

*Strange Fire:*  
John Howe (1630-1705)  
and the Alienation and Fragmentation  
of Later Stuart Dissent

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*To Yvonne.*

*There could be no other.*

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

<u>BL</u>	<u>British Library</u>
<u>Calamy</u>	<u>Memoirs of the Life of the Late Revd Mr John Howe, London, 1724.</u>
<u>CH</u>	<u>Church History</u>
<u>CR</u>	<u>A.G. Matthews, Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2, Oxford, 1934 (1988).</u>
<u>C.S.P.D.</u>	<u>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</u>
<u>D.N.B.</u>	<u>The Dictionary of National Biography, ed. L. Stephens and S. Lee, 63 Vols (1885-1900)</u>
<u>EMH</u>	<u>Early Modern History</u>
<u>EHR</u>	<u>English Historical Review</u>
<u>HJ</u>	<u>Historical Journal</u>
<u>JEH</u>	<u>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</u>
<u>JRH</u>	<u>Journal of Religious History</u>
<u>JBS</u>	<u>Journal of British Studies</u>
<u>L.A.C.T.</u>	<u>Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology</u>
<u>O.E.D.</u>	<u>Oxford English Dictionary</u>
<u>P&amp;P</u>	<u>Past and Present</u>
<u>RB</u>	<u>Richard Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae, ed. M. Sylvester (1696)</u>
<u>T.R.H.S.</u>	<u>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</u>
<u>Works</u>	<u>The Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A. as Published during his Life (ed. E. Calamy 1724) ed. J.P. Hewlett, 3 Vols (1848)</u>
<u>Whole Works</u>	<u>The Whole Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A. ed. J. Hunt, 8 Vols (1827)</u>

## Dates, Quotations and References

Unless there is confusion over the date, each reference has followed the modern practise of commencing the year on January 1. I have not, however, "corrected" the contemporary English dating to the later-adopted continental system.

In all quotations from printed works, the spelling, punctuation and type of the edition cited are reproduced where possible. This has meant that Howe's works often appear in modern spelling (or, at least, that favoured by his nineteenth century editors). Following standard practice, omissions are indicated by dots and square brackets enclose words and capitals not found in the cited edition.

Howe's published works are cited by their original titles in the first instance, with a further reference to the collected edition employed. Thereafter, the citation will be by an abbreviated title. In all cases the page numbers will relate to the collected edition.

## Abstract

Any attempt to understand fully the roots and decline of English Dissent must address theological issues. Crucial to the enterprise will be an approach which describes a spectrum of theological emphases. This thesis will propose a detailed theological model which employs an ecclesiological spectrum mapping relative stress on the visible or invisible church. When this model is applied to the later Stuart period the importance of John Howe (1630-1705) becomes evident.

Howe's life spanned a time of considerable disruption. His family was affected by Laud's policies, he became a minister during the Interregnum and his career lasted into Anne's reign. His significance has been masked by a hagiographical tradition and the fascination of historians with Richard Baxter.

Howe's Platonist philosophical roots led him to emphasise the transcendence of God and, accordingly, the invisible Church. He was active in Nonconformist affairs during the 1680s. He entered controversies sparked by "latitudinarians" Tillotson and Stillingfleet and maintained important contacts among dissident groups. He built a sophisticated theological case for unity which hinged on Christian charity. Howe was the crucial figure in Dissent following the Toleration Act of 1689.

An analysis of Howe's career and writings establishes the theological model proposed in this thesis. By this, in turn, the continuity of Dissent with "Puritanism" can be validly identified. Howe's influence on later Dissent was considerable, arguably greater than that of either John Locke or Baxter. His emphasis on the invisible Church relegated uniformity and structure. An increasing "bias to the invisible" was a factor in the alienation and fragmentation of later Stuart Dissent.

terms, crises and "toping men"

Introduction:

Themes and Outlines



\* In 1702 a group of "aged nonconforming ministers" published an anniversary account of their conscientious objections to the 1662 Act of Uniformity.<sup>1</sup>

\*\* In 1703 a young "nonconforming minister", Edmund Calamy (1671-1732), began publication of his *defence of Moderate Nonconformity* in which he sought ways that Church and Dissent might peacefully coexist.<sup>2</sup>

\*\*\* On April 2 1705, one of Calamy's mentors died at his home in London. Rev John Howe M.A. (1630-1705) had been chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, confidant of William of Orange and was the author of numerous works of theology.

\*\*\*\* In 1707 James Webster, minister of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh, was concerned about the impact on religion north of the border of the Act of Union. The example of English Nonconformity cheered him little.

Were not their Great topping<sup>3</sup> men their leaders, *Richard Baxter*, *Mr How* and *Dr Bates* for the lawfulness of Episcopacy?...from all which is evident, we have not many firm friends in *England*, we can rely on.<sup>4</sup>

It is not only in great events that themes worthy of historical study announce their presence. Important questions

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<sup>1</sup> A Letter from some Aged Nonconforming Ministers to their Christian friends, touching the Reasons of their Practice: August 24 1701, London, 1702.

<sup>2</sup> E. Calamy, A defence of Moderate Nonconformity, London, 1703-1705.

<sup>3</sup> Generally spelled "topping", used in the sense of "leading" or prominent - see O.E.D.

<sup>4</sup> J. Webster, Lawful prejudices against an incorporating union with England; or, some modest considerations on the sinfulness of this union, and the danger flowing from it to the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1707, p 8.

may be "overheard" in apparently obscure incidents. In the broad sweep of Early Modern British history, the three publications and one death described above are of only secondary importance. Yet, taken together, they point beyond themselves to significant problems. Woven through and between them are the questions which this thesis will attempt to address.

This is a study of later Stuart Dissent. The events outlined above highlight problems as yet unresolved in the historiography of the period. The issues centre on a few ultimately related themes: definition and continuity, the fate of Dissent itself and the significance of John Howe.

Collective terms have long been crucial to the historiography of seventeenth century England. "Puritanism", though recently rejected by some, has been and continues to be employed freely by others, especially when writing of the Elizabethan and Early Stuart Church. "Presbyterian" and "Congregational", apparently more precise terms, are standard in discussions of the later Stuart period. Despite previous debates and regardless of their continued popularity, these terms must be further examined.

The issues are not simple. When the "aged ministers" looked back from the perspective of forty years to the events of 1662 they eschewed the appellation "puritan", preferring the description "nonconforming". "Puritan" was an unwelcome epithet attached to Elizabethans, "eminent for piety and learning", who were "dissatisfy'd" with the "Reliques of

Popery" in the Church.<sup>5</sup> The debate over the usefulness of "puritan" and "puritanism" has made much of the negative connotations of the terms. It has largely concentrated on the Elizabethan and early Stuart ages. To this extent it would appear to resonate with the concerns of the 1702 apology.

There remain, however, tares in this historiographical wheat field. The "aged ministers" saw themselves as standing in a genuine tradition. The tone and tenor of their work demonstrated that, at least for them, the ecclesiastical controversies of the previous century had not been resolved. They held the "dissatisfy'd" of Elizabeth's day to be part of "the History of our Nonconformity".<sup>6</sup> As importantly they outlined this continuous Nonconformity in theological terms. The modern debate over definition is incomplete. It has attended properly neither to possible continuities across the seventeenth century nor to the role of theology.

"Puritanism" is not the only term at issue. Other nomenclatures require scrutiny. James Webster's complaint about the "Presbyterians" of Restoration England suggests that here too is a questionable term. Ostensibly this description carries considerably greater precision than does "puritan". Yet Webster alleges that important "Presbyterians" were willing to countenance episcopacy. If so, then the exactness of the label is clearly compromised. It will be seen that terms such as "Anglican", "Latitudinarian" and "Congregational" are similarly flawed.

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<sup>5</sup> A Letter from Some Aged Nonconforming Ministers, p 49.

<sup>6</sup> A Letter from Some Aged Nonconforming Ministers, p 49.

The 1702 account by the "aged ministers" claims to identify emphases and concerns which span the seventeenth century. Webster's polemic questions the validity of traditional labels. Both of these obscure publications disturb our perception of the religious dynamics of Early Modern England. If we are to delineate movements and trends with any clarity, a fresh approach to definition is required.

Also latent in the four events I have described are questions relating to the evolution of Dissent. One recent interpreter (for whom questions of definition are apparently of little account) suggests that John Howe's death marked the point at which "Puritanism was over".<sup>7</sup> Such a simplistic association cannot be sustained. Nevertheless, by 1705, it is clear that change was in the air. The 1690s had witnessed the collapse of attempts at institutional unity among Nonconformists. By 1700 they were becoming increasingly marginalised. External pressure was matched by internal flux. The "aged ministers" of 1702 were moved to defend to their "Christian friends" a "way of Worship which you find now deserted by some and every where spoken against".<sup>8</sup> Edmund Calamy's "moderate Nonconformity", was no mere tactical response to peripheral issues. Indeed Calamy has been held to have inaugurated a new epoch in Nonconformity.<sup>9</sup> Certainly he

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<sup>7</sup> J.I. Packer, A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life, Wheaton ILL, 1990, p 60.

<sup>8</sup> A Letter from Some Aged Nonconforming Ministers, p 1.

<sup>9</sup> R. Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition" in C.G. Bolam, J, Goring, H.C. Short & R Thomas (eds), The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism, London, 1968, pp 113-174, p 128.

refocussed its central concerns. Whatever its antecedents, Dissent at the end of the Stuart age was changing.

The history of Nonconformity (and especially the theological dynamics at work) in these years has received scant attention in modern scholarship. The field has been left almost entirely to an earlier generation of denominational historians. This is unfortunate, as the general historiography of the period is buoyant. Significant insights have emerged from new approaches to later Stuart history. Employing these, I will attempt to illuminate the fate of Dissent.

Finally there is John Howe himself. Webster cites him, along with Baxter and Bates, among the "Great topping men" of English Presbyterian Dissenters. Modern debates on the role of Nonconformists in the later Stuart period have either ignored the Divines altogether or fastened almost solely on Richard Baxter. Bates has faded from view almost completely. Howe has suffered a different fate. By the middle of the nineteenth century a pattern was set in which he was relegated to the role of a pious figure of essentially romantic interest. Calamy's account of his death set the tone.

Being at last quite worn out, he finished his Course with Joy... and was translated into the calm and peaceable Regions of the Blessed above, where nothing but perfect Charity and Serenity reign forever.<sup>10</sup>

Howe's perceived personal qualities have overwhelmed any political or theological influence he may have had. As I will show, this "Howe myth" must be revised.

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<sup>10</sup> E. Calamy, Memoirs of the Life of the late Rev. Mr John Howe, London, 1724, p 227.

John Howe was a far more significant figure than has hitherto been recognised. Webster was not mistaken when he listed him as a "toping man". Indeed, the themes "overheard" in the three publications cited above come together in this man. Webster's complaint of Howe's openness to episcopacy implies the possibility that the thought and career of this "presbyterian" may shed some light on questions of definition. Further, he emerges as a major figure in the evolution of Dissent.

There is no evidence to link Howe to the conservative "aged Ministers" of 1702. Indeed it appears that his own motivations were somewhat different from theirs. In the same year as the ministers published their *Letter*, Howe summarised his own case in a polemical reply to the barbs of Daniel Defoe. Significantly, Howe was defending not nonconformity but occasional conformity. The issues for him were charity and the exercise of individual conscience. These concerns placed Howe much closer to the "moderate Nonconformity" of Edmund Calamy than to the position of the "aged ministers". This was no coincidence. Calamy was influenced both personally and theologically by Howe. The younger man showed his material to Howe before publication and recorded that he indicated his "hearty approbation".<sup>11</sup> The theological emphases which John Howe represented played a crucial role in the development of later Stuart Dissent.

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<sup>11</sup> E. Calamy, An Historical Account of My Own Life with some Reflections on the Times I have Lived In (1671-1731), London, 1829 (2 Vols), Vol II, p 31.

Three publications and a death highlight the interwoven questions of definition and continuity, the fate of Dissent and the role of John Howe which I will address in this thesis. I will contend that the discrete and rigid definitions employed in the past are inadequate tools for describing later Stuart Dissent. In their place I will posit a flexible model which recognises the existence of a spectrum of theological approaches and which may be illustrated through the ecclesiological emphases of individual thinkers. I will adopt as a framework for this exercise the life, career and thought of John Howe. This is no arbitrary device. Howe will emerge as a sophisticated and influential Nonconformist theologian of the first rank.

The analysis in this thesis falls into two major sections. The first (chapters one & two) establishes the historiographical and theoretical foundations upon which the second (chapters three to seven) depends. Chapter eight draws together the threads laid out in both major sections.

Chapter one establishes the validity of a theological analysis. A major feature of later Stuart history was the inability of Church and Dissent to achieve a Restoration settlement satisfactory to both. A comprehensive solution proved impossible. By the accession of William and Mary a form of toleration was the only viable course. During the 1690s Dissent proved incapable of achieving unity within itself. The fate of Dissent under the later Stuarts was thus characterised by a process of alienation from the Church of England followed

by internal fragmentation. This decline is not adequately understood. I will assess the several models proposed to explain this history. Whilst acknowledging the advantages of each I will argue for closer attention to theological factors.

An important disincentive to theological analysis has been the vexed question of definition. An important debate, particularly centring on "Puritanism", has occupied historians of early modern England since the 1960s. I will summarise this discussion and highlight more recent insights which suggest a way ahead. Once again, I will contend that our understanding of these questions is advanced by a properly constructed theological model. In the final section of chapter one I will set out the formal parameters of such a model, based upon a spectrum of views as against discrete "party" positions.

The content of chapter one springs directly from the historical and historiographical questions which face the student of later Stuart Dissent. Chapter two steps back from the period in question to develop the theory which drives the thesis. The spectral<sup>12</sup> model sketched in chapter one depends upon an understanding of the fundamental theological themes of immanence and transcendence. The ecclesiological expression of these is found in the traditional Christian abstractions of the "visible" and "invisible" Church. I will trace the development and relative importance of these concepts from the emerging ideas of the early Church through to the debates in Elizabeth's England.

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<sup>12</sup> That is: "by means of a spectrum". I do not wish to imply the alternate meaning which relates to "seeing ghosts".



The process of outlining ecclesiological development adds further detail to the model proposed in chapter one. As a test of the potential of this refined model I shall apply it to the current lively debate on the early Stuart Church of England. It will be shown that our understanding of Laud's reforms and the reactions to them may be aided considerably if the suggested model is employed. This test case also provides a natural context for interpreting later developments within what would become Dissent.

Chapters one and two construct an historiographical and theoretical foundation. The chronological framework for chapters three to seven is provided by the career of John Howe. This is not mere biography. The principal focus is the ecclesiology of Dissent. Howe's thought is central but he is employed as a touchstone by which to assess the theology of others.

The prominence I will give to Howe contrasts with the traditional dominance of Richard Baxter's legacy in analyses of the period. An attractive, though romantic, emphasis on Howe's personal piety has masked his importance. This "Howe myth" must be stripped away. I begin this process by examining Howe's formative experiences and career up until his ejection in 1662.

In a legal sense at least, the Bartholomew's day ejections of 1662 formally created a body of clerical "Nonconformists". That year thus provides a convenient chronological point at which to pause. In chapters four to seven I will employ the model outlined in chapter two to

understand the theological dynamics which operated within Dissent over the ensuing four decades. Howe's career and thought will provide the framework for this analysis but the wider theological setting is also crucial. In an attempt to round out this context I will describe the ecclesiological landscape in which English Nonconformists found themselves in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

The concentration is squarely on Howe himself in chapter four. It will be suggested that his theology did not reach maturity until the later 1670s, after a period of reflection whilst living with his family in Ireland. Several of his early publications will be discussed but particular attention will be paid to a mature work which appeared at approximately the time Howe returned to London in 1676. *The Living Temple* was a work of philosophy in which may be observed Howe's fundamental approach to theology. It will be discussed in some detail. A series of sermons preached in 1677-8 will also be noted. The full significance of these sermons will become evident in chapter seven.

It was not until the 1680s that Howe achieved his greatest influence. The second half of his career is thus considered in more detail than the first. Chapter five concentrates on two controversies in which Howe featured during 1680. Those involved the important Churchmen, John Tillotson and Edward Stillingfleet. As importantly, other Dissenters entered the picture. A range of ecclesiological approaches emerged which transcended such convenient labels as "Latitudinarian", "Presbyterian" and "Congregationalist".

The expected distinction between Churchmen and Dissenters is revealed but so also are divisions within both larger groups. Within Dissent, Howe is shown to take an extreme position, quite different from that of older men such as Baxter and John Owen. Crucial detail is added to the spectral model.

The analysis of the 1680 controversies has ramifications beyond merely theological questions. Some light is shed on the current debate on the Restoration Crisis of 1678-83. Jonathan Scott's view that the political allegiances of the day are better understood in terms of "polarities of belief" rather than "parties" finds considerable support in the fluid situation revealed in contemporary theological debate. I will argue that this fluidity within both Church and Dissent signals a divergence of fundamental positions which ultimately made institutional unity impossible.

The 1680 controversies located Howe in a spectrum of ecclesiological views which spanned both Church and Dissent. As this thesis is primarily concerned with the phenomenon of Dissent, the focus necessarily narrows after chapter five. The next two chapters follow Howe's career and writings in the 1680s and 1690s respectively. His ideas are laid alongside those of the two figures in wider Dissent who have dominated interpretations of the period: John Locke and Richard Baxter.

In chapter six Howe's activities and thought over the decade 1681-91 are considered. Though intertwined, Howe's writings and career form distinct threads within this chapter. Three levels of analysis are possible.

The most significant questions spring directly from Howe's writings. The 1680s was the period in which he set out his fullest statements on ecclesiological issues. Preeminent among these was a sophisticated treatise on *Union among Protestants*. *Union* was a detailed call for toleration. Howe's argument differed in important ways from that of the most famous statement on toleration written in these years: Locke's *Letter*. The two works are compared in detail. There are important ramifications of their differences for our understanding of Howe himself, for the ecclesiological model employed in this thesis and for our understanding of Locke.

Howe's career adds a second perspective. His links with rebel sympathisers, his sudden flight to the Netherlands in August 1685 and his subsequent political activity are examined. Central aspects of the "Howe myth" are questioned.

Ecclesiology and activity combine to bring a third angle on the period. In 1680, fellow Dissenter Vincent Alsop's answer to Stillingfleet had been the closest of any to that of Howe. Despite this, the two men differed markedly in their response to James II's Indulgence offers in 1687-88. A useful model must be shown to be subtle enough to accommodate this divergence in political choice.

The concluding section of chapter six notes the significance of Howe's irenic endeavours in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. Howe was a crucial figure in the 1691 "Happy Union" among Nonconformists. This agreement between Presbyterians and Congregationalists failed. Howe gradually became disillusioned with activism as the 1690s progressed.

His theology in general, and his expectations for the Church in particular, came increasingly to reflect his eschatological views. Unity became something for the Spirit to bring about at the End, rather than a present reality, to be constructed by human effort.

The first part of chapter seven traces this process through several of Howe's published works. While his commitment to the transcendent and invisible did not waver, the framework in which this operated altered. Christian Hope became a dominant concept. Howe's major statement on Hope is found in the sermons preached in London in 1677-8. These are considered in detail. What emerges is a radically pneumatological eschatology which both coheres with and comes to undergird Howe's ecclesiology.

At this point Richard Baxter reenters the picture. The fundamental differences between the approaches of the two men to eschatology and ecclesiology are outlined. William Lamont has provided the most detailed modern analysis of Baxter's theology. Lamont's conclusions are summarised and criticised. I contend that the key element in Baxter's ecclesiology was not millennialism (as Lamont suggests) but discipline. Howe's foundation was laid in different soil. The ecclesiological gulf between Howe and Baxter, apparent in their answers to Stillingfleet in 1680, is confirmed.

The detailed images which emerge in chapters three to seven will be projected onto one canvas in chapter eight. I will return to the principal questions identified in this Introduction. The "Howe myth" may be challenged at several

points. Failures at important stages of his career will be acknowledged and his closeness to the dissident underground recognised. His philosophical foundations and theological development will be considered. This analysis of Howe will demonstrate the validity of the model outlined in chapter two. The model is then applied to questions of definition and nomenclature. It enables a cogent, though restrained, understanding of "Puritanism". The validity of the term is secured but in applications much narrower than earlier views. Similar constraints are placed on "Dissent". "Presbyterian" and "Independent" are shown to be less helpful, even misleading. English religion in the second half of the seventeenth century was characterised by fluidity. The scene was set by a series of related theological spectra rather than by competing parties.

The wider significance of John Howe must be considered next. In the 1690s at least, he stood out among the "toping men" of English Dissent. The acknowledged debt to Howe of later Divines is noted. One specific case - Calamy's revision of Nonconformity - is studied in depth. Roger Thomas and William Lamont have both trawled Calamy's work in an attempt to dredge up his influences. Thomas argues for the importance of Locke but both (though in different ways) find the principal source in Richard Baxter. I will argue that these interpretations are wrong - in part the product of the "Baxterisation" of later Stuart Nonconformity. A stronger case can be made that John Howe was the major influence on Calamy.

Given the important distinctions I have established between Howe's ecclesiology and that of both Locke and Baxter there are significant implications of this position. These I endeavour to spell out in a brief theological interpretation of the dynamics of the Christian Church in later Stuart England. A gradual trend, perhaps imperceptible to those involved, may be observed running through the flux and ferment of the Restoration and beyond. The key factor was the divergence which took place in fundamental ecclesiological emphases. By the time of the Glorious Revolution the area of common ground between Church and Dissent was insufficient to allow a *rapprochement*. Nonconformity had become characterised by an ecclesiology which increasingly emphasised the invisible Church. The trend continued through the 1690s. Calamy's revision merely represented a further step down the path. Howe was a crucial figure in this story. His unintended legacy was the fragmentation and near-fatal weakening of Dissent.

Three publications and a death have been used to introduce the themes of this thesis but they remain suggestive only. If this study is to transcend a merely retrospective agenda to become history, its concerns must spring from a wider context and debate. An outline of that context and debate is my first task.

" a slippery stage...a divided time"

Chapter One:

Approaching Later Stuart Dissent



*The principal headache...of the sixteenth and seventeenth century historian...is not too few documents but too many predecessors.*<sup>1</sup>

The student of later Stuart Dissent readily echoes Christopher Hill's lament. Unfortunately Hill himself continues to add to the burden! In the past decade, there has been an explosion of interest, particularly in the Restoration and its political problems. Integral to this fresh approach has been a renewed attention to the religion of the period. However, the interest has been largely in the role religion played in political and social developments, rather than in ecclesiastical history as such. Although important work has recently emerged on the Church of England<sup>2</sup> there remains a dearth of studies of Nonconformity. Since the work of Cragg and Nuttall, there have been few significant attempts to trace the legacy of the "dissatisfy'd Elizabethans" and the ideas that they represented into the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Even Michael Watts' often detailed study of *The*

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<sup>1</sup> C. Hill, "History and Denominational History", reprinted in C. Hill, The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill - Volume Two: Religion and Politics in 17th Century England, Brighton, 1986, pp 3-10, p 3.

<sup>2</sup> See the various articles and essays by Mark Goldie and the important work by John Spurr (listed in full in the bibliography).

<sup>3</sup> See particularly G.F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience, Oxford, 1947 and G.R. Cragg, Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1668, Cambridge, 1957.

*Dissenters* devotes only forty of five hundred pages to the Restoration period in England.<sup>4</sup>

It is increasingly recognised that the Restoration left many central issues unresolved. Theological questions were among these. The powerful religious forces evident in the Interregnum did not dissipate, any more than did those Divines traditionally called "Puritan" disappear. Yet, it is clear that Nonconformists under Queen Anne differed vastly from "Puritans" under Charles I and the Cromwells. A modern study of later Stuart Dissent must come to grips with these questions of continuity and change. The individual on which this thesis will focus, John Howe, spans the period. He reached his greatest personal development and public prominence in the 1680s and 90s but much of his thought grew out of his experiences during the 1650s.

This thesis approaches Dissent primarily through Howe's theology. In this chapter, I will seek to establish the validity of this strategy and outline the form it must take. The enterprise divides the chapter in two. The first division will outline important events affecting later Stuart Dissent and assess the various paradigms employed for interpreting this story. I will argue that a theological analysis is both valid and necessary to complement these approaches.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Watts, The Dissenters: from the Reformation to the French Revolution, Oxford, 1978. For the purposes of this study, the most important recent contributions are few, comprising Watts; R.A. Beddard, "Vincent Alsop and the Emancipation of Restoration Dissent", JEH, XXIV, 2, 1973, pp 161-184; W.M. Lamont, Richard Baxter and the Millennium: Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution, London, 1979 and N.H. Keeble The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England, Leicester, 1987.

In this first section, out of a concern to avoid getting bogged down at such an early stage, the commonly used terms "Dissent", "Nonconformity", "Presbyterian" and "Independent" will generally be employed without qualification. As signalled in the Introduction, I reserve the right to question the usefulness of these labels as the thesis progresses.

This freedom cannot, however, be claimed with regard to another crucial set of terms. The second division will take its starting point from the controversy surrounding the definition of "Puritan" and "Puritanism". Again, I will propose a qualified theological approach to the problem. Attention will then turn to questions more immediately pertinent to the study of John Howe. I will lay out the bones of the model which will guide this thesis. It is hoped that this skeleton will be clear of the conceptual cancer which identifies distinct and self-conscious parties within either Church or Dissent. In its marrow will be an interpretation of later Stuart theology via a spectrum of ecclesiological orientations. In chapter two, the bones will gather flesh with an examination of the background to, and complexities of seventeenth century ecclesiology.

In the four decades following the collapse of the Republic in 1659, Dissent experienced determining crises, both in its relationships with the Church of England and within itself. The later Stuart period was the crucible in which theological differences became irreconcilable and the fragmentation of Dissent gathered a fatal momentum.

I shall begin this first division with an outline of the principal developments of the period. This will not be a full account of religious politics under Charles, James, William and Mary. No attempt will be made to relate a comprehensive narrative. Rather, the troubled relationship between Dissent and Church until 1689 and the subsequent turbulence within Dissent itself will be the focus. Particular note will be taken of the several proposals for comprehension and/or toleration which alternated with periods of intensified persecution through the Restoration. It will be seen that a major turning point was reached in 1678-83. The "Restoration crisis" had important ramifications for the future of Nonconformity.

The second concentration will be on the historiography of these events. After reviewing significant recent scholarship I will contend that an understanding of Nonconformist theology is a vital adjunct to other approaches.

The course of events which resulted in the re-establishment of the Church of England and culminated in the Act of Uniformity and the great ejection of 1662 has been well described in modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup> From the outset,

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<sup>5</sup> See particularly R.S. Bosher, The Making of the Restoration Settlement, London, 1951; A. Whiteman, "The Restoration of the Church of England" and R. Thomas, "Comprehension and Indulgence", both in G. Nuttall & O. Chadwick (eds), From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962, London, 1962, pp 19-88 and 191-253; A.H. Wood, Church Unity without Uniformity: A Study of Seventeenth-century English Church Movements and of Richard Baxter's Proposals for a Comprehensive Church, London, 1963, pp 118-240; I.M. Green, The Re-establishment of the Church of England, 1660-1663, Oxford, 1978; R. Hutton, The Restoration: a Political and

ecclesiology was a centre of debate. A satisfactory settlement of the Church question was crucial to the success of the revived monarchy. The re-establishment of the Church of England was expected, even welcomed by "Churchmen" and "Presbyterians" alike,<sup>6</sup> but key questions remained. "What form would the new edifice take?" and (closely related) "Who would place themselves under its cover?".

Essential to these questions were the concepts of "comprehension" and "toleration". On the comprehension debate hinged the "who's in" issue. Would the new Church take a form which was acceptable to a variety of interested parties, or would the settlement reflect the concerns of those who sought a narrow base, similar to the Church under Laud? Comprehension was thus an essentially ecclesiological problem. It entailed arguments over structure and ecclesiastical authority and depended upon fundamental views of what the Church represented.

The toleration debate presented slightly different concerns. More directly political than comprehension, it sought to determine the official attitude to those who ended up outside the established Church. Should they be allowed to gather, to preach, to proselytise; or should the external practise of their religious views be constrained, even

Religious History of England and Wales 1658-1667, Oxford, 1985; P. Seaward, The Cavalier Parliament and the Reconstruction of the Old Regime, 1661-1667, Cambridge, 1989; J. Spurr, The Restoration Church of England 1646-1689, New Haven, 1991, pp 29-42.

<sup>6</sup> Whiteman p 84; Thomas, "Comprehension", p 191; Spurr, Restoration Church, p 44.

forbidden? The focus was more on civil than on ecclesiastical authority. However, the basic matters at stake in toleration were not as far apart from those of comprehension as might be imagined. As will be seen, in the seventeenth century attitudes to toleration related very closely to fundamental images of the Church.

The Church question was confused from the start of the Restoration. From Breda on 4 April 1660 Charles had declared

a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called into question for differences of opinion in matter of religion, which do not disturb the peace of the Kingdom

To those nervous about the return to prominence of such hardliners as Gilbert Sheldon, this sounded promising. But the declaration was vague on details. It was unclear whether Charles intended a broad comprehension within one Church structure, or a generous toleration, or a combination of the two. Adding to the conceptual jumble was the significant provision that the general religious settlement was, ultimately, to be a matter for Parliament.

The first meaningful negotiations took place at Worcester House in October 1660. Significantly, although spokesmen for the Court, the Churchmen and the Presbyterians were present, the Independents stayed away.<sup>7</sup> The main discussion was directed towards comprehension. The Declaration which followed offered a settlement generally acceptable to the Presbyterians whilst proposing few fundamental departures from the pre-

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<sup>7</sup> See Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 26-7 on divisions between Presbyterians and Independents over the Worcester House meetings and their results.

interregnum Church structure.<sup>8</sup> Significant positions in the new structure were offered to leading Presbyterians.<sup>9</sup>

Final legislative approval of the Declaration fell to the Convention. This interim body was ill-equipped to provide clear direction. It was not the unequivocally "Presbyterian" body sometimes assumed. The majority appears to have been at least moderately royalist, and most were willing to accept a form of episcopacy. Members recognised as Independent stood against the measure, thereby assuring its defeat.<sup>10</sup>

The fate of the Worcester House Declaration highlights important divisions among the dissenting groups. Its demise

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<sup>8</sup> RB I.ii para 276. Whiteman pp 66-8. Wood (p 151) records Baxter's "surprised delight" at the contents of the Declaration. See also Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 192-4; Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 34-6.

<sup>9</sup> Baxter, Reynolds and Calamy were offered bishoprics, Manton and Bates Deaneries. Baxter declined within two days. Reynolds accepted before the Declaration was rejected. As Lamont points out, Reynolds' acceptance of the see of Norwich was thus on the basis of an expected settlement incorporating a reduced episcopacy, along the lines earlier proposed by Archbishop Ussher. See Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 235-6. Baxter was offered Hereford which was near to his old charge of Kidderminster. This may not have been a great catch. It had been described as "the worst endowed bishopric in England." - Dictionary of English Church History, London, 1912, p 267. There is no record of any similar offer of a post to Howe, who was only thirty in 1660. See also Bosher pp 193-4; Whiteman p 65.

<sup>10</sup> The traditional view was that Presbyterians had considerable sway in the Convention - see C.G. Bolam & J. Goring, "Presbyterians in Separation: The Cataclysm" in Bolam et al (eds) The English Presbyterians pp 73-112, pp 73-8 and Wood p 122. This confidence was misplaced. Bosher (pp 146-7) accepts the view that "Presbyterians" (as distinguished from "Churchmen" and "Independents") were a minority and that the balance of power was "always precarious". Hutton notes the failure of efforts by the "Presbyterian Knot" to gain early control of the Convention (pp 105, 113, 117-8, 144-5). See also Cragg, Puritanism, pp 238-9, Whiteman pp 60-72; Watts pp 213-5; Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 31-33.

also marked the turning point of the Restoration Church settlement. Despite some rear-guard action by the Court<sup>11</sup>, the election of the "Cavalier" Parliament in 1661 removed any possibility of a broad settlement.

The Act of Uniformity endorsed a Church that was essentially the same as the pre-Interregnum "Laudian" institution. Spurr has shown how varied were the motivations of those who did not conform. Though, for most, nonconformity was attended more by sadness than anger, for many there was no option.<sup>12</sup> Baxter left his post before St Bartholomew's Day arrived.

The high degree of nonconformity demonstrated the failure of the Act of Uniformity to force comprehension. Almost immediately there was an abortive attempt to ameliorate the impact of this default. On 26 December 1662 Charles II declared a form of indulgence in the spirit of Breda. The Court sought Parliamentary sanction of a Royal prerogative to set aside the penalties of the Act of Uniformity. Among Dissenters, the reaction was mixed. The move was vigorously opposed by Sheldon and the eventual Bill had no chance of success in the Commons.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Boshier pp 250-64; Hutton pp 175-6.

<sup>12</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 43-5. See also Bolam & Goring, "Presbyterians in Separation", pp 79-84; Watts pp 227-238.

<sup>13</sup> Boshier p 270; N. Sykes, From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History 1660-1768, Cambridge, 1959, pp 70-1; Wood pp 233-4; Thomas, "Comprehension", p 195; R.A. Beddard, "The Restoration Church" in J.R. Jones (ed), The Restored Monarchy 1660-1688, London, 1979, pp 155-175, pp 167-168; Watts p 225; Hutton pp 193-197 (see also pp 175-6); Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 50-1.



Other, quite different legislation was successful in this period. The Conventicle Act of 1664 and the Five Mile Act of 1665 made sectarian activity very difficult. It was not until 1667 that either comprehension or toleration would again be formally proposed.

An apparent softening towards Dissent among some Churchmen was emerging as early as November 1666.<sup>14</sup> An interesting formal move began in January 1668. The chief architect was Dr John Wilkins (1614-72), Oliver Cromwell's brother-in-law and later Bishop of Chester. Wilkins proposed both comprehension and a parallel indulgence of those still unable to come into the established Church.<sup>15</sup>

The level of official support for this move is unclear.<sup>16</sup> In any case, the most important questions relate to the Nonconformist response. Wilkins' negotiations were with

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<sup>14</sup> Not too much can be built on this as the principal evidence is the sermon preached to the House of Lords by Reynolds, Bishop of Norwich, who had earlier identified with moderate Presbyterians. See W.G. Simon, "Comprehension in the Age of Charles II", *CH*, Vol. 31, 1962, pp 440-448, p 440. Barlow of Lincoln appears to have drafted a "Comprehensive Bill" in October 1667 - see Thomas, "Comprehension", p 197.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", p 199.

<sup>16</sup> The King appears to have endorsed it. Simon suggests no less than eight Bishops were involved. He lists them as Piers (Bath & Wells), Ironsides (Bristol), Nicholson (Gloucester), King (Chichester), Fuller (Lincoln), Croft (Hereford), Reynolds (Norwich) and Blandford (Worcester). He erroneously includes Wilkins, as at Chester, but this elevation did not take place until later in the year. Spurr has cast doubt on the manuscript evidence for this list. See Simon p 442; Beddard, "Restoration Church", p 168; J. Spurr, "The Church of England, Comprehension and the Toleration Act of 1689", *EHR*, 104, 1989, pp 927-946, p 941 n 4; G.J. Schochet, "From Persecution to "Toleration" in J.R. Jones (ed) Liberty Secured? Britain Before and After 1688, Stanford, 1992, pp 122-157, p 143.

Presbyterians. Accord was relatively quickly reached and a Bill drafted. But the Presbyterians had confined themselves to the comprehension side of the equation.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the Independents, led by John Owen, were interested only in indulgence. Interestingly, Owen rejected Wilkins' proposals for toleration and independently advanced his own scheme. The Wilkins plan did not necessarily exclude Papists. Owen's measure made strict Protestant orthodoxy a test.<sup>18</sup>

In the event, neither measure received a hearing in the Cavalier Parliament. As had happened after the 1663 attempt at indulgence, the 1668 Bills were followed by a call for even sterner measures against Dissenters. A new Conventicles Act was passed but failed to receive the King's assent.<sup>19</sup>

The magnitude of the opportunity lost in 1668 is hard to gauge.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the various moves signal important

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Manton (1620-77), William Bates (1625-99) and, later, Baxter were involved. See Simon pp 442-3; Wood pp 247-9; Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 198-202. The chronology outlined by Simon and Thomas does not support Spurr's suggestion of "long negotiations" - Spurr, "Comprehension" p 934.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", p 200. Both Sykes (pp 74-5) and D.R. Lacey, (Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661-1689: A Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism, New Brunswick, 1969 p 287, n. 41) appear to confuse the two proposals, suggesting that Owen's Bill left the way open for Papacy. All refer to Barlow's account (Bodleian Library B. 14, 15, Linc; H. Thorndike Works (1854) Vol. v. pp 304-5). Given the concerns of Owen, Thomas is probably correct to ascribe the less doctrinally rigid proposal to Wilkins.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", p 203.

<sup>20</sup> Some historians of the period (e.g. Wood and H.G. Plum, Restoration Puritanism: A Study of the Growth of English Liberty, Chapel Hill, 1943) barely mention the Bills of 1668. Among those who do, assessments of their importance of vary according to the account followed. Those preferring Baxter

differences within Dissent. This division was not limited to a neat line, drawn between Presbyterian and Independent. Different approaches had been developing within Presbyterianism since the Five Mile Act had forced a choice of compliance or defiance. This became more marked and obvious after the collapse of the 1668 effort. By 1671 Sir Joseph Williamson could identify two parties which he christened "Dons" and "Ducklings". Baxter, Manton and Bates, principal negotiators in 1668, were "Dons" - conservative leaders who actively sought comprehension and disliked Independency. The "Ducklings" were a group of generally younger men, closer to the Independents, who preferred some form of Indulgence as a solution to their difficulties.<sup>21</sup> It will be seen that these different concerns reflected more than obvious disagreements over Church polity. Deeper ecclesiological forces were at play.

Charles' Declaration of Indulgence of 15 March 1672 was of immense consequence. It suspended enforcement of laws against those Protestant Nonconformists who gained licences and allowed private worship to Roman Catholics. Again, the significance of the Indulgence lies less in its specific provisions than in the varying responses of Nonconformists to the toleration offered. Growing fundamental differences were laid bare.

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(e.g. Spurr) give the attempt little prominence. Those giving greater weight to Barlow's record (Simon and Lacey) accord it more significance.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension" pp 207-9; Lacey p 64 (following Thomas); Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 61-2.

On a simple reading of the figures, the Indulgence appears to have been welcomed eagerly.<sup>22</sup> Declining to recognise the Crown's jurisdiction over matters of conscience, many Baptists and all Quakers declined to apply.<sup>23</sup> Presbyterians varied widely in their enthusiasm. "Don" types accepted the measure reluctantly. Baxter waited until October to take a licence and would do so only if described as merely "Nonconformist". Howe was by this time in Ireland. Calamy asserts that, on Howe's return to London in 1676, he "made a quiet and peaceable use of King Charles's Indulgence".<sup>24</sup> The Indulgence had been abrogated by this time but this may suggest some continuing degree of *de facto* toleration, at least in London.<sup>25</sup>

The most eager licensees were the Independents. Moreover, a drift toward the Independent position was now readily discernible among the many younger Presbyterians who also applied. Ordinations, suspended since 1660, recommenced, necessarily in a "independent" style. Watts notes at least one case in which "a regular Church" was set up. In 1680 Edward Stillingfleet would assert that the Indulgence marked the beginning of Presbyterian separation. After the fillip

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<sup>22</sup> For such an interpretation see e.g. Lacey p 64.

<sup>23</sup> Wood pp 252-3; CR p xv; Watts pp 247-8.

<sup>24</sup> CR p 67.

<sup>25</sup> On the rigour or otherwise of enforcement of the Conventicle Acts in the country see A. Fletcher, "The Enforcement of the Conventicle Acts 1664-1679" in W.J. Sheils (ed) Persecution and Toleration, Studies in Church History 21, Oxford, 1984, pp 235-246. For London see G.S. De Krey, "The First Restoration Crisis: Conscience and Coercion in London, 1667-73", Albion 25, (Winter 1993) pp 565-580.

provided by the Indulgence, enthusiasm for comprehension among Nonconformists waned considerably.<sup>26</sup>

A similar decline in interest can be detected in the Church. Although a Bill "for the Ease of Protestant Dissenters", passed the lower house after the King had been forced to withdraw the Indulgence in 1673, this was very much a Commons (rather than Church) initiative and was effectively defeated in the Lords after determined efforts against it by Sheldon and his supporters. In any case, its main thrust was for toleration.<sup>27</sup>

Comprehension did not disappear as a theoretical option. It was discussed almost continuously from 1675-1681. Yet those with a positive interest in the idea were few: Tillotson and Stillingfleet from the Church; Baxter, Manton, Bates and Howe from Dissent.<sup>28</sup> The Church displayed interest only to the degree that it felt threatened. The experience of 1672 had shown how quickly parishioners might change allegiance if toleration were put in place.<sup>29</sup> Even more frightening was the

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<sup>26</sup> Watts pp 248-9; Wood p 255; Spurr, "Comprehension" pp 944-5, Restoration Church, pp 61-62; Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 209-210.

<sup>27</sup> Nonconformists (notably the ubiquitous Baxter) were consulted on the shape of the Bill but it was always a lay initiative and was closely related to the Constitutional issues presented by the Indulgence. See Sykes pp 76-78; Thomas "Comprehension", pp 210-214; Lacey pp 67-69; Spurr "Comprehension" p 935; Restoration Church, p 64.

<sup>28</sup> Little encouragement could be taken from the fact that the discussions in 1675 were prompted by two Bishops. Morley and Ward were unlikely peacemakers. See Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 219-221.

<sup>29</sup> Beddard, "Restoration Church", p 169; Spurr, Restoration Church, p 63.

prospect of "popery". It was no coincidence that the 1675 discussions commenced in response to the Duke of York's proposals for indulgence and that the strongest moves for both comprehension and indulgence in this period (1680) fell within the Restoration crisis.<sup>30</sup>

Moves towards both comprehension and indulgence came to an end in 1680. From 1681 until 1686 Dissent suffered the greatest persecution of the Restoration period. In 1682, John Howe gave a warning to a young man, "shortly to enter upon the more public stage of the world".

It is a slippery stage; it is a divided time, wherein there is interest against interest, party against party.<sup>31</sup>

Constant harassment was the reason given by Howe for abruptly leaving his congregation for Holland in August 1685.<sup>32</sup> However, yet another shift in alliances began under James II. When James offered his own Declaration of Indulgence on 4 April 1687, the reaction among Nonconformist clerics was as mixed as it had been in 1672. Many (including Baxter, Bates and Howe) refused to thank the King publicly, as he desired. Yet, a sizable number of Presbyterians and Independents did

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<sup>30</sup> Sykes pp 75-76, 82-3; Wood p 261; Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 222-228; H. Horwitz, "Protestant Reconciliation in the Exclusion Crisis", *JEH*, Vol 15, 1964, pp 201-217; Watts pp 249-51; Spurr, "Comprehension", pp 936-7.

<sup>31</sup> J. Howe, Self Dedication discoursed in the anniversary thanksgiving of a person of honour for a great deliverance, (1682), *Works*, I, pp 345-378, p 377. The "person of honour" was the Earl of Kildare.

<sup>32</sup> See Howe's Letter to His Congregation and Friends on Setting Out to Travel with Lord Wharton, (1685), *Works*, III, pp 556-60. This letter and its implications are discussed in chapter six, pp 235-239 below.

subscribe to Addresses of at least qualified acceptance of the measure.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in a marked change from 1672, Quakers and many Baptists were prominent in welcoming the Indulgence.<sup>34</sup>

The Catholic James, by now clearly estranged from the Church of England, continued to build alliances among "whig collaborators". Mark Goldie has demonstrated the alacrity with which many lay Nonconformists cooperated with the new King's measures.<sup>35</sup> Clerical Dissent was wooed from all sides. James renewed his Declaration in 1688 and actively sought Nonconformist support. He already had significant allies among the Quakers and Baptists but had made little headway among the more cautious Presbyterians and Independents. Twice, during the final months of his reign, James made direct approaches to Howe and others but failed to convince them to back his cause.<sup>36</sup>

These holdouts had other commitments. Negotiations with the Church on terms for comprehension were apparently enjoying

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<sup>33</sup> J. Stoughton, History of Religion in England, from the Opening of the Long Parliament to the End of the Eighteenth Century, London, 1881, Vol. IV, pp 119-121; Cragg, Puritanism, p 29; Thomas, "Comprehension", p 236; Lacey pp 180-2; Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", p 179.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", p 174-5; Lacey pp 182-4; Watts pp 257-8; Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", pp 174-5.

<sup>35</sup> See M. Goldie, "John Locke's Circle and James II", HJ, 35, 3 (1992), pp 557-586 and "James II and the Dissenters' Revenge: the Commission of Enquiry of 1688", HR, Vol 66, No. 159, Feb 1993, pp 53-88.

<sup>36</sup> William Penn the Quaker and Stephen Lobb, a Congregationalist were James' agents on the first of these occasions (May 23) see Lacey pp 211-2, 220; Thomas, "Comprehension", p 238.

a renaissance. The Petition of the Seven Bishops (presented in May against the King's direction to read the second Indulgence in the Churches) raised the prospect of some willingness to seek an acceptable settlement. Detailed discussions were held during July but nothing resulted.<sup>37</sup>

James and the Church were not the only suitors. In 1687 there were secret discussions with an envoy of William of Orange.<sup>38</sup> The complexity of the situation led many to be wary of all overtures. When William eventually landed, Nonconformist leaders were slow to endorse him before his victory seemed certain.<sup>39</sup>

With the Revolution, and a new Convention Parliament came early legislative moves for both comprehension and indulgence. The Bills were a Church package, designed to complement each other.<sup>40</sup> Their respective fates are instructive. The Comprehension Bill was narrow, in many respects not acceptable

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<sup>37</sup> The undertaking by the Churchmen was vague and noncommittal. It included a reference to Convocation and was given little credence by Dissenters. Lacey pp 187, 210-211 (see note 5); Spurr, Restoration Church, p 94. See also Plum p 68; Sykes pp 83-85; Wood p 265; Bolam & Goring pp 100-101; Watts p 259; Spurr, "Comprehension", p 937; N. Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism' and the Legalizing of Dissent, 1571-1719", in O.P. Grell et al (eds), From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England, Oxford, 1991, pp 17-49, p 39.

<sup>38</sup> Both Howe and Bates were involved. Morrice records some caution on the part of Nonconformists about their prospects if both William and Mary were to come to the throne. - see Lacey pp 186-187, 343 n 41.

<sup>39</sup> Lacey, pp 221-2, cites Morrice's frustration that Dissenters "'did not more openly and publicly rise for, and serve the Prince of Orange'". Baptists and Quakers, many of whom had collaborated with James II, "were most notably absent" from William's support.

<sup>40</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 103; Lacey pp 234-7.



even to moderate Nonconformists who put together an alternative measure. In an apparent deal between "tory" and "whig" groups, only the indulgence measure was seen through the parliamentary process, becoming the vaunted "Toleration Act". The comprehension issue was referred to a Church Convocation, from which it did not emerge.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that the Act settled few matters of importance in what B.R. White calls "the twilight of Puritanism".<sup>42</sup> The Presbyterians and Independents experimented with a "Happy Union" in the early 1690s, but this attempt at institutional co-operation quickly unravelled. There were minor attempts at reconciliation with the Church of England. These too were fruitless. By John Howe's death in 1705, all prospect of a broad, nationally-unified Church in England was gone. In the decades which followed, Dissent gradually broke up into competing nonconformities. It became "fragmented, highly argumentative and individualistic".<sup>43</sup> By the 1740s it is estimated that the numerical strength of Dissenters was half what it had been in 1690.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 251-3.

<sup>42</sup> B.R. White, "The Twilight of Puritanism in the Years Before and After 1688" in Grell *et al* From Persecution to Toleration, pp 307-330.

<sup>43</sup> R. Brown, Church and State in Modern Britain 1700-1850, London, 1991, pp 110-111.

<sup>44</sup> J.C.D. Clark, English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime, Cambridge, 1985, p 137. Holmes argues that the true relative weakness of Dissent was not appreciated by defenders of the establishment - G. Holmes, Religion and Party in Late Stuart England, London, 1975, *passim* and The Making of a Great Power: Late Stuart and Early Georgian Britain 1660-1722, Harlow, 1993, pp 350-365. See also J. Goring "The Break-Up of

Key questions present themselves to the student of later Stuart Dissent. The reasons for the failure of the Worcester House Declaration, the severity of the Act of Uniformity and its supporting legislation and the failure of Charles' attempts at Indulgence are neither simple nor obvious. The rise and fall of various attempts to construct a more comprehensive Church settlement also require explanation. Why was the Church apparently open to the possibility from 1675-80 only to abandon promising discussions with the apparent resolution of the Restoration Crisis? Why was toleration the only major fruit of the Glorious Revolution whilst comprehension, despite renewed negotiations during 1688, withered on the vine? What was the nature and cause of the divisions among the Presbyterians? Why did Quakers, Baptists and more radical Independents support the policies of the Catholic James? In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, why were lasting formal bonds unable to be forged within Dissent? Complex enough on their own, these problems cannot be divorced from broader issues. Political trends and struggles are particularly important. The current reconsideration of standard interpretations of the politics of the period has highlighted several interpretative screens through which Church questions may be viewed.<sup>45</sup> After

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Old Dissent" in Bolam et al The English Presbyterians, pp 175-218.

<sup>45</sup> The established historiography, and the tentative initial findings of the new approach, are summarized by T. Harris, "Introduction: Revising the Restoration" in T. Harris, P. Seaward & M. Goldie (eds), The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, Oxford, 1990, pp 1-28.

discussing briefly the main points of these I will propose another, theological approach. The intent is to augment the strengths of other models rather than provide a replacement or complete explanation. Simple, monocausal interpretations will not suffice. Although aspects of current models will be criticised, even rejected, it is recognised that many perspectives are needed to obtain a clear view of the whole.

There is a burgeoning historical literature covering the reigns of Charles II and James II. The various interpretations of Restoration Church history may be subsumed under the (conveniently alliterative) titles of, "peace", "power", "prosperity", "politics" and "popery". These headings denote factors which are intimately related to each other. Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, I shall consider each in turn.

A desire for "peace" has long been recognised as an important element in Restoration Church issues. The view clearly has some merit. After the turmoil and uncertainty of the preceding two decades, there was unquestionably a strong yearning for "peace" in 1660.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, this interpretation suggests a logical link between perceived threats to national stability (such as the Yorkshire uprising (1663), the Rye House Plot (1683) and Monmouth's rebellion (1685)) and moves

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<sup>46</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 29 records the relief of Newcome and South. Cragg, Puritanism, p 3 and Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 24-5 note similar feelings among Puritans.

against Dissent.<sup>47</sup> Yet, arguments for peace were variously applied. Some contended that the cause of peace was best advanced by toleration, rather than repression. Arguing that Dissenting ministers had more sway over the populace than did the parish clergy, John Hickes (Howe's brother-in-law) revised James I's maxim "No Bishop, no King" to read "No Non-conformist, no King".<sup>48</sup>

The call for "peace" was one aspect of a desire for a return to the pre-interregnum "status quo". Moves to restore structures of "power" were another. Nowhere was this more apparent than among the gentry who made up the bulk of the Cavalier Parliament. Green asserts that this group "attacked those forces which challenged the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the existing order of society."<sup>49</sup> Hutton describes this drive for the restoration of order as the "tremendous unifying

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<sup>47</sup> D.J. Milne, "The Results of the Rye House Plot and their Influence Upon the Revolution of 1688", TRHS, Fifth Series, Vol. 1, 1951, pp 91-108; Cragg, Puritanism, pp 25-27; Watts pp 221-229; Seaward, Cavalier Parliament, pp 189-90; J. Barry, "The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol" in T. Harris, P. Seaward & M. Goldie (eds), The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, Oxford, 1990, pp 163-189, pp 176-7; J. Spurr, "Virtue, Religion and Government: the Anglican Uses of Providence", in Harris et al, pp 34-35; Restoration Church, pp 51, 81, 88.

<sup>48</sup> J. Hickes, A True and Faithful Narrative of the Unjust and Illegal Sufferings of many Christians...in Devon (1671). Hickes would be executed for his part in the Monmouth rebellion. See also C. Wolsely, Liberty of Conscience the Magistrate's Interest (1668).

<sup>49</sup> Green p 180. Green further holds that "the zeal of the gentry for the episcopal Church of England" was "the most important single influence" on the church settlement - p 200. Seaward, Cavalier Parliament, p 194-5, suggests that a profound identification of stability with uniformity was found in only "a powerful minority" in the Cavalier Parliament but was nevertheless a factor "among the country gentry as a whole. See Hutton p 183; Beddard, "Restoration Church", p 156

force" of early Restoration developments. The gentry "fought to have Crown, Church, towns, Catholics dissenters and vagrants all equally within their control, so that no force could remain within society capable of destroying its stability again."<sup>50</sup> An "unwillingness to allow the extension of political rights" may have been a telling reason for the ultimate failure of the 1689 Bill for Comprehension.<sup>51</sup>

This view too is limited. It has little to offer in explanation of moves towards toleration within the Commons after 1680. Almost by definition it has nothing to say of the motivations of the Dissenters and sheds no light on the apparent waxing and waning of interest in comprehension within the Church.

Historians have frequently associated the "Puritans" and their successors with the merchant classes. None would now cast the disputes between gentry Churchmen and "middling" Nonconformists as simple class conflict.<sup>52</sup> However a "prosperity" interpretation has encouraged the idea that moves to toleration in particular were related to commercial

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<sup>50</sup> Hutton, p 289.

<sup>51</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 103. This concession to the political realities of parliament is interesting given Spurr's preference for a theological explanation of the Church's attitude to the Bill - see Spurr, "Comprehension", p 944.

<sup>52</sup> Although Christopher Hill comes close. In a recent work, he asserts, of a group which includes Richard Baxter, that, during the Restoration, "one common factor in the lives of these conservative Puritan ministers is the crucial importance to them of tithes" - The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries, London, 1984, p 217. Much of the framework for Hill's study depends upon economic stratification. As already noted, Green almost identifies parliamentary "Anglicanism" with the country gentry.

concerns. By this view, the economic importance of the Nonconformists (particularly in London) made persecution ultimately untenable. Economic arguments were certainly employed. The London M.P. and Merchant, Sir William Thompson supported toleration in 1668 "because..restraint would prove destructive to trade".<sup>53</sup>

Despite such sentiments the "prosperity" view is the weakest of the explanations under examination. It is now recognised that both Churchmen and Nonconformists were to be found throughout all strata of society.<sup>54</sup> Paul Seaward has shown that the merchant elites of London gave substantial support to Sheldon's push for uniformity.<sup>55</sup> The fluctuations of Nonconformist fortunes during the period demand a more subtle understanding.

Subtlety is certainly not lacking in the many-faceted "political" interpretations of Restoration Church problems. Several related themes emerge. The first is constitutional: the ongoing conflict between Crown and Parliament. Here the Indulgences of both Charles and James are understood as claims to prerogative power. The subsequent defeat or withdrawal of each represents victory for anti-

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<sup>53</sup> Lacey p 448. For further examples (including one from John Owen) see C.E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688, New York, 1931, pp 477, 495-6; R. Greaves, Enemies Under His Feet: Radicals and Nonconformists in Britain, 1664-1677, Stanford, 1990, p 153; Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism'", pp 34-6.

<sup>54</sup> Harris, "Introduction", pp 20-22.

<sup>55</sup> P. Seaward, "Gilbert Sheldon, the London Vestries, and the Defence of the Church", in Harris et al, The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, pp 49-73, esp. pp 50-1.

absolutists within Parliament. The reluctance of many Nonconformists to accept the Indulgences reflects constitutional qualms. For this last there is considerable support in the statements of the moderate Dissenters.

In many ways a Court version of the "peace and power" view, a second political theme lies in both monarchs' need to secure their position. Thus Charles' 1662 efforts to soften the provisions of the Act of Uniformity relate to his fear of Nonconformist reaction. The chronic need for finance explains his eventual capitulation to Parliament over the 1672 Indulgence. Support for comprehension from Charles (in the Worcester House Declaration and again in 1668) together with the dramatic overtures to Dissent by James reflect the desire to broaden the Crown's constituency, or at least to divide the opposition.<sup>56</sup> When the personal ambitions and machinations of other leading Restoration figures are incorporated it is clear that political explanations can be found for many of the twists and turns in the tortuous course of the Church disputes.

The most confident proponents of this view relegate religious concerns to a minor role. J.R. Jones asserts that

the gradual, grudging and partial acceptance of religious toleration...is another example of the demotion of religion from its previously dominant position.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> J. Miller, "The Later Stuart Monarchy" in J.R. Jones (ed), The Restored Monarchy, 1660-1688, London, 1979, pp 30-47, p 35.; Beddard, "Restoration Church" pp 161, 172.

<sup>57</sup> J.R. Jones, "Introduction" in Jones (ed), The Restored Monarchy, 1660-1688, pp 1-29, p 7. In the same volume Beddard suggests religion merely seconded "secular grievance" - "Restoration Church", p 156.

This position has recently been challenged by a raft of historiography which seeks

to restore a lively sense of the tensions and the conflicts, the high stakes and the stern pieties, involved in the religious politics of Charles II's reign.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, significant holes remain. As with the "status-quo" interpretations, little can be positively said by this approach about the attitudes of Nonconformists. The choice of so many not to conform in 1662 has no clear grounds in this view. As with the "peace" argument, constitutional grounds could be adopted for more than one purpose.<sup>59</sup> Most importantly, the divisions within Dissent over "comprehension" versus "toleration" and, on the Church side, the stands taken by such figures as Sheldon and Sancroft defy mere political explanation. The laborious debates which attended the ecclesiological disputes and the weight of polemical writing from divines with no apparent political ambition require historians to attend directly to the more obviously religious forces at work.

Interpretations which highlight concern over real or perceived threats from "popery" might appear to address religious issues more directly. This is not necessarily so. John Miller identifies politics as the primary factor behind the 1678-1681 "popish plot" disturbances, suggesting that the

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<sup>58</sup> Preface to Harris et al The Politics of Religion in Restoration England.

<sup>59</sup> See Lacey p 65 on Philip Nye's argument in favour of the 1672 Indulgence.



immediate dangers of "popery" were more imagined than real.<sup>60</sup> M.G. Finlayson argues that anti-Catholicism was a cypher for a complex web of constitutional, nationalistic and economic fears as well as theological concerns.<sup>61</sup> As with the general "politics" school, this relegation of strictly religious aspects has been challenged. By taking the arguments of protestant polemicists seriously, Jonathan Scott has built an impressive case for genuine religious factors in anti-Catholicism, at least in the 1678-83 "Restoration crisis". He argues that, when put in a European (rather than merely English) context, the concern of Protestants sprang from anxiety over the advance of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>62</sup>

In this form, the "popery" view explains well the discussions about comprehension between Church and Dissent in the 1670s and again in 1687-88. The advances of Catholicism on the Continent raised fears about a Catholic succession. James II's actions once King seemed to confirm the threat.<sup>63</sup> A general opposition to Catholicism may have sealed the

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<sup>60</sup> John Miller, Popery and Politics in England, 1660-88, Cambridge, 1973, pp 181-2.

<sup>61</sup> M.G. Finlayson, Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution, Toronto, 1983, pp 123-141.

<sup>62</sup> J. Scott, "England's Troubles: Exhuming the Popish Plot" in Harris et al, The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, pp 107-131.

<sup>63</sup> Calamy pp 70-1; Cragg, Puritanism, pp 22-3; Horwitz, "Protestant Reconciliation", pp 201-2; Watts pp 249-50; Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 65-7. Sykes (p 84) quotes Wake (in 1710) to the effect that, in 1688, most Church leaders were "at the height of our labours, defending the Church of England against the assaults of Popery and thought of nothing else".

Parliamentary fate of the Indulgences.<sup>64</sup> However, some features of the narrative remain inexplicable by this approach. The Church abruptly broke off negotiations in 1680 just as James' succession was secured and before the end of the popular disruptions over Catholicism. Further, Nonconformist groups like the Baptists and Quakers (whose theology eschewed "popery") supported the Indulgence efforts of James. Properly understood as a religious phenomenon, anti-Catholicism explains crucial issues in the minds of the Protestants. Yet, as a heuristic device for explaining the course of relations between Church and Dissent in the Restoration period, it is inadequate.

Whatever their individual limitations, might not the perspectives I have described, if taken together, provide a rounded and sophisticated portrait of church disputes in the Restoration period? Each has its strengths and can supplement the light shed by the others. In particular, the actions of Court and Parliament receive considerable illumination. However, even so combined, these approaches cannot provide the full picture. They leave significant shadows, the darkest of which fall on those of whose opinions we have an extensive written record: the Divines.

The theologians and leaders of both Church and Dissent have not been taken seriously enough. Individuals like Howe, Baxter, Owen, Bates, Alsop and their Church counterparts were religious, in most cases devout, men to whom theological

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 209-211.

questions were of the highest importance. Writing with Baxter in mind, Lamont has recently conceded that

we can understand why historians have become heartily sick of the godly, but there is a price...to be paid for not listening to their voice.<sup>65</sup>

In Restoration historiography the price has been an inadequate understanding of the alienation of Dissent.

The picture is only marginally different for the period following 1688. Several factors have been identified in the splintering and decline of Dissent. In 1975 J.W. Wilkes could explain the fate of late Stuart and Hanoverian Dissent almost entirely in terms of "secularisation".<sup>66</sup> In different ways Geoffrey Holmes and J.C.D. Clark have pointed to the social and institutional alienation of Nonconformists from political power.<sup>67</sup> Clark adds the impact of "assertive Anglicanism".<sup>68</sup> Clark and others also point to the debilitating effects of doctrinal disputes in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> W. Lamont, "Arminianism: the controversy that never was" in N. Phillipson & Q. Skinner (eds), Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain, Cambridge, 1993, pp 45-66, p 66.

<sup>66</sup> J.W. Wilkes, "The Transformation of Dissent: a Review of the Change from the Seventeenth to the Eighteenth Centuries" in C.R. Cole & M.E. Moody (eds), The Dissenting Tradition: Essays for Leland H. Carlson, Athens, Ohio, 1975, pp 108-122.

<sup>67</sup> Holmes, The Making of a Great Power, pp 355-6; Clark, English Society, pp 315-324, 376-7.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, English Society, p 137.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, English Society, p 317; Holmes, The Making of a Great Power, p 355; White, "Twilight" pp 328-30; Webb pp 171-174.

These latter interpretations appear to concede the importance of theology. Indeed they throw up significant insights. Nevertheless they deal primarily with surface manifestations rather than fundamental issues. The theological dynamics of Nonconformity are not fully described merely by identifying public disputes. As I will argue in chapter eight, a proper appreciation of the relationships between the various groups within Dissent must go beyond their differences to acknowledge the corrosive effects of their underlying similarities.

If historians, particularly students of the Restoration, have become "heartily sick of the godly", part of their distaste may derive from the seemingly intractable problems of definition which surfaced during the 1960s. As I have suggested in the Introduction, the writings of the period themselves put pressure on many popular terms. It is, therefore, no surprise that there is a debate over definitions, only that it took so long to arise. There has been a significant impact on early modern historiography. Arguments over definition have exacerbated a traditional division of effort about the year 1660. The result has been a loss of confidence in the possibility of finding any continuity between the vigorous religious energies of the Interregnum and the disparate and marginalised Nonconformity of the Restoration and beyond.

The issues are central to this thesis. In suggesting that theology is a crucial element in a rounded understanding of

the fate of Dissent I have laid myself open to peculiar temptations. Intellectual history can claim too much for itself. It can be blinkered and purely diachronic in its analysis, ignoring the historical context of the ideas in question. An aspect of this failing has often been the imposition of rigid and unsustainable definitions. Yet no historian can properly avoid the process of sorting and grouping. This is what analysis entails. At stake is the quality of definitions and the humility with which they are proffered, not the enterprise itself. In the debate over such terms as "Puritanism", the "godly" have been examined and dissected, often inconclusively. Nevertheless elements have emerged which allow for a new, flexible approach. Before I propose such a model, it is necessary to review the debate itself.

Admittedly, not all historians are troubled by the question of definition. There remain some Johnsonian positivists who wonder what all the fuss is about. Thus Ruth Spalding can entitle her study of Bulstrode Whitelocke "*The Improbable Puritan*" without seriously discussing what it is to be a "Puritan" (surely an essential element in assessing "probability").<sup>70</sup>

More careful, yet ultimately not too far removed, is the historiographical tradition which assumes Puritanism to be a discrete entity merely waiting to be described. In the

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<sup>70</sup> R. Spalding, *The Improbable Puritan: A Life of Bulstrode Whitelocke 1605-1675*, London, 1975. The only criterion Spalding seems to employ is "the popular image" - p 23.

twentieth century the most significant historians in this school have been Perry Miller and William Haller.

With the publication of *The New England Mind* in 1939, Perry Miller raised the study of American Puritanism to a new plane.<sup>71</sup> The breadth of his analysis has not since been equalled. Identifying and acknowledging an "Augustinian piety" at its root, Miller was most interested in Puritanism as "an intellectual system, highly elaborated and meticulously worked out."<sup>72</sup> This "system" was hegemonic. Miller concluded

that the first three generations in New England paid almost unbroken allegiance to a unified body of thought and took

the liberty of treating the whole literature as though it were the product of a single intelligence.<sup>73</sup>

His confidence has since been challenged. Moreover, though he makes no positive claim that a similar uniformity is found in England, Miller clearly understands there to be distinct schools there too.

[Congregationalism] was the unique and distinguishing feature of New England Puritanism, setting it off not alone from Anglicanism but from other Puritanisms and from Continental Calvinism.<sup>74</sup>

Dealing with the English scene at almost the same time as Miller was completing *The New England Mind*, William Haller, in *The Rise of Puritanism* (1938), also assumes the tangibility of his subject. Rather than first establishing its existence,

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<sup>71</sup> P. Miller, *The New England Mind*, Vol 1, *The Seventeenth Century*, (1939), Boston, 1954.

<sup>72</sup> P. Miller p 67.

<sup>73</sup> P. Miller p vii.

<sup>74</sup> P. Miller p 433.

he confidently sets out to describe it. For Haller Puritanism was more than piety, an intellectual system or religion. "It was a new way of life".<sup>75</sup> Although he acknowledged variations within the movement, these

were in the long run not so significant as the qualities of character, of mind and of imagination, which kept them all alike Puritan.<sup>76</sup>

"Puritan" and "Puritanism" were certainly terms in common usage in the later-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet frequent contemporary usage can promote overconfidence in historians. Behind the approach of Miller and Haller lies the belief that the contemporary popularity of "Puritanism" is enough to establish the existence of an entity or movement behind the term.<sup>77</sup> There is, after all, no smoke without fire. Mere popularity, however, can be ambiguous, even misleading. Another historian published in 1938, J.W. Allen, recognised possible difficulties.

If we can find no positive bond or unifying character...the word Puritan becomes unnecessary.<sup>78</sup>

Allen was disturbed at the enormous variety in the

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<sup>75</sup> W. Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, (1938), New York, 1957, pp 83, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Haller p 17.

<sup>77</sup> The O.E.D. cites the first use of "Puritan" in 1572, roughly coincident with "Puritanism" in 1573. Fuller, (The Church History of Britain, Oxford, 1845, Vol IV, p 327) refers to the use of "puritan" from 1564. No usage can be established before the 1560s. For detailed discussion of the provenance of the terms see B. Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition" in Studies in Church History, II, Oxford, 1965, pp 283-296, pp 287-290.

<sup>78</sup> J.W. Allen, English Political Thought 1603-1660, Vol. 1, 1603-1644, London, 1938, p 256. Despite his initial doubts, Allen was able to identify such a bond in a common attitude to the scriptures.

contemporary usage of the term. This problem lies at the heart of much later debate. There are, however, more fundamental issues which challenge students of "Puritanism".

J.C. Davis has pointed out that historians are caught between a desire to employ the language of a period and their quest to identify the social realities which pertained at that time. True anachronism threatens when contemporary words and labels are assumed simply to reflect underlying realities. The result can be misleading reification. "Puritan", he notes, is "the great exemplar of this problem".<sup>79</sup> The risk of reification is already great with "-ism" words. Harro Hopfl notes that the late sixteenth century saw an explosion in the coinage of such terms as "Puritanism", implying heresy, employed to denigrate and disparage distasteful ways of life.<sup>80</sup> If, as Hopfl suggests, an element of reification existed in contemporary usage, the difficulties of the historian writing at a distance of centuries and relying on the evidence of often polemical written accounts, are extreme.

These and other, related questions lie behind the Georges' restriction of the use of "Puritan" to the late sixteenth century.<sup>81</sup> However, it was Christopher Hill who

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<sup>79</sup> J.C. Davis, Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians, Cambridge, 1986, p 17.

<sup>80</sup> H. Hopfl, "-Isms", British Journal of Political Science, 13, (1983), pp 1-17. I am indebted to Dr Mandy Capern for this reference.

<sup>81</sup> C.H. & K. George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640, Princeton, 1961, pp 398-399. The philosophical concerns are more obvious in C.H. George, "Puritanism as History and Historiography", P&P, No. 41, Dec 1968, pp 77-104, p 97.



began what has become one of the major debates in early modern English historiography.<sup>82</sup>

Hill admits that "Puritan" is "an admirable refuge from clarity of thought".<sup>83</sup> He notes its origin as "a reproachful name" and the difficulties this presents the historian. The bulk of his discussion of the question of definition consists of a list of the varieties of meaning the word could attract for those who used it. The examples he chooses present a picture of almost hopeless confusion. Puritans could range

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<sup>82</sup> The material written on the definition of Puritanism is substantial. Notable contributions include: C. Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England, London, 1964, Ch 1, pp 13-29; Hall, "Puritanism: the Problem of Definition"; P. McGrath, Papists and Puritans Under Elizabeth I, London, 1967, Ch 2, pp 27-46; C.H. George, "Puritanism as History and Historiography"; W. Lamont, "Puritanism as History and Historiography: Some Further Thoughts", P&P, No. 44, Aug. 1969, pp 133-146; D. Little, Religion, Order and Law: A Study in Pre-Revolutionary England, Oxford, 1970, pp 250-259; H.C. Porter (ed), Puritanism in Tudor England, London, 1970, pp 1-14; I Breward, "The Abolition of Puritanism", JRH, Vol 7, No. 4, Dec. 1973, pp 20-34; M.G. Finlayson, "Puritanism and Puritans: Labels or Libels?", Canadian Journal of History, Vol. VIII, No. 3, Dec. 73, pp 201-223; R.L. Greaves, "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition" in R.B. Know (ed), Reformation Conformity and Dissent: Essays in honour of Geoffrey Nuttall, London, 1977, p 255-273; P. Christianson, "Reformers and the Church of England under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts", JEH, Vol. 31, No. 4, October 1980, pp 463-482; P. Collinson, "A Comment: Concerning the Name Puritan", JEH, Vol. 3, No. 4, October 1980, pp 483-488; M.G. Finlayson (again), Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution, esp Chs 3 & 6; J. Morgan, Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, Cambridge, 1986, pp 9-22; M.B. Endy Jr, "Puritanism, Spiritualism, and Quakerism: An Historiographical Essay", in R.S. & M.M. Dunn (eds), The World of William Penn, Philadelphia, 1986, pp 281-301; T.D. Bozeman, To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism, Chapel Hill (N.C.), 1988, pp 3-12; L.A. Sasek (ed), Images of English Puritanism: A Collection of Contemporary Sources 1589-1646, Baton Rouge, 1989, pp 1-27; P. Lake, "Defining Puritanism -again?" in F.J. Bremer (ed), Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith, Boston, 1993, pp 3-29.

<sup>83</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p 13

from being members of the "Family of Love" to the merely lawless.<sup>84</sup> Neither is this confusion cleared in Hill's own discussion. At one point he asserts that "for contemporaries the word had no narrowly religious connotation".<sup>85</sup> Yet, in his conclusion (again claiming the support of contemporaries), Hill holds that "there was a core of doctrine about religion and Church Government, aimed at purifying the Church from inside".<sup>86</sup> The latter view fits strangely with the purpose of Hill's book which is to suggest that "there might be non-theological reasons for supporting the Puritans, or for being a Puritan."<sup>87</sup>

Hill may have begun the debate in earnest but it was Basil Hall who set the agenda. Hall's is a reasoned and careful discussion of contemporary perceptions of "Puritanism". He acknowledges the many loose uses of the term but points out that this very looseness was itself bewailed by such observers as Parker, Fuller and Baxter.<sup>88</sup> From among the many available senses, Hall isolates an orthodox meaning.

Contemporary usage of the word Puritan was confined to the period 1564-1640 and applied to restlessly critical and occasionally rebellious members of the Church of England who desired some modifications in Church government and worship, but not to those who deliberately removed themselves from the Church.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, pp 17, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p 24.

<sup>86</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p 28.

<sup>87</sup> Hill, Society and Puritanism, p 9.

<sup>88</sup> Hall pp 285, 288.

<sup>89</sup> Hall p 290.

In the debate which has followed Hall's article, four major approaches can be observed. There are those such as George, Morgan and Finlayson who judge that the evidence precludes any productive retention of the term "Puritanism".<sup>90</sup> Finlayson and Morgan are prepared to retain "Puritan" as a noun or adjective applied to persons rather than to some impersonal fixed entity. For reasons which will become clear, I find these historians to be unduly pessimistic about the possibility of any working definition. Finlayson and Morgan have, however, both proposed a significant recasting of our interpretative framework. Finlayson has called for the abandonment of unhelpful dichotomies such as "Puritan" and "Anglican". Individuals should be understood in terms of their place on a spectrum of belief rather than their position in a defined party.<sup>91</sup> To this I shall return.

A larger group of historians retain the prospect that a substantive definition of "Puritanism", flexible enough to embrace seeming disparities, is possible. Within this group, three approaches can be identified. I will analyze these using a framework proposed by Melvin B. Endy Jr. Endy's essay is the best recent contribution to the debate over "Puritanism". He identifies three kinds of definition which have been applied

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<sup>90</sup> George, "Puritanism", p 104; Morgan p 16; Finlayson, "Puritans", p 222 (Finlayson's position softens to "use sparingly" in Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution, p 161.)

<sup>91</sup> Morgan pp 16-19. Finlayson's "Puritan" article is primarily an argument against false dichotomies between "Anglican" and "Puritan" and in favour of a spectrum understanding (see also Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution, p 74).

to religious movements. The first, the "functional" view denies to the movement a life of its own. Rather, it is seen "primarily as a response on the part of a class or group with distinct personal and social needs".<sup>92</sup> Marxist historians might thus interpret "Puritanism" as a facade for a rising middle class. Finlayson's rejection of the term springs from his view of it as a convenient mask for anti-catholicism.

Endy's second category of definition includes those who seek the "essential characteristic which marks the movement as a religious or sacred phenomenon".<sup>93</sup> In the modern debate there are those who would find the essence of "Puritanism" in the controversies in which "Puritans" were involved. "Puritans had one thing in common...- their desire to complete the purification of the Church of England begun in Elizabeth's day."<sup>94</sup> They often differed among themselves about specifics and the focus of their protests altered over the years but the element of reform remained. Whilst eschewing rigid "Puritan" and "Anglican" parties within the Church, Kearney, Hill (ostensibly), Collinson, Hall, Tyacke,<sup>95</sup> Sasek, even George (for the 1580s) accept versions of this approach.

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<sup>92</sup> Endy p 295.

<sup>93</sup> Endy p 295.

<sup>94</sup> E.H. Emerson, English Puritanism from John Hooper to John Milton, Durham (N.C.), 1968, p 46.

<sup>95</sup> Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism'", p 18. Tyacke admits "my own work on English Arminianism must bear some responsibility for the modern neglect of Puritanism" (n. 5, p 18). This highlights the danger of ignoring positive content when Puritanism is defined merely as protest.

The advantage of such a view lies in the ability of the definition to include persons with quite different prescriptions for reform. The shared desire to effect reform in a recognisably protestant direction is the essential criterion. This seems to provide a broad, inclusive framework. However there are two inherent narrowing outcomes. The first is that Independents and separatists are excluded. "Once a Puritan withdrew from the Church of England to set up a Church in distinction from its canons and episcopal government, he forthwith ceased to be clearly a Puritan."<sup>96</sup> Secondly, it effectively limits the period of Puritanism proper to the years 1570-1640. After this time the situation changed so dramatically that the definition becomes meaningless.

There are other difficulties with this approach to Puritanism. It contains the danger of seeing Puritan concerns in merely negative terms. To understand "an organised movement"<sup>97</sup> primarily as protest is unhelpful. Sheer "cussedness" may explain an individual's actions but hardly a sustained group effort. Moreover it is a minimalist understanding; descriptive rather than analytical. It provides few clues as to why Puritans challenged the *status quo* whilst others vigorously defended it. As Lake points out, a viable understanding must include "an acknowledgement of the links of thought and feeling" which bound Puritans together.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hall p 294.

<sup>97</sup> Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism'", p 18.

<sup>98</sup> P. Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker, London, 1988, p 6.

A desire to discern such links is found in another attempt to construct an essentialist definition. These historians seek some common element in the piety of Puritans. The two most prominent proponents of piety as the key to English Puritanism have been Geoffrey Nuttall and Richard Greaves. Greaves succinctly puts the case.

At the heart of the puritan experience is an evangelical piety dominated by an essentially emotional searching for a spiritual communion with God, made possible by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, and achieved with an immediacy that sets it apart from traditional Anglican modes of worship, which are fundamentally sacerdotal in nature.<sup>99</sup>

Greaves' approach is clearly valuable. This perspective can be seen readily to incorporate the controversial concerns of Puritans. It can cope with the way in which the appellation crosses boundaries and time frames (a feature Hall's protest-based approach to definition cannot easily assimilate). The analysis of John Howe which follows in this thesis will provide support for this view. Yet, although its fundamental validity is hard to question, on its own this approach delivers too broad a brush to the hand of the historian. The piety Greaves describes can be as easily discerned in second-century Montanists and in twentieth-century Pentecostals. Adopted consistently, definition via the route of piety alone might lead us (like Haller) to identify "Puritanism" at least

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<sup>99</sup> R.L. Greaves, "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition", p 258. See also Nuttall, Holy Spirit; R.L. Greaves, Society and Religion in Elizabethan England, Minneapolis, 1981, pp 3-14; S. Ahlstrom, Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy, New York, 1967, p 27. Perry Miller found the starting point of his analysis of puritanism in a distinctive piety but moved on to concentrate on theological issues, especially the Covenant Doctrines.

as far in the past as Chaucer.<sup>100</sup> The result is that the term loses much of its ability to inform our understanding of the specific features of Early Modern England. As Lake notes, "what it gains in subtlety it loses in precision".<sup>101</sup> Something more expressly attuned to the age is required.

To move to theology is not to move away from piety. The two are interwoven. Piety is "the soil out of which [theological formulations] grow and in which they thrive."<sup>102</sup> In this thesis, the immediacy of "Puritan" piety will be shown to have a counterpart in a theology which emphasises the transcendent activity of God. To focus on theology is to adopt what Endy calls the "formal" approach. This type of definition seeks to understand a religious movement in terms of shared beliefs, practices and institutional life.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, theology has the advantage over piety in being more concrete, more easily linked to a temporal milieu.

Nevertheless, attempts to comprehend the Puritans through their theology have been greatly criticised. Some in the

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<sup>100</sup> W. Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, pp 1-5. Greaves too asserts that "Puritans existed before there was any movement for reform" - Society and Religion in Elizabethan England, p 6.

<sup>101</sup> P. Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, p 5. Greaves too is aware of the difficulty. "What this means for the historian... is that the nature of Puritanism is elusive...Certain fundamental characteristics may be delineated, but in the end there can be no substitute for a careful immersing in Puritan literature in a quest to grasp what is at root experiential in nature." - "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition", pp 257-258.

<sup>102</sup> D.D. Wallace Jr, Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695, Chapel Hill (N.C.), 1982, p ix.

<sup>103</sup> Endy p 295.

debate on definition regard a theological solution as impossible.<sup>104</sup> The censure is not baseless. Attempts to find a single model (e.g. to equate Puritanism with Covenant theology or Calvinism) have foundered on the fact that many who cannot be called "Puritan" have shared the same ideas. Certainly, the value of a theological approach received no great advertisement in J.F.H. New's work.<sup>105</sup> Yet, the weakness of New's analysis lay in his portrayal of a radical dichotomy between "Anglican" and "Puritan" rather than his use of theology. Other work, less ambitious but more creative, has raised the possibility of gaining a grip on Puritanism through the thorough examination of individual strands of Puritan thought.

Paul Christianson has put forward a strong case for a redefinition of both "Anglican" and "Puritan" based upon the streams of continental Reformation thought they most closely represented. Wallace has examined the doctrines of Grace, Coolidge the place of Pauline conceptions, Lamont chiliasm. Bozeman discusses the role of "primitivism", particularly in New England Puritanism. Ecclesiology has been reexamined by Brachlow and Lake.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> B. Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition", pp 295-6; C.H. George, "Puritanism as History and Historiography", p 101; H.F. Kearney, "Puritanism and Science: Problems of Definition", in C. Webster (ed) The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century, London, 1974, pp 254-261, p 255.

<sup>105</sup> J.F.H. New, Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their opposition, 1558-1640, London, 1964.

<sup>106</sup> P. Christianson,, "Reformers and the Church of England"; D.D. Wallace Jr, Puritans and Predestination; J.S Coolidge, The Pauline Renaissance in England, Oxford, 1970;



A sophisticated grasp of Puritan theology promises more as an avenue for sound definition than either protest or piety. The protagonists in the "Puritan" controversies defined the issues and justified their positions in theological terms. "Puritanism" was inextricably linked with theology. Indeed, if the term has become inexact and unhelpful, this may be simply the result of stretching its use beyond contemporary theological debates. Hall is right when he suggests that "the word Puritan suffers inflation" from the efforts of those seeking to find denominational roots, sociological clues or a guide to political economy in the movement. Unlike Hall, however, I do not accept that the "inflation" is fatal, that the base value of the term is irretrievable.<sup>107</sup> A formal, theological approach provides the first element for a new synthesis in Puritan studies.

Problems of definition have constrained the study of possible Puritan continuities into the later Stuart period. As limiting has been a general historiography which has portrayed a decisive discontinuity between the periods before and after the Interregnum. This division has been highlighted by Michael Finlayson. Citing the work of such historians of the Restoration as J.R. Jones, J.R. Weston and Douglas Lacey, Finlayson suggests that the standard interpretation has been

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W.M. Lamont, Godly Rule: Politics and Religion 1603-1660, 1969; Richard Baxter and the Millennium: Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution, London, 1979; T.D. Bozeman, To Live Ancient Lives; S. Brachlow, The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology 1570-1625, Oxford, 1988; P. Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?.

<sup>107</sup> See Hall pp 287 & 293.

that religion played only a minor role in political affairs after the return of Charles II.<sup>108</sup> This stands in strange contrast to pre-Restoration historiography which has, says Finlayson, regards religious factors, and "Puritanism" in particular as the prime factor in the "revolution".

Puritanism, a fundamental in every analysis of the 'revolution' of the 1640s, has become, one generation later, essentially peripheral.<sup>109</sup>

The two interpretations cannot easily be reconciled.

The general assumption that political men after 1660 were somehow different creatures from their fathers is a constant source of misunderstanding and tends to cast a shadow of implausibility over the best political analysis.<sup>110</sup>

Although Finlayson has properly identified an historiographical conundrum, his proposed solution is highly questionable. The classic theory of the "Puritan revolution", he says, is wrong. Whatever its purely religious significance, as a political factor Puritanism was no more important before 1640 than it was after. Anti-Catholicism, rather than "Puritanism" is the basis for any continuity to be found between the periods. This prejudice was "religious" but only "in the sense that [its proponents] frequently justify themselves with the rhetoric and logic of religion."<sup>111</sup>

If Finlayson's argument were to be accepted in its entirety, any possibility of finding Puritan continuity into the Restoration period disappears. There can be no continuity

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<sup>108</sup> Finlayson, Historians, pp 120-122.

<sup>109</sup> Finlayson, Historians, p 45.

<sup>110</sup> Finlayson, Historians, p 122.

<sup>111</sup> Finlayson, Historians, p 122.

with something which did not exist. In part, his case depends upon the problems associated with the term itself and the risk of reification.<sup>112</sup> Yet, as outlined above, the strictures of this challenge need not be decisive. Finlayson's argument is flawed. He imposes the low place accorded religion among post-Restoration historians on the period prior to 1640. Without providing any compelling reason, he merely prefers one historiographical school to another.

If this rather strange position casts doubt on Finlayson's conclusions, his ground is swept away by the new historiography of the Restoration currently emerging. As Tim Harris notes "a major historiographical revision is under way".<sup>113</sup> Central is a challenge to the view that religion ceased to be important. John Spurr portrays the Church of England as a theologically confident body, prefiguring the aggressive "Anglicanism" described by J.C.D. Clark.<sup>114</sup> Keeble has shown that the "enthusiastic" piety of "Puritanism" lies at the heart of the literary temper of Nonconformity.<sup>115</sup> Dissent has been recognised as a major political factor<sup>116</sup>. In Charles II's reign, religion was not a slowly fading force.

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<sup>112</sup> Finlayson, Historians, Ch 3 *passim*.

<sup>113</sup> T. Harris, "Introduction", p 2.

<sup>114</sup> See Spurr's portrayal of the Restoration Church *passim* and Clark's English Society *passim*.

<sup>115</sup> Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 283-285.

<sup>116</sup> Harris, "Introduction", p 12. See also M. Goldie, "Danby, the Bishops and the Whigs" in Harris *et al*, The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, pp 75-105 and T. Harris, Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715, London, Longman, 1993.

The growing recognition of the significance of religion in Restoration affairs undermines Finlayson's conclusions. Importantly, the new historiography does not repeat Finlayson's methodological error in reverse by imposing the classic "Puritan revolution" model on the later period. Rather it is built on a reconsideration of evidence from the later Stuart period itself. Nevertheless, this fresh approach allows a confident examination of the many ways in which, as Lamont suggests, "the 1650s lived on into the 1670s".<sup>117</sup> It thus provides a second element in a new synthesis of definition.

Methodological parameters must first be set. Theology may be more tangible than piety but it remains a material with which it is notoriously difficult to work. Fortunately, Finlayson and others have articulated a viable framework for such study. Although much in Finlayson's 1983 contribution to the "Puritanism" debate is unhelpful, in an earlier article he set out a compelling case for a spectral approach to the religious world of seventeenth century England. Rather than expecting to uncover discrete and self-conscious parties, the historian should seek to plot individuals or loose groupings across a spectrum of views.

If we are to address ourselves to the problem of Puritanism in its almost infinite variety reliance on [a dichotomous] model will appear positively disadvantageous, will act as a hindrance rather than an aid to our analysis.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> W. Lamont, "The Religion of Andrew Marvell: Locating the 'Bloody Horse'", in C. Condren & A.D. Cousins (eds), The Political Identity of Andrew Marvell, Aldershot, 1990, pp 135-156, p 152.

<sup>118</sup> Finlayson "Puritanism" p 206.

The advantages of this approach to theological analysis are obvious. Although a certain body of technical language is shared, individual Divines used terms differently, emphasised some above others, or made token acceptance of concepts which appear central to the thought of contemporaries, even friends. This was not unique to Puritans or to the early modern period. It merely reflected the diversity of individual opinion. Writing in 1702, John Howe acknowledged that

since the beginning of the Reformation...there have been very different sentiments about the degree of that Reformation itself.<sup>119</sup>

If traces of "Puritan" continuity are to be sought, if a theological understanding of later Stuart Dissent is to succeed, a spectral framework is essential. Such a method, which eschews the unhelpful dichotomies of past historiography, is the third element in the model I propose.

Helpful as the spectral approach undoubtedly is, an important caveat must be noted. A simplistic, linear spectrum can become as obscurantist as a crude dichotomy. The historiographical debate summarised above identifies some of the pitfalls but also hints at means to avoid these traps. The detailed analysis which comprises the rest of this thesis suggests others. I shall discuss three.

Any proposed spectrum must focus on only one major aspect of theology. No one model can incorporate all available views on all theological concepts. The possible permutations and inevitable complexities make such a task impossible. The

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<sup>119</sup> J. Howe, A Letter to a Person of Honour, [1702], Works, III, pp 573-5, p 573.

historian must choose an appropriate axis along which to place his spectrum. For instance, in this thesis, I propose to consider John Howe and his later Stuart context in terms of varying emphases on the visible and the invisible Church. The corollary of this necessary focus must be recognised: any viable model will be limited and narrow. On its own, it can neither define nor fully explain a movement or even an individual. Studies of personality, events, other theological axes and so on are necessary for a fully rounded picture.

Secondly, it must be expected that individuals may move to and fro along a theological spectrum. Explanations for this will vary. The impact of external circumstances (such as the Regicide or the Act of Uniformity) may overwhelm erstwhile settled views and cause a shift. Others, driven by the internal dynamics of their ideas, may progress more or less gradually towards one pole or other. A spectral analysis insensitive to such changes may trap an individual just as surely as one which posits only two opposing parties.

The third qualification of the simple spectrum model modifies the second. Endy warns against assuming the range of views across a spectrum will be smooth, infinitely variable and unbroken. Endy argues that the "spiritualism" of Quakers was not smoothly continuous with the dynamics of "Puritanism". Quakers were not merely extreme "Puritans". The basic spectrum model is sound

but the existence of that horizontal line or pattern of continuity does not preclude the necessity of drawing vertical lines at certain significant junctures.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Endy p 296.

Endy makes an important point. If a spectral model is adopted it must not be pictured as a flat path which extends unbroken between two horizons. To change to a mathematical analogy: at various points the spectrum may shift from a linear to a logarithmic progression.

This thesis will employ a model which avoids the limitations outlined above. To a simple, linear spectrum will be added the spatial dimensions of an ellipse. True ellipses have two foci which will represent the poles of an ecclesiological spectrum. The advantages of the elliptical paradigm will become clear as the model is unfolded.

When the three factors of a renewed confidence in theology, the demise of the 1660 barrier and the spectral method outlined above are brought together, the outline of a new approach begins to emerge. Dualistic frameworks must be eschewed. "Puritanism" and its successors need no longer be regarded as fixed positions, but rather as orientations towards one pole or another of a theological axis or axes. Such is the skeleton of a viable model. Like the bones in Ezekiel's vision, it must "be covered in sinews and muscles, and then with skin" (Ezek. 37:8). To that task I now turn.

"visible body" or "airy spirits"

Chapter Two:

Images of the Church



A theological model depends upon the clarity of the concepts it employs. The purpose of this chapter is to add theoretical flesh to the skeleton laid out in the previous chapter. The principal focus will be on ecclesiology. This may at first seem the least promising theological lens to choose. Hall points out that

it is particularly in their doctrine of the Church (including ministry, ordination, discipline of morals, and the sacraments) that the differences among those commonly called Puritans can be determined.<sup>1</sup>

A verdict on whether or not the concentration on ecclesiology is justified ultimately depends upon the success or otherwise of the thesis as a whole. Nevertheless it is necessary at this point to provide some basis for the approach I have chosen by describing central ideas and their historical development.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the interrelated concepts on which the model is built. I will then trace the history of Christian notions of the "visible and "invisible" Church. Important will be the emergence of a theoretical dichotomy in the theology of Augustine and the evolution of this into a fundamental distinction in the thought of Martin Luther. Subsequent developments in Protestant ecclesiology will be outlined. A detailed theological model will then be proffered. In a final section the model will be tested in the light of the current debate over the early Stuart Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Hall pp 295-6

The divisive nature of ecclesiology appears to be borne out by the contents of a frequently cited document, published in 1642. *Religions Lotterie* purports to describe the various sects and groups which might be identified in the ferment of the times. Distinctions are consistently drawn on the basis of ecclesiological issues such as church government and requirements for membership.<sup>2</sup> If this is at all a fair representation of Stuart ecclesiology, any attempt to map similarities and affinities on the basis of views of the Church would appear to be doomed. Yet, the very fact that *Religions Lotterie* uses issues of form, authority and order to define its groups signals the crucial importance of ecclesiology to the disputes of the day.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, much of the apparent confusion falls away if attention shifts from the secondary questions cited in this pamphlet and by Hall. There is a more fundamental level from which to gain a perspective on disputes at the surface.

The "visible" and "invisible" churches constitute the poles of the spectrum I will employ in this thesis. However, these doctrinal constructs are themselves built upon an even deeper theological stratum which concerns the nature of divine interaction with creation. Here, the crucial concepts are the "immanence" and the "transcendence" of God. As at this level

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<sup>2</sup> [anon] Religions Lotterie (1642) reprinted in L.A. Sasek, Images of English Puritanism: A Collection of Contemporary Sources 1589-1646, Baten Rouge, 1989, pp 329-334.

<sup>3</sup> It is especially notable that the description of "Arminians" speaks of "a people which would have the Church governed by Archbishops and Bishops" but makes no mention of doctrines of Grace - Religions Lotterie p 331.

is found a crucial link with the understanding of Puritan piety articulated by Richard Greaves,<sup>4</sup> it demands careful consideration.

In Christian theology there has often been a tension between ideas which emphasis the "otherness" of God, his "transcendence", and those which stress God's presence within the world, his "immanence". Transcendent views tend to expect God's work to be a "breaking in" to a fallen, corrupt system, to effect spiritual rescue. Ideas based on immanence emphasise the view that the Spirit of God pervades all of creation and that the Grace of God comes through apparently natural means. The first can regard nature as an impediment to God's work, the second sees nature as the principal channel. Transcendence suggests God's activity is like a lightning bolt; immanence represents it as a mist rising from the bowels of the earth.

The implications of these two emphases may be observed in Christology. In theory, Christians believe that salvation is rooted in the entire Christ event. Often, however, the stress is put on one or other of two aspects of Christ. Those who emphasise God's transcendence look primarily to the drama of the cross, holding that some eternal transaction took place which rescued the universe from sin. On the other hand, those who emphasise the immanence of God hold the crucial aspect of Christ to be the incarnation, the divine becoming human, the ultimate example of God working through creation.

"Immanence" and "transcendence" have proved useful categories in some historical studies. John Sommerville links

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter one, pp 55-6 above.

early modern "secularization" to a shift in emphasis from divine immanence to transcendence.<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Merchant applies the categories to the history of science in the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> Particularly illuminating is Francis Oakley's extensive examination of a medieval defence against determinism.<sup>7</sup> Oakley identifies a distinction drawn between the "absolute" and "ordinary" powers of God. The crucial issue was whether God can effect what is "naturally" impossible? The scholastic Pierre d'Ailly, was

prone to speak of God as acting "naturally" when he acts in accordance with his ordained power, and as acting "supernaturally or miraculously" when he acts by his absolute power, breaching thereby the "common law" or "common course of nature".<sup>8</sup>

This distinction coheres almost exactly with the immanence/transcendence framework. In the normal course God works immanently, through "common laws", "laws of nature" which he has decreed and maintains. Nevertheless, God can "break in" and override his "ordinary" power through the transcendent operation of his "absolute" power.

I will apply the categories of immanence and transcendence to later Stuart theology. It is acknowledged from the outset that this is an approach replete with dangers.

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<sup>5</sup> C.J. Sommerville, The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith, New York, 1992, esp. pp 3-11, 165-187.

<sup>6</sup> C. Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution, San Francisco, 1980, p 202.

<sup>7</sup> F. Oakley, Omnipotence, Covenant and Order: An Excursion in the History of Ideas from Abelard to Leibniz, Ithaca (N.Y.), 1984, esp ch. 2, pp 41-65.

<sup>8</sup> Oakley p 56.

"Immanence" and "transcendence" did not feature in the theological debates of the times. I do not suggest that the divines I discuss were necessarily conscious of the features I identify in their thought. Far less do I imply that "immanentalism" or "transcendentalism" existed as self-aware movements within English theology. The framework I will build is intended to serve as an heuristic device to enable modern interpreters to map change and conflict in the seventeenth century. However, I will suggest that the theological concepts of immanence and transcendence provide a bridge between the Puritan piety described by Greaves and the actual debates of the period, especially those concerning ecclesiology.

Those who may be found to have stressed immanence also lay great store on the Church as the vehicle of God's grace. This "visible" Church was empirical, observable and typically (though not necessarily) identified with the institutions and hierarchies of ecclesiastical organisation. Conversely, for those who emphasised transcendence, the interest was in the "invisible Church" - a spiritual reality, not to be identified with any organisation or structure. Rather than a vehicle, the invisible Church was the product of God's Grace. It consisted of the elect, the truly saved. The history of these concepts must now be considered in detail.

Christian theology has displayed a remarkably *ad hoc* development. It has been influenced, sometimes largely determined, by crises both within and without the Church. As it has encountered powerful cultures, it has adapted, often

incorporating dominant philosophical mores in the process. These traits may be readily observed in the development of the complex and many-faceted doctrine of the Church.

As with many doctrines, the Church receives no systematic exposition in the New Testament. Given that in New Testament times Christ's return was held to be imminent this is not surprising. As Christianity spread and began to take institutional form, some self-understanding became necessary. From the start, a visiblist understanding predominated. For Ignatius of Antioch (d. c 115), the Church represented a union of flesh and spirit.

Fleshly people cannot do spiritual things, nor yet spiritual people fleshly things;... But what you do even according to the flesh, that is spiritual; for you do all things in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

The Church thus had an innate spiritual aspect, derived from its relationship with the Son of God. But this "spirituality" was not "other worldly". It was an extension of the incarnation. The Church came to be seen as a continuation of Christ's presence, his "mystical body". As by this understanding there can be only one Church, the natural result was an emphasis on catholicity and unity. The stress was on the Church as an "empirical, visible society", the church on the ground. There were various expressions. The West produced the rigid, episcopal institutionalism of Cyprian of Carthage. In the East the interest was more in the sacraments.

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<sup>9</sup> Epistle to the Ephesians 8:2, printed (with comment) in W.R. Schoedal, Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Philadelphia, 1985, pp 33-100, pp 63-4. See also Schoedal pp 23-24; J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, London, 1977, pp 190-1.

Whatever the differences of detail, priority was given to the Church as it was to be observed and experienced.<sup>10</sup>

Two minor streams of thought qualify this picture. Both responded, at least in part, to a persistent difficulty attached to the dominant view: the obvious imperfection of the institutional Church. How could the body of Christ encompass sin? The Alexandrians (Clement (c150-c215) and Origen (c185-255)) employed elements of the Platonic doctrine of Forms to posit a "true" ideal Church in heaven. Clearly "invisible", this provided the model to which the historic, empirical entity would eventually conform. Importantly, this view functioned to support, rather than challenge the authority of the institutional Church. The implication was that the visible Church, whatever its present imperfections, was to be measured by its potential.<sup>11</sup>

A third, quite different stream was represented by Tertullian (c160-220) (after his conversion to Montanism) and Hippolytus (c170-236). Institutional forms were played down in favour of purity. Only those genuinely conformed to Christ were the true Church. As with the dominant orthodoxy, the emphasis was squarely on the present, earthly reality. However, though the structures of the Church were valued, they were not regarded as determinative. Moral rectitude took the place of institutional form as the criterion of membership.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kelly pp 191, 204-7, 401-6; E.G. Jay, The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries, Vol. 1, London, 1977, pp 65-79.

<sup>11</sup> Jay pp 58-64; Kelly pp 200-204.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly p 200-1.

These three images of the Church converged in the teachings of Augustine. When he became Bishop of Hippo in 396 the Donatist split in the North African Church had existed for almost a century. The schism had no one cause but ecclesiology was an important factor. With ideas akin to the rigorist view of Tertullian, the Donatists appear to have held the true Church to be the congregation of the holy. Salvation was to be found only through the "pure" Church that they represented.<sup>13</sup>

Augustine's ecclesiology was forged in the dispute between the Catholic Church, which he represented, and the Donatists.<sup>14</sup> He built on the orthodox view of the Church as Christ's "mystical body" but did so by an increased emphasis on immaterial categories. The Church was the fellowship of the Spirit, characterised by the "invisible bond of love"<sup>15</sup> and thus unified. Schism equated with a lack of this love and, by extension, the absence of the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Augustine's offensive polemic against the Donatists was the product of this "spiritualised" orthodoxy. The Donatists, as schismatics, had

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<sup>13</sup> A summary of the theological issues at stake in the Donatist split can be found in G. Bonner, St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies, London, 1963, pp 276-311.

<sup>14</sup> Much of the following discussion of Augustine's doctrine of the Church relies on the concise analyses of Jay pp 84-92 and Kelly pp 412-417.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, On Baptism, Against the Donatists, 3, 26, in P. Schaff (ed), A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Grand Rapids, 1956 (1887), Vol 4, pp 407-514, p 445.

<sup>16</sup> The Holy Spirit and Love are intimately related themes in Augustine's theology. In his description of the Trinity he sometimes identifies the Spirit as the Love between the Father and Son. See Jay p 85; Kelly p 414.



stepped outside the Spirit's influence. Their sacraments had formal validity but lacked power. They could not appropriate salvation until they returned to the Catholic fold.

It is in Augustine's defensive polemic that we encounter his most original contribution. The Donatists pointed to the undeniable presence of sinners within the Catholic church. How could this be the body of Christ, which was to be "without spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27)? In reply, Augustine adopted his own version of the Alexandrian categories of the "true" and the "empirical" Church. The empirical, observable body contained both "wheat" and "tares", a mixed company of the apparently holy and the ostensibly sinful. The "true" Church, by contrast, was composed of those who were "inwardly and secretly within"<sup>17</sup>: the saints of all times and places.

There are potential difficulties with this concept. Kelly suggests that, if it is taken seriously, "the notion of the institutional Church ceases to have any validity".<sup>18</sup> Augustine did not solve this problem. Resorting to agnosticism with regard to the workings of grace, he accepted that the membership of the "true" Church was known only to God and thus could not be rigidly identified with the empirical body.

There are some also who as yet live wickedly, or even lie in heresies or the superstitions of the Gentiles, and yet even then "the Lord knoweth them that are His". For, in that unspeakable foreknowledge of God, many who seem to be without are in reality within, and many who seem to be within yet really are without.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, On Baptism, v, 27-38, p 477.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly p 417.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, On Baptism v, 27-38, p 477.

Only God can sort the tares from the wheat. This did not let the schismatic off the hook. The only proper course for believers was to continue within the visible Church as the only body of which they could be sure. To remain in communion with the Catholic Church was both a duty and the ground of personal assurance of salvation.

This underlying commitment to the visible Church is important. In Augustine's ecclesiology there was clearly a heightened interest in the immaterial aspects of the church but this was not his prime objective. He employed his concepts against disunity, to strengthen the institutional Church he represented. The "spiritual" was not opposed to the "material". Indeed, the opposite is true. As with the Alexandrians, Augustine's idea of the invisible, "true" Church primarily served to provide legitimacy to visible structures.

Nevertheless, Augustine's formulation introduced a fundamental dichotomy into ecclesiology. Here was the germ of a fully rounded theology of the invisible Church. A millennium later, his ecclesiological discourse would be reappropriated in order to justify, rather than defeat a schism.

Conceptions of the Church as an hierarchical, visible body dominated medieval ecclesiology. Yet, alternative models did emerge, especially when ecclesiastical authority was challenged. These can be observed in the Waldensians of the thirteenth century and most notably in the ideas of John Wycliffe (1328-1384). Wycliffe wrote in the context of the decline of the papacy immediately prior to the split between Rome and Avignon. He had to justify his own criticism of the

Catholic hierarchy. With his quite different polemical concerns he turned Augustine's doctrines on their head. The empirical church was no longer primary. Wycliffe equated Christ's "mystical body" with Augustine's "true Church", the invisible elect, rather than (as Augustine had done) with the visible Church.<sup>20</sup> Despite this ultimately influential shift, Wycliffe remained within the Catholic body.

Although the full implications of a more invisibilist view were not to emerge until the Reformers of the sixteenth century, the later medieval Church was far from quiescent on ecclesiological matters. Jaroslav Pelikan notes that

the Church became, especially in the fifteenth century, a primary issue, or the primary issue, "the first and the most universal principal (sic) of doctrine and of the science of the faith," upon which all other doctrines depended.<sup>21</sup>

The Reformation did not spring from nowhere and ecclesiology was central to its context.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was not a systematic theologian in the sense exemplified by Jean Calvin (1509-1564). His ideas, therefore, can sometimes be hard to describe with accuracy. The difficulty of the task is increased by the fact that many aspects of his thought developed and altered during his career.<sup>22</sup> Although these traits complicate our

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<sup>20</sup> H.F. Woodhouse, The Doctrine of the Church in Anglican Theology 1547-1603, London, 1954, pp 3-7; Jay pp 132-135,

<sup>21</sup> J.J. Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol 4, Chicago, 1984, p 71.

<sup>22</sup> On Luther's ecclesiology generally see E. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, Vol. 2, ET London, 1931, pp 477-494; E.G. Rupp, The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies, London, 1953, pp 318-20; J.S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition, Cambridge, 1955, pp 109-111; J. Pelikan,

understanding of Luther's ecclesiology, they also signal his dynamic approach.<sup>23</sup>

Luther introduced a more pronounced split in the concept of "church" than existed in Augustine's model.

We shall call the two churches by two distinct names. The first, which is natural, basic, essential, and true, we shall call 'spiritual internal Christendom'. The second, which is man-made and external, we shall call 'physical, external Christendom'.<sup>24</sup>

Of these, the most important was the first. Luther had to explain a rejection of the structures and hierarchies of Rome. He did so by preferring a radically invisible reality.

the natural, real, true and essential Christendom exists in the Spirit and not in any external thing.<sup>25</sup>

Luther drove Augustine's categories deeper. In doing so, he exacerbated the tensions in Augustine's view of the Church. He too was exposed to the charge that his Church had no

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Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation, London, 1964, pp 13-20; P. Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, (1963), ET Philadelphia, 1966, pp 287-293; Jay pp 163-5; P. Avis, The Church in the Theology of the Reformers, Atlanta, 1981, pp 3-6, 13-21; D.C. Steinmetz, "Luther and Calvin on Church and Tradition" in G. Dunnhaupt (ed), The Martin Luther Quincentennial, Detroit, 1985, pp 98-111. On the evolution of Luther's ecclesiological ideas through his career, see J. Pelikan, Spirit Versus Structure: Luther and the Institutions of the Church, London, 1968.

<sup>23</sup> Luther's theological method reflects his understanding of all theology as the theology of the cross. Though outside the scope of this thesis there is room for an investigation of the impact of this concentration on the Cross and redemption on Luther's ecclesiology. If there is a shift away from the incarnation as the crucial Christological theme, there are parallels in Protestant ideas of the Church. On Luther's method see Althaus, pp 3-42.

<sup>24</sup> M. Luther, On the Papacy at Rome, (1520), Luther's Works, Vol. 39, Philadelphia, 1970, p 70.

<sup>25</sup> Luther, On the Papacy at Rome, p 69.

effective visible reality. The impression is not entirely accurate. Luther's ecclesiology was no "Platonic flight from the objective and sacramental"<sup>26</sup>. He acknowledged the valid existence of the empirical church and recognised the value of structure.

The congregation is that mass out of which people are chosen and taken up into the company of the righteous...but if you would remove this mass, from where will the company of the righteous finally be strengthened and gathered? Then both would perish. Therefore these two must be there at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

However, this concession to visibility was quite different from the views of Augustine and medieval orthodoxy. Luther's primary concern was with the Gospel, the "Word", rather than with the empirical Church for its own sake. When he listed the "marks of the Church", they were dynamic and living, rather than static and institutional. The administration of the sacraments and, above all, preaching, were preferred to the credal formula of "one, holy, catholic and apostolic". Moreover, "the marks are indicative, not constitutive, of the Church."<sup>28</sup>

For the Church must appear in the world. But it can only appear in a covering (larva), a veil, a shell, or some kind of clothes which a man can grasp, otherwise it can never be found.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> E.G. Rupp, "Introduction" to Luther's Works, Vol 41, Philadelphia, 1966, pp xi-xvi, p xi.

<sup>27</sup> M. Luther, Lectures on the Psalms, Ps. 111, Luther's Works, Vol 11, Philadelphia, 1976, p 374.

<sup>28</sup> Avis, Church, p 16.

<sup>29</sup> Luther to Nicholas Amsdorf, 1542, cited in Rupp, Righteousness, p 319 from the Weimar edition of Luther's works W.A. Br. 9. 608. This letter is unfortunately not included in the English edition, Luther's Works.

The visible Church was thus merely the appearance of the "spiritual, internal Christendom" with no separate existence. It was a secondary manifestation; the invisible being prior.

Luther refashioned ecclesiological topography. In Catholic orthodoxy, exemplified by Augustine, concepts of the spiritual, "true" church served to support the validity and authority of the church "on the ground". In Luther the priority was reversed. More than that, what had been understood to represent Christ's "mystical body", the institutional Catholic Church, was accorded only relative spiritual worth. Interest had turned decisively towards the invisible. The groups which split from Rome in the sixteenth century were forced to find their way in this new landscape. Some reconciliation of the tensions in Luther's thought was necessary. Three broad approaches may be identified.

The first abandoned altogether any concession to the visible Church. The "spiritualists" among the radical reformers (although not most anabaptist groups) rejected any idea of the visible Church and, with it, the sacraments. Typical is Sebastian Franck who held that, at the end of the age of the Apostles,

the outward church of Christ, ... went up into heaven and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth. I am thus quite certain that for fourteen hundred years there has existed no gathered church.

The preferred policy was, therefore, to shed visible trappings

all outward things and ceremonies, have been done away with and are not to be reinstated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> S. Franck to J. Campanus, (1531) The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXV: Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, London, 1957, pp 145-160, pp 149, 150. See G.H.

True spiritualists were few in number. Most sought to solve ecclesiological tensions by better establishing a positive role for the visible Church. The problems faced by the second generation of Protestant theologians (assaults from Rome, their own need for organisation, and the anarchic challenge of the spiritualists) demanded a secure foundation. Luther himself became disillusioned with the ability of the Gospel alone to direct and guide "external Christendom".<sup>31</sup> The need to define and justify the empirical manifestation of the "true Church" was increasingly apparent. Two quite distinct approaches - the second and third streams in Protestant ecclesiology - can be identified.

In Jean Calvin and Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) there was a clear movement towards an objective measure of the Church. Calvin added qualitative conditions to Luther's marks.

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God exists.<sup>32</sup>

Melanchthon went further, appending a third formal mark: "punishment through the ban".<sup>33</sup>

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Williams, The Radical Reformation, London, 1962, pp 453-476; F.H. Littell, The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: a study of the Anabaptist View of the Church, New York, 1964, pp 22-27; Avis, Church, pp 53-4

<sup>31</sup> Avis, Church, 22-3.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, (1559, Bk iv, Ch. 1, para. 9), J.T. McNeill (ed), The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXI, Philadelphia, 1960, Vol 2, p 1023. See also A.E. McGrath, Reformation Thought: An Introduction, Oxford, 1993, pp 194-200.

<sup>33</sup> Avis, Church, p 28.

The introduction of discipline as a crucial factor in the visible manifestation of the Church is highly significant. It is characteristic of what Troeltsch describes as "sect type" ecclesiology.<sup>34</sup> It inherited the rigorist theme of Tertullian. The theme was variously developed by Beza, Bucer, Bullinger, the anabaptists, and John Knox. It appeared in the English separatists and was typical of the early "dissatisf'd Elizabethans".<sup>35</sup>

This attempt to reconcile tensions in the Reformed understanding retained a fundamental orientation to the invisible Church. If theological validity was to be given to the empirical body it must happen through the agency of this prior concept. The true Church visible was but the temporal manifestation of the invisible. This "rigorist" stream, by emphasising discipline, sought to reflect the latter in the former.

There can be, of course, no suggestion that an undifferentiated body of Protestantism was united in its application of this principle. In its extreme form, found among anabaptist groups, the Catholic acceptance of the presence of both "wheat and tares" in the visible body was totally rejected. Such extreme rigorists would exclude all but the elect "lest the entire visible Church be evil spoken of,

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<sup>34</sup> Troeltsch pp 691-694. Troeltsch's category is considerably narrower than the stream proposed in this study.

<sup>35</sup> Avis provides the most succinct summary of this line in "'The True Church' in Reformation Theology", Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 30, pp 319-345, pp 336-339. See also Avis, Church, pp 45-63.



disgraced and dishonoured..."<sup>36</sup> Calvin, though he himself provided seed for the approach,<sup>37</sup> specifically rejected its logical conclusions.

For there have always been those who, imbued with a false conviction of their own perfect sanctity, *as if they had already become a sort of airy spirits*, spurned association with all men in whom they discern any remnant of human nature.<sup>38</sup> [italics added]

The emphasised phrase is instructive. The impetus for this disciplinarian ecclesiology comes from an orientation to the invisible Church. At its heart lies an attempt to make the invisible visible.

The early English reformers displayed elements of the rigorist, disciplinarian view of the church. Cramner and Jewel, anxious to set a distance from Rome, adopted a view, close to that of Calvin, wherein

We have truly renounced that Church wherein we could neither have the word of God sincerely taught nor the sacraments rightly administered, nor the name of God duly called upon.<sup>39</sup>

More interesting, both for his own ideas and because of his influence on later Puritans, is John Foxe.<sup>40</sup> Virulently

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<sup>36</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier (c1481-1528) cited by Littell, p 88.

<sup>37</sup> See New, Anglican and Puritan, p 33; Avis, Church p 35; Brachlow, The Communion of Saints, pp 28-31.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, Institutes, iv, 1, 13, p 1027.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Avis, Church, p 65.

<sup>40</sup> On Foxe's ecclesiology see J. Facey, "John Foxe and the Defence of the English Church" in P. Lake & M. Dowling (eds), Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England, London, 1987, pp 162-192 and C. Davies & J. Facey, "A Reformation Dilemma: John Foxe and the Problem of Discipline" JEH, Vol 39, No. 1. January 1988, pp 37-65. See also V.N. Olsen, John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church, Berkeley, 1973. Recent work on appropriations and repudiations

anti-Papist, Foxe stressed the "true" invisible Church. His famous *Acts and Monuments* (1563) attempted to establish the continuity of the true Church even through the period of Rome's greatest apostasy. An earlier work, *De Censura* (1551), "was the earliest tract to be written by an English Protestant on the subject of ecclesiastical discipline."<sup>41</sup> However, it is clear that Foxe's interest in the invisible Church was not exclusive. *Acts and Monuments* was in fact a defence of the Elizabethan settlement. Foxe was willing to accept a national church structure little different from that of Rome. In the same work he placed great store on the role of the civil magistrate in religious affairs. Collinson has suggested that Foxe promoted the notion of imperial supremacy in Church affairs, following Constantine's example.<sup>42</sup> Foxe is thus a pivotal figure. Although he took his ecclesiological cues from his bias to the invisible Church, he maintained a strong interest in visible concerns. As it had in Luther's case, this inevitably led to some ambiguity. In the "Admonition Controversy" of the 1580s and 90s, Foxe would be cited by polemicists on both sides.<sup>43</sup>

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of Foxe include Lamont, Richard Baxter and the Millennium and A. Milton, "The Church of England, Rome and the True Church: The Demise of the Jacobean Consensus" in K. Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642, Basingstoke, 1993, pp 187-210.

<sup>41</sup> Davies & Facey p 37.

<sup>42</sup> P. Collinson, "If Constantine, then also Theodosius: St Ambrose and the integrity of the Elizabethan Ecclesia Anglicana" JEH, XXX, 1979, pp 205-29.

<sup>43</sup> Davies & Facey p 64.

One of these was Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603). Cartwright was a Presbyterian, greatly influenced by Calvin's successor at Geneva, Beza. Less concerned than Foxe to balance visible and invisible interests, he asserted that Christ alone was head, not only of the invisible Church (as accepted on all sides), but also of its visible manifestation. The immediate ramification was the rejection of archbishops as titular heads of churches. More far-reaching was the inference that, just as the elect (i.e. the invisible Church) were "conformed to Christ", so the visible Church must be similarly conformed. Specifically, the Church will follow "the form and policy which [Christ] has prescribed".<sup>44</sup> For Cartwright, that meant a presbyterian polity; other formulations were found among Congregationalists and Baptists. For all, the aspiration was that the visible should reflect the invisible both in membership and godliness.<sup>45</sup> This was the concept of the "visible saints".<sup>46</sup> Community discipline and sanction were regarded as ordained means to that end.<sup>47</sup> Just as membership of the invisible Church was a matter of personal faith, so

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<sup>44</sup> Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, pp 28-37.

<sup>45</sup> New goes too far in suggesting "a dogmatic annulment of the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church" but the effect is similar - Anglican and Puritan, p 33.

<sup>46</sup> The best work on this concept remains E.S. Morgan, Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea, New York, 1963. See also Brachlow pp 116-123 and *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> This frequently extended to a connection between discipline and soteriology, a link engendered by a conditional or "mutualist" interpretation of Covenant theology. Brachlow pp 21-76

voluntarism was more likely to be a feature of these groups.<sup>48</sup>

Only the extreme anabaptists imagined absolute identification of the visible with the invisible to be possible. For most it was a dream, a search, a desire which produced a wide range of responses depending upon the fervour with which it was pursued. Some, such as the English separatists felt the need to "come apart" from impurity. Others, including most of the Elizabethan "dissatisfy'd", worked for a more obviously godly Church of England.

In terms of the visible/invisible spectrum proposed in this study, this stream of Protestant ecclesiology flowed towards the invisible pole. Although it eschewed a totally spiritualist stance it was dominated by an acceptance of the essentially invisible nature of the Church. The visible was accepted and accorded value but the agenda was set by the perceived qualities of the spiritual congregation of the saints. Not until we turn to a third stream do we encounter a Protestant conception which accords a positive role to the visible Church on its own terms.

A new emphasis can be observed in conformist arguments produced during the admonition controversy. It emerged in the

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<sup>48</sup> New, in perhaps the strongest section of his much criticised book, sets out other systematic connections of this type of ecclesiology (Anglican and Puritan, pp 30-58). See also Morgan, Visible Saints, pp 1-32.

The broad continuity of this ecclesiology across apparently disparate groups is supported by Brachlow as an important element of his own thesis. In particular he points out that "there is a kinship of ideals between the first English Baptists and the theology and ecclesiology of early English dissent" (pp 155-6).

polemics of John Whitgift (1530?-1604) but received its classic statement in the work of Richard Hooker (1554-1600).

Hooker's Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie was aimed directly at those Elizabethan Presbyterians who sought to further "that which yee tearme *the Lords Discipline*".<sup>49</sup> At least one objective of the work was to counter English representatives of the rigorist Protestant ecclesiology outlined above.<sup>50</sup> Hooker is thus a useful example, the more so as he cast a long shadow over seventeenth century thought. The accuracy with which his subsequent admirers interpreted his ideas was sometimes suspect but Hooker's influence is undeniable.<sup>51</sup>

Although he was careful to avoid describing it as "true", Hooker did not deny the invisible aspect of the Church. Indeed, it was the body to whom the promises of God pertain. Nevertheless, it was, by nature, hidden.

Onely our mindes by intellectuall conceipt are able to apprehend, that such a reall body there is,... a body mysticall, because the mysterie of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense.

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<sup>49</sup> R. Hooker, The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker, Vol 1, Cambridge (Mass), 1977, p 2.

<sup>50</sup> Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, pp 225-230, has argued for a broader, anti-Calvinist agenda underlying Hooker's thought. For a different assessment of Hooker's importance in Anglicanism see P. White, Predestination, policy and polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War, Cambridge, 1992, pp 124-139.

<sup>51</sup> Subsequent appropriations of Hooker's thought and/or his symbolic authority are examined in R. Eccleshall, "Richard Hooker and the Peculiarities of the English: The Reception of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", History of Political Thought, Vol II, No. 1, Spring. January 1981, pp 63-117 and by Conal Condren in his unpublished paper "The Creation of Richard Hooker's Public Authority: Rhetoric, Reputation and Reassessment".

The membership of this body could be known "onely unto God, who seeth their heartes and understandeth all their secret cogitations".<sup>52</sup>

In both Hooker's understanding of this "mysticall" Church, and the controversy which occasioned it, there were clear parallels with Augustine's dispute with the Donatists. Though both gave theoretical preeminence to the invisible body, the main interest remained with the visible body. In *Ecclesiastical Politie* Hooker was concerned with "the ordering of the publique sprituall affayres of the Church of God".<sup>53</sup> The "Church of God", in this sense, was empirical. The promises of God may have lain with the "body mysticall" but,

when we reade of any dutie which the Church of God is bound unto, the Church whome this doth concerne is a sensible knowne company<sup>54</sup>

Hooker's approach was quite different from that of the rigorists. Far from being merely the pallid and flawed representation of an invisible reality, the visible Church had a discrete purpose of its own: to work out the designs of God. All that was required to establish membership of this visible society were the "notes of externall profession" which were

that one *Lorde* whose servantes they all professe themselves, that one *faith* which they all acknowledge, that one *baptisme* wherewith they are all initiated.<sup>55</sup>

These aspects of Hooker's ecclesiology demonstrated a significant shift of interest towards the visible Church. Yet

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<sup>52</sup> Hooker, *Works*, Vol. 1, pp 194-5.

<sup>53</sup> Hooker, *Works*, Vol. 1, p 206.

<sup>54</sup> Hooker, *Works*, Vol. 1, p 195.

<sup>55</sup> Hooker, *Works*, Vol. 1, pp 206, 196.

there are more fundamental characteristics of his thought which make Hooker a crucial figure.

Hooker's case against the disciplinarians was based on his concept of a hierarchy of laws. First, there were internally attested, natural and reasonable laws which govern individuals. A second set of laws governed societies. These were derived from within the society itself but were external as to individuals. On the question of *adiaphora*, Hooker asserted the right (indeed, the necessity) of both State and Church authorities to determine correct practice. As the visible Church was a society, rather than just an assembly of individuals, laws to ensure uniformity were required.<sup>56</sup>

Hooker stressed the providential origins of these laws.

So it is their error to thinke that the only law which God hath appointed unto men in that behalfe is the sacred Scripture. By that which we worke naturally, as when we breath, sleepe, moove, we set forth the glory of God...In reasonable and morall actions another law taketh place, a law to the observation whereof we glorifie God...<sup>57</sup>

...of law there can be no lesse acknowledged, then that her seate is the bosome of God...<sup>58</sup>

Thus immanence lay at the heart of his system. This is consistent with his relegation of preaching and with the high value he placed on the visible aspects of the Church and the

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<sup>56</sup> P. Avis, Anglicanism and the Christian Church, Edinburgh, 1989, pp 47-67; Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, pp 145-162.

<sup>57</sup> Hooker, Works, Vol. 1, p 138.

<sup>58</sup> Hooker, Works, Vol. 1, p 142.

power of sacraments and ritual.<sup>59</sup> As a counter to the invisibilist drift of rigorist ecclesiology Hooker's thought thus represented a major revision of Protestant thought.

Hooker's attitude towards Rome often appeared more open and positive than that of his "Puritan" opponents. Did his shift towards the visible amount to a repristination of a Catholic ecclesiology? This was more than a fine theological point. If Hooker's position was to represent a way ahead for the Church of England, and yet at crucial points amounted to Catholicism, where was the basis for continued separation from Rome? As Conal Condren has shown, recusants and Jesuits asked just this question. Recognising the difficulty, some sought to distance the Church from Hooker. Others within the Church endeavoured to interpret Hooker as a true Protestant, though representative of the vaunted *via media* rather than continental Reform.<sup>60</sup>

A satisfactory solution to the problem of separation from Rome was not found until Hammond's advancement of the "national Church" concept in the 1650s. Even so, a simple return by Hooker to Catholic views of the Church cannot be argued. Richard Bauckham has shown that an important series of sermons from 1586, although it precipitated a controversy with "dissatisfy'd" Protestants like Walter Travers, was in

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<sup>59</sup> P. Lake, "Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635", *P&P*, 114 (Feb. 1987) pp 32-76, pp 41-45; Anglicans and Puritans?, pp 162-182.

<sup>60</sup> Condren, "The Creation of Richard Hooker's Public Authority", *passim*.



fact anti-papist in intent.<sup>61</sup> Hooker claimed to have defined the visible Church of Christ as

a community of men sanctified though the profession of the truth which God hath taught the world by his Son.

This definition fell well within orthodox Protestant ecclesiology. Moreover, whilst in the later Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie Hooker restored immanence to a central role, the framework within which this immanence operated set his mature schema apart from Rome.

In Catholic ecclesiologies, immanence found expression in the idea of the visible Church as the "mystical body of Christ". Hooker's system did not depend on viewing the visible Church in this way. Indeed, he carefully attached the phrase "mysticall body" to the invisible Church. Hooker's redefinition of "mystical body" has baffled some interpreters and been disregarded by others.<sup>62</sup> Importantly, it found a precedent in Wycliffe. Hooker was familiar with, indeed greatly influenced by medieval and patristic theology. His use of the phrase, which reversed the standard Catholic practice, must be regarded as considered and deliberate.

Although both immanence and the visible Church were crucial to Hooker's thought, they were not fused, as in the Catholic model. It was Hooker's conception of Law, rather than the visible Church as the body of Christ, which affirmed the immanence of God. The seat of the law was "the bosome of God".

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<sup>61</sup> R. Bauckham, "Hooker, Travers and the Church of Rome in the 1580s", JEH, Vol 29, No. 1, January 1978, pp 37-50.

<sup>62</sup> Jay p 183; Woodhouse pp 50-1. Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, pp 160-2, ignores Hooker's terminology in his discussion of Hooker's "two societies".

Though in places he appeared close to Catholic orthodoxy, in others Hooker affirmed Protestant concepts. In fact he was laying a foundation for a uniquely English ecclesiology. To avoid unnecessary anachronism it is important to avoid the over-confident use of the term "Anglican" for this stream. "Conformist" is to be preferred.

Three streams of ecclesiology had developed within English Protestantism by the end of the sixteenth century. Spiritualist views were present only on the fringes of Church life. The other two streams were far more significant. A rigorist view was held in varying degree by Church "Puritans", separatists and Baptists. Conformists gravitated to the more visiblist ecclesiologies of such as Richard Hooker. With this understanding, it becomes possible to advance a working model by which to approach English Protestant ecclesiology.

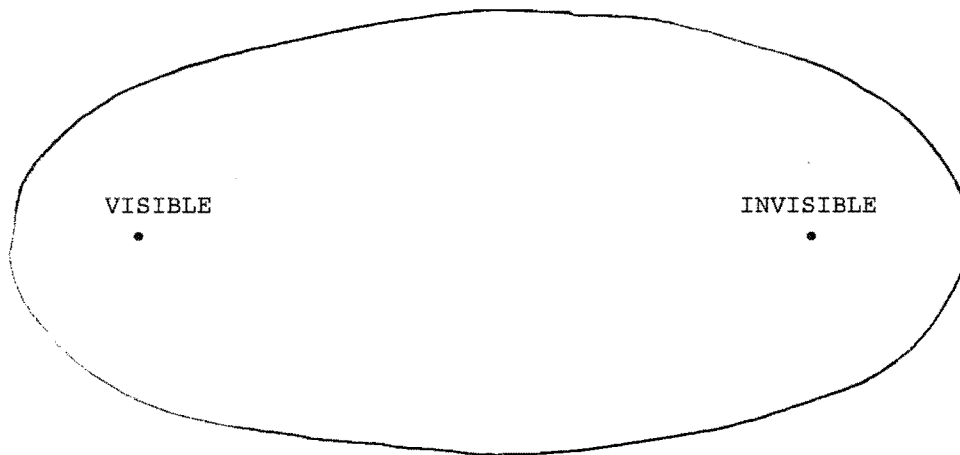
The relationship between the two sets of twin concepts, visible/invisible and immanent/transcendent, must first be made explicit. A range of relative emphases on the visible and invisible Church can be seen to underlie the diverse arguments over sacraments, polity, ritual and form which dogged the English Church. It is unhelpful, however to picture this spectrum as merely linear. If a graphic analogy is pursued, ecclesiology is better understood as an ellipse drawn around the twin foci of the visible and invisible Church.

Relative preferences for either focus in turn reflect the degree to which the immanent operation of God in the world is balanced against his capacity for transcendent action. The

visible church concept depends upon immanent activity. Stress on the invisible Church reveals a bias to divine transcendence. Thus, if the ecclesiological spectrum describes an ellipse, the immanent/transcendent range forms the page on which that ellipse is drawn.

Other ellipses may also be drawn across the same page. As already noted, immanence and transcendence influence more than ecclesiology. In this thesis, the visible/invisible spectrum will be found to be the most useful. However other theological categories will regularly feature as evidence of fundamental orientation or bias.

The model as presently constructed may be pictured as follows:



If applied to the developments in ecclesiology outlined in this chapter, the model provides the following picture. Between the two foci of visible and invisible lay the "conformist" and "rigorist" images of the Church. "Conformist" ecclesiology gravitated towards the visible Church focus; the

"rigorist" to the invisible. However, not all of an ellipse lies between its foci. At the ends are areas which lie within the ellipse but beyond the focal points. These allow a nice, though (I hope) helpful, further distinction. In the space beyond the visible focus, the invisible Church is virtually eclipsed in the shadow of the visible. Catholic ecclesiology tended to spill into this zone. Similarly, though in reverse, spiritualist views (in danger of losing sight of the visible Church altogether) extended into the area beyond the invisible focus.

Labels such as "Catholic" and "spiritualist", "conformist" and "rigorist" have obvious pitfalls. They are used here as descriptions of the part of the range occupied, rather than definitions of discrete positions. "Conformists" varied considerably in the relative emphasis they placed on the visible Church. "Rigorists" were similarly diverse. The model maps orientations and tendencies, not precise formulations. Accordingly, "conformists" were more likely to emphasise those things associated with the God's immanent operation through the visible Church: sacrament, structure, liturgy and centralised authority (usually episcopal). "Rigorists", on the other hand, were more likely to stress personal conversion, preaching and individual conscience.

In this thesis, I will apply this model to the fate of later Stuart Dissent. I will argue that important features of this history can be properly understood only when tensions between the emphases outlined above, and significant shifts

in these emphases, are acknowledged. However, as with the automobile, so in historical study: any new model should be given a test run before it is used in earnest. Fortunately, an appropriate testing ground is readily to hand. To demonstrate its potential, I shall direct the lens of the visible/invisible model to the current debate over the early Stuart Church.

In the past two decades, an important interpretation of the early Stuart Church has emerged. Most associated with Nicholas Tyacke, this view has described the ascendancy of "anti-Calvinist" Churchmen during the reign of Charles I. As the name of an early collection of essays implies, an important initial impetus for this approach came from a desire to understand the Civil Wars of the 1640s.<sup>63</sup> However, important work has since emerged which traces developments back as far as the Elizabethan Church.

Debate over the early Stuart period has given considerable attention to theology. The focus has been on the doctrines of grace, especially predestination. In bare outline, the thesis has been that the Church under Charles I became dominated by militant "Arminians". These men notably sought to extirpate "Puritan" elements, attacking what had been a general Calvinist consensus in the Church of England since Elizabeth's reign. This prompted a backlash which proved

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<sup>63</sup> See C. Russell (ed), The Origins of the English Civil War, London, 1973, esp. Tyacke's contribution, "Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter Revolution", pp 119-143.

to be a major factor in the events of the 1640s.<sup>64</sup>

Tyacke's thesis has increasingly come under fire. The most sustained attack has come from Peter White, who denies a "Calvinist consensus", instead finding a self-conscious *via media* to be evident as early as the Elizabethan settlement. In this view, the fatal development of the 1630s was not an innovative, clerical Arminianism but the fact that, because of the policies of Charles I, "the public perception of the Church became inextricably linked to the external face of the Caroline court".<sup>65</sup>

Major cracks have emerged within the Tyacke camp itself. These have been acknowledged in a recent collection of essays, covering the debate.<sup>66</sup> Most telling is the admission that predestination provides an inadequate, even misleading interpretative window on the theological issues of the time. Tyacke himself concedes that Arminianism was "essentially secondary to the sacramental reorientation of English religious life".<sup>67</sup> Lake suggests the "bizarre obsession with

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<sup>64</sup> Tyacke, "Puritanism"; also Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism c1590-1640, Oxford, 1987 (2nd ed 1990). Also important are P. Collinson, Archbishop Grindal, 1519-1583, London, 1979 and The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625, Oxford, 1982; Lake, Anglicans and Puritans; H. Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power" in Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays, Chicago, 1987, pp 40-119.

<sup>65</sup> P. White, "The *via media* in the early Stuart Church" in K. Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1640, Basingstoke, 1993, p 211-230, p 230. See also his earlier works: "The Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered" P&P, 101, 1983, pp 34-54 and Predestination, policy and polemic.

<sup>66</sup> K. Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642.

<sup>67</sup> N. Tyacke, "Archbishop Laud" in K. Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, pp 51-70, p 69.

predestination is threatening to obscure...the real issues at stake". A "wider context" is urgently required.<sup>68</sup>

What might that "wider context" be? In an earlier article, Lake himself identified the most fruitful categories.<sup>69</sup> The articles in Fincham's volume bristle with allusions to the issues highlighted in the ecclesiological model outlined above. Lake describes the "Laudian style" as

a coherent, distinctive and polemically aggressive vision of the Church, the divine presence in the world, and the appropriate ritual response to that presence.<sup>70</sup>

John Fielding has identified the importance to the Arminian view of "the concept of a holy visible church" which finds its logic in "a perceived divine immanence".<sup>71</sup> Evidence is not lacking. Thomas Laurence found God immanent in the sanctuary.

[God's] presence is indeed everywhere but his residence especially there and though his essence be diffused through heaven and earth in Jeremy, his glory in Exodus is peculiar to the tabernacle.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Laud himself held the altar to be "the greatest

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<sup>68</sup> P. Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s" in Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, pp 161-185, p 162.

<sup>69</sup> See P. Lake, "The Laudians and the Argument from Authority", in B.Y. Kunze & B. Brautigan (eds), Court, Country and Culture: Essays on Early Modern British History in Honour of Perez Zagorin, Rochester, 1992, pp 149-175. This essay develops insights first adumbrated by Lake in his 1987 essay "Calvinism and the English Church" (esp pp 45 & 74-5).

<sup>70</sup> Lake, "Laudian Style" p 162.

<sup>71</sup> J. Fielding, "Arminianism in the Localities: Peterborough Diocese, 1603-1642" in Fincham (ed) The Early Stuart Church, pp 93-113, pp 103-4.

<sup>72</sup> Cited by Lake, "Laudian Style", p 164.

place of God's residence upon earth".<sup>73</sup>

Tyacke's recognition of a "sacramental reorientation" and the insights of Lake and Fielding clearly imply the importance of images of the Church in the 1630s. Anthony Milton is even more specific. Citing Foxe and Hooker as pivotal figures, Milton analyses developments in attitudes to Rome. He examines changing views of the "true", the "invisible" and the "visible" Church, concluding that, under the "Laudians"

There was no longer to be any confusion in the use of the word 'church' - it would now only refer to visible institutions<sup>74</sup>.

Tyacke's favoured categories of "Arminian" and "Calvinist" are deficient. White argues that these labels depend more on the polemic of William Prynne than the details of a real debate.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Milton points out that Richard Montague's infamous *New Gagg* and *Appello Caesarem* (1624-5) were not confined to issues of predestination. Crucial arguments in each challenged Foxe's vision of the invisible Church.<sup>76</sup>

In a study of later Stuart Dissent, there are considerable risks involved in proffering interpretations of the early Stuart Church of England. However, as the issues are crucial to an understanding of the later period, there are obvious advantages in noting any links which may exist. The

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<sup>73</sup> Cited by K. Fincham, "Episcopal Government, 1603-1640", in K. Fincham (ed), *The Early Stuart Church*, pp 71-91, p 81.

<sup>74</sup> Milton, "The Church of England", pp 196-7 and *passim*.

<sup>75</sup> White, "*via media*", pp 224-6.

<sup>76</sup> Milton, "The Church of England", pp 198-200.



work of scholars in the field suggests that light may be shed on the 1630s by the model proposed in this chapter.

If the spectral model were thus applied, the importance of theology, recognised by Tyacke, would be preserved. However, the more helpful category of ecclesiology would be substituted for the inadequate dichotomy between Arminianism and Calvinism. Laud and his colleagues represented a shift in emphasis towards the visible Church. It was this feature which Lake recognised. Julian Davies has recently endeavoured to breathe new life into the term "Laudianism", which he suggests was characterised by

a more pronounced emphasis on the visibility and catholicity of the historical Church, upon the liturgy, and a deeper sacramental theology.<sup>77</sup>

This was not so much an innovative revolution as an unprecedented (at least in Protestant England) concentration on one focus of the ecclesiological ellipse. The emphasis on sacrament, beauty, liturgy and episcopacy are in keeping with this and the underlying stress on divine immanence. If such a shift took place then, as Lake suggests, "the effect of this was inevitably to polarise public opinion."<sup>78</sup> When it is seen that the stakes were thus raised, the reactions of the 1640s become explicable.

Room is also made for Peter White's critique. His denial of a (narrowly defined) "Arminian" controversy can be accepted. There was a controversy but at its heart were

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<sup>77</sup> J. Davies, The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, Oxford, 1992, p 53.

<sup>78</sup> Lake, "The Laudian Style", p 182.

different perceptions of how God operated rather than a single doctrine like predestination. The spectrum model incorporates White's suspicion of attempts to identify discrete party positions.<sup>79</sup> Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, some connection is possible with White's argument that the crucial development of the 1630s was the identification of Prince and Church.<sup>80</sup> An underlying stress on God's immanent working allows for an intimate association of Church and Magistrate as dual channels of that activity. At this point, theology crosses political theory, with attendant risks. Davies has probably taken this line too far with his suggestion of a theologically-conceived "Carolinism" as the major element in the tensions which preceded the Civil Wars.<sup>81</sup> Introducing an ecclesiological spectrum would lend greater subtlety.

To take the issues further would risk demonstrating that my reach exceeds my grasp of this period. The ecclesiological model I propose may not fully provide the new framework called for by Peter Lake. Yet, it is clearly arguable that such an approach allows an integration of many of the issues at stake in the current debate over the early Stuart Church. At the

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<sup>79</sup> See White "Via Media" pp 211-2. Fielding, despite his insights, portrays the disputes at Peterborough as "between the two camps - Arminian and puritan" - "Arminianism in the Localities", pp 93-4.

<sup>80</sup> White, "Via Media", pp 228-30.

<sup>81</sup> Davies, Caroline Captivity, esp. pp 5-45. Davies is better at describing what his supposed "Carolinism" might be than on identifying evidence for its roots. In particular, he fails to pay enough attention to legal and political debates. Compare P.G. Burgess, The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642, Basingstoke, 1992, esp. pp 179-211.

very least, the potential of the model is demonstrated.

There are other approaches to Interregnum and Restoration history which pick up some of the themes I have introduced. J.S. McGee has described "The English Protestant Minds" of the seventeenth century. Taking as a framework the "two tables" of the ten commandments he suggests a "Puritan" preference for the first four commandments, which deal with the relationship with God. "Anglicans", by contrast, emphasised the final six, which cover relationships between humans. Quite different understandings of fundamental issues such as obedience, peace and love resulted.<sup>82</sup> Colin Davis has depicted a ubiquitous "antiformalism" in seventeenth century England. He identifies a widespread suspicion of forms and other constraints on spirituality.<sup>83</sup> McGee's two tables have clear points of connection with transcendence and immanence. Davis's "Antiformalism" parallels orientations toward the invisible Church described above. The interpretative framework outlined in this chapter contributes important elements to an understanding of the phenomena both historians describe.

S.R. Honeygosky has applied the visible/invisible dichotomy to the ecclesiology of John Milton. He concludes that Milton's view of the Church was "predominantly mystical,

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<sup>82</sup> J.S. McGee, The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620-1670, New Haven, 1976.

<sup>83</sup> See J.C. Davis, "Cromwell's Religion" in J. Morrill (ed), Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution, London, 1990, pp 181-208; "Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution", HJ, 35, 3, (1992), pp 507-530; "Against Formality: One Aspect of the English Revolution", TRHS, 6th series, Vol. 3, 1993, pp 265-288.

invisible and increasingly internal."<sup>84</sup> Howe's view of the Church will be found to be very similar to Milton's. N.H. Mayfield has examined differences in the attitudes of "Presbyterians" and "Independents" to the regicide.<sup>85</sup> He suggests an important factor was the greater emphasis placed by the Independents on the invisible Church. Although both took their bearings from the invisible pole of the ecclesiological spectrum, the "Presbyterians" appear to have been closer to the centre than the "Independents". These differences would have repercussions in the Restoration.<sup>86</sup>

Though suggestive, these two studies have significant limitations. The first returns us to one of the major concerns of this thesis: definition. Although some, like Mayfield, find "party" frameworks useful for interpreting the Interregnum,<sup>87</sup> others have questioned the validity even for this period of such terms as "Presbyterian" and "Independent".<sup>88</sup> By 1707 James Webster was very suspicious of their value. It will be

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<sup>84</sup> S.R. Honeygosky, Milton's House of God: The Invisible and Visible Church, Columbia, 1993, p 42

<sup>85</sup> N.H. Mayfield, Puritans and Regicide: Presbyterian-Independent Differences over the Trial and Execution of Charles (I) Stuart, Lanham, 1988. See also S. Baskerville, Not Peace But a Sword: The political theology of the English Revolution, London, 1993, pp 187-208.

<sup>86</sup> Matthews p 111; Jay pp 211-212;

<sup>87</sup> See e.g. D. Underdown, Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution, Oxford, 1971 esp pp 45-75; C.G. Schneider, "Roots and Branches: From Principled Nonconformity to the Emergence of Religious Parties" in F.J. Bremer (ed) Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith, Boston, 1993, pp 167-200.

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. J.H. Hexter, "The Problem of the Presbyterian Independents" in Reappraisals in History, Chicago, 1979, pp 219-240.

shown that, at least by 1680, such labels were more misleading than helpful.

Honeygosky, a literary historian, makes a link between Milton's view of the Church and his attempt to transform theological language.<sup>89</sup> Mayfield's analysis depends upon a connection between ecclesiology and eschatology. Neither set the ecclesiologies they study in the context of immanence and transcendence. This substratum is integral to the model I have proposed.

That other historians may be observed driving vehicles similar to the model I propose is encouraging. Given that its potential has been shown on the test track of the early Stuart Church, it may now be ventured on the open road.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to cover with "sinews, muscles and skin" the skeletal model outlined in chapter one. Ezekiel's vision did not close at that point. He records that "breath entered the bodies, and they came to life" (Ezek. 37:10). A trace of such breath will now be sought in the early career of John Howe.

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<sup>89</sup> Honeygosky pp 229-239.

"objects we converse with beget their  
image upon us"

Chapter Three:

Struggle and Stress in the Early Career  
of John Howe

The previous chapter concluded with a tentative analysis of the turmoil in the early Stuart Church. Those controversies reached their peak in the early years of John Howe's life. Neither Howe himself, nor the theological dynamics of later Stuart Dissent can be understood except in the light of the Laudian controversies, the Civil Wars and the Interregnum. Having brought the theoretical issues up to Howe's era I can from this point fulfil my undertaking to anchor the theological analysis of this thesis in his life and career. Howe is no arbitrary choice. His central position arises directly from his importance in the alienation and fragmentation of Dissent. That significance, not previously recognised, will become clear in the chapters which follow.

The present chapter has three major components. The first is historiographical. The prominence given in later Stuart studies to Richard Baxter will be noted. Howe's contrasting treatment will be examined in depth. In the second section Howe's career will be traced to the ejection of 1662. Although some episodes will be examined closely, the principal aim is not biographical in the traditional sense. Howe will provide a window through which Nonconformity is observed and by which the model outlined in chapter two is tested and refined. In the third section the insights of the model are employed to describe the ecclesiological context with which Nonconformist theologians like Howe had to contend.

For three hundred years, the scholarly study of Restoration Nonconformity has suffered from the occluding effects of "Baxterisation". No other individual has received the attention accorded Richard Baxter (1615-91). The leading exponents of Baxter studies are currently William Lamont and N.H. Keeble.<sup>1</sup> However, studies overtly devoted to Baxter are but the tip of an historiographical iceberg. Works which touch on the period are replete with entries for him, eclipsing even his important Interregnum rival, John Owen.<sup>2</sup> Other notable figures, such as Milton, Marvell and Bunyan, are studied more for their literary legacies than for their immediate influence on the history of English Dissent.

Baxter's prominence is not wholly undeserved. He was a crucial figure in negotiations towards the Church settlement in 1660-1. His desire for a broad comprehension led him to maintain numerous contacts within the established Church. He was unquestionably the pivotal figure in relations between Church and Dissent in the 1660s and 1670s. However, his subsequent significance has been exaggerated. The signal fact

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to several articles, Lamont has published two books employing Baxter as a means of interpreting the Interregnum (Godly Rule, London, 1969) and the later Stuart period (Richard Baxter and the Millennium, London, 1979). He has recently edited Baxter's A Holy Commonwealth (Cambridge, 1994). Keeble is author of a literary biography (Richard Baxter: Puritan Man of Letters, Oxford, 1982) and with another "Baxterian", G.R. Nuttall, has calendared Baxter's letters (Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter, 2 Vols, Oxford, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> An example of this is Watts' respected work The Dissenters. Watts' index devotes seventeen lines to Baxter. John Howe is not mentioned at all.



that all of Baxter's Restoration schemes failed has been quietly ignored. From the late 1670s, comprehension was eclipsed by toleration as the central concern of Nonconformists. Baxter's star faded with it. His theological concerns became increasingly marginalised. As he died in 1691, he had no direct role in the fragmentation of Dissent in the 1690s.

Baxter's over-long shadow may be prosaically explained: he wrote a lot. Baxter's polemical fecundity and extensive correspondence have produced an invaluable record.<sup>3</sup> The autobiographical *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, though lacking a modern edition, has been trawled for pungent comment since its first publication in 1696. Nevertheless, in this thesis, I will contend that the dynamics of Dissent may be better observed in the career and thought of John Howe. Howe too had his failures but, unlike Baxter, he came to prominence in the crucial 1680s and 1690s. Chapters four to seven will examine many of Howe's works. It will be shown that his theological concerns were more representative of later Nonconformists in general than Baxter's.

The student of the John Howe encounters several obstacles. In direct contrast to Baxter, Howe left a dearth of manuscript sources. Access to the man is further confused by his few biographers, who have magnified to heroic proportions Howe's personal and spiritual qualities. Thus, although his published works are readily available, the

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<sup>3</sup> When Baxter's letters are first cited, reference numbers from the Keeble's Calendar will be included along with those of the MSS.

construction of a life setting for these writings can be difficult. Perhaps because of this problem of context, very little modern analysis of Howe's work has been attempted.

John Howe left neither journal nor autobiography. His oldest son, George Howe, recorded that his father, on his deathbed, ordered the immediate destruction of

the large memorials he had collected of the material passages of his own life, and of the times wherein he lived...stitch'd up in a multitude of small Volumes.<sup>4</sup>

George Howe's regrettable compliance with his father's instruction caused a significant loss, both to the study of Howe himself and the historiography of the period. The situation is only partially redeemed by the survival of a few manuscript letters and the ready availability of Howe's theological compositions. These latter fall into two categories. Most important is the quite extensive corpus of his published works, spanning forty-five years.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are several series of lectures and sermons "taken first in shorthand by the hand of a very ready and judicious writer" and published after his death.<sup>6</sup> Howe covered a wide range of

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<sup>4</sup> Dr George Howe to George Hughes. Cited by Calamy pp 227-8. Rogers, p 3, claims this letter to be addressed to Obadiah Hughes, George Hughes' father, George Howe's uncle, John Howe's brother-in-law. As Obadiah Hughes predeceased John Howe, Calamy's record is clearly to be preferred.

<sup>5</sup> Howe's works have been collected in several combinations. The only version currently available is a reprint of Calamy's 1724 collection, The Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A. (3 Vols - Ligonier, PA, 1990). References to the published works will be to this version which will be abbreviated throughout the thesis simply as "Works".

<sup>6</sup> Howe, Whole Works, V, p 211.

The posthumous sermons were first published in the 1720s. They may be found in J. Hunt (ed) The Whole Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A. (Eight Volumes - London, 1827). All references

issues in these works and the shape of his thought may be construed with some confidence.

Little biographical detail is to be found in John Spademan's funeral sermon for Howe. Neither is there much of the exaggerated respect for the deceased common in such orations. Spademan noted that Howe "hated the sounding a trumpet before him, living and dying".<sup>7</sup> However, in his dedication to the published version, regretting that he had "spoken so few things...concerning him", Spademan made recompense by recalling that

he was not only a shining light and ornament of his age, but an inviting example of universal goodness.<sup>8</sup>

Such an assessment was not exceptional following the death of a popular figure. What is at once intriguing and frustrating to the modern historian is that Howe's later biographers continue in this vein with apparently increasing enthusiasm.

Of the several accounts of Howe, four are more or less full-scale biographies. By far the most important is the first: Edmund Calamy's *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Rev.*

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to these sermons and lectures will be to this collection (abbr. as "Whole Works"). For indications of Howe's major concerns, the published material must take precedence. The recorded sermons are, however, of considerable value. They are generally easier to read than Howe's own written style. Further, as dates and locations are often noted, they are of value in plotting Howe's movements.

<sup>7</sup> J. Spademan, "A Sermon on the Occasion of the Justly Lamented Death of the Truly Reverend Mr John Howe", April 8, 1705, in Howe's Works III, pp 609-624, p 611. As was typical of such sermons, Spademan employs the example of the deceased to edify the living. See Keeble, Richard Baxter, pp 123-4.

<sup>8</sup> Spademan p 609.

Mr. John Howe, published in 1724. Calamy<sup>9</sup> (1671-1732) was a Nonconformist historian and polemicist. He assisted in the editing of Baxter's *Reliquiae* and produced the famous *Account of Nonconformists ejected following the Restoration*. His connections with Howe will be discussed in chapter eight.

Calamy's *Memoirs* supply the bulk of the information we have on Howe's life and laid the foundation for the subsequent veneration of Howe's memory. Although he gave little attention to his subject's thought, Calamy's recognition of a "Platonick Tincture" influenced all later assessments.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, Neal's *History of the Puritans* (1732-9) contained very little reference to Howe.<sup>11</sup> However, a form of Protestant beatification had taken place by 1809, when Bogue and Bennett published their *History of the Dissenters*.

Unfeigned and exalted piety filled the soul of John Howe. It would be difficult to say, if ever there was a better man in England...It would not be easy to find a man equal to him in love to all the disciples of Christ, in universal benevolence, and in that purity and humility which adorn the character of a man of God.<sup>12</sup>

This reverential tone was continued in a second, major biography: *The Life and Character of John Howe M.A.*, by Henry Rogers. Rogers (1806-1877) was a Congregational minister and

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<sup>9</sup> For Calamy's life see his own An Historical Account of My Own Life, 2 Vols, London, 1829 and the article in D.N.B..

<sup>10</sup> Calamy p 7. See also Rogers p 19; Horton pp 5-6; Scott p 6; Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 166-67.

<sup>11</sup> D. Neal, The History of the Puritans or Protestant Nonconformists, 4 Vols, London, 1732-9 (abridged in 2 Vols by E. Parsons, London, 1811.)

<sup>12</sup> D. Bogue & J. Bennett, History of the Dissenters from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808, London, 1809, Vol II, p 220.

man of letters who also produced an edition of Howe's published works (1862-3). His lifelong interest in Howe stemmed from the impact on him of reading Howe's *The Redeemer's Tears wept over lost Souls* (1684) at the age of seventeen.<sup>13</sup>

The *Life* is a curious, somewhat idiosyncratic work. Rogers added little detail to Calamy. His interest appears to be less in Howe's *Life* than in his *Character* - the latter displayed for the purpose of religious edification.

The light in which I regard him, is that of a signal trophy of the transforming power of the gospel...Thus viewed, his character well deserves the attentive contemplation of every Christian"<sup>14</sup>.

From a biographer of this persuasion, little substantial criticism of his subject is to be expected. None is to be found. At times, Rogers' own piety intruded upon his study. On several occasions he departed from Howe to make lengthy comment on the lessons which his contemporaries might learn from the events or ideas he had just described.<sup>15</sup>

These weaknesses suggest caution is needed before accepting Rogers' conclusions. Fortunately for this thesis, Rogers was strongest when dealing with Howe's thought. He dealt with each of the major works in some detail. As with the rest of the *Life*, Rogers' own concerns are evident but he supplied useful summaries and suggested contexts. He also

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<sup>13</sup> The D.N.B. entry on Rogers records that this encounter with Howe's thought had such a profound effect on Rogers that it "diverted his attention from surgery [his trade] to theology" - D.N.B., Vol XVII, pp 121-3.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers pp 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> For examples see Rogers pp 11-15, 21-26, 33, 99-102.

included the full text of many of Howe's unpublished letters. Of these, the early correspondence between Howe and Richard Baxter is of particular value.<sup>16</sup>

The *Brief Memoir* of Howe's life, prefaced by J.P. Hewlett to his edition of Howe's works (1848), was a more temperate and focused account than that of Rogers.<sup>17</sup> Its brevity, however, understandably limits its capacity for original interpretation.

In a third large-scale study, Robert Horton took a less obviously partisan approach than did Rogers. Yet he followed the same path of deference. In his preface he confidently asserted:

There are no dark spots to cover, no apologies to be made. One is called to mark the path of the upright, and to rejoice over a light which shines more and more unto the perfect day.<sup>18</sup>

Horton endeavoured to clarify a few dates but his analysis adds little new to our understanding of Howe's theology. A fourth biography, W. Scott's *The Life of John Howe* (1911), was a minor work which broke no new ground.

Howe appeared in more general nineteenth-century works. The entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, obviously limited in scope, depended largely on Calamy and Rogers. Other sketches are available in various Church histories written in the period. Historians of Nonconformity mentioned him briefly

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers pp 53-76, 92-94.

<sup>17</sup> J.P. Hewlett, "A Brief Memoir etc" in Howe's Works I pp ix-xxix.

<sup>18</sup> Horton p vi.

though unfailingly in glowing terms.<sup>19</sup> Most important was John Stoughton, who produced the multi-volumed *Religion in England* (1881). Stoughton, yet another admirer of Howe, gave him considerable attention in the volumes which cover the Commonwealth and Restoration. Most of the detail of Howe's career came from Rogers but Stoughton appears to have reached some of his own conclusions on Howe's theology. He rated Howe and Baxter as the pre-eminent theologians of the Restoration period.<sup>20</sup>

In modern historiography Howe rarely gets more than a passing mention. Watts is completely silent on him. There is only one published essay devoted to him. Although written as late as 1977, this merely repeats the uncritical veneration of the past, concluding

may the King and Head of the Church enrich it with many of his calibre and company.<sup>21</sup>

Already hampered by poor primary sources, the serious study of John Howe is further hindered by Howe's unblemished reputation, which grew through two centuries and has been left inviolate by a third. The dense cloud of this mythology has no doubt contributed to the apparent reluctance of scholars to attempt a critical analysis. There is another reason: Howe's works are difficult. Even such an admirer as Rogers

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<sup>19</sup> See e.g. H.S. Skeats & C.S. Miall, History of the Free Churches of England 1688-1891, London, 1891, pp 134-5. S. Horne, A Popular History of the Free Churches, London, 1903, pp 151.

<sup>20</sup> Stoughton, Vol. IV, pp 385-393.

<sup>21</sup> J.T. Carson, "John Howe: Chaplain to Lord Massarene at Antrim Castle, 1671-1677", Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, vii (1977), pp 11-16, p 16.

admitted that

his excellencies seem happy accidents; his faults and negligences are systematic and habitual.<sup>22</sup>

Despite his stylistic failings, the best recent treatment of Howe comes from the field of literary history. N.H Keeble includes Howe as a major figure in his study of late seventeenth-century Nonconformist writing.<sup>23</sup> In more conventional historical works, if mentioned at all, Howe is typically quoted for his involvement in a significant event or in relation to some other personage.<sup>24</sup> Clearly these works and the many others which relegate or ignore Howe have their

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<sup>22</sup> Rogers p 333. Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 22-3 includes Howe among the "misplaced persons" of Restoration literature.

<sup>23</sup> Literary Culture *passim*. Keeble too concedes Howe's literary faults, contrasting his "inelegancy" with the more attractive prose of such as Bates, Penn and Baxter - see Literary Culture p 246.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Lamont (Richard Baxter, pp 162, 198, 222) quotes Howe to build a picture of Baxter's mind but omits him from his list of "Baxter's friends and Enemies" (pp 325-329). D.D. Wallace summarises Howe's thought in five lines (Puritans and Predestination, p 160) and only mentions him again at any length because he features in a controversy over grace (pp 179-80). Christopher Hill, in his essay "Occasional Conformity and the Grindalian Tradition" (reprinted in Religion and Politics in 17th Century England, Brighton, 1986, pp 301-320), quotes the merest portion of one of Howe's later works (pp 315-6). New (Anglicans and Puritans), although extending his study to include much discussion of Baxter, ignores Howe altogether. Cragg cites Howe on thirteen occasions in Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution but never in depth and usually to effect a caricature of Howe's style and concerns. B.R. White, in his essay "The Twilight of Puritanism" (a study of the 1690s in which Howe might be expected to figure prominently), mentions him only in passing and with no analysis of his importance (p 313). I. Rivers, in Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, Cambridge, 1991, makes some useful comments but Howe is introduced primarily to illustrate analysis of such as Baxter, Doddridge, Watts and Wesley - see e.g. p 100, 183, 191, 198, 216.



own, valid concerns. Nevertheless, the almost complete absence of detailed analysis signals a void in the historiography of seventeenth-century England.

If the meagre and cursory attention Howe has received is not altogether inexplicable, it is nonetheless regrettable. Howe was not an obscure individual. He was involved in negotiations with the established Church,<sup>25</sup> was a confidant of William of Orange<sup>26</sup> and a leading figure within Nonconformity. His published works were widely read.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, enough evidence has already been gathered to justify a modified interpretation of some episodes in Howe's career. The reconstruction of Howe's early life which follows will highlight those influences and experiences most likely to have shaped his thought and attitudes. It is hoped that the picture which emerges will be more, rather than less, sympathetic to the real John Howe than the hagiographies of the past.

John Howe had clerical Nonconformity in his blood. His grandfather, William Howe, had been incumbent at Tattershall,

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<sup>25</sup> Calamy, p 72, records at least one occasion on which Howe was preferred to Baxter as negotiator by the Church party. See also Rogers pp 191-3; Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 225-227; Wood, Church Unity, pp 260-1.

<sup>26</sup> See Rogers pp 238-40.

<sup>27</sup> Howe's The Blessedness of the Righteous (1668) ran to at least four editions. It was one of the books recommended by Richard Baxter (see Keeble, Richard Baxter, p 37) and was especially favoured by the young Cotton Mather (Diary of Cotton Mather, New York, (1911) n.d., V. 1, p 56). At least three of Howe's works were owned by John Locke - see J.R. Harrison & P Laslett, The Library of John Locke, Oxford, 1965, p 159.

Lincolnshire.<sup>28</sup> One of William's sons, Obadiah Howe D.D. (1616?-1683), held charges in the same county under both Interregnum and Restoration regimes and was a minor polemicist.<sup>29</sup> Active dissent enters the family in the person of another son of William Howe. When his own son (the John Howe of this study) was born on 17 May 1630, John Howe sen. held a curacy in Loughborough, Leicestershire.<sup>30</sup> He was ejected from this post in 1634, for his prayer during a service "that the young prince might not be brought up in popery".<sup>31</sup>

The family spent some time in Ireland following this reversal. They returned to England in 1641-2, apparently to escape the rebellion, and settled in Winwick, Lancashire. Here John Howe jun. received his early education.

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<sup>28</sup> See DNB entry on Obadiah Howe. Calamy (p 6) mentions "one Mr. *William Howe* of *Gedney* in [Lincolnshire] that was (I suppose) of the Family, tho I can't be positive how related to [John Howe]."

<sup>29</sup> See DNB. Obadiah Howe's major controversy (1651-5) was with John Goodwin over Goodwin's Arminian tract, The Pagan's Debt and Dowry (1651).

<sup>30</sup> J. & J.A. Venn (eds) Alumni Cantabrigienses, Pt I, Vol II, Cambridge, 1922, p 417. W.G.D. Fletcher, The Rectors of Loughborough, Oxford, 1882, pp 19-21 notes that the Rector at this time was one of two "John Browne"s who held the post in the early decades of the seventeenth century. John Howe jun.'s Baptism was recorded on May 23 1630 - see W.G.D. Fletcher, "The Parish Registers of Loughborough in the County of Leicester", The Reliquary Quarterly Archaeological Journal and Review, London, 1873, pp 194-202, p 197.

<sup>31</sup> For this offence, the elder Howe was fined the then enormous sum of 500 guineas, later reduced to 20. See the C.S.P.D. Car. I, 1634-1635, pp 318, 550; Calamy p 6. The case achieved some notoriety, forming part of the charges eventually laid against Archbishop Laud - see W. Laud, The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud D.D., Oxford, 1854, (LACT), Vol IV, pp 323-4.

It is impossible confidently to assess the factors which may have influenced Howe in these early years. Exposure to the tumult of the 1630s and 1640s must have had some effect but, in his surviving works, Howe gave no direct clues. This uncertainty is in marked contrast to what may be affirmed of the next period of his life. The impact of his years at university is clear.

The formal details of Howe's university career may be quickly outlined. On May 19, 1647 he entered Christ's College, Cambridge. In 1648, having gained a B.A., he moved to Oxford. He was admitted to Brasenose College, took an Oxford B.A. in January 1650 (M.A. 1652). Howe was Chaplain at Magdalen from 1650 and a Fellow there from 1652 until 1655.<sup>32</sup>

For the seventeenth century there is little remarkable about this progress. The full import of Howe's university years lies not in his academic record but in the teachers and fellow students he encountered. Attendance at both Cambridge and Oxford brought Howe into contact with two important groups, each of which had a profound impact on his thought.

At Cambridge, Howe met the Platonists. Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683) was at King's and John Smith (1618-1652) at Queen's during Howe's Cambridge period. Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) was Master of Clare Hall and Regius Professor of Hebrew. Most important of all was Henry More (1614-1687). More had been a Fellow at Howe's college, Christ's, since 1639. With More, Howe developed a friendship which lasted until More's

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<sup>32</sup> Venn (eds), Alumni Cantabrigienses, Pt I, Vol II, p 417; A.A. Wood, Athenae Oxonienses, Vol 2, (facsimile ed, New York, 1967) pp 589-91.

death.<sup>33</sup> It was to these Cambridge connections that Calamy and others quite rightly traced Howe's "*Platonick Tincture*".<sup>34</sup>

Howe relished intellectual stimulation. He clearly spoke from his own experience when he described the joys of "ratiocination" in his first major work, *The Blessedness of the Righteous* (1668).

To the altogether unlearned it will hardly be conceivable, and to the learned it need not be told, how high a gratification...employment of his reason naturally yields to the mind of a man...What a pleasure is it, when a man shall apprehend himself regularly led on...through the labyrinths of nature; when still new discoveries are successfully made, every further enquiry ending in a further prospect, and every new scene of things entertaining the mind with a fresh delight!<sup>35</sup>

Howe appears to have vigorously indulged in this "delight". Whilst at the universities he developed his own "body of divinity".<sup>36</sup>

At Cambridge, fertile seeds of philosophical understanding were sown. Yet, as will be seen, Platonism was

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<sup>33</sup> Calamy p 8

<sup>34</sup> Calamy pp 7-8 attributes significant influence to More and Cudworth; Rogers p 19 wants to link Howe to Smith (perhaps because Smith's pious and gentle reputation accords best with Rogers' view of Howe); See also Horton pp 5-6; Scott p 6; Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 166-7. G.R. Cragg (ed) The Cambridge Platonists, New York, 1968, though he includes such as Theophilus Gale, does not mention Howe as a minor Platonist. On the Platonists generally see also J. Tulloch, Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century, 2 Vols, Edinburgh, 1872; F.J. Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists: A Study, London, 1926; E. Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, ET Edinburgh, 1953; C.A. Patrides, The Cambridge Platonists, London, 1969.

<sup>35</sup> J. Howe, The Blessedness of the Righteous, [London, 1668], Works II, pp 1-260, pp 63-4.

<sup>36</sup> Rogers pp 29-30; Horton p 14; Scott pp 8-9.

not the dominant feature of Howe's mature thought. In his six years at Oxford his platonic influences and his religious views were cultivated and enriched. Again he met men who were to be friends for life. John Spilsbury (1630-1699) was also a Fellow at Magdalen. Spilsbury was ejected in 1662 but licensed in 1672.<sup>37</sup> Howe was writing intimate letters to him until just months before Spilsbury's death.<sup>38</sup> The President of the College was Thomas Goodwin, a Congregationalist and a friend of John Owen. Calamy recorded an encounter between Howe and Goodwin which is important for the light it throws on the early breadth of Howe's sympathies. Goodwin, surprised at Howe's absence from his "gather'd Church among the Scholars", questioned Howe as to the reasons.

Mr. Howe with great frankness told him, that the true and only reason why he had been so silent about the matter, was because he understood they laid a considerable stress among them upon some distinguishing Peculiarities, of which he had no fondness, tho he could give others their Liberty to take their own way...; but that if they would admit him into their society upon *Catholick Terms*, he would readily become one of them.<sup>39</sup>

Though ordained, in 1652, by the Presbyterian Charles Herle of Winwick, Howe was never a narrow sectarian. The apparent ease and range of his associations are an important

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<sup>37</sup> On Spilsbury see CR. Spilsbury, a member of the Worcestershire Association, may have been an important connection between Howe and Richard Baxter - see C.F. Nuttall, "The Worcester Association: Its Membership", JEH, Vol. 1, (1950), pp 197-206.

<sup>38</sup> See letters J. Howe to J. Spilsbury April 20, 1695; Jan 25, [1698] 1699, Works III, pp 591-3. Of these, the first records Howe's version of the Pinners Hall/Salters Hall split among Dissenters in 1695. See also Calamy p 9; Rogers pp 279-281, 291-2.

<sup>39</sup> Calamy pp 10-11.

feature of his university years. When he left Oxford it was with a variety of connections, confident in his theology. In subsequent years his confidence would be sorely tested.

In 1654 Howe took up a perpetual curacy at Great Torrington, succeeding "the famous Independent", Lewis Stucley ((1632?-1687)).<sup>40</sup> This ministry has been portrayed as one of unblemished happiness. Howe married Katherine, a daughter of the respected Devon Presbyterian George Hughes. Calamy extended the bliss beyond mere domestic circumstances when he asserted

the more he spent himself in his Master's service, the more was he belov'd by the Inhabitants of his Parish.<sup>41</sup>

Howe was certainly earnest in his endeavours. He described to Calamy his habit on Fast days to preach for nearly three hours in total and lead his congregation in prayer for upwards of three more. Even Calamy conceded this have would have produced "inexpressible weariness" in most preachers and congregations.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, evidence of mutual affection is not lacking. Howe maintained links with Torrington after he had left. As late as 1674 he dedicated his treatise *Delighting in God* to "much valued friends" in his first charge, whilst admitting the need to temper their mutual passions.

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<sup>40</sup> Calamy p 13. On Stucley or "Stukely" see CR. Stucley later carried on considerable correspondence with Lord Wharton, with whom Howe was also closely acquainted. A further Congregational link lies in the fact that the curacy was the gift of Christ Church, Oxford of which John Owen was then Dean.

<sup>41</sup> Calamy p 15.

<sup>42</sup> Calamy pp 14-15.

I do very well understand your affection to me; and could easily be copious in the expression of mine to you, if I would open that sluice: but I do herein resolvedly...restrain myself; apprehending that...a gradual mortification ought to be endeavoured of such affection as is often between those so related as you and I have been.<sup>43</sup>

However, Calamy's view that Howe "had thought of no other, than of living and dying [at Torrington]"<sup>44</sup> must be questioned. In a letter to Richard Baxter in 1658, Howe himself averred that "when I settled there, I expressly reserved to myself a liberty of removing" if so led.<sup>45</sup> In the event, his translation to London and the service of Cromwell came in 1656, only two and a half years into the Torrington ministry. The most plausible account of how he came to Cromwell's notice has Howe a candidate for a living in the larger Devon town of Dartmouth.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> J. Howe, Delighting in God, [London, 1674], Works, I, pp 474-664, p 475.

<sup>44</sup> Calamy p 14.

<sup>45</sup> John Howe to Richard Baxter, May 25, [1658] Baxter Corr., xi, 232 (Rogers pp 69-71, Keeble, Calendar, no. 453).

<sup>46</sup> Significantly, Rogers discounts this version, largely because it does not fit the Howe myth. "At this period...nothing could be farther from his thoughts than removing from Torrington, where he had been recently settled, and where he was exceedingly happy." (Rogers p 40 note). Rogers prefers the less likely account given by Calamy in the Memoirs. In this version, Calamy suggests that Cromwell noticed Howe in the congregation of a Whitehall service and "discern'd something more than ordinary in his Countenance". However, in his later, (1727) Continuation Calamy records the Dartmouth story under an entry for Rev. Allen Geare. An assessment of the merits of the two accounts is found in Hewlett's "Brief Memoir", pp xiii-xv. Even Hewlett suggests that "no-one who properly appreciates this great man will suspect him of seeking Dartmouth" (p xv).

This may not have been the only time Howe was sought for another congregation. In 1655 Lord Paget (with whom, at least later in his career, Howe was connected) was active in seeking the appointment of a "Mr How" for Merlow - see R. Spalding

There are indications that Howe's ministry at Torrington was not easy. In the preface to *Delighting in God*, in which (as noted above) Howe otherwise avowed great affection for his former parishioners, he referred to

some who have...expressed more *contempt* of God...than *delight* in him. I know not how the case may be altered with such since I left you... Death I am sure will be making alterations, as I have heard it hath.<sup>47</sup>

A rift had developed under his predecessor.<sup>48</sup> Although he seems to have been able temporarily to calm this situation, soon after his departure Howe admitted to Baxter that

the people I left are breaking into parties; cannot meet in any one person as they profess they could in me...and, having heard of some inclinations on my part towards them, invite my return.<sup>49</sup>

Howe's continued concern for the flock at Torrington was not simple affection. It arose at least partially from these difficulties in finding a suitable successor. Moreover, his "inclinations...towards them" were intensified by his unhappiness at Whitehall. In the same letter the troubles at Torrington are revealed to be a screen for his other concerns.

I...resolve, to others, to insist upon the necessitous condition of the place I left as the reason of my removal (if I do remove;) to yourself I state my case more fully.<sup>50</sup>

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(ed), The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelock, Oxford, 1990, p 403 (April 8,9, 1655).

<sup>47</sup> Howe, Delighting in God, p 476.

<sup>48</sup> Howe to Baxter, 1 June, [16]58, Baxter Corr., iv, 79 (Rogers pp 71-3; Keeble, Calendar, no. 455).

<sup>49</sup> Howe to Baxter, May 25, [1658].

<sup>50</sup> Rogers' comment on this disingenuous approach is an instructive example of the need to preserve the Howe myth: The concluding paragraph of this letter would justly expose Howe to the charge of insincerity, had not the



Despite his love for learning and scholarly pursuits, Howe's biographers have discounted any possibility of intellectual frustration in Torrington, away from the centres of academic and theological thought. Horton was confident that he "was conscious of no limitation."<sup>51</sup> Yet this sanguine picture too can be questioned. In one of his Torrington sermons Howe employed a telling metaphor

Let us now use ourselves much with God. Our knowledge of him must aim at conformity to him; and how powerful a thing is converse in order hereto! How insensibly is it wont to transform men, and mould anew their spirits, language, garb, deportment! To be removed from the solitude or rudeness of the country to a city or university, what an alteration it doth make! How is such a person divested by degrees of his rusticity, of his more uncomely and aggressed manners! Objects we converse with beget their image upon us.<sup>52</sup>

Care must be taken in applying rhetorical flourishes to the life of the speaker. Nevertheless, it would be surprising if Howe, trained among some of the best minds of the day, did not welcome a transfer to London.

Without doubt, Howe felt his ministry at Torrington to have been valuable. Yet, significantly, he located this value in peacemaking roles, both among parishioners and (in what sounds like Baxter's Worcestershire Association) with other

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"lamentable condition" of the people at Torrington, been a real and very powerful reason for his leaving Whitehall. Provided we state the real reason for our conduct, it is agreed by all casuists, that we are not bound to state every reason. (Rogers p 71n)

<sup>51</sup> Horton p 15.

<sup>52</sup> Howe, Delighting in God, p 193.

local ministers.<sup>53</sup> The problems he faced reinforced his concern to avoid the corrosive effects of controversy.

Great reason I have to repent, that I have not with greater earnestness pressed upon you the known and important things wherein serious Christians do generally agree: but I repent not I have been so little engaged in the hot contests of our age about the things wherein they differ.<sup>54</sup>

In this respect at least, Torrington "begat its image" upon John Howe.

As Calamy recorded the move to London, Howe was very reluctant to enter Cromwell's service, but eventually bowed to the Protector's insistence.<sup>55</sup> This may have been the way Howe himself preferred to recall the transfer. Within a short time he was looking for a way out of a role he increasingly disliked. The best evidence we have from this period is the correspondence between Howe and Baxter, some of which has already been cited. This shows a young man out of his depth, at times depressed and increasingly desperate to escape a difficult situation.

The first of the series was dated at Whitehall, 12 March 1657/8.<sup>56</sup> Howe referred to a meeting with Baxter at

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<sup>53</sup> "Some overtures made by me were the occasion of a settled meeting of the neighbouring ministers of different persuasions.. which hath been discontinued and forsaken by one party...Torrington was the place of meeting...which, if not supplied by a person inclined to peace... will not draw in both parties thither." Howe to Baxter, 1 June, [16]58.

<sup>54</sup> Howe, Delighting in God, p 475.

<sup>55</sup> Calamy pp 16-17.

<sup>56</sup> Howe to Baxter, March 12, [16]57, Baxter Correspondence, Vol ii, 297, (Rogers pp. 53-7; Keeble, Calendar, no. 436). This would have been 1657/8, approximately 15 months after Howe's arrival in London.

Kidderminster "some years since" and to his admiration of Baxter's publications as reasons for his writing.<sup>57</sup> He wrote for advice about whether he should preach publicly against the "neglects" of the household he serves. If Howe's concern signals his moral scrupulousness, the expedient of writing to Baxter suggests a diffidence and lack of confidence about the proper course of action.

Baxter's reply of April 3 counselled most definitely against speaking out.

A time there is for open plain dealing; but as long as the case is not palpable, desperate, and notorious, and you have leave to speak privately, that may suffice you.<sup>58</sup>

He went on, effectively to recruit Howe as his agent at Whitehall.

I would awaken your jealousy to a careful (but very secret and silent) observance of the infidels and Papists, who are very high and busy.

With this letter, Baxter sent three enclosures concerning "healing principles" for Protestant unity which he wanted Howe to commend to Cromwell. One of these was a plan already submitted by Baxter to the Independent Philip Nye.<sup>59</sup> Howe was

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<sup>57</sup> Howe specifically mentioned Baxter's *Aphorisms of Justification* (1649). He acknowledged that Baxter's formulation regarding "universal redemption" directed his thoughts "when I was much fluctuating". Thus, very early in his career we find Howe espousing the modified Calvinism of Baxter. Although he eschewed the predestination issue in his own The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience of the Sins of Men, with the Wisdom and sincerity of His Counsels, Exhortations etc (1677), this work by Howe provoked controversy on the grounds of its alleged arminianism (see chapter four, pp 159-60 below).

<sup>58</sup> Baxter to Howe, April 3, 1658, Baxter Corr. iii, 200 (Rogers pp 58-61; Keeble no. 443).

<sup>59</sup> See Keeble, Calendar, notes 443:6-8 for details.

a ready collaborator. His rapid reply (April 13) endorsed Baxter's concerns and suggested amendments to the reconciliation plan.<sup>60</sup> On May 8 he reported to Baxter on a meeting with Nye about the proposals.<sup>61</sup>

Howe's next letter (May 25) has already been cited for what it indicates about the relative appeal of Torrington. He was concerned about the futility of his present position.

My call hither, was a work I thought very considerable; the setting up of the worship and discipline of Christ in this family...But now at once I see the designed work here hopelessly laid aside. We affect here to live in so loose a way...that it were as hopeful a course to preach in a market, or in any assembly met by chance, as here.<sup>62</sup>

Baxter's reply, evidently calling on Howe to stay at Whitehall, was ineffective. Howe's frustration mounted to crisis point. Only one week later he wrote to Baxter again. Torrington was portrayed as a place in which "my ministry.. was not.. altogether in vain". The following long extract gives a crucial insight into Howe's perception of himself and his plight.

Here my influence is not like to be much, (as it is not to be expected a raw young man should be much considerable among grandees;) my work little; my success hitherto little; my hopes, considering the temper of this place, very small; especially coupling it with the temper of my spirit, which did you know it, alone would, I think, greatly alter your judgement of this case. I am naturally bashful, pusillanimous, easily brow-beaten, solicitous about the fitness and unfitness of speech or silence in most cases, afraid...of being counted uncivil etc: and the distemper being natural (most

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<sup>60</sup> Howe to Baxter, April 13, 1658, Baxter Corr, iii, 198 (Rogers pp 61-3; Keeble, Calendar, no 447).

<sup>61</sup> Howe to Baxter May 8 1658, Baxter Corr iii, 196 (Rogers pp 63-65; Keeble, Calendar, no. 450).

<sup>62</sup> Howe to Baxter May 25 [1658].

intrinsically) is less curable. You can easily guess how little considerations are like to do in such a case. I did not, I confess, know myself so well as, since my coming up, occasion and refection have taught me to do. I now find my hopes of doing good, will be among people where I shall not be so liable to be overawed. I might have known this sooner, and have prevented the trouble I am now in. Though the case of my coming up thither, and continuance, differ much, so as that I can't condemn the former, yet I more incline to do that than justify the latter.

I shall beseech you to weigh my case over again.<sup>63</sup>

Howe's admirers have glossed over this interesting passage as "perfectly ludicrous" modesty.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, his pained self-assessment must be interpreted carefully. Intensely introspective breast-beating was typical of divines like Howe. He himself actively encouraged it. In *The Blessedness of the Righteous* he asked

what power is there in man, more excellent, more appropriate to reasonable nature, than that of reflecting, of turning his thoughts upon himself?<sup>65</sup>

The letter may display the exaggerated pleading of one attempting to justify his desire to escape an unhappy situation but it cannot be ignored. That Howe felt the need to justify himself to Baxter itself suggests that his self-accusation of being "bashful, pusillanimous, easily brow-beaten" was not completely without foundation. He was torn between his own sense of duty, the solicitations of some from Torrington, and pressure from Baxter. He sought, but seemed incapable of finding, a resolution which could satisfy all.

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<sup>63</sup> Howe to Baxter 1 June [16]58.

<sup>64</sup> Rogers p 72n. See also Horton p 52; Scott pp 13-14.

<sup>65</sup> Howe, *Blessedness*, p 166. For the introspection of Nonconformists see Keeble, *Literary Culture*, pp 204-214.

At this very point of despair, Howe appears to have found his answer. Just two days after his gloomy letter, in the final of the series, he wrote yet again to Baxter.

Since my last, something has come into my thoughts which may be a medium betwixt my deserting my present station, etc; i.e. to retain a relation still to Torrington, (which hitherto, for want of a successor, I could not divest myself of,) and get leave to be with them a quarter of a year...<sup>66</sup>

Howe negotiated the right to maintain his living. The arrangement was for a series of interim ministers, with Howe himself spending three months of each year at Torrington.<sup>67</sup> The scheme may have begun immediately. There is no mention of Howe in the descriptions of Cromwell's death on 3 September. As Household Chaplain he might have been expected to have attended the dying Protector or at least offered prayers, but this appears not to have happened.<sup>68</sup> He was present, however, in the official funeral party on 23 November.<sup>69</sup>

Immediately prior to his death, Cromwell had reluctantly sanctioned what would be the Savoy Conference of Independents (29 September to 12 October). Howe attended this gathering,

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<sup>66</sup> Howe to Baxter, June 3 [16]58, Baxter Corr. iv, 81 (Rogers pp 74-5; Keeble, Calendar, no 457).

<sup>67</sup> In the winter of 1658-9, Howe's stand-in was the young Increase Mather (1639-1723) - "Autobiography" p 283; M.G. Hall, The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather 1639-1723, Middleton Conn., 1988, p. 44.

<sup>68</sup> Godwin records that Cromwell "was principally attended on his death-bed by the two eminent divines, Goodwin and Owen" - W. Godwin, History of the Commonwealth of England, London, 1828, Vol. 4, p 573.

<sup>69</sup> R.F. Sherwood, The Court of Oliver Cromwell, London, 1977, p 109.

although as an observer rather than a participant.<sup>70</sup> Neal recorded that the Protector and some in his court were unhappy with this conference of Independents "as tending to establish a separation between them and the Presbyterians"<sup>71</sup>. At the time Cromwell retained hopes for a union of the two groups. Given Howe's views and reports to Baxter already cited, he is likely to have been closely linked to that cause.<sup>72</sup>

Howe had a high opinion of Oliver's more obviously devout son, Richard Cromwell. He retained his post as Household Chaplain but spent much of Richard's reign in Torrington.<sup>73</sup> By the time of the next extant letter to Baxter, dated May 21, 1659, the younger Cromwell had been all but deposed. This event, which he blamed squarely on elements in the Army, Howe regarded as a disaster.

Sir, such persons as are now at the head of affairs, will blast religion, if God prevent not. The design you writ me of, some time since, to introduce Infidelity or Popery, they have opportunity enough to effect. I know

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<sup>70</sup> Horton, himself a Congregationalist, endeavours to make Howe an Independent on the basis of his attendance at Savoy. See Horton pp 55-6.

<sup>71</sup> Neal, II, p 434.

<sup>72</sup> A.G. Matthews, The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658, London, 1959, p 16. This is borne out by the comments of Howe in his letter to Baxter of April 13 1658: "I made such a motion to [Cromwell] that he would please once for all to invite by some public declaration, the godly ministers of the several counties and of several parties, to the work of associating upon such common principles as might be found tending to the general good...He expressed a great willingness thereto.."

<sup>73</sup> CR p 279 suggests that Howe's place at Torrington was taken, by John Bullock on 26 March 1659. This must have lasted only a very short time. Increase Mather had been at Torrington over the winter. He records the reason for his departure as Howe's return. Mather took up a Chaplaincy on Guernsey in April 1659 - "Autobiography" p 283.

some leading men are not Christians. Religion is lost out of England, farther than as it can creep into corners...I am returning to my old station, being now at liberty beyond dispute.<sup>74</sup>

Howe did return to Torrington, to await events. During the hiatus before the Act of Uniformity an incident occurred which signalled later concerns. In October 1660, he was accused of preaching sedition. He was acquitted of the charge,<sup>75</sup> but the sermons on which it was based introduced themes which would come to dominate his ecclesiology. The information and depositions of this case have survived.<sup>76</sup> The accusation was made that Howe, in preaching against ceremony on 30 September and 14 October 1660, encouraged rebellion against those who would reintroduce such measures as the wearing of surplices and kneeling at Communion.

In Howe's defence, some twenty Torrington parishioners insisted that Howe's intent was merely to warn them against "having our hearts more set upon [ceremonies] than upon the substantial duties of God's worship". Thus, although the tone and intent of the sermon was in doubt, the subject matter was not. The aversion to ritual indicated in these sermons links Howe with a long tradition of "Puritan" concerns. There were also hints of a slightly new path down which Howe would

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<sup>74</sup> Howe to Baxter, May 21 [1659], Baxter Corr. vi, 235 (Rogers pp 92-5; Keeble, Calendar, no 574).

<sup>75</sup> There was some controversy over the validity of the hearings by which Howe was acquitted. See Calamy pp 27-29; Rogers pp 95-98.

<sup>76</sup> British Library Add. MS 11,342 A. 5,6. Along with the rebellion charge, there was also a suggestion that Howe had refused his Archdeacon entry to his Church and declined infant baptism to those not "of his congregated Church".



eventually go. His text was taken from Galatians 6:7-8:

Be not deceived: God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, for he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.

As will be shown, Howe's theology came to centre on pneumatology. The 1660 sermons may be the first sign of that concentration.

That mature thought was, as yet, some way off. On Bartholomew's Day in 1662 Howe was ejected under the provisions of the Act of Uniformity. Spurr has noted the various personal factors which may have influenced ministers' decisions.<sup>77</sup> Many who were to be ejected spelled out their reasons for nonconformity in farewell sermons. There is nothing to suggest that Howe was an exception but no final sermons at Torrington have survived. Nevertheless, it is clear that not all possible objections were shared by Howe. As he appears never to have taken it, the need to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant was not an issue. Neither, apparently, was he averse to the requirement to swear loyalty to the King. In 1666 he was prepared, unlike many others, to take the Oxford Oath.<sup>78</sup>

Calamy recorded two anecdotes from which it is possible to build a picture of Howe's reasons for nonconformity. The first was a meeting with the Bishop of Exeter, Seth Ward,

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<sup>77</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 43-44.

<sup>78</sup> Howe was one of twelve in Devon who signed a memorandum setting out the sense in which they took the oath. Characteristically, he then took the added step of recording his motivation for this action - see Bodl. Rawl. MS. D. 1350. 329; Calamy pp 40-43.

occasioned by proceedings against him for unauthorised preaching. On this occasion, Howe cited his objection to reordination.<sup>79</sup> The second is interesting, given Howe's later concerns. John Wilkins had pressed Howe as to why he, whom Wilkins knew to be a man of latitude, could not accept the settlement. Howe replied that there were many reasons but that, in the face of a settlement which appeared to show none,

this very latitude, was so far from inducing him to Conformity, that it was the very thing which made him a Non-conformist.<sup>80</sup>

In the same conversation, Howe specified a lack of discipline in the new Church structure as "a very considerable objection against the Establishment". The lack of this foundation, he averred, made conformity akin to "going into a falling house." Calamy's record did not specify parochial discipline but there is no doubt that that is what Howe means. Rogers provides the text of a document written by Howe (most likely in the 1650s) on the responsibilities of ministers which presupposes a local right of exclusion from Communion.<sup>81</sup> During comprehension negotiations in 1680, Howe told Bishop Lloyd of St Asaph that

a very considerable obstacle [to comprehension] would be removed, if the law were so framed as to enable ministers to attempt *parochial reformation*.<sup>82</sup>

Whatever the importance of discipline to Howe in 1662, it will be shown that other concerns came to drive his later

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<sup>79</sup> Calamy p 39.

<sup>80</sup> Calamy pp 31-3.

<sup>81</sup> Rogers pp 67-69.

<sup>82</sup> Calamy p 72.

ecclesiology.<sup>83</sup>

There is little unique or surprising about these grounds. Howe's objection to the narrowness of the settlement was shared by moderate Nonconformists. His personal concern for latitude was not new. As noted above, he placed similar conditions upon his religious associations at Oxford. The issues of parochial discipline and reordination were of particular concern to conservative Nonconformists like Richard Baxter. Importantly, ecclesiology impinges on each of these reasons. Geoffrey Nuttall has pointed out how discipline and reordination pivot on views of episcopacy.<sup>84</sup> The link between discipline and fundamental ecclesiology has already been noted.<sup>85</sup> The roots of Howe's latitude will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

Although he commenced ministry with a profound and comprehensive theological system in place, the years 1654-1662 were difficult ones for John Howe. There are clear grounds for questioning the myth that his ministry at Torrington was tranquil bliss and that his performance at Cromwell's Court was marked for its clear-sighted resolution and integrity.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See chapter six, pp 229-234 below.

<sup>84</sup> G. Nuttall, "The First Nonconformists" in G.F. Nuttall & O. Chadwick (eds), From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962, London, 1962, pp 150-187, pp 157-159. See also Keeble, Literary Culture, p 33.

<sup>85</sup> See chapter two, pp 80-85 above.

<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the myth endures, most obviously in American historiography. Increase Mather's biographer describes the Howe of 1658 as "a great man in the inner circle of Congregationalists" implementing their master plan at Cromwell's Court. See Hall, Last American Puritan, pp 42, 44. See also Keeble, Literary Culture, p 19.

The confidence he acquired at the Universities was greatly challenged by the vicissitudes of Church life and intrigue in the last years of the Interregnum. Far from the serene passage through strife implied by the hagiographers, the 1650s had been exacting. They left their mark. In particular, his dislike of disputation and strife had become almost pathological.

That John Howe was a man of principle cannot be doubted. He remained strong enough in his views to accept the consequences of dissent. Yet he was only thirty-two, an ejected minister with a family to support. He did not have the profile of such as Baxter and Owen and it is probable that he lacked their assurance and resolution. He certainly had little of their polemical fire. In 1662 he must have faced his temporal future with some disquiet.

Howe, of course, was not the only divine to experience trauma in those decades. In the 1640s, Church of England loyalists had personal crises to match those of 1662 Nonconformists. The turmoil of mid-century would continue to have its impact on theology in ensuing decades. Dissent would be characterised by an increasing orientation to the invisible Church. John Howe was to be a leading agent in this trend. Dissent was not unique in its drift to a more extreme position. Within the Church of England two ultimately incompatible streams would develop.

It is a feature of the spectrum model that no one position or tendency can be properly understood without

acknowledging those other broad groupings which surround it on the spectrum. Neither is it valid to posit trends within Dissent itself without first describing something of its initial shape. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address these requirements. Later Stuart spiritualist and conformist ecclesiologies will be discussed. I will then note important features of rigorist views of the Church on the eve of the Restoration.

Spiritualist types of ecclesiology had never played a major role in English Christianity. Their presence in the later Stuart period began small and rapidly diminished. Though they enjoyed a brief, albeit spectacular, flowering in the reaction to the highly visiblist ecclesiology of the Caroline Church, the only significant group to survive the Interregnum was the Quakers. Even here caution is necessary. At least partly because of spiritualists' native suspicion of organisation, attempts to trace continuities are fraught with difficulty. Simple, diachronic connections may certainly be disregarded.<sup>87</sup> However, Endy has made a convincing case for regarding groups that were "spiritualist" in a broad sense (such as the Quakers) as theologically distinct from those labelled "Puritan".<sup>88</sup>

There is certainly evidence of an extreme emphasis on the invisible Church in early Quaker thought. George Fox understood his mission to be

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<sup>87</sup> For examples see Williams pp 465, 788-789; Jay p 179.

<sup>88</sup> Endy, William Penn and Early Quakerism, Princeton, 1973 and "Puritanism".

to bring people off from all their own ways to Christ, the new and living way, and from their churches, when men made and gathered, to the Church in God...from all the world's fellowships, and prayings, and singings, which stood in forms without power, that their fellowships might be in the Holy Ghost.

However, Quakerism underwent a fundamental transformation during the Restoration. Not only organisation but a form of discipline developed. The second-generation Quakerism of such as William Penn took on the characteristics of a type of Protestant ecclesiology quite distinct from that of the thoroughgoing spiritualists. By the 1690s, Quaker thought was integrating the visible in a way not wholly dissimilar to the approach of the earlier rigorist stream.<sup>89</sup>

Conformist ecclesiology is more obviously important for our understanding of the period. In 1951 Robert Bosher identified as the principal reason for the unexpectedly harsh Act of Uniformity the "activity of the Laudian party".<sup>90</sup> Bosher's approach has been heavily criticised.<sup>91</sup> He himself was aware of the limitations of his label. He defined it in

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<sup>89</sup> See Endy, William Penn, pp 330-336; Watts pp 325-335; B. Reay, The Quakers and the English Revolution, London, 1985, pp 103-122; E.B. Bronner, "Quaker Discipline and Order, 1680-1720: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and London Yearly Meeting", in R.S. & M.M. Dunn (eds), The World of William Penn, Philadelphia, 1986, pp 323-335; B.R. White, "The Twilight of Puritanism", pp 316-318.

<sup>90</sup> Bosher, The Making of the Restoration Settlement, p 278. Apart from some details, Bosher's analysis was followed by A. Whiteman, "The Church of England Restored" and A.H. Wood. See also J. Gascoigne, Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, religion and politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution, Cambridge, 1989, p 28.

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, Green, The Re-establishment of the Church of England, pp 22-24 and *passim*; G.R. Abernathy, "Clarendon and the Declaration of Indulgence", JEH, Vol 11, 1960, pp 55-73.

terms neither of personal connection with Laud nor organisation. Instead Laudians

were High Churchmen who shared the religious viewpoint of Laud and who were in wholehearted agreement in their method of defending the Church's interests.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, even this inclusive definition must be qualified. Two streams may be observed within the Restoration Church of England. To the degree that both emphasised divine immanence, they may fairly be said to have shared Laud's "religious viewpoint". However, they dealt with Laud's legacy in different ways. Only one can properly be described as "High Church". The other, characterised by its reliance upon the civil magistrate, may be termed the "Constantinian" view. It was with an amalgam of these ideas that the leaders of Dissent had to contend. The basic features of each were revealed in the arguments employed by Churchmen in debates over comprehension and toleration.

Bosher's view fits a broad historiographical consensus which identifies a marked evolution of "High Church" ecclesiology during the Interregnum.<sup>93</sup> The most obvious

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<sup>92</sup> Bosher p xv.

<sup>93</sup> The interpretation has a long pedigree. Baxter noted the rise of "New Prelatists", identified with Hammond - see A. Whiteman, "The Church of England Restored", pp 43-44 and pp 37-49 generally.. John Keble discerned "a marked distinction" between Hooker's view of the episcopate and "the bolder and completer view" of such as Laud and Hammond - "Editor's Preface", R. Hooker, Works, Vol 1, Oxford, 1841, (Seventh ed. - 1888), pp ix-cxvi, p lxxxv. See also the works of Bosher's teacher, N. Sykes, Old Priest, and New Presbyter: The Anglican attitude to episcopacy, presbyterianism and papacy since the Reformation, Cambridge, 1956, pp 58-117 and From Sheldon to Secker, pp 105-139; G. Every covers some of the issues in The High Church Party 1688-1718, London, 1956, pp 1-18; Avis, Anglicanism, pp 139-153, is useful but tends to be more descriptive than analytical. The best available

elements in this development were the reinforcement of episcopacy and the refinement by Henry Hammond of the idea of the "national church". This latter concept in particular provided a defence against the Roman charge of schism.<sup>94</sup>

The High Church view continued a commitment to the visible Church. This may be readily observed in the writings of Herbert Thorndike. Thorndike (1598-1672) was one of the few truly systematic thinkers in the Interregnum and Restoration Church. He was the quintessential "High Church divine."<sup>95</sup> In 1659, he displayed a preoccupation with visible unity.

[U]nity in the Church is of so great advantage to the service of God, and that Christianity from whence it proceedeth, that it ought to overshadow and cover very great imperfections in the laws of the Church... Especially, seeing I maintain that the Church, by divine institution, is in point of right one visible body, consisting in the communion of all Christians, in the offices of God's service; and ought, by human administration, in point of fact to be the same.<sup>96</sup>

So crucial were visible communion and uniformity that their absence called into question the veracity of the faith.

[W]ere not the Church...one society, one visible body, communion or corporation from the beginning - the communion whereof always confin[ing] the profession and conversation of Christians to some certain visible rule

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analysis is found in the Spurr's work, esp. Restoration Church pp 1-28, 105-165.

<sup>94</sup> Boshier pp 83-4; Sykes, Old Priest, pp 66-84; Whiteman pp 43-48; Avis, Anglicanism, pp 139-154. Spurr, (Restoration Church pp 163-4) suggests that the national church concept was crucial as it "simultaneously repudiated Rome's accusations [of schism] and condemned the Nonconformists whilst remaining compatible with the Royal supremacy" as well as providing a focus for unity.

<sup>95</sup> On Thorndike see DNB; Stoughton, Religion in England, IV, pp 254-265; Avis, Anglicanism, pp 147-150.

<sup>96</sup> H. Thorndike, Of the Principles of Christian Truth, (1659) LACT, Oxford, 1845, Vol II, pt I, p 6.



- I should think it impossible to make evidence of any common truth received of all Christians.<sup>97</sup>

It was thus incumbent on the Church, through its leaders, to determine the proper interpretations of scripture and to institute appropriate forms and ritual.<sup>98</sup> The alternative was the anarchy of the Interregnum.

But if all the world should do as men do now in England, make every fancy taken up out of the Bible a law to their faith - not questioning whether ever professed, owned or enjoined by the Church, or not - it would soon become questionable whether there be indeed any such thing as Christianity or not, those that profess it agreeing in nothing...[A]ll churches should be linked together by a law of visible communion in the service of God, and so to make one Church.<sup>99</sup>

With one eye on Rome, Thorndike asserted that the Church was not infallible, but dissension was warranted only when its rulings were "destructive to the common faith". In all other cases, especially those relating to forms and structures, submission was required.<sup>100</sup> There was thus no ground for nonconformity. If Dissenters received harsh punishment, they had only themselves to blame.

[W]here...unity is once broken to pieces and destroyed, and palliating cures are out of date, the offence which is taken at shewing the true cure, is imputable to them that cause the fraction, not to him that would see it restored.<sup>101</sup>

Thorndike was a good, if extreme, case of what Spurr describes as "a shift in the Church of England's

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<sup>97</sup> Thorndike, Principles, Vol II, pt I, p 102.

<sup>98</sup> Thorndike, Principles, II, I, pp 114-6.

<sup>99</sup> Thorndike, Principles, Vol. II, pt II, p 400.

<sup>100</sup> Thorndike, Principles, Vol. II, pt II, p 511.

<sup>101</sup> Thorndike, Principles, Vol. II, pt I, p 6.

ecclesiological centre of gravity toward a more Catholic understanding of the nature of the Church."<sup>102</sup> His attitude to what would become Dissent is indicative of the approach taken by many during the later Stuart period.

Samuel Parker (1640-1688) attacked Dissent from a different direction. His was an heroically "Constantinian" vision. It was, however, markedly different from the formulation of Foxe.<sup>103</sup> Like Thorndike, Parker stressed the immanent work of God. Direct, immediate divine action was discounted; the age of miracles was dead. In only one period in history had God acted intrusively: in the crucial first centuries of the Christian Church. At that time, Parker declared,

[Christians] were not capable of any coercive Power; tis wonderfully remarkable how God himself was pleased to supply their want of civil jurisdiction by his own immediate Providence, and in a Miraculous way to inflict the Judgments they denounced.<sup>104</sup>

This age of frequent transcendent activity ended with Constantine. As soon as Emperors became sympathetic to the Christian cause

then began the Divine Providence to withdraw the miraculous Power of the Church...as being now well supplied by the natural and ordinary Power of the Prince.<sup>105</sup>

The prince was central to Parker's thought. Whereas Thorndike located immanence in the Church, Parker identified

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<sup>102</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 113.

<sup>103</sup> See chapter two, pp 82-3 above.

<sup>104</sup> S. Parker, A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie, London, 1669, p 44.

<sup>105</sup> Parker, Ecclesiastical Politie, p 49.

it with the magistrate. Princes were paramount because they were part of the God-ordained natural order. No scripture was needed to establish their supremacy as

from the first ages of the World, Monarchy was its only Government, necessarily arising out of the constitution of Humane Nature.<sup>106</sup>

There were obvious implications for the question of religious authority. Conscience could be dismissed as fickle and unreliable. Elevating individual conscience led inexorably to arrogance, rebellion and anarchy. This was what Parker held to be the fundamental crime of Dissenters. Their message was not merely wrong, it was dangerous, and not to be tolerated.

Although he was accused of "Hobbism", Parker's vision was radically different from what he called the "Malmsbury Philosophy". Hobbes saw Leviathan arising as the only practicable way of dealing with a bad situation. To Parker, the goodness of God precluded the possibility of there ever being a bad situation in nature. Humans were created with a drive to set up princes, that they did so was merely proof of God's providence. Although clothed in the discourse of theology, Hobbes' commitment to the sovereign was fundamentally pragmatic; Parker's lay at the heart of his religion.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, a major concern in Hobbes' thought was to remove unnecessary "fear" by placing God at a considerable

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<sup>106</sup> Parker, Ecclesiastical Politie, p 29.

<sup>107</sup> For a comparison of Parker and Hobbes see R. Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics & Locke's Two treatises of Government, Princeton, 1986, pp 48-52 and G. Schochet, "Between Lambeth and Leviathan: Samuel Parker on the Church of England and political order" in N. Phillipson & Q. Skinner (eds) Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain, Cambridge, 1993, pp 189-208, pp 201-3.

remove from humans. Richard Tuck has shown how Hobbes ultimately achieved this in *Leviathan*.<sup>108</sup> For Parker the movement was in the opposite direction. The nearness of God was secured in the magistrate. For Hobbes, immanence played little active part; for Parker it was everything.

Bosher's "Laudianism" obscures the presence of two quite different approaches to the Church. However, Thorndike and Parker are extreme cases, useful for appraisal and example but not necessarily representative of the majority. Not all or even most Churchmen were as committed to one position as were these two. Most held versions of the "High Church" and "Constantinian" views in tension. These ideas may be observed to varying degrees among many Churchmen of the Restoration. High Churchmanship akin to Thorndike's drove the Seven Bishops in 1688.<sup>109</sup> As will be shown, it was found in moderate form in Edward Stillingfleet.<sup>110</sup> Parker's Constantinian view probably reflected that of his patron, Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon<sup>111</sup> and was paralleled in Parker's contemporary and

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<sup>108</sup> R. Tuck, "The civil religion of Thomas Hobbes" in N. Phillipson & Q. Skinner (eds), Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain, Cambridge, 1993, pp 120-138.

<sup>109</sup> On this see M. Goldie, "The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution" in R.A. Beddard (ed), The Revolution of 1688, Oxford, 1991, pp 102-136, esp pp 124-132. See also J.A.I. Champion, The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its enemies 1660-1730, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter five, pp 190-197 below.

<sup>111</sup> Whiting p 502 asserts that Parkers Discourse was published at Sheldon's request. See also Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics, p 44. Parker was Sheldon's Chaplain. He had some responsibility for assessing books for imprimatur see L. Kirk, Richard Cumberland and Natural Law: Secularisation of Thought in Seventeenth-Century England, Cambridge, 1987, p 15 & esp pp 78-9.

fellow-defender of James II, Thomas Cartwright.<sup>112</sup> It found an attenuated echo in John Tillotson.<sup>113</sup> Thus, traces of each appeared across the range of conformist polity, from Archbishops to "Latitudinarians". This need cause no discomfort. The model employed here identifies and describes tendencies, not party platforms.

John Spurr accepts the level of diversity described here. Indeed this picture does not directly challenge his unapologetic use of "Anglicanism" to describe the Restoration Church of England. However Spurr's "Anglicanism" amounts to little more than a defensive solidarity. It does not encompass a distinct theology.<sup>114</sup> It is therefore of no value as a rubric to attach to ecclesiology. There was not one "Anglican" view of the Church.

The arguments of Thorndike and Parker signal the importance of views on authority. Was the Prince, ecclesiastical officialdom, or individual conscience to determine religious practice? This debate transcended formal ecclesiology and suggests a final modification of the model proposed in this thesis. At the risk of confusing an already

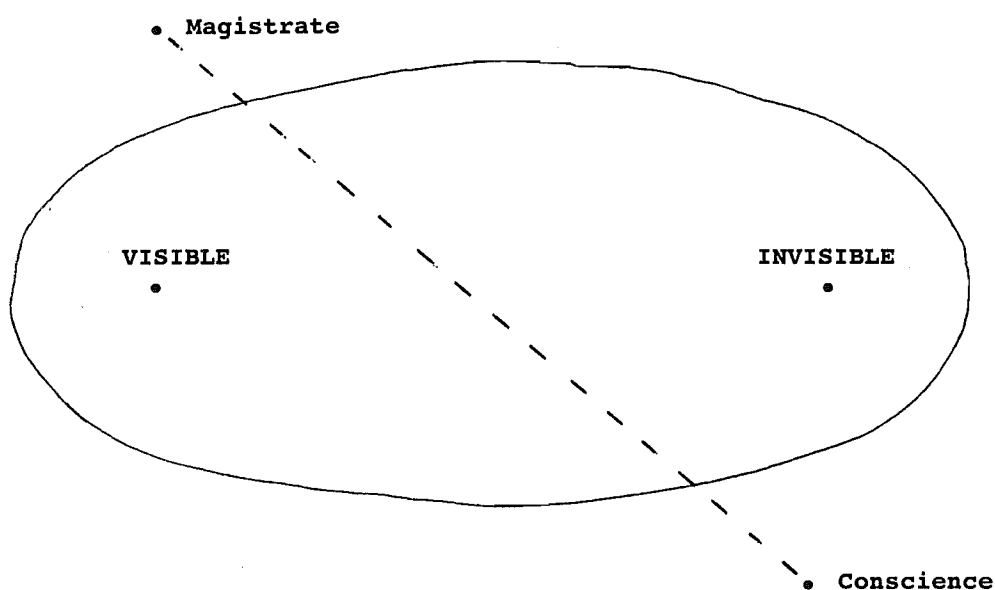
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<sup>112</sup> Cartwright (1634-1689) was appointed to Chester at about the same time as Parker was to Oxford. Both appointments were resisted by Sancroft. Burnet notes that Cartwright "had set himself long to raise the king's authority above law...their authority was from God, absolute and superior to law". In Burnet's assessment, Parker and Cartwright were "the two worst men that could be found out". See Burnet, History, pp 442-3; Goldie "Political Thought", pp 135-6. For a sympathetic view of Cartwright see R.A. Beddard, "Bishop Cartwright's Death-Bed", Bodleian Library Record, Vol. 11, 1984, pp 220-230.

<sup>113</sup> See chapter five, pp 182-190 below.

<sup>114</sup> See Spurr, Restoration Church, pp xiii-xvii.

complex paradigm, the wider debate over religious authority must be incorporated. Inevitably, another spectrum must be visualised. This time the categories are "secular", the poles represented by Hobbes and John Locke. One pole confers authority in external religion on the magistrate, the other on individual conscience.



The "authority" continuum cuts diagonally across the ecclesiological ellipse already proposed. The effect of this is to place the extremes outside the theological ellipse altogether. This is no accident. It was contended above that Hobbes' theory depended little upon a theology of immanence. It will be argued in chapter six that Locke too is best understood as standing outside truly ecclesiological concerns.

It remains to paint a brief picture of the ideas which would come to characterise Dissent. Laud and his followers did not create a new "Puritanism" but it is clear that a discernible "Laudian" tilt towards the visible reactivated concerns which had never completely disappeared.<sup>115</sup> I will contend that, for the later Stuart period at least, "Presbyterian" and "Independent" or "Congregational" are unhelpful labels. However, these terms have greater claims to usefulness for the 1640s and 50s. Carol Schneider has argued that the heightened awareness of ecclesiological issues in the 1640s, combined with observation of the emerging Congregationalism of New England, "helped generate deep fissures among Nonconformists" in old England.<sup>116</sup> The trend accelerated in the 1650s, encouraged by an unprecedented freedom to organise. Snapshots of consciously different ecclesiologies can be derived from the Westminster Confession (1647) and the Savoy Declaration (1658). Both were products of the "rigorist" view of the Church.<sup>117</sup> Both emphasised the invisible Church but they differed in the degree of this bias.

The Presbyterian system preserved a significant role for the visible Church. The definition in the Westminster Confession is instructive.

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<sup>115</sup> Christianson, "Reformers and the Church of England", pp 480-481.

<sup>116</sup> Schneider, "Roots and Branches", esp. pp 185-188.

<sup>117</sup> Schneider (pp 169-73) asserts the importance of the "disciplinarian tradition" (especially as represented by Thomas Cartwright) to the clerical nonconformists of the 1630s & 40s.

The visible Church...consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (XXV.2)

Yet, it was the invisible Church which was "the spouse, the body, the fullness" of Christ (XXV.1). The prime function of the visible Church was the "gathering and perfecting of the Saints" (XXV.3) In this there was the traditional concern for "the discipline" but also the signal that the visible was to be determined by invisible categories (i.e. the "saints", the elect). Further, the "visibility" of the Church fluctuated according to its purity (XXV.4). The importance of the visible Church flowed from its relation to the invisible. There was little sense of it having its own *raison d'être*.<sup>118</sup>

The Savoy Declaration made an even greater qualification of the visible. As the Declaration was based upon the Westminster document, its differences are important. Chapter XXV.2 of the Confession (quoted above) was replaced with the following statement.

The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the Gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according to it, not destroying their own profession by any Errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are, and may be called the visible Catholique Church of Christ, although as such it is not intrusted with the administration of any ordinances or have any officers to rule or govern in, or over the whole Body. (XXVI. 2)

This clause placed a greater stress on godliness. There was no mention of children<sup>119</sup> and, significantly, the phrase "out

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<sup>118</sup> Jay pp 210-211.

<sup>119</sup> Although a clause similar to that in the Westminster Confession appears in the 1680 version. See Matthews Savoy Declaration, p 111 n 5.



of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" was omitted. As would be expected, the Congregationalists proscribed any institutional authority of the wider Church.

From these "snapshots" it is evident that a range of emphases existed within the rigorist groups of the Interregnum. These fault lines would extend into Restoration Dissent. Indeed, more fundamental differences would develop as theological leadership fell on a new generation of divines.

Of English religion at the start of the Restoration period a picture has emerged which portends conflict and difficulty. The essential problem was one of disparate theological cultures. The re-established Church was dominated by those who stressed divine immanence in one form or another. The Dissenters came from those groups which sought a more immediate relationship with God. Over the next decades these differences would prove fatal to attempts at unity.

"to live and converse in this world"

Chapter Four:

The Philosophy of Maturity

It is difficult to comprehend fully what was the mood of the ejected clergy of 1662. Howe had prefigured his own likely feelings in the despondent letter to Baxter which followed the fall of Richard Cromwell: "religion is lost out of England, farther than as it can creep into corners".<sup>1</sup> As events would show, this assessment was too gloomy. Yet Howe himself effectively "crept into corners" for a decade and a half after his ejection. This is the period about which the least is known of Howe's activities. Nevertheless it is clear that these were critical years in his theological development. The corners in which he secluded himself apparently received enough light to read by and provided peace sufficient for deep contemplation. When he emerged, on his return to London in 1676, he rapidly assumed a role at the centre of Nonconformist affairs. Within two years he published and preached ideas which revealed a confident and resilient systematic divinity.

This chapter will deal with this "tunnel" period of Howe's career. What is known of his movements in the 1660s and early 1670s will be related. Although he himself was relatively quiet, he was building contacts through an extensive family network. Through this network he would be furnished with an ideal refuge from the turmoil of English affairs. Howe would use the opportunity to full advantage.

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<sup>1</sup> Howe to Baxter, May 21 [1659]

The works of this decade and a half, though few in number, are crucial to our understanding of Howe's mind. These, especially *The Living Temple*, will be examined to reveal of his fundamental approach to theology. A maturing process can be observed which laid a foundation for his later writings on the Church. A combination of platonism, experience and "Puritan" spirituality will be shown to underpin an influential, invisiblist ecclesiology.

For nine years Howe remained in Devon, probably in Torrington. Though he preached occasionally in the houses of sympathetic gentry, he did not set up conventicles or provoke the authorities. The conversation with Bishop Ward discussed above,<sup>2</sup> resulted from Howe's concern to pre-empt rumoured action against him for his country house activities.<sup>3</sup> In 1665 he was listed in the episcopal return as living in Great Torrington "peaceably".<sup>4</sup> It is therefore most unlikely that Howe was imprisoned in this same year "for two months in the Isle of St Nicholas" as reported by Calamy.<sup>5</sup> In 1666 he took

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter three, pp 130-1 above.

<sup>3</sup> Calamy pp 37-37.

<sup>4</sup> G.L. Turner (ed), Original Records of Early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence, London,, 1911, Vol 1, pp 180,189.

<sup>5</sup> Calamy p 43-5. This suggestion is based upon hearsay and inferred from a letter by Howe to his brother-in-law, Obadiah Hughes (who had been imprisoned in 1665 - CR, pp 281-2) in which Howe gives thanks for mutual "Occasions of thanksgiving". Calamy himself expresses some doubt about the report and later biographers have generally discounted its accuracy. See Hewlett p xxi; Rogers p 121; Horton p 79.

the Oxford Oath, perhaps to avoid expulsion from Torrington under the provisions of the Five Mile Act.

In 1668 Howe published his first major work: *The Blessedness of the Righteous*.<sup>6</sup> This treatise on the Christian's hope for Heaven was based on Torrington sermons. Though turgid in its prose and convoluted in its argument, it was apparently well received.<sup>7</sup> In the prefatory epistle, Howe signalled themes which were becoming dominant in his thinking. The topic of Heaven was chosen carefully. Howe did so firstly because it is "so little disputable". He castigated those who divert to "contentious jangling".

When contention becomes a man's element, and he cannot live out of that fire, strains his wit, and racks his invention, to find matter of quarrel...and loves dissension for itself; this is the unnatural humour which hath so unspeakably troubled the church, and dispirited religion, and filled men's souls with wind and vanity; yea with fire and fury. This hath made Christians gladiators, and the Christian world a clamorous theatre, while men have equally affected to contend, and to make ostentation of their ability so to do.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Heaven appealed as a subject precisely because it was "other-worldly". Hope of heaven enabled acceptance of

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<sup>6</sup> *Works*, II pp 1-260. In 1659 he had published a sermon (not extant) preached to the House of Commons followed, in 1660, by the sermon Man's Creation in a Holy but Mutable State (*Works* I, pp 462-473).

<sup>7</sup> In his prefatory note, Richard Baxter finds it necessary to anticipate that "plain unlearned readers" may "blame the accurateness of the style". Howe, *Works* II, p 8. Baxter had some questions about possible antinomian tendencies in Howe's soteriology. In a letter of 2 June 1668 Howe assures him that "my visible scope and drift in that part of my discourse will vindicate my words from any such meaning" - Howe to Baxter 2 June 1668, Baxter Corr ii, 121. (Keeble, Calendar, no 753).

<sup>8</sup> Howe, Blessedness, p 5.

present sufferings. In an earlier letter of comfort to his brother-in-law, Obadiah Hughes, Howe had referred to "the ...instability of a surly, treacherous world", concluding:

if we cannot, God will outwit it and carry us, I trust, safe thro to a better World, upon which we may terminate Hopes that may never make us ashamed.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, confidence in the spiritual reality of the "last end" was "the very soul of religion". Without it

religion were the vainest, most irrational, and most unsavoury thing in the world".<sup>10</sup>

Important epistemological themes were evident. The essential component of "Blessedness" was intense divine/human meeting or a "vision of God". This encounter attended a direct conversion. Howe rejected any suggestion of the efficacy of right belief or sacraments. He described the mind of those who did not accept the need for a "heart-change".

They are (they say) orthodox Christians; they believe all the articles of the Christian creed; they detest all heresy and false doctrine; they are no strangers to the house of God, but diligently attend the enjoined solemnities of public worship...they have been baptised, and therein regenerate, and would we have more?<sup>11</sup>

The true "vision of God" was an immediate, intuitive encounter the excellence of which excelled sensual experience, intellectual activity and even faith.<sup>12</sup> Howe's relegation of faith and right belief is particularly interesting, as it prefigured the scepticism which will be seen to lie behind his irenic ecclesiology.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited by Calamy pp 43-45.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, Blessedness, p 5.

<sup>11</sup> Howe, Blessedness, p 125.

<sup>12</sup> Howe, Blessedness, pp 63-5.

Is it not possible thou mayest be a Christian for the same reasons for which one may be a Jew, or a Mahometan, or a mere pagan? as, viz. education, custom, law, example, outward advantage, &c...and what then is become of thy orthodoxy, when, as to the formal object of thy faith, thou believest but as Mahometans and pagans do..?<sup>13</sup>

Howe's next publication, *The Vanity of Man as Mortal* (1671) continued the theme of heaven-oriented faith. Again the prefatory epistle is revealing, but in this case the interest lies in the biographical information which may be gleaned.

The epistle was dated April 12, 1671 at Antrim, Ireland. Possibly as early as 1670, Howe had moved to Antrim as Chaplain to Lord Massarene. The decision to take the position was probably not difficult. Calamy asserts that Howe was "reduc'd to straits" financially.<sup>14</sup> This would not be surprising as 1670 saw considerable pressure on Nonconformity in England, following upon the second "Conventicles Act".<sup>15</sup>

The epistle was principally addressed to one John Upton, the head of a Parliamentarian Devon family. The main branch was based at Lupton, near Dartmouth. Another had settled in Ireland in the 1590s and was related to the same Lord Massarene whom Howe was serving by 1671. George Hughes, Howe's father-in-law and close friend, had, in his second marriage, wed Rebecca Upton, the daughter of John Upton. Her brother, Ambrose Upton, had been Canon of Christ Church, Oxford until

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<sup>13</sup> Howe, Blessedness, p 137.

<sup>14</sup> Calamy p 50.

<sup>15</sup> Howe's brother-in-law John Hicke recounts some of this harassment in A True and faithful Narrative of the Unjust and Illegal Sufferings, and Oppressions of Many Christians...in Devon, (1671).

1660. The occasion of the writing of *The Vanity of Man as Mortal* was the death (in Spain) of another brother, Anthony Upton.<sup>16</sup>

Howe was an intimate of this family group. In letters to Baxter he referred to Ambrose Upton as his "uncle".<sup>17</sup> In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to *Vanity* he recounted the funeral gathering at which, including himself, there were present

no less than twenty, the brothers and sisters of the deceased, or their consorts, besides his many nieces and nephews and other relations.<sup>18</sup>

The rest of the party is impossible to reconstruct but the possibilities are intriguing. The family network was extensive. Cromwell's Secretary of State, John Thurloe was a close connection.<sup>19</sup> Relations by marriage included George and Obadiah Hughes, Thomas and Samuel Martyn and Howe's brother-

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<sup>16</sup> Tracing the connections of the Uptons is complicated by the fact that there were two John Uptons, uncle and nephew, who were both married to daughters of Sir John Lytcott and were thus both connected by marriage to Cromwell's Secretary, John Thurloe. The younger John Upton was a member of Parliament for Dartmouth in 1679 and 1681. Helpful information is found in B.D. Henning (ed) The House of Commons 1660-1690 (The History of Parliament), London, 1983, Vol. III, p 621; G.R. Aylmer, The State's Servants: The Civil Servants of the English Republic, 1649-1660, London, 1973, pp 220-221 & 402 n.26 and various "Upton" entries in Venn (ed) Alumni Cantabrigienses and the D.N.B.

<sup>17</sup> See Howe to Baxter, March 12, [1658] (Keeble, Calendar 436, n.2.; Baxter's reply April 3, 1658, Baxter Corr. iii, 200, (Keeble, Calendar, no. 443); Howe to Baxter, May 21 [1659].

<sup>18</sup> J. Howe, The Vanity of Man as Mortal, [London, 1671], Works, II, pp 261-315, p 262.

<sup>19</sup> See P. Aubrey, Mr Secretary Thurloe: Cromwell's Secretary of State 1652-1660, London, 1990, pp 205-212.



in-law, the radical John Hickes.<sup>20</sup> All of these were Nonconformists, active in or around Plymouth in the 1660s and 70s. Thomas Martyn and Hickes presented to Charles II the "grateful acknowledgement" of Devon ministers for the 1672 Indulgence. All had been imprisoned at some time. Hickes was to be executed in 1685 for his part in the Monmouth rebellion. To these Devon activists may be added Richard Baxter who was the brother-in-law of Ambrose Upton. Such clerical personnel, together with the politically active Upton branches and Lord Massarene, constitute a significant Nonconformist nexus. The family links explain Howe's appointment to Antrim.

It is not particularly surprising that Howe should figure near the centre of such a circle. Yet it is interesting that, of the Nonconformist clergy in this assembly, Howe was the least active, the least notorious in episcopal eyes, the most desirous of a quiet life. Not that he was unaware of the struggles which Dissenters faced. He called on his associates to oppose with "heroic vigour" the "prosperous wickedness" of the time. Yet the opposition was to be pacific and the vigour to be for holiness. Howe's spiritualising tendency was again evident.

[L]et us (my worthy friends) be provoked, in our several capacities, to do our parts herein; and, at least, so to live and converse in this world, that the course and tenor of our lives may import an open asserting of our hopes in another.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Upton's clerical connections were mostly by marriage, sometimes through a second spouse. The network may be tracked through the entries for these Nonconformists in CR.

<sup>21</sup> Howe, Vanity of Man, p 264.

Though he published a major work and consolidated a place in a significant network, Howe's career from ejection to his departure for Ireland must have been personally frustrating. Apart from occasional excursions to country houses, he was seldom able to preach. An obvious feature of his first two large treatises, *The Blessedness of the Righteous* and the later *Delighting in God*, must not be missed. Both were based on Torrington sermons, revised but not conceived in the 1660s. Further, Howe relished long afterwards the one public preaching engagement that is known. In a second-hand account, Calamy recorded "providential" circumstances which surrounded Howe's embarkation for Ireland. His ship being delayed for some time due to unfavourable winds, he was pressed into preaching in a local church on three occasions to a "prodigious multitude". Howe's own evaluation of this incident suggests that such opportunities were rare: "if my ministry was ever of any use, I think it must be then".<sup>22</sup>

This sanguine recollection may have been fuelled by the symbolic importance of his last week in England and the new beginning in prospect. If he sought opportunity for quiet reflection, he was to find it at Antrim. If there remained outstanding questions in his theology, these would be met. If he craved preaching and teaching, he was to find opportunity for both. The years in Ireland would complete the shaping of John Howe.

At Antrim he was allowed a remarkable latitude by the established Church authorities. The light duties of private

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<sup>22</sup> Calamy pp 51

chaplain allowed him time for regular preaching. Calamy records that Howe was not only tolerated but welcomed at the parish church in Antrim. Both the Bishop and Archbishop were said to have endorsed his ministry.<sup>23</sup> He was very active among the small but determined Presbyterian community. In 1672 a divinity school was established in Antrim, run by Howe and the local Presbyterian incumbent. Howe was given additional responsibility for coaching candidates for ordination held to lack sufficient training. Carson's examination of the Antrim Presbytery minutes reveals Howe as an active member.<sup>24</sup>

That none of this activity can be described as spectacular does not lessen its importance. Though little more than mundane ministry in normal times it was, for Howe, a period of consistent, recognised results. The boost to his confidence must have been considerable.

Howe's emerging assurance was both demonstrated and further stimulated by his writing. In 1674 the second volume based on Torrington sermons appeared. In *Delighting in God* themes common to earlier writings are continued. Although Howe manifested a concern for serious, personal piety, the other-worldliness already observed in *The Blessedness of the Righteous* lay at the heart of the later treatise. The plight of the Nonconformist was to be alleviated by exultant contemplation of God. "Delight in God" was the present foretaste of the heavenly experience of "Blessedness".

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<sup>23</sup> Calamy pp 53-4.

<sup>24</sup> Carson, "John Howe", pp 14-15. This information is the only original material in Carson's essay, which is otherwise based entirely on Calamy.

Howe's Platonic background was once more evident in his religious epistemology. "Delight in God" presupposed a communication from God which consisted of "an inwardly enlightening revelation of himself". This was the same "intuition" which had been placed above faith and knowledge in the earlier *Blessedness*. This time, however, it was carefully distinguished from "an enthusiastical assurance" which declined to be tested against external revelation.<sup>25</sup>

By 1675 Howe was being noticed. He was invited by some in the congregation of the recently deceased Lazarus Seaman to take up the resultant vacancy in the Presbyterian chapel at Haberdashers' Hall, London. The call was not unanimous; another party preferred Stephen Charnock. In December, Howe travelled to London to ascertain the details of the position and to assess his support. In typical fashion he penned a long missive: "Considerations and Communings with my Self concerning my present Journey, Dec. 20. 75. By night, on my Bed". He examined his motives and the possible ramifications of a shift to the capital. He also recorded a debilitating illness during 1675.

I am now sensibly under great decays, and not likely to continue long...What a Summer had I of the last? Seldom able to walk the Streets; and not only often disabled by Pain, but Weakness.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Howe, Delighting in God, pp 487, 530.

<sup>26</sup> Calamy p 65. The nature of this illness is impossible to identify with absolute assurance. But it may have been a variety of gout. Howe was in Bath in 1668 "for the benefit of his health" (Rogers p 125). He was ill again in 1682, requiring "a course, for the repairing of languishing health, which required some weeks' attendance abroad" - Howe, The Faithful Servant Applauded and Rewarded (funeral sermon for Richard Fairclough) Works III, pp 388-411, p 391.

If Howe contemplated the prospect of returning to London with some trepidation, Lord Massarene hoped he would not take up the position. In a letter to the Nonconformist M.P. John Swynfen, Massarene reported that he had been warned that "'Mr How will be wheedled from ye'", though he declined to believe his informant.<sup>27</sup> When Howe was eventually engaged, Massarene wrote again to Swynfen seeking his help in finding a replacement as "you found so good success in the choice of the last". His assessment of his Chaplain is significant: "no man can be better fitted to steer between the two extremes of Conformity and Nonconformity".<sup>28</sup>

Howe quickly became a leading figure. The Duke of Buckingham, probably in 1676, offered himself to Howe as a champion for the Nonconformists. Due to his lascivious reputation, Dissenters had long been cautious about Buckingham. Howe declined the offer.<sup>29</sup> More important were

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The intimation of illness during the year militates against Horton's suggestion that Howe was in London in Feb/Mar 1675. This assertion is based on three recorded sermons dated in those months. It is more likely that these were delivered in the early part of 1676 by the amended calendar, after Howe had moved permanently to London.

<sup>27</sup> Letter, Lord Massarene to John Swynfen, Feb 10th 75/6 - William Salt Library, Swynfen Letters MSS 454. no 24, p 1.

<sup>28</sup> Cited by Lacey, pp 445-6. The provenance of this quotation is uncertain. Lacey cites William Salt Library MSS 254, Swynfen Letters, No. 24, pp 1-2. This is incorrect. Lacey probably refers here to the letter of Feb. 10 1675/6, already cited, which predates Howe's decision to go to London and does not contain the words Lacey cites. No other likely letter can be traced among the Salt manuscripts.

<sup>29</sup> Calamy gives no date for this meeting but both Shaftesbury and Buckingham were "aggressive in seeking Nonconformist support" during 1676. By November Buckingham was seeking to introduce a "bill for the ease and security of all Protestant Dissenters" - see Calamy pp 240-1; Lacey pp 40-44,

discussions with Churchmen. Howe appears to have been respected by prominent younger leaders in the established Church. He was a personal friend of both Edward Stillingfleet (1635-99) Dean of St Paul's, and John Tillotson (1630-94) Dean of Canterbury. In 1677 Howe even ventured into polemics. In *The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience* he staked out a position on the doctrines of Grace very close to Baxter's modified Calvinism, which he had praised in their first correspondence.<sup>30</sup> This provoked two replies: a considered answer from Theophilus Gale, to which Howe replied; and a vituperative outburst from Howe's Magdalen College contemporary, Thomas Danson (1629-1694), whom, in turn, Marvell made a target.<sup>31</sup>

Had Howe in 1677 become one of the "Christian Gladiators" he had abhorred in 1668? Not in his own terms. In 1668 he was criticising contention over "petty questions". Large issues,

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79-80; T. Harris, "Introduction", p 11.

<sup>30</sup> J. Howe, The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience of the Sins of Men with the Wisdom and Sincerity of his Counsels...to Prevent Them, [London, 1677], Works, II, pp 474-513. On the connection with Baxter see chapter three, p 126 n. 57 above.

<sup>31</sup> T. Gale, The Court of the Gentiles, 1678; Howe's reply was issued in a Postscript to his initial publication (Works II, pp 514-526). T.D[anson], De Causa Dei; or a Vindication of the Common Doctrine of Protestant Divines concerning Predestination, 1678 prompted Marvell's, Remarks on a Late Disingenuous Discourse; A third reply, both to Howe's initial publication and his answer to Gale was A Letter to a Friend, touching God's Prescience about Sinful Actions by J. Troughton (1678). No response was made by Howe to this work. See Wallace, Puritans and Predestination, pp 179-80.

A century and a half later, the prominent Baptist Robert Hall (1764-1831) rated God's Prescience as "the most profound, the most philosophical, and the most valuable of all Howe's writings." - R. Hall, The Works of Robert Hall A.M., London, n.d., Vol. I, p 164.

such as whether God determines humans to sin (the central concern of *Reconcilableness*) were another matter.

If a man be drawn forth to defend an important truth against an injurious assault, it were treacherous self-love to purchase his own peace by declining it.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the John Howe who rebuffed Buckingham, counselled politicians and entered robustly into controversy was a different man from the one who shuddered at his own "pusillanimity" in 1658.

The speed and confidence with which Howe established himself on his return to London is entirely explicable. For one thing, his political connections were by now powerful indeed. He was in close contact with Dissenters in Parliament such as John Swynfen and Philip, Lord Wharton. He was an intimate of the family of Lord Russell.<sup>33</sup> The change is mirrored in his publications. Whereas *Delighting in God* was dedicated to the humble parishioners of Torrington, *Reconcilableness* was dedicated to the scientist Robert Boyle (1627-1691), with whom Howe apparently was closely acquainted.<sup>34</sup> Later works would be offered to such figures as Lady Anne Wharton, the Duke of Bedford, Sir Charles and Mary

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<sup>32</sup> Howe, Blessedness, p 5.

<sup>33</sup> On Swynfen see Lacey pp 445-6. Howe would travel to Holland with Wharton in 1685. He was consulted with a view to arranging marriages within the Russell family see Rogers pp 234-237.

<sup>34</sup> On October 20 1676 one John Bigrig wrote to the Secretary of State, Sir Joseph Williamson, seeking an appointment. As a reference he claimed to be "well known to Mr Howe, a very learned man in London and a great friend of Mr Boyle". If the reference is to John Howe, this letter is evidence not only of his connection with Boyle but of the speed with which he was making his mark. See S.P. Dom. Car II 386, no 80 (C.S.P.D. Vol 18, p 377).

Hoghton, and Lord Paget.<sup>35</sup>

Deeper factors were at play which went beyond political connections. Two major works of this time suggest that, when he took up his London post, Howe had settled his theology on strong foundations. The first was Howe's best-known work, *The Living Temple*. Although not published until 1676, this was written during his stay at Antrim.<sup>36</sup> It must be carefully weighed for its true significance.

*The Living Temple* was a work of natural theology. In Chapter V Howe argued against the notion that "glorious apparitions", "terrible voices" and "surprising transformations" (i.e. miraculous interventions) were necessary for God to make himself known to humans.<sup>37</sup> In Chapter VI he refuted arguments which would limit the "immensity" of God. God is truly everywhere, and has "converse with all men."<sup>38</sup> In terms of the categories employed in this thesis, these arguments might suggest that Howe's theological emphasis had swung to the immanence of God - counter to the "other-worldliness" of his earlier works.

A proper reading of *The Living Temple* suggests this initial impression is misleading. The treatise was incomplete.

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<sup>35</sup> Respectively: Of Thoughtfulness for the Morrow (1681), Bates' Funeral Sermon (1699), The Redeemers Dominion over the Invisible World (1699), Living Temple pt II (1702).

<sup>36</sup> J. Howe, The Living Temple or, A Designed Improvement of that Notion that A Good Man is the Temple of God, [London, 1676] (Part 1), Works I, 1-163. The second part was not published until 1702.

<sup>37</sup> Howe, Living Temple, I, pp 108-131 esp. pp 111-118.

<sup>38</sup> Howe, Living Temple, I, pp 132-163, esp pp 132-3 & 160-63.



The second part would not be published until 1702, but Howe clearly had it in mind.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the 1676 portion was merely prolegomena. Howe's intention was to go on to discuss a second kind of "conversableness", ultimately more significant than the first: "That which [God] more peculiarly hath with good men."<sup>40</sup> As the sub-title of the work suggests, it was this type of direct contact which promoted the construction of individual "living temples". When the intent of the whole work is taken into account, the shift to immanence possibly implied by the nature of the arguments seems less likely. In 1676 Howe clearly recognised and valued the immanent activity of God. He never lost sight of it. Yet, even in this, his most rationalistic work, he signalled the importance of something greater still: an immediate, transcendent divine contact.

*The Living Temple* was the most integrated expression to that date of Howe's platonism. Many of the concerns of the Cambridge men were present. The structure of the argument was typically platonic. From the idea of infinity was proved the existence and nature of God; from the attributes of God was disproved the view that God cannot be known directly.

[I]t may evidently be deduced from what has been said, tending to prove those things of God which are included in the notion of him, and from that notion itself, that he is such as can converse with men.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, though clearly incorporating the philosophical system

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<sup>39</sup> Howe, *Living Temple*, I, p 163. A check of the 1676 edition of part one confirms this was not a revision inserted when part two was published.

<sup>40</sup> Howe, *Living Temple*, I, p 132.

<sup>41</sup> Howe, *Living Temple*, I, p 145.

which would guide Howe all his life, *The Living Temple* was less purely platonic in form and argument than the earlier works. *The Blessedness of the Righteous* and *Delighting in God* were driven by the logic of their respective central ideas of heaven and contemplation. *The Living Temple* was no less, but it was more, displaying greater breadth and immediacy. Howe entered into live debate. He went outside platonism, to the theology of the schoolmen, employing forcefully the argument from design (in the process anticipating Paley's example of the watch).<sup>42</sup> Platonism alone does not provide the key to *The Living Temple*. This is confirmed when the work is placed in its proper philosophical context.

The intellectual history of the seventeenth century has been primarily interested in questions of epistemology and political theory. Yet, there was another debate which consumed enormous energy in England and elsewhere during Howe's career. This turned on metaphysical issues, primarily the question of substance. What is the nature of "spirit" and "matter"? How do the two relate? This was far more than an esoteric controversy. Churchmen and Nonconformists alike recognised the far-reaching implications for orthodox theology. The materialism of Descartes and Hobbes implied atheism. The response of the Cambridge Platonists suggested an incorporeal monism. Corporeal monism appeared in explicit form in Spinoza. John Pocock has shown how these apparently diverse ideas could

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<sup>42</sup> Howe, Living Temple, I, pp 42-44.

alike be perceived as dangerous by Churchmen.<sup>43</sup> The Nonconformist John Howe may be profitably put in this context.<sup>44</sup>

The decline of Aristotelian science was in part matched by the reprimination of Epicurean atomism. This approach rapidly attained a *de facto* orthodoxy in the "new philosophy" of the seventeenth century. Elements of it were picked up by Descartes and Hobbes. Epicurus held that visible phenomena, even the formation of the universe, could be explained as the result of collisions between the minute particles of which matter is constructed. Such a view presented considerable theological problems. Whilst not directly denying the existence of God, Epicurean atomism was a mechanical metaphysic which did not require any divine input. It was thus held to tend inevitably to atheism.

The dangers were not lost on the Cambridge Platonists. Henry More is an interesting case in point. More was initially impressed with Descartes' attempt to reconcile mechanistic physics with theism. Descartes posited a dualistic framework

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<sup>43</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, "Thomas Hobbes: Atheist or Enthusiast? His Place in a Restoration Debate", History of Political Thought, Vol. XI, No. 4, Winter 1990, pp 737-749.

<sup>44</sup> The debate over substance in the seventeenth century is complex. My summary is taken from the overviews in S.M. Fallon, Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England, Ithaca (New York), 1991, pp 1-78 and in L.E. Loeb, From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy, Ithaca (New York), 1981, esp pp 76-110. See also E. Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, ET, Edinburgh, 1953, pp 137-156; E. Lichtenstien, Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist, Cambridge (Mass), 1962 pp 10-11 & *passim*; R.L. Colie, Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians, Cambridge, 1957, pp 49-65.

of two independent types of substance: "thinking" (*res cogitans*) and "extended" (*res extensa*). Mechanical explanations could suffice for *res extensa* but not for the incorporeal *res cogitans*. The appeal of this to More was its preservation of a sphere (*res cogitans*) into which theistic concepts of God might fit. However, he came to regard Cartesian ontology to be flawed in the rigidity of its dualism. In particular, Descartes failed to satisfactorily account for any interaction between *cogitans* and *extensa*.

More's disillusionment with Descartes was fuelled by Hobbes' more thoroughgoing materialism. Unlike Descartes, Hobbes did not exclude reason and thinking from his description of matter as motion. Life itself "is but a motion of the limbs".<sup>45</sup> God was conceived as an incomprehensible "spirit corporeal".<sup>46</sup> Orthodox concepts of God were clearly discounted by this view. This implication provided the basis for the charge of atheism often made against Hobbes by his contemporaries.

The Platonists' response was itself extra-orthodox. In contrast to the mechanical physics of both Descartes and Hobbes, the Platonists had an ontological vision of corporeal matter infused with spirit. Instead of the dualism of Descartes, both Cudworth and More described a hierarchy of being from terrestrial, physical matter to the divine. Human souls, demons and angels were intermediate levels of existence. Against the mechanical determinism of Hobbes, they

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<sup>45</sup> Hobbes, Leviathan, p 9.

<sup>46</sup> Cited Fallon p 40. See Hobbes Leviathan, pp 76-78

held that this spirit realm ("plastick nature" in Cudworth) motivated corporeal matter.<sup>47</sup>

John Howe entered the metaphysical debate over substance with the first part of *The Living Temple*. This was directly aimed "Against Atheism, or the Epicurean Deism". That the significance of this has been missed by some commentators provides a useful study in misinterpretation. Howe's biographer, Horton, is a case in point. Although claiming a great admiration for this work, Horton completely misses the metaphysical context. He took "Epicurean Atheism" to refer to the low morality of Restoration England (picking up the seeking of pleasure associated with Epicurus). It is, perhaps, a measure of the weight of the Howe myth that Horton is uncomfortable with Howe's philosophical arguments. He is much happier associating Howe with moral concerns.<sup>48</sup> In fact *The Living Temple* was the only major Nonconformist contribution to the debate over substance.

Howe shared the Platonists' concern to preserve an active role for the spiritual. Like them, he attempted to avoid the dangers inherent in the ideas of both Descartes and Hobbes. However, he did not incorporate the Neoplatonic emanationist features of More and Cudworth's "plastic" hierarchy. Howe's response was more clearly dualistic.

Much of the first part of *The Living Temple* was taken up with what appear to be standard arguments for the existence

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<sup>47</sup> Fallon pp 50-78. See also Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists pp 110-129, 150-173.

<sup>48</sup> See Horton pp 104-122; Rogers pp 363-391.

of God, from "first cause" and "design". Noting these, Horton concluded that Howe "still dwelt in the cobwebs of scholastic reasoning".<sup>49</sup> This badly misconstrues Howe's intent. In fact the mere existence of God is assumed, based on the "common assent" of all nations, in all times. As will be shown in chapter six, this consensual argument was a feature of Howe's mitigated scepticism. The arguments from first cause and design were employed to establish the nature of God as "eternal, uncaused, independent, and necessary". In turn the confirmation of these qualities served the principal aim of the work: to establish the "Conversableness of God with Man".

Howe's target was what he perceived as the tendency of materialism to quarantine God; to exclude the spiritual from the material. His very title, *The Living Temple*, implied an indwelling by God in men and signalled his concern with the intimate relation of the divine to the human. He identified in the Epicurean concept an agenda contrived to isolate God.

Great care was taken, that he be set at a distance remote enough; that he be complimented out of this world, as a place too mean for his reception, and unworthy such a presence; they being indeed unconcerned where he had his residence, so it were not too near them. So that a confinement of him somewhere, was thought altogether necessary.<sup>50</sup>

This "confinement" led to the crucial problem as Howe perceived it: that the Epicurean God "is altogether unconvertible with men".<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Horton p 108.

<sup>50</sup> Howe, The Living Temple, I, p 134.

<sup>51</sup> Howe, The Living Temple, I, p 136.

In opposition to this view, Howe posited a God who is not excluded from the material sphere. However, this was not a repeat of the Platonists' response. Howe's description of God was consciously dualistic. The divine was not to be identified with creation. In the first part of *The Living Temple* Howe addressed this issue obliquely, in response to an objection to the notion of the "immensity" of God.

*First, That no difference can be conceived between God and creatures, if God, as they commonly speak be wholly, in every point, or do fill all the points of the universe with his whole essence: for so whatsoever at all is, will be God himself.*

*Answ. And that is most marvellous, that the in-being of one thing in another must needs take away all their difference, and confound them each with other; which sure would much rather argue them distinct. For certainly it cannot, without great impropriety, be said that any thing is in itself; and is both the container and contained.<sup>52</sup>*

The merits of Howe's argument need not concern us. The important issue is the structure of his cosmology. Spirit was distinct from matter. There was not the gradation of being implied in More and Cudworth. The divine was necessarily "over against" the material. If God was to reach out to his creation, he must first be at arm's length.

The first part of *The Living Temple* went little further than establishing that God "converses" with all of his creation. However, as noted above, Howe's real interest was in God's relation to the "Good Man", the Christian. Part One was but the prolegomena. The central concepts which flowed from this introduction would be expounded inchoate in a series of sermons in 1677-8 and published in systematic form in the

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<sup>52</sup> Howe, The Living Temple, I, pp 161-2.

1702 second part of *The Living Temple*. In the opening chapters of this later part, the essentially transcendent quality of God is confirmed. Here the target is not the atheistical materialism of Descartes and Hobbes but the equally objectionable monism of Spinoza. This scheme destroyed true religion, for

it is all one whether we make *nothing to be God*, or every *thing*; whether we allow of no God to be worshipped, or leave none to worship him. [Spinoza's] portentous attempt to identify and deify all substance...hath a manifest design to throw religion out of the world that way.<sup>53</sup>

The Christian conception of immediate, personal communion with the divine is threatened by "Epicurean Atheism" in all its forms. Howe was not burdened with mechanistic notions of life and matter. He could thus evade the fraught question of how spirit interacted with matter. Nevertheless, he was careful to define his view of the Holy Spirit's "indwelling" of Christians. Even here he predicated his response by emphasising "otherness".

It will not be inconvenient to say somewhat of the true import of the phrase *giving the Spirit*. It is evident, that whereas giving imports some sort of communication, there is yet a sense wherein that blessed Spirit is, to any creature, simply incommunicable. There is a *περιχώρησις*, or mutual *in-being*, of the sacred persons in the Godhead, which is most peculiar to themselves, not communicable to creatures with them.<sup>54</sup>

Properly conceived, the idea of the "giving of the Spirit" thus excludes notions such as being "godded with God" or "christed with Christ". The phrase is rather to be understood in two senses.

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<sup>53</sup> Howe, *The Living Temple*, II, p 175.

<sup>54</sup> Howe, *The Living Temple*, II, p 296.



[1.] Somewhat *real*, when he vouchsafes to be in us, as the spring and fountain of gracious communications, influences, and effects which are most distinct from himself.

and

[2.] Somewhat *relative*, the *collation of a right* to such a presence... God gives Himself, his Son, his Spirit, to them that covenant with him...And when we so covenant, then hath this *giving* its full and complete sense.<sup>55</sup>

The individual thus has immediate relationship, but not identity with the divine. By this understanding, Howe attempted to steer between the Scilla of Cartesian "confinement" of God and the Charybdis of monist assimilation.

This feature of the metaphysical debate allows further clarification of the ecclesiological model employed in this thesis. The "immanence" aspect of the model refers to God's immanent activity. Parker, Thorndike etc emphasised that God worked through nature, not that he was identified with nature *a la* Spinoza. Oakley has shown that this important distinction allowed an acceptable form of atomism and thus made space for the development of scientific method. Theologically orthodox apologists for the new philosophy (such as Howe's friend, Robert Boyle) eschewed the medieval notion that the order of nature was an immanent "participation in a divine reason".

Rather

the tendency...was to set God over against the world he had created and which was constantly dependent upon him, to view that world as an aggregate of particular entities linked solely by external relations, each comprehensible in isolation from the others and open to investigation only by empirical endeavour.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Howe, The Living Temple, II, pp 298-9.

<sup>56</sup> Oakley p 81.

Howe's contribution broke little new metaphysical ground in the controversy dominated by Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and More. He opposed rather than developed the new ideas. Like Parker and Thorndike, Howe accepted the immanent presence of God but rejected any suggestion of immanence of substance. Yet, even in this circumscribed sense, immanence played only a small role in Howe's system. His was an attempt to preserve the typically "Puritan" style of piety identified by Greaves from the encroaches of materialist philosophy. In *The Living Temple* he sought to provide a metaphysical foundation for immediate, spiritual communion. In this he gave pre-eminent place to the transcendent relation of God to the "Good Man".

That Howe protected an orthodox metaphysic, sharing his framework with scientists like Boyle as well as conformist divines, suggests implications for our understanding of his platonism. Howe's concern for the priority of spirit clearly cohered with his Cambridge connections. His debt to platonism is evident in the method of reasoning and argument used in his works. He cited both Cudworth and More in *The Living Temple* along with many of the ancient philosophers.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless he did not slavishly follow his teachers. Importantly, he did not subscribe to the emanationist ideas drawn from Plotinus and the Neoplatonists. These came uncomfortably close to the substantial immanence he opposed in Spinoza.<sup>58</sup> Far more

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<sup>57</sup> Keeble has studied this aspect of Howe's writing - see Literary Culture pp 166-7.

<sup>58</sup> Cudworth's acceptance of emanation was later attacked by Pierre Bayle as leading to the same effective atheism of Spinoza - Pocock, "Thomas Hobbes: Atheist or Enthusiast", p 747.

determinative in *The Living Temple* is Howe's concern for immediate contact with God.

This interpretation finds further support in a series of sermons preached in the winter of 1677-8, but not published until after Howe's death. These provide an essential counterpoint to the first part of *The Living Temple*. They reveal Howe's mature theology to be one which placed considerable emphasis on the spiritual and immediate, the transcendent activity of God. In the first nineteen sermons Howe worked out the ideas which would later appear in systematic form in the second part of *The Living Temple*. He described the operations of the Holy Spirit

as relating to particular persons, in a single or private capacity; for the regenerating of souls, or implanting in them the principles of the divine and spiritual life; the maintaining of that life [and] the causing and ordering [of] all the motions that are proper thereunto<sup>59</sup>

A second group comprised fifteen sermons covering the Spirit's influence on "the felicity and prosperous state of the church in general."<sup>60</sup> In these, Howe outlined a comprehensive pneumatological eschatology. The significance of this aspect of his thought will be discussed in chapter seven.<sup>61</sup>

The importance of the Holy Spirit to Howe at this point in his career appears to fit neatly the analysis of "Puritanism" put forward by Geoffrey Nuttall in his 1947 work *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*. Nuttall

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<sup>59</sup> Whole Works, V, p 215.

<sup>60</sup> Whole Works, V, p 215.

<sup>61</sup> See chapter seven, pp 296-301 below.

argued that an intense interest in the Holy Spirit provided a common thread running through the "Puritan" groups. Greaves (a follower of Nuttall's approach) has asserted for the same groups that "virtually every aspect of the Christian life was linked to the work of the Spirit". Greaves cites Howe's 1677-8 sermons as a prime example of how this was worked out in Nonconformist divinity.<sup>62</sup> Howe's sermons, and the work of Nuttall and Greaves call into question the view of C.J. Sommerville that "the Holy Spirit was not a subject of interest on its own in the Restoration period".<sup>63</sup>

Precise plotting of Howe's intellectual growth is impossible but a broad development may be posited. The three major publications before 1676 all drew on the Torrington period. Though clearly revised and extended, their genesis was in the mind of a young man, fresh from University. By contrast, *The Living Temple* and the pneumatological sermons were products of the 1670s. Howe was now in his late forties. He had suffered personal crises and witnessed the decline of true religion as he understood it. Five years in Antrim had enabled reflection and refinement. The later works herald the maturity of Howe's thinking. Historians of Cambridge platonism are probably justified in the universal omission of Howe from their accounts. Ironically, Calamy was perhaps more accurate than he intended when he identified a "platonick tincture" in

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<sup>62</sup> R.L. Greaves, "To Be Found Faithful: The Nonconformist Tradition in England, 1660-1700", in John Bunyan and English Nonconformity, London, 1992, pp 1-35, p 28.

<sup>63</sup> C.J. Sommerville, Popular Religion in Restoration England, Gainesville (Florida), 1977.

Howe's theological dish. A "tincture" is mere flavouring; it is not the meat. As Howe entered the period of his greatest prominence, the "high and aiery hills of platonisme"<sup>64</sup> had evolved into a sophisticated pneumatological theology, supported by rigorous reasoning. A "bias towards transcendence" provides a better interpretative motif for John Howe than does Cambridge platonism.

In his analysis, Nuttall describes a range of "parties within Puritanism": conservative, middle, radical and Quaker.<sup>65</sup> With the exception of his inclusion of Quakers in the continuum,<sup>66</sup> Nuttall's view coheres with the basic framework proposed in this thesis. However, his portrayal of Howe is less secure. Nuttall does not cite Howe extensively but, when he does, it was to place him in either the "conservative" or "middle" party.<sup>67</sup> In the chapters which follow I will put forward a revised view. Howe found a way "to live and converse in this world" but he did so with a more thoroughgoing application of the transcendence principle than has hitherto been recognised. The pattern first emerges in the controversies of 1680.

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<sup>64</sup> H. More, "Preface" to A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings, (1662), pp iv-xxvii - cited C.A. Patrides, (ed), The Cambridge Platonists, London, 1969, p 31.

<sup>65</sup> Nuttall, Holy Spirit, pp 6-19.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter one, pp 63-4 above, on this point. The issues are canvassed in detail in Endy, "Puritanism", *passim*.

<sup>67</sup> Nuttall, Holy Spirit, pp 33, 49.

"enwrapt as leviathan in his scales"

Chapter Five:

Protestant Divergence in the  
Restoration Crisis

In 1964 Henry Horwitz examined the fate of five bills for comprehension and/or toleration in the Parliaments of 1679-81.<sup>1</sup> Horwitz' study filled a significant gap. As he himself noted, the progress of these bills had "heretofore not been examined in detail".<sup>2</sup> He identified contemporary fears about "popery" and French influence as key factors. These findings remain secure. Nevertheless, other aspects of Horwitz' interpretation are open to question. The title of his essay, "Protestant Reconciliation During the Exclusion Crisis", suggests a framework which may be assailed on two fronts. The first challenge contests the notion of an "Exclusion" crisis in 1679-81 and draws on the current debate sparked by the work of Jonathan Scott.<sup>3</sup> The second probes the true extent of "reconciliation" between Protestants in this crucial period of Charles II's reign.

The latter of these challenges is the principal focus of this chapter. I will consider two controversies, each triggered in 1680 and both involving John Howe. Ostensibly

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<sup>1</sup> H. Horwitz, "Protestant Reconciliation in the Exclusion Crisis", *JEH*, v. 15, 1964, pp 201-217.

<sup>2</sup> Horwitz, "Protestant Reconciliation", p 204.

<sup>3</sup> The fullest account is in J. Scott, Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677-1683, Cambridge, 1991. See also the debate between Scott, Harris, Greaves and others in Albion, 25, 4, (Winter 1993), esp. Scott's contribution "Restoration Process. Or, If This Isn't a Party, We're Not Having a Good Time", pp 619-637.

concerning only a small group of divines, these disputes appear peripheral to the constitutional debates which have dominated interpretations of the crisis. Yet they disclose significant differences within both the established Church and Dissent. The parliamentary moves to "reconciliation", discussed by Horwitz, were undermined by antithetical developments in theology. It will be argued that this analysis provides further support for Scott's picture of "Restoration process" and sheds important light on the "ideological polarities" he wishes to substitute for notions of "party".

In the 1670s, Richard Baxter was sure he had friends in the Church of England sympathetic to the problems of Dissent. None was more important than John Tillotson (1630-1694) and Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699). In 1670 Baxter placed these two at the head of a list of "Moderate Divines" who might assist in reaching a *rapprochement* between Conformists and Nonconformists.<sup>4</sup> Three years later he assured the Earl of Orrery that

were but Dr *Stillingfleet*, Dr *Tillotson*, or any such moderate Men appointed to consult with two or three of us, on the safe and needful terms of Concord, we should agree in a Week's time.<sup>5</sup>

In 1675, both Churchmen were active in negotiations towards comprehension, with a group led by Baxter. Though these efforts proved fruitless, Tillotson maintained: "I do most

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<sup>4</sup> Baxter to the Earl of Lauderdale, 24 June 1670. See Rel. Bax. (1696) III, 77-8 (Keeble, Calendar, no. 803).

<sup>5</sup> Baxter to the Earl of Orrery, 15 December 1673. See Rel. Bax. (1696) III, 109-113 (Keeble, Calendar, no. 937).



heartily desire an accommodation."<sup>6</sup> Historians have regarded these two as leaders of the moderate, "Latitudinarian" wing of the Restoration Church. Yet, in 1680, both Tillotson and Stillingfleet were central figures in controversies which highlighted the gulf between the Church and Dissent. They were privately called to account and publicly criticised by significant Nonconformist leaders who were surprised at the positions of such "of whom better things might have been expected".<sup>7</sup> A careful consideration of these disputes lessens the impression of aberrance. Rather, both Tillotson and Stillingfleet were following the logic of their quite different fundamental ecclesiologies.

On 2 April 1680, apparently at short notice, John Tillotson preached before the King at Whitehall. This sermon was subsequently published as *The Protestant Religion Vindicated from the Charge of Singularity and Novelty*.<sup>8</sup> As the title declared, the sermon was a defence of the Church of England against the Roman Catholic charge of novelty and, by extension, schism. What sparked angry reaction from Nonconformists was Tillotson's general position on civil authority in matters of religion. No religion established by law, even if it were false, might be resisted as

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<sup>6</sup> Tillotson to Baxter, 11 April 1675. See Rel. Bax. (1696) III, 157 (Keeble, Calendar, no. 967).

<sup>7</sup> Howe, A Letter Written Out of the Country, [London, 1680], Works, III, pp 507-535, p 508.

<sup>8</sup> Tillotson, The Protestant Religion Vindicated from the Charge of Singularity and Novelty, London, 1680.

in this case the Subject is not bound to profess a false Religion, but patiently to suffer for the constant profession of the true.<sup>9</sup>

Further, only in exceptional circumstances was it permissible to seek to convince adherents from the established way.

I cannot think...that any pretence of Conscience warrants any man, that is not extraordinarily commissioned...and cannot justify that Commission by Miracles..., to affront the established Religion of a Nation (though it be false) and openly to draw men off from the profession of it in contempt of the Magistrate and the Law.<sup>10</sup>

Although the sermon as a whole was directed against Rome, this passage was a pointed reference to "Enthusiasts". To the Dissenters, the ramifications of Tillotson's position were clear, familiar and dangerous.

It was a measure of the regard in which Tillotson was held by leading Dissenters that public criticism was muted. Baxter maintained friendly correspondence. Howe wrote a reply but, instead of publishing it, delivered it in person. He and Tillotson remained friends. Later in 1680, they apparently corresponded over a possible candidate for an parish living in Plymouth, causing some consternation to the then Bishop of Exeter, Thomas Lamplugh (1615-91).<sup>11</sup>

Calamy relates a second-hand report of the private meeting at which Howe and Tillotson discussed the sermon. By this account, Tillotson, convinced of the error of his ways,

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<sup>9</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, p 11.

<sup>10</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, pp 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> See letters of Lamplugh to Sancroft Sept. 29 1680 & Oct. 9 1680 - Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MSS C 739. 139, 140.

fell to weeping freely, and said that this was the most unhappy thing that had of a long time befallen him.<sup>12</sup>

The accuracy of this story of rapid conversion is open to question.<sup>13</sup> Even if Tillotson's repentance is accepted, it is probably of less significance than it first appears. Howe's objection (to which I will return below) appears to have been to the prohibition on proselytising. The underlying issue of the ban on resistance to authority does not feature in Calamy's account of the discussion. Moreover, Tillotson maintained this doctrine in his 1683 *Letter to My Lord Russel*.

I do humbly offer to your Lordships deliberate thoughts these following Considerations concerning the points of Resistance...First, That the Christian Religion doth plainly forbid the Resistance of Authority.<sup>14</sup>

An examination of Tillotson's basis for this position is instructive. In *Protestant Religion Vindicated* he employed what appears to be a classic "divine right" argument. In this there were two strands. The first assumed a patriarchal model of civil authority.

Hath a Master of a Family more power over those under his Government than the Magistrate hath? No man ever pretended it: Nay, so far is it from that, that the natural Authority of a Father may be, and often is, limited and restrained by the Laws of the Civil Magistrate. And why then may not a Magistrate exercise the same power over his Subjects in matters of Religion

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<sup>12</sup> Calamy p 77. See also T. Birch, Life of John Tillotson, 1752, abridged in The Gentleman's Magazine, December, 1752 and the entry for Tillotson in DNB.

<sup>13</sup> Although Tillotson appears to have been open to manipulation and temperamentally inclined to avoid conflict, the passage at issue was retained in subsequent editions of the sermon. See J. Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church", HJ, Vol. 31, 1988, pp 61-82, p 73 and the DNB entry pp 875-6.

<sup>14</sup> J. Tillotson, A Letter Written to my Lord Russel in Newgate, the Twentieth of July, 1683., London, 1683.

which every Master challengeth to himself in his own family, that is, to establish the true worship of God in such manner and with such circumstances as he thinks best, and to permit none to affront it, or to seduce from it those that are under his care.<sup>15</sup>

The analogy between monarch and father had long been drawn.<sup>16</sup> However, just three months before Tillotson's sermon, Filmer's *Patriarcha* was published. Though no direct link is determinable, a connection is possible.<sup>17</sup> In any case, what is most significant is that Tillotson employed an argument normally associated with "tory" reasoning. This is particularly intriguing. Tillotson was at this time backing moves towards the exclusion of James.<sup>18</sup> Support for exclusion has been cited as a test for "whiggery".<sup>19</sup> The "tory" aspect of Tillotson's case suggests that the current challenge to that view is overdue.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, p 10.

<sup>16</sup> For a summary see J.P. Sommerville, "Introduction" to R. Filmer, Patriarcha and Other Writings, Cambridge, 1991, pp ix-xxiv, pp xvi-xx. See also G. Schochet, Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England, New York, 1975; J.P. Sommerville, Politics and Ideology in England 1603-1640, Cambridge, 1986, pp 27-34; Burgess, The Politics of the Ancient Constitution, pp 134-5.

<sup>17</sup> Laslett suggests that "only in *Patriarcha*, and after January 1680, was the authoritarian, patriarchal, Tory case at work on the minds of the politically important as one influential whole" - P. Laslett, "Introduction" to John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Cambridge, 1967, pp 3-126, pp 58-61.

<sup>18</sup> Birch p 544.

<sup>19</sup> J. Carswell, The Descent on England: A Study of the English Revolution of 1688 and its European Background, London, 1969, pp 206-7.

<sup>20</sup> In different ways Scott (Algernon Sidney pp 3-25) and T. Harris (Politics Under The Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715, London, 1993, pp 80-116)

The second strand in Tillotson's anti-resistance theory is of perhaps greater moment for the purposes of this thesis because of its affinity with arguments adumbrated in chapter two. Tillotson did not develop his theoretical stance in detail. Nonetheless, he can be shown to have employed a moderated form of the "Constantinian" framework of Samuel Parker.

The most important element in this was a confidence in the benevolent providence of God through the medium of civil authority. Thus (apart from "an extraordinary Commission from God" verified by the performance of miracle) "the making of proselytes" to any but the established religion may take place only if "the Providence of God make way for it by the permission of the Magistrate".<sup>21</sup>

At the time, Tillotson was accused of "Hobbism" for excluding resistance to authority and the right to proclaim a contrary religion. Calamy records that the King, who had slept through the sermon, was told afterwards by a "certain Nobleman" that

"tis a pity your majesty slept; for we had the rarest piece of *Hobbism* that ever you heard in your life. Ods fish, he shall print it then, says the King"<sup>22</sup>.

Of this charge, John Marshall has recently sought to convict Tillotson.<sup>23</sup> Like Parker before him, Tillotson resented the

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question this orthodoxy.

<sup>21</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, p 12.

<sup>22</sup> Calamy pp 75-6.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men 1660-1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson and 'Hobbism'", JEH, Vol. 36, No 3, July 1985, pp 407-427, esp pp 421-425.

association. In a letter to Baxter in June 1680 he lamented being placed in the

odious company of Spinoza & Mr Hobbs, as of the same Atheistical principles with them; a blow which I least expected.<sup>24</sup>

The charge was based on a shallow understanding of both Hobbes and Tillotson. The results were indeed similarly authoritarian, but the underlying principles were radically different. Hobbes placed authority in the sovereign for pragmatic reasons, keeping God as far from the picture as possible. To Tillotson such "atheistical principles" were anathema. His indignation at the association with Hobbes was justified. Tillotson was in fundamental continuity with the immanentist position of Parker. Religion was the very key to society.

The temporal felicity of men, and the ends of Government can very hardly, if at all, be attained without Religion....Religion is the strongest band of humane Society; and God so necessary to the welfare and happiness of mankind, as if the Being of God himself had been purposely designed and contrived for no other end but the benefit and advantage of men.<sup>25</sup>

However, as this passage reveals, Tillotson moderated Parker's scheme. The "benefit and advantage of men" almost assumed priority over the sovereignty of God. This became more explicit in his later sermons.

Is it not every man's interest that there should be such a Governor of the world as really designs our happiness, and hath omitted nothing that is necessary to it as would govern us for our advantage, and will

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<sup>24</sup> Tillotson to Baxter, 2 June 1680, Baxter Corr. ii, 78 (Keeble, Calendar, 1052).

<sup>25</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, pp 8-9. This concept is developed further in Tillotson's sermon, The Lawfulness and Obligation of Oaths (London, 1681).

require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for the doing of what is best for ourselves?...And we have reason to believe God to be such a Being, if He be at all.<sup>26</sup>

Both continuity with, and moderation of the extreme position of Parker are also evident in a concession, albeit minor, to conscience. Parker almost denied any individual, rational choice. Tillotson did not go that far. Conscience might validly direct private behaviour. It was, however, of little value on its own.<sup>27</sup> Any suggestion of democracy was rejected.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of the model proposed in this thesis, Tillotson displayed a moderated "Constantinian" ecclesiology. His conceptions were shaped by a fundamental orientation to the immanent, visible activity of God through the magistrate. Yet he did not go as far as Parker. Parker was willing to support almost any action of the sovereign. Tillotson, whilst eschewing resistance, was prepared to oppose the incumbent monarch on crucial issues like exclusion. The political outworking of his theology was thus quite different from that of the more extreme Parker. A picture emerges, of 1680 at least, in which individual Churchmen were able to adopt and modify available strands of theology, sometimes employing them for quite different ends. This suggests a more fluid situation within the Restoration Church of England than the existence of discrete parties. Further support for this interpretation

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<sup>26</sup> Cited by N. Sykes, From Sheldon to Secker, p 151.

<sup>27</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, pp 10-13.

<sup>28</sup> Tillotson, Protestant Religion Vindicated, p 21.

is gained from an examination of Stillingfleet's sermon.

Little remains of John Howe's response to Tillotson in 1680 but what Calamy recorded is highly suggestive. Howe's objection centred on the fine point of verification by miracle.

*Luther and Calvin...were (thanks be to God) of another mind. The Christian Religion...both as to its Precepts and Promises, is already confirmed by Miracles; and must it be repeal'd, every time a wicked Governor thinks fit to establish a false Religion?*<sup>29</sup>

Here the "Christian Religion" was identified with an ancient word of truth, "precepts and promises", rather than any institution or human authority. Howe's use of such an argument, consciously echoing Luther, accorded with an orientation towards divine transcendence. Interestingly, he was prepared to play down latter-day miracle. The Gospel was preserved through the dynamic operation of Word and Spirit, rather than by visible continuity (in either Church or civil authority) through Providence and Form.

Whatever the nuances of Howe's objections to Tillotson, too much should not be built on so sparse a record. Any interpretation must remain provisional, pending consideration of Howe's part in the Stillingfleet controversy, for which the source material is more extensive.

Little more than a month after Tillotson's effort before the King, Edward Stillingfleet preached a sermon before the Lord Mayor which was immediately published as *The Mischief of*

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<sup>29</sup> Calamy p 76.



*Separation*.<sup>30</sup> If John Tillotson had attacked Dissent in passing, Stillingfleet addressed the issue head on. The reaction was instantaneous. A multitude of responses and defences appeared. In 1681 Stillingfleet published a long treatise, greatly extending his arguments and answering his critics, entitled *The Unreasonableness of Separation*.<sup>31</sup>

Critical examination of this episode is very sparse. Brief essays have been made but no-one has attempted a full-scale analysis of the arguments of all parties, in the context of the Restoration crisis.<sup>32</sup> This is a pity, as the affray involved many of the leading clergy from both Church and Dissent and prompted an unpublished treatise by John Locke.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, this historiographical lacuna will not be completely filled by this chapter. Attention will be limited to the original sermon and five Nonconformist responses, notably Howe's. There are several reasons for this focus. The first is that Howe published no answer to Stillingfleet's later work. Secondly, *Unreasonableness* employed an historical approach, quite different to the doctrinal polemics of *Mischief*. The replies differed correspondingly. Locke's

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<sup>30</sup> E. Stillingfleet, *The Mischief of Separation: A Sermon Preached at Guild-Hall Chapel, May 11. MDCLXXX... Before the Lord Mayor, &c., London, 1680.*

<sup>31</sup> E. Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation: or An Impartial Account of the History, Nature, and Pleas of the Present Separation from the Communion of the Church of England...*, London, 1681.

<sup>32</sup> See Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism 1660-1688*, pp 523-529; Cragg, *Puritanism*, pp 232-238; Marshall, "Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men"; Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics* pp 490-496; Spurr, *Restoration Church*, pp 154-158.

<sup>33</sup> Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*, p 491.

unpublished response and the answers of Baxter, Owen and Humphrey to the later work are thus left out of this study (Locke will feature in chapter six). The third reason is that *Unreasonableness* was issued after both discussions towards comprehension and legislative attempts at exclusion had been thwarted. *Mischief*, by contrast, appeared at the height of the Restoration crisis. Finally, as the principal interest of this thesis lies with the spectrum of views within Dissent, responses to the sermon by Churchmen are excluded.

Stillingfleet had much in common with Tillotson. He too was a naturally irenic person, a friend of many of the moderate Dissenters and was several times involved in discussions towards comprehension. Yet Stillingfleet operated an ecclesiology significantly different from that of Tillotson. He was an example of how, in the seventeenth century, irenicism did not necessarily equate to toleration, especially when the Church appeared threatened.

It was just such a perceived threat which provided the context of *Mischief*. The sermon did not appear out of thin air in 1680. In the same year, Stillingfleet made an important contribution to the apology for Episcopal power in Parliament, against the onslaught of Shaftesbury and others.<sup>34</sup> In his

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<sup>34</sup> E. Stillingfleet, The Grand Question, Concerning the Bishops' Right to Vote in Parliament in Cases Capital, (1680). For a discussion of this and the entire controversy see M. Goldie, "John Locke and Anglican Royalism", Political Studies, XXXI, (1983), pp 61-85; "Danby, the Bishops and the Whigs" in Harris et al, The Politics of Religion in Restoration England, pp 75-105; "Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism" in Phillipson & Skinner (eds), Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain, pp 209-231. See also R.T. Carrol, The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet 1635-1699, The Hague, 1975, p 25.

sermon, he picked up similar themes. The rights and power of the bishops, this time in the field of ritual and Church government, were defended. Stillingfleet argued that nonconformity was unjustified, even by its own lights. His specific conclusions are interesting but most important was the concept of the Church he avowed, for it was on this that his case turned.

Stillingfleet demonstrated a clear concern for the visible church. His definition of the Church was institutional and echoed Richard Hooker's concern for order.

Just as several families uniting making one kingdom, which at first had a distinct and independent power, but it would be strange confusion in the world to reduce kingdoms back again to families, because they were at first made up of them. Thus national churches are national societies of Christians under the same laws of government and rules of worship. For a true notion of a *Church* is no more than of a Society of men united together for their Order and Government according to the Rules of the Christian Religion.<sup>35</sup>

Spurr cites this passage as evidence of Stillingfleet's "erastianism".<sup>36</sup> This would be strange, given Stillingfleet's concern to defend the power of bishops. Stillingfleet's argument was not erastian at all. The development of national Churches was analogous to the growth of secular kingdoms. Churches were not portrayed as subservient or secondary but parallel to civil structures. Erastian concepts were far from Stillingfleet's mind.

Hammond's development of the concept of the "national Church" provided a defence against accusations of schism from

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<sup>35</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, p 17.

<sup>36</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 154.

outside (Rome), and against justifications of separation within.<sup>37</sup> Stillingfleet, though rather weakly, sought to align his visible society with this model.

[I]f there be one Catholick Church consisting of particular Churches consenting to one Faith; then why may there not be one national Church from the consent in the same articles of Religion, and the same Rules of Government and Order of Worship?<sup>38</sup>

The themes of unity and order, signalled here, are important. By making them crucial markers, Stillingfleet was asserting the necessity for a Church to be encompassing, monolithic and uniform. It was not for nothing that he took as his text Philippians 3:26: "let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things." His case depended upon his exposition of this passage.

All the question is, what the Apostle means by this *Rule*, whether only a Rule of Charity and mutual forbearance, with a liberty of different practice; or such a *Rule* which limits and determines the manner of practice.

On this Stillingfleet was in no doubt.

It cannot be the former...the Apostles did not leave all persons to act as they judged fit, but did make Rules determining their practice, and obliging them to uniformity therein.<sup>39</sup>

Just as the body of Christ was not divided, neither was a true Church. Stillingfleet adopted the common argument that,

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<sup>37</sup> Howe quite rightly recognised that Stillingfleet's defence of the national Church was in part aimed to "acquit us from the imputation of schism" - Howe, Letter, p 520. Spurr in Restoration Church, p 155 (citing Howe's response to Stillingfleet by an incorrect title) dismisses this comment as a "jaundiced aside". In fact it was a perceptive recognition of the concerns of Church of England visiblists.

<sup>38</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, pp 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, pp 10-11.

if diversity is allowed, it feeds on itself, leading to fragmentation and schism. The result would be catastrophic. The rending and tearing of the established Church would mean more than just the demise of one institution among many. Such was the "mischief of separation" that the religious security of the nation would be at risk. He warned:

I never expect to see [the Protestant Religion among us] survive the destruction of the Church of England.<sup>40</sup>

Toleration would be but the thin end of the wedge.

An *universal Toleration* is that *Trojan Horse*, which brings in our enemies without being seen, and which after a long Seige they hope to bring in at last under the pretence of setting our Gates wide enough open, to let in all our friends.<sup>41</sup>

The only defence against those "enemies" (namely: "popery") was unanimity. The best means of achieving this was uniformity of practice.

Men may please themselves in talking of preserving *Peace and Love* under separate Communions; but our own sad experience shews the contrary; for...nothing tends more to unite mens hearts than joyning together in the same prayers and sacraments...<sup>42</sup>

Because the stakes were so high, the only responsible policy was the enforcement of uniformity at all levels.

There are many things which seem very little and inconsiderable in themselves, whose consequence and tendency is very great; and the wisdom of Governours lies in preventing the danger of little things, and keeping the zeal of well-meaning persons within its due bounds. For, those who are engaged below in the Valley, fighting in small parties, and pursuing their

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<sup>40</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief*, p 23.

<sup>41</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief*, p 58.

<sup>42</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief*, p 32. There is a clear echo here of Laud's view that "unity cannot long continue in the Church where uniformity is shut out at the church door" - W. Laud, *Works*, LACT, IV, p 60.

advantages, do run into their enemies (sic) Camp before they are aware of it, [they] may receive an unexpected check from their Commanders in chief, who from the higher ground espie the hazard they are in by their over-forwardness....: They wonder, they complain, they think themselves hardly used; but no understanding man blames their Generals who regard their safety more than they do themselves and know that allowing them the Liberty they desire, would endanger the destruction of them all.<sup>43</sup>

Stillingfleet's case pointed in a direction quite different from that of Tillotson. Stillingfleet represented the true "High Church" position, exemplified by Herbert Thorndike. His definition of the Church, his paramount concern for its institutional unity, the dire consequences of division that he predicted and the remedy he prescribed show that the visible Church took priority in his ecclesiology. If the national Church of England - personified in its bishops, both proclaimed and made whole in its rituals - was weakened, Christianity itself was threatened. If Dissenters would but realise the damage they were causing, they would desist.<sup>44</sup>

The visiblist ecclesiology Stillingfleet adopted in 1680 was in marked contrast to earlier views. Indeed, a clear evolution in Stillingfleet's thinking may be traced. In his 1661 *Irenicum* he had made a plea for acceptance of differences.<sup>45</sup> This work was quoted back to him mercilessly in 1680. The philosophical debates of the seventeenth century

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<sup>43</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, pp 12-13.

<sup>44</sup> In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Mischief, Stillingfleet declared his desire to find "a certain foundation for a lasting UNION among our selves. Which is impossible to be attained, till men are convinced of the EVIL and DANGER of the present SEPARATION."

<sup>45</sup> E. Stillingfleet, Irenicum: A Weapon-Salve for the Church's Wounds, 1661.

appear to have encouraged a greater role in Stillingfleet's later arguments for the immanent providential activity of God.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, in 1661, Stillingfleet was unconvinced that episcopacy was essential to the Church. J.A.I. Champion has shown how this view had changed by the time Stillingfleet had written his account of the history of the British Church, *Origines Britannicae*, in 1685.<sup>47</sup> Champion suggests that Stillingfleet's change of heart is "powerful evidence of the persuasive role history could play in forming individual beliefs".<sup>48</sup> As the argument of *Mischief* demonstrates, Stillingfleet had come to this position at least five years before. Perceived threats to the Church may have been as significant in his development as historical investigation.

Leading Dissenters could not leave Stillingfleet's attack unanswered. In what follows I will consider the most significant of their published responses.<sup>49</sup> There is little

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<sup>46</sup> S. Hutton, "Science, philosophy, and atheism: Edward Stillingfleet's defence of religion" in R.H. Popkin & A. Vanderjagt (eds) Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Leiden, 1993, pp 102-120, esp pp 113-20.

<sup>47</sup> E. Stillingfleet, Origines Britannicae, or the Antiquities of the British Churches, 1685.

<sup>48</sup> Champion, p 63.

<sup>49</sup> These are: R. Baxter, Richard Baxters Answer to Dr Stillingfleet's Charge of Separation..., London, 1680; J. Owen, A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists from the Charge of Schism... (London, 1680) in W.H. Goold (ed) The Works of John Owen, D.D., London, 1853, Vol. XIII, pp 305-342; [J. Humfrey & S. Lobb], An Answer to Dr Stillingfleet's Sermon, by Some Nonconformists, Being the Peaceable Design Renewed, London, 1680; T.P. [V. Alsop], The Mischief of Impositions or, A Sovereign Antidote Against a Late Discourse Called the Mischief of Separation, London, 1680; Howe, Letter.

surprise in the fact that these men presented conceptions of the Church quite different from that employed by Stillingfleet. Although they explained their positions and justified their common indignation in quite different ways, important aspects of their basic ecclesiology were remarkably similar. However, it would be a mistake to expect one, homogeneous ecclesiology of Dissent to emerge. A careful reading of these works reveals how an apparently common doctrinal position at one level masked considerable theological diversity at another. There were eddies and cross-currents in the waters of Restoration Dissent which had little to do with the traditional "party" divisions of "Presbyterian" and "Congregational". These I shall endeavour to chart.

Peripheral issues surfaced frequently among the respondents. They pointed out the inability of parish churches and conformist ministers to meet the needs of their many parishioners.<sup>50</sup> Most questioned Stillingfleet's exposition of his text<sup>51</sup> and rejected as a caricature his portrayal of the Nonconformist idea of the Church.<sup>52</sup> I shall concentrate on two crucial issues: their common rejection or relegation of the national Church, and their diverse positions on the authority of Conscience.

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<sup>50</sup> Baxter, Answer, pp 8-9; Humfrey & Lobb, Answer, pp 6-7; Howe, Letter, pp 508-9.

<sup>51</sup> Baxter, Answer, pp 28-30; Owen, Brief Vindication, pp 320-327; [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, pp 6-22; Howe, Letter, p 519.

<sup>52</sup> Baxter, Answer, pp 36-7; Owen, Brief Vindication, pp 317; [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p 29; Howe, Letter, p 521.



The least impressive of the Nonconformist responses was Richard Baxter's Answer. This was a muddled and disjointed effort, compromised by Baxter's apparent determination to take Stillingfleet's attack personally. Baxter had sought clarification on several points because

you have told the Magistrates and the World what you think of me as guilty of sinful separation.<sup>53</sup>

Unhappy with the Dean's reply, Baxter wrote a lengthy, point by point disputation which, Stillingfleet suggested, appeared to have been "written...in one continued fit of anger".<sup>54</sup>

Even allowing for the accumulated impact of "Baxterisation" Richard Baxter was a hugely significant figure. His *Answer* reveals an important stage of his thought. On the crucial question of the Church, Baxter rejected Stillingfleet's definition as inexact and misleading.

This definition...maketh an Army, a Navy, a Ship, a company of *Christian Merchants, or Corporation, &C* to be a Church: For all these may be '*Societies of Men united together for their Order and Government, according to the Rules of the Christian Religion*': For the *Christian Religion* giveth Rules to all sorts of *Christian Societies*.<sup>55</sup>

To be of any use, "Church" must be distinguished from such general societies. Baxter did this in two ways. Firstly, he asserted that the proper notion of "Church" could only refer to a religious body instituted by God. Baxter rhetorically asked for proof of the divine institution of "National Regent Churches", implying that none could be produced.

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<sup>53</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 8.

<sup>54</sup> Stillingfleet, Unreasonableness, p lx.

<sup>55</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 36.

God made the Form of the *Universal Church*, of which the particular are parts; whose Form also is of his making: And if God hath made *National Regent Churches* as distinct from *Christian Kingdoms* and *Commonwealths*, we will obey them; if not, we must know what Men made them, and by what authority, and whether God authorized them thereto<sup>56</sup>

Turning to "particular" or local bodies, Baxter again dismissed the type of organization so important to Stillingfleet.

The Definition which I give of such a Church doth make the *Terminus* to be...*personal, presential Communion* in Doctrine, Worship and Holy Conversation as distinct from absent Communion by Delegates or Letters only.<sup>57</sup>

Baxter recognised only the Universal Church and local, particular bodies. An intermediate, national entity was allowed no part. The themes signalled in this passage are very important. The stress on immediacy and relationship show Baxter's orientation towards the invisible. Yet, the discipline aspect was not unequivocally invisibilist. The manner in which discipline was to be exercised is crucial to our understanding of Baxter.

In the universal Church, authority resided in Christ himself. In the local body this was exercised through the Pastor. Indeed, the relation of pastor to flock was constitutive of this manifestation of the Church.<sup>58</sup> Any other medium of authority was either invalid or suspect. The episcopal authority which Stillingfleet had sought to establish failed along with the national Church. Erastianism

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<sup>56</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 39.

<sup>57</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 38.

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 35.

too was discounted. If Stillingfleet's definition was followed, secular "Christian Kingdoms" (the divine institution of which Baxter accepted<sup>59</sup>) might possibly rank as "Churches" but this does not justify civil authority over the true Church. The authority of the magistrate was "accidental", rather than "constitutive".<sup>60</sup>

Baxter's theological development has been plotted by William Lamont.<sup>61</sup> For most of his career he gave a high place to both the magistrate and a national Church. Though never a true erastian, he accorded an important spiritual role to civil authority. This was limited to a carefully defined sphere, supporting rather than directing the discipline of the Pastor in the local congregation. The national Church he envisaged subsisted within this magisterial zone. Significantly, Baxter's *Answer* to Stillingfleet was written in the period (c. 1678-1683) in which Baxter appeared to lose faith in magistracy. The muddled nature of its argument may reflect his intellectual confusion in these years. Yet, even in 1680, though distanced from direct authority in Church, the magistrate did not disappear altogether.<sup>62</sup>

Another feature of Baxter's *Answer* was more consistent with his life-long concerns. Conscience was allowed only a very circumscribed role. In *Mischief*, Stillingfleet had been

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<sup>59</sup> Baxter, Answer, p 42.

<sup>60</sup> Baxter, Answer, pp 43-44.

<sup>61</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter and the Millennium, pp 210-284, see esp. pp 243-256.

<sup>62</sup> See chapter seven, pp 293-295 below.

hard on any resort to conscience.

Men ought not to rest satisfied with the present dictates of their *Consciences*, for notwithstanding them, they may commit very great sins. I am afraid, the common mistating (sic) the *Case of an Erroneous Conscience* hath done a great deal of Mischief to conscientious men, and betrayed them into great security, while they are assured they do act according to their *Consciences*.<sup>63</sup>

He went on to distinguish between "Errors of Conscience" of two types. Those caused by "invincible Ignorance" will not be "imputed as Sin" but

if men fall into *Wilful Errors of Conscience*...they may be in...great danger of committing heinous sins.<sup>64</sup>

In what was otherwise a point for point, often pedantic, rebuttal of Stillingfleet's sermon, Baxter takes no issue with this section. His only comment was to agree that

If we make not Gods Laws the Rule of Conscience, no wonder if we err: God preserve us from all corrupting prejudice, passions, interest and Canons.<sup>65</sup>

The inclusion of "Canons" in the list of undesirable influences was a polemical sting in the tail. Nevertheless, on this issue, Baxter, always suspicious of unbridled conscience, was in substantial agreement with Stillingfleet.

The response by John Owen was a considerably more measured work than Baxter's *Answer*. This was acknowledged by Stillingfleet who thanked Owen for his "Civility, and Decent

<sup>63</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief*, p 43.

<sup>64</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief*, pp 44-5. For the importance of a properly informed conscience to ideas of intolerance see M. Goldie, "The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England", O.P. Grell & ors (eds), *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, Oxford, 1991, pp 331-368.

<sup>65</sup> Baxter, *Answer*, p 91.

Language".<sup>66</sup> Owen's avowed intent was to defend Nonconformists from the charges laid against them, rather than to confute Stillingfleet paragraph by paragraph as Baxter had set out to do.<sup>67</sup>

Owen alluded only briefly to the Universal Church. As might be expected from a redoubtable Congregationalist, his concept of the Church centred on "particular" Churches.

particular or congregational churches, stated with their officers according to the power of the gospel, are entire churches, that have just right and power to reform themselves.<sup>68</sup>

In agreement with Baxter, Owen held that this right derived from Christ's own institution of these bodies. The "right and power to reform themselves" was crucial. Yet, unlike Baxter (who was prepared to accept parochial churches as "true") Owen cast doubt on this because these bodies lacked the capacity for local reform. The cause of this lack was the very national Church structure which Stillingfleet revered.

The rule and government which such parochial churches are absolutely under... - namely, that by the courts of bishops, chancellors, commissaries etc, - is unknown to the Scriptures, and in its administration is very remote from giving a true representation of the authority, wisdom, love and care of Christ to his church; which is the sole end of all church rules and discipline. The yoke hereof many account themselves not obliged to submit to.<sup>69</sup>

Owen thus made a stronger case for separation from parish churches than did Baxter, who preferred to argue against

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<sup>66</sup> Stillingfleet, Unreasonableness, p lxix.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 311.

<sup>68</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 315.

<sup>69</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 329.

coercion into them. Nevertheless, both men agreed in their rejection of the national Church as lacking Christ's institution and true communion.<sup>70</sup>

Owen, like Baxter, had an invisibilist ecclesiology. True communion was not a matter of uniformity but of "faith and love, and all the fruits of them, unto the glory of God."<sup>71</sup> His fundamental orientation was made starkly obvious in his assertion that Churches did not exist for themselves.

believers are not made for churches, but churches are appointed for believers. Their edification, their guidance and direction...is their use and end; without which they are of no signification.<sup>72</sup>

"Without which they are of no signification" was a statement which Stillingfleet could never make.

If they shared this basic ecclesiology, Baxter and Owen also had similar views regarding authority. For both, the mind of Christ was all. However, Owen relegated the magistrate further than Baxter. They might intrude on outward matters, but these were of no account in the real business of religion.

In what kings, potentates and other supreme magistrates, might do to accommodate the outward profession of religion unto their rule and the interest thereof, we are not at all concerned...whilst they impose not the religious observation of their constitutions unto that end upon our consciences and practice.<sup>73</sup>

This reference to conscience was not absolute. Like Baxter, like Stillingfleet, Owen wrote only of enlightened conscience. His response to the Dean's section on erroneous conscience was

<sup>70</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, pp 316, 318.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 314.

<sup>72</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 317.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, Brief Vindication, p 316.

to eschew any disagreement.

We seek no shelter nor countenance from what is pleaded by any concerning the obliging power of an "erroneous conscience...for we acknowledge no rule of conscience in those things which concern churches..., but divine revelation [Scripture] only...This rule we attend unto, and enquire into the mind of God in it, with all the diligence we are able.<sup>74</sup>

Baxter's *Answer* and Owen's *Brief Vindication* reflected similar ecclesiologies. The focus was almost entirely on the local congregation as a manifestation of the invisible body. The wider, visible Church with its inevitable concern for hierarchies and structure had next to no place. Nevertheless, this was a tempered invisibilism. The individual was suspect and the conscience valid only if strictly hedged and channelled (an orthodox view, shared with Stillingfleet).<sup>75</sup> A concession was in fact made to the need for a visible authority (the Pastor for Baxter, the congregation as a whole for Owen). In the three remaining responses to Stillingfleet, a subtle shift is evident. The specific doctrine of the Church was similar but, to quite different effects, conscience and the individual were of far greater importance.

The most unusual of the answers to Stillingfleet is *An Answer to Dr Stillingfleet's Sermon*, attributed to John Humfrey (1621-1719) and Stephen Lobb (1647?-1699). This was

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<sup>74</sup> Owen, *Brief Vindication*, pp 339-340.

<sup>75</sup> For an insightful description of how conscience operated in the cases of two Englishmen, a century apart see A. Kenny, "The Conscience of Sir Thomas More" in *The Heritage of Wisdom: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, Oxford, 1987, pp 108-115 and D. Woolf, "Conscience, Constancy and Ambition in the Career and Writings of James Howell" in J. Morrill, P. Slack & D. Woolf (eds), *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G.E. Aylmer*, Oxford, 1993, pp 243-278.

largely a republication of a 1675 treatise which had made intricate proposals to resolve the problem of Nonconformity.<sup>76</sup> Both authors began their clerical careers as Presbyterians. By 1680, although careful to eschew extreme separatism, they were aligned with Congregationalists.<sup>77</sup> Of the two men, Humfrey is the most interesting. Calamy records that "he hath follow'd his own Genius, and fallen in with no Party".<sup>78</sup>

As might be expected from a reissued work, the *Answer* made little attempt to meet Stillingfleet's arguments directly. Yet it is interesting as a general apology for Nonconformity. Like the works of Baxter and Owen, *An Answer to Dr Stillingfleet's Sermon* was clearly written from an orientation towards the invisible Church.

The Church may be considered as *Universal*, and so Christ alone is the Head of it, and we receive our Laws from him: Or as *Particular*, and so the Pastors are Heads...over their respective flocks, who are commanded therefore to *obey them in the Lord*: Or as *National*, which is an accidental and external respect of the Church of God, wherein the King is to be acknowledged as the Supream Head of it.<sup>79</sup>

This understanding had clear parallels with the formulations already considered, particularly that of Baxter. As he had, these authors acknowledged that

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<sup>76</sup> J. Humphrey & S. Lobb, *The Peaceable Design*, London, 1675.

<sup>77</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, *Answer*, pp 3-4. See entries in DNB and CR for Humfrey and in the annotated index to A. Gordon, *Freedom After Ejection: A Review (1690-1692) of Presbyterian and Congregational Nonconformity in England and Wales*, Manchester, 1917 for Lobb.

<sup>78</sup> CR p 284.

<sup>79</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, *Answer*, p 30.



our Parish-Churches are true Churches: And that it is our duty consequently to desire and endeavour their Union and Prosperity<sup>80</sup>

However, in a point aimed directly at Tillotson's sermon, they stressed that a second duty of ministers was to preach the Gospel. Tensions, they asserted, arose when the imperative to promote union and prosperity conflicted with the duty to preach. Answering their own question: "Which is the greater matter?", Humfrey and Lobb confirmed an ecclesiology radically different from that of Stillingfleet.

What is *Parochial Union* in comparison?...The preaching of the Gospel, and *Particular Assemblies*, are of *Divine*, *Parochial Churches* are of *Human* Institution. That which is of *Divine*, is undeniably to be prefer'd before that which is of *Human* appointment.<sup>81</sup>

"Parish Churches" were indeed true churches but only by virtue of being examples of "particular assemblies". The parochial structure of the established Church was not crucial. Humfrey and Lobb relegated as of human institution what Stillingfleet held to be of divine provenance. Where, to them, separation was justified if it meant saving men's souls, to Stillingfleet it could lead only to destruction. Whereas *Mischief* called for submission to episcopal authority, Humfrey and Lobb asserted "there is no burden whereof we ought to be more sensible, than that which lies upon our Consciences".<sup>82</sup>

This last quotation signalled the point at which Humfrey and Lobb's response departed from those of Baxter and Owen. Though all three espoused similar formulations of the doctrine

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<sup>80</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, Answer, p 4.

<sup>81</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, Answer, pp 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, Answer, p 3.

of the Church, Humfrey and Lobb took a different path on the question of authority. There were two manifestations of this departure. The first was the apparently erastian flavour of the solution Humfrey and Lobb proposed to the problem of Nonconformity. In the "accidental" national Church, authority was devolved on the monarch.<sup>83</sup> The King need merely declare all erstwhile conventicles legal. This was not "Indulgence" (although this was called for too; the authors even append a draft Bill to support their proposals). Rather, the wound of Dissent was to be healed by the incorporation of Nonconformist groups into the national body. By this expedient, any alleged schism immediately disappears.

This "erastianism" was more apparent than real. It was quite different from its immanentist counterpart. Parker saw the monarch as representing the positive power and providence of God in all aspects of life and society. The structure of religion was a crucial part of that whole and belonged securely under the King's direction. Humfrey and Lobb came to their position by an entirely different route. National structures were merely accidental, external institutions. Ultimately they mattered little. They might be safely left to the secular authority ordained by God for such matters. Conal Condren summarises Humfrey's case: "what is humanly set up can be amended: hence the question - why aren't we yet

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<sup>83</sup> In another passage, the Government of the Church is declared to be part of the Administrative Law, under the Monarch, rather than of the inviolable Constitution - see Humfrey & Lobb, Answer, p 19.

comprehended?"<sup>84</sup> In the meantime, individuals guided by their conscience and Pastors responsible for discipline, could get on with the job of true religion.<sup>85</sup>

The second shift encountered in Humfrey and Lobb on the question of authority, related to the role of conscience. In part of their *Answer* which repeated the 1675 treatise, individual scruple provided the framework for a justification of Nonconformity. The case depended on a notion which may be styled as "constructive separation".

If there be but one Particular imposed on us as a condition of Conformity, which we prove to be

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<sup>84</sup> C. Condren, George Lawson's *Politica* and the English Revolution, Cambridge, 1989, p 146 & pp 143-169 *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> Gary De Krey has identified this distinction between public and private spheres in earlier writings by Humfrey, Owen and Nye. See G.S. De Krey, "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667-1672", HJ, 38, I, (1995), pp 53-83, pp 60.

Ironically, in one facet at least, Humfrey and Lobb's version of erastianism may be closer to "Hobbism" than that of either Parker or Tillotson. That facet is the potential for toleration of privately held beliefs.

This is most clearly seen in the attitude to Papists. The 1675 Peaceable Design had accepted that Catholics "must be held in the same Predicament with...our selves". The Crisis of 1680 led to a more cautious statement:

The Papist is one whose worship to us is idolatry, and we cannot therefore allow them the liberty of publick Assembling themselves, as others of the separation. (Answer, p 32).

Nevertheless,

as for the common *Papist*, who lives innocently in his way, he is to us in regard to what he does in private, in the *Matter of his God*, as others who refuse likewise to come to Common Prayer...he may hope for the enjoyment of his conscience as we, without wrong or oppression. (Answer, p 32).

Both the change from 1675 and the private Toleration of Papists were noted by Stillingfleet (Unreasonableness pp xxv-xxvi).

In the privacy, but not the concomitant public erastianism, there are also parallels in Locke's ideas on toleration - see Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics, pp 492-3. See the discussion on Locke, in Chapter six below.

sinful...it is not the Refuser, but the Imposer is guilty of the Schism.<sup>86</sup>

This was in direct contrast to Thorndike's formula on schism.<sup>87</sup> Humfrey and Lobb proceeded to delineate reasons why Nonconformists found conditions relating to reordination, the declaration of assent to the Prayer Book, and subscription to the oaths in the Act of Uniformity and the "Oxford" Act to be a "Hazard of some sprain to their Consciences".<sup>88</sup>

This accordance of a central place to the strictures of conscience was repeated in a fourth response to Stillingfleet: Vincent Alsop's *The Mischief of Impositions*. Alsop (1630-1703) is a particularly useful figure in a study of John Howe. Born in the same year, the two had remarkably parallel careers. Both matriculated at Cambridge as Sizars in 1647, both were ejected in 1662, both took up important pastorates in London in the late 1670s, both were instrumental in the "Happy Union" of the 1690s. Yet, as will be discussed in chapter six, Alsop and Howe took quite different stances on the plight of Dissent during James' reign.<sup>89</sup> These factors make a comparison of their respective contributions to the Stillingfleet controversy of 1680 of considerable interest.

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<sup>86</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, *Answer*, p 7.

<sup>87</sup> See chapter three, p 138 above.

<sup>88</sup> Humfrey & Lobb, *Answer*, p 9.

<sup>89</sup> Alsop's writings and 1680s career are covered by Beddard in "Vincent Alsop and the Emancipation of Restoration Dissent". See also Gordon p 199.

Alsop's work was the longest of those examined here. It was a sharp, sometimes satirical, point by point refutation of Stillingfleet's position. The Dean was highly indignant at the treatment he received.<sup>90</sup> Although Alsop's specific treatment of the Church was essentially the same as those encountered in all three of the responses considered so far, it was closest to that of Owen. National Churches were discounted as "prudential contrivances for common security" to which "the Scriptures are perfect strangers". The "particular", local Church, responsible for its own Government, was what mattered.<sup>91</sup>

As the title of his work suggested, Alsop's stance on Nonconformity picked up the "constructive separation" line of Humfrey and Lobb. The fault lay not with Dissenters but with those demanding a narrow uniformity.

lasting Union, (the Doctor thinks) is impossible to be attained, til men are convinced of the evil and danger of the present Separation: but others think...that it is impossible to be attained till men are convinced of the evil and danger of the present Impositions.<sup>92</sup>

However, unlike in Humfrey and Lobb, there was no pseudo-erastianism in *The Mischief of Impositions*. The focus was very much on conscience. In a lengthy "Epistle Dedicatory" Alsop set out "the principles upon which the present Separation is carried on". These related primarily to authority. Although Scripture and Christ's ordinances were accorded objective priority, the role of the individual was crucial. Just as a

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<sup>90</sup> Stillingfleet, Unreasonableness, pp lxii-lxv.

<sup>91</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, pp 28, 30.

<sup>92</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p [iv].

particular Church might choose its own Pastor, so

every particular Christian [has] the same power to chuse his own Church...I will thank my friends that will recommend to my choice an able Physician, a faithful Lawyer but I am sure I love my health, my life, my estate so well as not to put the Election out of my own hands into theirs, who are not likely to love me better than my self: and if I chuse amiss, the greatest wrong will be my own.<sup>93</sup>

The diversity which arises from individual choice was to be accepted, not ridiculed.

let him [Stillingfleet] not always miscall *Conscience* by the scandalous name of *Fancy!* The very truth is we have no Mathematical certainty in these matters [of worship and liturgy and]...from some little trouble that arises in a Church from the levity and volubility of men's minds, to bring in that enormous, monstrous principle, of enslaving all mens judgments and conscience...is a medicine worse than Poyson.<sup>94</sup>

Importantly, unlike Baxter or Owen, Alsop took Stillingfleet to task over his statements on conscience. Whilst in full agreement that wilful error does not excuse sin, he rejected the inference that "men ought not to rest satisfied with the present dictates of their consciences".<sup>95</sup>

Conscience is more my rule than the dictate of any Church: and if I ought not to rest satisfied with that which God has made my *next and immediate* guide, I may the more lawfully examine their commands, which are more remotely such.<sup>96</sup>

This confidence in direct, divine ministration allowed Alsop to "take the voice and countermand of Conscience to be God's voice."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p [ix].

<sup>94</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, pp [xxvii-xxviii].

<sup>95</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, p 43.

<sup>96</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p 74.

<sup>97</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p 75.

To this point, though he had made greater rhetorical use of conscience, Alsop had not gone beyond the position of Baxter and Owen. However, he departed markedly from the older men in introducing sincerity as a factor. In the case of a soul which sins out of genuine error

God may pity it, though erroneous, if sincere; for sincerity is more in the sight of him who desires truth in the inward parts than Orthodoxy: and he sees the general frame of the heart to be upright...though in the application of the general frame of heart to this or that particular practice it may be out most wretchedly.<sup>98</sup>

Alsop was no Quaker; he did not propose a fully competent, "inner light". Like his fellows, he stressed the need for conscience to be informed and attuned to God. Nevertheless, as will be shown, the mere employment of sincerity was significant. It signalled a movement beyond Baxter and Owen, beyond Humfrey and Lobb, to a more pronounced individualism.

The outworking of this emphasis can be observed in Alsop's career. In 1687 he was one of the few Presbyterians to welcome James II's Indulgence. He was interested only in toleration and that by whatever means available. In the clear individualism he revealed in 1680, he had set out his ground for this stance.<sup>99</sup>

A complex picture emerges from the analysis so far. Slight variations have been observed in the precise wordings of the doctrine of the Church espoused by these writers. Interestingly, even these differences did not fall neatly

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<sup>98</sup> [Alsop], Mischief of Impositions, p 77.

<sup>99</sup> Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", p 178. On this see further chapter six, pp 256-61 below.

along expected "party lines". The position of the "Congregationalist" Owen was, in its particulars, closest to that of the "Presbyterian" Alsop. The "Congregationalists", Humfrey and Lobb described the Church in terms very close to those of the "Presbyterian" Baxter.

Within this diversity of detail all agreed in rejecting the notion of a divinely instituted national Church. Structure and hierarchy were discounted in favour of local or "particular" congregations in which the true Saints might become evident. This is as near as it is possible to come to an "orthodoxy of Dissent". In the context of the Stillingfleet controversy this feature, taken with the reasoning which sustained it, gives strong support to the basic framework proposed in this thesis. Restoration Nonconformity was characterised by a fundamental bias towards the invisible Church.

Ecclesiology, however, is more than discrete formulations of the doctrine of the Church. When related factors are examined, differences of degree emerge within this basic orientation. Baxter and Owen were more cautious about the role of individual conscience than were Humfrey and Lobb. Vincent Alsop made conscience more central than any of the others. That Alsop, a "Presbyterian", embraced what appears to be the most extreme position raises further doubts about any simplistic party analysis. The challenge is strengthened by a consideration of the response to Stillingfleet by another "Presbyterian": John Howe.



Howe adopted a style unlike any other respondent. Rather than a head-on attack, his answer to Stillingfleet was cast in the form of a mildly censorious letter to a third party. The full title of the work (*A Letter Written Out of the Country to A Person of Quality in the City who took Offence at the Sermon of Dr Stillingfleet*) followed a common form. Nevertheless, the play on the famous Shaftesbury/Locke *Letter* of 1675 is unmistakable and may have been deliberate.<sup>100</sup>

Howe's was the shortest and most pacific of Nonconformist responses to *Mischief*. Though clearly the product of a theologian, his letter was written as if by a one layman to another. He reproved the passion of his correspondent's reaction to Stillingfleet's sermon, taking as his text Galatians 6:1: "Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted". The Dean acknowledged the tone:

he discourses Gravely and Proudly, without Bitterness and Rancor, or any sharp Reflections, and sometimes with a great mixture of Kindness towards me; for which, and his Prayers for me, I do heartily Thank him.<sup>101</sup>

The distress of the "Person of Quality", Howe believed, arose from his fear of the possible impact of the sermon on the Nonconformist cause, and his anger at Stillingfleet's action. His aim in the *Letter* was to

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<sup>100</sup> [anon] A Letter from a Person of Quality to His Friend in the Country (1675). Howe's connection with the Shaftesbury circle at this time is undoubted. As noted in chapter four, p 163 above, he was close to the Russells and Lord Wharton. The letter may have been written by John Locke. During the 1670s, Locke sometimes used the home of John Hickes, Howe's brother-in-law, as a mailing address - see Ashcraft p 113, n141. By the mid-1680s at least Howe was a friend of Locke. The two certainly met up in Holland in 1685 - see chapter six, pp 239-244 below.

<sup>101</sup> Stillingfleet, Unreasonableness, pp lxi-lxii.

first defend the cause against Dr Stillingfleet, and then add somewhat in the defence of Dr Stillingfleet against you.<sup>102</sup>

Howe undertook this double task with some humour and considerable skill. His rhetoric revealed an individualism even more extreme than Alsop's and a thoroughgoing rejection of the visible Church. He carried the "constructive separation" argument further than the responses already considered. Like them, he adopted the theme of conscientious objection but, more thoroughly than had the others, Howe centred his argument on the religious consequences for the believer.

The role of the individual conscience was elevated. This may be detected in three features of Howe's *Letter*. The first was structural. Humfrey and Lobb took the importance of conscience as axiomatic and concentrated their arguments on specific points of objection to uniformity. Alsop made more direct use of conscience but, in his point for point engagement with Stillingfleet, he followed a method similar to that of Humfrey and Lobb. Howe, by contrast, adopted conscientious scruple as his central argument. Merely by the space he accorded this underlying problem, he magnified its importance.

Second, and more important, was the treatment of conscience in the argument itself. Howe cited two apparently conflicting elements in Stillingfleet's *Mischief*. The first was the dominant argument that it was sinful to worship in separation from the established, parish Church. The second lay

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<sup>102</sup> Howe, Letter, p 508.

in Stillingfleet's acknowledgment that a genuinely erroneous conscience could create "a necessity of sinning, if he acts with it or against it."<sup>103</sup> Howe argued that Stillingfleet had placed Nonconformists in an impossible predicament. They were unable to hear the word or receive the sacraments without committing either the sin of separation (by attending conventicles) or the sin of offending against their conscience (by submitting to the Church). Nonconformists were thus "damned if they did, and damned if they didn't".

We are indeed satisfied that our sin...would contribute little to our salvation. But when also we are satisfied that we cannot enjoy the means of salvation in his way without sin; and he tells us, we cannot without sin enjoy them in our own: we hope every door is not shut up against us, and cannot think the merciful and holy God hath so stated our case, as to reduce us to a necessity of sinning to get out of a state of damnation.<sup>104</sup>

By this understanding, one part of Stillingfleet's case must fail. To Howe there was no doubt as to which: Stillingfleet's insistence on uniformity was invalid. The rule of conscience was part of God's order; the rituals and external form of the Church of England were not.

For any divine law that can be supposed to oblige us to the use of the things we scruple, or else to live without the worship and ordinances of God, not knowing of any ourselves, we must wait until we be informed of it.<sup>105</sup>

In proposing an irreconcilable tension in Stillingfleet's case, Howe either misunderstood or misused the Dean's concession on conscience. Stillingfleet acknowledged that to

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<sup>103</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, p 44.

<sup>104</sup> Howe, Letter, p 514.

<sup>105</sup> Howe, Letter, p 514.

breach conscience was sinful but he did so grudgingly and in passing. His real point was that the consequences of sinful action might be avoided, if the error was genuine. Even this was a straw position, admitted in order to set up his intended characterisation of the Nonconformists' error as "wilful", rather than merely the product of "invincible ignorance".<sup>106</sup> Importantly, Stillingfleet never conceded that truth was other than objective (and accessible, by implication, through the Church). He did no more than acknowledge genuine error as a plea in mitigation, where God's ordinances had been broken. Sin, like truth, remained essentially objective.

By contrast, Howe argued that the individual conscience could on its own define sin - "those things be sinful to us which our consciences judge to be so".<sup>107</sup> In this, as had Alsop, Howe was amplifying the subjective element of sincerity and relegating objective standards. This line of argument is important as it indicates a pronounced move towards the self-reliance of the individual before God. Keith Thomas has noted a transition in the seventeenth century from

a conception of morality as the application of divine laws to human affairs to the idea of it as the simple love of God and pursuit of goodness.<sup>108</sup>

Howe was part of this trend.

The third strand of Howe's subjective individualism came out in his "defence" of Stillingfleet against the passion of

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<sup>106</sup> Stillingfleet, Mischief, pp 44-45.

<sup>107</sup> Howe, Letter, p 517.

<sup>108</sup> K. Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England" in Morrill et al, Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England, pp 29-56, p 51.

Howe's correspondent. Stillingfleet had been known for moderate and irenic views. His apparent *volte face* since *Irenicum* had received unfavourable comment. Howe sought to temper the hostility of this reaction with a significant insight into the formation of opinions. As this passage signals ideas which become important in later works, I quote it at length.

Believe him [Stillingfleet], in the substance of what he said, to speak according to his present judgment. Think how gradually and insensibly men's judgements alter, and are formed by their converse: that his circumstances have made it necessary to him to converse most, for a long time, with those who are fully of that mind which he here discovers...and who, therefore must have the more power and influence upon him, to conform his sentiments to their own.

We ourselves do not know, had we been, by our circumstances, led to associate and converse mostly with men of another judgement, what our own would have been. And they that are wont to discover most confidence of themselves, do usually but discover most ignorance of the nature of man: and how little do they consider the power of external objects and inducements to draw men's minds this way or that. Nor, indeed, as to matters of this nature, can any man be confident that the grace of God shall certainly incline him to be of this or another opinion or practice in these matters; because we find that those we have reason to believe have great assistances of divine grace are divided about them, and go not all one way.<sup>109</sup>

Howe echoes here Alsop's acknowledgement that "mathematical certainty" is impossible. As has been noted already, a degree of scepticism fed Howe's irenic approach to controversy. Despite his high place for sincere conscience, Howe was cautious about human capacity to hear God correctly. This was, however, a limited rather than a thoroughgoing scepticism. Howe was confident of the central truths of his faith. His doubts related to "these matters": issues of form

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<sup>109</sup> Howe, Letter, p 530.

and ritual - the points on which he was engaged with Stillingfleet. Howe's brand of scepticism will be examined more closely in the next chapter.<sup>110</sup> At this point it is enough to note that his method and epistemology reinforced, rather than weakened, his individualism. On all but the core doctrines of the faith, conscientious believers must be given space.

Stillingfleet saw in the enforcement of uniformity a means of leading people to the truth. Howe's lack of confidence in "external objects and inducements" naturally reintroduces the model proposed in this study. As was observed in the other Nonconformist respondents, at the heart of Howe's answer to Stillingfleet is a rejection of the claims of the visible Church. Near the close of his *Letter* Howe satirised exclusivity based merely on form.

They have least reason to expect much compliance from others, who bind themselves up within their own party, are as enwrapt as leviathan in his scales, call themselves the church, and call all men separatists that will not be of their church. And perhaps they assume and appropriate the name with no more pretence or colour, and with no better sense, than if a humoursome company of men should distinguish themselves from others by wearing a blue or yellow girdle, and call themselves mankind.<sup>111</sup>

Howe's arguments are consistent with the view that the ecclesiology of Dissenters displayed a fundamental orientation towards the invisible Church. Yet, when related variants are introduced, a simple visible/invisible dichotomy becomes

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<sup>110</sup> The full implications of Howe's "mitigated scepticism" will be discussed when his ideas are compared to those of John Locke in chapter six, pp 245-251 below.

<sup>111</sup> Howe, *Letter*, p 534.

untenable. The responses to Stillingfleet show that there existed in Dissent a spectrum of ecclesiological views rather than one agreed position. Different Nonconformists exhibited different degrees of bias towards the invisible.

Where then did Howe "fit" on such a range? The analysis in this chapter, limited to one publication, suggests he was more concerned with conscience and individualism than some others. Precision cannot be pretended in such matters, but a working hypothesis may be tendered. In this controversy at least, Howe and Alsop took positions which accorded a greater role to typically "invisiblist" concerns than did Baxter and Owen, with Humfrey and Lobb occupying a middle ground. All rejected the claims made by Stillingfleet for the visible Church of England. All sought the immediate, rather than mediated authority of God. For Baxter and Owen, the principal scene of this encounter was the particular congregation; for Alsop and Howe it was the individual conscience.

By this interpretation, Howe is located among the more radically invisiblist in mainstream Nonconformity. This is a departure from earlier assessments. Nuttall's placement of him among the "conservative" or "middle" parties must be questioned. The association of Howe with "moderates" on political issues - with "Dons" rather than "Ducklings" - is similarly challenged. Yet, if Howe's ecclesiology is to be identified with feisty advocates of toleration and independency like Alsop, how are we to account for his own consistently irenic efforts towards comprehension? In subsequent chapters, I shall examine his later ecclesiological

writings in their contexts. A fuller understanding of Howe and a refined picture of later Stuart Dissent will emerge.

Before moving on to those issues it is pertinent to consider what may be drawn from the analysis in this chapter for an understanding of the wider context of the crisis of 1678-83. As Tim Harris and Jonathan Scott have persuasively argued, it is no longer possible to view the problems of these years merely as a function of the rise of "tory" and "whig" parties. It is as yet unclear whether a replacement, overarching interpretation is possible. Certainly, it would be pretentious to suggest one here. Nevertheless this study may have some value in placing a further piece in a large puzzle. What insights there are spring as much from what is revealed of Tillotson and Stillingfleet, as of their opponents.

Though united in their rejection of previous models, Harris and Scott differ in their positive interpretations. Harris is satisfied that enough evidence of rudimentary parties exists. However, he eschews any definition of these based purely on constitutional views. Religious issues are central to Harris's case. "Whigs" and "tories" may be identified by their "divergent attitudes towards the issue of Dissent."<sup>112</sup> Scott is unwilling to accept any true parties. He portrays a fluid situation dominated by an almost universal fear of popery and (related with it in contemporary minds) arbitrary government. Though shared, this fear could engender opposing political responses dependent upon historical memory.

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<sup>112</sup> Harris, Politics, p 82.



"Whig" and "tory" do not denote parties but

polarities of belief, and memory, reacting equally strongly to perceived threats to the English church and state.<sup>113</sup>

The study in this chapter of two apparently arcane theological disputes in 1680 gives most support to Scott's case. Both Tillotson and Stillingfleet censured Dissent in the context of the threat of popery. Further, Tillotson was an example of the blurring of "party" lines. Harris suggests that "whigs" typically employed natural law arguments whilst "tory" discourse was generally dependent on divine right theory, notably Filmer's.<sup>114</sup> Yet, Tillotson, who supported exclusion, argued his *Vindication* sermon on the basis of divine right.

If these controversies point to Scott's reconstruction, they may also point beyond it. Scott recounts the course of the crisis and convincingly highlights the impact of events on the political stances adopted by the protagonists.<sup>115</sup> An understanding of the respective positions of Tillotson, Stillingfleet and the Dissenters adds a theological dimension. The Nonconformists gave short shrift to the visible Church. The two Churchmen both accorded a dominant role to the immanent activity of God. However, only Stillingfleet represented a true "High Church" position. Tillotson followed a theological line in which lurked a potential threat to the Church. Like Parker before him, he argued for the authority not of bishops or Church but of the magistrate as God's agent.

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<sup>113</sup> Scott, Algernon Sidney, p 49.

<sup>114</sup> Harris, Politics, pp 90-1, 96.

<sup>115</sup> Scott, Algernon Sidney, pp 50-77.

This was a crucial distinction. In a series of articles, Mark Goldie has shown the complexities of the established Church's relationship with the Crown. Both attacks on and defences of the authority of the bishops made for major debates during the Restoration. Although he himself was later to be Archbishop, Tillotson's divine right theory contained the seeds of a challenge to episcopal authority. The Nonconformists were predisposed against the bishops. The common ground between Nonconformists and Constantinian Churchmen may seem slight, but common cause over this issue is at least theoretically possible.<sup>116</sup> There is no definition of "whiggery" lurking here. Subsequent research may show the stance favoured by Tillotson to be as much subject to blurring across party lines as any other. Nevertheless, the crucial ecclesiological issue in the crisis may have been not (as Harris suggests) attitudes to Dissent, but attitudes to the Church of England.

Some light may also be shed on a curious feature of the crisis, which directly involved John Howe. The end to the six-year period of Church overtures to Dissent coincided exactly with the resolution of the exclusion issue. On 14 November 1680 Howe had been called to a meeting with Bishop Lloyd of St Asaph at Tillotson's home. There they discussed "what [Howe] thought would satisfy the Nonconformists, that so they might be taken into the Church". Calamy records

they agreed upon a meeting the next Night, at seven a Clock, at Dr *Stillingfleet's*, the dean of *St Pauls*. Mr Howe propos'd to bring Mr *Baxter* along with him; but the Bishop would by no means allow of it. Then he propos'd

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<sup>116</sup> See esp. Goldie, "John Locke and Anglican Royalism" pp 76-7; "Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism" p 231.

to bring Dr *Bates*, and was answer'd, that no man could be more proper. Accordingly Dr *Bates* and Mr *Howe* went at seven in the evening to Dean *Stillingfleet's*, as had been appointed the day before. The Dean had provided a very handsome Treat, but they found not the Company they expected. They waited until eight, till nine, till near ten a Clock; but the Bishop neither came, nor sent, nor took any notice of the matter afterwards. And that very Night, as they heard the next Morning, the *Bill of Exclusion* was thrown out of the House of Peers, by a majority of thirty Voices, fourteen of which were Bishops. And after this, there was no farther occasion for any talk about a *Comprehension*.<sup>117</sup>

The involvement of moderates like Tillotson, Stillingfleet and Lloyd in these discussions was not remarkable. However, it is clear that what backing from the Church hierarchy which might have existed was withdrawn when the bid for exclusion failed. I have tentatively suggested that exclusion was associated with groups perceived to threaten the Church of England. The preservation of the succession may have convinced the High Churchmen that their cause too was safe. They needed no longer to court Nonconformists. Irenic overtures were abandoned. The ensuing policy was one of increased pressure on Dissent.<sup>118</sup>

Taken with the work of Scott, Harris and Goldie, the analysis in this chapter describes a fluid public discourse which defies rigid categorisation. The Restoration crisis was

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<sup>117</sup> Calamy pp 71-3

<sup>118</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension", p 226, suggests that the debates on Comprehension and Toleration did not begin until after the rejection of the Exclusion Bill. However, Horwitz's account shows that behind-the-scenes activity had been going on for some time. Moreover, the debates Thomas cites were very much limited to the Commons. They were not sponsored by the Church. Calamy was quite correct to mark an end to discussions between leading Divines on 15 November 1680.

fuelled by a concatenation of events and memories which raised fears and prompted ever-changing extremes of political thought. There were parallel developments in the theological community. Even Horwitz, who wanted to find "reconciliation", conceded that Parliamentary efforts towards unity foundered on a lack of agreement among the divines.<sup>119</sup> The stresses of the crisis brought to the surface the wide spectrum of views which existed in both the Church and Dissent. The theological drift was not to Protestant reconciliation, but to divergence.

In the Church of England, the much vaunted unity was beginning to fray.<sup>120</sup> Even among moderates like Stillingfleet and Tillotson, quite different theological paths were emerging. That these two held quite different ecclesiologies casts further doubt on the usefulness of the term "Latitudinarian" to describe a moderate party within the Church.<sup>121</sup> Within Dissent, younger men like Howe and Alsop were coming to the fore. Owen would soon be dead. Baxter would

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<sup>119</sup> As Horwitz himself notes "The diversity of purpose among the participants...exercised great influence on the legislative history of both the Comprehension and Toleration Bills" - "Protestant Reconciliation" p 208.

<sup>120</sup> On the concern for visible unity within the Church of England, and the ecclesiological tensions which it sought to contain, see Spurr, Restoration Church, pp 105-165.

<sup>121</sup> On this see J. Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church" *passim*. This contrasts with an earlier view, purporting to identify and define a "latitudinarian system", purveyed in M.J. Griffin Jr, Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England, Leiden, 1992. More recently W.M. Spellman has attempted to describe a "self-conscious group" whose membership nevertheless differed among themselves on important theological issues and changed in composition markedly The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700, Athens GA, 1993 esp pp 5-6.

retreat to an earlier, even more isolated position. Determined to escape the "scales of leviathan", Alsop and Howe would pursue invisibilist ideas which would assume greater significance as the decade progressed.

"that our divisions may not  
be our ruin"

Chapter Six:

Charity and Unity Under Pressure,  
1681-1691

The "resolution" of the Restoration crisis of 1678-81 proved evanescent. Tensions remained unresolved, leading some to seek violent solutions. Plots and rumours of plots would become open rebellion in the Monmouth uprising.<sup>1</sup> The shifts and reverses of policy under James II could not prevent the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9. With the subsequent passage of the "Toleration" Act, the alienation of Nonconformists from the Church of England was more or less completed. In the "Happy Union" of 1691 they would attempt unity among themselves.

For most of this period, John Howe remained in London, an active preacher, writer and advocate for Dissent. The notable exception was a two-year sojourn in the Netherlands which commenced with a somewhat mysterious decampment in 1685. Both the writings and the Netherlands interlude are crucial to our understanding of Howe and, consequently, the fate of later Stuart Dissent.

In chapter five, Howe was considered in a spectrum of views which ran from the "visiblist" ecclesiology of Edward Stillingfleet to the plainly "invisiblist" views of Vincent Alsop. It was contended that the range of positions evident within both Church and Dissent precludes simple "party" analysis. Howe's position appeared to be quite different from that of some other leading Nonconformists.

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<sup>1</sup> See R.L. Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom: British Radicals from the Popish Plot to the Revolution of 1688-1689, Stanford, 1992.

The further differentiation of views within broad Dissent is the aim in this chapter. Attention shifts from two specific controversies in one year to the events and thought of a tumultuous decade. The first section will examine works Howe published between 1681 and 1683. Howe's emphasis on the transcendent activity of God will be confirmed. Yet, Howe had interests beyond mere doctrine. Section two will reconsider Howe's activities early in James II's reign. Both the writings and the activities set up the comparison of Howe's ecclesiology with the thought of John Locke which constitutes section three. Significant differences will be noted which question Locke's intellectual continuity with Dissent.

Another foil to Howe is employed in section four. Vincent Alsop's 1680 ecclesiology was held to be closest to Howe's. Yet, the two responded differently to the circumstances of 1687-91. The elliptical model proposed in this thesis will be shown to be able to incorporate these differences. In a final section the question of Howe's allegiance to "Presbyterianism" or to "Congregationalism" will be considered. These terms will be held to be inadequate for understanding later Stuart Dissent.

Three works published by Howe in the early 1680s stand out. Each is discussed below. The first, *Thoughtfulness for the Morrow* (1681)<sup>2</sup> clearly revealed the transcendentalist direction of Howe's thought. In the second, *Of Charity in*

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<sup>2</sup> J. Howe, *Of Thoughtfulness for the Morrow: with an appendix; Concerning the Immoderate Desire of Foreknowing Things to Come* [London, 1681], Works II, pp 391-450.



*Reference to Other Men's Sins*<sup>3</sup>, also published in 1681, Howe employed Christian love as a dynamic principle. This theme was fully developed in the third treatise from this period, *Union Among Protestants* (1683).<sup>4</sup> More than any other work, this revealed the integrity of Howe's irenic approach to ecclesiastical disputes.

*Of Thoughtfulness for the Morrow* was a reflection on Matt. 6:34:

Take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

It was dedicated to Ann, Lady Wharton, third wife of Howe's sponsor and companion on the 1685 flight to the Netherlands.

Detachment was explicit and central to Howe's argument in *Thoughtfulness*. Concerns and fears, either for ourselves or for the success of Christianity, were held to reflect a poor understanding of the faith. Yet Howe did not suggest that prudent recognition of future duties and mental preparation for approaching trials be abandoned.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the target was unwarranted attention to complex eschatological schemes. His warning was that by "undue excursions into futurity...we can but bewilder and lose ourselves to no purpose".<sup>6</sup> The error of

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<sup>3</sup> J. Howe, *Of Charity in Reference of Other Men's Sins*, [London, 1681], Works, II, pp 453-473.

<sup>4</sup> J. Howe, *A Sermon Concerning Union Among Protestants; A discourse Answering the Following Question, "What May Most Hopefully Be Attempted to Allay Animosities Among Protestants, That Our Divisions May Not Be Our Ruin?"* [London, 1683], Works, III, pp 156-188.

<sup>5</sup> Howe, *Thoughtfulness*, pp 397-401

<sup>6</sup> Howe, *Thoughtfulness*, p 395.

such endeavours lay not in being too detached from worldly reality, but in being too concerned for it. Efforts to predict the future through interpretations of signs and prophecies revealed an infatuation with what was "temporary and terrene". Even if utopian, such visions remain worldly.

[T]o think of a state approaching, wherein all things shall be perfectly and unexpectedly well for ever, is but cold comfort. Blessed God! what a mortal token is this! Do we understand nothing of distemper in it? Do we see ourselves as *men of time*...and do not our hearts misgive at the thought?...Can the felicity of heaven belong to them that value it not as their best good, but count a terrestrial paradise of their own devising better?<sup>7</sup>

Throughout *Thoughtfulness* Howe relegated the natural and sensual in favour of the heavenly and spiritual. Accordingly, the alternative to the "distemper of futurity" was not for Christians to live only for the present.

[S]urely no worse thing can rule over me, than a sensual spirit; that binds me down, and limits me to this spot on earth, and point of time.<sup>8</sup>

Time itself was the problem. It provided an inadequate context for the Christian and was to be eschewed as an ultimate reference point.

Neither our present duty or peace, nor our future safety or felicity, can be provided for as they ought, till our minds be more abstracted from time, and taken up about the unseen, eternal world.<sup>9</sup>

The rejection of time was more than a philosophical nicety. It was an aspect of Howe's understanding of the truly religious life as an unmediated, spiritual relationship with

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<sup>7</sup> Howe, Thoughtfulness, p 437.

<sup>8</sup> Howe, Thoughtfulness, p 429.

<sup>9</sup> Howe, Thoughtfulness, p 391.

God. This was further borne out when he listed the roots of "undue thoughtfulness" for the future. One was an expectation that God's blessing will include material comfort (a false hope, according to Howe). In a crucial passage he effectively limited God's interest to the Christian's spiritual welfare.

"Shall we not be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" Heb. xii. 9... The title which the sacred penman there fixes on God, "the Father of spirits"...ought to be both instructive, and grateful to us. He is the great Paternal Spirit. We (in respect to our spirits) are his offspring... In this context, the fathers of our flesh, and the Father of spirits are studiously contradistinguished to one another. The relation God bears to us as our Father terminates on our spirits. And his paternal care and love cannot help but follow the relation, and principally terminate there too. He must be chiefly concerned about our spirits, that they be preserved in a good and healthful state.<sup>10</sup>

That "the relation God bears to us...terminates in our spirits" is telling. Howe starkly exposed his bias towards the transcendent. The result was an overwhelmingly "inward" faith. Concluding the first section of *Thoughtfulness*, he recommended two endeavours. The first was the submission of "our thoughts and the inwards workings of our spirits", for

do not all the laws of God that enjoin us any duty, lay their first obligation upon our inward man?<sup>11</sup>

The second called for a concomitant indifference to outward events. For instance, nature (the realm of time) had no role in faith or salvation.

One that fears God and...believes in a world to come... hath little cause to concern himself about interviences, which, as to his part in that world, will not alter his case. We are not the surer of heaven,

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<sup>10</sup> Howe, *Thoughtfulness*, p 406.

<sup>11</sup> Howe, *Thoughtfulness*, p 426.

if the sun shine out to-morrow; nor the less sure, if it shine not.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst not specifically touching on ecclesiology, *Thoughtfulness* provides considerable support for the view that Howe belonged among those who tended radically towards the invisible pole of the spectrum proposed in this thesis. The relegation of nature in favour of an unmediated, spiritual experience of Grace points to a transcendentalist theology.

In the same year that *Thoughtfulness* appeared, Howe's assistant minister, Daniel Bull, was discovered to have committed adultery. This lapse necessitated Bull's removal from office.<sup>13</sup> More important for our purposes than the fate of the unfortunate Bull, is the fact that his fall prompted Howe's work *Of Charity in Reference to Other Men's Sins*.

Howe took his text from 1 Corinthians 13:6, "[charity] rejoiceth not in iniquity". In a model of "Puritan" exposition, he examined in detail the context, tenses and likely meanings of the words of his text. It is clear that Howe intended far more than a palliatory call for generosity towards Bull.

*Charity* established a crucial element in Howe's irenic approach to Church disputes. Christian love assumed the role of an integrative principle. It was identified with the very nature of God and was essential to all other virtues.<sup>14</sup> As the defining characteristic of Christians, charity was by

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<sup>12</sup> Howe, *Thoughtfulness*, p 427.

<sup>13</sup> For Bull see, Rogers p 196; *CR* p 85.

<sup>14</sup> Howe, *Charity*, pp 460-461.

nature inconsistent with iniquity or any rejoicing thereat. True charity required the godly to "decline the society" of those who sin in order to vindicate "the Honour of the Christian religion". At the same time, it precluded any satisfaction at this outcome.

It ought to be very grievous to us, when the reproach of our religion cannot be rolled away without being rolled upon this or that man; if especially, [he is] otherwise valuable.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, shunning the sinful allowed neither Churchman nor Dissenter to excuse themselves from the Church as a whole.

When wickedness breaks forth...is this no matter of lamentation to you? ...Will you say you are unrelated to him...or have no concern with him? Can any party be united within itself, by so sacred ties as all true Christians are with the whole body of Christ?<sup>16</sup>

Of those "sacred ties", charity was the foremost - "the eternal bond of living union"<sup>17</sup> among the saints in Heaven. By extension from its function in this invisible body, charity also must guide the Church on earth.

Howe was explicit about the connection between charity and the church disputes of the 1680s. In his preface (which, in the nature of these things, was really an afterword) he identified charity as the solution to these problems.

We vainly expect, from either eloquence, or disputation, the good effects, which charity alone (could it take place) would easily bring about without them.<sup>18</sup>

The source of unity was found in this Christian virtue and not

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<sup>15</sup> Howe, Charity, p 468.

<sup>16</sup> Howe, Charity, pp 471-2.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, Charity, p 473.

<sup>18</sup> Howe, Charity, p 451.

in authority or structure. This is significant. An invisibilist ecclesiology naturally seeks and accepts a unity expressed through such an immaterial quality as charity. Concrete expressions (e.g. uniformity and organisation) are characteristic of visibilist concepts of the Church.

Howe did not exclude all indirect operation of God's will. In one place in *Charity* he acknowledged God's action through natural endowments and providence, in addition to unmediated grace.<sup>19</sup> However, it is clear that this sermon confirmed the transcendentalist orientation encountered in *Thoughtfulness*. Howe's bias to the invisible Church is apparent in the following passage from the preface.

What piety is to our union with God, that is charity to our union with one another. But we are too apt, as to both, to expect from the outward form, what only the internal, living principle can give; to covet the one with a sort of fondness, and deny the other. One common external form in the Church of God, wherein all good men could agree, were a most amiable thing, very useful to its comely, better being; and the want of it hath inferred, and doth threaten, evils much to be deplored, and deprecated. But this divine principle [charity] is most simply necessary to its *very being*. Whatsoever violates it is the most destructive, mortal schism; as much worse than an unwilling breach of outward order, as the malicious tearing in pieces a man's living body, is worse than the accidental rending of his clothes.<sup>20</sup>

Christian love featured in Howe's earlier works, but by 1681 it had assumed a central role in his thinking. It continued in this place through the rest of his career. The preface to *Charity* set the agenda of the next decades.

Precisely why charity emerged as a dominant principle in Howe's thought is not entirely clear. One clue may be his own

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<sup>19</sup> Howe, *Charity*, pp 466-467.

<sup>20</sup> Howe, *Charity*, p 452.

scholarly interests. In 1679, Matthew Poole had died, with his master work *English Annotations on Holy Scripture* unfinished.<sup>21</sup> Howe was one of many who assisted with a posthumous completion of the commentary. Howe's project was the Epistles of John, published in a volume which appeared in 1682, the year following *Charity*. Significantly, love is the major theme of the longest of the letters: I John. Howe cited I John several times in *Charity* and it is highly likely that John's radical promotion of love as the basis of faith and communion had a large impact on his thinking during the early 1680s.

In addition to his own work, there may have been outside influences. It is impossible satisfactorily to reconstruct Howe's intellectual circle. The platonist, Henry More was a friend and Howe cited his works often, especially in *The Living Temple*. Locke and Baxter were significant contacts. Another possibility is Joseph Glanvill (1636-80), Rector of Bath from 1666 and advocate for the Royal Society. Glanvill was an admirer of Baxter and, like Howe, a platonist.<sup>22</sup> Positive evidence of a connection between the two is lacking,

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<sup>21</sup> For Poole see CR pp 394-5. For the history of the completion of the Annotations see Wood, Athenae Oxonienses, Vol. 4, Col. 112-3.

<sup>22</sup> On Glanvill see DNB; J.I. Cope, Joseph Glanvill, Anglican Apologist, St Louis, 1956; R.H. Popkin, "Introduction" to (R.H. Popkin, ed) J. Glanvill, Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion, New York, 1970, pp v-xxxiii; N.H. Steneck, "'The Ballad of Robert Grosse and Joseph Glanvill' and the Background to *Plus Ultra*", The British Journal of the History of Science, XIV, 1981, pp 59-74; R.H. Popkin, "The Scepticism of Joseph Glanvill" in The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought, Leiden, 1992, pp 246-253.

although Howe was reported to have been in Bath in 1668.<sup>23</sup> There are, however, intriguing intellectual parallels. In 1669 Glanvill published a sermon called *Catholic Charity Recommended*<sup>24</sup> in which he set out themes which Howe developed in his own *Charity* and subsequent works. Glanvill was a conformist, suspicious of Dissent and opposed to toleration, yet between him and Howe there were significant parallels. As will be seen, Glanvill anticipated Howe's arguments in at least two other instances.

The most important work on ecclesiological issues that Howe published in the early 1680s was *Union Among Protestants*. This treatise addressed the question

What may most hopefully be attempted to allay animosities among protestants, that our divisions may not be our ruin?

Howe eschewed any comment on "laws and constitutions" (the province only of rulers) or controversies between parties (which he regarded as fruitless). Instead the emphasis was on what Christians may do in their "private capacities".<sup>25</sup>

Once again, the dominant concept was charity. This time the text was Colossians 2:2.

That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God.

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<sup>23</sup> Rogers p 125.

<sup>24</sup> J. Glanvill, *Catholic Charity Recommended in a Sermon, before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London: In order to the abating the Animosities among Christians that have been occasion'd by Differences in Religion*, London, 1669.

<sup>25</sup> Howe, Union, pp 156-7.



But Howe had developed his ideas. Simple charity was not sufficient. Charity would bring about unity only within the context of "a clear, certain, efficacious faith of the Gospel".<sup>26</sup> In other words, it must be a distinctly Christian charity. In *Union Among Protestants*, Howe discoursed on the dynamic interplay between charity and "full assurance of understanding". A proper understanding of the Gospel (the "mystery of God") would lead naturally to a unifying love. In turn, when exercised, this love would allow further insight into the Gospel. Charity and assurance would thus build on each other to create a natural unity among Christians.

I will draw out the importance of *Union Among Protestants* through a comparison of its features with those of John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, published in 1689. This process will throw light on both men, inform our understanding of seventeenth-century ideas on toleration and further refine the model employed in this thesis.

The importance of John Locke (1632-1704) in intellectual histories of the later Stuart period is enormous. There is much current attention to Locke's social and intellectual links with the divines of the day. Some historians, notably Richard Ashcraft, seek to associate Locke closely with Nonconformity.<sup>27</sup> Others find continuities with "latitude men"

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<sup>26</sup> Howe, Union, p 160

<sup>27</sup> See R. Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics; "John Locke, Religious Dissent, and The Origins of Liberalism" in G.J. Schochet (ed) Restoration, Ideology, and Revolution, (Folger Institute Papers), Washington, 1990, pp 149-167; "Latitudinarianism and toleration: historical myth versus

such as Stillingfleet and Tillotson.<sup>28</sup> This fascination with Locke is alone a sufficient reason to use his ideas on toleration as a control alongside which to place Howe's views. There are, however, other reasons to link the two men. Indeed, they appear to have been friends.<sup>29</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Locke took an interest in the Stillingfleet controversy (he owned a copy of Howe's *Letter Written Out of the Country*<sup>30</sup>). His influential *Letter on Toleration*, although not published until 1689, was written in 1685, only two years after Howe's *Union Among Protestants*.

Locke's political associations have been long recognised. Howe's have not been fully appreciated. A connection is likely. The principal evidence for this comes from an enigmatic incident in Howe's career. In August 1685 he abruptly left London to travel to Europe with Philip, Lord Wharton. Having told few of his decision to go, he had to write a letter back to his congregation to account for his

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political history" in R. Kroll, R. Ashcraft, P. Zagorin (eds) Philosophy, science, and religion in England 1640-1700, Cambridge, 1992, pp 151-177. A similar connection is attempted, unconvincingly, by J.W. Baker, "Church, State, and Toleration: John Locke and Calvin's Heirs in England", in W.F. Graham (ed), Later Calvinism: International Perspectives, Vol. XXII, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 1994, pp 525-543.

<sup>28</sup> e.g. G.A.J. Rogers, "Locke and the latitude-men: ignorance as a ground for toleration", in Kroll et al Philosophy, science, and religion in England 1640-1700, pp 230-252 and, in the same volume of essays, J. Marshall "John Locke and Latitudinarianism", pp 253-282.

<sup>29</sup> See the reference to Howe in a letter from Isabella Duke to Locke, Octb. 21, 1686 in E.S. De Beer (ed) The Correspondence of John Locke, 8 Vols, Oxford, 1976, Vol 3, Letter 873, p 58.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison & Laslett, The Library of John Locke, p 159.

disappearance.<sup>31</sup> He would not return until 1687.

Although Howe's behaviour in this instance has caused some puzzlement to his hagiographers, they have proved equal to the task. His failure to give advance warning they blame on the short notice Howe himself received of the offer to accompany Wharton.<sup>32</sup> His honour and integrity are thus preserved.

This is, however, an unsatisfactory interpretation. Final preparations were certainly rushed<sup>33</sup> but the secrecy surrounding the journey did not arise merely from a lack of notice. Howe may have been given little warning of the precise timing of his departure, but he made it clear in his letter that the concept of the trip had an earlier provenance. Even so, he

could not so much as bid farewell to [you], the solemnity whereof you know our circumstances would not admit. Nor could I have opportunity to communicate to you the grounds of my taking this long journey, being under promise while the matter was under consideration, not to speak of it to anyone that was not concerned immediately about it.<sup>34</sup>

The larger question of the trip itself has been equally

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<sup>31</sup> J. Howe, Letter to His Congregation and Friends, [London, 1685], Works, III, pp 556-560.

<sup>32</sup> Calamy p 113; Rogers p 223; Horton pp 159-160; Scott p 52.

<sup>33</sup> Wharton had been granted a passport on 7 August and was in Dover expecting to travel within five days. Unfavourable winds delayed the actual departure until 18 August. See J.K. Clark Goodwin Wharton, Oxford, 1984, pp 139-40. This chronology corrects Jones' suggestion that the party did not leave England until December 1685 (see G.F.T. Jones, Saw-Pit Wharton: The Political Career from 1640-1691 of Philip, fourth Lord Wharton, Sydney, 1967, p 254.

<sup>34</sup> Howe, Letter to His Congregation, p 556.

poorly explained. Why did Howe chose exile when others (such as Alsop, Bates and Humphrey) remained in London? In his letter, he cited the effects of the ongoing persecution and his preference for an untroubled existence.

It...has been my settled habitual sense and sentiment for a long time, to value...peace and quiet, with some tolerable health, more than life.<sup>35</sup>

Howe's biographers have uncritically accepted his need to escape the vicissitudes of the general pressure on Dissent. Yet, if a personal dislike of strife was indeed all that lay behind Howe's departure, this alone would challenge the portrayal of him as the fearless champion of Nonconformity. He himself hinted at other reasons but declined to detail them as the exercise "would lose time that I may more profitably employ, for both you and myself". This excuse was probably convenient. There is evidence to suggest that Howe's decision to leave related more to specific, immediate danger than to timidity or general discomfiture.

The context of Howe's sudden departure, in August 1685, is important. Monmouth's rebellion had been crushed only one month previously. The arrests and trials of those implicated were still in train. Howe's abrupt migration must be understood in the context of Monmouth's failed cause. One who would be executed for his part in the uprising was John Hicke, John Howe's former brother-in-law.<sup>36</sup> Another friend,

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<sup>35</sup> Howe, Letter to His Congregation, p 556.

<sup>36</sup> Howe's sister, Hicke's first wife, Abigail, had died in 1675. By 1685 Hicke had remarried. For Hicke see entries in DNB, CR and R.L. Greaves & R. Zaller, Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century, (3 Vols), Brighton, 1982.

Matthew Mead, had been implicated in the 1683 Rye House plot and was a principal figure in the Monmouth conspiracy. Like Howe, he fled to the Netherlands in 1685.<sup>37</sup> In the early 1680s Howe had had contact with the conspirator Robert Ferguson.<sup>38</sup> Along with several who would be subsequently implicated, Howe had met with Monmouth in the Autumn of 1682.<sup>39</sup>

Of the conspirators not caught in 1685, Greaves points out that "a surprising number...made their way to the continent."<sup>40</sup> There is no reliable evidence to implicate either Howe or Wharton in the rebellion itself.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Wharton feared increased persecution of Dissenters and the associations of both men with many of those involved undoubtedly placed them at risk.<sup>42</sup> Wharton, who

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<sup>37</sup> On Mead's radical involvement see R.L. Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom, pp 286-289; "The Rye House Plotting, Nonconformist Clergy, and Calvin's Resistance Theory" in W.F. Graham ed. Later Calvinism: International Perspectives, 1994, pp 505-520 esp. pp 517-519.

The same age as Howe, Mead was a contemporary at Cambridge (although Howe dates their first meeting to about 1656. When Mead died in 1699, Howe preached the funeral sermon - J. Howe, A Funeral Sermon for the Reverend Matthew Mead [London, 1699], Works, III, pp 458-481, p 477.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Ferguson to his wife, July 1680, S.P. Dom. Car. II, 414, No. 5 (C.S.P.D. Charles II, Vol. 19, 1679/80, p 541).

<sup>39</sup> Memo of Sergeant Ramsay, Sept. 17-25, S.P. Dom. Car. II, 420, no. 116 (C.S.P.D. Charles V 21, pp 429-30).

<sup>40</sup> Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom, p 295.

<sup>41</sup> Goodwin Wharton recorded in his autobiography that his father was a conspirator but his biographer rates Goodwin an unreliable witness and there is no support for his suggestion in any other record - see Clark, Goodwin Wharton, p 343 n. 5.

<sup>42</sup> G.F.T. Jones p 253; Clark p 140.

arranged and financed Howe's trip, had disingenuously obtained leave from the King on the basis of a journey to France.<sup>43</sup> The actual destinations were first Emmerich and then Utrecht - both in the Netherlands and both continental refuges for Nonconformist and political exiles.

Howe settled in Utrecht. He preached regularly in the English Church and assisted in the training of young men for ministry. He was reported to have met with the fugitive Robert Ferguson. This Howe strenuously denied in a letter to the English Consul in which he protested his "detestation of any practices against Government".<sup>44</sup> This avowal is consistent with the message of a sermon Howe preached in Utrecht on January 9, 1687. John Erskine recorded that Howe

went near to be against the using of means for effectuating such changes as may with ground be expected both in Church and civil affairs.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, if not himself one of their number, he did have contact with such rebels or sympathisers as Locke, Mead, Sir John Thompson (and his chaplain Walter Cross) and Sir Patience

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<sup>43</sup> S.P. Dom Jac. II, Entry Book 336, p 197, Aug 7 1685 (C.S.P.D. James II, Vol 1, p 441). See also BL Add. MSS 41,818, fol. 106v; G.T.F. Jones p 254, Clark, Goodwin Wharton, p 343 n. 7; Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom, p 419 n25.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from John Howe, Utrecht, July 15/25 [16]86 - British Library Add Ms 41819 fol 213r. In this letter Howe makes another mention of poor health. On Ferguson see R.L. Greaves & R. Zaller (eds), Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century, (3 Vols), Brighton, 1982, Vol. I, pp 276-7.

<sup>45</sup> J. Erskine, Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687, Edinburgh, 1893, p 219.

Ward.<sup>46</sup> Whilst in Holland he also built contacts with the court of William of Orange. He discussed the future of Nonconformity with Gilbert Burnet (1643-1675 - a confidant of both William and Mary and later Bishop of Salisbury).<sup>47</sup> He had at least one audience, on the eve of his return to England, with the royal couple themselves.<sup>48</sup>

There can be little doubt where Howe's sympathies lay in the mid-1680s. His activities placed him in orbits very close to those of John Locke. His surprise departure for Holland may not have been as a fugitive, but it was almost certainly prompted by his connections with those who were. It is most likely that, in August 1685, the "solemnity of [Howe's] circumstances" was greater than has hitherto been recognised.

Locke's *Letter* might initially appear an unlikely candidate for direct comparison to *Union Among Protestants*. Whereas Howe restricted his comments to the private sphere, Locke addressed the role of the civil magistrate.<sup>49</sup> Howe's

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<sup>46</sup> Calamy pp 126-127; G.F. Nuttall, "English Dissenters in the Netherlands 1640-1689" in Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgschiedenis, 59, 1978, pp 37-54; Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics, pp 471-2; Greaves, Secrets of the Kingdom, pp 295-302.

<sup>47</sup> Calamy pp 127-8. Like Howe, Burnet was an intimate of the Wharton family - G.F.T. Jones p 255, Clark, Goodwin Wharton, p 332 n. 32.

<sup>48</sup> On the basis of Howe's own report, Calamy (pp 130-1) asserts there were several meetings with William. Details are given of only this one. See also Lacey pp 186, 199-200, 343 n. 41.

<sup>49</sup> J. Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689) reprinted in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds) John Locke: A Letter Concerning Toleration in Focus, London, 1991, pp 12-56, p 17.

arguments called for unity among Christians, based on tolerant acceptance of difference. Locke pursued the related but different cause of toleration within the state. There were, however, considerable points of overlap.

Both Howe and Locke built their cases on the cruciality of charity. Locke opened with an allusion to Johannine themes. Charity is essential both to Christianity and toleration.

If the Gospel and the apostle may be credited, no man can claim to be a Christian without charity, and without that faith which works, not by force, but by love.<sup>50</sup>

Their joint dependence on charity was matched by an inwardly oriented view of religion. This has been noted several times from Howe's writing. For Howe the value of full assurance was that it produced "an inward vital owning" of the truth.<sup>51</sup>

Locke appeared equally certain:

all the life and power of true religion consists in the inward and full persuasion of the mind.<sup>52</sup>

For both writers, individual conscience was central.

Howe's declaration

to do anything against the preponderating inclination of my judgement and conscience were great wickedness<sup>53</sup>

appears to find an echo in Locke.

No way whatsoever that I shall walk in against the dictates of my conscience, will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed.<sup>54</sup>

If the comparison were halted at this superficial level

<sup>50</sup> Locke, Letter, p 14.

<sup>51</sup> Howe, Union, p 162.

<sup>52</sup> Locke, Letter, p 18.

<sup>53</sup> Howe, Union, p 180.

<sup>54</sup> Locke, Letter, p 32.



and considered according to the model proposed in this thesis, Howe and Locke might seem to occupy the same space on an ecclesiological spectrum. Their shared emphases on charity, inward religion and individual conscience would suggest that both were invisibilists, differing only in degree from such as Owen and Baxter. But would such an interpretation be valid? A closer analysis reveals distinct differences between Locke and Howe. The contrast both refines and confirms the spectrum model.

Gary Remer has pointed out that Locke's case for toleration had two major strands. One highlighted the individual's right to conscience, the other was a version of what Remer calls "the sceptical case for toleration" and what G.A.J. Rogers terms "the argument from ignorance".<sup>55</sup> John Howe also employed these categories, but conceived and employed them in a fashion fundamentally different from that of Locke. I shall discuss the two arguments separately.

Though both proclaimed its importance, Howe and Locke had different understandings of the nature of conscience. For Locke, conscience was reduced to judgment. This was explicitly stated in his *Essay Upon Human Understanding*. Conscience

is nothing else, but our own Opinion or Judgment of the Moral rectitude or pravity of our own actions.<sup>56</sup>

The individual must "by meditation, study, search, and his own

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<sup>55</sup> G. Remer, "Humanism, Liberalism, & the Sceptical Case for Religious Toleration", *Polity*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, Fall, 1992, pp 21-43; Rogers, "Locke and the Latitude-men", *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> J. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, [London, 1689] ed P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, 1975, p 70.

endeavours"<sup>57</sup> attain the "full persuasion of the mind" which lay at the heart of true religion. Locke's conscience had only one constructive input and that was human. Its output is similarly terrestrial, focused on "actions".

Howe, by contrast, did not so confine conscience. It was not merely a matter of individual decision, rational or otherwise. Rather, conscience was one end of a relationship: "conscience towards God". More than mere "action" it produced the richer idea of obedience. It must lead to "an 'acknowledgement', an inward, vital owning, a cordial embrace".<sup>58</sup> Howe's "conscience" thus had a twin focus: first on God and then, dependent on that encounter, on compliance.

Related differences may be observed in their ecclesiologies. Locke regarded the Church simply as "a voluntary society of men".<sup>59</sup> Individuals were free to pursue their salvation in whichever of these societies they chose. As importantly, they were free to leave if they perceived their salvific interests were not being promoted.

Howe acknowledged the responsibility and right of the individual to seek God's favour for himself.

[W]ho can doubt but I ought to use for my soul...the aptest means that I can ordinarily have for the promoting its edification and salvation?<sup>60</sup>

He would not, however, accept Locke's pragmatic reduction of the Church to a society for public worship. The Church

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<sup>57</sup> Locke, Letter, pp 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> Howe, Union, pp 161-2

<sup>59</sup> Locke, Letter, p 20.

<sup>60</sup> Howe, Union, p 174.

transcended small groups. *Union Among Protestants* was not a call to the Church of England to leave Dissenters alone. It was a plea to all parties to recognise and promote their oneness.

[Charity is not] a love to Christians of this or that party or denomination only. That were as much unduly to straighten and confine it. The love that is owing to Christians as such, as it belongs to them only, belongs to *all* them who, in profession and practice, do own sincere and incorrupt Christianity. To limit our Christian love to a party of Christians, truly so called, is so far from serving the purpose now to be aimed at [unity], that it resists and defeats it.<sup>61</sup>

The difference from Locke went further. To Howe, "society", no matter how big and whatever its purpose, would be an inadequate description of the people of God. Just as conscience had a divine ingredient, so did the Church. It was a spiritual organism - the body of Christ. Joining it may have had an inevitable voluntary component but leaving it was not so simple. Locke suggested that, if the Christian discovered error or incongruity he was "as free to go out as...to enter".<sup>62</sup> To Howe this was unacceptably casual. Even in "cases of great wickedness" no member could break

from the body of other Christians in the world, so as not to be concerned in the affairs of the body.<sup>63</sup>

In all the writings examined in this chapter, Howe placed great importance on the individual. But always it was the individual before God, directly receiving divine grace or inspiration. Howe's was the individual shorn of mediating

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<sup>61</sup> Howe, Union, p 165.

<sup>62</sup> Locke, Letter, p 20.

<sup>63</sup> Howe, Charity, p 471.

structure and forms. In the *Letter*, Locke was able to discuss conscience and the Church almost entirely in terms of the human alone, reliant only upon native capacity to choose and judge. As N. Wolterstorff describes it, in Locke's schema "God is never present to the mind".<sup>64</sup> Locke's was the individual effectively shorn of God. Howe never went that far. The Divine was always an active partner. Similarly, though both writers described religion as "inward", their concepts of "inwardness" differed markedly. Locke's inner world was the semi-autonomous world of the mind. Howe used "inner" as a cypher for "spiritual". His inward realm was the scene of transcendent encounter with God.

Differences of a similar nature are found in the second strand of Locke's case for toleration. Remer traces the roots of the "sceptical case" for toleration to the Greek "New Academy" philosophers. Cicero was an important exponent and authority.<sup>65</sup> The argument depended upon a "mitigated scepticism" which, though acknowledging that absolute certainty is not available, nevertheless found enough probability on crucial issues to act as if certainty were possible on those matters. The test of that probability was the consensus of the community. The result was a limited freedom of opinion. Only those things on which the community as a whole agreed could be insisted upon.

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<sup>64</sup> N. Wolterstorff, "Locke's Philosophy of Religion" in V. Chappell (ed), The Cambridge Companion to Locke, Cambridge, 1994, pp 172-198, p 186.

<sup>65</sup> Remer p 25.

In the sixteenth century the sceptical case was picked up by humanist thinkers, notably Erasmus. Once again the community determined essential ideas. There was, however, an important difference. The community was held to be coterminous with the institutional Church. Indeed it was the Church, guided as it was by the Holy Spirit, which formed the consensus. Consensus, with the benefit of divine input, could be held to be certain, not merely probable. The humanist case was that toleration was advisable on matters indifferent, but was to be denied on the essentials.<sup>66</sup>

Like Chillingworth before him, Locke's scepticism ran deeper than that of the humanists. He preferred something closer to the Academicians' version. Not even things essential could be treated as certain. Faith depended upon probability.<sup>67</sup> Locke held back, however, from total toleration on this ground. It was an unresolved tension in his case that conscience could not be exercised without a belief in God. He assumed as axiomatic that all Christians agreed that Jesus was the Messiah. Although in theory themselves matters only of probability, disagreement on these basic doctrines was not contemplated. The inconsistency was evaded in practice because disputes almost invariably turned on matters on which Locke held there to be no consensus. On such, not even probability was possible and toleration must be

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<sup>66</sup> Remer pp 26-30.

<sup>67</sup> Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, pp 654-655.

extended.<sup>68</sup>

Howe, too, employed a mitigated scepticism. Rogers has shown the "argument from ignorance" to be characteristic of other Platonists, notably More and Glanvill.<sup>69</sup> Howe integrated his platonist epistemology with charity and his faith in the immediate relation of God to the human conscience. His structure was a variant of the humanist sceptical case. On matters indifferent, one could not be certain. On these, Howe agreed with Locke that no Christian could judge another. However, although the two men cite the same biblical text, their separate conceptions of conscience produced parallel differences on forbearance. Locke refused the right to judge error in another.<sup>70</sup> Howe's concern was with relationship - "the posture of his heart Godward". Sincerity, rather than error, was the crucial issue in assessing the actions of another.

I can at least refrain from censuring my fellow Christians...most of all when the matter wherein I presume to sit in judgment upon another is of so high a nature as the posture of his heart Godward: a matter peculiarly belonging to another tribunal, of divine cognizance, and which we all confess to be only known to

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<sup>68</sup> See Remer pp 36-37. Wootton points out that, in the first Letter, the principal argument is that letting either civil or ecclesiastical authorities determine one's religion is an irrational abdication. It is irrational because, in matters of religion, these authorities are no better able to discern the truth than the individual - see D. Wootton, "Introduction" in D. Wootton (ed) John Locke: Political Writings, Harmondsworth, 1993, pp 7-122, pp 94-110.

<sup>69</sup> Rogers, "Locke and the Latitude-men", pp 235-242. See also A. Gabbey, "'A disease incurable': scepticism and the Cambridge Platonists" in R.H. Popkin & A. Vanderjagt (eds) Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Leiden, 1993, pp 71-91.

<sup>70</sup> Locke, Letter, pp 24-5.

God himself. And if I would take upon me to conclude a man insincere, and a hypocrite, only because he is not of my mind in these smaller things that are controverted among us, how would I form my argument? No one can, with sincerity, differ from that man whose understanding is so good and clear, as to apprehend all things with absolute certainty, just as they are; and then go on to assume "But my understanding is as good and clear as," &c. It is hard to say whether the uncharitableness of the one assertion, or the arrogance of the other is greater; and whether both be more immoral or absurd. But the impiety is worst of all..."Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" Rom. xiv. 4<sup>71</sup>

Operating on this subjective level, Howe was even wary of persuasion.

[M]en of...reason and conscience...bend themselves by argument to convince the reason, and satisfy the consciences of such as differ from them. But herein also there may be an excess that is unprofitable and grievous to those they would work upon by this course<sup>72</sup>

This caution sprang from a distinctive form of the argument from ignorance, one which acknowledged "idiosyncrasy".

The notion of peculiar attributes or "constitutional inclinations" of understanding in individuals did not have a long history in 1683. The Oxford English Dictionary cites the first use of "idiosyncrasy" in this sense by the ubiquitous Joseph Glanvill in 1665. The title of Glanvill's work is instructive: *Scepsis Scientifica: or, Confest Ignorance the way to science in an essay of the vanity of dogmatizing, and confident opinions.*<sup>73</sup> Glanvill identified idiosyncrasy as a major factor in error.

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<sup>71</sup> Howe, Union, pp 177-8.

<sup>72</sup> Howe, Union, p 180. Compare Locke on the duty of persuasion - Letter, p 19.

<sup>73</sup> London, 1665.

[I]n a sense the *complexion* of the *mind*, as well as *manners*, follows the *Temperament* of the *Body*. On this account some men are genially disposed to some *Opinions*, and naturally as averse to others.<sup>74</sup>

Howe made much of this idea. On the matters at dispute between Church and Dissent, he called for caution before imposing any one interpretation.

What is another man's opinion to signify against my sense and constant experience? Is there not such a thing as a mental *idiosyncrasy* (or peculiarity of temper) as well as a bodily? and whereto what is most agreeable, any man that is not destitute of the ordinary understanding is the fittest judge himself<sup>75</sup>

Once these "peculiarities of temper" were acknowledged, the exercise of forbearance became the more essential.

[W]hile there is any thing colourable to be alleged for this or that way, true Christian love, compassion of human frailty, and a duly humble sense of a man's own, would oblige him to think, that conscience towards God may have a greater hand (though, with some, misguided itself) in guiding men the different ways they take, than is commonly thought: and to consider, though such and such reasons seem not weighty to me, they may to some others, who are as much afraid of sinning against God as I; and perhaps their understandings as good in other matters as mine.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, idiosyncrasy was encountered as much in emotional preference, or taste as in understanding. These affections, though not rational, were not to be despised. They too could help build faith.

Though it be true, that our spiritual edification lies more in the informing of our judgements, and confirming our resolutions, than in the gusts and relishes of affection, yet who sees not that these are of great use even to the other...? And they that think all this

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<sup>74</sup> Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica*, p 89. Nevertheless, Glanvill appears to have been very wary of any wider scepticism - see Gabbey pp 71-2.

<sup>75</sup> Howe, *Union*, p 174.

<sup>76</sup> Howe, *Union*, p 175.



alleged difference is but fancy show they understand little of human nature, and less of religion.<sup>77</sup>

Latitude was thus necessary "in these smaller things that are controverted among us". However, the same arguments did not apply to the essentials of the faith. Howe was not a thoroughgoing sceptic. Like the Academicians he found crucial matters established in the consensus of the community. In his 1675 *Living Temple* he argued the existence of God on the ground of "common assent". Significantly he quoted Cicero as a principal authority.<sup>78</sup> In the preface to the 1681 *Thoughtfulness*, he was quite explicit.

As was said by one that was a great and early light in the Christian Church; "That is not philosophy which is professed by this or that sect, but that which is true of all sects." So nor do I take that to be religion, which is peculiar to this or that party of Christians...but that which is according to the mind of God among them all.<sup>79</sup>

Howe did not reduce truth discerned in this manner to mere probability. In this respect he was in line with the humanists. Yet, there is an important departure. Erasmus allowed only the Church to draw from the well of consensus. Howe gave a bucket to each individual. Here his invisibilist ecclesiology intruded. The activity of the Spirit was not limited to the authorities of the Church. Individuals did not determine essentials but, in keeping with his elevation of conscience, Howe allowed that they may recognise them.

All good men, in all times and ages of the Christian church, have a constant value and love for the great

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<sup>77</sup> Howe, Union, pp 176-77.

<sup>78</sup> Howe, Living Temple, I, pp 21-36.

<sup>79</sup> Howe, Thoughtfulness, p 392.

substantials of religion, which have in them that inward evidence and excellency as command a rectified mind and heart.<sup>80</sup>

Howe was here building upon the religious epistemology he first articulated in *Delighting in God*. The regenerate were blessed with a special communication from God.

Wherefore there is somewhat to be apprehended by God's representation of himself to the minds of this regenerate people, at least *more clearly* than by other men.<sup>81</sup>

Howe's scepticism about inessentials was mitigated by a positive affirmation of religious knowledge about those things which are essential to salvation. These were delineated by consensus but were confirmed to the individual by the inward certainty which arose from the soul's communication with God. All of this was held together by charity. Howe's was a case of impressive symmetry and coherence. As noted above, *Union Among Protestants* described a complex interaction between charity and assurance. This same interaction is found in the Johannine letters on which Howe was working in these years.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is Love.

- I John 4:7-8

Howe did not cite this verse in *Union* but it contains the pith of his argument: by loving we know God.<sup>82</sup> This knowledge allowed Christians better to discern the essential from the indifferent making them thus able to love all the more.

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<sup>80</sup> Howe, *Union*, p 176.

<sup>81</sup> Howe, *Delighting in God*, pp 492.

<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, the passage was cited by Glanvill, *Catholick Charity*, p 3.

*Union Among Protestants* confirmed Howe's radical emphasis on the immediate, transcendent activity of God. It was an integrated case, yet one to be distinguished from Locke's. Although both employed individual conscience and the argument from ignorance, Locke and Howe placed these arguments in quite different contexts. At the very heart of Howe's approach was a confidence in direct contact between divine and human. Locke had no positive role for such revelation. His arguments depended almost entirely upon human capacity. God had slipped from the picture in any active role.<sup>83</sup>

This distinction between the ideas of Locke and Howe assists in the essential task of identifying the boundaries which encompass the ecclesiological spectrum I have proposed. Although theoretical focal points have been nominated, any spectrum of emphasis is practically infinite. One cannot identify, in any one work or individual, a terminus. Even greater stress on either immanence or transcendence always remains theoretically possible. It is, however, important to accept that some ideas, though similar in argument and result, may be outside the ecclesiological ellipse altogether.

Locke was such a case. The model I have suggested incorporates a range of ways of understanding the activity of

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<sup>83</sup> Nicholas Jolley has recently shown that Leibniz' principal objection to Locke's philosophy was Locke's materialism - N. Jolley, Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the New Essays on Human Understanding, Oxford 1984, esp pp 1-34. Stillingfleet identified atheism lurking behind Locke's protested theism - see Hutton, "Science, philosophy, and atheism" pp 118-19. Marshall argues that Locke is best understood in the context of socinianism - "John Locke and Latitudinarianism" pp 269-73.

God. Yet, however much stress on the immanent or the transcendent may vary in degree, divine activity itself is presupposed. Locke effectively excluded himself from this schema. His picture was so drawn as virtually to leave God out. Though he shared an interest in the related, intersecting issue of authority, Locke's case did not truly depend on Christian ecclesiology at all. He was arguing on a different plane, beyond the boundary of the postulated ellipse.

There are wider implications. Ashcraft has examined the rationalism of Restoration divines, arguing persuasively that

there was not one, but two "rational theologies", propounded during this period; one by the latitudinarians, and the other by the dissenters.<sup>84</sup>

Citing Howe as one example, he distinguishes Dissenting rationalism as follows.

For nonconformists, "rational theology" meant that the linkage between divine reason and human reason is an essential precept of religion.<sup>85</sup>

By this interpretation, Dissenters emphasised the continuity of their reason and their conscience with the mind of God. Ashcraft finds Locke's rationality to be in sympathy the Dissenting position. Anglicans by contrast breached the divine/human continuity by "interposing the arbitrary will of the magistrate". The exercise of individual conscience must be subject to this civil authority.

In the same volume of essays, but taking a markedly different approach, Rogers endeavours to trace a line between Locke and the latitude-men. This he finds in their common use

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<sup>84</sup> Ashcraft, "Latitudinarianism", p 155.

<sup>85</sup> Ashcraft, "Latitudinarianism" p 162.

of the very argument from ignorance which has been discussed above. Rogers acknowledges that the line is not unbroken. For one thing, it is clearly problematical to locate the tolerationist Locke among the authoritarian "Anglicans" Ashcraft describes. The "latitude-men" did not derive toleration from the argument from ignorance.

It is only with Locke that this more radical stage of the implications of the argument is reached.<sup>86</sup>

Both perspectives on Locke may be assessed in the light of the comparison with Howe. Ashcraft overstates the difference between Anglicans and Dissenters. Both groups linked human rationality to God's. He rightly finds that Anglicans saw this link as indirect and mediated but is incorrect in suggesting that they regarded the magistrate's will as "arbitrary". The immanentists in the Church saw civil authority as a medium through which God worked, not as a barrier to his will. Howe's concern for unmediated relationship with God also fits the model of "a linkage between divine wisdom and human wisdom". Locke, however, cannot be so described. It is on this question of divine/human encounter that Locke and Howe must be distinguished.

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<sup>86</sup> Rogers, "Locke and the Latitude-men", p 242.

It is interesting to reflect that, for Joseph Glanvill, the concept of idiosyncrasy did not translate into toleration. Instead he took the view that "the *Form and Circumstances of Government* was to be left to the *Ruling Powers* in the Church." (see Rogers, "Locke and the latitude-men" p 241.) Glanvill's writings in support of the "new philosophy" are replete with allusions to the immanent work of God. He rejected, for instance, the accusation that the new way encouraged unbelief. Properly understood, nature is "but his instrument, and works nothing but as empowered from him." (cited by H.R. McAdoo, The Spirit of Anglicanism, London, 1965, p 166). See also Glanvill, Essays, Essays IV and V.

In different ways, Rogers' appraisal can also be challenged. Both Alsop<sup>87</sup> and Howe employed forms of the argument from ignorance in favour of toleration. Only by ignoring these Dissenters can it be maintained that Locke alone realised the radical implications. Moreover, the link Rogers makes between Locke and the latitude-men is tenuous. I have suggested that Locke is fundamentally out of step with a Dissenter who both used similar arguments and favoured toleration. Only by questionable logic may he be linked with Churchmen who, though they appear to have employed one argument in common, came to a different conclusion altogether.

Locke stands apart. Marshall notes parallels but concludes that "on many issues Locke differed substantially from the latitudinarians".<sup>88</sup> Both Churchmen and Dissenters were influenced by the way they understood God to work. Only for Locke does God become largely irrelevant altogether. His leap was radical indeed. Success in placing Locke among either the Dissenters or the Churchmen is improbable. If links are to be sought, continuities between Church and Dissent are more likely. The model I propose in this thesis is one attempt to map this progression.

The chief characteristics of John Howe's thinking about Church disputes of the 1680s were the centrality of Charity and his scepticism about "inessentials". *Union Among*

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<sup>87</sup> See chapter five, p 207 above.

<sup>88</sup> Marshall, "John Locke and Latitudinarianism", esp. pp 273-4

*Protestants* was the best statement in this position. Its arguments were repeated in short form, in his *Letter to Dr Barlow* in 1684.<sup>89</sup>

The few available details of Howe's experiences and activities in Utrecht have been noted above. The interval on the continent marks a definite turning point in his career. The five years following his return in 1687 were the most politically active of his life. His congregation, perhaps aware of how precarious his situation had been in August 1685, appears to have welcomed him back. With Owen gone and Baxter failing he assumed a major role in Nonconformist leadership.

Dr Goldie has noted apparent contradictions between the theoretical positions of John Locke and the pragmatic collaboration with James II of some of Locke's friends.<sup>90</sup> The turmoil of the times produced strange bed-fellows. Similar issues are presented when Howe's activities in this period are compared with those Vincent Alsop.

Of the respondents to Edward Stillingfleet in 1680, Vincent Alsop was probably the closest to Howe, notably in the degree of individualism both demonstrated. Both were Presbyterians in London and were known to one another. With their congregations, both appear to have come under

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<sup>89</sup> J. Howe, Letter to Dr Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, [London, 1684], Works, III, pp 552-555. This minor work was issued in response to Barlow's call for "the strict enforcement of the Laws against Dissenters" in January, 1684.

<sup>90</sup> M. Goldie, "John Locke's Circle and James II", HJ, 35, 3 (1992), pp 557-586.

considerable pressure in 1681-5.<sup>91</sup> Yet, despite the apparent nearness of their intellectual positions and their similar experiences, Howe and Alsop made quite different responses to James II.

Alsop had gone underground during the worst of the persecution but appears not to have left the country. As much as he was able, he continued his ministry through small gatherings of his flock. Unlike Howe, he was in London when James issued his first Indulgence, in April 1687. James, having alienated Churchmen and seeking a new support base, desired public endorsement for this measure from Dissenters. Anabaptists and Quakers gave this readily enough but most others were suspicious of the King's motives and generally held back. Only a small group of "Presbyterian" and "Congregational" ministers addressed thanks to James. They were led by Vincent Alsop.<sup>92</sup> This act of collaboration was much criticised by the staunchly resistant bulk of the Nonconformist leaders.

Howe returned to England following James' Declaration, but joined the majority of his colleagues in refusing to accept its validity. He thus stood apart from Alsop on this important question. Prosaic reasons for their different responses are not hard to find. Alsop's son had been in the rebel army in 1685 and was facing execution. A father's need to curry favour with the King has been suggested as Alsop's

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<sup>91</sup> See Beddard, "Vincent Alsop" pp 166-173. Alsop, like Howe, maintained a close relationship with Lord Wharton.

<sup>92</sup> Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", pp 175-180; Keeble, Literary Culture pp 62-3.



motivation for addressing James.<sup>93</sup>

Howe by contrast had become closely associated with the Prince of Orange. Calamy records that William had warned Howe not to address thanks to the King.<sup>94</sup> Called to a private audience with James to explain his stance, Howe proffered the excuse that he lacked interest in "State affairs".<sup>95</sup> This explanation was disingenuous. Howe discussed politics with the likes of Hampden and Swynfen.<sup>96</sup> He was an active supporter of William; possibly meeting with his envoy during 1687.<sup>97</sup> In a later address to the then William III he claimed a clear-headed view that, under James II,

a design hath been industriously driven, that we might be made papists, to make us slaves; and for the enslaving us, to debauch us.<sup>98</sup>

After William's accession to the throne, but before the settlement of the religious question, Howe penned *The Case of*

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<sup>93</sup> Stoughton, IV, pp 119-120. A pardon was granted to the son soon after the delivery of the Address by Alsop. On this explanation for Alsop's actions see Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", pp 180-1.

<sup>94</sup> Calamy pp 130-1.

<sup>95</sup> Calamy p 136.

<sup>96</sup> Howe to John Swynfen Sept. 26, 1687 and Swynfen's draft reply, BL Add MSS 29910 ff 226-7.

<sup>97</sup> Lacey pp 199-200; Ashcraft, Revolutionary Politics, p 555. Ashcraft's assertions about Howe's actions following his return to London must be treated with caution. In places he confuses John Howe, Nonconformist Divine with "Jack" Howe, Parliamentarian (and sometimes even with the latter's brother, Emmanuel Scrope Howe). This is despite the accuracy of his secondary sources - see pp 516-7, 558 n 152, 595. For "Jack" Howe's family see B.D. Henning (ed), The Commons 1660-1690, History of Parliament, Vol. 11, pp 606-612.

<sup>98</sup> J. Howe, Dedication (prefixed to the third volume of Dr Manton's Works) [1690], Works, III pp 593-596, p 594.

*the Protestant Dissenters Represented and Argued*.<sup>99</sup> This was a political tract, containing very little theology. Howe represented the concern of the Dissenters, through all the problems of the Restoration, as being for "the civil interests of the nation".<sup>100</sup> On the reluctance of himself and others to endorse the Indulgence, he acknowledged the impact of Gaspar Fagel's *Letter* which had circulated in late 1687 and which purported to outline William's policy on toleration.<sup>101</sup> Opposition to James was sustained by hope of better things

if ever that happy change should be brought about, which none have now beheld with greater joy than we.<sup>102</sup>

To what extent Howe anticipated the events of 1688 cannot be determined. Nevertheless it may have been, as Goldie suggests for Locke, that Howe "knew something his friends did not, and it made the world of difference to the contingencies of their respective political lives."<sup>103</sup>

Important as these factors were, there was more to the actions of Alsop and Howe than paternal concern and political expediency. Beddard argues that Alsop's action was consistent with the principles he espoused in 1680. Alsop gave a high priority to Independency and individual conscience. Prepared to let high politics take its course, he naturally welcomed

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<sup>99</sup> J. Howe, *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters Represented and Argued*, [London, 1689], *Works*, III, pp 560-567.

<sup>100</sup> Howe, *Case*, p 564.

<sup>101</sup> For the circumstances and response to Fagel's *Letter* see Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics*, pp 485-89.

<sup>102</sup> Howe, *Case*, p 564.

<sup>103</sup> Goldie, "John Locke's Circle" p 586.

any move which allowed the free exercise of these principles. In terms of the model I propose, there is little surprise that Alsop joined with Anabaptists and Quakers in accepting the Indulgence. Though not as extreme as they, Alsop had in common with these groups an ecclesiology radically committed to the invisible Church. The only policy they sought was toleration. They had no reason to seek the alternative of comprehension. Moreover, formal constitutional niceties were to them of small consequence. As Beddard suggests

unlike his more fastidious and discriminating brethren [Alsop] did not bother whether toleration came by way of an exercise of the prerogative or by the promulgation of statute; for him the means were subordinate to the end.<sup>104</sup>

By contrast, Howe's political sensibilities, apparently latent in 1680, had been awakened by 1687. Had he moved away from the ecclesiological position he and Alsop had occupied? Had his invisibilist principles, worked out with care in the early 1680s, been overwhelmed by a political preference for William during Howe's stay in Utrecht and through his contact with such as Locke? Certainly *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters* contained few of the themes of the earlier works. There was even a section which could have been lifted directly from Locke's political theory. Commenting on the validity of the laws requiring uniformity, Howe denied there could be

so much as a pretence of authority derived for such purposes from the people, whom every one now acknowledges the first receptacle of derived governing power.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Beddard, "Vincent Alsop", p 179.

<sup>105</sup> Howe, Case, p 562.

Yet, although by 1689 Howe was more politically involved, it is unlikely that he had travelled very far from the ecclesiological territory he had occupied with Alsop at the beginning of the decade. In the *Case* he defended the Nonconformists who accepted Charles II's Indulgence in terms of which Alsop would have approved. Howe maintained that authority to govern true religion lay with God alone.

We are therefore injuriously reflected on, when it is imputed to us that we have...acknowledged an illegal dispensing power. We have done no other thing herein, than we did when no dispensation was given or pretended, in conscience of duty to Him that gave us breath: nor did, therefore, practise otherwise, because we thought these laws dispensed with, but because we thought them not laws.<sup>106</sup>

In failing to respond to James II, Howe did not reject toleration *per se*. He wanted it as much as did Alsop, but judged it advisable to wait for what William could deliver. Even so, Howe's pragmatism does not alone explain his different path. Unlike Alsop, he continued to seek comprehension (still a live, if fading, cause when *The Case* was published) as an ideal.

If Howe had not moved outside the ecclesiological spectrum into Locke's materialist orbit, had he shifted in the opposite direction, to a more visiblist position? Spurr has identified in Restoration Churchmen the fear that comprehension would "import schism into the Church".<sup>107</sup> This was inexplicable to Howe.

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<sup>106</sup> Howe, *Case*, p 563.

<sup>107</sup> Spurr, "Schism and the Restoration Church", p 420.

[T]he favouring of us...will as much ruin the church as its enlargement and additional strength will signify its ruin.<sup>108</sup>

Howe's continued interest in comprehension came not from a new attraction to the visible but grew out of his concern for charity. In 1687 it was natural to him to endeavour to keep alive the chances of comprehension, or at least rapprochement, which were being proffered by anxious Churchmen. He decided that that end was best served by opposing James' transparent attack on the established Church.

The comparison with Alsop confirms the value of the elliptical aspect of the model which is tested in this thesis. Alsop and Howe both clearly emphasised the invisible Church. Both radically emphasised the transcendent relation of God to human. Yet their ecclesiologies were not identical in all respects. Christian love did not assume the dynamic role in Alsop's thinking that it took in Howe's. For Alsop, the dominant concepts were centrifugal: Independency and individuality. Howe spoke little of Independency and, in his scheme, the centrifugal force of individual conscience was balanced by the centripetal energy of charity. These two divines each found positions within the ellipse which lie close to the invisible focus. Yet they did not occupy the same point. The model allows for similar degrees of emphasis on the visible/invisible spectrum whilst providing for distinctive expressions of this shared bias. Alsop and Howe exemplify this feature. Despite his unpopular line in 1687, Alsop was soon a prominent figure again. He and Howe remained close

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<sup>108</sup> Howe, Case, p 565.

colleagues. Alsop was an important subscriber to the Common Fund and a signatory to the 1691 *Heads of Agreement*. He and Howe were further associated in setting up the Salters' Hall lectures in 1694. Whatever they thought of his cooperation with James II, it is clear that his associates did not regard Alsop as beyond the pale theologically. The ecclesiologies of the two, albeit differently configured, remained compatible.

Howe returned to familiar themes in a second short publication of 1689. *Humble Requests Both to Conformists and Dissenters* appeared after the passing of the Act of Toleration.<sup>109</sup> By now, comprehension was a dead letter. Howe's fear was that the new environment would encourage criticism and legitimate disharmony. Many of the arguments of *Union Among Protestants* appeared in shortened form in *Humble Requests*. All were employed to minimise the importance of differences in "externals". If the

internal principles of [Christianity] may live and flourish in our own souls...there may at length cease to be any divided parties at all.<sup>110</sup>

With the failure of comprehension and the achievement of a modicum of toleration, Howe's efforts shifted to unifying Dissent. Moves towards what would be called the "Happy Union" between "Presbyterians" and "Congregationalists" began in 1690. The Common Fund for the support of the ministry was

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<sup>109</sup> J. Howe, *Humble Requests Both to Conformists and Dissenters, Touching Their Temper and Behaviour Toward One Another Upon the Lately Passed Indulgence*, [London, 1689], *Works*, III, pp 567-572.

<sup>110</sup> Howe, *Humble Requests*, p 570.

formally set up in London on 1 June of that year. Howe was a founding subscriber.<sup>111</sup> His personal commitment to the project cannot be questioned. He subscribed the grand sum of one hundred and sixty pounds annually, considerably more than any other.<sup>112</sup>

The Common Fund was but the precursor to a far more ambitious project. Howe was most likely the drafter of the *Heads of Agreement*, signed in 1691 and representing an attempt to provide for co-operation and support between the main Nonconformist groups.<sup>113</sup> On April 6, 1691 "above fourscore" "Presbyterian" and "Congregational" ministers agreed on a "Happy Union" of those groups. It was a moment of triumph for Howe and his closest collaborators, "Congregationalists" Matthew Mead and Increase Mather. Both these two men had been Nonconformist activists for most of their careers. Nevertheless, Howe appears to have been the senior figure in this venture.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Apparently, "Presbyterians" took the initiative in this venture. Of the four original subscribers on 9 April 1690, three (including Howe) were "Presbyterians". The wording of the minutes suggests the "Presbyterian" managers were selected first - Gordon pp 158-9, 164. See also Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, (1893) Boston, 1960, pp 445-6; Jones, Congregationalism, p 111; White, "The Twilight of Puritanism", pp 325-6.

<sup>112</sup> No other individual came near to Howe. Vincent Alsop subscribed a total of 110 pounds, Samuel Annesley 108. See Gordon pp 164-7.

<sup>113</sup> On Howe's role see Calamy p 181; Gordon pp 155-6, 189-90; Jones, Congregationalism, pp 111-2.

<sup>114</sup> Walker (p 445) suggests that "the strongest influence...in the accomplishment of the Union" was Mather. Mather certainly played a prominent role but his recent biographer concedes that Howe was the "main spirit behind the reconciliation" and that Mather was recruited as a "go-

The *Heads of Agreement*, though inevitably a compromise document, is revealing. The opening clause was overtly biased towards the invisible Church. Here, formally and explicitly stated, was the ecclesiology implicit in earlier works.

We acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ to have One Catholick Church, or Kingdom, comprehending all that are united to Him, whether in Heaven or Earth. And do conceive the whole multitude of visible Believers, and their Infant-Seed (commonly called the Catholick Visible Church) to belong to Christ's Spiritual Kingdom in this world: But for the notion of a Catholick Visible Church here, as it signifies its having been collected into any formed Society, under a Visible human Head on Earth, whether one person singly, or many collectively, We, with the rest of Protestants, unanimously disclaim it.<sup>115</sup>

This clause displayed the classic features of invisibilist ideas of the Church. The true church contained all Saints, in heaven and on earth. Visibility was conceived in individualistic terms and even then served merely to demonstrate the believer's membership of the spiritual body. Ecclesiastical form and authority, so important to Stillingfleet, were specifically rejected.

Though probably drafted by Howe, the *Heads of Agreement* seems closest to "Congregational" principles.<sup>116</sup> Congregational commentators have explained this by downplaying Howe's "Presbyterianism". Their interpretation depends upon the view that Howe was "Congregational" in his youth, only becoming a "Presbyterian" nominally and late in his career.

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between" - M.G. Hall, Last American Puritan, pp 238-9. See also Calamy p 181; Gordon pp 155-7; Walker pp 443-8; Jones, Congregationalism, p 111; Mather "Autobiography" p 338.

<sup>115</sup> Heads of Agreement Clause I, 1 (Walker p 457).

<sup>116</sup> On the compromise between the two positions see Watts pp 290-291.



The issue impinges directly on the themes of this thesis and may now be usefully addressed.

The Congregational case appears strong. Howe's associations with "Congregationalists" at University were noted in chapter three.<sup>117</sup> The *Episcopal Return* of 1665 listed him among Congregationalists at Torrington.<sup>118</sup> Later, hagiographical Congregationalists Stoughton, Horton, Dale, and Scott certainly wanted to make him one of their own; at least in spirit.<sup>119</sup> A biographer of John Owen nominated Howe as a virtual secret agent for Owen, whilst at Whitehall.<sup>120</sup> Williston Walker is forthright in his account.

So it came about that, under his desire for an honourable union with the Church of England, Howe drifted from association with the Congregationalists, and, without apparently any radical change of view on the subject of church polity, was numbered among the Presbyterians.<sup>121</sup>

Counting against the hopeful claims of Congregationalist historians are several telling features of Howe's career. He received a Presbyterian ordination. His relations by marriage were Presbyterian and it was to a Presbyterian (Baxter) that

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<sup>117</sup> See chapter three, pp 118-9 above.

<sup>118</sup> Turner, Original Records Vol II, p 1174.

<sup>119</sup> Stoughton, II, pp 210-11; Horton p 55; R.W. Dale, History of English Congregationalism, London, [1907], p 377; Scott p 9. See also F.J. Bremer, "Increase Mather's Friends: The Trans-Atlantic Congregational Network of the Seventeenth Century", Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. 94, Pt 1, 1984, pp 59-96, p 71.

<sup>120</sup> A. Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen" in W.H. Goold (ed), The Works of John Owen D.D., (16 Vols, 1850-53), London, 1965, Vol. I, pp XXI-CXXI, p XLIV.

<sup>121</sup> Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p 445. See also Dale p 475.

he turned for counsel when at Whitehall. His London church was Presbyterian. He was never listed among Congregationalists.

Assessments of Howe's own mind are difficult. As he was in Antrim at the time, he never took up a license under the Indulgence of 1672. Moreover, other than in the unique case of the *Heads of Agreement*, nowhere in his works does he devote any attention to specific questions of Church polity. Indeed, he confirmed the worst fears of James Webster in *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters*, declaring a willingness to accept and work within even an Episcopal system.

[T]he generality of the dissenters differ from the church of England in no substantials of doctrine and worship, no, nor of government, provided it be so managed, as to attain its true, acknowledged end.<sup>122</sup>

Yet, against the hopes of partisan biographers, the only acceptable view of Howe is that he preferred no one polity above any other. Walker is, in part, correct - Howe chose those allegiances which would best promote unity - but nominal "Presbyterianism" does not imply a reluctant departure from heartfelt "Congregationalism". To Howe, polity was a matter of theological indifference, compromised by historical uncertainty and individual idiosyncrasy. Compared to the task he pursued, it was a distraction.

You greatly prevaricate, if you are more zealously intent to promote independency than Christianity, presbytery than Christianity, prelacy than Christianity, as any of these are the interest of a party, and not considered in subserviency to the Christian interest, nor designed for promoting the edification and salvation of your own soul.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Howe, Case, p 565.

<sup>123</sup> Howe, Humble Requests, p 572.

There are ramifications which extend beyond Howe himself. The "Happy Union" was a creature of nascent denominational identities. Many divines gave conscious and public allegiance to one group or other. To this degree, traditional party labels retain some validity. Genuine differences of emphasis existed and would lead to division during the 1690s. Yet denominational historians have misrepresented the subtle watercolours of later Stuart Dissent as a line drawing. The standard terms mislead by focusing attention on narrow questions of polity. Individual allegiance was as likely determined by the form of ordination received as by views on Church government. In signing the "Heads of Agreement", "Presbyterians" could agree to a form which amounted to "Congregationalism". A leading figure like Howe could transcend rigid divisions. The diverse views revealed in the controversies of 1680 found a parallel in 1691. Simple nomenclatures based on formal Church polity fail to capture the complexities and shadings of Nonconformist ecclesiology.

There can be no doubting the impact of the Church disputes on Howe in the years 1681 to 1691. Pressure on Dissent forced him to develop and articulate ideas on toleration and unity. Concerned lest "our divisions be our ruin", he developed a complex combination of Christian charity and mitigated scepticism. His arguments depended on a radically transcendentalist appreciation of the way God relates to human beings. The result was a uniquely irenic ecclesiology which called at once for both tolerance and

unity. Howe never regarded comprehension and indulgence as alternatives. In his vision, both were possible and necessary as aspects of one Christian spirit. His conviction that this vision was indeed possible led him into the most publicly (and privately) activist period of his career.

The significance of Howe in this crucial period has been missed. Certainly from 1687 and probably earlier he was in the front rank of Nonconformity. His importance was realised by James II. When the ministers of London gathered to welcome William of Orange, it was John Howe who presented the address.<sup>124</sup> Despite this prominence, his thought has been ignored. This has been to the detriment of our understanding of later Stuart Dissent. In this chapter I have argued that John Locke is a poor guide to the ecclesiology of later Nonconformity. The same will be shown to be true of Richard Baxter. For reasons which will become clear, John Howe is to be preferred.

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<sup>124</sup> Calamy pp 139-142; Lacey pp 222-3.

"mere external peace"

Chapter Seven:

Disappointment and Hope in the 1690s

Because of illness, Richard Baxter had been out of the negotiations which led to the *Heads of Agreement* in 1691. Long experienced in struggles for unity, he rejoiced at the "very attempt" but warned "you must look that it should be assaulted by Cavil and Reproach."<sup>1</sup> His caution was well-founded. The "Happy Union" would founder within two years. Although some sharing of resources would continue into the 1720s, Nonconformists would not again come so close to institutional unity.

There were important theological factors involved. Forces which contributed to its alienation from the established Church would in turn advance the fragmentation of Dissent. The *Heads of Agreement* could not hold the parties together. The irenic drive and goodwill of such as Howe and Mead had advanced the front of institutional unity well beyond the supply lines of doctrinal agreement.

The 1690s proved to be a difficult decade for John Howe. The fragmentation of Nonconformity seems to have affected him deeply. After 1693 he appears to have abandoned the efforts towards formal reconciliation which had engaged him since 1680. Although sporadic attempts at unity, even comprehension, continued through the 1690s, there is no evidence to suggest that Howe had a part. Nevertheless, he remained active in

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<sup>1</sup> Baxter to "The United Protestant Nonconformists in London", 23 April, 1691 - Church Concord (1691) (see Keeble, Calendar, no. 1234).

other areas, retaining his pastoral post until just before his death, in 1705. His preaching and writing continued unabated. The emphasis, however, shifted. Though unity remained paramount, by the end of the century Howe evinced a disillusionment with debate and negotiation, indeed any endeavours which depend upon human, time-bound methods. His focus turned to ultimate Christian hope. Unity became an eschatological, rather than a present vision.

This chapter falls into three sections. I will first explore what his works published in the 1690s reveal of Howe's changing mind. I will argue that the "shift" to eschatology was actually a return to themes articulated in 1678. Howe's fundamental emphasis continued to be on transcendence and the immediate activity of God. A detailed comparison will then be made with the ecclesiology of Richard Baxter, as recently interpreted by William Lamont. It will be argued that Baxter and Howe, though sharing apparently similar opinions on many issues, were in fact a long way apart in theological approach. Finally, the implications of this comparison for the interpretative model proposed in this thesis will be considered.

The "Happy Union" was not as happy as it appeared. Across the spectrum of Nonconformist theology there were misgivings. The Union was to crack along some of these fault lines and ultimately collapse in the following years.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Mather (brother of Increase), though a nominated manager of the Common Fund, refused to sign the agreement. Some Independents were reluctant to be so closely

Serious tactical errors by Howe would contribute to this failure. The first can be traced back to 1689. Samuel Crisp, son of the deceased antinomian Tobias Crisp (1600-1643), issued posthumously some of his father's sermons.<sup>3</sup> In a seemingly innocuous act, Howe and a number of other prominent ministers certified that the sermons were in fact those of the elder Crisp. However, in his preface to the published version, Samuel Crisp maligned the views of Richard Baxter. Baxter was appalled at the attack, the publication itself, and the association with it of such as Howe. He responded publicly with a series at the popular Nonconformist forum, the Merchants' Hall lectures and in *The Scripture Gospel Defended* (1690). Howe sought to calm the gathering storm but was able to divert Baxter from public criticism of himself only by endorsing, along with several others, refutations of antinomianism, written by John Flavel and, most damagingly, Dr Daniel Williams.<sup>4</sup>

This action merely complicated matters further. The controversy highlights the importance of theological factors beyond the limits of Church polity. Many who identified themselves as "Independents" favoured a strongly Calvinist soteriology. Extreme versions of this system are open to the

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tied to those (like Baxter and Howe) who favoured "Sacramental Communion with the Church of England" - Gordon p 156. See also Walker pp 447-8; Dale p 475; Jones, Congregationalism, pp 112-3.

<sup>3</sup> T. Crisp, Christ Alone Exalted (1689).

<sup>4</sup> See J. Flavel, Planelogia: A Succinct and seasonable discourse...with an epistle...relative to Dr Crisp's works, (1691); D. Williams, Gospel Truth Stated and Vindicated (1692).



very charges of antinomianism which attended Tobias Crisp.<sup>5</sup>

It was to refute antinomianism that Williams wrote Gospel Truth Stated and Vindicated in 1692. Howe and the other signatories to Williams' pamphlet were all Presbyterians. Some Independents objected to what they interpreted as an oblique attack on their more orthodox views. Williams was already a controversial figure, involved in a parallel dispute concerning the extreme Independent, Richard Davis (1658-1714). The Crisp and Davis controversies combined to polarise the groups.<sup>6</sup>

Howe undoubtedly blundered in putting his name to the Crisp publication. Why had he done so? He most certainly did not share Tobias Crisp's views. His ideas on Grace were similar to those of Baxter. Rogers suggests that the certificate was a trick by the younger Crisp, intended to garner credibility to his own attack on Baxter.<sup>7</sup> This may be true; Howe does not appear to have known about Crisp's preface until publication.<sup>8</sup> However, another explanation for Howe's action is available.

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<sup>5</sup> It was his concern that some versions of Calvinism encouraged antinomianism which prompted Richard Baxter to develop his "middle way" from 1649. This modified Calvinism bordered on Arminianism and made Baxter suspect in the eyes of many Independents - See Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 124-155.

<sup>6</sup> Stoughton pp 295-298; Gordon pp 156-7, 184-7; Thomas, "Parties", pp 107-8; "Presbyterians in Transition" in Bolam et al ed, The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism, London, 1968, pp 113-174, pp 115-119; Jones, Congregationalism, pp 114-117; Watts pp 291-297.

<sup>7</sup> Rogers pp 272-3.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, "Parties", p 108.

Howe may have agreed to sign the certificate as a gesture intended to promote Nonconformist unity. This was of particular concern to him in 1689. His publications of that year had called for real unity among Christians,<sup>9</sup> or at least a united front.<sup>10</sup> The certificate to Crisp senior's *Christ Alone Exalted* was a symbol of the latter. The signatories comprise six Congregationalists (including Nathaniel and Increase Mather and Isaac Chauncey), four Presbyterians (including Howe and Vincent Alsop) and one Baptist, John Gammon. The allegiance of the twelfth, Hanserd Knowles, is unclear. The publication of fifty-year-old sermons must have seemed an innocuous enough vehicle for a display of unanimity. That it ultimately led to such disastrous results was a major blow.

Attempts were made to limit the damage. In 1692, Howe took part in negotiations for a settlement of the Davis affair. Some agreement was reached<sup>11</sup> but irreparable damage had already been done. By 1693, Congregationalists were withdrawing in large numbers. The "Happy Union" was clearly falling apart.

In response, Howe published two sermons on *The Carnality of Religious Contention* to which he added a long "Preface to

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<sup>9</sup> Howe, *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters*, (1689) - see chapter six, pp 264-5 above.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, *Humble Requests Both to Conformists and Dissenters*, (1689) - see chapter six, p 267 above.

<sup>11</sup> This short-lived settlement was recorded in *The agreement in doctrine among the Dissenting Ministers in London* (London, 1693). See also Calamy pp 183-3; Gordon p 156; Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 119.

the Reader".<sup>12</sup> On its face this work appears to add little to Howe's earlier calls to put aside differences. In sentiments which echoed those expressed as early as 1668, in *The Blessedness of the Righteous*, Howe censured all parties. Yet, *Carnality* signalled the beginning of a realignment of Howe's hopes and priorities, which became more definite as the decade progressed. It was a shift born out of disappointment.

The new mood which underlay *Carnality* is highlighted when it is compared to Howe's most important work of the 1680s: *Union Among Protestants*. In *Union*, Howe set out a positive case for unity, based upon the dynamic power of Christian love. *Carnality* gave the obverse of that case. In a detailed examination of the reasons for strife and dissension, Howe set out specific stages and facets of contention among Christians. As his chosen title suggests, he held these to spring from "Carnality"; that is, the "lust of the flesh", in the broad sense of the concerns and methods of the worldly. Here was the suspicion of human nature which underlay much Nonconformist thought. Men's products and traits, from philosophical constructs to natural passions - though acceptable, even valuable in their place - became "strange unhallowed fire" when they usurped the prerogatives of the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> Even the interpretation of scripture became destructive when "there is more of the man in it than of the Christian".<sup>14</sup> Most

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<sup>12</sup> J. Howe, *The Carnality of Religious Contention: In Two Sermons, Preached at the Merchants' Lecture, in Broad Street*, (London, 1693) in *Works*, Vol. III, pp 111-155.

<sup>13</sup> Howe, *Carnality*, pp 142-147.

<sup>14</sup> Howe, *Carnality*, pp 137, 142.

dangerous of all,

the contentious, disputative genius...hath grown strong and vigorous, and acquired the power to transform the church from a spiritual society, enlivened, acted and governed by the Spirit of Christ, into a mere carnal thing, like the rest of the world.<sup>15</sup>

The result was a fascination and passion for things not essential to the faith.

In sum; not only are things most alien from real Christianity added to it, but substituted in the room of it, and preferred before it.<sup>16</sup>

Not until these distractions were shed, would the unity which was already a fact in the spiritual realm (i.e. the invisible Church) translate into a "more entire, visible oneness".<sup>17</sup> This vision was one of love and acceptance. Even earthly unity was not portrayed as a matter of structure and uniformity. Howe had not adopted the visiblist ecclesiology of Stillingfleet. Accordingly, he did not argue that visible disunity in itself constituted the destruction of the Church. Rather, its effect was to cramp and weaken the Christian interest. Infidels were repelled at it and the Spirit was induced to withdraw "unto such degrees as shall testify displeasure".

And hence is the growth of the church obstructed, not only naturally, but penally too.<sup>18</sup>

There was nothing substantially new in Howe's argument. His relegation of the natural and his view of the Church as

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<sup>15</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 112.

<sup>16</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 115.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 116.

<sup>18</sup> Howe, Carnality, pp 116-7.

primarily a "spiritual society" were in line with the stress on transcendence and the invisible church which have already been noted. The logic of *Carnality* depended upon the same basic theological orientation that has been observed in his works of the 1680s. Yet, two features of *Carnality* disclosed the first stirrings of a new emphasis.

The first was a note of pessimism not found so explicitly in Howe's thought since the fall of the Protectorate. The very focus of *Carnality* was negative: the anatomy of failure. This was more than a device. Howe appeared now to doubt the possibility of achieving the oneness he sought. As noted above, he located the immediate cause of disunity in "the addition of unnecessary things". Until such time as these were removed, progress was impossible.

But this amputation is, according to the present posture of men's minds all the Christian world over, a thing equally to be desired and despaired of; as a general union therefore is, in the meantime.<sup>19</sup>

Howe had not given up - not yet - but *Carnality* was a decidedly more gloomy work than such as *Union Among Protestants*.

That only which the present state of things admits of, is, that we keep ourselves united in mind and spirit with all serious Christians, in the plain and necessary things wherein they all agree.<sup>20</sup>

The second feature related to doctrine, rather than mood. Parallel to the negative spur of discouragement was a positive factor which would assume great importance in Howe's thought. A decade before, in *Union Among Protestants*, Howe had

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<sup>19</sup> Howe, *Carnality*, p 117.

<sup>20</sup> Howe, *Carnality*, p 117.

briefly outlined the essentials of the faith. Then, the concentration was on Christological and soteriological doctrines.<sup>21</sup> In 1693, Howe repeated the exercise. Early in his preface to *Carnality*, he anticipated a crucial question.

It will here then be inquired,...what Christianity is?...what is its essence...or wherein doth it consist?

The answer is instructive. The themes of 1683 remain, but an eschatological framework is added.

[I]t will be readily acknowledged, that Christianity ...must be estimated more principally by its end [i.e. goal], and that its final reference is not to this world, but to the world to come, and to a happy state there.<sup>22</sup>

Further on, concluding the preface, Howe made a plea which echoed the central themes of his sermons of 1677-8:

let us supplicate more earnestly for the effusions of that Holy Spirit, which alone can give remedy to our distempers, and overcome the lusts of the flesh, of whatever kind, and restore Christian religion to itself, and make the Christian name great in the world.<sup>23</sup>

In the later 1690s, a growing pessimism about present prospects for unity led Howe to rely increasingly upon future hope. This would be less a new direction than the reactivation of the pneumatological eschatology of 1678.

In the meantime, efforts to preserve unity in at least "mind and spirit" continued. A committee of five Congregationalists (Mead, Annesley, Veale, James and Lobb) and five Presbyterians (Howe, Hammond, Alsop, Mayo and Slater) met

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<sup>21</sup> See Howe, Union, pp 186-7.

<sup>22</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 113.

<sup>23</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 120.

inconclusively until as late as December 1694.<sup>24</sup> Even this faint flicker was eventually extinguished. Once again Dr Williams was at the centre of the problem. In an April 1694 lecture at Pinners' Hall, Nathaniel Mather accused Williams of "semi-socinianism". This led directly to the departure of the bulk of Presbyterians to set up their own, competing lectureship at Salters' Hall. Howe was one of those who departed but, as with his caution about joining Goodwin's group at Oxford forty years before and his decision not to conform in 1662, it was a concern for catholicity and latitude, rather than his own lack of these qualities, which determined his course. To Spilsbury, a year later, he declared

God knows how I strove against that division...I have urged, both publicly and privately, that the same lecturers might alternate in both places, which would take away all appearance of disunion...Upon these terms I had preached with them [those who remained at Pinner's Hall] still; but I will not be tied to them, nor any party, so as to abandon all others.<sup>25</sup>

If not "tied to a party", Howe was dedicated to a cause. He made one more fruitless bid for peace. In 1695, the charge of socinianism was again levelled at Dr Williams, this time by Stephen Lobb (1647?-1699). Lobb's evidence was poor but his case received a boost from an unlikely source: Howe himself. Howe weighed in, casting doubt on Williams' position. Thomas suggests that Howe was hoping by such a concession to win back

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<sup>24</sup> Walker pp 452.

<sup>25</sup> Howe to John Spilsbury, April 20, [16]95, in Calamy pp 195-198 (Rogers pp 279-281). On the Pinners' Hall - Salters' Hall split generally see O.M. Griffiths, Religion and Learning: A Study of Presbyterian Thought from the Bartholemew Ejections (1662) to the Foundations of the Unitarian Movement, Cambridge, 1935, pp 95-105; Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", pp 117-120; Wallace pp 179-80.

Congregational support for the Union. If so, he failed. His action merely escalated the dispute. Williams referred the question to Stillingfleet (by then Bishop of Worcester) who cleared him of the charge, effectively ending the controversy, but not healing the wounds.<sup>26</sup>

The final Williams affair appears to have exhausted Howe's faith in earthly struggles for unity. Increasingly he sought a change of cosmic proportions. Yet this disillusionment with human effort reflected an intensification, rather than a radical change of his view of the Church. His commitment to an invisibilist ecclesiology remained constant.

In 1695 Howe published a sermon marking the death and funeral of Queen Mary. He took his text from Hebrews 12:23, which suggested the informal title of the discourse: *Heaven a State of Perfection*.<sup>27</sup> The principal theme was the nature of the "perfection" to which the saints aspire. However, the treatise depended upon understanding the true Church to be that invisible, spiritual society which finds its proper home in heaven. This body consisted of the truly saved of all generations and, intriguingly, included the angels.

"And to the spirits of just men made perfect." This shows they all make but one church, even such spirits as have dwelt in flesh, being received into the communion of those whose dwelling never was flesh. And, in the mean time, those that yet continue in these low, earthly stations, as soon as the principles of the divine life have place in them, belong, and are related to that

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 122.

<sup>27</sup> J. Howe, A Discourse Relating to the Much Lamented death, and Solemn Funeral of Queen Mary (London, 1695), Works, III, pp 315-341.



glorious community; for they are said to be already come thereto, and all together comprise but one family. For there is but one *paterfamilias*, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is said to be named.<sup>28</sup>

This passage is probably Howe's most unequivocal statement of those concepts which constitute the doctrine of the invisible Church, as explored in chapter two and employed throughout this thesis. A little further on in his sermon, he argued the absurdity of expecting entry to "perfection" based on formal attachment rather than inward conversion.

Let a soul be supposed actually adjoined to that glorious assembly and church above, that is yet unacquainted with God...such a soul will only seem to have mistaken its way, place, state and company...the outrage of its own lusts and passions would create to it a hell in the midst of heaven...<sup>29</sup>

When John Howe thought of the Church, it was the invisible body that came to mind. Nowhere was this more explicit than in this sermon of 1695 but the same understanding underlay all of his contributions to the ecclesiological issues of the later Stuart period. It was the natural product of a theological orientation towards the spiritual, the transcendent, and Howe never departed from it.

In December 1697, Howe preached *A Sermon on Thanksgiving Day or Peace Considered as God's Blessing*,<sup>30</sup> marking the peace of Rijswick, negotiated by William. This short discourse gives further evidence of a changing outlook, in response to the frustrations of his activist period of 1681 to 1695. The

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<sup>28</sup> Howe, Funeral of Queen Mary, p 322.

<sup>29</sup> Howe, Funeral of Queen Mary, pp 324-5.

<sup>30</sup> J. Howe, A Sermon Preached on Thanksgiving Day, December 2, 1697 [Peace Considered as a Blessing], [1697], Works, III, pp 240-261.

fundamental theology had changed little, but the focus has shifted considerably.

As clear as ever was Howe's commitment to immediate, spiritual experience. The thesis of the sermon was that, though civil and military peace was to be welcomed, it counted for little unless it was accompanied by a renewal of "substantial godliness". Without this revival of religion, peace was merely "external" and could not be rated a "real and peculiar blessing". Howe cited the example of Jabez (1 Chron. 4:9-10) who asked for a "blessing indeed". In other words,

let me have a blessing within a blessing; let me have that blessing whereof the other is but a cortex, the outside; let me have that blessing that is wrapt up and inclosed in the external blessing... There is a spiritual sort of blessing that may be enclosed in the external blessing, and particularly in this peace...<sup>31</sup>

This principle, applied initially to a specific situation, was rapidly made general. True value was in spiritual, rather than material benefit. Christians were to desire most from God "immediate, spiritual blessing".

Let us, I pray you, learn to distinguish between a self-desirable good, that in its own nature is such, so immutably that it can never degenerate, or cease to be such; and what is only such by accident, and in some circumstances may be much otherwise. Spiritual good, that of the mind and spirit, and which makes that better, especially that which accompanies salvation (Heb. vi. 9) that runs into eternity, and goes on with us into the other world, is of the former sort. External good is but *res media*, capable of being to us sometimes good, and sometimes evil, as the case may alter...the

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<sup>31</sup> Howe, Peace, p 251. The use of "cortex" here provides another link with Henry More, Glanvill and the platonism they shared with Howe. The O.E.D. identifies the first uses of "cortex", in the sense of an "outer shell or husk", in two works by More (1660 & 1681) and in Glanvill's Scepsis Scientifica (1665). This last is the same work which introduced "idiosyncrasy" in the sense employed by Howe in Union Among Protestants - see chapter six, pp 248-250 above.

kindest and most benign part of the divine government lies in immediate influences on the minds of men.<sup>32</sup>

In such passages, Howe displayed, yet again, his attraction to the transcendent work of God. If anything, failure had strengthened rather than weakened this fundamental bias. Other things, however, had changed. Most notable was Howe's diminished confidence in institutional shows of unity.

Men may, notwithstanding mere external peace, be as miserable in this and in the other world, as if they had never known it....mere external peace, without [spiritual blessings] can never be a complete blessing.<sup>33</sup>

In the final part of *Peace*, Howe directly addressed the failure of unity within the Church. Not only did structural unity fail to deliver on its apparent promises, any unity short of total communion was a failure. Howe renounced half measures, which, in the past, he had accepted as the best available course.

I also reckon it too low and narrow a design to aim at a oneness of communion among Christians of this or that single party and persuasion: which would but make so much the larger *ulcus* and *tumor*, a greater unnatural *apostem*, or secession, in the sacred body of our blessed Lord.<sup>34</sup>

This was an important critique. It reflected the evolution of Howe's own views. His own nearest formal success (the "Happy Union") was limited to two groupings within Dissent. It had met with failure. Further, Howe's statement of such views in a sermon of this date (Dec. 1697) may be no

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<sup>32</sup> Howe, *Peace*, p 254.

<sup>33</sup> Howe, *Peace*, p 252.

<sup>34</sup> Howe, *Peace*, p 260.

coincidence. Horwitz' research suggests that 1696/7, in particular the autumn of 1697, saw increased activity towards a rapprochement with the Church of England among "Presbyterians". It is certainly likely that John Humphrey and Vincent Alsop reopened discussions with leading Anglican figures.<sup>35</sup> "Congregationalists" appear to have excluded themselves.<sup>36</sup> Given his espousal of unity and previous involvements in the cause, Howe might have been expected to feature alongside Humphrey and Alsop. Yet there is no evidence to connect him with these late manoeuvres. He seems to have moved away from piecemeal solutions. A unity both deeper and broader was necessary.

[A]ny serious living Christian of whatsoever party or denomination I ought to communicate with as such, and only as such.<sup>37</sup>

But how was such a comprehensive unity to be achieved? Not by external measures certainly. Nor is it enough to rely upon reason and apparent goodwill.

I cannot forget, that sometime discoursing with some very noted persons, about the business of union among Christians, it hath been freely granted me that there was not so much as a principle left...upon which to disagree; and yet the same fixed aversion to union continued as before, as a plain proof they were not principles but ends we were still to differ for.<sup>38</sup>

Recent painful experience had shown that mere human

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<sup>35</sup> H. Horwitz, "Comprehension in the Later Seventeenth Century: A Postscript", *CH*, Vol. 34, Sept, 1965, pp 342-349. Alsop's alleged involvement is intriguing, given his highly independent style of "presbyterianism" (see chapter five, pp 210-214 and chapter six, pp 261-264 above).

<sup>36</sup> Horwitz, "Comprehension" p 345.

<sup>37</sup> Howe, *Peace*, p 260.

<sup>38</sup> Howe, *Peace*, p 258.

efforts would amount to little. The achievement of full communion among Christians would require a dramatic alteration to the present state. This in turn could only result from an equally dramatic, "internal blessing" of God. There were two principal elements in this blessing. The first was "vital religion",

wherein stands [Christians'] being at peace with God; when there is a mutual amplexus between him and them, mind touching mind, and spirit spirit; when he does, by his Spirit embrace the spirits of men, and infuse light and life into them, and adapt and suit them for his communion.<sup>39</sup>

The second flowed from and into the first: "mutual love among Christians,"

to reconcile them to one another: which indeed, is also but to Christianize them, to make vital religion take place with them.<sup>40</sup>

These were themes already noted in Howe's 1680s writings. The intense, unmediated, interpenetrative relationship with the divine and the dynamic power of charity were particularly evident in the most important work from that period, *Union Among Protestants*. In 1697 Howe was more explicit about the means of bringing this happy state about.

To this purpose, we have great cause to beg and supplicate earnestly for a greater pouring forth of his Spirit...

The matter speaks itself; that opposite spirit unto truly Christian peace and love, which appears amongst us, nothing but the Spirit of Christ can overcome; we are not to expect a cure of our distempers in this kind, but by the pouring forth of this blessed Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Howe, Peace, p 256.

<sup>40</sup> Howe, Peace, p 257.

<sup>41</sup> Howe, Peace, pp 256, 257.

In this way, in the final decade of Howe's life, cosmic eschatology reappeared as a major theme.

A link between the re-emergence of Christian hope in Howe's thought and the events of the early 1690s is almost certain. Howe's disappointment at the collapse of his schemes is clear. Yet, too much should not be made of this shift. Howe never retreated to quietism; he never dismissed the value of active effort. In his 1698 sermon on *The Duty of Civil Magistrates*, he would insist upon strenuous involvement in society by Christians. Moreover, his pneumatic eschatology was not accorded a major treatise of its own in this period. It did not stand alone but, rather, surfaced as a factor (although increasingly the crucial factor) in Howe's discussions of how unity might be achieved.

Dr William Bates died in 1699. The passing of his friend prompted Howe to bring together the themes of a disappointing decade. He concluded the sermon with a vision which combined sustained hope in God with pessimism about immediate success.

Be it far from us to say, "Let us die with him [Bates]," as despairing of our cause; if our cause be not that of any self-distinguished party, but truly that common Christian cause, of which you have heard. While it is the divine pleasure to continue us here, let us be content and submit to live and own it, to live and serve it, to our uttermost...

Though the dream of inclusive unity continued undimmed, it was by now overtly eschatological.

When our confidences and vain boasts cease... then (and I am afraid, not till then) is to be expected a glorious resurrection, not of this or that party, for living, powerful religion, when it recovers, will disdain the limits of a party...Then will all the scandalous marks and means of division among Christians vanish...Then...will that Almighty Spirit so animate and form this body, as to make it every where amiable, self-recommending and capable of spreading and propagating

itself, and to increase with the increase of God. Then shall the Lord be one, and his name one, in all the earth.<sup>42</sup>

Howe's dependence on the cosmic work of God was less a traumatic lurch into his past than a fresh appreciation of the value of an integral part of his theological framework. In his sermons on Ezekiel, preached in 1667-8, Howe had set out a detailed pneumatic eschatology. In the 1680s he had expounded on the chief ends portrayed in that vision. It was not until the late 1690s that he returned to the all-important means: the sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit. John Howe did not have to reinvent his eschatology; he merely dusted it off.

The very continuity of Howe's pneumatic eschatology makes it worthy of careful consideration. This was not an aberration of his dotage. Together with the first part of *Living Temple*, the sermons of 1677/8 were the fruit of what probably was the major crisis period of his life: the years following the Ejection. That he returned to these ideas after two decades demonstrates their abiding value and makes this an appropriate point at which to examine them in detail. A recognition of the importance of Howe's eschatology in turn allows a direct comparison with the Nonconformist who has dominated interpretations of the later Stuart period: Richard Baxter.

In *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*, William Lamont has attempted to reconstruct the development of Baxter's theology. As the title of his study suggests, Lamont argues that a

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<sup>42</sup> J. Howe A Funeral Sermon for that Most Excellent Minister of Christ, the Truly Rev. William Bates, D.D., Works III, pp 428-457, pp 456-7.

hitherto unrecognised eschatological framework provides the key to understanding the sometimes baffling and apparently contradictory positions taken by Baxter at various points in his long career. Though neither Baxter nor Howe was associated with the more dramatic millennial movements such as the Fifth Monarchists, each had a sophisticated understanding of God's cosmic purpose. A comparison of their views on this and related issues sheds important light on their ideas of the Church. Moreover it will be seen to have implications for the interpretative model put forward in this thesis.

Lamont identifies three stages in Baxter's career. These are delineated by changes in Baxter's attitude to the idea of a "national Church". The first and longest period ran from 1649 (the year of Baxter's first publication, the *Aphorismes of Justification*, a work admired by Howe<sup>43</sup>) until about 1676-7. In this period, Baxter favoured a national church supported by a strong civil magistracy. From 1677 to about 1683, he moved away from that ideal, only to return to it with even greater enthusiasm from the mid 1680s until his death.

Several features of Baxter's early national Church vision are notable. The dominant concern was for Christian "discipline". This was the task of the Pastor: to train and direct in godliness. For this to be effective, the role of the magistrate was crucial. He would protect the Church, perhaps regulate its national affairs. All importantly, civil authority would support, through enforcement where necessary,

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<sup>43</sup> See Howe's first recorded letter to Baxter, March 12 1657. See also chapter three p 126 above.



the local Pastor. Support, but not usurp. Though an enthusiast for wide powers of magistracy, Baxter was no erastian in the true sense in which the powers of the clergy in such areas as excommunication were circumscribed. Pastors should avoid politics but in turn should be free to carry out their own allotted responsibility. As Lamont puts it, "Baxter did not see the authority of the civil magistracy as a *rival* to clerical discipline, but as its *prerequisite*."<sup>44</sup> A pastoral sphere of influence was thus created and preserved. In his 1659 *Holy Commonwealth* Baxter described the relationship thus:

Magistrates and Pastors having different kinds of Power, must exercise their several Powers on one another: So that the Magistrate is the Pastors Ruler by the sword, and the Pastor is the Magistrates Pastor and Ruler by the Word.<sup>45</sup>

The roots of this authoritarian ecclesiology are not hard to find. Baxter's experience during the civil wars, and his contact with radical sectaries in the 1640s created in him a dread of anarchy and its spiritual parallel, antinomianism. His concern for discipline was one result, his respect for magistracy was another. From this flowed a hatred of "popery". The principal danger of Catholicism was the opposite to that of erastianism. Baxter decried as "the way to bring in popery" suggestions that "the Magistrate should have no power in all

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<sup>44</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 132-3, 174.

<sup>45</sup> Baxter A Holy Commonwealth (ed Lamont) Thesis 249, p 167. In a 1656 letter to Edward Harley M.P. (1624-1700) Baxter had suggested how this parallel relationship between Magistrate and Pastor might be achieved under the Protectorate - Baxter to Harley, 15 September 1656, Baxter Corr. i, 226 (Keeble, Calendar, no. 324).

matters of Gods Worship, Faith and Conscience".<sup>46</sup>

A fourth, eschatological dimension entered in the reign of Richard Cromwell, when Baxter glimpsed the possibility of a "Holy Commonwealth" in England. Lamont makes much of this, arguing that the vision "owed most of all to the sense in which Baxter shared in the millenarian excitement of the age." This is stating the case too strongly. In the same paragraph Lamont concedes that Baxter had little to say on the apocalypse at this time. I will contend that the key lies elsewhere.<sup>47</sup>

Though the expectations of 1659 were dashed with the fall of the Protectorate and the subsequent Restoration, the other elements of Baxter's national Church ecclesiology survived well into Charles II's reign. He continued to seek comprehension of Nonconformists within the established Church. Properly modified (perhaps along lines proposed by Archbishop Usher), even an episcopal system could promote discipline.<sup>48</sup> As the clouds of the Restoration Crisis gathered, however, Baxter's confidence waned. The established Church seemed to him to be drifting towards Catholicism. Discipline could not thrive in such conditions. His fear of popery turned cannibalistic; he now questioned the value of the magistrate.

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<sup>46</sup> Baxter, Holy Commonwealth pp 22, 30-34, 41-47. See also Baxter Treatises vii, f. 300v

<sup>47</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 202.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. the letter to Harley, 15 September 1656. Baxter's willingness to contemplate a form of Episcopacy is a central thesis in Wood's study see A.H. Wood Church Unity Without Uniformity, *passim*. See also Keeble Richard Baxter, pp 26-7; Lamont pp 212-3.

Indeed in a series of works from this "crisis" period Baxter argued against the national Church (at least, in the form of the "new prelacy" promoted in the Church of England) and flirted with the "sect type" model of Church structure.<sup>49</sup> As shown in chapter five, this was certainly his position in 1680.<sup>50</sup>

This apparent *volte face* did not last long. Baxter returned to a form of his earlier model during the 1680s. Lamont wants to link this recovery to Baxter's investigations into the book of Revelation, whilst he was in prison in 1686. Nevertheless, he concedes that the swing back had begun by 1684. Baxter began to see that the sect model was an even greater threat to discipline than the flawed Church of England. The "nightmare of fragmentation" forced him to reconsider.<sup>51</sup>

Baxter's millennial investigations did, however provide a crucial plank. His description of the dispensations of history are telling.

As Moses was above Aaron and Solomon above Abraham so is the King [above] the Archbishop...Christ's Kingdome was but in its infancy until he visibly ruled by the sword and by Christian Princes...So did he, by propheticall Apostles and inspired Teachers, keep up the Church until he had ripened it for a Christian Empire.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See R. Baxter, Church History of the Government of Bishops and their Councils Abbreviated (1680) A treatise of Episcopacy (1681); A Second True Defence of Meer Nonconformists (1681); The True History of Councils Enlarged (1682). See also Keeble, Richard Baxter, pp 117-121; Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 248-9.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter five, pp 194-197 above.

<sup>51</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 259-261.

<sup>52</sup> Baxter Treatises, vii, f 300v.

The "empire" was Constantine's, "for it was at that historic point in time that Christ came to 'visibly reign by Christian Rulers' ".<sup>53</sup>

Lamont makes much of this development in Baxter's thought but overstates the case when he makes Baxter's prison eschatology the key to the resurgence of his "Protestant imperialism" or national Church ecclesiology. The real issue for Baxter was always discipline. At no stage did he resile from this ideal. If the national Church model and the magistracy as they operated in the late 1670s failed to promote that goal, both could be questioned. In the 1680s, it was the realisation that the sect approach was even worse which drove him back to his earlier position. His reading of Revelation rehabilitated a crucial element of his national Church model but it was the need for discipline which drove his ecclesiology.<sup>54</sup>

Although Lamont overstates the importance of millennialism, the framework he suggests for Baxter's ecclesiology is very helpful. The categories he identifies make Baxter's ideas a potent foil to those of John Howe. The principal elements of Baxter's national Church ecclesiology are four: discipline, magistracy, anti-popery and eschatology. In the final decade of his life, Howe touched directly on the last three. I will argue that the considerable differences

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<sup>53</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 263.

<sup>54</sup> For Baxter, it was the Pastor/Congregation relationship which constituted the Church - See Baxter's Answer to Stillingfleet pp 43-4 and Baxter Treatises vi, ff 317-319.

which may be observed on these fronts signal a radical divergence on the first. Moreover, the contrast between the visions of Richard Baxter and John Howe points to a fundamental theological difference. I shall consider the four categories in reverse order, beginning with eschatology.

Christian formulations of how God will consummate his relationship with creation have been notoriously complex and varied. Lamont identifies four major strands in seventeenth-century England: radical millennialism, preterism, historicism and futurism.<sup>55</sup> The first depends heavily on a terrestrial rule by Christ for 1000 years. Common in extreme groups like the Fifth Monarchists and the Diggers, it typically declared an imminent commencement of Christ's reign and the creation of a holy and just society. This view depended upon association of the imagery of biblical passages from Daniel and Revelation with events and people of the present and immediate past. It is the view which most properly deserves the description "millennialist".<sup>56</sup> By contrast, the "preterist" interpretation, favoured by Roman scholars, located the fulfilment of the prophecies in the early years of the Church. Apocalyptic images were effectively separated from the *eschaton* altogether, allowing a concentration on the Catholic Church's continuing role in representing Christ on earth. The third, "historicist" schema located the commencement of a "flourishing time" (rather than a

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<sup>55</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 11-13.

<sup>56</sup> See Cohn's list of the characteristics of millennialist movements - N. Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium, London, 1970, p 13.

"millennium") in the past. A precise, 1000 year duration was not essential. Christ's sovereignty is extended by a gradual process rather than a crisis. In England, classic expression was given to this view by John Foxe.<sup>57</sup> The fourth version, "futurism", postponed fulfilment of prophecies to the very end of time. Richard Baxter held a modified historicist view; John Howe propounded a type of the futurist interpretation.

In 1659 Baxter confessed to being confused over the details of eschatology.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, in the 1680s, influenced by Foxe, he developed a variation of the historicist view quite different from those of his friends. In most Protestant versions, the Antichrist was identified with the papacy. Baxter was ambivalent on this issue; his hatred of popery was grounded elsewhere. More important was Baxter's dating scheme. Protestants had generally looked back to the first two centuries of the Church as a golden period which declined rapidly under the Constantinian Catholic Church. In Baxter's version, the forces of Christ were identified in the ideal of the Christian emperor. The flourishing age began with Constantine. Baxter's prison research is important here. He recognised that, in the age of Constantine, the Church had ripened into a Christian Empire".

Lamont lacks precision in his analysis of Baxter's eschatology. He frequently describes Baxter's formulation as

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<sup>57</sup> For the details of Foxe's schema and a critique of Lamont's interpretation see P.J. Olsen "Was John Foxe a Millenarian?", JEH, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1994, pp 600-624.

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, Holy Commonwealth, p 133.

"amillennialist", yet in other places finds him merely locating the millennium in the past. The causes of this are not hard to identify. Lamont's broad expansion of the term "millennium" to include any vision of "Godly rule" is unhelpful and has been criticised.<sup>59</sup> As important in this case is his neglect of other aspects of the End. The "millennium" does not exhaust Christian concepts of the eschaton. Such aspects as the defeat of the forces of Antichrist and the final judgement are also to be incorporated. Baxter was prepared to regard the millennium as passed whilst holding that the conflict with evil was not complete and that the judgement was still to come. This caused some consternation to his historicist friends, who expected the defeat of Antichrist to be complete by the end of the reign and judgement to coincide with the close of the millennium.<sup>60</sup> Baxter did not deny a millennium, and is thus poorly described as "amillennial". Nevertheless, his "millennium" was wrapped up. He neither accepted its currency nor expected it in the future. It thus played a minor formal role in his eschatology. However, as will be shown, his association of the millennium with Constantine had enormous implications for his ecclesiology.

When John Howe renewed his interest in the consummate activity of God, he did not propound a detailed, new schema.

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<sup>59</sup> See Bernard Capp "GODLY RULE and English millenarianism", P&P, lii, (1971), pp 106-17 and "The millennium and eschatology in England", P&P, lvii, (1972), 152-162; Olsen, "Was John Foxe a Millenarian?", pp 619-624.

<sup>60</sup> See Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 55, 61-64, 305-6 and *passim*.

Instead, he alluded in various phrases to "the effusion of the Spirit". These are unmistakable shorthand references to the pneumatic eschatology he spelled out in 1677-8. When those sermons are examined, marked differences from Baxter's understanding are readily apparent.

Howe eschewed the first three models mentioned above. He rejected the preterist approach, which claimed early fulfilment of the prophecies. The suggestion, for instance, that the figures of Gog and Magog may be identified with such as Antiochus Epiphanes was specifically dismissed.<sup>61</sup> Neither was the radical millennialist view endorsed. It has already been noted that, in his 1681 *Thoughtfulness for the Morrow*, Howe lamented the distracted reading of signs and portents which characterises such schemes.<sup>62</sup> The same position is found in the 1677-8 sermons. Millennialist speculations signalled a greater interest in the

circumstances of such an expected state, than [in] the substantials that do belong to the state itself.<sup>63</sup>

In an important passage, he listed those components of eschatological views which he found untenable.

For my own part, I will not assert any of these following things. Either, *first*, That that thousand years doth precisely and punctually mean such a limited interval of time; however more probable it may seem that it doth so, and though it be confessed to do so by them that would have these things to be in the past. Nor, *secondly*, That Christ shall personally appear...at the battle of Armageddon; and that he shall personally reign afterwards upon the earth for a thousand years. Nor, *thirdly*, That there will be any resurrection before

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<sup>61</sup> Whole Works, V, pp 231-2.

<sup>62</sup> See chapter six, pp 226-227 above.

<sup>63</sup> Whole Works, V, p 224.



that time do commence...nor *fourthly*, That the happiness of that time shall consist in sensual enjoyments...And least of all, *fifthly*, That in this state of things the saints as such, shall have any power or right given them in the properties of other men; or that there shall be a disturbing and overturning of ranks and orders in civil societies.<sup>64</sup>

There was no acceptance of the claims of the radical millenaries. The fourth and fifth propositions, in particular "carry no other face, than of things to be abhorred and detested."

If Howe was clear on his distaste for preterist and radical millennialist views, he was just as adamant in rejecting the historicist interpretations which Lamont suggests were favoured most by orthodox protestants. He linked the second proposition above to "them that would have these things to be past". Here he came directly against Baxter's views. Baxter looked at history and held it to be obvious that Constantine's conversion ushered in a golden era, no less than the "reign of Christ". Howe rejected such a view. His reasons are revealing.

Howe argued that the "millennium" would be recognised by Christians in

first, the destruction of their external enemies; secondly, a very peaceful, composed united state of things among themselves; and thirdly, a very lively, vigorous state of religion.<sup>65</sup>

Never, in the history of Israel and the Church, had these conditions coincided. Specifically,

There was in Constantine's time, and after, much of tranquillity, by the cessation of persecution from

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<sup>64</sup> Whole Works, V, p 234.

<sup>65</sup> Whole Works, V, p 232.

without; but there was less of the life and vigour and power of religion<sup>66</sup>.

This points to a crucial difference between Baxter and Howe. Richard Baxter held the "visible rule" by the Christian magistrate to be essential for the operation of discipline and, therefore, a prerequisite for holy living. Howe was not as confident.

Experience hath done very much...to refute the folly of any such hope, that any external good state of things can make the church happy...There can be no good time in the church of God, without the giving of...his own Spirit. That, or nothing, must make the church happy.<sup>67</sup>

This was exactly the distinction Howe would later delineate in his preference for "internal" above "external" blessings. Baxter believed that the right civil conditions would help create the "holy commonwealth". For Howe the process was quite different. The "happy time", the millennium, would be the direct result of the effusion of the Spirit.

The key point for Howe was that this "happy time" had not yet occurred. He thus rejected historicist as well as preterist and radical millennialist eschatologies. Instead, he unequivocally propounded a "futurist" schema. Lamont suggests this interpretation was favoured by some seventeenth-century Catholics because, by it, the antichrist would not appear until the very end of time. The current papacy was thus let off the hook. For that very reason, Lamont suggests, it was not "attractive to Protestants".<sup>68</sup> Yet, Howe

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<sup>66</sup> Whole Works, V, p 233.

<sup>67</sup> Whole Works, V, p 225.

<sup>68</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 12.

(unquestionably not a papist) espoused an overtly futurist view as he concluded the argument of the first two sermons in the 1677-8 series.

And therefore we have the thing first proposed I conceive in good measure cleared, that there is a state yet to come of very great tranquillity and prosperity to the church of God for some considerable tract of time.<sup>69</sup>

If Howe was unusual in propounding a futurist view, he was doubly so when the most obvious feature of his schema is recognised. Howe's eschatology was almost exclusively pneumatological. The bodily return of Christ did not feature. Neither did the associated events of tribulation and judgement play a significant role. The "effusion of the Spirit" had effectively replaced the "second coming".

This was a notable departure from traditional views. Its direct roots may be found in Howe's textual base. Whereas Baxter and most theologians of the eschaton seem to have found their source material in Daniel and Revelation, Howe based his description of the End upon Ezekiel, specifically Ezek. 34:29:

Neither will I hide my face any more from them; for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord.

Although he occasionally cited both Daniel and Revelation, Howe kept coming back to this verse and its context for the framework of his eschatology.

Why did Howe take this path? Nuttall has argued that a "spiritualised" eschatology is to be found among erstwhile Fifth Monarchists, whose expectation of material change faded

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<sup>69</sup> Whole Works, V, p 236

with the passage of time.<sup>70</sup> This cannot have been Howe's history. There is no suggestion that he ever held such radical millennialist hopes. Nevertheless, the repristination of his eschatology may be linked to Howe's sense of disillusionment in the later 1690s. In general, futurist views may not have appealed to Protestants but, as Christopher Hill has suggested, a postponement of the "millennium" into the distant future seems to have been part of the response to defeat of Interregnum activists.<sup>71</sup> In the face of his 1690s disappointments, a futurist eschatology may have had renewed attraction for Howe.

Whatever the indirect causes, the roots of Howe's pneumatological eschatology lie in his fundamental orientation towards transcendent, divine activity. The member of the Trinity from whom such activity would naturally be expected is the Holy Spirit. When, in the later 1690's, John Howe returned to the eschatology of 1678 he was merely following a career-long tendency. The underlying feature of his theology, which has been identified numerous times, may be stated again, with increased confidence. Howe's primary interest was in the internal, direct work of God. It was this bias which lay at the heart of the differences between Howe and Baxter.

From such disparate eschatologies flowed other differences. One, though not immediately apparent, was in their attitudes to the Papacy. On the face of it, Baxter and

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<sup>70</sup> Nuttall, Holy Spirit, pp 110-2.

<sup>71</sup> Hill, The Experience of Defeat, pp 164, 318.

Howe held quite similar views on Rome. Both regarded Catholicism as anathema to the Christian cause. However, both were reluctant to identify the papacy with the Antichrist in their eschatologies. For Baxter, this was because he found the evidence for such an association unconvincing. To Howe, taking his prophetic cues from Ezekiel, the figure of antichrist was not even a major symbol. His preferred personifications of evil were Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38:2). Even these apocalyptic figures he declined to identify.<sup>72</sup>

What, then, lay behind the implacable opposition of both Nonconformists to Catholicism? Baxter found the crime of the Papists to be their usurpation of the role of the magistrate. They dared to elevate the visible Church in the form of ecclesiastical hierarchy above civil authority. This was an error wherever it manifested itself.

And hereby the Glory of Christs Kingdome as set up in Power, by Christian Emperors and Kings is clouded, and the sense of the Revelation perverted, by Papists and too many Protestants, who call for the exercise of Christs Kingly office by a vile mistake as if it were only in the hands of pope, prelates, presbyters or popular congregations.<sup>73</sup>

The danger of popery (and some protestantism!) was thus visible. It threatened to check the flow of the power of God, immanent in the civil magistrate.

In contrast to Baxter's concerns, Howe was worried about the invisible effects of Catholicism. On Guy Fawkes' day, 1705, he preached *Deliverance from the Power of Darkness*. In this sermon he celebrated past deliverances from popery in the

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<sup>72</sup> Whole Works, V, p 231-233.

<sup>73</sup> Baxter Treatises, vii, f. 300v.

uncovering of the Gunpowder Plot and in the Glorious Revolution. The devil, he asserted, exerts power at two levels, "first, spiritual and internal: secondly, secular and external". Of these, the first was to be feared above the second and, consequently,

It is manifestly a far greater deliverance to be freed from his spiritual power, and the horrid effects thereof, than from that which he may use in reference to our outward concerns.<sup>74</sup>

England, in being rescued from Catholicism, was delivered from the power of darkness at both levels. Explaining this, Howe passed very quickly over the external threat but dealt in some detail with the internal dangers. These latter consisted of certain doctrinal "infatuations" (e.g. transubstantiation, apostolic succession) and, most damning of all,

the monstrous degeneracy, not from Christianity only, but even from humanity too, that is to be found in the temper of their spirits.<sup>75</sup>

Where Baxter feared for the magistrate, Howe was concerned with the direct effect of popery on the individual soul. "Infatuation" with "absurd" doctrines created, in turn, a need aggressively to defend those positions, turning "reasonable creatures..into ravenous, wild beasts".<sup>76</sup> The greatest effect of this "degeneracy" was to be seen in its impact on unity. Weaving in his favourite theme, Howe identified the ultimate threat of popery as the destruction of Christian communion. Full communion may be had only

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<sup>74</sup> J. Howe, Deliverance from the Power of Darkness, (1705), Works, III, pp 189-206, pp 193-4.

<sup>75</sup> Howe, Deliverance, p 198.

<sup>76</sup> Howe, Deliverance, p 199.

wheresoever the essentials of Christianity do not appear to be subverted by the addition of other things, that are inconsistent with any of those essentials: as is the case with them, whose black character hath been given in this discourse.<sup>77</sup>

The papacy was to be feared, not for its apocalyptic significance, but as an insidious threat to Christian unity.

At first glance, Baxter and Howe seem to be of one mind regarding Rome. Yet, it is clear they came to this shared abhorrence from different places. In Howe's terms, Baxter was above all concerned with the "secular and external" power of this darkness. Howe himself declined to be frightened by such "outward concernments". The real battlefield was within.

Similar differences are found when a third element in Lamont's picture of Baxter's ecclesiology, the role of magistracy, is considered. Baxter's position has already been outlined sufficiently to require only brief restatement. By godly rulers, Christ ruled visibly. These magistrates supplied security and (when required) enforcement, to enable Pastors to promote holy discipline.

An initial reading of Howe's view of magistrates suggests that he and Baxter were very close. In the 1678 sermons, Howe acknowledged two means by which the Spirit can operate. This passage is doubly important, as Howe's categories coincided with those employed in this thesis.

There is nothing that is so genuine and natural a product of the effusion of the Spirit, as the *life of religion* in the world. And it may be shewn, how the Spirit may have an influence to this purpose both *mediately* and *immediately*.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Howe, Deliverance, p 203.

<sup>78</sup> Whole Works, V, p 256.

Four "mediate" influences were acknowledged. These were:

1. "kings and potentates",
2. "ministers of the gospel",
3. "family order" and
4. the example of "serious and exemplary religion in the professors of it."<sup>79</sup>

Nowhere was Howe closer to the heart of Richard Baxter. Magistrates, Pastors, family life, exemplary living; all were crucial elements in Baxter's practical theology. Howe seemed to confirm the parallel when, in his 1698 *Sermon for the Reformation of Manners*, he described magistrates as "gods among men".<sup>80</sup> In this work, the theme of mediation (even amounting to general revelation) was again present.

The magistrate is God's minister to men for their good. Next to the sweet airs and breathings of the gospel itself, where have we a kinder or more significant discovery of God's will to men?...This is, we find, another medium by which God testifies, or leaves not himself without witness, besides what we have elsewhere; that he gives men rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons.<sup>81</sup>

As magistrates were God's agents for good, Christians were to do more than submit to civil authority - they were actively to cooperate with it.

*Reformation of Manners* provides a useful reminder that, for all his predilection for immediate encounter, Howe was not abandoned to the concept. There was no room for Quaker-like civil disobedience.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, too much should not be

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<sup>79</sup> Whole Works, V, pp 254-262.

<sup>80</sup> J. Howe, A Sermon for the Reformation of Manners, (1698), Works, III, pp 262-280, p 269.

<sup>81</sup> Howe, Reformation of Manners, p 268.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, as Keeble points out, Howe and other "presbyterians" generally eschewed unauthorised publication - Keeble, Literary Culture, pp 112-3.



made of this apparent similarity with Baxter. Howe's entreaty to co-operate with the authorities was a treatment of Romans 13:4. Active compliance was to be less for dread than "for conscience sake". Indeed, *Reformation of Manners* was as much a treatise on the civil ramifications of following individual conscience, as it is a defence of magistracy *per se*. It was precisely because of the individual's reverence for God, that he would be eager to obey those who exercised a divine commission.

It is the authority of God that he is invested with...What an awe this should lay upon our spirits! It is, therefore, to be served for conscience' sake, which hath principal reference to God. We need not here dispute whether human laws bind conscience; no doubt they do, when they have an antecedent reason or goodness.<sup>83</sup>

Howe deliberately avoided considering the opposite case, where human laws have no "antecedent reason or goodness". Baxter was prepared to accept even tyranny in preference to anarchy.<sup>84</sup> The bulk of Howe's case was directed to "the grand precept first laid down" - the ideal of magistracy. This was no accident. An important distinction between Baxter and Howe on magistracy springs from their disparate eschatologies. Baxter's case had to deal with the realities of history. As has been shown, his "millennium" was already in the past. In 1678, when he acknowledged the mediating role of the magistrate, Howe was relating his vision for the future. Magistrates, Pastors, families and exemplary Christians would

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<sup>83</sup> Howe, Reformation of Manners, p 276.

<sup>84</sup> R. Baxter, A Christian Directory (1673) in Richard Baxter's Practical Works, London, 1990, Vol 1, esp pp 722-745. See also Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 235.

be effective only with the benefit of the "effusion of the Spirit". That "effusion" was still awaited in 1698. Overt eschatology was absent from *Reformation of Manners*, but the thrust of the argument remained limited to the as yet unrealised ideal.

A further contrast relates to the pastoral role itself. For Baxter, ministers were figures crucial to the development of the "Holy Commonwealth" for

making them indeed Divine, is the first thing in the making a Common wealth divine.<sup>85</sup>

If released to get on with the role of discipline, Pastors were truly effective. In 1656 Baxter had sought for himself merely to be freed for "Church guidance and that little part of Discipline which I exercise".<sup>86</sup>

In 1678, by contrast, Howe had little faith in the efforts of ministers.

It is plain, too sadly plain, there is a great retraction of the Spirit of God even from us: we know not how to speak living sense unto souls, how to get within you: our words die in our mouths, or drop and die between you and us.<sup>87</sup>

The difference in mood was, of course, partly due to the reverses of the intervening years. By 1678, Baxter too had grown disillusioned with some parts of his national church vision. The efficacy of pastoral discipline was, however, the notable exception. It was precisely because effective discipline was impossible in the prevailing climate that

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<sup>85</sup> Baxter, Holy Commonwealth, p 145.

<sup>86</sup> Baxter to Harley, 15 September 1656.

<sup>87</sup> Whole Works, V, p 257.

Baxter toyed with Independency. This could only have been a short-lived flirtation. In Baxter's scheme, pastoral discipline depended upon authority, both of magistrate and Pastor. He expected civil back-up to pastoral discipline. In contrast, even in his age of the Spirit, Howe never extended the function of the magistrate in spiritual affairs beyond encouragement and example. Further, Baxter accorded considerable authority to the Pastor himself. As Lamont puts it, "the neglect of ministerial *rule* was as grave as the neglect of preaching."<sup>88</sup> Howe made no mention of discipline and control. The only "authority" which the Pastor might gain with the Spirit was the (limited) power to persuade.<sup>89</sup>

Considerable differences can be observed in the ecclesiologies of Richard Baxter and John Howe. These in turn signal differences in the ultimate concerns and fundamental theological biases of these men.

As argued above, Richard Baxter's ecclesiology was consistently driven by the importance he placed on discipline. The goal of this discipline was holiness, which Baxter prized above all. This was recognised by a critic of Baxter's national Church model, the Dean of Durham, Thomas Comber (1645-1699), who in 1691 wrote: "it is *Peace* I perceive you

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<sup>88</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 167. See esp. the "Preface" to "Richard Baxter's Confession of his Faith" (1655)

<sup>89</sup> Whole Works, V, pp 257-8. Howe questioned the likelihood of success even in this venture. In the 1683 *Union Among Protestants* he was very cautious about attempts at persuasion (see chapter six, p 248 above). In his 1699 sermon on Bates' death he confessed "our very sermons are lost upon most" - Works, III, p 442.

would have, but *Holiness* more".<sup>90</sup> Comber hit the nail on the head. As Lamont concedes,

if a 'National Church' meant no more than *peace* Baxter would not have been interested. The argument for Baxter was not over whether a 'National Church' secured *peace*, but over whether it secured *holiness*.<sup>91</sup>

Howe too was concerned with holiness, but he regarded peace in a different light. Holiness would arise naturally, not from mere discipline, but from the action of the Holy Spirit. The principal result of this action would be love and its concomitant, peace. From out of this most basic Christian characteristic, holiness would naturally develop. For both Baxter and Howe "peace" was a prerequisite for holiness. However, whereas Baxter conceived of a peace enforced in the civil realm, for Howe it was the fruit of the internal, regenerative power of the Spirit.

Peace almost defined holiness, indeed Christianity itself, for Howe. In the 1678 sermons, peace was the principal sign of the effusion of the Spirit. Conversely, the absence of it was coupled with "carnality".

as the Christian church hath grown more carnal, it hath grown more contentious; and as more contentious, still more and more carnal.<sup>92</sup>

Although some ostensibly touch on other topics, all Howe's works examined in this chapter turned at some point to the question of unity. From passages already quoted, the message is clear.

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Comber, Union Pursued (1691), pp 12-13 - cited in Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 274.

<sup>91</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 274.

<sup>92</sup> Howe, Carnality, p 112.

The more truly catholic the communion of Christians is, it is the more truly Christian.<sup>93</sup>

to reconcile [Christians] to one another...is also but to Christianize them.<sup>94</sup>

Lest there be any remaining doubt about the matter, it must further be noted that this unity was conceived in invisible, spiritual terms. Uniformity was not Howe's goal.

I must avow it to all the world, it is not this or that external form I so much consider in the matter of Christian union and communion, as what spirit reigns in them with whom I would associate myself.<sup>95</sup>

The evidence drawn from his writings on eschatology, papacy, magistracy and unity provide overwhelming support for the contention that Howe's theology depended upon his bias to the invisible, the transcendent, the spiritual arena.

There are implications, too, for our understanding of Richard Baxter. Baxter allowed a greater role for the mediated power of God, than did Howe. In chapter five, I examined the different arguments put up by Nonconformists in 1680, in response to Stillingfleet. I suggested that a range of emphases may be observed. Among other things, I contended that Baxter and Howe were a considerable distance apart on that spectrum. Baxter appeared far less committed to the invisible Church than did Howe and Alsop. If this was true for 1680 when, if Lamont is right in his argument, Baxter was in the middle of a brief period in which he had shifted towards the sect-type model generally favoured by invisibilists, it is

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<sup>93</sup> Howe, Deliverance, p 203.

<sup>94</sup> Howe, Peace, p 257.

<sup>95</sup> Howe, Union Among Protestants, p 183.

doubly so for Baxter's main line of thought. As Lamont's analysis implies, and the evidence in this chapter demonstrates, for the bulk of his career Baxter was even further away from Howe in his fundamental ecclesiology than the 1680 controversy suggests.

Two further pieces of evidence may be cited to support this view of Baxter. The first is his concern to establish some visibility for the true Church. In 1660 he published *The Successive Visibility of the Church*, a defence of protestant claims to visible continuity.<sup>96</sup> In 1684 he was making a similar point when, returning to his national Church model, he criticised the sect approach.

this opinion must needs make men seekers, who say, that the church was in the wilderness, and lost all true Ministry...after the first...century...And consequently we have no wiser answer to the Papist [where was your Church before Luther] than to say that it was *Invisible*; that is, that we cannot prove that there was any such thing on earth.<sup>97</sup>

Such passages do not imply that Baxter rejected the basic protestant view that the "true" Church was the invisible communion of the saints. What they do show is the importance he consistently placed on corporate, institutional visibility. In John Howe, such a concern is much less evident.

Further support for a more visiblist view of Baxter comes from the parallels between his ideas and those of the virulent anti-Dissenter Samuel Parker. The association initially seems bizarre, but Baxter may be placed closer to Samuel Parker than

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<sup>96</sup> R. Baxter, *The Successive Visibility of the Church*, London, 1660.

<sup>97</sup> R. Baxter, *Whether Parish Congregations be True Christian Churches*, London, 1684, p 27.

has hitherto been recognised. Lamont hurriedly discounts any similarity between Baxter and Parker.

Baxter was not a Samuel Parker or a Roger L'Estrange. His support for the magistrate on the throne stemmed from his principles, not from his lack of them.<sup>98</sup>

This is both to misunderstand Parker and to miss the possible significance of evidence Lamont himself cites. Interesting parallels between Baxter and Parker are not lacking. On two occasions Baxter may be found rejecting arguments originally directed against Parker.<sup>99</sup> Like Parker, much in Baxter's case for the "unfettered authority of the magistrate" sounded like an argument of Hobbes. Both were, indeed, accused of Hobbism.<sup>100</sup>

There are, moreover, more direct, intellectual connections. The emphasis on immanence they shared produced at least two similar positions on seemingly unrelated issues. Both distinguished themselves from Hobbes precisely because he discounted providential, immanent divine activity in favour of a Godless, mechanical determinism.<sup>101</sup> Further, in a

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<sup>98</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 93.

<sup>99</sup> Baxter counselled John Humfrey against publishing A Case for Conscience (1669) which was largely addressed against Parker's Ecclesiastical Polity - see Baxter to Humfrey (undated), Baxter Corr. iii, 11-12 & ii, 108 (Keeble, Calendar, no 766). He also rejected the quite different arguments of Henry Dodwell as set out in the latter's Two Letters of Advice, Dublin, 1672. - see R. Baxter An Answer to Mr Dodwell and Dr Sherlocke (1682) esp pp 70-89. Importantly, in the Dodwell case the key issue was discipline. Lamont cites both these instances - Richard Baxter, pp 223, 230.

<sup>100</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 103-4.

<sup>101</sup> On Parker in this regard, see G.J. Schochet, "Between Lambeth and Leviathan", p 201. On Baxter see Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 140-142.

particularly intriguing parallel, both criticised excessive use of florid language and metaphor. Although this may seem an inconsequential, even eccentric, attitude, it was one they shared with Hobbes. Baxter and Parker, however, were being true to their immanentist theology. The effect of a high regard for immanence was to accord value to the apparently ordinary. The obverse of this elevation of the mundane, at least for Parker and Baxter, was a suspicion of complicated imagery and analogy. Parker called for metaphor to be outlawed.<sup>102</sup> Baxter asserted that

the plainest words are the profitablest oratory in the weightiest matters. Fineness is for ornament, and delicacy for delight; but they answer not necessity though sometimes they may modestly attend that which answers it.<sup>103</sup>

Baxter was not merely a Nonconformist Parker. Parker had virtually no place for immediate contact with the divine. He was totally committed to immanence, which he invested solely in the magistrate. It is his radical consistency in this regard which makes him difficult for modern interpreters to fathom. Baxter departed from this in two ways. Firstly, he was not so thoroughly dedicated to immanence. His concern for holiness signalled a deep interest in personal religion which went beyond Parker's definition of religion as virtue.<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> Parker, Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie, pp 75-6.

<sup>103</sup> R. Baxter, A Treatise of Conversion (1657) in Richard Baxter's Practical Works, London, 1990, Vol 2, pp 397-500, p 399. On this aspect of Baxter's style see Keeble, Richard Baxter, pp 48-54; Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 140-1.

<sup>104</sup> "all true Religion can consist in nothing else but either the Practice of Vertue it self, or the use of those Means and Instruments that contribute to it - Parker, Ecclesiastical Politie, p 69.



greatest reservation Baxter had about the national Church idea was his fear of admitting to communion those who had not this personal commitment. Secondly, unlike Parker, Baxter preserved an oasis of ecclesiastical immanence in the unique functions he reserved for the Pastor. Nevertheless, despite these important differences, the similarities between the two men are striking.

There are significant ramifications of this analysis. In chapter two, I proposed a model which sought to incorporate varying stresses on the immanent or transcendent activity of God. I posited an ellipse which allows for a range of emphases on either the visible or the invisible Church. Lying diagonally across this ellipse is a line which plots views on religious authority and ranges from civil authoritarianism to the sovereignty of the individual conscience. The model thus allows for a complex web of views. This may now, cautiously, be plotted (see fig. 3).

At the invisibilist pole, the emphasis was on the transcendent action of the Spirit on the individual soul. Ecclesiastical structure and external authority in matters of religion were denied. By contrast, Anglican High-churchmen such as Thorndike and Dodwell found divine activity to be immanent in the institutions and hierarchies of the visible Church. Individual conscience was not trustworthy, magisterial authority must not impinge upon the proper functions of the Church. Lying outside the ecclesiological ellipse, at one end of the religious authority spectrum, John Locke rejected

external authority in matters of faith. Importantly this stance lacks the consciousness of direct encounter with the divine which provides the logic for the truly invisiblist position. At the other end of the authority spectrum, also outside the ecclesiological ellipse, is the civil authoritarian position exemplified by Thomas Hobbes.

These are simplified extremes. The model enables more subtle interpretations. Civil authoritarianism may be found within the ecclesiological ellipse, dependent upon a radical consciousness of immanence. Unlike the truly visiblist position, this "Constantinian" view did not locate God's immanent activity in ecclesiastical structures. Instead it found God working primarily through the magistrate. Samuel Parker was the prime example. Moderate positions are also incorporated. Edward Stillingfleet and John Tillotson exemplify moderate versions of the visiblist and Constantinian views respectively.

Richard Baxter tests the flexibility of the model. Though he had a lively sense of personal religion he called for a national Church, accorded an authoritarian role to the Pastor and was prepared to accept a modified episcopacy. Most intriguingly, Baxter placed great value on the magistrate as the means by which Christ "visibly reigns". That he thus located immanence primarily in civil authority is of enormous importance. His close friendship with Tillotson and the links with Parker become explicable. Baxter seems to have been a creature of the middle. If a pivotal figure is to be found in the confusion of ideas which followed the Restoration, Richard



visible focus. It misses entirely the national and personal of crises of 1662 and 1688. Nevertheless, if held lightly, such a portrayal of later Stuart ecclesiology gives some insight into the relative concerns and interests of significant philosophers and divines.

In my next, concluding chapter, I will argue that Howe's influence on later Nonconformity was greater than Baxter's. Inevitably, an element of that influence was his transcendentalist theological bias. Yet his personal vision of unity was far from realised. Indeed, the relegation by Howe and others of "mere external peace" was itself an important factor in the alienation and fragmentation of Dissent.

"strange fire"

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion: John Howe and the fate of  
Dissent

This thesis is an attempt to understand the theological dynamics of later Stuart Dissent. Largely through a study of the career and ideas of one man I have sought to address the issues raised in the Introduction. It remains now to synthesise this material, especially that covered in chapters three to seven. Conclusions about John Howe himself are of obvious concern. As will be seen, what is revealed about Howe has important ramifications for the remaining two themes of definition and nomenclature and continuity and crisis in the history of later Stuart Dissent.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first draws together conclusions about Howe and his theology. Integral to this exercise is an effort to understand the roots of Howe's bias towards the transcendent activity of God. This will be seen to lead naturally into the second theme of definition. The categories employed to understand Howe also inform our understanding of the issues which attend such terms as "Puritan", "Presbyterian", and "Congregational".

The use of John Howe as the touchstone for this thesis is justified on two counts. The first is obvious, though insufficient on its own: Howe's life and ideas had not been studied at length in this century. The second is more fundamental but requires considerable evidential support.

Howe's importance in the history of Nonconformity has been missed. In the third section of this conclusion I will argue that Howe's thought provides a valuable, indeed the best, individual window on Nonconformist theology. Finally, by the light shed through that window, I shall proffer a reinterpretation of the theological factors in the fate of later Stuart Dissent.

The picture of John Howe which emerges from this study challenges the "Howe myth" on several points. The ministry at Torrington was not an unblemished success. Rather than a fearless advocate for the cause of "the Godly" in Cromwell's court, Howe was a prevaricating young man, lacking confidence. He would not attain any eminence within Dissent until the later 1670s. Neither is the record of the next two decades unequivocal. The precise nature of Howe's involvement with underground causes is unclear, but it is certain that he maintained close contact with political activists. The sudden departure to Holland in 1685 may have been related to those connections. If it was not, it can only be seen as a desertion in the face of pressure which others managed to withstand. Finally, though he was clearly respected, Howe made significant blunders in the 1690s. Indeed, as I will contend in this chapter, his theological legacy contributed directly to the fragmentation of later Stuart Nonconformity.

The outstanding feature of Howe's ecclesiology was its irenic quality. He favoured comprehension but only if the settlement were broad and accepting of difference. Unlike even

moderate visiblists like Stillingfleet, he placed little premium on uniformity. Richard Baxter strove for unity primarily in order to facilitate proper authority and discipline. Howe's call for reconciliation was driven by his invisiblist reverence for charity. This dominant concern made him willing to overlook disagreements on other issues, especially matters of form. Thus, he was relaxed about the practice of occasional conformity.

In 1702 the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Abney, was both a regular at Howe's congregation and an occasional conformist. Daniel Defoe challenged Howe to account for his acceptance of the practice. Implicit in Defoe's challenge was an attack on Howe's own sincerity. In reply, Howe summarised the factors which had guided his attitude to such matters throughout his life.<sup>1</sup> By Howe's standards, this was an unusually polemical work. The recollections of an old man, seeking to justify himself, must be interpreted with some caution. The pamphlet is, however, useful in that it identifies some of the factors which have been noted in chapters three to seven.

The most obvious is Howe's mitigated scepticism. In his reply to Stillingfleet in 1680 and more directly in *Union Among Protestants* in 1683 Howe called for tolerance of different views. In his reply to Defoe, he quoted a passage from the preface to his 1674 collection of Torrington sermons,

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<sup>1</sup> J. Howe, Some Consideration of a Preface to an Inquiry Concerning The Occasional Conformity of Dissenters etc, (1702), Works, III, pp 536-552. On this clash with Defoe see E. Calamy, An Historical Account of My Own Life with some Reflections on the Times I have Lived In (1671-1731), London, 1829, (2 Vols), Vol I, pp 464-5; Stoughton, V, pp 302-3.



*Delighting in God*, in which he signalled his epistemological caution.

I have little reason to be conceited of any advantage I have of [those who differ from me] in point of knowledge...and can with the less confidence differ from them, or contend with them: being thereby, though I cannot find that I err in these matters, constrained to have suspicion lest I do.<sup>2</sup>

Howe claimed, flowing from this caution, a deep respect for the decisions of others. "Where is the man that can say I ever persuaded him to conform, or not to conform?"<sup>3</sup>

This acceptance of other views was, however, due to more than philosophical indifference. It was the product of two crucial elements in Howe's theology. The first was Christian love. In chapter six, I showed that Howe developed a dynamic theology of charity, which formed the centrepiece of his case for unity. This too, was evident in his 1702 recollection.

[W]hen the love of God comes to govern the Christian Church, and reign in the hearts of men; then will the kingdom of God come in power. For I am sure the spirit of love is the spirit of power, and of a sound mind.<sup>4</sup>

Charity, the source of "a sound mind" was more important than precision in small matters. Howe concluded his final defence of occasional conformists with the parting shot:

Mr Prefacer, if your judgment on the case itself be true; I conceive that truth, accompanied with your temper and spirit, is much worse than their error.<sup>5</sup>

The second element in Howe's irenicism was the importance

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<sup>2</sup> Howe, *Delighting in God*, pp 475-6, cited in Howe, *Some Consideration of a Preface*, p 537.

<sup>3</sup> Howe, *Consideration of a Preface*, p 538.

<sup>4</sup> Howe, *Consideration of a Preface*, p 547.

<sup>5</sup> Howe, *Consideration of a Preface*, p 552.

he placed on conscience. In his reply to Stillingfleet, Howe accorded a crucial role to this factor. In the intervening works discussed above, and again in 1702, the individual alone before God was the scene of divine encounter and, hence, true religion.

The matter were indeed easy, if (for instance) in a select gathered church...one conscience, or a few men's would serve the whole body; or, by parity of cases, of a whole parish or nation. But when we consider, that every one must give an account of himself to God; and that in matters which concern our own duty God-ward, we are no more capable of having it done by another for us, than...of being represented by another in the day of judgment; this will bring the matter with weight upon our own spirits, lest we should be found transgressors in Bethel, and to have offered strange fire, instead of a sacrifice, on the one hand; or needlessly, on the other, set on fire the temple itself.<sup>6</sup>

There was no mediation, no escape from direct contact with and responsibility to the Spirit of God. The enormity of the stakes gave urgency to the transcendentalist theology which guided Howe's ministry.

Howe's memory, as recorded in the reply to Defoe, was not exhaustive. He was silent on his activist connections in the 1680s and on his struggles in the early 1690s to construct and maintain some institutional expression of unity. Yet, the matters he did mention in *Consideration of a Preface* cohere with the analysis undertaken in this thesis. There can be little doubt about what drove Howe's response to the Church disputes of his day. The importance of Christian love and individual conscience point to the conclusion, asserted several times already, that the invisible Church is the crucial category; the transcendent activity of God the power

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<sup>6</sup> Howe, Consideration of a Preface, p 538.

to which Christians must respond. On the ecclesiological ellipse, Howe took his bearings from the invisible focus.

The model I have outlined provides useful insight into John Howe. Does its value extend further? I contend that it does. In particular, it calls into question simplistic party labels used to describe religious movements in seventeenth century England.

In chapter one, I discussed various attempts to understand "Puritanism".<sup>7</sup> Whilst there are considerable problems associated with the term, the most useful available view approaches "Puritanism" as a distinctive form of piety. This interpretation is best articulated by Richard Greaves. Greaves' summary is worth repeating.

At the heart of the puritan experience is an evangelical piety dominated by an essentially emotional searching for a spiritual communion with God, made possible by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, and achieved with an immediacy that sets it apart from traditional Anglican modes of worship, which are fundamentally sacerdotal in nature.<sup>8</sup>

Greaves' approach is subtle but inevitably lacks precision. A theological definition, if one were possible, has the potential to address this deficiency. Unfortunately attempts to identify "Puritanism" by discrete set of commonly held doctrines have failed. Yet if, as Wallace suggests<sup>9</sup>, theology grows in piety a bridge between the two should be possible.

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter one, pp 52-58 above.

<sup>8</sup> Greaves, "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition", p 258. See chapter one, pp 55-6 above.

<sup>9</sup> See chapter one, pp 56 above.

The concepts of immanence and transcendence provide that crucial link between theology and piety. On these I have constructed a flexible ecclesiological model by which Howe and others may be understood. It is now possible to complete the circle; to examine the pietistic soil in which Howe's transcendentalism was rooted.

Several passages in which Howe talks of intense intimacy with God have already been noted. In his sermons on the Holy Spirit of 1677-8 he insisted that Christians must depend upon the "immediate influence" of the Spirit.

I am very much persuaded, that [the lack of this dependence] is the great worm at the root of religion this day.<sup>10</sup>

Howe's Bible was one of the few items which survived his destructive instructions to his son. In it he recorded two experiences, years apart, of profound spiritual intensity.

Dec. 26. 89 After that I had long, seriously, and repeatedly thought with my self, that besides a full and undoubted Assent to the Objects of Faith, a vivifying savory Taste and Relish of them was also necessary, that with stronger Force and more powerful Energy they might penetrate into the most inward Center of my Heart, and there being most deeply fix'd and rooted, govern my life; and that there could be no other sure Ground whereon to conclude and pass a sound Judgment on my good Estate Godward...This very morning I awoke out of a most ravishing and delightful Dream, that a wonderful and copious Stream of Celestial Rays...did seem to dart into my open and expanded Breast...But what of the same kind I sensibly felt...on Oct 22. 1704 far surpass'd the most expressive words my thoughts can suggest...Tears gushing out of mine eyes for Joy that God should shed abroad his Love abundantly though the Hearts of men, and that for this very purpose mine own should be so signally possess'd of and by his blessed Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Whole Works, V, pp 155-6.

<sup>11</sup> Calamy, Memoirs pp 229-231. The original was written in Latin. Calamy adopts the translation made by Spademan and published with the funeral sermon for Howe. This record of

If the roots of transcendentalist/invisiblist theology are to be found in piety, it will be in experiences perceived in this way. It would be difficult to imagine an account closer to Greaves' description of an emotional, pneumatic, immediate communion with God. The "Puritan" impulse which Greaves identified was a central feature in Howe's spirituality. Indeed, so important was it to his understanding of religion that it provided the only "sure ground" on which to judge "my good Estate Godward".

The implication of this interpretation of Howe should not be lost. If "Puritanism" is understood in Greaves' terms, it was clearly as much a feature of the later Stuart period as of the Elizabethan, early Stuart and Interregnum eras. To revisit the expression of William Lamont<sup>12</sup>, the 1650s lived on, not just into the 1670s but into the 1690s and beyond.

Identifying a continuous strand of piety is not enough to restore to "Puritanism" any significant historiographical usefulness. Such a recovery might be achieved however by linking "Puritan" piety to a theological framework. I contend that the ecclesiological model I have proposed makes this possible. "Puritanism" may be understood as an orientation towards the invisible Church. The precise doctrinal and polemical outworkings of this alignment varied with a host of other factors but the principle remains valid. In chapter two

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Howe's experience seems to have gained some celebrity. Philip Doddridge (1702-51) recounts a similar experience, "which indeed put me in mind of Mr Howe's 'full-stream of rays'" - Cited in G. Rupp, Religion in England 1688-1791, Oxford, 1986, p 165.

<sup>12</sup> See chapter one, p 61 above.

I showed how this framework could be applied to the early Stuart Church.<sup>13</sup> Mayfield has gone some way to exploring the impact of a bias to the invisible Church in the 1640s. In the bulk of this thesis I have shown how the model illuminates later Stuart Church affairs.

Carefully defined, then, "Puritanism" may validly be employed. It describes certain theological and pietistic tendencies. It helps explain the reactions of those who possessed those tendencies when their spiritual concerns appeared threatened. It may not, however, resume its place as a global explanation for the history of seventeenth-century England. If stretched beyond ecclesiology and piety into politics or economics it loses its validity. Other approaches are vital; other concerns must be identified; different terms must be employed. These terms too, however, must be subject to the rigorous critique which "Puritanism" has endured.

Even in the religious field in which its validity may be conditionally accepted, "Puritanism" cannot claim primacy. From the 1640s and certainly after 1662 alternate nomenclatures are readily available. The Act of Uniformity created what appears to be readily identifiable group - "Dissent" - which assumed advocacy of many of the concerns of earlier "Puritans". Yet, "Dissent" does not describe a homogeneous party. On toleration and comprehension (issues which might promise to define Nonconformity) there were widely differing views. Even among Dissenting clergy (who were at least linked by their refusal to conform) there was not one

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter two, pp 93-100 above.

discrete position to which all would have subscribed and which would have distinguished them from other Christian types.

Neither are the generally accepted major subsets of Dissent, "Presbyterian" and "Congregational/Independent", sufficiently accurate. The complex variety of views within Dissent explodes terms which suggest agreement on ecclesiastical polity. As James Webster complained, even "toping men" like Howe and Baxter placed little store on such issues.

If we are to understand the phenomenon of later Stuart Dissent we must abandon party frameworks. Our ability to interpret the period is preserved only by employing a spectral model such as the one which has been tested in this thesis. Particularly in the reigns of Charles II and James II there was such a flux of views and theological concerns that party labels are misleading. "Dissent" describes a complex of doctrinal positions. In general, these may be held to have been "Puritan" in the sense of demonstrating an orientation to the invisible and transcendent. Yet, even this description is inadequate. The fate of later Stuart Dissent did not stem from the static ecclesiological alignment of its leaders. Rather, the crucial factor was the increasing influence of those whose commitment to the invisible pole was greatest.

The seeds of English denominationalism were sown in the 1680s and 90s. For two decades following the Restoration, the future of the main body of Dissent was in the balance. Some were enthusiastic in accepting Charles II's 1672 Indulgence; others retained dreams of comprehension. After 1681, with the

temporary resolution of the Restoration crisis, such hopes rapidly faded. The 1680s completed the alienation of Nonconformity from the established Church. In the 1690s, finally cut adrift, they attempted unity among themselves. These efforts failed. A splintering had begun which would continue until fragmentation was complete by the 1730s.

John Howe reached his greatest prominence at the beginning of this crucial period. I contend that the invisibilist ecclesiology which he exemplified played a critical role in the alienation and fragmentation of Dissent. If such a case can be made, the analysis proposed in this thesis assumes an importance beyond its insights into one seventeenth-century divine.

It is first necessary to establish the relative eminence of Howe among later Stuart Nonconformists. Three factors are important in this assessment. The first, most obvious qualification is active leadership within Dissent during the 1680s and 90s. The second, drawing on the central concerns of this thesis, is theological stature. The third factor is the legacy of the candidates, particularly their influence on later Nonconformist leadership. From the apparently large group of dissenting divines, few may claim eminence by all these criteria. Prominence on one level is rarely matched on the other. A survey of the field, based on these factors, reveals them to be uniquely combined in John Howe.

John Owen (1616-1683), doyen of Interregnum Independents, was clearly a theologian of the first rank. However, Owen's direct influence reached its apogee under



Cromwell. As he died in 1683, he was unable to exercise leadership in the crucial years surrounding the Glorious Revolution. Recent attempts to identify his influence on Locke are tenuous and unconvincing.<sup>14</sup>

The long-lived John Humfrey (1620-1719) was certainly not handicapped by an early demise. He wrote a considerable body of theology. As Conal Condren has noted, Humphrey's work, in particular the political dimension of his ideas, deserves closer investigation.<sup>15</sup> Humfrey's response to Stillingfleet has been noted.<sup>16</sup> He contributed to the controversies of the 1690s.<sup>17</sup> Yet, on theological questions, Humfrey was more a polemicist than a systematic thinker. Calamy describes him as an idiosyncratic figure.

This good Man has never been able to be of the rising side. He hath follow'd his own Genius and fallen in with no Party.<sup>18</sup>

Although he ministered in London almost until his death, he remained a peripheral, if respected figure within Dissent.

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<sup>14</sup> See J.W. Baker, "Church, State, and Toleration" *passim* and the discussion in this thesis, chapter six, pp 234-5 & 253-5 above.

<sup>15</sup> Condren, "The Creation of Richard Hooker's Public Authority", pp 25-27.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter five, pp 200-205 above.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. J. Humfrey, Pacification touching the Doctrinal Dissent among our United Brethren in London, Being an Answer to Mr Williams and Mr Lobb, London, 1696; The friendly Interposer, between the Authors of those Papers, the one called A Report; the other, A Rebuke of that Report, London, 1698; Animadversions: Being the Last Two Books of My Reverend Brother Mr Williams... Conscientiously Examined, London, 1699.

<sup>18</sup> CR p 285, See also Condren, "The Creation of Richard Hooker's Public Authority", p 25.

The theological qualifications of Owen and Humfrey were not matched by prominent leadership in the crucial period. Conversely, there were undoubted leaders whose theological significance was limited. Howe preached the funeral sermons for two notable cases: Matthew Mead (1630?-1699) and William Bates (1625-1699). Mead was closely linked to dissident movements but, other than a few sermons, published no significant works of theology. Bates wrote a couple of treatises in the 1670s but was renowned more for his preaching than for his thought.

Daniel Williams (1643?-1716) and Richard Davis (1658-1714) were at the centre of the controversies of the 1690s. Williams was a lecturer at both Salters' and Pinners' Hall and wrote at length against antinomianism. Neither man achieved acceptance outside their respective parties. Moreover, as with Mead and Bates, neither was a systematic theologian of the breadth of John Howe.<sup>19</sup>

R.A. Beddard argues for the pivotal role of Vincent Alsop (1630-1703).<sup>20</sup> Alsop was an acute thinker. Though he broke ranks over James II's Indulgence, he remained a leading Nonconformist until his death. With Bates and Howe, he set up the Salters' Hall lectures in 1694. Beddard contends that Alsop recognised the inevitability and desirability of independence from the established Church. This insight makes

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<sup>19</sup> See entries for Bates, Davies, Mead, and Williams in Gordon. On Bates and Mead see Howe's funeral sermons Works, III, pp 428-457, 458-481.

<sup>20</sup> Beddard, "Vincent Alsop" *passim* - see also chapter six, pp 259-60 above.

Alsop a principal figure in what Beddard calls the "emancipation" of Dissent. Yet, such boosting of Alsop is difficult to sustain. Beddard ignores Horwitz's suggestion that (unlike Howe, who realised the cause was futile) Alsop was among those who, in the 1690s, made belated overture's towards comprehension.<sup>21</sup> Further, as suggested in chapter six, Alsop's ecclesiology lacked the sophistication and development which has been noted in Howe's thought. Finally, Beddard fails to produce any evidence of Alsop's influence on other Dissenters.

Richard Baxter presents a quite different case. As I have argued in chapter seven, Baxter had an ecclesiology which was fundamentally different from that of Howe. If Baxter's concerns provided the theological drive of later Nonconformity, the thesis I propose would be threatened. The relative importance of the two men must be weighed.

In terms of active leadership of later Dissent, the balance lies with Howe. Baxter's importance in the 1660s and 70s is undoubted but, in the 1680s, the picture changed. Howe was minister to an important London congregation. Baxter, ill and with no appointment, sought to maintain his influence through his publications and his extensive correspondence. Edmund Calamy Jnr questioned Baxter's pre-eminence.

That Mr Baxter was a man of interest and influence among them, I freely own; but that he was any thing of a proper head, I know not.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Horwitz, "Comprehension", p 345 - see chapter seven, p 285 above.

<sup>22</sup> Calamy, Historical Account, I, p 213.

On at least one occasion, Howe was preferred by Churchmen as a negotiating partner.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Baxter was in prison in the mid-1680s, Howe was in the Netherlands, consorting with dissident leaders and establishing a relationship with William of Orange. It was in this period that he was "esteemed as one of the greatest preachers in England."<sup>24</sup> It was Howe who led the welcoming Nonconformists ministers in 1689 and who drew up the *Case of the Protestant Dissenters* before the Act of Toleration. It was Howe who headed the subscribers to the Common Fund and who composed the *Heads of Agreement* in 1691. Whilst Baxter died in 1691, Howe's role continued through the 1690s.

On the crucial issue of theological stature the distinction is less clear cut. Baxter's theological importance is unchallengeable. His "middle way" on predestination was sophisticated and influential. Moreover, his discipline-centred ecclesiology survived his death. It featured in the 1690s polemics of Daniel Williams. Williams argued against Baxter's *bete noire*, antinomianism, in his controversy with Crisp. The Pinners' Hall/Salters' Hall split was precipitated by Williams' Baxterian, modified Calvinism. When accused of socinianism in 1695 his ideas were again linked to Baxter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter five, pp 219-220 above.

<sup>24</sup> Erskine, Journal, 24 January 1686, p 174.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter seven, pp 273-4 & 279-81 above. See also Thomas, Daniel Williams 'Presbyterian Bishop', London, 1964 and "Presbyterians in Transition" pp 117-123. Thomas describes Williams as "a devout disciple of Baxter".

The case for Howe is equally strong. The analysis in chapters three to seven reveals an integrated body of thought. Howe published important theological treatises right up to his death. Stoughton was right to suggest that, in the later decades of the seventeenth century, Howe and Baxter were the outstanding Nonconformist theologians.<sup>26</sup>

If Baxter and Howe are to be ranked equally in theological sophistication their differences are doubly important. Specifically, they represent quite different views of the Church. As shown in chapter seven, Baxter found his natural place near the middle of the ecclesiological spectrum. Howe, on the other hand, displayed a radical bias to the invisible Church. Baxter's ecclesiology was discipline-centred; Howe's was charity-centred. The importance of this fundamental dissimilarity is revealed when the third factor I have identified - influence on later Nonconformity - is introduced.

Baxter's place in history is secure. Yet it has not been his systematic theology which has guaranteed his reputation as a patriarch of Nonconformity. Significantly the only collection of his works is limited to his practical divinity. As I have shown, Howe's popular reputation has been largely based on his piety and personal qualities. Nevertheless a theological influence may be traced into the nineteenth century. Philip Doddridge (1702-51), hymn writer and educationist, exhibited a pacific spirit very like Howe's. He wrote of Howe to John Wesley,

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<sup>26</sup> Stoughton, IV, pp 385-393.

I cannot but say that he seems to me to have understood the gospel as well as any uninspired writer I have ever read...[his] two posthumous volumes on the Spirit...you must read.<sup>27</sup>

The Baptist Robert Hall (1764-1831) (also renowned for his irenicism) was quite specific about Howe's importance.

I can only say that I have learned far more from John Howe than from any other author I ever read...he was unquestionably the greatest of the puritan divines.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever their legacy among later figures, the case on which the immediate influence of Baxter and Howe turns involves a younger contemporary: Edmund Calamy Jnr (1671-1732). Roger Thomas has credited Calamy with inaugurating "an epoch in the evolution of Dissent" through his historical accounts of the movement and his own moderate ecclesiology. Calamy's prescription placed emphasis firmly on individual conscience and congregational autonomy. The effect was twofold. First, the "presbyterian" drive for a national structure was removed. Second, the Church of England could be portrayed as merely another Christian body with which Nonconformist groups could happily coexist. Calamy thus at once dissipated the threat of sedition perceived in Nonconformity by the establishment and liberated Dissent to a sectarian future.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> P. Doddridge, Correspondence and Diary (ed. J Humphreys) 1829-31, II, p 230. On Doddridge's life-long appreciation of Howe see G. Nuttall, "Philip Doddridge: A Personal Appreciation" in Nuttall (ed) Philip Doddridge 1702-51: His Contribution to English Religion, London, 1951, pp 154-163.

<sup>28</sup> R. Hall, Works, Vol I, pp 163-164.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition" *passim*. See also Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 210-212, 273-276.

Both Thomas and William Lamont identify Baxter's ecclesiology as providing the critical context for Calamy's thought. This perception may be challenged as a prime example of the "occluding effects of Baxterisation". Thomas and Lamont manifest the presumption towards Baxter which has dominated the historiography of Dissent. Their arguments, however, are quite different. According to Thomas, Baxter provided the essential positive foundation for Calamy's ecclesiology. By Lamont's view, Calamy had to sanitise Baxter's ideas. Recognising the significance of Baxter, Calamy was compelled to revise him in a manner which would support his own, rather different ecclesiology. In either case, Baxter is crucial.

The principal testimony to Calamy's dependence on Baxter is the fact that Calamy issued a revision of the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, in 1702.<sup>30</sup> This was edited "with freedom" by Calamy and included the first version of his own account of ejected ministers.<sup>31</sup> Considerable controversy ensued on the publication of Calamy's *Abridgment*. Calamy's three-volume *Defence of Moderate Nonconformity* (1703-5) was his response to criticisms of Baxter's history and his own glosses. One of Calamy's principal protagonists was Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761). Picking up differences between Calamy and Baxter, Hoadly questioned the faithfulness of Calamy's "Introduction" to earlier Nonconformity.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 127; Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 79-81.

<sup>31</sup> See Calamy, Historical Account I, pp 442-459.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", pp 129-30

Thomas suggests that Hoadly missed the mark, asserting instead that Calamy

was in many ways a typical Baxterian but, although he stuck to the theological pattern inherited from Baxter more faithfully than some of his younger contemporaries, he did so with a magnanimity that was perhaps more faithful to Baxter's genius than Baxter might have been himself.<sup>33</sup>

The "genius" to which Thomas refers is Baxter's supposed "catholicity". Calamy's revision of Dissent was distilled to its purest statement in his "Introduction" to the 1704 second part of his *defence of Moderate Nonconformity*. In his new system, Calamy held that

Each worshipping society must determine for itself all necessary circumstances and each private Christian has his own judgement and discretion left untouched.<sup>34</sup>

The provision for "each worshipping society" evinces the shift away from presbyterian polity noted above. However, it is the protection of the individual conscience in this passage which most impresses Thomas. He asserts that Calamy came to this position by "remodelling" Baxter. This remodelling he puts down to the incorporation of John Locke's view on toleration.<sup>35</sup> This dual association is important in the light of the analysis of both Baxter and Locke in this thesis.

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 127.

<sup>34</sup> E. Calamy, "Introduction" to A defence of Moderate Nonconformity - Second Part, London, 1704.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 130. This is not surprising; Locke is an important factor in Thomas's view of later Dissent. Thomas also contends for Locke's influence on Doddridge - R. Thomas, "Philip Doddridge and Liberalism in Religion" in G. Nuttall (ed) Philip Doddridge 1702-51: His Contribution to English Religion, London, 1951, pp 122-153.



Thomas's case for Calamy's dependence on Baxter and Locke is tenuous. Calamy honours the ecclesiologies of the two senior men only in the breach. The salient features of his new system are actually those which depart from Baxter and Locke. Calamy rejected the national Church structure which was important to Baxter's vision for most of his career. More significant was the relegation of discipline. Thomas concedes that "Baxter's adherence to 'discipline' naturally conflicted with his catholicity."<sup>36</sup> Yet, as I have argued, discipline (not "peace", and certainly not catholicity) was the very key to Baxter's ecclesiology.<sup>37</sup> Even in his aberrant period, Baxter was not prepared to give individual conscience the high place Calamy accorded it.<sup>38</sup>

The link with Locke is similarly compromised. Thomas notes that Calamy went "even further than Locke himself". Locke called for civil freedom of association with Churches.

Calamy, however, clearly envisages a measure of toleration within the worshipping community itself...he acted on the principle of a good deal of internal latitude and toleration within the Church.<sup>39</sup>

Completely overlooked by Thomas is a far more likely direct influence on Calamy. Lamont, recounting Thomas's interpretation of Calamy, inadvertently identifies the crucial distinguishing concept. "Charity" he notes, "weighs more with

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas "Presbyterians in Transition", p 127 n. 1. This concession is based on R. Schlatter, Richard Baxter and Puritan Politics, New Brunswick, 1957, pp 33-37.

<sup>37</sup> See chapter seven, pp 299-296 above.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter five, pp 196-197 above.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 130.

Calamy than the 'plausible Pleas of Uniformity and Decency'.<sup>40</sup> It was Howe, rather than Baxter, who built his ecclesiology around charity. Even in 1680, Howe was far more concerned with individual conscience than Baxter. Moreover, Calamy's "extension" of Locke also mirrored Howe's concerns. In contrast to the mere civil context of Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* Howe's call in *Union Among Protestants* was for tolerance within the congregation.<sup>41</sup> Ignoring these connections, Thomas posits an intellectual context for Calamy's "moderate Nonconformity" which is vague and peripheral.

William Lamont qualifies Thomas's account but replaces it with an interpretation which displays similar flaws. Like Thomas he identifies Calamy's 1704 "Introduction" as the crucial turning point in the "emancipation" of Dissent.

To emancipate Restoration Dissent...Calamy would have to revise Baxter. But Calamy did not need to invent new concepts. He transformed Protestant Nonconformity, not by ignoring Baxter or by misunderstanding him, but by developing arguments that had already been advanced by Baxter, particularly in his writings of the late 1670s and the early 1680s. Indeed, in that period of his writings, there is evidence to suggest that the development of his views might have led logically to the philosophy that Calamy expressed in 1704. *Baxter might have been the man to emancipate Restoration Dissent.*<sup>42</sup>

According to Lamont, that Baxter was not the agent of emancipation was due to his recovery of an apocalyptic vision and subsequent return to the national Church vision. Thomas's account "misses the final distance between Baxter's answers

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<sup>40</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 276.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter six, pp 240-1 above.

<sup>42</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 211-2.

in the [later] 1680s and Calamy's in 1704".<sup>43</sup> Lamont identifies Calamy's key revision to have been his removal of the eschatological structure from Baxter's ecclesiology. With the stakes thus lowered, both separatist and established Churches could be viewed in a more sober manner.<sup>44</sup>

The distance between the mature Baxter and Calamy is highlighted by the reaction to Calamy's "Introduction" by the undoubted "Baxterian", Daniel Williams. In his account of his own life, Calamy records that Williams alone of his colleagues objected to the scheme, advancing that "when a proper season came...he could overthrow the whole fabric, with ease". Calamy's response to Williams is instructive.

I told him, frankly, that the principles there advanced were spreading so wide, and prevailing so generally among us, that if he neglected the present opportunity, he might afterwards find it very difficult to make way for other notions.<sup>45</sup>

Lamont suggests that Calamy repristinated ideas which Baxter flirted with in 1677-82. However, Lamont's own analysis demonstrates that this was the period when Baxter departed from his main line of thought. Once again, Calamy is portrayed as honouring Baxter in the breach. It is thus wishful thinking to cite Calamy as evidence of Baxter's influence on later Nonconformity. Calamy held himself to be in the mainstream of Nonconformist thought. This new consensus clearly did not spring from Baxter's legacy.

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<sup>43</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, p 275.

<sup>44</sup> Lamont, Richard Baxter, pp 278-9.

<sup>45</sup> Calamy, Historical Account, II, p 30.

John Howe is a far more likely source for Calamy's ideas than Baxter. There are numerous links between the two. It was Howe who advised the young Calamy to seek education in Utrecht. In 1692, Howe endorsed Calamy for a position in a large congregation in Bristol and subsequently advised him. During the 1690s Calamy attended a weekly meeting for "amicable discussion", at the home of Howe's relation, Dr Francis Upton. Calamy's closest friend in the 1690s was Howe's assistant, Thomas Reynolds, with whom he also shared a lodging. It was to Howe that both younger men first applied for ordination.<sup>46</sup> Neither should the significance of another pertinent detail be missed, merely because it is obvious. Calamy may have edited Baxter's autobiography but he wrote a full-scale biographical study of Howe.

The importance of these contacts should not be exaggerated. The Dissenting clerical world was small. Calamy was assistant at various times to the "Baxterians", Sylvester and Williams. Nevertheless the assumption that Baxter provided the only logical theological context for Calamy's restatement of Nonconformist principles is clearly ill-founded.

This view is further strengthened when Calamy's ideas are laid along side those of Howe. The eschatological structure Howe revived in the 1690s has been shown to differ significantly from Baxter's.<sup>47</sup> Importantly, the futurist, pneumatological scheme favoured by Howe removed the spotlight

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<sup>46</sup> Howe ultimately declined but this seems not to have damaged their relationship - Calamy, Historical Account, I, pp 139, 311-7, 324, 339.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter seven, pp 294-301 above.

from current institutions, either separatist or established. With this, Calamy's lowering of the stakes readily coheres.

Calamy himself testified to the harmony of his ideas with those of Howe. That Howe endorsed Calamy's scheme is mentioned only in passing by Thomas and Lamont.<sup>48</sup> Yet Calamy's account of the approbation is important, suggesting the ecclesiologies of the two men were very close indeed.

In the last visit I made to Mr Howe, a very few days before he died, speaking of this Introduction, and signifying his hearty approbation of it, he made it his request to me, that, at a proper juncture, I would take it off the stocks, (as he was pleased to express it,) make it more general, without a reference to any particular persons or writings, and publish it as an Essay towards an Ecclesiastical Settlement. It was his opinion it might be of considerable service.<sup>49</sup>

The novelty of Calamy's "Introduction" has been overstated. He was merely synthesising for a new generation the type of ecclesiology which had already found sophisticated expression in Howe's works. This continuity should not have been missed. In his *Memoirs* of Howe's life Calamy noted that Howe stood for the very principles Calamy himself was to outline in the 1704 "Introduction".

He was for having nothing remain as a Test or Boundary of Christian Communion, but what has its Foundation as such, in plain Reason or express Revelation.<sup>50</sup>

The ghost of Richard Baxter must be laid to rest. If the lineage of the "new epoch" is to be traced beyond Calamy, its lines will lead to John Howe.

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", p 130; Lamont, *Richard Baxter*, p 274.

<sup>49</sup> Calamy, *Historical Account*, II, p 31.

<sup>50</sup> Calamy p 239.

It remains to consider the implications for our understanding of later Stuart English Church history. I have developed an ecclesiological model in the conviction that a subtle theological interpretation adds a valid perspective on the period. Indeed, I contend that such an approach is necessary if a satisfactory and sympathetic account of this time of turmoil and lost opportunity is to be attained. In what follows, I shall outline the principal ramifications of my analysis.

Periodisation is a constant problem for historians. In chapter one I discussed the effects of the traditional division of seventeenth-century English history at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. By focusing primarily on "later Stuart Dissent", I have apparently accepted that split. Nevertheless, much of what I have argued supports the current historiographical trend to cross the Restoration divide. In chapter two, employing the insights of others, I suggested ways in which fundamental ecclesiology provides links with both early Stuart debates and crucial Interregnum issues. In this chapter, drawing together the threads of my own analysis of Howe, I have argued for another continuity. "Puritanism", if understood as a concern for immediate piety, can be shown to have survived the downfall of the Protectorate and Republic. "Puritan" piety found one expression in Nonconformist, invisibilist ecclesiology.

A theological approach highlights issues which did not disappear in 1660. Yet, it is clear that the later Stuart period witnessed an increasing divergence of fundamental

ecclesiology. Continuity with the past does not imply that theology is static. Nor does it exist in a vacuum. Whilst it is unhelpful to set an impermeable boundary at 1660, it is as misleading to ignore the pressures of the later political and ecclesiastical context.

In the established Church, two competing emphases developed. Both stressed the immanent activity of God. One located this in the Church, represented by its Bishops; the other found it in the state. Within Dissent, the transcendent operation of God's will was dominant. A view of the Church which stressed the invisible society gradually came to prominence. The impact of these trends can be observed in three broad phases in the history of Nonconformity.

The first phase spans the 1660s and 70s. These decades began with the failure of the Savoy Conference, the rejection of the Worcester House declaration and the 1662 Act of Uniformity. Yet, these were also the years in which a *rapprochement* between at least the some "Presbyterians" and the established Church may have been possible. Both aspects may be understood in terms of the model I propose.

Contrasting theological frameworks lie at the heart of the breach between Anglicans and Dissenters. To the leaders in the Church of England, the requirements of the Act of Uniformity were entirely logical. The visible Church concept carried with it the imperatives of obedience to authority and institutional unity. More extreme visiblists employed an assumption in favour of episcopal rulings. The Bishops, as *jure divino* symbols of the Church, should be obeyed. All

visiblists placed importance on uniformity. They were happy to concede that the act required uniformity on many matters of "indifference" (i.e. those questions of form and ritual which all agreed did not in themselves determine salvation). However, small issues assumed a kind of significance when set in the context of the Church. If matters were truly indifferent, scruples over them could validly be set aside in the interest of what was important: visible unity. The proper response of all Christians was clearly to conform.

To those who became Nonconformists, contrasting criteria applied. To varying degrees, their leaders emphasised the invisible Church above the visible. Episcopal rule, institutional unity and shared ritual gave way to local authority and individual conscience. Questions of "indifference" took on an aspect markedly different from that of the Churchmen. If individuals scrupled at particular practices, conformity would require transgression of conscientious principles - tantamount to sin. Those who were relaxed about particulars felt that acquiescing in Uniformity would put undue pressure on others. As Howe put it to Bishop Wilkins, his "latitude...was the very thing which made him a Non-conformist."<sup>51</sup>

Discussions between the parties were handicapped by these different ecclesiological biases. Nevertheless, until the end of the 1670s, comprehension seemed a possibility. Standard analyses of the period have identified the various attempts

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<sup>51</sup> Calamy pp 31-3. See chapter three, pp 130-1 above.



to bring this about.<sup>52</sup> Among the Nonconformists, some, uninterested in national Church structures, sought only toleration. The most consistent interest in comprehension was shown by Richard Baxter. In the first decades of the Restoration, Baxter was at the peak of his influence within Dissent. Importantly, as shown in chapter seven, Baxter's concerns placed him near the middle of the ecclesiological spectrum. In this period at least, he continued to favour a national Church and was thus open to institutional expressions of unity. In Churchmen such as Stillingfleet and Tillotson, he had natural partners who shared many of his interests.

By the end of the 1670s, Baxter's efforts were looking increasingly futile. Genuine interest in comprehension was fading on both sides. It would briefly revive in 1680, but all proposals foundered. The shift away from comprehension has been correctly linked to the burst of relative freedom under the 1672 Indulgence.<sup>53</sup> Yet, neither the Indulgence nor a simple generational shift from "Dons" to "Ducklings" can satisfactorily explain the change. More complicated changes were occurring within both Dissent and the Church. The fluidity of political allegiance in the Restoration crisis had its counterpart in theology. The crisis signalled a second phase in the history of later Stuart Nonconformity.

As I argued in chapter five, the controversies of 1680 revealed significant ecclesiological fault lines. These did not, however, neatly correspond with those traditionally

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<sup>52</sup> Outlined in chapter one, pp 25-31 above.

<sup>53</sup> Watts pp 248-9; Thomas, "Comprehension", pp 209

assigned. The so-called "Latitudinarians", Stillingfleet and Tillotson, did not employ the same ecclesiology. By 1680 Stillingfleet had moved to a greater reliance on the visible Church. Tillotson had adopted a moderate, "Constantinian" position. Both men were less willing than previously to make concessions to Dissenters. Though in different ways, they both displayed a shift towards immanence. The mediated action of God had become more important to their ecclesiology. Accordingly, Dissenters' claims to follow conscience carried less weight.

Among the Nonconformists a corresponding, though opposite process was occurring. As Lamont has shown, in the face of apparently unremitting official hostility and the threat of Roman Catholic ascendancy, even Richard Baxter moved to a more sectarian ecclesiology during the Restoration Crisis. For Baxter as an individual, the tilt was temporary. Eventually his discipline-based national Church ecclesiology gyroscopically reasserted itself. For the larger body of Dissent, the shift was more telling. The most influential ecclesiology of the 1680s would not be Baxter's. Yet neither was it the case that the Interregnum Congregationalism of John Owen took over. Dissent did not simply lurch to Independency. Instead, it drifted to the thoroughgoing invisiblism of John Howe.

If Howe's importance is accepted, the theological dynamics of later Stuart Dissent take on a different aspect. Our understanding of the 1680s and 90s needs to incorporate the increasing power of an ecclesiology which emphasised the

invisible Church and which drew its logic from a radical bias to the transcendent activity of God.

The result of these developments among both Churchmen and Dissenters was the removal of the common ground that Baxter had exploited in the preceding decades. The intensified pressure of the early 1680s, followed by the accession of James II, served to confirm the widening rift. Comprehension would be discussed again in 1688-9, but it was no longer a realistic possibility. Spurr has shown that committed Churchmen were opposed to a broad comprehension for fear it would compromise uniformity, thereby "importing schism into the Church."<sup>54</sup> Theological barriers to comprehension were not confined to the Anglicans. Dissenters like Howe, desirous of unity based on the principle of charity, were, nevertheless, unwilling to enter into any arrangement which threatened the exercise of individual conscience.

By the Glorious Revolution, Nonconformists were speaking an ecclesiological language quite different from that of even moderate Churchmen. When it was referred to Convocation in 1689, comprehension finally died as a viable option. The pattern had, however, been set a decade before. Crucial leaders on both sides had moved closer to opposing poles on the ecclesiological spectrum. The 1680s witnessed the final alienation of Dissent from the Established Church. With the passing of the Act of Toleration, Nonconformity entered a new phase.

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<sup>54</sup> Spurr, "Comprehension", p 944 and *passim*.

Recounting the ultimate demise of comprehension, Spurr concludes that "the cost to the Church of England was incalculable".<sup>55</sup> Not immediately obvious was the profound effect radical invisibilism would have on Nonconformity. In developments which mirror the failure of a wider comprehension, Nonconformists were unable to effect a strong institutional unity. It would be anachronistic to identify "denominationalism" in the 1690s. However, the ecclesiology exemplified by Howe in the 1680s and 90s and codified by Calamy in 1704 undoubtedly laid the ground for later sectarianism. The 1690s onward was the third phase of later Stuart Nonconformity. The theological dynamics which contributed to its alienation from the Church of England, would play a major role in the fragmentation of Dissent.

The importance in this process of invisibilist ecclesiology may be illustrated by a comparison of the history of later Nonconformity with that of the Church of England in the same period.

In the Common Fund of 1690 and the "Happy Union" of 1691, "Presbyterians" and "Congregationalists" achieved a modicum of institutional unity. As outlined in chapter seven, this was unable to survive a series of doctrinal disputes. The antinomian and trinitarian controversies which centred on Daniel Williams led directly to serious splits. The Baptists, who also attempted institutional unity among themselves, likewise ended the 1690s disunited.<sup>56</sup> In the first decade of

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<sup>55</sup> Spurr, Restoration Church, p 103.

<sup>56</sup> See White, "Twilight", pp 318-325.

the eighteenth century, a further attempt at co-operation was made. The "General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about London" included Baptists but was a looser body than the "Happy Union" and, in any case, was limited to the capital and to political ends.<sup>57</sup> In 1719 a further trinitarian controversy split this group. Although some co-operation in the training of ministers continued into the 1730s, Nonconformists were unable to sustain any form of institutional unity.<sup>58</sup>

The established Church too, was wracked by doctrinal disputes in the decades following the accession of William and Mary. At approximately the same time that the Dissenters were arguing over the trinity, the Church was embroiled in the socinian controversy which centred on Dr Wallis. There were long-running disputes over Convocation and, in 1710, the trial of Dr Sacheverell exposed considerable differences within the Church. The Bangorian controversy which began in 1717 centred initially on concepts of the Church.<sup>59</sup> Yet despite these considerable strains, the Church of England did not formally split. Even the 1689 departure of the Non-jurors had not precipitated a significant schism. Most High Churchmen remained within the established body. Torn by similar disputes, the Nonconformists had broken down to their

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition", pp 125-6.

<sup>58</sup> See J. Goring "The Break-Up of the Old Dissent", in C.G. Bolam et al The English Presbyterians, pp 175-218

<sup>59</sup> Rupp, Religion, pp 88-101. Thomas links the Nonconformist controversy which culminated in the 1719 Salters' Hall split directly with the Bangorian Controversy see Thomas, "Non-subscription Controversy", pp 180-185.

constituent parts by 1730. The Church of England remained largely intact.

A direct comparison between Nonconformists and the Church of England has obvious problems. It is likely that the smaller numbers of Dissenters magnified personal and doctrinal differences. Legal and constitutional factors placed a presumption of institutional unity on Anglicans. Nevertheless, the importance of fundamental ecclesiology should not be discounted. The security of the Church of England as a national Church was built on two foundations. One was its confidence in itself as the visible Church of Christ. The second was its connection with the constitution and particularly the sovereign. As has been argued in this thesis, both of these concepts depend upon an acceptance of the immanent activity of God. To those who emphasised this basic position, the idea of rending a body so established was unacceptable. The presumption towards institutional unity thus engendered proved able to withstand the considerable centrifugal force of doctrinal dispute.

Dissent, by contrast, lacked a secure motivation for unity. In Howe's ecclesiology, this function was performed by the dynamic power of Christian charity. Yet it was just this quality which most quickly disappeared in the polemical exchanges associated with early modern theological controversy. It was, in any case, an invisible measure of unity. It enabled the fiction that, despite institutional factionalism, spiritual unity was maintained. Nonconformists lacked the momentum for visible unity which kept the Church

of England together. The centrifugal pressure of doctrinal dispute was not balanced by an effective centripetal force.

This leads to an important conclusion about the fate of later Stuart Nonconformity. It is not sufficient merely to explain the fragmentation of Dissent in terms of individual controversies and doctrinal differences. Even the different Church polities associated with "Presbyterians", "Congregationalists" and "Baptists" do not, in themselves, provide the key. By the time of Queen Anne these differences were small. All operated on an essentially similar model: effective congregational autonomy tempered by association over issues such as ordination. Underlying the organisations of Nonconformists was an ecclesiology which, by its emphasis on the invisible Church and on individual conscience, provided little foundation for the institutional unity periodically attempted. Ultimately the fragmentation of Dissent may be traced, not to the doctrines on which the parties differed, but to the ecclesiology they shared.

This thesis, then, calls for a reinterpretation of later Stuart Dissent. The ecclesiological model constructed in chapter two has proved helpful in understanding the theology of John Howe. Specifically, Howe's view of the Church has been distinguished from that of the Latitudinarians, John Locke and Richard Baxter. When the effects of the Howe myth and generations of Baxterisation are stripped away, Howe's individual importance in the history of Nonconformity becomes clear. His prominence in turn increases the likely value of the model by which he may be best understood. When applied to

the period as a whole, the ecclesiological model gives a significant new perspective on events.

There is paradox in the picture which emerges. The view of the Church which came to dominate Nonconformist thought was one which ostensibly transcended party division and made space for individual conscience. The long commitment of its principal exponent to schemes for comprehension and unity was not an aberration. Yet, in that it removed the seat of unity from the visible to the invisible sphere, his approach contained the seeds of institutional fragmentation and division. It proved itself to be "strange fire". In a tragic irony, some of the theological roots of the alienation and fragmentation of Dissent lay in the irenic ecclesiology of John Howe.



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