apprehended for delivering a “Pamphlet at the Door to the Members of this House, intitled, ‘A Confession of Faith of Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists.’”\(^{244}\) The early Baptists’ zeal to demonstrate their orthodoxy was clearly not well received.

Some insight into the principles of these early English Baptists can be found in the journals of the House of Lords from January 16, 1641.\(^{245}\) On that day, by command of King Charles I, the Lord Privy Seal presented a paper to the House of Lords that describes how on January 10, 1641, the “Constables and Church-Wardens of St. Saviours” arrested a group of “at least sixty people” worshipping in the home of a Richard Sturges on a Sunday, instead of attending the officially sanctioned church services. When questioned “why they would not go and resort to their Parish Church, according to the Law,” they responded, “That the Law [dating

\(^{242}\) See article XLIX.

\(^{243}\) Jones, 81. With that said, Stephen Wright has problematized making too sharp a distinction between “General” and “Particular” Baptists, especially in the early years. Instead he persuasively argues that early English Baptists were not clearly delineated along “Particular” and “General” Baptist lines until after controversies of 1640s. See Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2006).


back to Queen Elizabeth] was not a true Law, for that it was made by the Bishops; and that they
would not obey it.” According to the report, their “tenets,” were as follows:

[1] That they would not go to their parish churches: That those churches were not true
churches; and that there was no true church but where the faithful met;
[2] That the king could not make a perfect law, for that he was not a perfect man;

Here we see some of the main principles of the Baptists spelt out: that the church ought only to
consist of regenerate believers and that Christians are required to obey the civil magistrate, but
only in civil and not in spiritual matters. The House of Lord’s response was to issue an edict to
be read in every parish that any such further gatherings would “be severely punished.”

**Outbreak of the Civil War**

After 1642, as the English Civil War broke out, religious diversity was increasingly seen
as a threat to political stability and religious orthodoxy. In fact, the English Revolution had
created just the kind of situation that allowed sects and heresy to spread. As one author notes, the
freedom of the press expanded not so much as a right, but as a necessity due to the “general
collapse of authority.”246 This in turn, opened the door for an unusually public debate over
church reform. The expanding role of the press would not confine the debate over church
government to Westminster nor limit its participants to educated divines. For the first time, the
debate over religion received a true “public hearing,” opening a door for unprecedented religious
reform.247

The social disruption caused by the war opened a door for otherwise forbidden sects to
emerge. As another author writes, “After 1640, the sects became visible and vocal.”248 For a
visual illustration of this, simply note the number of pamphlets issued by Baptists in 1641 as

246 Powell, 2.
247 Powell, 2.
248 Coffey, 143.
compared to in 1640. In 1641 there are 26 tracts published related to the Baptists whereas there were zero just the year before.\textsuperscript{249}

![Figure 8: Books and Pamphlets published pertaining to the Baptists/Anabaptists in England in the 1600s](image)

As you can see there was an explosion of Baptist literature in the 1640s during the time of the English Revolution, which continued through the end of the 1650s and then slowed down, but did not disappear for the rest of the century. The year 1646 alone saw 103 tracts published and this number peaked in 1660 with 117 publications. Access to print publications was only made possible by the disruption of a civil war. As Acheson observes,

With the collapse of episcopal control [after 1640], especially over the licensing of pamphlets, and with the release of hitherto silenced radicals from prison, new ideas and concepts proliferated in the early 1640s. The result was the growth of a whole series of often contradictory notions concerning the nature of both the political and religious settlement of England.\textsuperscript{250}

Before 1640 there were 10 known non-conforming congregations: one Independent, six Separatist, one Particular Baptist, and Two General Baptist.\textsuperscript{251} By the end of the war, this number had multiplied.

\textsuperscript{249} I created the following graph by calculating number of the books listed in \textit{A Baptist Bibliography: Being a Register of the Chief Materials for Baptist History, Whether in Manuscript Or in Print, Preserved in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies} (Kingsgate Press, 1916).

\textsuperscript{250} Acheson, 45

\textsuperscript{251} Acheson, 45.
No longer able to control the publication of dissenting and “unorthodox” pamphlets, conservative Puritans lamented the spread of heterodoxy. So dire was the situation that the ever-exaggerating “heresiographer,” Thomas Edwards (1599-1647) bemoaned in 1645, “there have been more books written, sermons preached, words spoken, besides plots and efforts, for toleration during these last four years than for any other thing. Every day now brings forth books for toleration.”

In the midst of a Civil War, the proliferation of sects frightened Parliament, which found itself torn between the Episcopal establishment that sided with Charles I and the ever-present Catholic threat of France and Spain. A unified front was needed to stave off heresies and maintain social, political, and religious order. But London, the seat of Parliament and the Westminster Assembly, was increasingly the home to various new religious movements, most notably, the Baptists. As a result of the instability caused by religious disunity and in order to form a united front against religious “innovators,” a gathering of Presbyterian and Independent ministers in 1642 led to an agreement not to preach or print tracts against each other. A unified front therefore developed between Presbyterians, Independents, and other moderates in order to

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253 “About the beginning of the second year of the sitting of the Parliament, the Presbyterian Pastors in London, and the Independents, met together, at the reverend and religious Master Calamies House in Aldermanbury; there they agreed that ‘neither side should preach, print, or dispute, or otherwise act against the others way; and this to continue till both sides in a full meeting, did declare the contrary; a formal agreement to this effect was drawn up and side. Another reporter adds that the independents ‘promised to join with all the rest in preaching against the Brownists, Anabaptists and other sectaries’. J.Vicars. _The Schismatic Sifted_ (1646); W.R[athband?], _A Brief Narration of some church courses_ (1644). Cited in Wright, 88. See a similar account in _Agreement between Presbyterian and Independents in 1641 not to preach against each other: “In 1641, Philip Nye and Edmund Calamy, the prominent Presbyterian of London, had reached an agreement concerning the relationship between Independent and Presbyterian ministers in London. Both men had agreed that ‘(for advancing of the publice cause of a happy Reformation) neither side should Breach, Print, or dispute, or otherwise act against the other's way; and this to continue ’til both sides, in full meeting, did declare the contrary.’ (Nye and Calamy cited by Liu, Discord in Sion, p. 9). Cited in Zakai, 11.
suppress the Baptists “and other sectaries.” This also helps explain the ways in which the Westminster Assembly and House of Commons coordinated efforts to suppress dissent.254

The Westminster Assembly and the “Committee for Plundered Ministers”

Studying the records of the House of Commons in the 1640s exposes the united efforts of the Westminster Assembly and Parliament to suppress religious innovations in general and the Baptists in particular. One of the most surprising revelations of the House of Commons’ records is the degree to which the Westminster Assembly employed the so-called “Committee for Plundered Ministers” in suppressing the Baptists. This “committee” has received some slight attention for their efforts to suppress Royalist clergy. What is largely unstudied, however, is the role they played in punishing and persecuting dissenting ministers, in particular, the Baptists, even though they were uniformly on the side of Parliament.

The “Committee for Plundered Ministers” could be described as the “hired muscle” of the Westminster Assembly. They were established by Parliament in 1642 as a response to the great number of Puritan clergymen who had fled to London, having been driven from their parishes by Royalist soldiers for their Puritan preaching and parliamentary leanings. Initially, the House of Commons ordered a charitable collection for the ministers. But upon further consideration, on December 31, 1642, they appointed a committee “for the relief of such godly and well-affected ministers as have been plundered...”255 Furthermore, on July 27, 1643, they were given authority to gather information against “scandalous ministers” for the purposes of

254 Stephen Wright discusses the relationship between the Westminster Assembly and the House of Commons and their work against the Baptists and antinomians in 1640s in his dissertation “The British Baptists and Politics 1603-1649,” pages 106-108. Some Baptists, such as John Spilsbury, seemed to recognize the importance of maintaining political stability through religious carefulness more than others, like Edward Barber and Thomas Nutt.

255 These notes are taken from Daniel Neal’s History of the Puritans (Harper & brothers, 1843), 451. Though not the most reliable source, Neal is one of the only authors who discusses the Committee.
replacing ministers suspected of Royalist-leanings with ministers who were loyal to Parliament.256

By 1643, they become a powerful agent in London and surrounding counties. They gathered evidence and reported to the Westminster Assembly, but the Assembly had the final authority to question and make a verdict on whether ministers should be deprived of their livings and punished.257 Because of their role in removing and prosecuting unwelcome ministers, they were, perhaps more accurately, called by the Royalists, “The Committee for Plundering Ministers.”258

Without exception, when discussing instances of Baptist preaching and efforts to suppress the Baptists, the House of Commons referred the issue to the Committee for Plundered Ministers. On 20 November, 1643 the House of Commons called on the Committee to search the city for instances of “gather[ed] Churches” that convene “contrary to the Laws of the Land.”259 On August 31, 1644 the House of Commons called on the Committee to suppress “all such as shall publish the Opinions of Anabaptism or Antinomianism.”260 On September 19, 1644 the Committee was ordered by the House of Commons to place one Baptist “Mr. Picott” under arrest.261 On November 1st, 6th, and 14th, a document compiled by the Committee—“the Report from the Committee of plundered Ministers, concerning the preventing the Mischiefs that may

256 Neal, 451. Another author writes, “The Committee for Plundered Ministers arose out of the desire of the Long parliament to purify the ministry of the Church and out of the religious politics of the Civil War” (Bustin, 78).
258 James Nichols, *Calvinism and Arminianism Compared* (1824), 33.
follow upon the divulging the Opinions of Antinomianism and Anabaptism”—was read and discussed by Parliament. On January 29, 1645, the House of Commons called on the Committee to examine the London Baptist Confession of Faith, which the Commons ordered to be suppressed.

The most notable showdown between Parliament, the Westminster Assembly and the Baptists occurred on August 9, 1644 when a group of diverse “Ministers of the [Westminster] Assembly” arrived at the House of Commons to appeal that Parliament act to keep the opinions of the “Anabaptists and Antinomians” from spreading. Cornelius Burges (d. 1665), leading the ministers from the Assembly, addressed the house. The immediate occasion of the visit was to deliver a letter from the Earl of Warwick and “Articles” against one Baptist minister named “Picott,” who is described as holding “Dangerous Opinions” of “Anabaptism, & c.” and spreading them on the Island of Guernsey, a small isle in the English Channel, just off the coast of Normandy. Stephen Marshall (1594 – 1655), another divine from the Assembly, stepped in and mentioned that many ministers were petitioning the House for a suppression of the Anabaptists. He said,

It is high time to suppress them: And we can forbear no longer, but petition this House to think of some such Way for the Stopping of them, as you, in your Wisdoms, shall think fit.

264 Although the House of Commons records only refer to “Dr. Burges,” this is undoubtedly Cornelius Burges (1589? – 1665) of Hertfordshire, a prominent minister, because he is referred to as “Dr. Burges.” The other “Burges” (Anthony Burges [d. 1664]) of the Assembly, unrelated to Cornelius, lacked a Doctor in Divinity.
Particularly illuminating for Parliament, Marshall provided an account of the activities of the Anabaptists as “of late.” First, he describes how one “Mr. Knolles” (the well-known particular Baptist minister Hansard Knollys [1599–1691]), recently preached “against the Baptizing of Children” and that “the Baptizing of Children was one of the greatest Sins in the Land.” Marshall mentions many other anecdotes about the “latest” Baptist activities including that one preacher recently said “That Jesus Christ is in Hogs and Dogs, or Sheep…”

In response, the House of Commons resolved to call on the Committee for Plundered Ministers to imprison Mr. Picott, Knollys, and the other Baptist ministers. Furthermore, the order was also given for the public burning of “one Williams his Books,” “concerning the tolerating of all sorts of Religions.” This is nothing other than the most significant Baptist treatise on religious freedom of the seventeenth century: Roger Williams' *The Bloudy Tenent.*\(^{265}\) The House then called in Burges, Marshall, and the other representatives of the Assembly of Divines, and informed them of the steps that they were taking for “remedying and preventing the mischiefs that arise from the spreading the dangerous opinions of Antinomianism and Anabaptism.”

In conclusion, a uniform opposition to the spread of the Baptists and to religious toleration characterized the Westminster Assembly and the House of Commons in the early years of the English Revolution. Some Baptists found relief by serving in the military. For example, Oliver Cromwell famously issued a letter to reinstate one William Packer as Lieutenant Colonel

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\(^{265}\) Although the incorrect name is recorded (“concerning the tolerating of all sorts of Religions”), this is undoubtedly referring to Roger Williams’ *Blody Tenent,* published that same year in London, 1644. In fact, a recent work surveying printed documents published by Oxford University Press “A Chronology and Calendar of Documents Relating to the London Book Trade 1641-1700” identifies this book ordered to be burned on August 9, 1644 as Roger Williams’ “Blody Tenent.” See Donald Francis McKenzie, Maureen Bell, *A Chronology and Calendar of Documents Relating to the London Book Trade 1641-1700: Volume I: 1641-1670* (OUP Oxford, 2005), 120.
“although He is Anabaptist” in 1643. Nonetheless, even as far as May 2, 1648, laws were still being enacted that targeted the Baptists in particular.

As the seventeenth century wore on, Baptists found themselves increasingly torn between justifying their theological distinctions of believer’s baptism while simultaneously convincing others of their theological orthodoxy. These efforts, however, were thwarted by the spectre of Anabaptism that proved too difficult to shake. The Baptists came under attack by the Westminster Assembly and Parliament, being consistently persecuted by the Committee for Plundered Ministers. Nonetheless, the seventeenth century was a century of significant growth for the Baptists. What had begun as a small English sect in the 1600s by the mid-seventeenth century boasted some 250 congregations and hundreds of published pamphlets and books defending their views. Throughout all this time, the Baptists maintained their same basic biblical arguments against religious persecution in emphasizing the difference between Old and New Testaments to prove that civil magistrates did not have the authority of Old Testament kings to persecute religious dissenters and punish heterodoxy. As the next chapter will show, their argument for toleration thus came from nothing other than an innovation in Covenantal Theology. Having adapted Puritan Covenant Theology in order to defend their doctrine of

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266 Cromwell’s words in his letter are worth recounting. He writes on March 10, 1643: “Ay, but the man is an Anabaptist. Are you sure of that? Admit he be, shall that render him incapable to serve the Public? … Sir, the State, in choosing men to serve them, takes no notice of their opinions, if they be willing faithfully to serve them, that satisfies. I advised you formerly to bear with men of different minds from yourself: if you had done it when I advised you to it, I think you would not have had so many stumbling blocks in your way.” Oliver Cromwell, The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell (Methuen & Company, 1904), 171. The editor of Cromwell’s Letters observes that Cromwell is probably thinking of Henry Warner and William Packer, since Warner, not Packer, was Major-General Crawford’s Lieutenant-Colonel (170 n. 1).

267 ‘May 1648: An Ordinance for the punishing of Blasphemies and Heresies, with the several penalties therein expressed,’ in Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660, ed. C H Firth and R S Rait (London, 1911), pp. 1133-1136 http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp1133-1136 [accessed 16 February 2016]. “… or that the baptizing of Infants is unlawfull, or such Baptism is void, and that such persons ought to be baptized again, and in pursuance thereof shall baptize any person formerly baptized… he shall be committed to prison by the said Justices until he shall finde two sufficient Sureties before two Justices of Peace for the said place or County…”
believer’s baptism, the Baptists’ adapted theology then undermined the basis for an established church as well.
Covenants, Conscience, Circumcision and the Theological Roots of [In]tolerance

I do not find in any point of Divinity, learned men so confused and perplexed (being like Abraham's Ram, hung in a bush of briars and brambles by the dead) as here.268

- Anthony Burgess (d. 1664)

This is (I confess) somewhat a knotty question, and therefore I would speak warily unto it.269

- Obadiah Sedgwick (1600-1658)

It is well known that the Baptists’ disagreements with the Presbyterians in the seventeenth century over the issues of the church and baptism resulted from different ways of understanding the relationship between the biblical covenants.270 This is particularly evident from the ecclesiological differences between Presbyterians and Baptists in the seventeenth century. However, this chapter posits that the differences go even deeper. In a word, the fact that the Presbyterians and Baptists disagreed in views of church and state was the result of a different way of understanding the nature of and relationship between the biblical covenants. Or in other

words, political differences between Presbyterians and Baptists over the role of the state in relation to religion were the outcome of the differences in their respective Covenant Theologies.

The Baptist adaptations of the dominating Covenant Theology of the time occasioned two significant changes in the way they approached church and state. The first and primary implication of their new Covenant Theology was the replacement of infant baptism with believer’s baptism. This move, rooted deeply in their Covenant Theology, undermined the notion of a nationally established church. It meant that the strictly “believer’s church” could not be coterminous with the state and that citizenship could not be mistaken for church membership.

The second implication of their Covenant Theology was that Old Testament Israel could not serve as a binding example for civil magistrates. While Old Testament laws may be useful to study for principles of government, no subsequent nation enjoyed the same covenant relationship with God, that covenant having been fulfilled with Christ’s coming. To base legislation in general, and religious persecution in particular, squarely on the basis of Old Testament laws would be to misunderstand the key change in covenants at Christ’s coming. So we see that the first implication of Baptist Covenant Theology related primarily to the church—that it should be a believer’s church—and the second implication related primarily to the state—that it does not share Israel’s covenantal duties or privileges. Taken together, these two implications formed the basis for a seventeenth-century Baptist political theology that was decidedly opposed to religious persecution and unequivocally in favor of an institutional separation of church and state.

These differences are most evident in the two major statements of faith of these respective groups, the Westminster Confession of 1647 and the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, but also in the writings of various authors over the course of the century. Therefore, since their respective arguments about toleration and the role of the state were
undergirded by fundamental differences in their assumptions about the nature of the Old and New Covenants and the relationship between them, any discussion of their political views must begin with their respective understandings of Covenant Theology.

**Puritan Covenant Theology**

By way of introduction a note on terminology is also in order. As has been noted, the twentieth century has witnessed much attention devoted to the Puritan idea of covenant. The notable Daniel Elezar defines a covenant as “a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another unconditionally” or elsewhere as “a binding of partners into new or renewed relationships entailing mutual promises and pledges of reciprocity.”\(^{271}\) Perry Miller defines it as “a mutual engagement between two independent parties, who, once they have given their oath, are eternally bound.”\(^{272}\) One Puritan preacher asserted in 1641 “The word covenant in our English tongue signifies a mutual promise, bargain, and obligation between two parties.”\(^{273}\) At the heart of Covenant Theology, however, is simply the premise that God is a covenant-keeping God and relates to his people on the basis of covenants or promises that will not be broken.\(^{274}\)

At the onset, the difficulty of this topic should not be underestimated. Commenting on the relationship between the covenants, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) says, “There is perhaps no part of divinity attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines do so much differ as stating the precise agreement and difference between the


\(^{272}\) Miller, 409.

\(^{273}\) Witte, 587.

\(^{274}\) I will be frequently referring to Puritan Covenant Theology, Presbyterian Covenant Theology, and Reformed Covenant Theology to each describe the same “Reformed paedobaptist” view as encompassed within the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). By Baptist Covenant Theology I am simply referring to Baptist’s adaptation of Presbyterian Covenant Theology in the second half of the seventeenth-century as explained in the First (1644) and Second London Baptist Confessions of Faith (1689).
two dispensations of Moses and Christ.”

Similarly the theologian John Ball (1585-1640) confesses the difficulty of explaining “how, and whether at all the Covenant of Grace, was manifested by Moses.”

Even the Puritan scholar and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, John Owen (1616-1683) found the subject “wrapped up in much obscurity, and attended with many difficulties.”

Despite the complexity of the topic, the significance of Covenant Theology to the Puritans cannot possibly be overstated. The term “Covenant Theology” itself is attributed to Scottish Presbyterian Robert Rollock in 1596. It arose in importance among Protestant Reformers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in Scotland, England and Western Europe. But already by the end of the sixteenth century, Puritan writers assumed their readers to be knowledgeable of the covenant. The central place of Covenant Theology in Puritan theology is best encapsulated in the 1647 “Westminster Confession of Faith”—the new confession of the Church of England called up by the so-called Rump-Parliament to replace older

276 Ball, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace, 95.
278 Some of the main Reformed Covenant Theologians of the seventeenth-century include: William Ames (1576-1633), the author of Medulla theologiae (The Marrow of Theology, 1629); John Ball (1585-1640). Presbyterian Puritan and author of A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace (1645); Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), a non-conformist Puritan theologian and author of The Gospel Covenant; or the Covenant of Grace Opened (1646); Thomas Blake (1597-1657), a Puritan Presbyterian minister and author of Vindiciae foederis; or, A treatise of the covenant of God entered with man-kinde (1653); Herman Witsius (1636-1708), a continental theologian and author of the four-volume work The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man (1677); Samuel Peto (1642-1711), the author of The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace, Infant-Baptism Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Thomas Grantham (1691) and Infant Baptism of Christ's Appointment; Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675), author of a five-volume work on covenant theology, of which two volumes remain: The Ark of the Testament Opened (London, 1661), a treatise on the covenant of grace; and The Ark of the Covenant Opened (London, 1677); and Francis Turretin (1623-1687) the Continental theologian and author of the three volume set Institutes of Elenctic Theology (1679-1685). See more examples in Trueman, 72.
church teachings.\textsuperscript{280} It outlives the Puritans as the chief representation of what church historians call “Reformed Orthodox Puritanism.”\textsuperscript{281} While the doctrine and concept of covenant was certainly present before the Puritans, they were the first to transform it into “their organizing principle.”\textsuperscript{282} The widespread popularity of Covenant Theology among the English Puritans results from the clarity it brought to the Reformation-inspired views regarding the fall, man’s natural relationship to God, how man can be justified by faith in Christ apart from works, and the assurance of salvation. Each of these questions, the Puritans believed, could be best understood and answered in reference to the notion of covenant: that from the creation of man through the coming of Christ, God has always related to his people on the basis of a covenant. To borrow a phrase from Perry Miller, in the doctrine of the covenants, the Puritans believed themselves to have “found in the idea a key to the history of the universe.”\textsuperscript{283}

Since Reformed Protestants understood there to have only been one way of salvation throughout history—by grace through faith—they understood there to have existed a single covenant, which included all of God’s elect. At the risk of oversimplification, the Puritans united all of scripture under the maxim: \textit{one covenant under several administrations}. This, according to their view, sufficiently accounted for the unity and the diversity of Scripture. The Old Testament and New Testament both fit within this “one covenant” scheme, even though there were acknowledged differences in “administration”—such as temple worship, animal sacrifices, and circumcision. This one single covenant that encompassed all of Scripture, they called the “Covenant of Grace,” of which more will be said later.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{280} J.I. Packer says “‘The Westminster Confession embodies Puritan covenant theology in its classical form.’” Packer, 155. \\
\textsuperscript{281} Trueman, 75. \\
\textsuperscript{282} John Witte Jr., \textit{Blest Be the Ties that Bind: Covenant and Community in Puritan Thought} (36 Emory Law Journal, 5/9, 1987, 581. \\
\textsuperscript{283} Miller, 376.
\end{flushright}
Of course the Puritans understood that there is much diversity of covenants. There are different kinds of covenants, even throughout the Scriptures. So the Scottish Presbyterian theologian Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675) described how “while arguing that all covenants involve some sort of condition and mutual obligation… some covenants are between equals, others are between superior and inferior; some involve explicit conditions, other implicit; some antecedent conditions, others consequent; some are meritorious, some gratuitous; some of justice, some of grace.”  

In fact, in his treatise *The Ark of the Testament*, he lists several conditions for a biblical covenant:

1. There must be two or more parties
2. They must involve agreement
3. There must be conditions
4. These conditions must be mutually binding
5. They must be mutually beneficial
6. They must be strictly binding, to the extent that any breach of covenant is tantamount to a breach of the law of God.  

Despite such differences in covenants, Puritan theologians still understood there to be one overarching “Covenant of Grace” that includes all of the biblical covenants and all of God’s people throughout all ages. As John Ball (1585-1640), a Presbyterian Puritan put it,

> God as an absolute Sovereign hath right and authority over all men: but in a certain and peculiar reason they are called his people, who receive his commandment, and acknowledge him to be their Lord and Saviour.  

Those who are in the Covenant of Grace are the ones who have been redeemed by God throughout all ages. Thus, Covenant Theology shows how despite differences in dispensations since Christ’s coming, God’s covenant promises have not failed: He has had one people, through

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one covenant across time.  

Of course, there are significant differences between the Old and New Testaments. However, Covenant Theology generally emphasizes the continuities between God’s people between Old and New Testaments more than the discontinuities.

Puritan Covenant Theology consisted of three covenants: a “Covenant of Redemption,” a “Covenant of Works” and the “Covenant of Grace.” The Covenant of Redemption refers to that “agreement between the Father and the Son” that Christ would “pay the full price for the redemption of believers,” a covenant agreed upon even before the creation of the world.  

The Covenant of Works refers to the promise of salvation to those who live by perfect obedience to God’s law. It is a conditional covenant, as the Westminster Confession states,

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

This Covenant was made between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden, with Adam acting as the federal head of all mankind. Therefore, when Adam sinned, breaking the Covenant of Works, all fell with him and became guilty of violating that covenant.

The third, the Covenant of Grace, is the unconditional covenant between God and His elect, who, though guilty under the Covenant of Works, are credited with Christ’s righteousness through their union with Him by faith. In the words of the Westminster Confession,

The Covenant of grace: whereby [God] freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to...
give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.\textsuperscript{292}

Whereas the Covenant of Works places man in a predicament of guilt before God, the Covenant of Grace fulfills the promise of the Covenant of Redemption. By living a perfect life of obedience, Jesus Christ fulfilled the perfect obedience demanded under the Covenant of Works; and, by dying a substitutionary death, credits his perfect record of righteousness to those elect included in the Covenant of Grace.\textsuperscript{293} As one theologian put it, “The Covenant of Grace has been called the characteristic Puritan doctrine, as justification by faith was the characteristic doctrine of Luther.”\textsuperscript{294}

Of course, much of this may sound like a standard articulation of Luther’s Law-Gospel distinction that all Protestants and many Christians throughout the ages recognized. After all, Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) made much of his “discovery” of the covenantal connection between Adam and Christ.\textsuperscript{295} Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) similarly presented the Covenant of Grace as representative of God’s covenant in the Old Testament in his 1534 treatise \textit{De Testamento seu Foedere Dei Unico et Aeterno}.\textsuperscript{296} Calvin, while less explicit in his Covenant Theology than later generations, also addressed this issue and affirms the unity of God’s covenant in Old and New Testaments.\textsuperscript{297} What is significant

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{292} WC, VII:iii
\item \textsuperscript{293} Witte, 581.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Packer, 202.
\item \textsuperscript{295} See discussion of Zwingli’s Covenant Theology in David Curtis Steinmetz, \textit{Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler Von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza} (Oxford University Press, 2001), 96-97.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Herman Selderhuis, \textit{A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy} (Brill, 2013), 407.
\item \textsuperscript{297} I do not think that Calvin fits neatly to either “side” of the credobaptist-paedobaptist Covenant Theology debate, at least insofar as it is framed in the language of the seventeenth-century. On the one hand, he clearly affirms the traditionally Reformed paedobaptist view of the Covenants as one substance under two administrations: “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation” (John Calvin, John T. McNeill, and Ford Lewis Battles, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion: In Two Volumes} (Philadelphia; London: The Westminster Press ; SCM, 1960), II. x. p. 429). Yet he consistently refers to the Old Testament and Old Covenant interchangeably, a move a paedobaptist Reformed theologian of the Seventeenth-Century would be loath to make. Furthermore, his treatment of the New Covenant in his writings on Heb. 8:6-13 sounds nearly identical to John Owen’s position in his
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
about the Puritans, however, is how Covenant Theology became, in the words of Perry Miller, “the marrow of Puritan divinity.” In contrast to discussions of the covenant by early writers, which were “only incidental and isolated,” the “Puritan theologians in England and America—in alliance with Continental Protestants—transformed the covenant into one of the cardinal doctrines of theology.”

**Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace**

The Reformed paedobaptist (Presbyterian, Anglican, and Congregational) argument for infant baptism (“paedobaptist” simply means infant-baptism) emerged as an inference from the basic continuity of the “Covenant of Grace.” Paedobaptists argued that infants ought to be baptized and therefore included in the covenant community of the church on the grounds that God had promised Abraham in Genesis 17 that his descendants would be included in the Covenant of Grace on the condition that they were circumcised, and this promise is reaffirmed in the New Testament in Acts 2:39. As infants of followers of God in the Old Testament received the covenant sign of circumcision as recognition of their covenantal status, infants of followers of Christ in the New Testament are similarly included in the covenantal community of the church and ought therefore to receive the New Testament sign of baptism as a sign of their belonging. Thus, contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, the Puritans did not teach that baptism is regenerative (for Catholics baptism washes away original sin) or that baptism guarantees future regeneration is guaranteed. Rather, it recognizes one’s status in the

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Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews (London: 1668) insofar as Calvin affirms that the New Covenant is confirmed and ratified by Christ in the New Testament (See Institutes, 454). In saying this, note that I am not siding with the so-called “Calvin against the Calvinists” thesis of Torrance, Barth, Miller, or Muller, but simply noting that significant development in Covenant Theology occurred after Calvin that went beyond what Calvin himself had articulated.

298 Perry Miller, Errand Into the Wilderness, 1964.
299 Witte, 581.
300 Some variations of the Catholic understanding of Baptism as “salvific,” working ex opere operato, may also be present in some Lutheran and Anglican contexts. The Council of Trent asserts, “sacrament of baptism, which is the
Covenant of Grace and makes available the covenant blessings that must be appropriated personally through faith. Therefore, faith is not a prerequisite to covenant-inclusion or baptism. This is where the Baptists differ from the rest of Reformed Christians. So William Ames (1576-1633), a Puritan preacher, writes that a lack of faith and repentance should not bar infants from baptism:

Faith and repentance no more constitute the covenant of God now than in the time of Abraham, who was the father of the faithful. Therefore, the lack of these ought no more to prevent infants from being baptized now any more than it prevented them from being circumcised then.301

The paedobaptist one-to-one equivalency between circumcision and baptism depends on the assumption of unity of substance of the Covenant of Grace between testaments.

**The Church: The Internal Efficacy and the External Administration of the Covenant of Grace**

This Reformed paedobaptist understanding of baptism has implications on the nature of the church. As has been noted, there is an emphasis within Calvinism on the purity of each member of the church. However, since *all* the progeny of church members are *de facto* included in the church, the church is bound to contain both believers and unbelievers alike. As Old Testament Israel consisted of both those who were faithful to God’s Covenant and those who were not, the church is then expected to consist of both covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers.

Furthermore, Reformed paedobaptists have recognized that since infants are not regenerated by baptism, they are not included in God’s Covenant in the same way as a believer. As a result, to the present day, Reformed theologians distinguish between the internal and the sacrament of faith… and without which no man was ever justified finally…” (Sixth Session: Justification, Ch. VII. p. 33). The Reformed view of Baptism, in contrast, is fundamentally not regenerative.

301 William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity Drawne out of the Holy Scriptures, and the Interpreters Thereof, and Brought into Method / by William Ames ... ; Translated out of the Latine ... ; Whereunto Are Annexed Certaine Tables Representing the Substance and Heads of All in a Short View ... as Also a Table Opening the Hard Words Therein Contained.*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 302:23 (London : Printed by Edward Griffin for Henry Overton ..., 1642., 1642), 207.
external aspects of the Covenant of Grace. The internal elements of the Covenant of Grace refer to the internal regenerative work of the Holy Spirit (which is only for the elect). Its external elements refer to membership in the community of the church and access to the sacraments.\textsuperscript{302}

One can be a part of the “external covenant” without the Covenant’s “internal” benefits. The ecclesiological implications of this doctrine entail a “mixed” nature of the church. That is, by institutional design, the church would inherently include some professing elect, some professing reprobate, as well as their children. John Ball attests to the internal and external aspects of the Covenant of Grace:

[God’s people] be of two sorts; for God doth make his Covenant with some externally, calling them by his Word, and sealing them by his sacraments, and they by profession of faith and receiving of the sacraments oblige themselves to the condition required: and thus all members of the visible church be in covenant. With others God doth make his Covenant effectual, writing his Law in their hearts by his Holy Spirit, and they freely and from the heart give up themselves unto the Lord, in all things to be ruled and guided by him. And thus God hath contracted Covenant with the faithful only. The first are the people of God outwardly or openly, having all things external and pertaining to the outward administration. The second are the people of God inward or in secret, whom certainly and distinctly the Lord only knoweth.\textsuperscript{303}

Hence, one sees how paedobaptist Covenant Theology forms the “mixed” nature of the church with a “visible church” which consists both of believers and unbelievers, the relationship between circumcision and baptism.\textsuperscript{304}

To summarize, by distinguishing between the substance and the administration of the Covenant of Grace, Reformed paedobaptists were able to maintain that there has only been one church (substantially) since the foundation of the world even though its “administrations” have changed. Hence the elect and the non-elect could be included in the same covenant. The elect participate in the substance and the internal administrations of the Covenant, whereas the non-

\textsuperscript{302} Denault, 41.
\textsuperscript{303} John Ball, \textit{A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace} (1645), 202f. Cited in Denault, 49.
\textsuperscript{304} Wellum, 101.
elect participate only in its external elements. By locating the beginning of this Covenant with God’s promise to Abraham and his offspring in Genesis 17, paedobaptist theologians were able to maintain a place for the unregenerate in the covenant who receive the signs of the Covenant of baptism and the Lord’s supper.305

The Development of Baptist Covenant Theology

Having examined the prevailing form of Puritan Covenant Theology in the seventeenth century, we can now turn to the ways in which the Baptists subsequently adapted it.306 Put simply, rather than “one covenant under two administrations” the Baptists taught that God had revealed one covenant progressively which was concluded formally under the New Covenant.307 First, however, the similarities of Baptist Covenant Theology to the dominating paedobaptist view should be noticed before the differences can be elucidated. The seventeenth-century English Baptists were eager to affirm the unity of the Covenant of Grace as the means of

305 Paraphrased from Denault, 47-48.
306 The number of relevant Baptists in the seventeenth-century who addressed these issues were many. John Spilsbury (1598-1668), the pastor of the first Calvinist Baptist church (founded in 1638) and the signer of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1644 authored the important Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme in 1652. Henry Lawrence (1600-1664), a Puritan and statesman associated with Oliver Cromwell, was also the anonymous author of Of Baptism (1646) where he criticizes paedobaptism and posits a covenant theology consistent with believer's baptism. Thomas Patient (?-1666), pastoral assistant to William Kiffin in London, was the author of The Doctrine of Baptism, And the Distinction of the Covenants (1654) in which he attacks Presbyterian view of covenant theology as one covenant under two administrations. John Bunyan (1628-1688), perhaps the most well-known Baptist of the seventeenth-century, and perhaps of all time, was not only the author of the all-time best-selling book in the English language—Pilgrim’s Progress—but also the author of The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded (1659), which expresses a Baptist understanding of the covenants. Similarly, Edward Hutchinson (?-?) was Calvinistic Baptist and the author of A Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism (1676). Nehemiah Coxe (?-1688), the son of Benjamin Coxe, was probably the most formidable of Baptist covenant theologians. He was the author of A Discourse of the Covenants that God made with men before the Law (1681) wherein he outlines the differences between paedo- and credobaptists based on their interpretation of the Abrahamic Covenant. He summarizes the Baptist position as follows: “The Old Covenant and the new differ in substance and not only in the manner of the administration.” His work attempts to show that the Old and New Covenant are two distinct covenants and not merely two expressions of the same covenant. Coxe was also a principal author of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith. Thomas Grantham (?-1692) a General Baptist theologian and author of Truth and Peace or the Last and most Friendly Debate Concerning Infant Baptism (1689). Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), the principal Baptist theologian of the second half of the seventeenth-century and author of The Everlasting Covenant (1693), The display of Glorious Grace: Or, The Covenant of Peace Opened, in Fourteen Sermons (1689). Finally, many Baptists of the time suggested that John Owen’s Covenant Theology was in line with their own. See Edward Hutchinson Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism (34-35).
307 See Denault, 63.
salvation for all believers throughout all time, from Genesis to Revelation. Note how the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 explicitly uses the language of the Covenant of Grace:

Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{308}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Unity of Covenant of Grace from Gen. to Rev. & No unity. Covenant of Grace is only for the New Testament \\
\hline
Old Covenant and New Covenant are both Covenant of Grace & Paedobaptist (Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregational) & — \\
\hline
Old Covenant and New Covenant are not the same as the Covenant of Grace & Baptists & Socinianism/Marcionism \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Contrasting Baptist and Paedobaptist Views of the Covenants}
\end{table}

In fact, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 is an almost word-for-word replica of the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 with the notable exceptions of its teachings on Baptism, the church, and the state. There were many reasons for the Baptist’s eagerness to highlight their similarity to the Reformed faith. Most significant was the desire to disassociate themselves from the Socinian teachings, which they were often accused of approximating.\textsuperscript{309}

Socinianism was not something a self-conscious Protestant was eager to be associated with. Among other things, Socianians regarded human agents as completely free and unrestrained in their will, contrary to Calvinist teachings. But that was not their worst error.

\textsuperscript{308} Second London Baptist Confession, ch. 7.
\textsuperscript{309} Socinianism was founded by the Italian Laelio Sozzini (1525-1562) and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604). Fausto’s book “\textit{De Jesu Christo Servatore}” (1594) was perceived as a direct attack on orthodox Christology and soteriology. Socinianism gained creedal expression in the Racovian Catechism of the Polish Brethren in 1605. Socinianism now lives on chiefly within Unitarianism.
Socinians were also known for denying that Jews in the Old Testament were saved by faith and denying that the Old Testament Scriptures pointed ahead to Christ, a position not dissimilar to the heresy known to the early church as Marcionism. In this sense they were the polar opposite to the Reformed paedobaptist view of the Covenant of Grace in both Old and New Testaments as “one substance, two administrations” (see chart 9 above). As a result, Puritans such as John Owen were staunch opponents of Socinianism, which was seen as an early rationalist movement, and. At the time, for the Baptists to be associated with Socinianism was not far from being compared with Atheism.

The challenge for Baptists, therefore, was to sufficiently distinguish themselves from the Socinians by denying the unity of the Old and New Covenants without denying the unity of the substance of the Covenant of Grace. Hence, in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, the Baptists were eager to distinguish their own position from that of the Socinians. For example, they clarified that inclusion in the Covenant of Grace has always been on the basis of justification by faith: “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.”

Similarly, Baptists affirmed that the same blessings of the Covenant of Grace applied to believers in the Old Covenant as under the New Covenant when they wrote in chapter 21 of the 1689 Confession, “All of that was common also to believers under the law in terms of its

310 Trueman, 27. Owen wrote against Socinianism’s view of the will: “All the acts of the will being positive entities, were it not previously moved by God himself, ‘in whom we live, move, and have our being,’ must needs have their essence and existence solely from the will itself; which is thereby made autonov, a first and supreme cause, endued with an underived being” (Trueman, 29. Quoted from Works, 10, 120).
311 I am indebted to Pascal Denault for this observation. Denault, 46, 55. The same concerns about Baptists’ approach to Covenant Theology exists among Reformed theologians who accuse the Baptists of confusing ordo salutis and historia salutis. See Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint’s review article “Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum’s Kingdom Through Covenant,” in WTJ 76 (2014): 189-217.
312 Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 11.
substance.” One early English Baptist, Edward Hutchinson (1641-1700) makes this point exceedingly clear in his treatise in 1676,

… at the coming of the Messiah there was not one Church taken away and another set up in the room thereof, but the Church continued the same in those that were children of Abraham according to the faith. The Christian Church is not another Church, but the very same that was before the coming of Christ, having the same faith with it, and interested in the same Covenant.

Like the paedobaptist view, the Baptists agreed that there was one Covenant of Grace that included believers in the Old Testament and the New Testament. By highlighting this fact, the Baptists hoped to avoid accusations of Socinianism and Antinomianism and prove their Reformed orthodoxy. Hence, we observe that the Early Baptists did agree with the Presbyterians and other paedobaptists regarding the basic tenets of Covenant Theology: that although there were differences between the old and new covenants, God had ordained one people under the headship of Christ, and that baptism is the sign of the new covenant.

Differences in Baptist Covenant Theology

The Baptists, however, critically rejected the standard Reformed “one covenant under two administrations” understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants. As Coxe writes in his Discourse (1681), “the Old Covenant and the New differ in substance and not only in the manner of their administration.” The covenants differ not only in administration but also in substance: the Old and New testaments reflect different covenants. Whereas the Presbyterians and other paedobaptists taught that both Old and New Testaments fit within the broader heading of the “New Covenant,” the Baptists protested that the New Covenant belongs

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313 Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 21.
314 E. M Hutchinson, A Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism (London: Printed For Francis Smith, 1676), 33.
315 Jones, 74.
316 Nehemiah Coxe, A Discourse of the Covenants that God made with men before the Law (1681), 33. John Owen seems to agree with this position when he writes, “… We may consider that Scripture does plainly and expressly make mention of two testaments, or covenants, and distinguish between them in such a way, that what is spoken can hardly be accommodated to a twofold administration of the same covenant” (Owen, 186).
to the New Testament and the Old Covenant belongs to the Old Testament. Simply put, the
Baptists wanted to maintain the unity of the Bible without ignoring the “oldness” of the Old
Covenant or neglecting the “newness” of the New Covenant.

The Covenant of Grace, as the Second London Baptist Confession states, “is revealed in
the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and
afterwards by further steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New
Testament.”317 Hence, for Baptists, there is an “already, not yet” tension in the Old Testament.
There is unity between the Old and New Covenants because the promise of the New Covenant is
made as early as Genesis 3:15.318 But there is also discontinuity because that promise is not
formally concluded before the death and resurrection of Christ.319 With the establishment of the
New Covenant then, all the previous Covenants are abolished and replaced by the New Covenant
alone.

Hence, an accurate summary of Baptist Covenant theology could be that there is “one
covenant revealed progressively and concluded formally under the New Covenant.”320 That
means that no covenant before the New Covenant constituted or contained the Covenant of
Grace. Instead, in the earlier covenants before the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace was

317 Second London Baptists Confession of Faith (1689), ch. 3.
318 Coxe explains that although the promise of the Covenant of Grace were revealed in part to Adam, there was no
formal covenant of grace made: “It must also be noted that although the Covenant of Grace was revealed this far to
Adam, yet we see in all this there was no formal and express covenant transaction with him. Even less was the
covenant of Grace established with him as a public person or representative of any kind. But as he obtained interest
for himself alone by his own faith in the grace of God revealed in this way, so must those of his posterity that are
saved.” (Coxe, 57)
319 To quote Owen, “It lacked its solemn confirmation and establishment, by the blood of the only sacrifice which
belonged to it. Before this was done in the death of Christ, it had not the formal nature of a covenant or a testament,
as our apostle proves, Heb. 9:15-23. For neither, as he shows in that place, would the law given at Sinai have been a
covenant, had it not been confirmed with the blood of sacrifices. To that end the promise was not before a formal
and solemn covenant.” (Owen, 185).
320 I am indebted to Pascaul Denault for this formulation.
only a future promise. And whereas the Covenant of Grace was promised in the Old Testament, it was not formally concluded until the New Testament.\(^{321}\)

Writing almost a half-century later, the Baptist Benjamin Keach helpfully summarizes the progressive revelation of the Covenant of Grace:

1. It was first *decreed* in eternity past
2. It was secondly *revealed* to man after the Fall of Adam and Eve
3. It was *executed and confirmed* by Christ in his death and resurrection
4. It becomes *effective* for its members when they are joined to Christ through faith.\(^{322}\)

So we see that the Baptists agreed that there has only been one Covenant of Grace and that the inclusion in the Covenant of Grace has always been faith. However, the Baptists refused to deny that the Old Covenant is synonymous with the Covenant of Works, as given to Moses in the Law and to Abraham in the Covenant of Circumcision. Instead, they understood circumcision to be a part of that Mosaic Law associated with the Covenant of Works. Once the New Covenant was established, that Covenant was abolished.

**Baptism, Circumcision and the Old Covenant**

We have seen that the Presbyterian argument for infant baptism depended on the unity of the substance of the Covenant of Grace between the Old and New Testament. Since under the

\(^{321}\) Again, no one is better than John Owen on the matter of "formally concluded." Owen writes, “This is the meaning of the word [νενοθετηται: [...] ‘reduced into a fixed state of a law or ordinance.’ All the obedience required in it, all the worship appointed by it, all the privileges exhibited in it, and the grace administered with them, are all given for a statute, law, and ordinance to the church. That which before lay hid in promises, in many things obscure, [...] was now brought to light; and that covenant which had invisible, in the way of promise, put forth its efficacy under types and shadows, was now solemnly sealed, ratified, and confirmed, in the death and resurrection of Christ. *It had before the confirmation of promise, which is an oath; it had now the confirmation of a covenant, which is blood.* That which before had no visible, outward worship, proper and peculiar to it, is now made the only rule and instrument of worship to the whole church, nothing being to be admitted in that respect but what belongs to it, and is appointed by it. The apostle intends by νενοθετηται, the "legal establishment" of the New Covenant, with all the ordinances of its worship. On this the other covenant was disannulled and removed; and not only the covenant itself, but all that system of sacred worship in accordance with which it was administered. [...] When the New Covenant was given out only in the way of a promise, it was consistent with a form of worship, rites and ceremonies, and those composed into a yoke of bondage which belonged not to it. And as these, they were inconsistent with it when it was completed as a covenant; for then all the worship of the church was to proceed from it, and to be conformed to it.” (Owen, *Exposition*, p. 173-174. Cited in Denault, 65.

Old Covenant, the natural descendants of Israelites were included in the covenant on the basis of God’s promise to Abraham—“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7)—they assumed that the same ought to be true in the New Testament. Even if the administration has changed—circumcision has been replaced by baptism—the genealogical principle ought to continue, especially since the promise to Abraham seems to have been reaffirmed in the New Testament in Acts 2:39 (“this promise is for you and your children…”).

The Baptists responded by arguing that the paedobaptist view misunderstood God’s covenant with Abraham. According to the Baptists, paedobaptists did not sufficiently distinguish between the promises in Genesis 17. Instead of reading the Covenant of Grace into the entirety of the chapter, the Baptists, referring to passages such as Galatians 4:24, identified two distinct covenants made with Abraham. By failing to see the differences between these two Covenants, paedobaptists failed to distinguish between Abraham’s two seeds: one spiritual

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323 We have already described how this construction requires distinguishing between the external and internal aspects of the covenant, since infants would be considered to be a part of the Covenant without having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There thus remained a legitimate place for the unconverted in the church who participate in the church “externally” without enjoying its “internal” benefits.

324 The key text under dispute is Genesis 17:3-14: “Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.” God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

325 Galatians 4:24: “Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery.”

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and one physical. According to the Baptists, the first covenant—the Covenant of Grace—is *promised* but not concluded. The second covenant—the Covenant of Circumcision—is *formally concluded*. The first is a covenant according to the spirit. The second is a covenant according to the flesh. The first covenant is for those who share the same *faith* as Abraham. The second is for those who are physically descended from Abraham. Commenting on this text, Nehemiah Coxe writes,

> Abraham is to be considered in a double capacity: he is the father of all true believers and the father and root of the Israelite nation. God entered into covenant with him for both of these seeds and since they are formally distinguished from one another, their covenant interest must necessarily be different and fall under a distinct consideration. The blessings appropriate to either must be conveyed in a way agreeable to their peculiar and respective covenant interest. And these things may not be confounded without a manifest hazard to the most important articles in the Christian religion.

This understanding of a two-fold covenant with Abraham was the planned topic of debate on December 3, 1645 between a group of three Baptist ministers and a Presbyterian minister. It seems that a merchant in the city of London had called for a debate to settle the question of baptism, whether some or no infants ought to be baptized. However, on the day of the debate, which was supposed to take place in the home of the Presbyterian minister, the crowds proved too large for the planned space. The merchant, therefore, requested of the mayor that a public debate be held. Having first agreed, the mayor later issued a decree that the debate would not be permitted for fear of a “disturbance of the publicke Peace.” It seems that the mayor feared rumors that the Baptists would become violent and that the Presbyterian minister would not leave

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326 Baptists commonly distinguished here between Abraham’s “spiritual seed” and “fleshly seed. See Spilsbury, 6. And as Henry Lawrence writes, “Here you have a distinction as it were of two Abrahams, a begetting Abraham, and a believing Abraham, and also of two seeds, the children of the flesh, that is by carnal generation only, and the children of the promise... Now, saith he, those only, which according to that of which Isaac was a type, are born by promise, those and those only are counted for the seed, Rom. 9:8” (Lawrence, 90-91).

327 Coxe, 72-73.

328 This story is recounted in *A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute* (London : printed in the year, 1645), 1-6.

329 *A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute*, 3.
the debate alive, to which the Baptists Benjamin Coxe, Hanserd Knollys, and William Kiffen responded with a treatise in 1645.

In this treatise, Coxe, Knollys, and Kiffen root their disagreements over baptism in Genesis 17, where God promises blessings to Abraham and his offspring, or “seed.” According to Coxe, Kiffin and Knollys, Presbyterians apply the benefits of the singular Covenant of Grace to the “fleshly seed” of Abraham, and therefore also to the “fleshly seed” of believing Gentiles. Thus, membership in the Covenant of Grace extends to the children of believers—as it extended to Abraham’s children—with the distinction that the covenant sign has been changed from circumcision to baptism. However, in contrast to the Presbyterian view, these three Baptists argue that there are two covenants made with the two “seed” of Abraham: a Covenant of Works made with Abraham’s “fleshly seed” and a Covenant of Grace made with Abraham’s “spiritual seed.” The blessings of the “Covenant of Grace” extend only to the “children of the promise,” and not to the children of believers according to the flesh. The following chart might make these differences more clear (see chart 10 below).

Assuming Genesis 17 to only be referring to the Covenant of Grace, the Presbyterian view finds in it the basis for including not-yet-regenerate infants in the “external” Covenant. The Baptists, in contrast, distinguishing between the Covenant of Circumcision and the promise of the Covenant of Grace, find in Genesis 17 a contrast between the Old and New Covenants. In the Old Covenant, the fleshly and the spiritual descendants of Abraham were mixed: “For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants… [since] it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.” (Rom. 9:6-8). In contrast, under the New Covenant, all of

330 A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute, 17.
331 A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute, 17.
332 A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute, 16.
those in God’s visible covenant community—the church—ought to be true spiritual descendants of Abraham. That is, they all ought to share Abraham’s faith, since in the promised New Covenant, “they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34).

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<th>Presbyterian</th>
<th>Baptist</th>
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<tr>
<td>Covenant(s) with Abraham:</td>
<td>One Covenant</td>
<td>Two Covenants</td>
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<td>Seed(s):</td>
<td>One seed</td>
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<td>Covenant(s):</td>
<td>Covenant of Grace</td>
<td>Covenant of Grace and Covenant of Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covenant Sign(s):</td>
<td>Circumcision is the sign of the Covenant of Grace</td>
<td>Circumcision is the sign of the Covenant of Works; baptism is the sign of the Covenant of Grace</td>
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<td>New Testament application:</td>
<td>Circumcision is replaced by baptism as the sign of the Covenant of Grace to be administered to the physical seed of covenant members (infants)</td>
<td>Covenant sign of circumcision is repudiated in the New Testament (“fulfilled by Christ”). Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant to be administered to regenerate believers.</td>
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Edward Hutchinson makes the same point in his “Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism” (1676). According to Hutchinson, “The Covenant or promise made to Abraham, and to his seed, is the great hinge or Engine upon which the whole business of Infants-Baptism moves.” For Hutchinson, the covenant of circumcision with Abraham was an articulation of the conditional covenant of works upon all of his fleshly seed. Abraham stood in a two-fold role: as father to his fleshly seed (the Israelites) and as father to his spiritual seed (believers, both Jews and Gentiles alike). “So,” Hutchinson writes, “there is a twofold seed of Abraham, a fleshly, and

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333 E. M Hutchinson, A Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism (London: Printed, for Francis Smith (1676).
334 Hutchinson, 3.
a spiritual…” \(^{335}\) The fleshly seed is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah and the spiritual seed in those who through faith and regeneration have an “inheritance in the promise.” \(^{336}\) Regarding what kind of covenant God made with Abraham’s natural seed, Hutchinson is adamant that it was not the Covenant of Grace as the Presbyterians taught, “but a distinct Covenant of itself concerning the worship and service of God, and so may be called a Covenant of Works, rather than a Covenant of Grace.” \(^{337}\)

For Baptists, the “spiritual descendants” of Abraham have always been included in the Covenant of Grace on the basis of faith (Romans 4). In contrast paedobaptists would posit that all of Abraham’s descendants were included in the Covenant of Grace externally by circumcision, and that those who believed were included in it internally. \(^{338}\) The differences come down to who is included in the covenant and how they enter.

**Birth or Re-birth? The doorway of the Covenant of Grace**

The most significant implication of the Baptist understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant is that the means of entering God’s visible covenant people have changed between the Old and New Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, one became a part of Israel merely on the basis of being born into it. Hence, circumcision recognized and confirmed one’s identity as a member of the covenant. With that membership came the duties and obligations to fulfill the terms of the Covenant of Works, summarized primarily in the Ten Commandments.

For paedobaptists such as the Presbyterians, one enters the external administration of the Covenant of Grace by birth, and the internal substance by faith and regeneration. The invariable

\(^{335}\) Hutchinson, 26.
\(^{336}\) Hutchinson, 30.
\(^{337}\) Hutchinson, 93.
\(^{338}\) Note how Calvin asserts that when it comes to those who were included in the “communion of the church,” being “regenerated by his Spirit through the preaching of the gospel,” then in “ancient Israel there were very few—almost none—who embraced the Lord’s covenant with their whole hearts and minds” (Institutes, 457).
result is a mixed-church consisting of believers and non-believers. We have already quoted Ames who asserts that “Faith and repentance no more constitute the covenant of God now than in the time of Abraham, who was the father of the faithful.” Since this is so, writes Ames, “the lack of [faith and repentance] ought not to prevent infants from being baptized any more than it prevented them from being circumcised then.”339

For Baptists, there is no way to enter into the Covenant of Grace except through faith. “There is no being in the Covenant of Grace,” writes Hutchinson, “but by election on God's part; and actual faith on man's part.”340 Both God’s election then, and man’s faith are pre-requisites for covenantal-membership. The possible Presbyterian rebuttal therefore, that a not-yet-regenerate infant may be part of God’s election, and would therefore be in the Covenant of Grace, is negated. Bunyan writes that not even the unregenerate elect are included in the Covenant of Grace.341 The Covenant of Grace is not with the elect but only with the converted elect.342

The Baptists agreed with the Presbyterians that covenant signs recognized covenantal status. They agreed, therefore, that none ought to be baptized except those that belonged to the Covenant of Grace. They thus differed only over who belonged to that Covenant of Grace and how one entered. Whereas in the Old Testament, access to the covenant community was passed on to all of the physical seed of Abraham, in the New Testament age, access to the church comes, not through, “natural descent,” but as Benjamin Keach argues, only to “those who have

339 Marrow, 211.
340 Hutchinson, Animadversions, 28. Denault 84. Spilsbury similarly states, “Who are the approved subjects of this Covenant [of Grace], and they are only such as believe; for God approves of none in covenant with him by his Word out[side] of Christ, nor of any in Christ without faith. Nay, God denies his approving of any in fellowship or communion with him, that does not believe...” (A Treatise Concerning the Lawful Subject of Baptisme, 9).
341 Bunyan, Doctrine of Law and Grace, 541.
342 See Denault, 85.
the Faith of Abraham.” The Baptists held that only regenerate believers belonged in the covenant and that the means of entering the covenant was repentance and faith. On the other hand the Presbyterians held that while access to the internal efficacy of the Covenant depended on regeneration and faith, the children of believers still belonged in the external administration of the covenant on the basis of birth.

Therefore, where the Baptists critically disagreed with paedobaptists, was on the proper subjects of baptism. Whereas paedobaptists baptized infants, the Baptists only baptized believers. Since the Covenant of Grace had no “external administration” where the non-elect were to be found, Baptists rejected the paedobaptist idea that the Covenant of Grace was made up of believers and unbelievers (their children). Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant. Whereas in the Old Testament, “the people of God were both a nation and the spiritual people of God,” the New Testament church consists solely of the spiritual people of God. While in the Old Testament era, “circumcision signaled one’s affiliation with the nation,” in the New Testament era, baptism signals one’s affiliation with the church. Whereas the Old Testament covenant sign of circumcision was passed on indiscriminately to the physical descendants of Abraham, the New Testament covenant sign of baptism is limited to the spiritual descendants of Abraham. This is the way that the New Covenant promises are fulfilled and God’s covenant people will not consist of covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers, but solely of those who “all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”

To summarize, whereas the Reformed Presbyterian view understood both Old and New Testaments to be expressions of the one Covenant of Grace, the Baptists refused to deny the

343 Benjamin Keach, The Ax Laid to the Root (London: Printed for the author, and are to be sold by John Harris, 1693), 11.
344 Wellum, 144.
345 Jeremiah 31:34 (NRSV).
continuity between the Covenant of Works and the Old Testament. For the Baptists, the Old Testament accorded to the Old Covenant, even as the New Testament accorded to the New Covenant. The Old Covenant principle of circumcision functioned to demarcate a national and ethnic people, and belonged to the Covenant of Works. Since Christ has fulfilled that Covenant in his death and resurrection, the genealogical principle of circumcision whereby physical descendants of Abraham are automatically included in the covenant no longer applies. The Covenant of Grace was pictured and promised in the Old Testament but not formerly concluded until the New Testament. All those spiritual descendants of Abraham, who shared his faith in God’s promises, were included in the Covenant of Grace on the basis of their faith, not their physical descent. Likewise today, New Testament believers are similarly included in the Covenant of Grace on the basis of their regeneration and faith, not on the basis of their physical descent.

Political Implications of Baptist Covenant Theology

Finally, a few of the political implications of the Baptists’ adaptation of Covenant Theology must be examined. First, the discontinuity between Old and New Covenants warrants a firm distinction between membership in the civil state and membership in a church. Second, by implication, citizenship cannot be equated with church membership. Third, the fact that the covenant sign of the New Covenant is baptism upon profession of faith prevents membership in

346 Commenting on Galatians 3:10, the Reformed theologian Herman Witsius explains his understanding of the Law: “But many things prove that nothing is meant by the curse, but the curse of the Covenant of Works” (Quoted in Denault, 30). Similarly, commenting on 2 Corinthians 3, Witsius argues, “The apostle does not here oppose the Covenant of Grace, as it is dispensed after the coming of Christ, to the same Covenant of Grace, as it was dispensed before, but opposes the Covenant of Grace, as in its full efficacy under the New Testament, to the national covenant made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai; and as a spiritual covenant to a typical” (Denault, 31).

347 For instance, Baptist theologian Benjamin Keach identifies the Old Covenant and the Covenant of Works as one and the same thing. Keach writes that the Law of works given to Israel, “frequently called the Old Covenant, and the Covenant of Works, which required perfect Obedience of all that were under it” (Denault, 32).
the church, unlike membership in the civil state, from being conferred upon birth. Fourth, with
different membership pools and means of entrance, an institutional separation between churches
and the civil state exists. Fifth, as the Old and New Covenant reflect different institutional
realities, arguments for structuring the relationship between church and state under the New
Covenant according to the national-church of the Jews under the Old Covenant are rendered
void. That is, the state-church of the Jews is neither a desirable nor lawful model for the New
Covenant church. Each of these changes resulted from the nuanced version of Covenant
Theology developed by the Particular English Baptists.

The Baptists of the time were in no way ignorant of the political implications of their
adaptation of Covenant Theology on church and state. Benjamin Keach observes the direct logic
between infant baptism and an established national church:

The covenant of circumcision, was, it appears, made in the design and end of it, to
separate the natural seed of Abraham in their national church, standing from all other
nations of the world… Will any say that the Covenant of Grace, or Gospel Covenant, in
the design of it, is to separate all true believers, and their natural seed… from all other
people in the world, in a Church State? If they should affirm this, then the gospel church,
for ever ceases to be congregational, but must be national as the Jewish Church was…

Similarly, regarding infants in the Old Covenant, Hutchinson replies, “the church and the
Common-wealth being all one, they [infants] must needs be Members.” Now, however this is not
the case:

There being no institution of Command for it; besides the Church and the Common-
wealth are now divided, and God hath not taken in any one Nation, or sort of people
distinct from others to be his Church; but Believers only out of every Kindred, Tongue,
and Nation.

348 Keach, 18-19.
349 Hutchinson, 96.
Another Baptist explains in even stronger terms in 1646 that a magistrate’s authority to administer God’s law was a unique privilege given to the tribe of Judah. This privilege was “typical and shadowish only” and therefore ceased when Christ came:350

Now no civil kings of the nations of this world were types of this, but Christ Jesus only, from whom it is that all believers in a spiritual respect are equally kings and priests… For even as the [Old Testament] land, people and priest were types of a spiritual, not civil, land, people and priesthood, even so their kings must also have their spiritual antitypes, and so it follows clearly, not civil but spiritual, even Christ Jesus is the true Antitype shadowed forth.351

That does not mean that civil magistrates should not be obeyed, but only that they have no authority in spiritual matters:

But the civil power which is from nature, and so moral and perpetual continues still, and subjection to it is expressly commanded in civil things (Rom. 13, 1 Pet. 2:13,14) whereas subjection to it in matters spiritual, is as expressly forbidden (Matt. 20:25-27, Luke 22:22-27), 1 Cor. 7:23, Col. 2:20-22, Matt. 15:19). And this is the true sense of the Gospel in this point, thus clearly distinguishing betwixt the Civil and Spiritual power.352

Another Baptist, writing later in 1700, understood the danger infant baptism posed on equating church membership and citizenship:

Others say (or at least it is constrictively so) if they are born in a Christian Kingdom or Commonwealth, they are then born in the Church; and as such are church-members, and therefore have a right to Baptism. This is absolutely national and confounds the World with the Church, and differs little from a Wilderness. For it is not the being born in England, though it be a Land of Light, that makes a Christian.353

351 Barrow, 19.
352 Barrow, 19. One may hear echoes of Luther’s earlier writings on spiritual and temporal authority here. p. 11
353 “And so God has ordained the two governments, the spiritual [government] which fashions true Christians and just persons through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the secular (worldly) government which holds the Unchristian and wicked in check and forces them to keep the peace outwardly… Therefore care must be taken to keep these two governments distinct, and both must be allowed to continue their work, the one to make people just, the other to create outward peace and prevent evil doing. Neither is enough for the world without the other…” John Calvin and Martin Luther, Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority, trans. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11-12.
354 Thomas Minge, Gospel-Baptism (London, 1700), 47.
The Baptists’ adaptation of Covenant Theology thus laid the critical groundwork for their subsequent arguments for religious toleration for all. Their arguments were then neither rooted in religious indifference nor an “Arminian” view of the human conscience. Rather, they were rooted in Congregational convictions of a “believer’s church” based on covenantal differences between Israel and the church, and their political convictions about the magistrate’s authority arising from these convictions on covenantal differences between Israel and the state. With the proper theological groundwork in place, we can now proceed to the Baptists' political writings for religious toleration and the debates over toleration in the 1640s.
CHAPTER IV

PURITANS, PREACHERS, AND POLITICAL THEORISTS:
TOLERATION DEBATES IN ENGLAND (1643-1649)

Whatever they may say about toleration of religion where they are under hatches, when they come to sit at the stern, they judge and practice quite contrary.354

- John Cotton, Personal letter to Roger Williams

Nor doe Libertines charge us more with persecution, then Anabaptists did Bullinger and our Reformers, and the Donatists did Augustine, and the Catholics upon whom Augustine retorted the challenge, for the true Church (saith he) casts out Agar the handmaid, is this persecution?355

- Samuel Rutherford (1649)

The previous chapter demonstrated how changes in Baptist Covenant Theology had important implications on the way they viewed the church and state. Namely the church was not supposed to be a mixed-body co-extensive with the political nation, consisting of believers and unbelievers, but rather a body of regenerated believers who were baptized upon their profession of faith. Additionally, Old Testament Israel was not the binding model for the state, which will be discussed further below. While somewhat useful as a model for principles of government,

Baptists contended that no subsequent nation enjoyed the same covenant relationship with God as Israel. These two dual convictions thus shaped subsequent Baptist political writings on toleration and the relationship between church and state.

We have seen that differences between Reformed paedobaptist and Baptist understandings of baptism and the church were rooted in fundamental disagreements over the nature of and relationship between the different biblical covenants, in particular over the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In the 1640s, paedobaptists such as the Presbyterians accused Baptists of denying the unity of God’s covenant people between the Old and New Testaments while the Baptists accused the Presbyterians of denying the “newness” of the New Covenant. For Presbyterians, Old Testament precedent left the door open for establishing a national church into which all the nation’s inhabitants were born in covenant relationship with one another and with God. Following the laws set down in Deuteronomy 13 and 17, the civil magistrate would establish right religion in accordance with the word of God and punish heresy and idolatry. For Baptists however, the “old wineskins” of magisterial control over religion (which belonged to the Old Covenant) could not hold the “new wine” of a regenerate church (which belonged to the New Covenant), to borrow Jesus’ metaphor from Mark 2:21-22/Matthew 9:16-17. The covenants had changed. The external Covenant of Circumcision that set apart a distinct Covenant nation had been done away with. Now, the Covenant of Grace had been made visible in regenerate churches for all to see. To include infants in the covenant and to persecute for religion belonged to the Old Covenant, not the New.

This chapter examines the toleration debate in the 1640s through the lens of three Puritan leaders. Samuel Rutherford, John Cotton, and Roger Williams were all drawn into a pamphlet war over the issue of religious toleration. Williams (d. 1683), an English Baptist, inaugurated the
debate with his 1644 *Blody Tenent*, to which the Congregationalist and so-called “patriarch of the Puritans of New England” John Cotton (d. 1652) responded in 1647. Scottish Covenanter and Presbyterian minister Samuel Rutherford (d. 1661) responded as well in his 1649 *Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*. Williams stood for religious toleration while the two leading figures of seventeenth-century Puritanism—Rutherford and Cotton—(though vehemently opposing one another on matters of ecclesiology) were united in their opposition to Roger Williams. By examining each of their arguments for religious persecution, it becomes apparent that both men were strongly rooted in the same Covenant Theology and the belief in the continued relevance and applicability of the Old Testament law on civil governments and on the church today. Williams, in contrast, argued for religious toleration on the basis of Baptist Covenant Theology, which posited greater discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and rejected infant baptism.

**The Reformed Tradition on Church and State**

First, by way of background, it is important to recall that Rutherford and Cotton’s belief in the responsibility of the magistrate over matters of religion was not at all at odds with the historical precedent of the Reformed and Protestant churches of Europe. In fact, that is precisely what English Protestant exiles on the continent would have been taught by the teachings of John Calvin, Theodore Beza, Heinrich Bullinger and others in the 1550s and 1560s.\(^\text{356}\) There was little question at the time that the binding biblical model of the time was of one church, under the state, with liberty and justice for practitioners of true religion only. Any incongruity between the national population and the Christian community was a problem to be fixed rather than an

\(^{356}\) English exiles in Geneva such as John Knox would have heard Calvin preach things such as, “Therefore must we needs conclude, that our Lord will have Princes and magistrates to use the sword that is given them, to the maintenance of his honour, and of the unity of faith and good agreement; so as if any man raise up trouble or go about to sow darnel, he may be rooted out” (Calvin’s Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses in *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), No. 87 on Deuteronomy 13:4-5. P. 537).
instance of pluralism to be celebrated. As the Peace of Augsburg (1555) determined for the Holy Roman Empire in 1555, and the Treaty of Westphalia affirmed for Europe in 1648, the pithy phrase “Cuius regio, eius religio” (whose realm, his religion) would for centuries ensure that religious identity was merely a matter of territory. For Reformed theologians such as Calvin, the magistrate was duty-bound to imitate his Old Testament model in protecting true religion and punishing false religion. This is further confirmed in the Reformed Confessions of the sixteenth century. 357 Even when explaining the Biblical justification for the execution of heretics such as Servetus, both Calvin and Beza point to Old Testament passages such as Deuteronomy 13 and 17. 358 Without a doubt, the Reformers and their children were still “thinking about politics in exactly the same Old Testament terms.” 359 According to one seventeenth-century Divine, to do otherwise and argue that religious persecution was evil implied the God of the Old Testament was too cruel. 360

Hence, there was little question in the minds of the Reformed-minded Puritans of the revolutionary Parliament that the first priority of government should be the right establishment of religion. As the first act of the Long Parliament, after opening at Westminster on November 3, 1640, the House of Commons called for a day of fasting, prayer, and preaching. 361

357 In fact, there is hardly a Confession of Faith of the Magisterial Reformers that does not give the civil magistrate coercive power in matters of religion. For instance, The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 cites Deuteronomy 17:18-19 to call on Civil Magistrates to follow “the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord.” Following their example, Magistrates are to positively “advance the preaching of the truth, and the pure and sincere faith,” and negatively “root out lies and all superstition, with all impiety and idolatry.” As a summary statement it affirms that “the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate (Deut 17:18-19. See a comparison of Reformed confessions on the topic of the Civil Magistrate in Salnar and Peter Hall, The Harmony of Protestant Confessions: Exhibiting the Faith of the Churches of Christ ... (J.F. Shaw, 1842), 473-499.

358 This paragraph on the Magisterial Reformers is paraphrased from John Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution,” The Historical Journal 41, no. 4 (December 1, 1998), 972.

359 Coffey, 972.


361 This day of prayer and fasting was led by no lesser figures than the Puritans Cornelius Burges and Stephen Marshall. Burges opened the morning in force with a sermon on Jeremiah's prophecy in Jer. 50:5, “that Babylon
solemnness of the moment assured Parliament and the nation that they stood on the brink of a new age in England’s history. On December 11, 1640, a petition called the “root and branch,” signed by some 15,000 (including over 1000 ministers), was presented to Parliament calling for the reformation of the church according to the principles of God's Word. Precisely what would replace the Episcopacy was not clear. What was clear, however, is that the Episcopal system of bishops must be done away with for good. Toward this end, Parliament gathered 120 ministers, lords and commoners of the Westminster Assembly to settle the question. The Assembly that met between 1643 and 1649 was charged with drawing up a new liturgy to replace the Book of Common Prayer and with determining what manner of church polity was appropriate for the Church of England. In both cases, it was assumed that the Westminster Assembly would only serve to make recommendations and that Parliament would then have the final word.

Heroes and Villains? Historiography of the Westminster Assembly

Like Covenant Theology and many other aspects of Puritan studies, discussions of toleration in the context of the Presbyterians and the Independents of the Westminster Assembly have been fraught with error and oversimplification. Ever since A.S.P. Woodhouse’s *Puritanism and Liberty* (1936), the Independents have been portrayed as the heroes in the struggle for religious toleration against the intolerant Presbyterians. Woodhouse paints the Independents as the “center-party” of the English Reformation who through “a logical development of their own
basic doctrines,” became “the party of toleration.”\textsuperscript{365} Not only did they oppose a Presbyterian nationally-established church, they were supposedly staunch believers “in a total separation of church and state” and unified by “the demand for liberty of conscience.”\textsuperscript{366} According to Woodhouse, these political doctrines emerged as “necessary implications” of their congregational convictions. The uniform conclusion of most historians is that the Independents were the party of toleration in opposition to the Presbyterian persecutors. One historian asserts that toleration emerged when “a core of Independents led by Oliver Cromwell... became the leading opponents of Presbyterianism and supporters of a general toleration.”\textsuperscript{367} Robert Ashton describes how the Westminster Assembly was divided over toleration “which was supported, for obvious reasons, by the Independent minority and detested by the Presbyterian majority.”\textsuperscript{368} The ever uncareful Perez Zagorin, followed suit and asserts “the Independents in Parliament and the army, the Puritan ministers who favored congregational autonomy and opposed compulsion in religion.”\textsuperscript{369} Even Christopher Hill claims, contrary to fact, that Thomas Goodwin, the leading Independent Divine in the Westminster Assembly, “believed in toleration.”\textsuperscript{370} W.K. Jordan does the same in his exhaustive four-volume study of \textit{The Development of Religious Toleration} in England.\textsuperscript{371} More recently, however, historians have complicated that long-standing narrative.

\textsuperscript{365} Woodhouse, 16.
\textsuperscript{366} Woodhouse, 18.
\textsuperscript{368} Robert Ashton, \textit{The English Civil War, Conservatism and Revolution, 1603-1649} (London, 1978), 218.
\textsuperscript{369} Perez Zagorin, “Rebels and Rulers, 1500-1660,” vol. 2, \textit{Provincial Rebellion, Revolutionary Civil Wars} (London, 1982), 162
\textsuperscript{370} Christopher Hill, \textit{The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries} (New York, 1984), 179. Goodwin was one of those attacked by Roger Williams in 1643-1644 for opposing toleration.
\textsuperscript{371} W. K. Jordan, \textit{The Development of Religious Toleration}, 4 vols. (London, 1932-40), 3: 369-370: “Almost insensibly Independency was transformed into a powerful movement whose genius and thought were laid in character and whose sole cohesive force was devotion to the principle of religious toleration.” Jordan even goes on to say, “it was advocacy of the principle of religious toleration which set the Independents apart and since this
Ahivu Zakai points out that “It is an oversimplification to state that the Independents favored toleration while the Presbyterians opposed it.”\textsuperscript{372} Such a binary distinction is unhelpful and inaccurate. Hunter Powell’s recent study of the Independents likewise concludes, “it is quite clear that the Apologists [Independents] actually desired a national church.”\textsuperscript{373}

**Samuel Rutherford and the Presbyterian Argument for Persecution**

That the Presbyterians of the Westminster Assembly opposed toleration is well-known. A group of ministers wrote to the Assembly in 1645, “Our bowels, our bowels are stirred within us, we could not even drown ourselves in tears,” due to the degree to which all manner of sects roamed free in London.\textsuperscript{374} This is documented in their writings and even in the Westminster confession of Faith (1646).\textsuperscript{375} What is less well-emphasized is that their arguments rested on a covenantal argument about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

The implications of Presbyterian Covenant Theology on their view of church and state was well-recognized in their own day. According to one prominent Presbyterian minister, Thomas Blake (1597-1657), the fact that the New Testament covenant community is inherently “mixed” entailed that it could and perhaps even ought to be as co-extensive as the entire nation, as was the case for Old Testament Israel. Commenting on Matt. 28:19, he writes, “But whole principle gained for them the support of the sects, Independency was inevitably to be forced to the left by the radicalism of diverse groups fused under its leadership.” (Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 3: 51.) In his favor, Jordan also admits, albeit reluctantly, that the Independents “specifically renounced any support of any general principle of religious toleration and spoke with orthodox fervour against the rising menace of sectarianism” (Jordan, 371). How Jordan simultaneously maintains that the Independents were heralds of toleration while denouncing general religious toleration is beyond me.

\textsuperscript{372} Zakai, 6.


\textsuperscript{374} Letter of the Ministers of the City of London to the Assembly of Divines, against Toleration (London: Printed for Samuel Gellibrand, 1645), 5.

\textsuperscript{375} The Westminster Confession of Faith makes no calls for religious freedom: “... of such opinions or maintaining of such practices as... are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church and by the power of the civil magistrate... It is his duty [the magistrate] to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies by suppressed” (See Westminster Confession XX.IV; XXIII.III. Cited in McBeth, 69).
nations are in a capacity (in God's ordinary way of working) to enter into this Covenant, as is plain in the text” without “any inward change, or work upon the soul to the being of it.” This is politically significant as Blake, here, justifies the existence of a national church on covenental grounds. For a whole nation to enter into covenant with God, it is not required that each person in the nation should be “really holy and sanctified.” Nor is any “inward change, or work upon the soul” a prerequisite for being part of it. Since under the Old Covenant the unregenerate were included in the Covenant of Grace, and because there is unity in substance between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, the unregenerate in the present age can be included in a similar church covenant regardless of whether or not they are sincere professors of faith. They can be included in an “external covenant” where they become obliged to fulfill the terms of the covenant, even against their own will. In fact, he even says that this is “God’s ordinary way of working.”

Puritan Covenant Theology’s emphasis on the unity of the Old and New Testaments in terms of their substance shaped the way they thought about baptism and the church, and therefore how they thought about the state and toleration. For that reason, I could not disagree more with Collinson’s assertion that Covenant Theology was a portent of individualism, undermining institutional forms. It accomplished the precise opposite, giving greater definition to the mutually reinforcing duties of church and state. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the writings of the Scottish Presbyterian and Covenanter Samuel Rutherford.

377 Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: J. Cape, 1967), 464-65: “For most church Puritans, the Presbyterian polity, or any other scheme for the extensive reparation of the church's structure, institutions and ministry became a remote and irrelevant idea. By 'reformation' they tended to mean the pursuit of a piety or a moral order with a Puritan type, not the establishment of the external forms and symbols of a reformed church.”
Samuel Rutherford (c. 1600 – 1661) was one of the most prominent Presbyterian ministers at the Westminster Assembly. He is most famous for his 1644 response to John Maxwell’s treatise of that same year, *Sacro-sancta regnum majestas*, wherein Maxwell advocated the absolute power of kings against the writings of Catholic thinkers such as Francisco Suárez (d. 1617) and Robert Bellarmine (d. 1621). Rutherford responded with *Lex, Rex*, wherein he posits how “royal power is radically in the people” and how “The people create the king.” For the purposes of the toleration debate, however, Rutherford is best remembered for his 1649 *Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* against “authors contending for lawless liberty, or licentious toleration of sects and heresies.” This treatise has been called by Owen Chadwick, “the ablest defence of religious persecution during the seventeenth century.”

Rutherford covers many topics in this extensive treatise of over 400 pages. A staunch Calvinist, he recognizes the inefficacy of compelling religious observation, since true worship cannot be coerced. He nonetheless holds that magistrates may punish false religions that lead others astray. Not only are religions to be punished that err in fundamentals (matters of salvation), but also those that err in non-fundamentals (matters of doctrine and worship). However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is Rutherford’s Covenant Theology and his way of relating Old Testament Israel to the present state that is of prime interest. And he spends nearly

382 Max Weber captures the logic behind the irony of the inherent tolerance of Calvinism’s intolerance, “The idea of predestination basically prevented the state, through its intolerance, from actually promoting religion... The state's intolerance did not enable it to save a single soul.” Max Weber and Stephen Kalberg, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210 n. 129.
383 See chapters 52, 54. It is interesting that the example that Rutherford always brings up if toleration is allowed is child-sacrifice (see p. 328, 395: “as the sacrificing of innocent children to God”).

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ten chapters on that topic, arguing for persecution on the basis of perpetuity of Old Testament laws. That is, Rutherford grounds his political theology on a doctrine of continuity between testaments.

Rutherford affirms that present-day kings and rulers possess all the privileges and duties that belonged to kings in the Old Testament. It is this that authorizes civil magistrates to execute all the laws commanded to Old Testament kings. As Rutherford writes,

What the Patriarchs and Godly Princes of Israel and Judah were obliged to doe, as Rulers and Princes, and not as such Rulers who were privileged types of Christ, that all Kings and Rulers under the new testament are obliged to doe.\textsuperscript{384}

It is a statement of authorization and of radical political continuity between Old and New Testaments. Whatever kings of Israel were commanded to do, civil magistrates are still commanded to do. Hence, Rutherford roots his entire argument for political coercion in matters of religion in Old Testament precedent. After listing a string of examples from the Old Testament, Rutherford concludes, “these examples prove corporal, and sometimes capital, punishment ought by the magistrate to be inflicted on all blasphemers, on all ringleaders of idolatry and false worship.”\textsuperscript{385} Otherwise, they might lead others astray. Hence, “it is the rule for him that bears the sword, to inflict bodily punishment upon perverters of the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{386}

While Rutherford recognizes that there are aspects of the Old Testament law that are no longer in force (he accepts the medieval distinctions between civil, moral, and ceremonial laws), Rutherford calls Old Testament laws requiring the death of false prophets “a perpetual Law.”\textsuperscript{387}

\textsuperscript{384} Rutherford, 177. 
\textsuperscript{385} Rutherford, 183-184. 
\textsuperscript{386} Rutherford, 184. 
\textsuperscript{387} Rutherford, 187. See also p. 298: “Judicial laws may be judicial and Mosaical, and so not obligatory to us, according to the degree and quality of punishment, such as is Deut. 13. the destroying the City, and devoting all therein to a curse; we may not do the like in the like degree of punishment, to all that receive and defend Idolators and blasphemers in their City: And yet that some punishment by the sword, be inflicted upon such a City, is of perpetual obligation; because the Magistrate bears the sword to take vengeance on ill doers, and so on these that are partakers of his ill deeds, who brings another Gospell, 2 Ioh, v. 10” (italics mine). Note that Calvin makes a similar
That is, laws requiring the persecution of idolatry have not been fulfilled or abrogated by the New Covenant, but are very much still in place. For example, Rutherford takes the account of Saul being commanded to destroy the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. Although a unique account since there are no Amalekites to destroy today, Rutherford argues that the principle and precedent remains binding for us.

Where there is an injury done to God, against the Law of nature, and against our brethren, in drawing them from serving the true God, and a punishment commanded by God to be inflicted once; that punishment, or the like in substance and nature, must ever be such as obligeth us in the like cases.\footnote{Rutherford, 298.}

Civil magistrates in the present age, therefore, have the obligation to punish idolaters, heretics, and others who draw the faithful away from serving the true and living God.

This does not, however, give Christian nations license to kill religious persons of other nations on Old Testament grounds. Rutherford cites Deuteronomy 17's laws requiring the death of false prophets and explains how these laws do not require waging wars against idolaters or pagan nations. He writes, “not simple Idolaters, nor all the Nations round about, nor all the Papists, that are educated in Idolatry, by this Law shall be put to death, but such as are within the gates of Israel... in Covenant with God.”\footnote{Rutherford, 187. Italic mine.} This is extremely significant. The basis for the punishment of idolatry is that they have transgressed against the covenant. Since pagans of other nations have no part in that covenant they are not to be put to death since they have not violated that covenant. Only “such as are within the gates of Israel... in Covenant with God” are held to this higher standard.\footnote{Rutherford, 187.}
For Rutherford, therefore, the bounds of the covenant extend as wide as the bounds of the nation. To be a part of the nation is to be a part of the covenant community. This stands in stark contrast to the Baptist view that God's covenant is not with any nation as a whole as it was with Israel, but only with members of each local church.\footnote{In this sense, Williams calls Israel “a non-such, unparallelled, and unmatchable” (Bloudy Tenent, 278).} Within a nation there could then exist several covenant communities. Violating the terms of that covenant community (local/gathered church) may lead to discipline and excommunication within the church, but Baptists would never discipline someone who had never been part of that covenant community. Hence, the Baptists would agree with Rutherford's conviction that only those \textit{within} the covenant may be held accountable and punished. Only, they would disagree about the scope of that covenant; namely, that it could extend over an entire nation, including even those who are unbelievers.

Rutherford was well acquainted with Roger Williams and other Baptist arguments against his position.\footnote{How well Rutherford understood the tenets of Baptism is dubious. After all he follows the trope of association Baptists with Antinomianism when he writes, “By this Argument Mr. Williams will give us no visible Church, but the Church of Anabaptists, consisting of sinless, regenerated, and justified men, who are beyond the courtesie of the Law, free grace, and a Redeemer, or pardon of [sins?]” (389, last word not legible).} He frequently quotes and references Williams’ \textit{Bloudy Tenent} as well as other Baptist writings against persecution such as Blackwood’s \textit{Storming of the Antichrist}.\footnote{See references to Williams’ \textit{Bloudy Tenent} (London: 1644) and Christopher Blackwood, \textit{The Storming of Antichrist} (London: 1644) in Rutherford, 334, 335, 387, 389, 410.} He even adopts Williams’ definition of persecution (“to molest any for their conscience is persecution”) and anticipates their objections.\footnote{Rutherford, 335.} He likewise recognizes that his argument for persecution rests on an analogy between Old Testament Israel and contemporary nations. Quoting Roger Williams, almost word for word, Rutherford anticipates that the Baptists will object that whereas “The state and national church of the Jews swore a covenant… that whosoever would not see the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whole nations or kingdoms now… [do not] follow
that pattern of Israel.”

The Baptists will object that “we should not swear such a Covenant” as a nation but only such as are “regenerated, and justified men” are covenanted with each other.

To Williams' argument that none but those that are regenerate may make such a covenant, Rutherford simply retorts, “We think Mr. Williams Arguments weak and Anabaptistical.”

Instead, Rutherford affirms the same kind of national Covenants are still in place:

But as for the substance of the service; the swearing of an oath, and religious Covenants, being of the law of nature, and the punishing of apostates from the doctrine of the Gospel, to which they have sworn… must be from the law of nature lying on us; we must by the same law be tied.

Rutherford’s response is telling. The basis for persecution is not only that it is endorsed in the Scriptures. Rather, it is endorsed in the Scriptures because it accords with the law of nature.

Although there is not time to develop the idea here, it seems that a significant reason for Rutherford’s insistence on unity between Old and New Testaments depends on his doctrine of natural law. He states, “That which is perpetually moral, and one act of Justice at all times and places, must oblige us Christians, and the Christian Magistrate, as well as the Jewish Rulers.”

To claim otherwise—that God’s view of toleration has changed between Old and New Testaments—would for Rutherford suggest that God’s moral law has changed, which is impossible based on Rutherford’s theory of natural law. Rutherford would not say that states are

395 Rutherford, 386-387. This is a paraphrase of Williams, Bloudy Tenent 187: “Tis true, the people of Israel, brought into covenant with God in Abraham, and so successively borne in Covenant with God, might (in that state of a Nationall Church) solemnly covenant and swear that whosoever would not seeke Iehovah the God of Israel, should be put to death, 2 Chron. 15. whether small or great, whether man or woman. But may whole Nations or Kingdomes now (according to any one title exprest by Christ Iesus to that purpose) follow that patterne of Israel and put to death all, both men and women, great and small, that according to the rules of the Gospel are not borne againe, penitent, humble, heavenly, patient?”

396 Rutherford, 387, 389.

397 Rutherford, 387.

398 Rutherford, 387. Italicis mine.

399 How could it be, he asks, that “blasphemy, and offering the sons to Molech, as the Indians do now, was then by the law of Nature, a dis-worship, or a false worship, punishable in Jews and heathen, but now it is not in any punishable by the sword at all” (189). Rutherford's rhetorical question seems to suggest that to say otherwise would be to violate the unity of the law of Nature.

400 Rutherford, 311.
bound to persecute heretics because heretics were persecuted in the Old Testament, but that both Old Testament and New Testament nations are bound to persecute heretics because it accords with the law of nature. Since persecuting false religion both accords with Scripture and with the law of nature, Rutherford finds Williams’ argument unconvincing that “the New Testament-dispensation is so spiritual that God will have no remedying of seducing, but by the spiritual armor of the word.” This view of Williams’, according to Rutherford, “is said without ground.”

**John Cotton and the Independents’ Argument for Persecution**

The differences between Presbyterians and Independents only became clearer as the 1640s wore on. Initially, there existed much diversity within “Presbyterian” views. The debate was over authority—where the authority of the church lay. The debate came down to two issues in particular: discipline and leadership. Who makes decisions in instances of church discipline and excommunication and who chooses the leaders and pastors of the church? Does that authority lie with individuals within the congregation, the civil magistrate, an external religious body of “presbyters,” or a bishop? The Ministers of the Westminster Assembly were in agreement that authority in discipline and the appointment of ministers did not lie with the civil magistrate or the bishop. But they disagreed over the authority, or “independency” of the congregation in relation to an external body of ministers—a so-called “presbytery.”

The three main publications of the Independents explain their views on the church and toleration: The *Apologetical Narration* (1643), *The Ancient Bounds* (1645), and John

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401 Rutherford, 311.
402 Rutherford, 311.
403 Powell, 248.
Cotton’s *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644).\(^{406}\) Nowhere do the Independents call for a complete religious toleration. Instead, they affirmed the spiritual authority of the civil magistrate over a church, while denying the spiritual authority of any one church (presbytery or episcopacy) over another. Goodwin and Nye explained that in publishing Cotton's *Keys* they hoped to shed light on their so-called “middle-way” between Presbyterianism and Brownism (separatism).\(^{407}\) For the Independents, the churches ought to be independent of any external spiritual authority, but still dependent and subservient to the civil magistrate.

In his *Keyes*, Cotton outlines four ways “which concern the civil peace,” wherein the local church is to be subject to the state. First, the church must submit to the civil magistrate in regard to civil matters or things of this life, such as lands, taxes, goods, and inheritances. This is hardly innovative or controversial. However, the second area in which the church is to be subject to the civil magistrate is regarding the “establishment of pure religion, in doctrine, worship, and government, according to the word of God...” There is, therefore, according to Cotton, a place for the civil magistrate to establish “pure religion.” This sounds like a line straight out of Calvin’s Institutes.\(^{408}\) As the basis for the authority of the magistrate over religion, Cotton turns to the Old Testament. He references the Kings of Judah and frequently cites Old Testament passages to demonstrate that “the establishment of pure religion, and the reformation of corruptions in religion, do much concern the civil peace.”\(^{409}\) He can thereby simultaneously


\(^{407}\) “The substance of this brief Extract from the Authors larger Discourse, is That very Middle-way (which in our Apologie we did in the generall intimate and intend) between that which is called Brownisme, and the Presbyteriall-government” (John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), intro, no pagination).

\(^{408}\) *Institutes* IV.xx.3: “I now commit to civil government the duty of rightly establishing religion” (p. 1488 in the McNeill edition).

\(^{409}\) Cotton cites several Old Testament passages, thereby showing where he is drawing his Biblical evidence from. 2 Chron. 14.3, 4, 5, 2 Chron. 15.8. to 16. 2 Chron. 17.6. to 9. 2 Chron. 19.3, 4, 2 Chron. 24.4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10. 2 Chron. 29.3. to 35. 2 Chron. 30.1. to 12. 2 Chron. 34.3. to 33, Judges 5.8. 2 Chron. 15.3, 5, 6. Hagg. 2.15. to 19. 2 Chron. 17.7, 8, 9. 2 King. 22.20. Ezra 7.23. Zach. 13.3.
assert that the civil magistrate is only to interfere in religion in ways that “concern the civil peace” and assert that the magistrate ought to punish false religion: namely because false religion concerns the civil peace. This is the clearest evidence that the fact that the Independents and the Presbyterians shared the same assumptions about Covenant Theology shaped the way both of them thought about the relationship between church and state. In the words of one historian, their argument for persecution still rested on an analogy between ancient Israel and Christian nations.\footnote{John Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution,” \textit{The Historical Journal} 41, no. 4 (December 1, 1998), 971.}

Cotton also places bounds on the authority of the state. The state is not to establish whatever religion it pleases, but only that true religion “according to the word of God...”\footnote{Cotton, 50. Again, this sounds like Calvin: “For when I approve of a civil administration that aims to prevent the true religion which is contained in God’s law from being openly and with public sacrilege violated and defiled with impunity, I do not here, any more than before, allow men to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God.” (\textit{Institutes} IV. xx. 3. p. 1488)} Magistrates are therefore to “stir up” churches by use of “civil punishments.” Nonetheless, in order to protect the integrity, purity, and witness of the church the civil magistrate may not “compel all men to come and sit down at the Lord's table, or to enter into the communion of the church, before they be in some measure prepared by God for such fellowship.”\footnote{Cotton, 51.} For to do so would be contrary to God’s law. Such forced entry of the unregenerate into the pure body of the church would not be a “Reformation, but a Dereformation of the Church.”\footnote{Cotton, 51.}

Only those qualified to be “Church-members” may have access into fellowship and the Lord's Supper.

Cotton is clear: the duties of the civil magistrate extend to “things civil” relating to “the civil peace.” However, nothing is more important for the “civil peace” than the “establishment of pure religion.” It is the duty of the magistrate, then, to take care that true religion is established and to punish false religion where necessary. The duties of the civil magistrate extend not only to

\footnote{Cotton, 50. Again, this sounds like Calvin: “For when I approve of a civil administration that aims to prevent the true religion which is contained in God’s law from being openly and with public sacrilege violated and defiled with impunity, I do not here, any more than before, allow men to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God.” (\textit{Institutes} IV. xx. 3. p. 1488)}

\footnote{Cotton, 51.}

\footnote{Cotton, 51.}
the second table of loving one’s neighbor, but also to the first table that relates to loving God. As the Independents explicitly state in *The Ancient Bounds* (1645), “We have committed to the magistrate the charge of the Second Table… But is that all? No, surely. He may enter the vault even of those abominations of the First Table.”

The Independents did not understand themselves to be supporters of toleration. In fact, in a sermon in 1645, Jeremiah Burroughs defended himself against such accusations, insisting, “I do not here stand to plead for liberty for every man to step up into the Pulpit that will be.”

Nor were the Separatists ignorant of the fact that the Independents were anything but advocates of toleration. Upon reading the *Apologetical Narration* in 1644, the tolerationist William Walwyn remarked that he was most surprised by the “nearness between them [the Independents] and the Presbyterians.” Roger Williams similarly saw little difference between the Presbyterian and Independent views on toleration, and remarked in strong language that the Independent “jumps with the Prelates, and though not more fully, yet more explicitly than the Presbyterians, cast[s] down the crown of the Lord Jesus at the feet of the civil magistrate.”

The only group that associated the Independents with toleration were themselves enemies of toleration: the Presbyterians. The historiographical error of identifying the Independents with toleration seems to be an overreliance on the inaccurate political writings of Thomas Edwards

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416 “Having heretofore met with an Apologetical Narration of Thomas Goodwin . . . I did with gladness of heart undertake the reading thereof, expecting therein to find such generall reasons for justification of themselves, to the world, as would have justified all the Separation. . . . But finding contrary to that expectation that their Apology therein for themselves and their Toleration was grounded rather upon a Remonstrance of the nearness between them and the Presbyterians, being one in Doctrine with them, and very little differing from them in Discipline, how they had been tolerated by other Presbyter Churches, and indulge with greater privileges, then the Separatists, how they differed from the Separatists, and had cautiously avoyded those rocks and shelves against which the Separatists had split themselves, confirming by these words, the people disesteem of Separatists, suggesting by that phrase of theirs, as if there were amongst the Separatists some dangerous by-paths or opinions, which they warily found, though no mention be made what they are, which is the worst sort of calumny (Wallwyn, 1-3. Cited in Zakai, 18).
and other extremists. Unfortunately, one of the reasons historians have thus misunderstood the toleration debate during this time period is that they have given too much weight to misleading primary sources. For example, the belief that the Independents actually favored toleration is an accusation made by enemies of toleration who sought to discredit the Independents in the eyes of the more conservative Presbyterians. Since authors of vitriolic pamphlets are probably the least suited to rightly characterize and understand the reasons and motivations for their opponents’ views, for historians to simply believe these characterizations will lead to a misunderstanding of the debate, the sides, and the reasons for opposing views. The same mistake is made by those who assume an affinity between toleration and Arminianism simply because opponents of toleration accuse those defending toleration of Arminianism. But this is as wrong as to assume that the English Baptists were actually Antinomians because they were called such. All of this goes to show that labels and accusations from the time are often untrustworthy.

What the Independents sought was toleration for themselves and for similarly orthodox independent churches within the establishment of a national church. The Independents’ political theory of how the church and state relate is not so different from the Presbyterian view. Both rely on a similar unity between covenants that maintains infant baptism as the New Covenant equivalent of Circumcision, and that Israel remains a binding model for the State in punishing false religion and promoting true religion.

Roger Williams and the Baptist Argument for Toleration

John Cotton entered into direct controversy on the issue of toleration as a result of the writings of his acquaintance Roger Williams. At some point in the 1630s, Williams wrote to Cotton asking his opinions on toleration. In *The Blody Tenent* (1644), Williams includes

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Cotton’s reply and structures his book as a response to Cotton’s argument for persecution. At the heart of Williams’ argument for toleration is the issue of authority. For Williams, the state is simply not authorized by God to persecute in matters of religion. By persecution, Williams means “to molest any for their conscience is persecution,” which he takes to be the equivalent of “spiritual rape.” Writing in response to the Dissenting Brethren’s Apologie Williams writes, “And oh! since the Commonweal cannot without a spiritual rape force the consciences of all to one Worship, oh that it may never commit that rape, in forcing the consciences of all men to one worship, which a stronger arm and Sword may soon (as formerly) arise to alter” (Williams, Queries of Highest Consideration [London: 1644], 3).

Since the “defence of religious coercion had rested foursquare on the analogy between ancient Israel and Christian nations,” Williams’ response must establish his case by contrasting the Old and New Testaments.

The whole point of The Bloudy Tenent is to show that “The state of the land of Israel, the kings and people thereof” are merely “figurative and ceremonial, and no pattern nor precedent for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow.” Accordingly, when magistrates justify their persecution of religious dissenters on the grounds that they are imitating Old Testament rulers, they “turn back the clock to a time forever lost” because Israel had no modern counterpart. In Williams’ words, Israel “was not a pattern for all lands: It was a non-such, unparalleled, and unmatchable.” Israel was a special nation in which the church and state were combined into a single institution ruled directly by God through mediators. However, since Christ’s coming, “God had dissolved the combination” of church and state in Israel. In fact, this dissolution “was in fact one of His purposes in sending Christ into the world.” Through the establishment of the New Covenant, “the Jewish church ceased to be the church of God; the

419 Writing in response to the Dissenting Brethren’s Apologie Williams writes, “And oh! since the Commonweal cannot without a spiritual rape force the consciences of all to one Worship, oh that it may never commit that rape, in forcing the consciences of all men to one worship, which a stronger arm and Sword may soon (as formerly) arise to alter” (Williams, Queries of Highest Consideration [London: 1644], 3).
422 Morgan, 92.
423 Williams, 278.
424 Morgan, 92.
425 Morgan 92.
Jews became an ordinary nation on a par with other nations; and the Israel of the Old Testament assumed a purely typological significance." As a result, “A combined church-state composed of Christians was an impossibility and Israel as a church-state could have no literal significance for man in the Christian era.” Now, in the “gospel-age,” the church and state are “independent” in function and in membership. The civil magistrate has been entrusted with the civil sword, which is “of a material civil nature, for the defense of persons, estates, families, liberties of a city or civil state, and the suppressing of uncivil or injurious persons or actions by such civil punishment.” By its “material nature” Williams is contrasting the corporeal or earthly duties of the state with the spiritual work of the church. The civil sword, Williams contends, “cannot according to its utmost reach and capacity… extend to spiritual and soul-causes.” This means that “the magistrate has no spiritual power over the church,” but only temporal power. And likewise, “the church has no temporal power over the magistrate,” but only spiritual power.

The church, on the other hand, is “constituted out of the Nations and Peoples now converted by this preaching.” Note here that Williams writes that the church is composed of those gathered “out of the nations” as opposed to the church being representative of the nation. Instead, the church is the gathered body of the baptized elect. Williams calls the church the “lily amongst the thorns.” The church is within a “city of country” yet it is distinct from the “Civil State, City or Country in which it is.” For Williams, excommunication is the strongest

426 Morgan 92.
427 Morgan, 93.
428 Williams, 120.
429 Williams, 79.
430 Williams, 79-80.
431 Williams, 121.
432 Williams, 165.
433 Williams, 94.
434 Williams, 94.
punishment that the church can inflict upon a blasphemer, idolater, or false prophet in the Gospel age.\textsuperscript{435} Temporal power is located exclusively with the state.

When Williams looked back at history, he concluded that much of the confusion over the church and the state resulted from Constantine’s establishing Christianity as the religion of Rome. According to Williams, Constantine’s coopting the church “began the great mystery of the church’s sleep, the gardens of Christ’s Churches turned into the wilderness of national religion, and the world.”\textsuperscript{436} Williams calls this age “the most unchristian Christendom.”\textsuperscript{437} Here Williams employs his favorite metaphor, the church being a pure garden and the world being a wilderness, which are intermixed only to the detriment of the church.\textsuperscript{438}

Along with his distinctions between the church and the state, Williams asserts a comprehensive doctrine of religious freedom that encompasses the followers of any religion. “It is the will and command of God, he writes, “that, since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-Christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries.”\textsuperscript{439} Now, this “permission” does not mean infallibility or that all are equally correct in their religious suppositions. Rather, it means that they must be “permitted” by the state “and that they [false religions and heresies] are only to be fought against with that sword which is only, in soul matters able to conquer: to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the word of God.”\textsuperscript{440}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[435] Williams, 206.
\item[436] Williams, 250.
\item[437] Williams, 250.
\item[438] Williams writes elsewhere, “Therefore lastly, I ask if this be not to turne the World upside down, to turne, the World out of the World, to pluck up the roots and foundations of all common societie in the World? to turne the Garden and Paradice of the Church and Saints into the Field of the Civill State of the World, and to reduce the World to the first Chaos or confusion” (241).
\item[439] Roger Williams, \textit{The bloudy tenent of persecution} [1644], in E.B. Underhill (London, 1848), 2.
\item[440] Williams, 2.
\end{footnotes}
Conclusion

Contrary to the dominating scholarly tradition of the twentieth century, the story of the development of religious toleration in England is far more complicated than a battle between the tolerant Independents and the intolerant Presbyterians. Instead, the Presbyterians and Independents alike, while disagreeing on ecclesiology, agreed over the duty of the civil magistrate to interfere in matters of religion and punish and suppress dissenters, blasphemers, and heretics. Their reasons for doing so were obvious: it accorded with the tradition of the church and with the precepts of the Old Testament. In particular, it was the general continuity of their Covenant Theology that enabled writers such as Samuel Rutherford and John Cotton to maintain the continual relevance of the Old Testament laws on civil governments in the present age. Furthermore, the practice of infant baptism brought all of society into a covenant community as extensive as the nation, obliging all members of society to fulfill the terms of the national covenant.

It took radical dissenters such as Roger Williams to challenge Rutherford, Cotton, and others’ interpretation of Scripture. On the basis of his Baptist Covenant Theology, which posited greater discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and rejected infant baptism, Williams argued that the Scriptural commandments for magistrates to persecute in matters of religion belonged to the Old Covenant alone; a covenant that had been fulfilled in Christ and no longer applied to Christians in the gospel-age. Through this he introduced a robust theory of religious toleration for all.
LEAVING A LEGACY—THE BAPTISTS AND LIBERALISM

The Gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution; but that the church of Christ should persecute others, and force others by fire and sword, to embrace her Faith and Doctrine, I could never yet find in any of the books of the New Testament.  

- John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689)

No single thinker is more credited with the ideas of political liberalism than the English philosopher John Locke. In many ways, the United States Constitution and system of government is directly connected to his writings, in particular his Second Treatise on Government (1689). His influence on James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and other framers of the constitution is well known. Yet discussions of the American founding often portray Locke as the non-religious or philosophical skeptical alternative to a “Christian,” or religious founding. For example, R.L. Bruckenberger wonders if the American founding is rightly seen as Puritan or Lockean, pitting the two against each other as mutually exclusive. Yet during his own day, Locke was not famous for his political philosophy. His Treatises on Government seemed

442 Bruckenberger writes, “The greatest luck of all for the Declaration was precisely the divergence and the compromise between the Puritan tradition and what Jefferson wrote. Had the Declaration been written in the strictly Puritan tradition it would probably not have managed to avoid an aftertaste of theocracy and religious fanaticism. Had it been written from the standpoint of the lax philosophy of the day, it would have been a-religious, if not actually offensive to Christians.” Raymond Bruckenberger, Images of America (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 93.
unoriginal and uninteresting. It was Locke’s epistemological and philosophical writings such as his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that garnered him fame.

The point of this chapter is not to attempt a thorough sketch of Locke’s religious beliefs, but rather, to note the similarities between Locke’s doctrines of the church and state and arguments about religious toleration and the writings of English Baptists a generation earlier. The similarities are uncanny. While John Locke was clearly not a Baptist, his theological views, like the Baptists, are generally seen as at odds with the theological orthodoxy of the time. While he did not construct a Covenant Theology of his own, his own political views are grounded in discourse and debate about the Old Testament and its relation to the present day. \(^{443}\) Like the Baptists, he is loath to flatten the Scriptures and squarely apply Old Testament laws to the present time, which often led to his being accused of Socinianism. This section ends by raising more questions than it provides answers, about the relationship between Baptist political theology and liberalism. Namely, to what extent was Locke influenced by the Baptists and other dissenting Protestants in England? What was the reason for the similarity between their arguments about church and state?

**Baptizing John Locke’s Liberalism**

Amidst the backdrop of temporally bleak but spiritually hopeful times of religious and political crisis in England, John Locke emerged onto the scene. \(^{444}\) Born in 1632 to a Puritan family, Locke grew up during one of the most volatile times in English history, including the English Civil War (1642-1649) and the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Despite his later theological deviations from Reformed Christianity, Locke’s upbringing and education was

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\(^{443}\) See in particular his *First Treatise on Civil Government* (1689).

\(^{444}\) A version of the following discussion of Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* was previously published as “Church-State Confusion and Schizophrenic Reasoning in *Everson v. Board of Education*” in *Utraque Unum* 7:2 (Spring 2014), 33-39.
steeped in Puritanism. Raised by a conservative Puritan family, Locke studied under the great Puritan divine John Owen, the head of Christ Church (Locke’s college at Oxford), and Vice-Chancellor of the University. His choice to study medicine over the expected route of ordination in the Church, however, surprised his family and marked the beginning of Locke’s break with his family heritage and Puritan tradition. 445

While in exile in Holland, in his Letter Concerning Toleration (1689), Locke calls the pursuit and practice of toleration “the chief characteristical mark of the true Church.” 446 Persecution, on the other hand, he calls both “contrary to the glory of God” and “to the purity of the Church.” 447 To defend these views he proceeds to define the distinct duties of function of civil government and of the church. 448 The state, Locke takes to be “a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests.” Namely, “life, liberty, health, and indolency of body…” 449 This definition says more in what it excludes than what it includes. Namely, for Locke, “the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concernments” and nothing further. As such, the important task of the “salvation of souls” lies strictly outside of its jurisdiction. 450

445 Locke John, Two Treatises on Government, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 19. Locke’s break from tradition can and has been often overstated. Political philosopher Leo Strauss famously criticized Locke’s anthropology He writes, “The Bible talks of man’s state before and after the Fall, but neither corresponds to a state of nature in which men were dependent only upon their own instincts and reason” (Strauss, Natural Right and History (1953), 215). On the other hand, another author writes, “Locke's writings are Christian to the core... modern liberal political thought continues to be religious, since it conceals an essentially theological structure in secular garb” (Jakob De Roover and S. N. Balagangadhar, “John Locke, Christian Liberty, and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration,” Political Theory 36, no. 4 (August 1, 2008), 540).

446 John Locke and David Wootton, Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 390.

447 Locke, 391.

448 “I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other.” (393) By using the word “religion” rather than church, Locke is not here implying a secular-religious dichotomy between the church and state reminiscent of what has been called a “naked public square.”

449 Locke, 393.

450 Locke, 394. “… all civil power, right, and dominion is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls, these following considerations seem unto me abundantly to demonstrate.”
Locke gives three reasons for why the civil magistrate should not be concerned with the care and salvation of souls. The first is that God has not granted that authority to the state. That is, God has never “given any such authority to one man over another as to compel anyone to his religion.” But the question remains, can the state promote religion? That leads to Locke’s second reason. The magistrate may promote religion, but only “by “use of arguments” and not by use of sword.” After all, Locke acknowledges that being a magistrate “does not oblige him to put off either humanity or Christianity” and “every man has a commission to admonish, exhort, convince another of error, and by reasoning to draw him into truth.” But there is a marked difference between persuasion and commanding, between “arguments” and “penalties.” The first is permitted, the second is not. The magistrate may not use his power “of the sword” for “the establishing of any articles of faith, or forms of worship, by force of his laws.” Laws are only effective to the degree that their violation invokes the threat of punishment by the state. It is this threat of punishment from the state that must not infringe on a citizen’s religious choices. Finally, Locke argues that to charge the civil magistrate with the care of souls would imperil those souls’ ability to be saved. Since, as Locke states, there is “one truth, one way to heaven,” what hope would there be for citizens born into a country blindly following religious laws of their political leaders? Since civil magistrates “are as much divided [in opinions in religion] as in their secular interests” most peoples would have no hope of attaining salvation if they followed only the religion of their nation.

451 Locke, 394. “The care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men.”
452 Locke, 394.
453 Locke, 395.
454 Locke, 395. Here it is unclear whether Locke is speaking of the magistrates promoting religion in his capacity as magistrate or his capacity as a regular citizen. That is, is the magistrate using his legislative privileges to advance religion? Locke’s meaning is ambiguous and there are reasons for either interpretation.
455 Locke, 395.
456 Locke, 396. Locke concludes, “that all the power of civil government relates only to men’s civil interests, is confined to the care of the things of this world, and has nothing to do with the world to come.”
The church, Locke defines as “a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls.”\(^{457}\) It is significant that in this definition Locke stresses here the voluntary nature of the church. That definition effectively precludes a national church. “Nobody is born a member of any Church” he says, “otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates…”\(^{458}\) In this, Locke sounds remarkably similar to the Baptist argument against Presbyterianism and infant baptism. Faith and salvation are not inherited, Locke says. One is not born into the church, in Locke’s schema, one must join voluntarily.

Locke seems to espouse a congregational-like polity when he defines the church as voluntary and based on the consent of all of its members. The laws, discipline, and officers are all authorized by “common consent.”\(^{459}\) Foreseeing an objection from non-congregational churches based on the argument of apostolic succession, Locke merely responds: “let them show me the edict by which Christ has imposed that law upon his Church.”\(^{460}\) Instead, he responds with Jesus’s statement in Matthew 18:20—the verse at the heart of Congregationalist arguments—“wheresoever two or three are gathered together in in his name, he will be in the midst of them.”\(^{461}\) Furthermore, Locke insists that the power of a church extends only to excommunication and not to physical force. “For force,” he writes, “belongs wholly to the civil

\(^{457}\) Locke, 396.  
\(^{458}\) Locke, 396.  
\(^{459}\) Locke, 397.  
\(^{460}\) Locke, 397. “Some perhaps may object that no such society can be said to be a true Church, unless it have in it a bishop, or presbyter, with ruling authority derived from the vey apostles, and continued down unto the present times by an uninterrupted succession. To these I answer, in the first place: let them show me the edict by which Christ has imposed that law upon his Church.”  
\(^{461}\) Locke, 397.
magistrate.” The power of the church, in contrast, is limited to church discipline, to “cast out” and for an offender to be “separated from the society.”

462 The church Locke describes is not a national church like the Church of England, but the voluntary church espoused by the Baptists and other dissenting Protestants. In fact, Locke’s arguments for toleration depend on his doctrine of the church and his doctrine of the state, which fall squarely along Separatist Puritan lines. What is most surprising is not Locke’s theological ingenuity or originality, but the lack thereof. He is simply restating Separatist Puritan and Baptist arguments, passages of Scripture, and understandings of church, state, and religious toleration. In fact, in some ways, Locke is even less liberal than many of the earlier Baptists for whom toleration was to be extended to Catholics and Atheists, groups to whom Locke denied toleration. 463 These views were considered “radical” and even worthy of censorship and punishment a generation earlier. But, as the similarity of Locke’s reasoning to that of the Baptists demonstrates, these arguments had become more popularized and accepted by the 1680s.

462 Locke, 399. “This is the last and utmost force of ecclesiastical authority: no other punishment can thereby be inflicted than that, the relation ceasing between the body and the member which is cut off, the person so condemned ceases to be a part of that Church.”
463 I am indebted to Jo Ann Moran Cruz for pointing out this passage in Locke to me. As early as 1612 Thomas Helwys stated on p. 69 of The Mistery of Iniquity, that regarding “them of the Romish religion we do freely profess that our Lord the King hath no more power over their consciences than over ours, and that is none at all… Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure in spiritual matters.”
CONCLUSION

Such as hold a National Church of God must needs disclaim Christ and follow Moses. Consult with Moses and the old Covenant or Testament, we ask, are you Moses or Christ’s followers?\textsuperscript{464}
- Roger Williams (1644)

This thesis has argued that the contrasting visions of church, state, and religious toleration among seventeenth-century Protestants during and after the English Civil War can best be understood only in terms of their disagreements over Covenant Theology. Disagreements on an ecclesiological and a political level over religious toleration and religious establishments were rooted in more fundamental disagreements over the nature of and relationship between the biblical covenants. The Baptists’ arguments for religious toleration and against an established church were not merely the result of being a persecuted minority in England. Their arguments were the logical implications of their Covenant Theology, since they understood that the Old Testament model of a nation in which church and state were united under a king, had been abrogated with Christ’s coming. God’s church was no longer tied to any nation, ethnicity, or political system. Rather it comprises all baptized believers of any nation into particular churches. For Christians to establish national churches and persecute dissenters on the basis of Old Testament laws, Baptists argued, was to miss the point of Christ’s coming altogether. Jesus did

\textsuperscript{464} Roger Williams, \textit{Queries of Highest Consideration} (London, 1644), 6.
not come to establish his Kingdom through force and temporal means, but to establish a church that pictures, previews, and points to the Kingdom that is already inaugurated, but not yet complete until Christ’s return.

In many ways, the Baptist vision of “religious toleration” and “religious freedom” was far more expansive than today’s hot-button issues over which “church and state” often seem to collide, such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and tax exemptions for religious institutions. For the seventeenth-century Baptists, “religious toleration” entailed a new approach to state and society that was accepting of pluralism and that saw religious and political diversity as a reality to be endured rather than a problem to be exterminated. For Baptists, to quote one of Jesus’ parables, the “wheat and the tares” would inevitably be mixed in the world until judgment.465 The True Church’s task was not to rip up all of the “tares” (false Christians) sown amidst the “wheat” (true Christians) in the world—but only to do so in the local church (Jesus explicitly states that His parable is referring to the world, not the church).466 “What have I to do with judging outsiders?” writes St. Paul.467 Similarly, the Baptists understood their charge to be to gather True Churches of True Believers in order to embody a prophetic witness to the watching world of Christ’s Kingdom. Their job was not to turn the world into Christ’s Kingdom—to “bring in” or “establish” the Kingdom as Amillennial paedobaptist and Post-millennial theologies have sometimes claimed. The task of individual churches and the universal church as a whole was to preview and point to Christ’s Kingdom in the purity of its membership, its preaching, and its unity.

This is the church of Christ in exile in Babylon, the early persecuted church in Rome, the historic Christian persecuted church around the world, and the church alive in the world today

466 Matthew 13:38: “The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.”
467 1 Corinthians 5:12.
from China to Africa. It is profoundly adaptable and content within whatever political condition it finds itself. Whether in persecution or in a time of temporary relief from persecution, its mission to point to and preview the Kingdom in the purity of its membership is unchanged.

While dogmatic about the membership in their churches, the Baptists nonetheless exemplified a “Reformed Catholicity” that was unafraid of denominational and doctrinal distinctives. Seventeenth-century Baptists could affirm that Presbyterians, Independents, Anglicans, and other Baptists were true Christians and gathered in True Churches, through rightly preaching the Word and rightly administering the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and baptism. Even while disagreeing about the exact nature and administration of these ordinances, they could recognize each other, encourage each other, and join together as a united force against Roman Catholicism and other deviations from true Christianity.

Nonetheless, Baptist Covenant Theology and the emphasis it entailed on guarding the purity of the church and the futility of trying to unify the entire nation under a single national church did not prove entirely unassailable. In the 1650s an apocalyptic movement of Puritans emerged that found some traction among Baptists. This movement, known as the Fifth Monarchist Movement, not only held to the common view of the time that the so-called “Fifth Monarchy” of Christ (built off of the Kingdoms described in the Book of Daniel) would be established by political power. That belief was common and for many it would come through parliament, the army, and the protectorate. What distinguished the Fifth Monarchists was their belief that Christ’s Kingdom would be established through the conflict between the saints and Cromwell’s Protectorate. Although the only military uprising of this movement was defeated in 1657, and it is not representative of seventeenth-century Baptists as a whole, it does carry with it several important lessons. First, it shows how Covenant Theology or the way one thinks about
the nature of abrogation between Old and New Testaments is not the only factor that matters for a denomination’s Political Theology. Eschatology matters too. If Covenant Theology provides the basic categories and limits of a Political Theology, these categories can be blurred, conflated, or demolished by an eschatology that predicts the imminent return of Christ and provides certain conditions that must be met before Christ’s return can occur. It is this fiery eschatological combination of (1) a set of attainable conditions to meet in order to “trigger” or “summon” Christ’s return and the beginning of the Millennium, and (2) a conviction that Christ’s return and the end of the world really are imminent, that make an eschatology politically radical. I have elsewhere called this combination “Radical Apocalypticism,” since it makes radical and often violent political engagement the most logical conclusion. This was unfortunately the case with the seventeenth-century Baptists whose Covenant Theology and Baptist principles were hijacked by radical apocalypticism. This ought to serve as a lesson for us today. Devout religious belief that is otherwise politically moderate can be hijacked by some forms of radical eschatology. In particular, any eschatology that outlines a set of attainable criterion to meet that will bring about an imminent end of the world will tend to be politically radical.

Although it has not been the direct subject of this research on the development of religious toleration in England in the seventeenth century, this research on the English Baptists nonetheless serves as a reminder that religion matters for the political world. Contrary to reductionist theories of human behavior, whether Marxist, Freudian, or Randian, religious beliefs can genuinely matter for people’s motivations, especially their political motivations, especially when studying the seventeenth century. But not only is religion important, it is equally important to understand that religion is not monolithic in its approach to politics. Scholars and writers who

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468 For a thorough defense of these two factors as explanatory variables for Protestant theology, particularly at the time of the Reformation see my essay “Prophetic Untimeliness: How Reformation Apocalypticism Inspired Political Radicalism” in *Utraque Unum* 8:1 (Winter 2015), 33-39.
paint religion in broad strokes and argue that “fundamentalism” is the same everywhere in its many manifestations do great harm and misrepresent reality. Instead, as the title of this thesis suggests, the irony is that it is the religiously intolerant (Baptists) who prove to be the most politically tolerant, at least in theory. The hard-won right for Locke, Jefferson, and subsequent thinkers to be religiously indifferent was not won chiefly by skeptics and deists but by religious fundamentalists, the kind you might not want to invite to a dinner party or be seen with in public. Furthermore, this research shows how religion can be harnessed for immense good or immense evil. After all, both the persecuted and the persecutors in this story did what they did as a result of deep-seated religious convictions.

As a result of highlighting how even minor differences between Baptists, Presbyterians, and Independents led to vastly different approaches to politics and religion, we learn more about the important diversity within religious traditions and the impact it can have on the state. Simply put, there is no lack of competing political alternatives within Christianity. The seventeenth-century Baptists harnessed the internal resources of their doctrinal distinctives in order to argue for their political philosophy that challenged the status quo. This is no less true for other religious traditions. Scholars of history and politics must understand that religion matters, and that it will never provide a monolithic approach to politics.

To conclude, while religious fundamentalism is often portrayed as the cancer of an otherwise healthy body politic, a wider historical lens complicates this narrative through counterexamples that illustrate how religious dogmatism and fundamentalism can actually work

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469 I am thinking here of so-called “New Atheist” works such as Sam Harris’ “Religion Poisons Everything” as well as more scholarly works such as Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby’s “Fundamentalism Project;” *Fundamentalisms Observed; Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education; Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance; Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements; Fundamentalisms Comprehended: Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004).
for an expansion, rather than suppression, of human rights. After all, it was the dogmatic and “intolerant” religious beliefs of the seventeenth-century Baptists that propelled them into conflict with the dominating political system in order to achieve a more just society that would guarantee the free exercise of religion for all. Not merely in spite of their religious convictions, but thanks to their religious convictions and fundamentalist Biblicism, the Baptists stood for equality, liberty, freedom of speech, and toleration—some of the foundational values of liberalism. Hence, this research demonstrates the myriad of ways in which theological arguments can be harnessed within a single tradition and the diversity of political outcomes that then follow. Whether we like it or not, religion is here to stay, and it continues to matter for politics.470 Living in increasingly pluralistic societies requires a more robust vision of toleration than the versions of secular liberalism in the twentieth century had imagined. Rawls’ insistence that comprehensive worldviews of religion must be categorically excluded from the table will not do. Achieving a robust religious toleration that can accommodate an increasingly pluralistic world requires a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between religion and politics, something we can learn from studying the impact of the seventeenth-century Baptists. The Puritans may have come to America to create an establishment of their own, but it was the Baptists who got their way in the end.

Glossary

Anabaptist: A derogatory term meaning “rebaptizer” used by the enemies of Anabaptists and Baptists throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to refer to those Christians who rejected infant baptism (paedobaptism) in place of believer’s baptism (credobaptism) by immersion. In seventeenth-century England, the term is often used as a term of abuse to refer to the Baptists.

Antinomianism: A theological term that literally means “against the law” and refers to those who reject God’s law, saying that obedience to it is superfluous. In seventeenth-century England it is often used along with the term Anabaptist to refer to the English Baptists, perhaps because of their approach to the Old Testament or because they were believed by some to hold to a view of Christian perfectionism.

Arminianism: The belief system espoused by followers of Dutch Protestant Theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), who rejected Calvinist doctrine and whose writings and teachings were condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). His teachings had some influence on the General Baptists who similarly rejected, in particular, the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement. (Also see Calvinism).

Baptist: Those Protestant Christians who reject the practice of infant baptism in favor of adult baptism upon profession of faith, also called “believer’s baptism” or “credobaptism.” Baptists believe that baptism by immersion in water upon profession of faith is the teaching of the New Testament and a prerequisite to church membership and the Lord’s Supper. (Also see General Baptists and Particular Baptists).

Calvinism: The Protestant theological system associated with John Calvin (1509–1564) that emphasizes the grace of God, God’s sovereignty in election, and the glory of God in all things. Calvinism took particularly strong roots in parts of Switzerland, Holland, among French Huguenots, the English Reformers, and among the Puritans in seventeenth-century England.

Congregationalists: That denomination of Protestants who adhere to a system of church government in which individual local churches are self-governing and largely autonomous. (Also see Independents).

Covenant Theology: A largely Calvinist scheme of theology that organizes the history of God’s dealings with mankind from Creation to Fall to Redemption to Consummation within the framework of God’s Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. Covenant Theology gained particular popularity among the Puritans, although it was developed significantly by Olevianus, Bullinger and many Dutch Theologians.

Donatist: A member of a schismatic Christian group in North Africa, formed in 311, who held that the church ought to consist of saints, not sinners and only those living a blameless life. They
argued that those Christian leaders who had compromised during the Diocletian persecutions were “trajtiores” and unfit to handle the sacraments. Baptists were sometimes compared by their opponents to Donatists for their emphasis on the purity of the church.

General Baptists: The branch of English Baptists that rejected Calvinist Theology.

Independents: The party during the Westminster Assembly and after the English Revolution that held to congregational church government instead of Presbyterian church government.

Magisterial Reformers: A term that refers to those Protestant Reformers that sought to reform the church through the use of the “magistracy,” such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

Mennonites: A Protestant sect originating in Friesland in the sixteenth century under the leadership Menno Simons that similar to the Baptists emphasized adult baptism. However, unlike the Baptists, they rejected military service and public office, instead embracing pacifism.

Particular Baptists: The branch of English Baptists that adopted Calvinist theology and broke off from the Puritans because of their convictions on believer’s baptism.

Presbyterian: That branch of Reformed Protestantism that arose in Scotland and England, following the tradition of John Calvin and the continental Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century. In England, they played a prominent role in the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649) and their theology is encompassed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

Reformed (Reformed Protestantism): A blanket-term that refers to those Protestants who, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, follow the tradition of Calvin and adhere to Reformed theology (predestination, among other things) in contrast to the Lutherans.

Socinianism: Socinianism was founded by the Italian Laelio Sozzini (1525-1562) and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604). Fausto’s book “De Jesu Christo Servatore” (1594) was perceived as a direct attack on orthodox Christology and soteriology. Socinianism gained creedal expression in the Racovian Catechism of the Polish Brethren in 1605. Some Socinians such as Crellius denied God’s knowledge of the future, effectively subverting any conflict of divine omniscience and human freedom. Socinianism is often seen as a precursor to Unitarianism for its denial of the Trinity. For this reason and others they were fiercely opposed by Reformed Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Westminster Assembly: The Westminster Assembly (1643 – 1649) gathered 120 of the most Protestant theologians from England and Scotland to reform the worship in place of the Church of England.
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