CHURCH AND STATE, 1550-1750: THE EMERGENCE OF DISSENT*

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Published in Robert Pope, ed., *The T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (T&T Clark, 2013),

chapter 4

The history of Dissent has usually been written with the end in view. Church and Dissent were to become separate entities, and historians of Anglicanism and Nonconformity were inclined to write a teleological history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, explaining why this came to pass. This was not an illegitimate approach, for one of the duties of the historian is to explain why things have come to be the way they are. But too often, weak teleology became strong teleology, and a sense of inevitability crept into the narratives.¹

Anglicans tended to assume that the current shape and temper of the Church of England was the natural state of things, an expression of 'the genius of Anglicanism'. When P. E. More and F. L. Cross assembled their major anthology of *Anglicanism* (1935), their selection of texts was heavily skewed towards the high church and latitudinarian traditions. Although a few Calvinist and Puritan icons made the cut (notably James Ussher and Richard Baxter), the anthology thoroughly obscured the Reformed identity of the Church of England under Elizabeth I and James I. Richard Hooker loomed large, but there was no space given to William Perkins, who in his own day was much more famous across Europe as a spokesman for the English Church.² Puritanism was seen as an alien force, quite out of keeping with Anglicanism. The same editorial principle was at work in a much more recent anthology, *The Anglican Tradition* (1991), which contained many medieval sources (such as the Fourth Lateran Council's statement on transubstantiation), but not a single extract from the continental Reformed divines who according to Eamon Duffy, 'played so decisive a role in shaping the emerging Church of England: no Calvin, no Bucer, no Bullinger'.³ As a result, the low church,

Reformed character of early Anglicanism was thoroughly obscured, so that the split between Anglicanism and Puritanism, Church and Dissent appeared to be entirely predictable. The latter was a malignant growth that was always going to be rejected by the Anglican body.

Ironically, this polarised account suited historians of Dissent, who were only too happy to underplay the early nonconformists' attachment to the Established Church, while exaggerating their affinities with modern Free Churches. The eighteenth-century historian Daniel Neal set the pattern by emphasizing the tyranny of the bishops, the persecution of the Puritans, and the affinity between Puritanism and Liberty. As a consequence, Puritanism was understood not as the cutting edge of the English Church, but as the natural precursor of Dissent.⁴ The story of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism was written as teleological denominational history, even though both groupings operated within the national church until 1662.⁵ Radical (and unrepresentative) Puritans like Thomas Helwys and Roger Williams were singled out as heralds of a liberal future, pioneers, prophets and apostles of religious freedom.⁶ John Owen was credited with instilling tolerationist principles in his pupil John Locke, even though Owen's toleration was strictly bounded and Locke had favoured religious uniformity at the Restoration.⁷ Milton and Cromwell were reclaimed as champions of 'civil and religious liberty' (language they themselves had popularised).⁸ The result was a Whig interpretation of history, which emphasized those aspects of the past that had triumphed in the present.⁹

In recent times, historians have become wary of teleological narratives, and more acutely aware of our tendency to read the present into the past. We are more likely to emphasize the foreignness and difference of the past. In this chapter, I want to offer an account of Church and State between 1550 and 1750 that does not point inexorably towards the separation of Church and Dissent. Instead, I want to stress that the story of Dissent can only be told in conjunction with the story of the Church of England. Until late in the seventeenth century, most Dissenters remained thoroughly invested in the state Church, and

deeply committed to the ideals of the magisterial Reformation. While the sects did sever links with the Established Church, the parting of the ways between the Church and a broader Dissent was a slow and painful business, one that was contingent rather than inevitable. What we call Puritanism was imbricated with Anglicanism. To set these abstractions at war with each other is to distort the story of post-Reformation England. Much of early Protestant Dissent was not dissent *from* the Church of England, but dissent *within* it and on its behalf. The religious settlement continued to be hotly debated long after 1559, and there were numerous attempts to remake the English Church – by Puritans and Laudians, Presbyterians and Independents, Latitudinarians and High Churchmen. Only after much struggle and various contingencies did Church and Dissent become rival ecclesiastical blocs.¹⁰

I. The Birthpangs of Protestant England

The eventual schism between Church and Dissent set England apart from other Protestant nations. By the eighteenth century, the Established Church had decisively distanced itself from the Reformed tradition, and Dissent had split into four denominations (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers), a situation without parallel elsewhere in Protestant Europe. But in the sixteenth century, the English were less exceptional. Henry VIII, of course, was unique, a monarch who broke with Rome while repudiating Luther. But England's *Protestant* Reformation was emphatically part of the broader European Reformation. During the reign of Edward VI (1547-53), the English Reformers were in close contact with their continental brethren. Indeed, the English state recruited three major European Reformed theologians – Jan Laski, Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli – appointing the latter two to chairs at Cambridge and Oxford respectively. Thomas Cranmer himself moved beyond his early Lutheran positions to a distinctly Reformed theology, eloquently expressed in his second Book of Common Prayer (1552) and the Forty-Two Articles (1553). And the Edwardian Reformation was unequivocally magisterial, complete

with a programme of state-sponsored iconoclasm that whitewashed the internal walls of churches and removed 'idolatrous' images. While the Radical Reformation made a fleeting appearance in the shape of Free Willers and anti-Trinitarians, neither fared well. In 1550-51, the Edwardian regime burned Joan Bocher and George van Parris at the stake for heresy. The executions prompted no public debate on the rights and wrongs of religious coercion. The Reformed were firmly committed to religious uniformity. And as in the reign of Henry VIII, church and state were unified under the supreme authority of the monarch.¹¹

Under Mary I (1553-58), Protestants suffered ferocious persecution, with almost three hundred being burned to death for heresy. Yet if this was a traumatic decade, it also witnessed a dramatic surge of Reformed (particularly Calvinist) expansion. This new wave of Protestantism swept across France, claiming up to 10 per cent of the population, and made great inroads into the Netherlands. In Geneva itself, Calvin consolidated his authority, both through the sheer force of his personality, piety and learning, and with the support of the state. In 1553, Geneva imitated the Edwardian regime by executing an anti-Trinitarian, the notorious Servetus. Calvinists persecuted others even as they underwent persecution themselves. Although a few – like Sebastian Castellio – denounced the killing of heretics, most Protestants shared the Augustinian assumption that rulers had been established as 'nursing fathers' to the church and 'agents of wrath' against its enemies. The numerous Reformed confessions drawn up in the mid-sixteenth century nearly all included an article on the civil magistrate. Here the Reformed repudiated the Anabaptist notion that Christians should not hold civil office; instead, they taught that Christian magistrates were like the kings of Old Testament Israel who overthrew idolatry and punished teachers of false religion.¹²

This union of church and state was reaffirmed by the Elizabethan settlement. England followed Zurich rather than Geneva, preferring an 'Erastian' policy of royal supremacy to the Calvinian view that the church should be independent of the state.¹³ Elizabeth I was determined to keep the church under a tight rein. A traditionalist kind of Protestant, her faith

had taken shape in the early phase of evangelical reform in the 1530s and 1540s and she was unenthusiastic about the more militant Reformed Protestantism that had swept the board in the 1550s. She insisted on clerical vestments and was a stickler for conformity to the Prayer Book. She disliked long sermons and would have preferred a celibate clergy. However, much to her chagrin, almost the entire episcopal bench resigned soon after her succession, and she was forced to replace them with convinced Reformers, a number of whom had spent the last few years in exile on the continent, participating in the advanced religious reforms of continental cities like Strasbourg and Basel. These Reformed bishops set the tone for the early Church of England. They were Calvinist in theology, believing that the doctrine of predestination was necessary to protect the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*. They read and recommended the writings of European Reformed divines, and identified strongly with their sister churches in the Reformed world – in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Hungary and elsewhere.¹⁴

Of course, in certain respects, the Church of England looked different to other Reformed churches. It retained the medieval ecclesiastical hierarchy and a traditional threefold model of ministry (bishops, priests and deacons). Although the Scots and the Hungarian Reformed Church also had bishops (or superintendents), the Reformed had adopted a fourfold model of ministry (pastors, doctors, elders and deacons). The English Church retained a prescriptive liturgy, whereas most Reformed churches had directories of worship that allowed the clergy to extemporise. The English clergy wore (or were meant to wear) traditional vestments, including the surplice and cope, whereas most other Reformed clergy wore plain academic robe. Finally, the Church of England retained cathedrals and choirs, which contrasted sharply with the plain congregational psalm-singing heard in most parishes.

It was the 'half reformed' character of the Elizabethan church that provoked the rise of 'Puritanism' and dissent. In the mid-1560s, a Vestiarian Controversy broke out over clerical

dress. The Puritan protestors were not marginal extremists – two of their leaders were heads of Oxford colleges. But the queen was appalled at the ‘diversity, variety, contention and vain love of singularity’ in the church, and demanded ‘uniformity of order’. The advocates of conformity argued that ‘things indifferent’ – *adiaphora*, or things not determined by Scripture – could be decided by the magistrate. Puritans either replied that the cope and the surplice were not indirectly condemned by Scripture, or that things indifferent should be left to individual conscience. In 1566, thirty-seven Puritan ministers were suspended from office and threatened with deprivation if they failed to conform within three months. In the event, however, most clergy compromised and very few were deprived of their livings. The Puritans were dissenters within the established church, and few of them could contemplate separation.¹⁵

When the next wave of Puritan agitation arrived in the 1570s, it was bolder and more far-reaching. Once again, though, it came from within the establishment, as a Cambridge divinity professor, Thomas Cartwright, gave a series of lectures calling for the government of the church to be remodelled along the lines of the New Testament church. Cartwright was removed from his chair and left England for Geneva. Two other presbyterians, John Field and Thomas Wilcox, published *An Admonition to Parliament* (1572), sparking the extended Admonition Controversy. Yet the title of their book indicates that theirs was to be a magisterial reformation, carried out by Parliament. And while both men were imprisoned for a spell, their pastoral ministry was soon resurrected thanks to powerful patrons like the Earl of Leicester and Lord Burghley. The struggle between the bishops and the presbyterians did become increasingly fierce, and by the late 1580s, the polemicist who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Martin Marprelate’ was denouncing Archbishop Whitgift as ‘a monstrous Antichristian Pope: a most bloudie oppressor of Gods saintes’. The new bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, succeeded in breaking the back of the presbyterian movement in the 1590s.

Although presbyterian ideas continued to circulate among some Puritan clergy, most learned to live with bishops and work effectively within the Established Church.¹⁶

A small number of radical Puritans, however, became so disaffected with the national Church that they separated to form pure congregations. Separatism was brutally suppressed by the authorities. A royal proclamation against Robert Browne and Robert Harrison in 1583 described them as 'lewd and evil disposed persons ... ready to violate and break the peace of the church, the realm, and the quietness of the people'. Separatism was not mere religious opinion, it was a seditious breach of civil order. Many separatists were imprisoned and a number were executed, including John Greenwood, Henry Barrow and John Penry in 1593.¹⁷ Because separatists lived in the fear of their lives, many migrated to the Netherlands, especially during the reign of James I. It was among these exiles that English Puritanism took its most radical turn, as John Smyth and Thomas Helwys adopted believer's baptism. Smyth eventually joined a Mennonite sect, the Waterlanders (identifying explicitly with the continental Radical Reformation) while Helwys returned to England, founding the first English Baptist church in Spitalfields in 1612.¹⁸

With the separatists and the Baptists we see a gulf opening up between Church and Dissent. But these were tiny groups, entirely unrepresentative of the mainstream of English Puritanism. The vast majority of the godly remained within the church. Even the arch-separatist, Robert Browne, returned to parish ministry, only finally losing his living during the Laudian crackdown on nonconformity in the 1630s. Moreover, the main separatist leaders before the Baptists continued to accept some of the key assumptions of the magisterial Reformation, including the duty of Christian magistrates to suppress idolatry and punish heresy. Dissatisfied with their current magistrates, they refused to 'tarry for the magistrate', and proceeded to reform the church from the grass roots. But they retained the ideal of the godly state.¹⁹ Smyth and Helwys, by contrast, issued sweeping condemnations of religious coercion. Probably influenced by Dutch multi-confessionalism and by the Mennonites, they

demanded the toleration of all religions. 'Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes, or whatsoever it appertynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure', wrote Helwys.²⁰ This resounding call for religious liberty would eventually become synonymous with Dissent.²¹ In 1612 it was highly eccentric.

II. A Church Divided

By calling for radical reform of the Church of England and even breaking away from it, Puritans provoked a fierce backlash. And from the 1590s onwards, anti-Puritanism would serve to legitimise a new style of conformist churchmanship that sought to distance the Church from the Reformed tradition. Historians have struggled to find a name for the advocates of this hierarchical and sacramentalist tendency within the established church. At the time, they came to be called Arminians and eventually Laudians, and more recently they have been labelled avant-garde conformists or high churchmen. Among them we can count famous figures in the Anglican tradition like Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker, along with less celebrated divines like John Overall, Samuel Harsnet, Hadrian Saravia and Peter Baro. They first rose to prominence during the anti-puritan drive of the 1590s, in what has been called 'the Anglican moment'.²² The label 'Anglican' can be misleading, for in many respects these figures were themselves dissenters, as hostile to the status quo as the presbyterians. They simply wanted to pull the Church in the opposite direction to the Puritans – away from the Reformed churches. For them, the English Church was (or was meant to be) unique, and they lamented its drab services, its low view of the sacraments, its predestinarian doctrine, its warm relations with continental Calvinists, its nonconformist clergy and their populist appeals to the laity. The Church of England, they believed, should aspire to something better, something more elevated. It should be the perfect embodiment of patristic Christianity, it should reinforce the dignity and authority of its bishops, it should rediscover 'the beauty of

holiness', and it should emphasize the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In mapping out a unique identity for the Church of England, these divines were busy inventing 'Anglicanism' as something set apart from the vulgar Reformed churches of the continent.²³

Initially, these would-be reformers of the Church were no more successful than their Puritan enemies. The majority of the bishops were staunchly Reformed in their theology and ecclesiastical identity, and feared that this avant-garde tendency was intent on reversing the Reformation. Barrett and Baro's careers were ruined by their reckless attacks on Calvinist predestinarianism, and Howson's progress was also damaged. Much of Hooker's great work, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, remained unpublished, and only in later years would he acquire the reputation as the supreme exponent of Anglicanism. The Church's centre-of-gravity remained with the conformist Calvinists, men like George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1611 to 1633, and his brother Robert, bishop of Salisbury and author of a major work in defence of William Perkins' Calvinist and anti-Catholic apologia for the English Church. Although James I was attracted to high church clergy like Lancelot Andrewes, the king remained firmly committed to Calvinist orthodoxy, sending a delegation to the Synod of Dort in 1618 which joined in the condemnation of the Dutch Arminians.²⁴

Because the Church of England remained within the Calvinist international, the vast majority of Puritans remained within the Church.²⁵ Some Puritan clergy were disciplined or suspended for nonconformity – for refusing to wear clerical vestments, or use the sign of the cross in baptism, or require kneeling at communion. Others were discreet in their nonconformity, or were indulged by sympathetic Calvinist bishops. And many 'moderate Puritans' poured their energies into pastoral work.²⁶ Frustrated in their drive to reform the church's government and liturgy, they learned to make the best of their ample opportunities within a half-reformed church. If Puritanism as a movement of ecclesiastical reform was derailed in the 1590s, Puritanism as 'the first Protestant Pietism' was thriving.²⁷ The godly clergy pioneered 'a hotter sort' of Protestantism, marked out by a strenuous programme of

voluntary religion beyond the parish services. It involved 'gadding' to hear the sermons of Puritan incumbents and lecturers, reading godly books, intensive personal prayer and fasting, family worship and psalm-singing, and gathering in small groups and conventicles. This kind of fervent Protestant religion took hold in numerous parishes across England. Towns like Dorchester and Banbury became renowned for their godliness. Cambridge colleges like Emmanuel and Christ's produced several generations of eager and talented Puritan clergy. And moderate Puritans learned to work with bishops, defending Reformed orthodoxy and participating in the translation of the Authorised Version of the Bible in 1611. Under James I, Puritanism appeared to be not an oppositional movement, but the cutting edge of English Protestantism. Only a tiny minority seceded, and according to Patrick Collison, there seemed little prospect of a major schism between Puritanism and Anglicanism, Church and Dissent.²⁸

Events, however, would intervene. First, there was the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in 1618. It began when the Calvinist nobles of Bohemia revolted against the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor and offered the crown to James I's son-in-law, Frederick of the Palatinate. Puritans and many conformist Calvinists believed that England should support the Calvinist rebels and the Calvinist Palatinate, and were deeply disturbed when the king stood on the sidelines and watched as the revolt was crushed and the Palatinate was sacked. Increasingly, the king turned to the high church 'Arminians', who had little sympathy for continental Calvinists and the highest reverence for the authority of kings. The elevation of this high church faction was accelerated when Charles I succeeded his father in 1625. By 1628, their rising star William Laud had been made bishop of London, and in 1633 he succeeded George Abbot as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The rise of the Laudians was accompanied by a fresh assault on Puritanism. As the godly clergy came under increasing pressure for nonconformity, some decided to emigrate. As in the early seventeenth century, a number chose to go to the Dutch republic, where they could establish godly congregations undisturbed by the authorities.²⁹ But there was now a

new option – America. In 1619-20, a group of separatists, later lionised as the Pilgrim Fathers, established a colony at Plymouth in New England. By the mid-1620s, leading Puritan aristocrats like Lord Saye and Sele and the Earl of Warwick, were exploring the possibility of colonisation in the West Indies. This eventually came to fruition in the short-lived Providence Island colony.³⁰ But the most successful venture was launched by the Massachusetts Bay Company. Between 1628 and 1640, during the Great Migration, around 15,000 English settlers moved to Massachusetts, with seventy-six Puritan clergy among them. Unlike the Pilgrim Fathers, the Massachusetts colonists were not separatists. They continued to profess loyalty to the Church of England, and when the opportunity came to reform it in 1640, many returned to their homeland. In Massachusetts, they were theoretically under the jurisdiction of the bishop of London, but since he was three thousand miles away, their congregations were essentially autonomous. They introduced a system of church membership, which was only open to those who professed faith and showed evidence of conversion in their godly lives. This was a radical departure from English arrangements, where all parishioners were members of the church by virtue of their baptism. But the Massachusetts Congregationalists continued to practice infant baptism and their meeting houses functioned as parish churches, with the whole population expected to attend. In line with the magisterial Reformation, the civil authorities had the power to punish heresy and blasphemy. The churches of Massachusetts were still established, state churches.³¹

Some Puritans, however, were moving in more radical directions. The godly clergy had forged a hot Protestant subculture in which the laity were galvanised and mobilised. It proved difficult to control, producing a troubling succession of exorcists, prophets, heresiarchs, lay preachers, sectaries and controversialists.³² On both sides of the Atlantic, Puritanism was troubled by antinomian controversies over law and grace.³³ There were signs that its energies were all too fissiparous. The Laudian decade was radicalising the godly, turning them towards outright dissent. Separatism was growing, and a few separatists were baptised as adult

believers, forming the first Calvinistic Baptist congregations. Like the General Baptists, they were few in number, but they reflected a growing militancy.³⁴ There was widespread outrage in 1637 when three leading Puritans – a minister, Henry Burton; a lawyer, William Prynne; and a doctor, John Bastwick – had their ears cropped and were branded with the letters ‘S.L.’ for seditious libel against the bishops. Moderate Puritans had once come to terms with bishops, but with hardline conformists in power, they were rapidly becoming more sceptical. This was especially so after the Glasgow General Assembly abolished episcopacy in Scotland at the end of 1638, held in the wake of the Covenanter revolt against the imposition of a Scottish Prayer Book. The situation now looked ominous, and the setbacks of Protestant forces in the Thirty Years War contributed to a sense of apocalyptic foreboding. A group of leading noblemen – led by the Puritan Earl of Warwick and the Calvinist Earl of Bedford – began plotting against the Laudian regime. When Charles I failed to suppress the Covenanter revolt in the First Bishops War of 1639, he found himself caught between Scottish rebels and an English fifth column.³⁵ In 1640, he had no choice but to recall Parliament for the first time in eleven years. His Personal Rule was over, and the struggle for a new religious settlement was underway.

III. The Puritan Revolution, 1640-60

The Elizabethan settlement of 1559 had lasted for eight decades, but it had always had its discontents. For Puritans, it was only ‘halfly reformed’; for Laudians, it was too Reformed by half. The Puritans were now in the ascendancy. The Short Parliament of April-May of 1640 witnessed fierce attacks on the high church bishops, and when the king lost the Second Bishops’ War to the Covenanters in the summer of 1640, the Laudian experiment was halted in its tracks. The Long Parliament that assembled in November of that year was to sit until 1653, presiding over a religious revolution, one that historians have dubbed ‘The Puritan

Revolution'. Puritans, dissenters and nonconformists now became the establishment, and they were determined to remake the Church of England.³⁶

This is a vital point, easily missed. We are so accustomed to pitting an oppositional Puritanism against an establishment Anglicanism that we forget that Puritans were the establishment in the mid-seventeenth century. We know that the Puritan reformation of the national church ended in failure, and so we think of the mid-seventeenth century as the period when the great dissenting denominations were formed – the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers. But that was not the goal, at least for the vast majority of English Puritans. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists were not merely interested in founding denominations; they aimed higher – at the reform of the national Church.

Historians have sometimes talked as if the Church of England was driven underground in the 1640s and 1650s.³⁷ While happy to refer to 'the Interregnum Church' or the 'Cromwellian Church' they have been clear that this was not 'the Church of England', an entity only 'restored' or 're-established' with the monarchy after 1660.³⁸ Some contemporaries took the same view, insisting that the removal of bishops, canons and prayer book entailed the death of the Church. In December 1660, the Earl of Clarendon praised the English Church as 'the best and the best-reformed church in the Christian World'. It had been 'buried so many years, by the boisterous hands of profane and sacrilegious persons'; now, God had 'miraculously...raised it from the grave'.³⁹

Reformed Protestants indignantly rejected this claim. A year before the Restoration, Richard Baxter chided those advocates of prelacy who 'confidently...appropriate the title of the Church of *England*'. Militant anti-Calvinists like Thomas Pierce pretended to follow the Church of England, when in reality they had deserted it.⁴⁰ To the question 'where is your Church of England now?', Baxter retorted: 'it is living still'.⁴¹ Far from dying or disappearing, the Church was being reformed and renovated. The Puritan ambition was that England's state

Church (the *ecclesia Anglicana*) would finally assume its providential role as the first among equals, the purest of Europe's Reformed churches, the spearhead of the Protestant cause. The Puritan Revolution was a second Reformation of the Church of England.⁴²

As such, it was a *magisterial* Reformation. Its headquarters were in Westminster, seat of the Houses of Parliament. Here, the politicians observed forty-two monthly fast days between 1642 and 1649, days when they listened to long sermons from the country's leading Puritan divines who urged them to build the temple of the Lord like Solomon or restore Jerusalem like Ezra and Nehemiah. From here there issued a constant stream of ordinances and statutes for the reform of the English Church and people.⁴³ In 1641, Parliament ordered churchwardens to reverse Laudian 'innovations' by removing communion rails, altars, crucifixes and images from parish churches. State-sanctioned iconoclasm, such a marked feature of Calvinist reformation, and so prominent under Edward VI, was happening once again. In 1643, Parliament signed the Solemn League and Covenant with the Scottish Covenanters, agreeing to reform the English church 'in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches'.⁴⁴ In 1644, it proscribed the Book of Common Prayer, replacing it in 1645 with a new Directory of Public Worship. In the same year, Archbishop Laud was beheaded on Tower Hill, and in 1646, the Westminster Parliament abolished episcopacy.

Westminster was also the venue for 'the Assembly of Divines', the body tasked with advising Parliament on the reform of the national church. The Assembly met from 1643, and although the majority of its members were divines, it also had thirty lay representatives from among peers and MPs. It was Parliament's largest standing committee, a reminder that this was an Erastian reformation, on which the politicians had the final say. The Assembly drew up a new directory of worship to replace the Prayer Book, a new confession of faith, catechisms, and a form of church government which advocated a presbyterian system. Parliament

ensured that the final settlement secured lay control of the church, and the clericalist ambitions of many of the Assembly's divines were curtailed.⁴⁵

Had English Puritans united behind this Erastian-Presbyterian programme it would have had broad appeal. Few tears had been shed for the Laudians, and there was widespread agreement that the Church needed to reassert a robust Reformed Protestant identity. Of course, the abolition of bishops and liturgy had been deeply controversial. While many agreed that the power of bishops should be reduced and the liturgy reformed, it came as a shock to see them removed altogether. There was powerful grass roots nostalgia for the Prayer Book.⁴⁶ And the ejection of over two thousand beneficed clergy from their livings testified to the radicalism of Puritan reform.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, once Parliament had won the Civil War, the prospect of a stable settlement was alluring. If the godly had coalesced around the Assembly's recommendations, it could have become a reality.

Instead, Puritan reformers became bitterly divided. In the Westminster Assembly itself, a small minority (the Dissenting Brethren) had objected to elements of Presbyterianism, and argued in favour of Congregationalism – self-governing churches made up of the godly rather than the whole parish. Outside Westminster, in the City of London and elsewhere, radical Puritanism flourished. Separatists and Baptists established numerous congregations, and (perhaps more importantly) they acquired notoriety through pamphleteering and preaching.⁴⁸ Heterodox ideas were openly aired, and England appeared to have its own Radical Reformation.⁴⁹ Presbyterian divines demanded the suppression of heresy and schism, calling on godly magistrates to imitate Old Testament kings like their sixteenth-century forbears. But they were countered by a vigorous campaign for religious toleration, involving radical Puritans like John Milton, Roger Williams, John Goodwin and William Walwyn. Tolerationists threw into question some of the fundamental assumptions of the magisterial Reformation tradition. In particular, they started to deny that the magistrate had coercive

powers in matters of religion. Taking up the slogan 'liberty of conscience', they argued that even ill-informed consciences ought to be respected.⁵⁰

This would not have mattered had radical Puritans been isolated and denied political support. But by the mid-1640s, an Independent coalition had formed that included some powerful Westminster politicians (like Sir Henry Vane the younger, former governor of Massachusetts) and military commanders (like Oliver Cromwell). The Independents supported toleration (though they differed on how far it should extend), and were wary of, if not hostile to, the Scottish Covenanters. And they quickly became dominant in Parliament's armies, reorganised in 1645 as the New Model Army. Although the political Presbyterians were the majority at Westminster, they had lost control of the army by 1647, when it was in open revolt. After it won the Second Civil War against the king in 1648, the army purged Parliament. In January 1649, Charles I was put on trial and executed for treason.⁵¹

The Presbyterian reformation was now stymied, though not as emphatically as its Laudian predecessor. But where did this leave the national church? Here the triumphant Independents were deeply divided between radical and magisterial impulses. For radicals like Milton, Williams and their friend Vane, the best thing the state could do was to leave the church alone. Interfering magistrates had been the bane of Christian history, and religious coercion was the tool of Antichrist.⁵² This radical Puritan defence of religious liberty was much celebrated by later Dissenters, but it was heavily contested even among Independents. At times, John Owen could sound like Roger Williams, but he remained more attached to traditional Protestant ideals. Godly magistrates should uphold true religion by ensuring that orthodox teachers were placed in parishes, and by using their power to punish heresiarchs (like the anti-Trinitarian John Biddle).⁵³ Influenced by Henry Ireton and then by Owen, Cromwell was firmly committed to magisterial reformation. The Cromwellian religious settlement maintained the parish churches and tithes, and set up a system of Triers and

Ejectors, the former to examine new clergy, the latter to remove the politically, morally or theologically unsound.⁵⁴

The great majority of the godly – and the overwhelming mass of their clergy – remained within the Church of England. Presbyterians, though deeply frustrated by the failure of their own system, soon participated as Triers and Ejectors. They deplored the regicide and the proliferation of sects and heresies, but recognized that the Cromwellian settlement offered real opportunities. Richard Baxter lamented the rise of the New Model Army and the triumph of the Independents, but he also looked back on the 1650s as a golden moment. Through his writings and his regional associations, he tried to transform the parish ministry into a dynamic force for the evangelization of England. The Congregationalists, of course, had a formative influence on Cromwell's religious policy, although they constituted only a small proportion of the parish clergy. John Owen rejected the concept of a 'national church' on the grounds that the only true churches were local congregations, but he worked hard (though unsuccessfully) to draw up a confession of faith that would be binding on all parish ministers; he and Philip Nye were satirically compared to the archbishops of Canterbury and York. The Congregationalists did assemble gathered churches beyond the parish, voluntary fellowships of the godly. Yet many of them also held parish livings, and they remained committed to parochial and national reformation.⁵⁵ Recent research has suggested that their Savoy Confession of 1658 was no narrow denominational project, but a response to the Humble Petition and Advice, which had mandated a national confession of faith.⁵⁶ Although the Baptists were mostly separatists, even they had pastors who doubled as parish clergy. Indeed, several Baptists – including John Tombes and Henry Jessey – sat on the national committee of Triers, examining men for the public ministry.

With hindsight, of course, the Puritan Revolution can be seen as the crucible in which denominational identities began to form. The Westminster Assembly produced the seminal texts of later Presbyterianism; Congregationalists and Particular Baptists drew up confessions

of faith that revised Westminster's; and Quakers emerged as a brand new movement, growing rapidly from a standing start to as many as 60,000 by 1660. Most Baptists and all Quakers stood outside the established Church. Quakers, in particular, experienced persecution, from both mobs and officials. In 1656, after a ten-day debate in the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament, their most extravagant minister, James Nayler, was sentenced to be branded, flogged, bored through the tongue with a hot iron, and imprisoned.⁵⁷ Altogether around two thousand Quakers were imprisoned by local magistrates.

Yet Cromwell himself was averse to persecuting the Quakers, and he regarded Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists as godly brethren. In the 1650s, these groups were the insiders; the true Protestant dissenters were the dissident episcopalians, who resorted to clandestine ordinations and illegal conventicles using the Prayer Book, some of which were disrupted by the authorities. The Church of England was under Puritan hegemony, and at the height of Cromwell's Protectorate, the people we call 'Anglican' royalists despaired of the future.⁵⁸ In 1657, when he was offered the Crown and re-inaugurated as Lord Protector, Oliver was not yet sixty years old, and it was hard to imagine an imminent restoration of the Stuarts and the bishops.

IV. Church and Dissent in the Restoration, 1660-88

This, however, was exactly what transpired in 1660-62, soon after Cromwell's unexpected demise in 1658. Suddenly, finally and irreversibly, Puritans became Dissenters. Presbyterians had eagerly backed the Restoration, anxious to end the anarchic constitutional and religious experiments of 1659. But they had hoped – even expected – to continue where they belonged, within the parishes, within the national Church. In their own eyes, they were establishment men, utterly distinct from the wild sectaries who had supported the regicide and disrupted the unity of the parish. To many of their countrymen, however, they were the ministers whose incendiary sermons had sparked the Civil War and unleashed all that followed. The regicide,

the sects, the war and the chaos of the preceding decades were blamed on the Puritan ministry, hundreds of whom were unceremoniously ejected from their parishes in 1660. The Presbyterians, however, still held out hope of a favourable settlement. Several had been offered bishoprics and while Baxter and Edmund Calamy declined, Edward Reynolds accepted the see of Norwich. In October 1660, the Worcester House Declaration suggested generous terms of accommodation for the Puritans, though its status was unclear. In April 1661, twelve leading Puritans met with twelve episcopal clergy at the Savoy Conference to discuss liturgical revision. Baxter took the provocative step of presenting a new Reformed liturgy, which was firmly rebuffed by the conference convenor, Gilbert Sheldon, who was determined to restore the Prayer Book.⁵⁹

Sheldon and his allies prevailed, and he became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1663. His anti-Puritanism resonated powerfully with the Cavalier Parliament which was to sit from 1661 to 1679. It was dominated by Anglican royalists who were in no mood to compromise with the zealots who had preached up the Great Rebellion. In December 1661, they passed a Corporation Act, which required all civic office holders to submit to a sacramental test. Then MPs trained their sights on nonconformist ministers. The Act of Uniformity (1662) required all clergy to renounce their non-episcopal ordinations and the Solemn League and Covenant, and to give full assent to the Book of Common Prayer. Altogether, almost two thousand Puritan clergy were removed between 1660 and 1662.⁶⁰

With hindsight, we can see that it was a decisive parting of the ways between Church and Dissent. Before the Civil Wars, 'nonconformists' had been parish clergy who scrupled at certain ceremonies; now they were ejected ministers. This wholesale purge of the Puritan ministry was a dramatic break with the Church's past, something that is obscured when we talk of the Church being 'restored' or 're-established'. This was no longer the Church of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century – by expelling its Puritan tendency more thoroughly than Laud had ever dared, the Church was realigning itself and striking out in a new direction.

Increasingly, its Reformed identity would be downplayed, its uniquely Anglican identity celebrated. The restoration of the bishops and the liturgy can obscure the fact that this too was a second Reformation.

Other legislation was designed to shut down the religious marketplace that had opened up under Cromwell, reasserting the monopoly of the established church. During the 1650s, even Quaker meetings were legally permissible; under the Quaker Act (1661) they were outlawed. The Conventicle Act (1664) prohibited any adult from attending a nonconformist meeting of five or more people outside the household. The Five Mile Act (1665) banned ejected ministers from coming within five miles of their former parish or any corporate town. The second Conventicle Act (1670) was more draconian than the first, with heavier penalties for nonconformist clergy and incentives for informants.

The enforcement of these laws varied considerably across the Restoration era.⁶¹ Chronologically, persecution was intense during the first decade when there was considerable fear of a Dissenter revolt led by disbanded New Model Army soldiers. It levelled off during the Cabal ministry (1667-73) which supported Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, before intensifying under the Earl of Danby in the mid-1670s, who persuaded the king to align himself more firmly with the Church party. In the Exclusion Crisis (1678-81), Dissenters experienced a new period of relief, as public anxiety focussed on a Catholic plot and the Whigs took advantage. But the association of Dissenters with Exclusion and Whig radicalism provoked a Tory-Anglican reaction after 1681, the nadir of nonconformist fortunes. As in the early 1660s, the worst persecution coincided with fears that civil war might break out again. Relief only came with the Declarations of Indulgence issued by James II in 1687 and 1688.

Persecution fluctuated according to geography and denomination. In many communities, local magistrates were sympathetic to Dissent, and some bishops favoured a policy of lenience too. Elsewhere, the law was rigorously implemented. As for the denominations, militant Anglicans tended to see all Dissenters as sectaries and schismatics,

but others recognized that there was a broad spectrum extending from moderate Presbyterians to radical Quakers, with Congregationalists and Baptists somewhere in between. Presbyterians like Baxter acknowledged that Quakers bore the brunt of the repression, though no group was immune.

While the Restoration state stopped short of using the death penalty against dissenters, persecution was fierce. Thousands were heavily fined or had property sequestered, with a good many suffering financial ruin. Thousands were also imprisoned. Among the Quakers alone, it has been estimated that as many as 11,000 went to gaol between 1660 and 1686, and around 450 died as a result of their sufferings. Among the Quaker leaders who met their death in prison were Richard Hubberthorne, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, young men who had played a key role in creating the national movement. Nor was imprisonment reserved for the sects alone. In 1682, at the start of the Tory Reaction, fifty-two Presbyterians were consigned to Bristol gaol together with eighty-six Quakers, 'almost stifled' with up to thirty in a single room. Over 200 of the ejected clergy served time in Restoration prisons, including Richard Baxter. In this respect, at least, the persecution of the Puritan clergy in the Restoration was harsher than that inflicted on their Anglican counterparts during the Civil War era. In its scale and intensity, this was a persecution of Protestant by Protestant unparalleled in seventeenth-century Europe.

Despite this, there is a danger in viewing Restoration Puritanism through the lens of a denominational future' rather than 'through the lens of a dynamic and unsettled national church past'.⁶² As Mark Goldie observes, 'many, perhaps most, of the ejected ministers were careful to maintain their loyalty to the national Church', while 'the great majority of the Dissenting laity were likewise partial conformists'. As a consequence, 'the boundary between the Church and moderate Dissent' was 'highly porous'.⁶³ Quakers and most Baptists were adamantly separatist, but even among the Baptists there were exceptions – John Tombes, the former Trier, 'came constantly' to Edward Fowler's parish church in Salisbury, 'heard

common prayer and received the sacrament kneeling'.⁶⁴ Congregationalists were divided over whether it was legitimate to attend the Established Church to hear sermons – John Owen and William Bridge argued strenuously against such a compromise, but Philip Nye thought it a duty to do so, though he agreed that it was wrong to join in Common Prayer and take the Sacrament. Some Presbyterian clergy took Nye's position, but in general they were more willing to participate in parish worship and communion.⁶⁵ Unlike the Episcopalians of the 1650s, they were extremely reluctant to ordain new ministers; whereas the bishops had conducted around 2500 ordinations between 1646 and 1660, the presbyters may have ordained as few as twenty new pastors between 1662 and 1694.⁶⁶ They regularly attended parish services and scheduled their own meetings so as not to clash with the official Prayer Book services, clinging to the hope that they would soon be accommodated within the national church.⁶⁷ They had not come to terms with being Dissenters.

The Puritan gentry and aristocracy remained even more firmly ensconced with the parish churches, even as they attended the sermons of nonconformist clergy and employed them as domestic chaplains.⁶⁸ A significant number of Puritan MPs were re-elected, and they were to emerge as a significant force in the Exclusion Crisis, led by a veteran of 1640s Parliamentarianism, Sir Denzil Holles. These 'Puritan Whigs', like the older Presbyterian clergy, worked hard to promote schemes of comprehension, designed to reincorporate the Presbyterian ministers within the Church of England.⁶⁹ And comprehension enjoyed considerable support from moderate episcopalians, both clergy and laity.⁷⁰ As Michael Winship notes, we should not equate 'the Church of England' with its militant conformists or even with the majority of its legally active clergy. Their hostility to Nonconformists was not universally shared by other 'Anglicans', and the identity of the established Church was still being hotly contested. The debate about Puritanism 'was ultimately a debate about who could claim possession of the Church of England'.⁷¹ Had comprehension worked, it would have entailed a new religious settlement, one with a more Reformed flavour.

Comprehension, however, proved more difficult to implement than a policy of toleration. In 1672, the Declaration of Indulgence allowed the nonconformists to seek licences for their meeting places and their ministers. This was an important turning point, because among the sixteen hundred who took up the offer were almost a thousand Presbyterians. By formalising their conventicles, the Presbyterians consolidated their separate identity, even though they continued to attend parish worship. The indulgence was soon recalled after pressure from Parliament, but a younger generation of Presbyterian clergy (the 'Ducklings') became more reconciled to their dissenting status than the older 'Dons' like Baxter. Whereas the Dons still sought comprehension, the Ducklings were more likely to join with the Independents in lobbying for toleration.⁷² These years witnessed a vigorous debate over 'liberty of conscience', with powerful contributions being made by a range of writers sympathetic to Dissent, including John Locke (in his unpublished *Essay concerning Toleration*); John Milton in *Of True Religion*; the poet and MP Andrew Marvell in his satire, *The Rehearsal Transposed*; the republican, Slingsby Bethel; the Presbyterian John Humfrey; the Congregationalist John Owen; and the Quaker William Penn.⁷³ When Penn was granted a royal charter to found the colony of Pennsylvania in 1681, he called its capital Philadelphia (brotherly love); its laws stipulated that no theistic believer was to 'be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion, or practice, in matters of faith and worship, nor shall they be compelled, at any time, to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place of ministry whatever'.⁷⁴

Presbyterians had once lambasted toleration as a doctrine of Anabaptists and Socinians, Arminians and Sectaries. But as the ejected ministers became victims of religious intolerance, they were slowly (and painfully) weaned off their attachment to the principle of enforced uniformity.⁷⁵ They found their own words quoted against them, as Anglicans defended the suppression of dissent by republishing the anti-toleration tirades of earlier Presbyterian. Thomas Long, for example, reprinted Baxter's spicy denunciations of toleration

from 1659 alongside similar quotations from Calvin, Thomas Edwards and other 'Presbyterians'.⁷⁶ But by 1679, Baxter himself was sounding very different notes, as he complained about the 'many and many books ... that cry down liberty and toleration'. He observed that those who supported toleration were usually 'they that are lowest', whilst those who condemned it were the ones 'in power'. They typically talked of the 'mischiefs' it occasioned – the Japanese and Chinese had done so to justify the suppression of Christians, the Papists to justify their Inquisitions, while 'Lutherans cry down the toleration of Calvinists'. Yet as Baxter pointed out (like Henry Robinson before him and John Locke after him), 'If all the princes on earth should force their subjects to be of one religion, it would be their own'. Toleration, he concluded, was preferable to uniformity.⁷⁷

The experience of persecution was also hardening ecclesiastical identities. While leading Congregationalists were willing to countenance attendance at parish services, they held out little hope for comprehension. John Owen, once the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, used his high-level contacts to promote a policy of indulgence. Freed from the distractions of parish ministry, Congregationalists gave undivided attention to building their gathered churches. Many Baptists had refused to participate in the Cromwellian state Church, and they were adamantly hostile to the Church of the Restoration. Quakers were now less inclined to heckle the parochial clergy than in the early days of their movement, and in some cases they even held minor parish offices, but they were the uncompromising epitome of Dissent. Their most famous work during this era was begun in prison by William Penn and entitled *No Cross, No Crown* (1669/1682).

The stubborn persistence of Dissent became one of the central issues of Restoration politics. By the Exclusion Crisis, it was an issue that divided those nascent political parties, the Whigs and the Tories. These were initially terms of abuse that bore witness to the fact that Restoration politics was the politics of religion.⁷⁸ Whigs were named after militant Scottish Covenanters, Tories after Irish Catholic Confederates. Although the majority of Whigs were

conformists, they had strong nonconformist support, and were committed to the toleration of Dissent. Tories were the Church and King party, the party of religious uniformity, and during their brief period of triumph after 1681 they 'aimed at nothing less than the annihilation of Dissent'.⁷⁹

Ironically, this last and greatest persecution was ended during the reign of the Catholic James II. Quakers and Baptists were brought in from the cold, as the king sought to construct an alliance of Dissenters and Catholics against the hitherto privileged Church party. Most Dissenters were very wary of his motives, and inclined to believe Halifax's warning that the king was embracing the nonconformists so that he might squeeze them later. Had James survived, the prospects for comprehension may have increased, as Dissenters and Anglicans drew together to defend the Protestantism of the English nation. Yet his strategy was a disaster, particularly since it coincided with the brutal suppression of the Huguenots by Louis XIV. By 1688, some of England's most powerful statesmen and bishops were preparing to invite a Dutch invasion.

V. 1689 and After

The Glorious Revolution that followed the Williamite coup brought toleration and denied comprehension. Bills for both had been introduced into Parliament, but comprehension was once again blocked by Anglicans, who now had to worry about a Dutch Reformed king.⁸⁰ Presbyterian clergy – who had long hoped to resume service as pastors of the *ecclesia Anglicana* – now had to accept their status as Dissenters. 1689 saw 'the victory of the Independent concept of toleration over Presbyterian hopes of Comprehension'.⁸¹

The 'Toleration Act' (1689) was limited – it neither mentioned 'toleration' nor offered a principled defence of liberty of conscience; it simply suspended the penal laws against Trinitarian Protestant nonconformists; it excluded Unitarians, Catholics, deists and atheists; and it left Dissenters as second-class citizens, who could only hold civil office if they took

communion within the Established Church. Nevertheless, it was a landmark piece of legislation that liberated Dissent. Dissenters were legally free to erect chapels, administer communion and baptise infants. In the two decades after 1689, they registered thousands of meeting houses. By 1715, there were at least 400,000 Dissenters in England and Wales, comprising around 7 per cent of the population.⁸²

Even the Presbyterians now accepted their status as a denomination. They held their services on Sunday mornings, in competition with parish worship, and the practice of partial or semi-conformity went into steep decline. Instead, lay Dissenters practised 'occasional conformity', taking Anglican communion once a year simply to qualify for civil office. In 1697, the Lord Mayor of London caused offence when he brazenly received Anglican communion in the morning before parading in full regalia to a Dissenting meeting house in the afternoon. The same loophole allowed Presbyterians to occupy the mayoralty of Nottingham for two-thirds of the eighteenth century.⁸³ While finding ways to retain civil office, Presbyterians increasingly identified more closely with other Dissenters than with Anglicans. In the 1691, they banded together with Congregationalists to form the 'Happy Union' and set up a Common Fund. Both were short-lived, but they were merely the first in a long series of cooperative schemes. Another symbolic turning point was the first public ordinations of Presbyterian ministers in 1694. 'Denominationalism', as Mark Goldie explains, had been 'a slow and reluctant process, and its decisive moment was neither 1662 nor 1672, but 1689'.⁸⁴

Many high churchmen were infuriated that the state had abandoned the hallowed principle of religious uniformity and caved in to religious pluralism. Some churchmen called for the 'Toleration Act' to be repealed or restricted in its effects. Daniel Defoe parodied their zeal in his satire, *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* (1702), only to be gaoled for his efforts. In 1709, the high Church divine Henry Sacheverall preached an incendiary sermon against Dissent and toleration. When he was put on trial the following year for libelling the Revolution, mobs shouting 'High Church and Sacheverall' attacked and partially destroyed

some of the largest Dissenting chapels in London. In 1711, high church MPs pushed through an Occasional Conformity Act, aimed at preventing Dissenters from qualifying for public office by taking Anglican communion once a year. In 1714, the Schism Act was passed, with the intent of shutting down the flourishing Dissenting Academies, which provided higher education to those excluded from Oxford and Cambridge. Both acts were repealed by the Whig administration in 1719, but for a time, toleration had looked fragile. In Birmingham, for example, there were major anti-Dissenting riots in 1714 and 1715. Only after 1719, could Dissenters breathe more easily.

The days in which Presbyterians denounced toleration seemed distant. In Part II of his *Defence of Moderate Nonconformity* (1704), Edmund Calamy redefined Dissenting identity on Lockean lines. Although he accepted the venerable Reformed conception of Kings and Queens as ‘nursing Fathers and...nursing Mothers to the Church under the New Testament’, Calamy denied that they had coercive powers or could pass penal laws. Every congregation should ‘manage itself in an entire independency’, and there should be no imposition by magistrates or synods. Moreover, ‘every Man’ should be left free in matters of religion to act according to his conscience and ‘has none to controul him, as long as the Civil Interests of Mankind ... remain untouch’d’.⁸⁵

Later Rational Dissenters highlighted Calamy’s book as a key turning point in the intellectual history of English Presbyterianism. Andrew Kippis admitted in 1773 that seventeenth-century Presbyterians had ‘never entertained any just sentiments on the subject of toleration’, but thanks to Locke and Calamy there had been an ‘alteration in ... the Dissenters’ sentiments’. This was a posthumous vindication for the Puritan tolerationists whose ideas had been so emphatically condemned by Presbyterians in the 1640s. As Goldie comments, the new Presbyterians, with their emphasis on godly magistrates who suppress immorality and irreligion while allowing Protestant diversity to flourish, remind us ‘how close Lockean toleration was to Cromwellian independency and how far from Enlightenment

secularism'. Locke himself wrote to Calamy expressing his approval of his work, and John Toland agreed that the Presbyterians had now 'expressly declared their minds' on liberty of conscience, especially in Calamy's writings, 'which they generally approve'.⁸⁶ Anglican critics pointed out the contradiction between 'how very violent the Presbyterians in 1645, &c were against any Toleration in Religion, when they had the Power in their Hands; and how very clamorous they are now for it'. A pamphlet subtitled *1645 against 1710* contrasted the opinions of 'the Old and the New Presbyterians', devoting five pages to anti-tolerationist quotations from Calamy's grandfather.⁸⁷

Such Anglican critics implied that 'the new Presbyterians' were hiding their true intentions, but there is every reason to think that their change of tune was more than a pragmatic move. In 1703, London Presbyterians joined Baptists and Congregationalists in writing to the New England authorities, asking them to overturn anti-Quaker legislation. Calamy reproduced the letter in one of his works to show that Dissenters were not 'Enemies to the Liberty of others', as their Anglican critics claimed. The letter stated that it was against 'the Principles of the Gospel' and 'the undoubted Rights of Mankind' for anyone to be punished for 'conscientious and peaceable Dissent from the Establish'd Way of Religion, whilst they are not justly Chargeable with any Immorality, or what is plainly Destructive of Civil Society'.⁸⁸ This was an essentially Lockean view of toleration and its limits.

By the 1720s and 1730s, a younger generation of more liberal Presbyterians went further than Calamy, engaging in an explicit attack on the intolerance of the Reformed tradition. In 1722, the Presbyterian Samuel Chandler translated the Dutch Arminian Philip van Limborch's famous treatise on the history of the Inquisition. In a later tract, he honestly admitted that the Presbyterians of the 1640s had no intention of tolerating other religions (and he quoted the Westminster Larger Catechism to prove it).⁸⁹ Chandler and other Rational Dissenters like Caleb Fleming, John Taylor, Micaiah Towgood, drew on Locke, Bayle and Benjamin Hoadly to craft a 'consistent Protestantism' that eschewed the enforcement of

religious doctrine as ‘the very ESSENCE of Popery’.⁹⁰ In their periodical of the 1730s, the *Old Whig*, this new generation of Presbyterians, steeped in Enlightenment texts, launched attacks on bigotry and intolerance, including a lengthy account of the execution of Servetus that was fiercely critical of Calvin.⁹¹ Such English Presbyterian divines now sounded like the most radical tolerationists of the 1640s, as they rejected religious establishments altogether, and insisted, as Towgood did, that ‘Human Lawgivers have Power only over Bodies and Estates ... but to Matters of Conscience and Religion their Authority cannot extend’.⁹² For English Presbyterians this was a remarkable volte-face. In 1659 Baxter had condemned ‘Universal Liberty’ in religion and the denial of the magistrate’s power in religion as ‘a wicked doctrine’ – by the 1730s, that very doctrine was being trumpeted by leading Presbyterian divines as the heart and soul of Protestantism. The principles of magisterial Reformation were giving way to religious voluntarism.

Ironically, Dissenters struggled to take advantage of this new world. Having survived the storm of persecution, they now found themselves becalmed in the smooth sea of toleration. By the 1730s, there was growing anxiety and debate about ‘the decay of the dissenting interest’. While some lamented Dissent’s lack of sophistication, others feared that it was losing its spiritual edge and vitality. Around fifty Dissenting ministers had conformed to the Established Church since 1714, among them Joseph Butler and Thomas Secker, and many others were swept along by the fashion for ‘rational religion’. Among Presbyterians especially, Calvinism and Trinitarianism were in steep decline, and the number of converts and worshippers seemed to be falling too. Between 80 and 90 per cent of Quakers were the children of Quakers. Dissent seemed to be losing its expansionist, evangelical energy. England was now a religious marketplace, but Dissenters seemed ill-placed to exploit it.⁹³

Among those who did rise to the challenge were the Congregationalists Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts. Both were emphatically Lockean in their commitment to religious liberty and religious voluntarism, but also wary of Locke’s minimalist theology. In their hymns

and writings they promoted traditional Reformed doctrine and Puritan piety, believing that these were the best means of ‘reviving the Dissenting interest’.⁹⁴ They found a kindred spirit in the New England Congregationalist, Jonathan Edwards, who was an acute participant-observer of local and regional ‘revival’. In England and Wales, ironically, revivalism would be spearheaded by Anglicans like George Whitefield, John Wesley and Howell Harris, who took to the fields and the streets to preach. To Dissenters, who had worked so hard to establish their ‘polite’ credentials in the face of Anglican disdain, this was a surprising development. But as the eighteenth century progressed, growing numbers of Congregationalists and Baptists were swept along by the Evangelical Revival. In the religious marketplace that had opened up since the Act of Toleration, the congregations that flourished would be those that embraced the new Evangelical style – populist, participatory, expressive and missionary. England’s Reformation had been driven forward by the State; the Revival would come from the grass roots. Instead of ‘tarrying for the magistrate’, Evangelicals would put their faith in voluntary religion.⁹⁵

VI. Conclusion

The religious settlement ushered in by the Glorious Revolution proved to be remarkably durable, lasting until 1828 when the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts brought Dissenters civic equality. But we have seen that there was nothing inevitable about this outcome. The triumph of toleration and the emergence of Dissent was the result of a long, convoluted and contingent history. For two thirds of our period (i.e. 1550-1689), the majority of nonconformists wished to belong to the national Church and remained drawn to magisterial reformation. They had good reason to hope that they could avoid becoming Dissenters outside the Church of England. At numerous junctures in the story, alternative futures had opened up and then closed. Various ecclesiastical factions had attempted to remake the Church of England in their own image, only to meet with failure. New religious settlements had been forged in the 1640s and 1650s, in 1662 and 1689.

Eventually, even the Presbyterians had to concede that the game was up. Comprehension was not going to work. Church and Dissent were to go their separate ways. For Baptists and Quakers (and even for Congregationalists) this was easier to accept, since they did not share the Presbyterian devotion to parochial ministry and the ideal of a 'national church'. But these bodies accounted for less than half of the Dissenters – in 1660, they probably only numbered between 100,000 and 150,000 adherents (2-3 per cent of the population). It was the Presbyterians, with their élite support and their mass following, who constituted the greatest loss for the national Church. The state churches in other Protestant lands had produced minor splinter groups; the English Church had ejected one fifth of its own clergy. Dissent was set to become a major force in national life.

*I am most grateful to Professor Anthony Milton for his comments on this chapter.

¹ For the distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' teleology, see Glenn Burgess, 'On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 609-27.

² P. E. More and F. L. Cross (eds), *Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England, Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: SPCK, 1935). On the agenda of the original editors see W.B. Patterson's 'Foreword' to the new edition More and Cross (eds), *Anglicanism* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 2009), xvii-xxiv. See also W.B. Patterson, 'William Perkins as Apologist for the Church of England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 57 (2006), pp. 252-69.

³ Eamon Duffy, 'The Shock of Change: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Elizabethan Church of England', in S. Platten (ed.), *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), p. 42. The anthology to which he refers is Gillian R. Evans and J. Robert White (eds), *The Anglican Tradition: A Handbook of Sources* (London: SPCK, 1991).

⁴ John Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Religious Division and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

⁵ For one distinguished example, see R. W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (London: Hasell, Watson and Viney, 1907). The language of liberty runs through Dale's book, and he celebrated Puritanism as the movement that led to 'the inalienable rights of man' and the principle of 'religious liberty' (p. 173).

⁶ See for example, E. B. Underhill, *Struggles and Triumphs of Religious Liberty: An Historical Survey* (1851). For the Hanserd Knollys Society, Underhill edited *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution, 1614-61* (1846) and Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1848).

⁷ William Orme, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Religious Connexions of John Owen* (1820), p. 106.

⁸ For one example, see the Baptist Joseph Ivimey's study, *John Milton: His Life and Times* (London: E. Wilson, 1833). On the origins of the language of 'civil and religious liberty' see Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 8.

⁹ The Nonconformists' Whiggish appropriation of seventeenth-century Puritanism is explored in Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), chapters 8-10.

¹⁰ The finest overview of Dissent during this period remains Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). The best anthology is R. Tudur Jones (ed.), *Protestant Nonconformist Texts, vol. I: 1550-1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007).

¹¹ See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

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- ¹² For the continental context see Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
- ¹³ On the contributions of Zurich and Geneva see Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'The Church of England, 1533-1603', in Stephen Platten (ed.), *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), pp. 34-40.
- ¹⁴ On this generation of English bishops see Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal, 1519-1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).
- ¹⁵ See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), pp. 21-97.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.; Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterians and English Conformist Thought – Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). On the persistence of presbyterianism after the 1590s see Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
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the Restoration, when Laudian writers preferred to ignore the inconvenient truth that Anglican conformity to the Cromwellian Church was widespread'. Boshier, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1951), p. 24 n.1.

³⁸ See for example, Anne Whiteman, 'The Restoration of the Church of England', in Geoffrey Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (eds), *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962* (London: SPCK, 1962), chapter 1; I. M. Green, *The Re-Establishment of the Church of England, 1660-63* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

³⁹ 'Speech to Both Houses on the Dissolution of the Convention Parliament, 29 December 1660', in John Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 347.

⁴⁰ Richard Baxter, *A Key for Catholics* (1659), pp. 335, 30. See also pp. 453ff.

⁴¹ Richard Baxter, *Catholic Unity* (1659), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 4 vols (1846), IV, 689.

⁴² For a full development of this thesis we await Anthony Milton's major monograph, *England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England, 1636-66*.

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⁴⁴ Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1994), p. 484.

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⁸⁶ M. Goldie, 'The Dissenters and toleration: the impact of Locke', unpublished paper delivered at the Yale Conference on Civil and Religious Liberty, 2008.

⁸⁷ [Anon], *1645 against 1710* (1710),

⁸⁸ Edmund Calamy, *An Abridgement of Mr Baxter's History*, 2 vols (1713), vol. I, pp. 670-72.

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