

2005

The Explosive Cleric: Morgan Godwyn, Slavery, and Colonial Elites in Virginia and Barbados, 1665-1685

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THE EXPLOSIVE CLERIC: MORGAN GODWYN, SLAVERY, AND COLONIAL
ELITES IN VIRGINIA AND BARBADOS, 1665-1685

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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July, 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I especially wish to thank Dr. John Kneebone for all his help with this project. Without Dr. Kneebone's consistent and excellent dialogue, critiques, and patience this thesis would surely not have been completed. For all his time over the past two and a half years I am truly grateful. I am also indebted to Dr. Philip Schwarz for convincing me that I could find a home in Colonial American History, and for introducing me to Morgan Godwyn. Thanks also to Dr. Norrece Jones for his help developing the project and his essential help narrowing an expansive topic. Thanks also to Dr. Timothy Thurber and Dr. Catherine Ingrassia for their insights.

I also want to thank my parents for their desire and consistent efforts to make me challenge myself.

Finally, to Pop-Pop, Deb, and Sparkkey—thank you for the motivation, the promise, and the strength. We find immortality in others' hearts.

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Abstract

THE EXPLOSIVE CLERIC: MORGAN GODWYN, SLAVERY, AND COLONIAL ELITES IN VIRGINIA AND BARBADOS, 1665-1685

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Historians often describe how the ideas of national identity, race, religious affiliation, and political power greatly influenced the development of societies in colonial America.

However, historians do not always make clear that these ideas did not exist independently of one another. Individuals in colonial American societies often conflated and incorporated one or more of these ideas with another. In other words, individuals did not always think of national identity and race and religious affiliation as independent entities.

The specific case of the Reverend Morgan Godwyn illuminates just how connected these ideas were in the minds of some colonial Americans. As a minister in the Church of England, Godwyn spoke and wrote within an overtly religious context. His words, however, reveal that to him, religion and politics, national identity and race and ethnicity, could not be unpacked and viewed separately—each heavily influenced the others.

Godwyn used his position as a cleric to challenge the authority of English colonial elites. He attempted to convince the English public of the necessity of reining in the growing powers of colonial elites in order to preserve the authority of the English monarch and the

Church of England clergy. From studying Morgan Godwyn, one can see how complex and convoluted ideas—and simultaneously important—ideas of national identity, race, religion and political influence were in seventeenth-century colonial American societies.

Chapter I

An Undefined Cleric: Historians and Morgan Godwyn

As English men and women came to their country's American colonies, they brought their religious institutions with them. Most colonial governments established the state-funded Church of England and sanctioned it as the only "acceptable" form of worship. The Church of England enjoyed privileged status in English society from the English Reformation of King Henry VIII in 1534 until 1642 and the beginning of the English Civil War. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the Church of England once again became England's only state-supported religious institution. The 1689 Act of Toleration, while officially allowing some dissenting Protestant sects to practice in England, maintained a privileged status for the Church of England by forcing other Protestants to be "certified" by the Crown and Church, and continue to pay tithes to the Church of England. For all but twenty years in the seventeenth century, the Church of England was the official state church of England and her citizens. Except in the Puritan New England colonies beginning in 1620, in Quaker Pennsylvania starting in the 1670s, and in New York where Dutch Reformed churches prevailed in the Dutch-American counties even after the Peace of Westminster gave control of all of New York to the English crown in 1674, the Church of England dominated colonial religious activities through the seventeenth century.¹

¹ Several historians of colonial America describe the religious sentiments and institutions of England's American colonies. Specifically see David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel

Describing seventeenth-century Virginia, historian Brent Tarter states that the colonial “church stood alongside the colonial government as one of the principal organizing institutions of society.”² The ways in which these two institutions worked together, how each tried to control the other, and how both attempted to exert influence on society are complex questions for which definitive answers have been elusive. However, the lives and writings of a few people of the time reveal the interaction between religion and politics and its impact on social conditions within England’s American colonies. One such person is the Reverend Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican minister who served in Virginia and Barbados from 1665 to 1680. In 1680, Godwyn returned to England and published tracts espousing his negative perception of colonial Englishmen’s religious devotion and the excessive social and political power of wealthy colonial plantation owners. Much of Godwyn’s writing focused on Barbados, and slavery’s pervasive presence on the island became a focal point of his critique.

For that reason, historians writing about the interaction between religion and race in colonial America often cite Morgan Godwyn. Historians best know Godwyn for his 1680 publication *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*.³ The *Advocate*, written most likely

Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Both Fischer and Greene relate religious sentiment to the development of local political and social institutions.

² Brent Tarter, “Reflections on the Church of England in Colonial Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 112, no. 4 (2005), 347.

³ The full title of Godwyn’s first and largest surviving work is *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate, suing for their admission to the church, or, A persuasive to the instructing and baptizing of the Negro’s and Indians in our plantations shewing that as the compliance therewith can prejudice no mans just interest, so the willful neglecting and opposing of it, is no less than a manifest apostacy from the Christian faith: to which is added, a brief account of religion in Virginia* (London, 1680), and is hereafter cited as *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*. The letter to Governor Berkeley comprises the last chapter of *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, and is titled “The State of Religion in Virginia, as it was sometime before the late Rebellion,

in 1679 but not completed and published until Godwyn's return to London the following year, criticized Barbadian slaveholders' practice of not allowing the enslaved access to Anglican religious instruction. Additionally, the *Advocate* included the published version of a letter Godwyn sent in 1674 to Sir William Berkeley, then royal governor of Virginia.⁴ Most historians of colonial Virginia focus their discussions of Godwyn on this letter. However, four other published texts by Godwyn survive: the 1681 *Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate*, the 1682 *The Revival, or, Directions for a sculpture*, the 1685 sermon delivered in Westminster Abbey *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, and finally a letter published posthumously in 1708 as part of Francis Brokesby's *Some Proposals Towards Propagating of the Gospel*.⁵ It is my contention, and the central rationale for writing this thesis, that historians have not given Morgan Godwyn's thinking comprehensive and accurate treatment. No single analysis is complete, nor does combining all the historical analyses of Godwyn provide an accurate picture of Godwyn's

represented in a Letter to Sir W.B. then Governour thereof." This chapter, because it discusses a different topic and location from the remainder of the book, will be treated as a separate work and referred to as "The State of Religion in Virginia."

⁴ Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62 – 63.

⁵ Like *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, these works of Godwyn's also have lengthy titles. The following are their complete citations with the abbreviated titles that will be used throughout this thesis. Morgan Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate, Or, Some further Considerations and Proposals for the effectual and Speedy carrying on of the Negro's Christianity in our Plantations without any prejudice to their Owners* (London, 1681), hereafter cited as *A Supplement to the Advocate*. Morgan Godwyn, *The Revival: or Directions for a Sculpture, describing the extraordinary Care and Diligence of our Nation, in publishing the Faith among Infidels in America, and elsewhere; compared with other both Primitive and Modern Professors of Christianity* (London, 1682), hereafter cited as *The Revival*. Morgan Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd before Religion, and Christ made to give place to Mammon: Represented in a Sermon relating to the Plantations* (London, 1685), hereafter cited as *Trade Preferred Before Religion*. Morgan Godwyn, "A Brief Account of Religion, in the Plantations, with those Causes of the Neglect and Decay Hereof in those Parts," in Francis Brokesby, *Some Proposals Towards Propagating of the Gospel in Our American Plantations* (London, 1708), hereafter cited as "A Brief Account of Religion."

meaning, his influence on English society, his intentions in speaking out against what he deemed to be the atrocious actions of slaveholders in English colonies, and his perception that Englishmen neglected their essential duties as Protestant Anglican Christians in the New World. Missing from the historical discourse is an investigation of how Godwyn's critiques of colonial English society—especially the wealthy slaveholders—challenged ideas of cultural identity within that society. Challenging colonial elites' cultural identity allowed Godwyn to appeal to the English public emotionally. While he was ultimately unsuccessful in changing the actions of colonial elites, Godwyn's emotional appeal was his way of challenging the ability and right of Virginia's wealthy vestrymen and Barbados's wealthy sugar plantation owners to possess political and social authority.

Historians have not noticed Godwyn's simultaneous challenges to English colonial elites and to the interaction between race and religion. Instead, historians have unpacked Godwyn's arguments and divided them into distinct subjects. For example, Godwyn is often mentioned in discussions of religion and parish politics in seventeenth-century Virginia. George MacLaren Brydon devotes a significant portion of the appendix of *Virginia's Mother Church* to Godwyn's "The State of Religion in Virginia." Brydon attributes Godwyn's animosity toward Virginia's vestries and their uses of laymen substitutes for ordained clergy to a juvenile aversion to a foreign situation.⁶ Brydon implies that Godwyn merely disliked not being treated with the respect he felt he deserved and therefore lashed out at Virginia's vestries from a selfish standpoint.⁷

⁶ George MacLauren Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church and the Political Conditions under which it Grew*, (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1947), 507.

⁷ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 509.

Brydon criticizes Godwyn for failing to understand the circumstances necessitating the use of lay preachers in Virginia's seventeenth-century Anglican churches, but Brydon is equally guilty of failing to grasp the underlying cause of Godwyn's animosity. Brydon never mentions Godwyn's clear language haranguing vestrymen for overstepping their bounds and meddling in church affairs.

Brydon also associates Godwyn with the 1667 law of the Virginia General Assembly that baptism of the enslaved did not affect their unfree status.⁸ Brydon acknowledges that *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* was written in Barbados and about Barbadian slaveholders' reluctance to provide religious instruction to the enslaved, but he speculates that, as the same issue must have arisen in Virginia with the passage of the 1667 statute, "quite possibly Morgan Godwyn himself had first raised the question" in Virginia.⁹ There is, however, little evidence that Godwyn promoted extending religious instruction to the enslaved while in Virginia. No records remain save Godwyn's own assertions regarding his attempts to baptize enslaved Virginians. Godwyn, when speaking about his experiences in Barbados, tangentially declares only that he baptized two enslaved Africans while in Virginia. Godwyn implies other attempts to proselytize, but gives no indication of the amount of time spent—or allowed him by slave owners—

⁸ The 1667 statute states: "Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children that are slaves by birth, and by the charity and piety of their owners made partakers of the blessed sacrament of baptisme, should by vertue of their baptisme be made free; It is enacted and declared by this general assembly, and the authority thereof, that the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedome; that diverse masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of greater growth if capable to be admitted to that sacrament." William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619* (New York: R&W&G Bartow, 1819-1823), II, 260, Act III.

⁹ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 187.

with the enslaved.¹⁰ Additionally, historian Anthony S. Parent, Jr. recently cited Godwyn's letter to Governor Berkeley to illustrate Virginia slave owners' reluctance to allow their slaves to be baptized in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹¹

Brydon's analysis of Godwyn is far from complete and filled with unfounded assumptions. Brydon seems unaware of Godwyn's works not published in *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, therefore missing any changes in Godwyn's arguments or approach to his audience. More important, Brydon assumes that Godwyn's experiences in Virginia and Barbados were similar if not identical. Brydon exports Godwyn's statements about religious instruction of the enslaved in Barbados to the setting of Virginia without any consideration of differing societal contexts. Consequently, Brydon presents a depiction of Godwyn that may be anachronistic. Brydon uses Godwyn's writings in 1680 about Barbados as evidence for what he thought about Virginia a decade earlier. Brydon does not consider that Godwyn's experiences in the two colonies might have evoked different reactions. Given that Godwyn wrote distinct tracts about Virginia and Barbados covering different topics relating to each colony (as will be discussed later), it seems very likely that Godwyn did have markedly different reactions to his stays in Virginia and Barbados.

Brydon's study of Morgan Godwyn actually raises many questions and partial answers come from historian John Woolverton. Woolverton begins with a brief chronicle

¹⁰ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 140.

¹¹ Parent mentions Godwyn in passing, spending only a few sentences on him. However, his point about slave owners' reluctance to allow their slaves to be baptized marks a crucial shift away from Brydon's interpretation of Godwyn and the relationship between race and religion in seventeenth-century Virginia. Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 238-239.

of Godwyn's life before his training at Oxford and subsequent travels to the Americas. He stresses Godwyn's missionary zeal and finds its precedent in Godwyn's studies of Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*. According to Woolverton, "from that eighth-century chronicle [Godwyn] had learned how his own country had been converted to the Christian religion. Fired by the stories in Bede of saintly bards and missionary teachers, Godwyn was struck by the similarity of opportunity in Virginia," where, "following in the footsteps of Bede's heroes," he could convert unbelievers in America.¹²

Woolverton, like Brydon, applies Godwyn's opinions expressed in *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* to his experiences in Virginia even though that text was expressly written about the conditions observed in Barbados.¹³ Godwyn does cite Bede routinely in *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, and he almost certainly had read Bede while at Oxford if not before, lending some credibility to Woolverton's claim that Godwyn expressed evangelical opinions regarding incorporating enslaved Africans and African-Americans and Native Americans into Anglican congregations in Virginia as he did in Barbados because the idea would have been in Godwyn's head before his travels to the Americas. However, Woolverton over-extends his argument. He intimates that Godwyn's confrontation in Virginia with John Dodman, of Potomac Parish, was

¹² John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 71-72.

¹³ The full title of the work indicates Godwyn's distinction between the two colonies. The addendum of "The State of Religion in Virginia" apart from the rest of the text clearly shows that Godwyn differentiated the two locations. Barbados and Virginia were different enough in his eyes to write distinct texts about them in 1680. Moreover, the complaints Godwyn makes about the two colonies and their inhabitants are different. This will be discussed in greater depth later in the paper.

predicated on Godwyn's desire to spread the gospel to enslaved blacks.¹⁴ The altercation between the two men eventually made its way to court. Dodman sued Godwyn for the value of a horse that had been lent to Godwyn and had somehow disappeared. The county court awarded Dodman one thousand pounds of tobacco. Because Godwyn could not pay the fine, the sheriff seized Godwyn's books and possessions. The case apparently remained contested until two years later when Godwyn placed a countersuit. The judge's decision in the countersuit reversed the earlier decision and ordered Dodman to return Godwyn's possessions, pay all court costs, and apologize to Godwyn before the court. As historian Alden T. Vaughan states, "there is nothing in the trial record about Negroes or Indians or baptism, or about criticism of the vestries; the case may have simply concerned the missing horse."¹⁵ Woolverton's assumptions, while potentially accurate, have no clear evidential support.

Woolverton gives attention to Godwyn's somewhat ambiguous comments on slavery and race. He writes that Godwyn "entertained no thought of black freedom from bondage," however, he "became a vociferous advocate of the rights of colonial slaves" to have access to religious instruction.¹⁶ Woolverton states that Godwyn believed in spiritual equality, if not secular equality, for all people. To Woolverton, this attitude differed so significantly from the opinions of the rest of colonial English society that it accounted for Godwyn's ostracism and expulsion from Virginia and Barbados, even though he was neither an abolitionist nor an egalitarian.

¹⁴ Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 73.

¹⁵ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 59.

¹⁶ Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 72 and 73.

In *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, David Brion Davis states that Godwyn “foreshadowed a mood and concern which would stir the Church of England at the beginning of the eighteenth-century and give birth to a number of ambitious programs for the Christianization of American slavery.”¹⁷ Davis focuses solely on Godwyn’s criticisms of West Indian slaveholders. To Davis, Godwyn is actually an example of how the Anglican Church made slavery and Christianity compatible. Godwyn’s assurances that baptism did not confer freedom from bondage nor preclude future enslavement allowed the growing numbers of English capitalists involved in the slave trade to rationalize and remove any impediments to slavery from their consciences. According to Davis, the Church of England rationalized a spiritual sanction for slavery. This rationalization went so far in Godwyn’s mind as to contend that bringing the enslaved into the Church of England would make them more reliable and docile workers.¹⁸

Additionally, Davis interprets Godwyn’s text in the context of England’s internal religious struggles of the late seventeenth century. As an Anglican, Godwyn viewed Catholics as enemies to the true faith. Dissenting English Protestants such as Puritans and Quakers also challenged the true word of God and His earthly representatives. Dissenters’ attempts to modify or correct the Anglican hierarchy threatened the stability of the Anglican Church. From this perspective, colonial planters’ singular desire to increase profits caused them to neglect their proselytizing duties as Christians and brought them dangerously close to atheism. Davis explains that the profit-minded

¹⁷ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 211.

¹⁸ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 204-205.

slaveholders of Barbados thus seemed to be proponents of “secular imperialistic forces, the subversive notions of political liberty, the religious heterodoxy and abuse of Scripture, which were destroying the old world of faith, obedience, and contentment.”¹⁹ Davis adds another element to Godwyn’s social impact in *Slavery and Human Progress*. He finds that late eighteenth-century abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson used and interpreted Godwyn as a proto-abolitionist. Clarkson and his contemporary antislavery supporters viewed Godwyn, along with Quaker George Fox and Nonconformist Richard Baxter, as evidence of earlier Christian uneasiness with slavery. Godwyn’s influence, according to Davis, lasted well after his death, becoming central to the late eighteenth-century abolition movements in England.²⁰

Davis delves deeper than Brydon and Woolverton into the social significance of Godwyn’s challenges to Barbadian slaveholders. He evaluates Godwyn’s complaints only in the religious realm and does not consider the underlying political and social consequences of Godwyn’s harsh critiques of slaveholders. The men Godwyn viciously chided for denying enslaved Africans the right to Anglican religious instruction were the wealthiest and most politically powerful individuals in Barbados. Additionally, the wealthiest and most politically powerful men in other English colonies were often slaveholders or made their wealth through the slave trade. By the second half of the seventeenth century, they exerted considerable influence on the government in England,

¹⁹ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 339-341. Quotation from p. 340.

²⁰ David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 138-139.

and their wealth privileged them in the English economy.²¹ For instance, owners of Caribbean sugar plantations possessed sufficient wealth to purchase seats in Parliament. So positioned, they lobbied for and created laws beneficial to themselves. This political power allowed these sugar magnates to monopolize markets for their sugar until 1846.²² Clearly a challenge to such men—even if in the 1670s and 1680s they did not yet possess this degree of political sway—had implications beyond the competition for souls among religious sects.

Theodore Allen does see broader implications in Godwyn's criticisms of Barbadian planters but, in his context, Godwyn was only a dissident voice against the rising tide of "white supremacy" emerging in Anglo-America. Godwyn's words challenged slaveholders to admit that Africans and African-Americans were spiritual equals with Englishmen. Allen says nothing about how Englishmen—specifically the white colonial elites Godwyn harshly ridicules—interpreted and reacted to Godwyn's message. For instance, Allen does not examine Godwyn's statements that he was threatened by colonists in both Barbados and Virginia. In Allen's context of burgeoning "white supremacy," colonial Englishmen easily dismissed voices like Godwyn's. According to Allen, Godwyn in some way provided spiritual or intellectual support for a

²¹ Eric Williams, in *Capitalism and Slavery*, makes the argument that the colonial English sugar planters in the Caribbean colonies created such wealth that they could significantly influence politics and economics in England. Williams's "Triangular Trade" not only produced wealth for the country by creating a profitable staple crop – sugar – but also stimulated domestic production by providing large markets for English-made and English colony-made consumables. The profits of this monopolistic economy then helped to fund the industrialization of Great Britain in the eighteenth century. That creation of wealth and stimulus to the rest of the English economy allowed West Indian sugar planters to have an extraordinary amount of political influence. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 52, 94-95.

²² Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 94-95, 153.

nascent racialized and slave society since he did not actually call for an end to slavery, nor did he challenge the institution in a way that would have significantly reduced the profit opportunities for colonial slave owners.²³

Lester Scherer, Winthrop Jordan, and Robin Blackburn each present interpretations of Godwyn that critique Allen's view. To Scherer, Godwyn was a spokesman for the humanity of the enslaved. While Godwyn's conscience allowed him to stand up for the spiritual equality of Africans and African-Americans—which only meant that they deserved access to Anglican Protestantism, not that any African spiritual belief was valid—the “general European assessment of [Africans] as barbarians” still limited Godwyn's thinking.²⁴ Winthrop Jordan makes similar statements in *White Over Black*. Jordan interprets Godwyn as an Englishman who does not agree with the assertions that Africans were developmentally lesser beings than whites. Jordan implies that while Godwyn disagrees with the sentiment that would take a larger role in slavery apologists' rhetoric at later times, the fact that Godwyn argues the point—and vehemently so—indicates that the view of Africans as beasts was socially pervasive in seventeenth-century England.²⁵ Robin Blackburn also addresses the fact that Godwyn's attacks on colonial English slaveholders in Barbados contrasted “their insensate greed with what he sees as the more responsible attitude of Puritans in New England or even of

²³ Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997), 191-192.

²⁴ Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America 1619-1819* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 33.

²⁵ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), 229-230.

the abominable Catholics in Spanish America.” Blackburn also notes that Godwyn’s contempt for these slaveholders stemmed from what he believed was a love of profit that encouraged the blasphemous actions of ignoring the Christian directive to proselytize the gospel to non-believers.²⁶

However, Allen, Blackburn, Jordan and Scherer do not view Godwyn’s attacks in their complete social context. Godwyn’s unfavorable comparisons of Anglican slaveholders to Puritans and Catholics would not have been well received in the Anglican community following the English Civil War. Dissenters had deposed Charles I, executed him, and replaced him with the Commonwealth Government that was Protestant, but anti-Anglican. Dissenting Protestants were Anglicans’ military and political enemies during the Civil War and Interregnum, which ended in 1660. As Norah Carlin states, religion in seventeenth-century England can be better defined as a body of believers rather than a body of beliefs.²⁷ These bodies of believers also tried to exert political authority with their spiritual authority. If the religious community worshipped incorrectly, “it was feared that God would show his displeasure by visiting disaster upon it.”²⁸

Godwyn was a product of this line of thinking. Godwyn’s accusations that the Protestant dissenters, who had in recent memory been the enemies of the Anglican body of believers, were superior to Anglican slaveholders implied that these wealthy

²⁶ Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800* (New York: Verso, 1997), 259.

²⁷ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 47-48.

²⁸ Carlin, *Causes of the English Civil War*, 48.

Barbadians had become England's new enemies. To Godwyn, individuals who forgot their primary duty to their religion created a dangerous rift in the community.

Edward Bond does place Godwyn within the social context in which he wrote, but Bond's subject is seventeenth-century Virginia and he therefore does not address Godwyn's actions in and reactions to Barbadian society of the 1670s. Bond acknowledges Godwyn's missionary impulse and intimates that it drove his actions in Virginia.²⁹ Likewise, Bond emphasizes Virginia slaveholders' rejection of spiritual equality of the enslaved, focusing his discussion of Godwyn on how inclusion of the enslaved in the Church of England could, in slave owners' minds, equate spiritual equality with temporal equality and freedom.³⁰ Virginia's seventeenth-century slaveholders, perceiving their future wealth to be gained from a burgeoning slave economy, created a definition of Englishness—in part by passing numerous statutes restricting the civil rights of anyone of African descent—that precluded individuals of African descent from entering equally into English colonial society.³¹ Bond's discussion of Godwyn focuses only on his ideas about the position Africans and African-Americans should have in the colonial Anglican church.

Bond barely mentions how Godwyn's texts address Native Americans' presence in colonial Virginia society and religious institutions. This omission is glaring given Bond's argument that white colonial Virginians created social ideologies that proscribed

²⁹ Edward Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 198.

³⁰ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 198-200.

³¹ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 198-208.

individuals from other cultures from entering equally into English colonial societies. Godwyn spends little time talking about involving Native Americans in the Church of England, but it would seem his apparent reluctance to speak about Native Americans would be interesting to an historian discussing the early racial barriers created to English spiritual life in Virginia. Additionally, while Bond does state that Godwyn attempted to impose English ecclesiastical ideas of church hierarchy on the colonial vestries, he does not explore the social and political ideas motivating Godwyn's initial criticisms and the vestries' responses. Moreover, Bond's scope in *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony* inherently limits a complete discussion of Godwyn. Bond does not explore ideas Godwyn developed in Virginia and took with him to Barbados, nor does he relate Godwyn to the larger framework of seventeenth-century English colonial society.

Alden T. Vaughan, in *Roots of American Racism*, devotes an entire chapter solely to Godwyn and his writings. As the title suggests, Vaughan incorporates Godwyn into the growing English colonial world increasingly polarized by race. Vaughan fits Godwyn neatly into the slave society formed by 1680 in the British Caribbean as a lone critic of slave owners' ideology of slavery and the subsequent ideas of race created to support exploiting enslaved African labor. To Vaughan, Godwyn both criticizes slaveholders' violent treatment of the enslaved as inhumane, and their constructed ideology of racial superiority that was used to rationalize brutality toward the enslaved.

As Vaughan states,

Godwyn's criticism of slave owners' abuse of slaves and refusal to let them become Christians was the most forceful and persistent of his era; his explanation of racism's insidious emphasis on pigmentation preceded by almost a century the insights of several Revolutionary era reformers; and his verbal jousting with the

slave owners' racist ideology presaged in many ways the antebellum debate over the African American's innate qualities and potentialities.³²

Vaughan interprets Godwyn as the antecedent to many later opponents of slavery and racial inequality. Later in the chapter, however, Vaughan cites Godwyn's attempts to show slavery's compatibility with Christianity and declares that his words foreshadowed nineteenth-century rationalizations of the institution.³³ The two ideas—Godwyn as proto-reformer and Godwyn as proto-apologist—do not appear compatible, but Vaughan does not clearly address this incompatibility.

Vaughan also notes that Godwyn wrote for two audiences: the slave owners in the colonies and the English public.³⁴ Godwyn's purpose seems to be first, to excite, anger, and shame colonial slaveholders into changing how they treat the enslaved, and second, to evoke strong condemnations from Englishmen at home to pressure colonials into changing their behaviors. However, Vaughan suggests that Godwyn's choice of audience was only motivated by his desire to propagate the Christian gospel, not by a desire to see the political and social authority of colonial slaveholders reined in. Essentially, Vaughan fails to place Godwyn adequately in a context that examines both colonial and English concerns. For example, when Godwyn openly states that the enslaved are more deserving of Christian salvation than colonial slave owners, Vaughan fails to explore the significance—both to the slave owners and the English public—of the statement. Statements such as this were laden with political meanings as well as religious ones.

³² Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 57.

³³ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 68.

³⁴ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 64.

Proclaiming colonial slaveholders to be unworthy Christians, or even heathens, directly challenged their political and social standing within English society. Vaughan, as do most other historians, correctly notes Godwyn's strong evangelical message and its appeals for ameliorative treatment of the enslaved, but he does not present a complete picture of Godwyn's intentions, or the effects of his words on his audience.

Historians have not explored how Godwyn's criticisms of Barbadian planters and Virginian vestrymen inherently challenged their status as Englishmen. By calling into question these slaveholders' belief in God, their practice of Anglican Christianity, their morality, and their dedication to profit, Godwyn simultaneously challenged their national identity. In seventeenth-century England, national identity was defined by a series of professed beliefs—not all of which were religious in nature. That national identity allowed individuals to rationalize that they possessed a privileged position: that Englishmen were the pinnacle of civilization and the English nation was God's elect. By bringing slaveholders' identity into question—the identity of the most powerful people in colonial societies—Godwyn attempted to deny these individuals the right to possess political influence and consolidate material wealth. In essence, Godwyn's challenges to Barbadian slaveholders and Virginian vestrymen threatened to take away the high societal positions they had grasped for themselves as Englishmen created new English societies around the globe.

Godwyn's intention was to counteract the trends he observed in English colonial societies. He wanted to prevent wealthy colonial merchants and planters from gaining too much political, social, and economic power. To Godwyn, power was properly placed

in the hands of the English Crown and its spiritual arm, the Church of England. Together these two entities had ruled England and should continue to rule. As will be shown through this thesis, Godwyn interpreted the rising political and social influence of wealthy colonial Englishmen as a direct threat to the ability of the Crown and Church to control English citizens. Godwyn developed an argument against these colonial elites that he believed would incite the public in England and encourage those in powerful political and social positions in England to limit the power of colonial elites. In his argument Godwyn used the example of colonial slave owners refusing to grant salvation to Africans and Indians in order to portray colonial elites as immoral. Moreover, Godwyn's argument explicitly states that those who do not proselytize enslaved Africans and tributary Native Americans ignore the directives of the Crown and Church, thereby refusing to submit to their authority.

Morgan Godwyn is important because he left behind texts used by historians of colonial America and the Caribbean. Historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries believe these texts expose issues absolutely essential to the development of British American colonies. It is therefore crucial to have a well-contextualized understanding of Godwyn's arguments and his contemporary meaning and impact. Morgan Godwyn wrote and spoke about the spiritual plight of enslaved Africans and tributary Native Americans, but he did not speak or write for them. Godwyn appears to have possessed a genuine desire to proselytize Africans and Native Americans and considered them potential spiritual equals, but enslaved Africans and tributary Native Americans were not his central concern. Morgan Godwyn used his perception of their

spiritual dilemma as a tool to convince other white, non-colonial Englishmen of the dangers of allowing wealthy colonial merchants and planters to grasp excessive political and social influence.

The following chapters explore this idea in Godwyn's surviving writings. Chapter II extrapolates Godwyn's intended meaning from his writing on Virginia. Rather than espousing a deep-rooted concern for the souls of Africans and Native Americans living in Virginian society, Godwyn explicitly declares Virginia's vestrymen to be too politically powerful and socially influential. Consequently, these vestrymen constitute a danger to the authority of the Crown and Church. Chapter III follows a similar pattern for Godwyn's more extensive writings on his experiences in Barbados. It is in Barbados that Godwyn develops his strong rhetoric for proselytizing Africans and Native Americans. As in his writings about Virginia, Godwyn's focus remains the dangerously powerful colonial elites who present a direct threat to the authority of traditional English sources of political and social power. Finally, Chapter IV explains the social and intellectual context, as well as the significance of Godwyn's arguments.

Chapter II

Profane Usurpers: Morgan Godwyn and the vestries of colonial Virginia

English religious institutions experienced quite a bit of flux during the seventeenth century. The English Civil War began in 1640 with the summoning of the Long Parliament. Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud was executed in 1645, and King Charles I four years later. A Parliament nominated by Oliver Cromwell, leader of the anti-monarchy and anti-Church of England forces, took its seats in 1653. Cromwell's Commonwealth government remained in power for two years after Cromwell's death in 1658. The Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under Charles II after the collapse of the Commonwealth spurred a resurgence in the Church of England. Once again Anglican clergy and Anglican parishioners had official support from the government.³⁵ The Restoration also gave a renewed impetus for training Anglican clergy at Oxford. The Church of England was once again state-supported. The fall of the Commonwealth undermined Puritan political power. With these more favorable political conditions, Oxford could focus on producing young clergymen with sufficient zeal to help maintain the Church of England's position as the official church of the country.³⁶

If Morgan Godwyn had not been exceptionally zealous, he still might have been a good candidate for the Anglican ministry. As Alden Vaughan notes, Godwyn's choice of

³⁵ This is a very brief account of some major events of the English Civil War. For more information, see Maurice Ashley, *The English Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Christopher Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads: The English Civil War 1642 – 1649* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993); Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

³⁶ George MacLaren Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church and the Political Conditions under which it Grew* (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1947), 6 – 7.

the “clerical profession was almost predictable by birth.”³⁷ At least three previous generations of Godwyns served in important positions in the church. Morgan Godwyn’s father, also named Morgan, served as rector of Bricknor, Gloucestershire. He later became canon of Hereford. Grandfather Francis Godwyn had been bishop of Hereford. Great-grandfather Thomas Godwyn was a chaplain to Queen Elizabeth and bishop of Bath and Wells. The younger Morgan Godwyn was born in 1640. He followed his family’s example, graduated from Christ Church, Oxford in 1665, and received ordination in the Anglican Church.³⁸

Until his graduation, Morgan Godwyn seemed to have done nothing unexpected given his family’s historical positions in the Church of England. However, after graduation, Godwyn left England for the colonies. As John Woolverton states, Godwyn’s “removal to Virginia was unusual for one of such connections and prospects in the church.”³⁹ Someone with Godwyn’s family history and education could probably have found a position of note in the church at home in England. Positions in the Anglican Church hierarchy were few and far between in the American colonies. Formal religious institutions of any kind were relatively scarce in colonial British America outside the Puritan stronghold of New England. Given the contentious relationship between the Church of England and dissenting Puritans in the second half of the seventeenth century, the reception for an Oxford-trained Anglican priest in Puritan New

³⁷ Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57.

³⁸ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 57 – 58.

³⁹ John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 71.

England would have most likely been anything but warm. Even in royal colonies, Anglican churches were far from well established. In Virginia, for instance, while the Virginia Company and then the royal governor and his government had verbally encouraged the establishment of churches with ministers and transplanted Anglican church hierarchy, mirror images of Church of England parishes and diocese never developed during the seventeenth century.⁴⁰

Virginia suffered a continual shortage of ministers. Official authority for the Church of England in the colonies rested with the Bishop of London. So far removed from the colonies, no bishop could effectively see to all of a colonial church's needs. In the Church of England, ministers had to be ordained by a bishop. With the closest bishop on the other side of the Atlantic, Virginia had a hard time finding ordained ministers to preach to its residents. Ministers had to come from England to Virginia. To help correct the problem, the Virginia General Assembly drafted several laws to regulate religion within the colony, as well as provide Virginians with some semblance of routine and organized religious instruction. Laws of 1631 and 1632 "defined the religious duties of both ministers and lay people."⁴¹

The laws of 1631 and 1632 also set the precedent for developing vestries for Virginia's parishes. Virginia's statutes clearly designated that each parish needed a vestry to care for the church property and assist the minister. The adoption of vestries

⁴⁰ Virginia was run by the Virginia Company until 1624. In that year, the Company went bankrupt and the Crown took over control of the colony. From then until the American Revolution, Virginia's governors would be appointed either by the king or Parliament. Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 128.

⁴¹ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 130.

was a distinct attempt by Virginia colonists to apply English religious institutions to the colonial setting. As in England, a handful of laymen from the parish comprised the vestry whose duties included securing ministers for the parish, organizing the construction and maintenance of church buildings, overseeing the moral welfare of parishioners, providing care for poor and sick parishioners, and setting the parish levy. Originally, individual Virginia parishes determined the number of vestrymen; however, a 1662 law finally standardized the number of vestrymen at twelve. Theoretically, parishes elected vestries at regular intervals of years. The acts granting the vestries' powers, however, did not set specific lengths of tenure or indicate the intervals for elections. Without restrictions to their terms of office, vestrymen continued to hold their positions until death or resignation. Vestrymen themselves chose their replacements when they finally left their posts.⁴²

Even though the colony's population surged from around eight thousand to thirty thousand from the 1640s through the 1660s, the number of clergy did not rise significantly. According to historian James Horn, there were between five and ten ordained clergymen in Virginia throughout the period.⁴³ Even the English Civil War, which thrust many Anglican clergy out of their positions in England, did not increase the supply of ministers to Virginia. Ministers simply avoided the colony. By 1672, four-

⁴² Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 91 and 97; Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: the Colonial Church of England Clergy during the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 15; James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 195 – 196; John K. Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690 – 1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 33 – 34.

⁴³ Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 385.

fifths of Virginia's parishes lacked ordained ministers. The scarcity of ministers compelled parish vestries to permit laymen to perform religious services and baptize dying children.⁴⁴

Godwyn's decision to leave England for the colonies seems to have been one of personal choice rather than one forced upon him. The Restoration of King Charles II and the renewal of governmental support for the Church of England increased opportunities for ministerial employment in England. Unlike many contemporary Anglican clergymen, he willingly traveled to the colonies. His family had a long line of ties to English dioceses. Nevertheless, Morgan Godwyn left England for Virginia in 1665. Some historians attribute Godwyn's decision to head for the colonies to a strong missionary impulse.⁴⁵ Godwyn's later writings certainly show missionary zeal. However, the actual reasons for his departure in 1665 are not known. Edward Bond, John Woolverton, and Alden Vaughan all note that Godwyn cites Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* in his attacks on Barbados slaveholders in *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*.

Bond's description is emblematic:

Filled with evangelical ardor and inspired by Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* and its saga of how the Romans had brought Christianity to the motley tribe of ancient Britons, Morgan Godwyn ... arrived in Virginia ready to act upon the Great Commission and spread the Gospel to all nations.⁴⁶

Vaughan also finds some precedent for Godwyn's missionary activities in the cleric's family. Godwyn's grandfather Francis published a work in 1615 that discussed the

⁴⁴ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 173 and 507; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 185.

⁴⁵ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 198; Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 58.

⁴⁶ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 198.

conversion of ancient Britain to Christianity. Implicit in the work was the idea of “the basic urgency of spreading Protestant Christianity to the four corners of the world.” Vaughan believes that Godwyn could have interpreted his grandfather’s message to include the need to spread Christianity to the Native Americans encountered in Virginia.⁴⁷

Other factors likely contributed to Godwyn’s decision. In 1665 he would have only been twenty-five years old, and certainly a young man, motivated by his faith and eager to serve, may have welcomed the challenge and excitement of travel to the Americas. Additionally, Godwyn could have easily believed he would find a very receptive audience for his ministerial services in Virginia. By the 1660s, Virginia was a royal colony where the Church of England received sanction and support from the colonial government. Several of Virginia’s political leaders had remained loyal to the Crown and Church of England during the Civil War and Interregnum, including Governor Sir William Berkeley, who resumed his position as governor after Charles II’s accession. Given this information which Godwyn would likely have gained either through his schooling at Oxford or personal contacts, he conceivably thought Virginia would hold many excellent opportunities to work with eager Anglican congregations.

Whatever Godwyn’s exact motives, they were strong enough to propel him to Virginia. Godwyn first served as minister in Marston Parish in York County and stayed there for over a year. In 1667 he moved north to Potomac Parish in newly formed

⁴⁷ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 58.

Stafford County, where he remained until his departure from Virginia in 1670.⁴⁸ Godwyn found some aspects of Virginia's religious life far from adequate. Sometime around 1674, Godwyn wrote a letter to Sir William Berkeley, the royal governor of Virginia, criticizing the excessive control that certain parishioners exerted over the religious activities of their churches. It is unclear whether Berkeley ever read the letter. If Godwyn's writing did cross Governor Berkeley's desk, it does not appear to have had any appreciable effect on Berkeley or his administration of the colony.⁴⁹ The letter later became the final chapter of the 1680 publication of Godwyn's most extensive work, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*. But when reading the letter, it must be remembered that Godwyn is talking about the Virginia he observed and knew from 1665 through 1670. By 1674, Godwyn had been away from Virginia for four years.

Godwyn declared that Virginia was wanting in "the Propagation and Establishing of *Religion*," and that many families had never witnessed a "public Exercise of *Religion* since their *Importation* into that *Colony*."⁵⁰ His major complaint with the situation in Virginia was that the parish vestries had been allowed to overstep their proper bounds. Godwyn called the vestries "*Plebian Junto's*" which had complete control over the hiring and admission of ministers to the parishes and charged that the colonial government did nothing to prohibit vestries from hiring laymen to act the part of ministers for the people

⁴⁸ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 187; Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 58 – 9; Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 71 – 72. Stafford County was formed from a portion of Westmoreland County in 1664.

⁴⁹ Warren Billings, in his recent biography of William Berkeley, makes no mention of the letter, nor of Morgan Godwyn. Warren M. Billings, *Sir William Berkeley and the Forging of Colonial Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004). Berkeley died in 1677, before the letter appeared in print.

⁵⁰ Morgan Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia" (London, 1680), 168.

of Virginia.⁵¹ The power granted to the vestries had encouraged them to act without piety. Vestries “reduce [ministers] to their own *Terms*, that is, *use them how they please*, pay them *what they list*, and *discard them whensoever they have a mind to it.*”⁵²

The vestries’ power over the ministers did not stop with hiring, firing, and paying. Godwyn charged that the vestries threatened to defame their ministers in order to prod them into accepting the vestries’ points of view. Vestries invented slanderous stories for the courts and governor as methods of punishment for ministers who strayed too far from the vestries’ control.⁵³ Rhys Isaac notes an eighteenth-century example in the relationship between the planter Landon Carter and the Reverend Mr. Kay. Kay, in 1747, complained to the bishop of London that Carter demanded complete obedience of him. When Kay attempted to preach against pride during a church service, Carter physically threatened the minister and proceeded to convince the parish vestry to oust Kay from his post. A later relationship with Reverend Mr. Giberne that lasted into the 1770s had consistent quarrels. Mostly, Landon Carter could not tolerate a parson’s open defiance of his wishes. To Carter, such actions broke down the proper hierarchical bonds that structured the society he wished promulgate in Virginia. Vestries, as secular officials, had the power to oust clerics from their parishes and to administer the sacraments—the explicit duties of ordained clergy according to Church of England doctrine—to the

⁵¹ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 168.

⁵² Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 168.

⁵³ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 170 and 172.

parishioners.⁵⁴ Godwyn took the exact opposite stance, and accused the vestries of placing all religious authority in Virginia either in the hands of laymen selected by the vestry which acted as their pawns, or in the hands of the vestrymen themselves.

According to Godwyn, the power of the vestries to control the spiritual lives of Virginians rested partially in the fact that Virginia lacked the appropriate parish structure and church hierarchy. Godwyn cited that lay-preachers appointed by the vestries, or their few ordained counterparts, had to travel through sixty to seventy mile long parishes. Some ministers were commissioned by the vestries of four or five parishes, thereby not merely overextending the ministers geographically, but also expecting them to provide for the religious instruction and meet the spiritual needs of far too many individuals.⁵⁵ He also noted that because Virginia lacked the typical Anglican hierarchy, Virginia's ministers had no one to address their concerns. Anglican Church hierarchy started with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Below the Archbishop were the bishops who administered dioceses. Dioceses were divided into parishes, each headed by a rector. Godwyn's ministers had no way to redress their plights other than through direct appeals to the governor himself. Given Virginia's dispersed population, few ministers would be in a geographical position to get word, efficiently and effectively, to the governor. Moreover, the pressures from the vestries themselves discouraged ministers from speaking out. The vestries' closer physical proximity to the ministers allowed them to

⁵⁴ Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter's Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 249 – 50; Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 172.

⁵⁵ Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 172.

control, according to Godwyn, the ministers' reputations as well as their purses and positions in the community.⁵⁶

Inherent in Godwyn's arguments against the abuses of the vestries was the sentiment that clerics—men who, like Godwyn, received significant formal education and had been ordained in the Church of England—did not receive the respect they deserved in the colony. Ordained clergy left the comforts of England and risked their lives to come to Virginia. Once in the colonies, they met only with “Strangers and Enemies to their Profession, who look upon them as a Burden.”⁵⁷ Godwyn seemed to couple this lack of respect of ministers to a general lack of respect for religion. The vestries' use of laymen as preachers was merely a way for these wealthy and profit-minded individuals to save money and time. Godwyn stated that laymen were procured for “a very moderate rate,” and that if the vestries could not find a minister for what they deemed to be a reasonable cost, they simply did without one. This shameful neglect of religion, to paraphrase Godwyn, not only removed religion from its necessary role in the vestries' lives, but from all those within the parishes as well. He declared the Anglican clergyman's situation in Virginia to be far worse than what was endured under the “*Usurpers*” of the Commonwealth government.⁵⁸

Godwyn ended his letter to Governor Berkeley with an admitted afterthought. Godwyn chided the lack of effort given to incorporating Native Americans and African and African-American slaves into the churches. Proselytizing nonbelievers was “the only

⁵⁶ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 160 – 170.

⁵⁷ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 169.

⁵⁸ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 168 – 169.

end of God's discovering those Countries to us," according to Godwyn, "yet is lookt upon, by our new Race of Christians, as so idle and Ridiculous, so utterly needless and unnecessary, that no Man can forfeit his Judgment more, than by any proposal looking or tending that way."⁵⁹ Essentially, the vestries quashed any effort raised to proselytize and so derided the author of the idea to defame him before his neighbors. Godwyn then reminded Governor Berkeley that religion helped the government effectively control its subjects. Additionally, God destroyed lands where the people ignored religious instruction and proper worship. Finally Godwyn added what he saw as the solution to Virginia's religious problems: to have "the *Ministers* encouraged, and all Invaders of that sacred Calling [meaning evaders of religious promotion], cashired and punished for their bold and prophane *Usurpations*."⁶⁰

The arguments in "The State of Religion in Virginia" may very well be hyperbole. As George Brydon notes, Godwyn's assessment of the vestries' responsibilities imposed by the Virginia legislature may be misleading. The Virginia Code of 1661/62 provided for a standard salary for colonial ministers of either eighty pounds sterling, or its equivalent, per year.⁶¹ The other residents in the parish could sue vestries that failed to provide this salary for their ministers, or to choose to employ a lay reader rather to save the expense of an ordained minister. The Code of Virginia did put more checks on vestry power than Godwyn led his readers to believe. However, vestrymen's position in the community would likely have prevented such suits from

⁵⁹ Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 172.

⁶⁰ Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 173.

⁶¹ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 508.

being successful. The Church Act of 1662 ordered Virginia's parishes to elect vestries composed of the "most able" men in the parish. To seventeenth-century Virginians, "most able" meant the men with the most land, servants and slaves, and consequently the most influential people in the area. Additionally, vestries did at times refuse to present ministers to the governor for induction. Induction would have allowed a minister to hold his position in the parish for life. Vestries were not willing to give up their right to remove a minister when they chose. Even though Virginia's seventeenth-century governors repeatedly asked parish vestries to present their ministers for induction, vestries apparently were consistently able to avoid complying with the governors' requests.⁶²

Godwyn's hyperbole is important to note to understand his argument completely. Godwyn constructed what he believed were effective and convincing arguments. Godwyn's significance lies in his perception of how the vestries carried out their powers within the parishes, whether these powers were warranted, and what he thought this situation meant for Virginia society as a whole. To appreciate Godwyn's significance requires a closer examination of his Virginia context.

During the thirty-five years (1642 – 1676, with an interruption during the Commonwealth) that Governor Sir William Berkeley, the man to whom Morgan Godwyn addressed his "The State Religion in Virginia," held political tenure in Virginia, the colony's "population increased fivefold from 8000 to 40,000 inhabitants. It developed a coherent social order, a functioning economic system, and a strong sense of its own

⁶² Nelson, *A Blessed Company*, 34 – 35 and 128 – 130.

unique folkways. Most important, it also acquired a governing elite which Berkeley described as ‘men of as good families as any subjects in England.’⁶³ These elites were almost all Anglicans. Virginia’s elites inhabited the high positions of colonial government. By 1660, elites from five families held all seats on the colony’s Royal Council, the political body closest to the governor and functioning as his “cabinet, the upper house of the legislature and the colony’s supreme court.” As David Hackett Fischer writes, “the hegemony of Virginia’s first families was exceptionally strong through the first century of that colony’s history.” Holding high-ranking positions within the colonial government, Virginia elites also controlled the distribution of wealth in land. The ruling elites could distribute lands to their family members and friends, thereby helping to maintain their advantageous economic position within the colony.⁶⁴

Wealthy Virginians in the seventeenth century did not just hold colony-wide offices. They also strictly controlled Virginia politics at the county level. Historian James Horn notes that the situation of colonial Virginia posed problems for the government’s ability to maintain order. The dispersed population, the presence of potentially hostile Native Americans, and the small numbers of crown officials in the colony forced colonial Virginia to develop a hierarchy of courts and local officials that

⁶³ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 210. For a discussion of Virginia’s elites consolidating economic and political power within the colony prior to 1660 see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 7 – 18.

⁶⁴ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 218 – 224 and 377; Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660 – 1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 30 – 33.

connected individual counties with the colonial government. This shift in governing strategy “emphasized the role of the gentry as local rulers.”⁶⁵

Local governments in seventeenth-century Virginia incorporated both the parish and the county to govern local residents. The two institutions shared the same personnel and functions. Always the people in positions of power in both institutions were local elites. Elites sat as vestrymen and county court justices, as lay readers and justices of the peace, as churchwardens and jury members. According to historian John K. Nelson,

Nowhere is there evidence that parish vestrymen or county court justices viewed themselves respectively to be primarily ‘religious’ or ‘civil’ officials. Nor is there evidence that they made such distinctions among the array of responsibilities they bore separately or jointly.⁶⁶

The vestry and the county court were positions with relatively equal local authority. The long tenure allowed for vestrymen helped solidify elite control of the vestry and the parish. Virginia’s wealthy planters had devised a way to adapt English church structure to their particular environment. In the process, they placed themselves at the top of that hierarchy and were very reluctant to surrender that authority to anyone else, as was evidenced by their resistance to the establishment of a resident bishop and to the induction of parish ministers.⁶⁷

These elites also displayed strong religious affinities. Virginia’s economic and social elites kept devotional journals, repeatedly emphasized religious instruction for their heirs in wills, and included prayer books and devotional literature in their personal

⁶⁵ Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 338; Parent, *Foul Means*, 33.

⁶⁶ Nelson, *A Blessed Company*, 13 – 15; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 196.

⁶⁷ Nelson, *A Blessed Company*, 30 – 36; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 386.

libraries.⁶⁸ Rich Virginians even funded the construction of parish church buildings completely out of their own pockets. Robert “King” Carter, Landon Carter’s father, built Christ Church in Lancaster County on his own property and made sure that worship in his church started after his own grand entrance into the building.⁶⁹ To continue with the Carter example as Fischer states, “many generations of Carters headed the vestry list of this parish from as early as 1654.”⁷⁰ Historians have recognized that Virginia’s elites attempted to replicate the parish administrative unit found in England, and routinely, if not completely, dominated vestry lists almost immediately after their inception in 1643.⁷¹

According to Philip Alexander Bruce,

Even more controlling was the influence which the vestrymen exercised from a social point of view. As the first gentlemen in the county, apart from the prestige they derived from being the principal guardians of public morals, they were looked up to as the models of all that was most polished and cultured in their respective parishes. It was one of the happiest features of that early society that each community possessed in its vestry a body of men prompted as well by every instinct of birth, education, and fortune, as by every dictate of their official duty, to set the people at large a good example in their personal deportment and in their general conduct. To their influence is directly traceable a very large proportion of what was most elevated and attractive in the social life of the Seventeenth century.⁷²

⁶⁸ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 332 – 336; Philip Alexander Bruce, *Social Life in Old Virginia: from the Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 3 – 27, and 293 – 315; Isaac, *Landon Carter*, chapter 5.

⁶⁹ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 338.

⁷⁰ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 339.

⁷¹ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 207 – 8. Bruce, *Social Life in Old Virginia*, 62; Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 97; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 50; Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 406; Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 30 – 32.

⁷² Bruce, *Social Life in Old Virginia*, 63 – 64.

It was these powerfully situated men that Morgan Godwyn called “*Plebian Junto’s*” and “Invaders of the sacred Calling.” Of course Godwyn did not pen these words while still within physical reach of those he chided. Godwyn left Virginia around 1670.⁷³ His letter to Governor Berkeley was not written until 1674, four years after his departure from the colony. Given Godwyn’s own statements in the letter about how vestrymen intimidated and forced ministers to bend to their demands, along with Godwyn’s court records while in Virginia, it can reasonably be surmised that Godwyn genuinely feared significant repercussions for challenging vestries’ authority while still in their presence. Godwyn stated explicitly that ministers did not dare bring injustices to the ears of the governor “for fear of being used worse” by the vestries.⁷⁴ He also affirmed that powerful vestrymen defamed some ministers’ reputations in order to cause the ministers to lose credibility within the community and therefore lose their positions. Vestrymen created false stories about ministers they wanted removed and presented them as evidence against the ministers in courts and, according to Godwyn, to Governor Berkeley himself.⁷⁵ A vestry’s assertion of authority over ministers and how they interacted with parishioners not only started after the minister riled the vestry’s sense of social position, but from the moment some ministers set foot in the colony. Godwyn maintained that when vestries paid for the passage of ministers to Virginia, the ministers, rather than being allowed to perform their clerical duties for the parishioners, were “made to become [the vestryman’s] Servant, or to Ransome himself from that Thralldom and

⁷³ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 59 – 60.

⁷⁴ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 169.

⁷⁵ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 170.

Misery at a very great rate, perhaps four or five times so much as their Passage should have cost.”⁷⁶

While he did not say so specifically, Godwyn could draw significantly from personal experiences with vestrymen of his parishes. Starting in late 1667 or early 1668, Godwyn was part of a prolonged court battle involving one Colonel John Dodman. Dodman, according to historian Alden T. Vaughan, was “probably a member of his parish and probably a vestryman too, since high rank in community and church customarily overlapped.” The case was ostensibly about a horse that Dodman lent Godwyn and that Godwyn, for unknown reasons, was not able to return to its owner. Dodman sued Godwyn in the county court. The court, again according to Vaughan, “composed, almost certainly, of the colonel’s friends,” ordered Godwyn to pay Dodman one thousand pounds of tobacco. When Godwyn could not pay, the county sheriff seized his books and possessions. The case remained contested for two more years.⁷⁷

While there is no explicit evidence in the case records to indicate that Godwyn’s dispute with Dodman was the result of a vestryman trying to exert control over a problematic minister, the case does seem to resemble Godwyn’s assertions about vestrymen in his letter to Governor Berkeley. The case suggests the difficulty ministers encountered when vying with influential laymen in their counties. Dodman’s social position seemed to be a significant contributing factor to the county court’s decision in his favor, and the punishment levied on Godwyn. Godwyn was unable to find redress

⁷⁶ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 171.

⁷⁷ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 59.

until he removed the case from Stafford County. This echoes his appeal to Governor Berkeley in “The State of Religion in Virginia” that the only way to counter the devious workings of vestrymen was to address the Governor directly. However, Godwyn was unable to do this for two years. His claim that the only available check ministers possessed to the vestry’s authority was almost too difficult to warrant pursuing also seems valid given this case. Moreover, the punishment imposed on Godwyn by the Stafford County court was such that it would have made it all but impossible for him to continue his duties as minister in Potomac Parish. By fining Godwyn a sum he could not pay, the court allowed the county sheriff—a man that, given Vaughan’s conclusion that men in high positions would have known one another, would have probably shared Dodman’s interests—to impound Godwyn’s possessions, the very items Godwyn would need to perform church services, baptize parishioners, and administer any number of spiritual duties. This could have effectively removed Godwyn from his station as minister. At the least, it hindered his execution of the position and made him reliant upon others within the community who may have possessed items such as Bibles and Prayer Books. These people would have been the same individuals who were local social and political elites—the same individuals who would be vestrymen in Stafford County in the late 1660s.

The language Godwyn used to describe overly powerful vestrymen would have certainly provoked strong reactions from them. In addition to labeling vestrymen “*Plebian Junto’s*” and “Invaders of that sacred Calling,” Godwyn equated vestrymen

with the “*Usurpers*” who controlled England’s government during the Interregnum.⁷⁸

These monikers would have most likely been extremely antagonistic in two ways. They implied the vestrymen’s irreligion and associated them with the Commonwealth men who controlled England under Cromwell’s government during the Interregnum. Under the Commonwealth government, the Church of England was no longer state-supported. Commonwealth men, in Godwyn’s parlance, referred to Puritan dissenters from the Church of England and, therefore, to individuals worshipping and believing in religious doctrines that countered the teachings of the Church of England. Godwyn accused vestrymen of inhibiting the proper practice of religion within their parishes. Godwyn would later refer to any act that inhibited proper—to Godwyn, Anglican—religious worship as a “dangerous conspiracy ... against Christianity” and “evil,” and any person who made such an act as “barbarous” and “inhumane.”⁷⁹ We can surmise that Godwyn felt similarly when describing acts denying people what he considered the proper access to religious instruction six years earlier. These terms, or ones like them imparting similar meanings, challenged vestrymen’s positions within Virginia society. Vestrymen were local elites. Claiming that these elites inherently denied the type of religious service needed to achieve salvation implied that they did not act benevolently and, therefore, risked turning the rest of the population against them. As historian Gary Nash states, “religion was the organizing principle of life” for people during the seventeenth

⁷⁸ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 169.

⁷⁹ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate* (London: 1680), (xi), 76, and 79. The publisher of *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate* did not number the title page, opening letter addressing the work to God and the Archbishop of Canterbury, preface and table of contents. The (xi) represents my own pagination for this section. The citation comes from the eleventh page of text, the third page of the preface.

century.⁸⁰ To people who considered religion such an important part of their lives, acts denying access to properly performed religious exercises would have almost certainly been intolerable.

Equating vestrymen with supporters of Cromwell's Commonwealth government was, at least in Godwyn's mind, a stinging rebuke. Godwyn intimated his political leanings several ways. Foremost, his ordination into the Church of England was a strong indication of his support for the crown. The king of England, since Henry VIII initiated the split from the Catholic Church, sat as the head of the Church of England. The king of England served both as secular and religious head of his country; he was both the governmental and spiritual leader of his subjects. The Crown, Church and gentry acted as grand patriarchs to the rest of English society. According to historian Gary A. Puckrein, theoretically these grand patriarchs—taking orders from the crown—sought to instill material interest in the petty patriarchs which would ensure their allegiance to the nation and its leaders. Following the English Civil War, the Church of England, the monarchy, and gentry formed even closer alliances in order to exert better control over society.⁸¹ Godwyn was a product of this time. His education, ordination, and his first

⁸⁰ Gary B. Nash, *Red, White and Black: the Peoples of Early North America* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 28.

⁸¹ Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 9-10; Frederick Quinn, *To Be a Pilgrim: the Anglican Ethos in History* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 113. Not all English gentry were Anglican. Significant numbers of English gentry were Catholic or Puritan. The conflict between competing sects did not end with the English Civil War or the Restoration of the monarchy, but continued even after the Glorious Revolution in 1689. However, after the Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, the crown reaffirmed its ties with the Church of England. Those gentry who allied with the crown and the Church of England gained control of Parliament. After the passage of the Toleration Act in 1689, dissenting Protestants in England were allowed to worship in their own churches, but under onerous regulations imposed by the Church of England-dominated Parliament. The combination of crown, church

ministerial duties all occurred within five years of the Restoration. Godwyn also emphasized to Governor Berkeley that his intention was “to the securing of the *King’s* Interest in those Plantations.”⁸²

Moreover, Godwyn addressed his letter to a devout royalist. Governor Berkeley came to Virginia in 1642 and resigned his post when Cromwell’s government took power in England. During the Commonwealth government, Berkeley recruited displaced royalist gentry who felt pressured by the new government in England to Virginia. Many of these immigrants entered into the already existing elite structure of county politics that included membership on parish vestries.⁸³ After the Restoration, Berkeley returned to his position as Virginia’s royal governor. Godwyn, by calling vestrymen usurpers of power, attempted to play to Berkeley’s beliefs that dissenters from the Anglican Church would work to undermine the royal government’s authority.⁸⁴ The events of the Civil War would have been fresh in both men’s minds and certainly would have influenced their thinking about social control and politics.

Additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that the vestrymen themselves—or a large portion of them—would have found Godwyn’s remarks offensive. If many of the recent elite immigrants to Virginia were royalist exiles from Cromwell’s government, a comparison of them to the men who drove them from their homes would have been ill

and gentry maintained power in Restoration England. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Septre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics 1689 – 1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 24.

⁸² Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 173.

⁸³ Bernard Bailyn, “Politics and Social Structure in Virginia,” in *Interpreting Colonial America* ed. James Kirby Martin (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973), 192 – 195. Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 212 – 213.

⁸⁴ Billings, *Sir William Berkeley*, 103 – 105.

received. Virginia developed an anti-Puritan policy by the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1642, Puritan congregations in Nansemond County had their request for three Massachusetts Puritan ministers rejected by Berkeley. The following year, the Virginia General Assembly declared that all ministers in the colony must conform to the Church of England's practices. In 1647, the General Assembly refused Parliament's instruction to abandon the Book of Common Prayer, which was central to Anglican ceremonies, in their church services. Finally, according to Brydon, only a few non-Anglican clergy came to Virginia during the period of the Commonwealth government, the only period when the Church of England did not hold privileged status as a state-supported church.⁸⁵ The vestrymen Godwyn attacked would have been some of the same men enacting these laws in the General Assembly and certainly some of those deciding which ministers to employ in the parishes. If vestrymen, generally, had an aversion to Puritans, Godwyn's association of them with Cromwell's government would have likely been provocative. Godwyn's continuous allusions in his letter to Berkeley made it obvious that provocation was his intent.

Perhaps the most telling indication of what Godwyn proposed in "The State of Religion in Virginia" comes from one sentence:

However, let me be bold to be your Remembrancer, and to mind your *Excellency* how needful it is, that those good Laws which are made for the suppression of *Vice*, and for *reducing* the People from this affected *Gentilism*, to a more diligent and conscientious discharge of their Duty to *God*, (*the only sure means to retain them in their due Allegiance to their Sovereign*) be by the Inferior Magistrates

⁸⁵ Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 46; Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 120, 121 and 131.

more duly executed; The *Ministers* encouraged, and all Invaders of that sacred Calling, cashired and punished for their bold and prophane *Usurpations*.⁸⁶

Here, Godwyn clearly, if not succinctly, called for the colonial government, acting through local magistrates, to rein in the power of vestrymen. Godwyn wanted Virginians to give up their pretensions to what he called “gentilism.” Instead, Virginians should focus on their duties to God, their religious worship, and spreading the Gospel to unbelievers. To Godwyn, continuing to allow socially influential men to increase their power within the community, and thereby increase their sway over Virginia’s poorer inhabitants, was dangerous to the authority of the Governor. Since the Governor was the agent of the Crown in Virginia, this increasing dominance of wealthy individuals potentially challenged the monarch’s ability to control his own colony.

To correct this potentially explosive situation, Godwyn wanted Governor Berkeley to remove some of the vestrymen’s authority and, not incidentally, place it in the hands of ordained colonial clergy. Because these ministers were presbyters of the Church of England, in Godwyn’s mind, they were more closely tied to the state and would work to maintain its order and the authority of the crown. However, Godwyn’s solution ran against the trends of Virginia society developing since at least the end of the Virginia Company’s control in 1624. As historian Edmund Morgan declares, starting in the 1620s when tobacco production took the colony by storm and gave impetus for the creation of the plantation system in Virginia, private enterprise created fortunes for the

⁸⁶ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 173.

few at the expense of misery for the many.⁸⁷ However, these newly influential men were not social elites transplanted from England. They were men who came to Virginia and made their fortunes from, what historian Bernard Bailyn calls, “their ability to wring material gain from the wilderness.”⁸⁸ The people who prospered economically also tightened their control over government in the colony.⁸⁹ Adding Jack P. Greene’s interpretation of the development of Chesapeake society to this model helps fill out its context. Greene states that after 1660, the creole elite in Virginia tried “to make the area more recognizably English.” However, creating new English societies meant granting powers of control to people who had not held those powers in England since immigration to the colonies largely consisted of individuals who did not possess great political authority at home. Without the controlling influence of traditional English ruling elites, these men set out to consolidate their local authority in an effort to increase their economic gains.⁹⁰ In this light, the actions of vestries in the 1640s through the 1660s to accumulate more authority within the parish and ensure the perpetuity of a select group’s access to that authority can be seen as additional methods by which Virginia’s economic

⁸⁷ Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: WW Norton and Co. Inc, 1975), 129.

⁸⁸ Bernard Bailyn, “Politics and Social Structure,” 190.

⁸⁹ Morgan, *American Slavery*, 185.

⁹⁰ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 85; Bailyn, “Politics and Social Structure,” 191. Here I borrow Ira Berlin’s definition of “creole.” Berlin, both in *Many Thousands Gone* and in “From Creole to African,” uses the term to describe Africans with significant knowledge of European culture and attitudes. According to Berlin, creoles could operate both in African and European societies and often served liaisons and interpreters between the two. This unique position allowed creoles to better understand European thinking and society and to adapt better to life in European American colonies. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series 53 (Apr., 1996): 251 – 288.

and social elites consolidated their power in the colony. Godwyn's recommendations, therefore, were attempts to counter this trend. He wanted to check the authority of vestrymen by creating a separate body of people that would possess authority over the spiritual lives of Virginians.

Godwyn also accused vestrymen of over-stepping their bounds and undermining the practice of religion in the colony. By allowing laymen to preach, administer the sacraments, and to absolve parishioners' sins, vestrymen permitted "all things that concern the *Church and Religion* [to be left] to the Mercy of the People."⁹¹ Removing control of spiritual practices from the clergy was not permissible to Godwyn. Not only could complete vestry—and therefore, temporal—control over church activities remove the need for ordained clergy in Virginia—thereby removing job opportunities for men like Godwyn—but it also countered the Anglican religious ethos. As Nancy Rhoden explains,

Theologically the Church of England walked the middle path between the strict predestinationism of Calvinism and the alternate Arminian extreme of emphasizing good works. The moralistic theology of Anglican divines certainly emphasized men's need to live according to the gospel, but Anglicans also insisted upon the importance of the sacraments to salvation.... Anglicans explained spiritual regeneration as a lifelong process and therefore stressed the importance of public worship and regular participation in the church's sacraments.⁹²

Sacraments could only have their full spiritual weight when administered by ordained clergy.

⁹¹ Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 172.

⁹² Nancy Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 11 – 12.

Historians of colonial Virginia generally declare that vestries developed in Virginia as a response to the lack of ecclesiastical hierarchy and a shortage of ordained ministers. Without clerics to oversee the spiritual lives of the colonists, laymen took on some of those responsibilities. Vestries in Virginia “recruited ministers, maintained parish property, cared for the infirm or indigent, and prosecuted moral offenses in the county courts.” As such, the vestry “came to occupy a key place in the parish government as well as being a means of introducing some men to public office. . . . The weight of [the vestry’s] duties meant that the office was filled by local political magnates or else men whom the mighty considered potential recruits to their company.”⁹³

However, when these men attempted to impose their secular authority over spiritual matters, they riled Godwyn. Removing clerical oversight of religious practices—especially ones like administering the sacraments that determined whether individuals achieved salvation—placed the community in serious peril. To Godwyn, vestrymen acting in such ways usurped not only the authority granted the Church of England, but also the innate authority of God to have His word passed throughout the world. By denying the proper people the right to preside over religious acts, vestrymen also crossed the God they proclaimed to believe in. This lay control of church affairs was too similar to Puritan doctrine for an Anglican cleric like Godwyn to stomach. While in the first half of the seventeenth century (before the English Civil War), the distinction between Anglican and Puritan could not clearly be drawn, by the end of the Interregnum and during the Restoration periods, Anglicans had rejected the Puritan idea that faith

⁹³ Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia: a History* (White Plains, New York: KTO Press, 1986), 65; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 207 – 8; Brydon, *Virginia’s Mother Church*, 87 – 88.

alone could achieve salvation because it “had damaged the nation’s moral life by inadvertently sanctioning antinomianism.”⁹⁴ Godwyn would have found anything of the sort unacceptable for true Anglicans.

Unlike in his later writings, Godwyn left his appeal for including blacks and Native Americans in the Anglican Church to the end of this treatise. He even admitted that he almost forgot to address the point.⁹⁵ Godwyn’s sentiments about this topic were likely influenced by the world he observed in Virginia between 1665 and 1670. After Godwyn left Virginia in 1670, he never returned. Godwyn’s location in North America would greatly affect how he saw Anglo-Americans interacting with both African-Americans and Native Americans. Godwyn spent the majority of his time in Virginia—three of the four and a half to five years he spent in the colony—in Stafford County’s Potomac Parish. Godwyn arrived there in 1667. Stafford had only been a separate county for three years. In 1664 it was created from Westmoreland County, which itself had only been formed in 1653.⁹⁶ Godwyn lived on Virginia’s northwestern frontier. Many of what are today Stafford’s neighboring counties would not be formed for quite some time: King George to the east in 1721, Spotsylvania to the south in 1721, Caroline to the southeast in 1728, Fauquier to the northwest in 1759, Culpeper to the west in 1749, and Prince William to the northeast in 1731.⁹⁷ Position on the frontier of English settlement greatly influenced interactions with Native Americans. As James Merrell

⁹⁴ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 62 and 247.

⁹⁵ Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 172.

⁹⁶ John Vogt, *Formation of Virginia Counties from 1634* (Athens, GA: Iberian Publishing Co., 1985).

⁹⁷ Vogt, *Formation of Virginia*.

states, regardless of where they were along the east coast of North America, the nearer Native American groups were to English settlements, the more all facets of Native American life were affected.⁹⁸ Likewise, the nearer English settlers were to Native Americans the more their lives were influenced by the differing cultures.

Virginia in the 1660s still had a substantial Native American population, one that proved to be a boundary to English settlement and to English cultural hegemony. As Neal Salisbury states, “Indians as much as Europeans dictated the form and content of their early exchanges.”⁹⁹ It was not until the 1670s that Virginians were in a position to dictate trade interactions, as with the requirement that Native American traders supply their own interpreters. Anglo-American missionary efforts largely met failure on the frontier. Missionaries in Virginia in 1724 rarely even attempted to convert Indians not living permanently among white Virginians, choosing to focus their energies only within the English settlements. Additionally, there was never a sustained effort by the Anglican Church to convert Native Americans in Virginia.¹⁰⁰ If Godwyn attempted to proselytize Native Americans around Potomac Parish—though he never stated he did—he was most likely the only one doing so. Moreover, given the parish’s position at the time on the northern fringe of the colony, the likelihood that many Native Americans would listen remained small as well. As James Merrell notes, Native Americans who still possessed

⁹⁸ Merrell, “‘In the Customes of Our Country’: Indians and Colonists in North America,” in *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* eds. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 120.

⁹⁹ Neal Salisbury, “The Indians’ Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of Europeans,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 53, no. 3 (1996): 454.

¹⁰⁰ Merrell, “Indians and Colonists in Early America,” 129 and 147; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 385.

the ability to resist English cultural domination rarely, if ever, willingly accepted Protestant Christianity that “entailed political subjection and cultural suicide.”¹⁰¹ Additionally, Native American groups finding themselves too weak to withstand Europeans’ attempts to impose a foreign culture on them often joined with other Native American groups rather than submit to Euro-American cultural domination. Only when hemmed in by, in the case of Virginia, English settlers would Native Americans usually accept Anglo-American religion, and even then Native Americans often continued to reject the words of English missionaries.¹⁰² Given Stafford County’s position on the frontier, it is very unlikely Godwyn would have experienced Native Americans in this position.

Godwyn’s situation with Native Americans aside, English colonists in Virginia by the 1660s had a distinct idea about how to interact with Native Americans. Practically all English colonial ventures at least nominally declared conversion of the non-Christian Indians to be a goal. English colonists generally believed Native Americans potentially redeemable, even though, in the words of James Axtell, “there was one crucial hitch: they were still in a state of ‘savagery’ or ‘barbarism,’ which every civilized person knew to be an ‘infinite distance from Christianity.’”¹⁰³ Thus, English missionaries sought first to “civilize” Native Americans—instill in them English standards for conduct, labor, trade,

¹⁰¹ Merrell, “Indians and Colonists in Early America,” 148.

¹⁰² James Merrell, “The Indians’ New World: The Catawba Experience,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 41, no. 4 (1984): 547; Merrell, “Indians and Colonists in Early America,” 149; Horn, *Adapting to a New World*, 198 – 199.

¹⁰³ James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: the Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 147.

et cetera—before bringing them into the church.¹⁰⁴ The fact that Native Americans almost always attempted to retain their traditional ways of life discouraged English settlers from continuing efforts of “cultural assimilation.”

The violence that occurred between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans further reinforced the idea in English minds that Native Americans were either unfit for English culture or unwilling to adopt it. After the wars with the remnants of the Powhatan Confederacy in 1622 and 1644, the missionary impulse towards Native Americans in Virginia all but died out.¹⁰⁵ The violence encouraged prejudicial feelings from Anglo-Americans toward Native Americans. As a result, the purpose of religion changed in Virginia. As Edward Bond posits, “instead of being a gift the English offered to men enslaved by Satan, Christianity became a justification for ethnic prejudice and the use of violence against an infidel foe.”¹⁰⁶ Additionally, as settlers took more and more land from Native Americans and began to form more culturally exclusive societies, clerics began emphasizing sins—fornication, Sabbath breaking and bastard bearing—that they closely linked to the actions of Native Americans.¹⁰⁷

While these trends had not taken complete hold in Virginia by the 1660s, they certainly were present with some individuals. Godwyn’s request for inclusion of Native Americans into the Anglican Church in many ways flew in the face of these trends. Not

¹⁰⁴ Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 147; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 75 – 76; Forrest G. Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 29.

¹⁰⁵ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 115 – 125; Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 132.

only would Godwyn's request run counter to the burgeoning ideas of Native American distinctiveness and inferiority, but it would also contest the authority of parish vestries. The vestries had ultimate say over who would or would not be admitted to the parish church. Vestries denying access to the church to Native Americans could easily perceive Godwyn's appeal to Governor Berkeley that proselytizing Native Americans be encouraged as an attempt to go over their heads to another authority. Looking at Godwyn's appeal in light of his other statements regarding the excessive power of vestries, it is likely that this is exactly what Godwyn intended.

Godwyn's coinciding appeal to include Africans and African-Americans in the Church of England could have evoked similar responses from colonial Virginia's vestrymen. As noted earlier, vestrymen were local elites who not only held political sway, but also possessed substantial economic wealth compared to others in the parish. As such, vestrymen were some of the most likely people in a parish to be slaveholders. Godwyn clearly only talked about enslaved people, not all individuals of African descent, and differentiated the enslaved from Native Americans by espousing "the *propagating* of [Christianity] amongst the *Heathen*, both *Natives* and *Slaves*."¹⁰⁸

Anyone reading Godwyn has to ask how many people Godwyn actually discussed including in Virginia's Anglican churches. Population figures from 1660 indicate that Virginia had a total population of 27,020 individuals who were not Native Americans. Of those, only 950 were black—including both enslaved and free individuals. Put another way, Virginia had twenty-seven whites for every black individual. According to

¹⁰⁸ Godwyn, "The State of Religion in Virginia," 172.

historian Anthony S. Parent, even in the early 1670s, few farmers in Stafford County—where Godwyn spent the majority of his time in Virginia—used enslaved labor, still preferring white indentured laborers.¹⁰⁹ As such, Virginia in the 1660s not only had few slave owners. While numbers of Africans brought to Virginia increased drastically during the second half of the seventeenth century, the Virginia he recalled when he wrote “The State of Religion in Virginia” had a very small black population. Godwyn did cite his efforts to convert enslaved African-Americans. In *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* Godwyn stated that he baptized two enslaved black Virginians during his tenure as minister.¹¹⁰ Godwyn seemed to have had more frequent interactions with the enslaved than he did with Native Americans, even though the black population was small. By 1710, however, roughly one third of Virginia's population was black.¹¹¹ Godwyn most likely knew of this drastic increase but because he never ventured back to Virginia after 1670, whether he realized just how substantial a percentage of the population the enslaved had become is unknown.

As in the case of Native Americans, there is little evidence to indicate that the enslaved desired Anglican religious instruction. As Roger Bastide notes, Africans brought to the Americas held a wide range of religious beliefs and systems and retained these beliefs after initiation to American slavery.¹¹² The strongest evidence that Virginia's enslaved population desired access to Anglican religious services is only

¹⁰⁹ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 178 – 179; Parent, *Foul Means*, 70.

¹¹⁰ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 140.

¹¹¹ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 178 – 179.

¹¹² Roger Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 23.

conjecture. Ira Berlin has shown that many of the very first Africans brought to North America had spent a considerable amount of time in and around European-controlled areas in Africa and the Caribbean before being brought to North America. Some of these individuals willingly adopted European manners, including European religious institutions. Additionally, some of these charter-generation American blacks adopted Christianity as a conscious effort to secure freedom for themselves or their progeny, knowing Englishmen's confused stance on the morality of enslaving fellow Christians.¹¹³ Individuals like these may have actively pursued admission in the Church of England in Virginia, but little evidence exists to support this belief for mid-seventeenth-century Virginia and Godwyn did not mention any such action as a reason for his appeal. He only cited that spreading Christianity to non-believers was the duty of all Christians, never taking into account whether those non-believers had any interest in Christianity or its specific Anglican form.

Vestrymen and other elites in 1660s and 1670s Virginia would likely have shown little enthusiasm for incorporating the enslaved into their churches. While historian John K. Nelson states that "African Americans, whether slave or free, male or female, were parishioners" in seventeenth-century Virginia, he also adds that "few among them considered themselves as such" and that "few, if any, of the dominant white inhabitants would have been willing to acknowledge" African Americans as parishioners. Moreover, parishes did not provide assistance to slaves in trouble and always placed the needs of

¹¹³ Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African," 251 – 259; Parent, *Foul Means*, 110 – 115 and 239; J. Douglas Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore during the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1993), 176 – 177.

whites before those of blacks.¹¹⁴ While Virginia's black population could be considered members of the colony's Anglican parishes in an abstract sense, the attitudes of Virginia's white population kept African Americans from a place in their Anglican churches. Jack P. Greene affirms that Virginia in the seventeenth century was highly materialistic and focused on exploiting labor to maximize the profits for the few.¹¹⁵ Moreover, slave owners claimed fifty acre-headrights on slaves entering Virginia from 1634 until the turn of the eighteenth century. These headrights made African slaves important sources for acquiring new lands. If allowing African slaves into Anglican churches conferred freedom, Virginia's slave owners may have been more reluctant to bring enslaved Africans to Virginia, therefore limiting their labor pools and land holdings.¹¹⁶ Given this scenario, planters and those wanting to be planters would not consider anything good that could potentially inhibit their access to servile labor and land, and therefore profits.

Edmund Morgan states that probably by 1660 it was more profitable for Virginians to invest in African slaves than English indentured laborers, even though the switch from white labor to black did not fully occur until the 1680s at the earliest.¹¹⁷ At least by 1665, Virginians debated whether the enslaved could have access to Anglican religion. In that year an enslaved individual was deemed a Christian by Virginia's courts

¹¹⁴ Nelson, *A Blessed Company*, 259 – 260.

¹¹⁵ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Parent, *Foul Means*, 113.

¹¹⁷ Morgan, *American Slavery*, 299.

and remitted to her master as an indentured servant instead of a slave.¹¹⁸ Apparently, though numbers of the enslaved in the colony remained small, the risk that Christianizing the enslaved could lead to their eventual freedom proved substantial. By 1667, the General Assembly declared that acceptance of Christianity did not equate freedom or a lesser time or servitude. The General Assembly reiterated this position in 1670, codifying that neither free Christian blacks nor Indians could purchase white Christian indentured servants. Virginia's slaveholders remained suspicious that Christianizing the enslaved would allow them to press for their freedom, and while some slave owners may have shared Godwyn's sentiments that denying Christian instruction to the enslaved posed a moral dilemma, the idea was not strong enough to influence Virginia's legislators to pass statutes actively promoting conversion in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁹

The General Assembly's efforts to codify that religious status – at least acceptance of Christianity – did not affect servile status indicates that white Virginians persisted in questioning whether one Christian should own another. Godwyn's appeal to admit the enslaved into the church was likely seen by slave owners as a potential challenge to their ability to keep enslaved property, thereby limiting their profit potentials. Godwyn's appeal would also have caused another reaction in the minds of Virginia's vestrymen. If the scholarship showing Virginia to be a stratified society, one where the most wealthy people tried to exert political and social power over the rest of society, is accurate, then admitting the enslaved as equal spiritual partners would have

¹¹⁸ Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 70.

¹¹⁹ Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 70; Parent, *Foul Means*, 241.

been all but impossible for these wealthy elites to acknowledge.¹²⁰ Godwyn discussed this very point in his attacks on Barbadian slave owners' unwillingness to admit enslaved Africans to the Church of England. Historians of seventeenth-century Virginia generally agree that the same processes causing slave owners to deny Anglican religion to the enslaved in Barbados were present in Virginia by the 1660s and 1670s. Godwyn's appeal for the inclusion of the enslaved in the Anglican Church not only brought up the question of Christianity's compatibility with slavery, but also challenged slaveholders' self-proclaimed position atop Virginia's cultural hierarchy by suggesting that the enslaved and slave owners were spiritual equals.

Also intriguing is Godwyn's own admission that he only baptized two enslaved Africans while in Virginia. Godwyn never explicitly states that Virginia's vestrymen prohibited slave baptism, but the small number of baptism may indicate slaveholders' aversion to admit enslaved Africans had spiritual equality. The figure also question Godwyn's devotion to actively proselytizing the enslaved in Virginia. Coupled with his statements proclaiming proselytization of the enslaved to be an afterthought, the miniscule number of professed baptisms makes Godwyn's intense devotion to spreading the Christian gospel to non-believers in Virginia seem somewhat doubtful. At the least, his concern over the abuse of authority by parish vestries seems much more pressing.

Virginia's elites did not take kindly to Godwyn's "The State of Religion in Virginia," even if their reasons may be still debated. Former Deputy Governor Colonel Francis Moryson declared the letter to be "virulent libel" against those Godwyn

¹²⁰ For Virginia as a stratified and wealth-based society in the seventeenth-century, see Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, chapter 2; Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*; and T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture*.

criticizes.¹²¹ By all measures, Godwyn left Virginia in 1670 because he was no longer welcome.

¹²¹ Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, 506.

Chapter III

Barbaric Infidels: Morgan Godwyn and the slave owners of colonial Barbados

Morgan Godwyn spent five contentious years in Virginia. In 1670 he had had his fill of the tobacco colony; possibly the tobacco colony had had its fill of him. That same year, Godwyn ventured to Barbados where he acquired a ministerial position.¹²² The society Godwyn encountered in Barbados reinforced the attitudes about colonial elites he had developed while in Virginia. Though Barbados was quite different demographically than Virginia, the two colonial societies shared, in Godwyn's view, an aggressive ruling elite that attempted to exert power that challenged the political authority of the king and the ecclesiastical authority of the parsons of the Church of England.

Englishmen first settled on Barbados in 1627, twenty years after the creation of permanent settlements in Virginia. According to historian Richard Dunn, "Barbadians formed a simple community of peasant farmers" until the 1640s.¹²³ But starting in that decade, Barbadians who had enough capital to buy their own lands, supply those lands with enough laborers, and construct the necessary mills, boilers and refineries, began to switch from tobacco to sugar production. Those individuals who possessed and acquired sugar plantations accumulated vast amounts of wealth and used that wealth to consolidate

¹²² Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

¹²³ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624 – 1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxi and 18.

political and social power.¹²⁴ As Dunn states, “by 1650 in Barbados ... the big sugar planters had taken charge.”¹²⁵

With the wealthy planters’ consolidation of social and political power in Barbados, one might predict Godwyn to rant, as he did in Virginia, about the abuses of power by elites. The year Godwyn left Barbados, 1680, he published *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, a tract “suing for their admission into the Church: or a persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the *Negro’s* and *Indians* in our Plantations.”¹²⁶ Given Godwyn’s own description of his complaints against Barbadian religious habits, his sentiments seem to have changed. Rather than focusing on how local elites controlled religious practice and bullied ministers, Godwyn instead claimed to focus on the spiritual lives of the enslaved. Only a few years before, Godwyn had admitted that his concerns over the spiritual lives of the enslaved and Native Americans were an afterthought.¹²⁷

However, Godwyn encountered a very different society in Barbados than the one he experienced in Virginia. While the wealthy in both colonies exercised great control over local political and social life, Barbados in the 1670s was far different from Virginia

¹²⁴ For discussions of the effects of the sugar revolution in English Caribbean colonies, see Michael Craton, “Reluctant Creoles: The Planters’ World in the British West Indies,” in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 314 – 362; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), chapter seven; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), chapter 10; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Gary Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700*, (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

¹²⁵ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 47.

¹²⁶ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate* (London: 1680).

¹²⁷ Morgan Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” (London: 1680), 172.

a decade earlier. From the 1620s boom-time of tobacco, in the words of Edmund Morgan, Virginians had begun “to move toward a system of labor that treated men as things,” but not until the last quarter of the seventeenth century did that unfree and hard-used labor force become permanently enslaved and black.¹²⁸ In the intervening forty to fifty years, Virginia’s servile labor force primarily consisted of indentured white laborers.¹²⁹ In 1660, less than one thousand men and women of African descent lived in Virginia out of a total population of slightly over 27,000.¹³⁰

According to historians Timothy Breen and Stephen Innes, those few men and women of African descent living in Virginia before the last quarter of the seventeenth century were not absolutely conscribed to permanent servitude. At least on Virginia’s frontiers, some black Virginians obtained their own large farms, their own servile laborers, and successfully petitioned in colonial courts to keep their real and personal property.¹³¹ Expanding on Breen and Innes’s work, historian J. Douglas Deal adds, “Although most blacks—and only blacks—were slaves, the logic of racial slavery had not yet entrapped the beliefs and practices of either whites or blacks in seventeenth-century Virginia.” Deal explains that in the transition period of the mid- to late-seventeenth century, “the forces of assimilation of the races were, for a while at least, just

¹²⁸ Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: WW Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), 129.

¹²⁹ Morgan, *American Slavery*, 299 – 344.

¹³⁰ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 178 – 179.

¹³¹ T.H. Breen and Stephen Innes, “*Myne Owne Ground*”: *Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640 – 1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

as strong as those that were to lead, eventually, to segregation.”¹³² By 1710, the demographic situation had changed considerably, indicating white Virginians’ recent switch to racial slavery. In 1710 almost one third of Virginians were black: 23,118 out of 78,281.¹³³ Godwyn, living in Virginia from 1665 to 1670, viewed Virginia on the cusp of this transition. However, his timing in the colony allowed him only to witness a Virginia much more like the one described by the 1660 demographics than the one of 1710.

The Barbados Godwyn observed in the 1670s was significantly different. As mentioned, the sugar revolution had taken Barbados by storm some thirty years earlier. The transition to sugar cultivation, while also allowing a few individuals to acquire vast amounts of wealth, also brought about the widespread use of enslaved Africans as laborers. By the 1670s, Barbadian planters preferred enslaved African laborers on their plantations. While some indentured English and Irish laborers remained on the island, enslaved Africans constituted the vast majority of unfree workers. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Barbados’s slave population and the continued importation of slaves into the island were large enough to support an inter-colonial slave trade from Barbados to Virginia, much of which may have been via non-regulated markets.¹³⁴ There

¹³² J. Douglas Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore during the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1993), 176 – 177.

¹³³ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 178 – 179. See also Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), chapter five.

¹³⁴ Many historians document the demographic and economic changes that accompanied the sugar revolution in the Caribbean. For Barbados specifically, see Hilary McD. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), chapter one; Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627 – 1715* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*; Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660 – 1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 66 – 68; Puckrein, *Little England*, chapters six, seven, eight, nine, and ten.

was likely never a time on Barbados after English settlement when black men and women were not considered slaves. As George Fredrickson among others notes, the first Africans came to Barbados in 1627, the same year as the first Englishmen. These Africans most likely arrived as slaves.¹³⁵ More than one-half of Barbados' population in 1660 was black and enslaved: 27,100 out of 53,300. The populations of enslaved Africans and African-Americans continued to grow on Barbados through the rest of the seventeenth century, and by 1710, four of every five people living on Barbados were black and enslaved.¹³⁶ Godwyn, therefore, witnessed a Barbadian society much more resembling what historian Ira Berlin has termed a slave society. Using the same categories Berlin initiates, the Virginia Godwyn knew could only be called a society with slaves.¹³⁷

But to what extent did Morgan Godwyn realize and internalize the differences in English colonial societies brought about by the widespread introduction of African slavery and a reliance on it for economic prosperity? Whatever his perceptions, Godwyn used the Barbadian slave society to ignite his literary and ministerial careers. After leaving Barbados in 1680, Godwyn published *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*. The book included his earlier letter to Governor Sir William Berkeley of Virginia, but 166 of the 174 pages constituted a biting critique of how Barbadian slave owners treated their slaves, focusing specifically on their refusal to admit the enslaved into the Church of

¹³⁵ George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 193 – 194.

¹³⁶ Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 178 – 179.

¹³⁷ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.

England.¹³⁸ A year later Godwyn published *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate* where he further outlined his critique of slave owners' behaviors and proposed what he deemed were the necessary changes to the institution of slavery in the American colonies as a whole, and specifically Barbados.¹³⁹ In 1682, Godwyn attempted to commission an illustration entitled *The Revival* that was to be printed with the *Advocate*; the text of the commission survives.¹⁴⁰ Finally, Godwyn published his sermon, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, which he delivered at Westminster Abbey in 1685.¹⁴¹ In 1708, Francis Brokesby published a letter by Godwyn in his *Some Proposals Towards Propagating of the Gospel in our American Plantations*. Godwyn's letter to Brokesby was written some years before, and was used by Brokesby as evidence of a well-known Church of England advocate's support for the establishment of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.¹⁴²

Godwyn returned to England after his decade-long venture to Barbados and became more of an author and agitator than a minister. Upon returning to England, he found a position as rector of Woldham, Kent, and later transferred to be vicar of Bulkington, Warwick.¹⁴³ Apparently, Godwyn also gave at least occasional sermons

¹³⁸ Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians Advocate*.

¹³⁹ Morgan Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate* (London: J.D., 1681).

¹⁴⁰ Morgan Godwyn, *The Revival: or Directions for a Sculpture* (London: J. Darby, 1682).

¹⁴¹ Morgan Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion, and Christ made to Give Place to Mammon* (London: B. Took, 1685).

¹⁴² Francis Brokesby, *Some Proposals Towards Propagating of the Gospel in our American Plantations* (London: Three Golden Flower-de-Luces, 1708).

¹⁴³ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 63.

throughout London. His elongated title to *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion* states the sermon was “First Preached at Westminster Abbey, And afterwards in divers Churches in London.”¹⁴⁴ Godwyn completely adopted the role of social critic, espousing his sentiments regarding English colonial society. He used his ordination in the Church of England as a literal pulpit from which to disseminate his views to England’s public.

Godwyn addressed all his writings about Barbados and the need to proselytize Africans, African Americans and Native Americans to the English public. While he primarily talked about slave owners in Barbados, they are conspicuously not his audience. Godwyn apparently assumed either Barbadian slave owners would not read his tracts given their antipathy toward including the enslaved in the Anglican Church, or he consciously chose to speak to others in British society. Godwyn’s actual sentiments that come out in his writings point to the latter explanation. While he asserted that he wrote for the benefit of the enslaved’s immortal souls, Godwyn’s persistent attacks on Barbadian slave owners indicate a different and, to Godwyn, more pressing concern with English society as a whole, especially in the colonies.

Godwyn’s 1680 work, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, is his longest discussion about the state of religion in seventeenth-century English colonies. Godwyn began *The Advocate* by stating that the enslaved in Barbados were “within the *English Dominion*” and that the English had the religious duty to proselytize them.¹⁴⁵ This statement formed the crux of Godwyn’s argument. He believed that the Church of

¹⁴⁴ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*.

¹⁴⁵ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, (ii). The publisher of the *Advocate* did not number the pages of the introduction or the preface. I delineate my own pagination for these sections of the text with parentheses around the page numbers.

England and its English adherents had an obligation to their God to spread the Gospel to those who did not share their beliefs. In this regard, Godwyn was very much a missionary. In fact, the definition of Christianity that Godwyn gave his readers denotes the importance he placed on missionary zeal:

*A devoting of ourselves to the Service of Christ, and a strict Obligation in defiance of the whole World, to promote his Interest and Honour, even with the loss of whatsoever is precious or dear unto us.*¹⁴⁶

He saw it as his duty to increase the number of communicants and believers in the Church of England. However, Godwyn believed his compatriots living in Barbados ignored this missionary duty. To Godwyn, shirking one's religious duties came with exceedingly high costs. The introduction to *The Advocate* continued,

It would be but gross Impertinence for me to undertake to acquaint your Grace how zealous our Ancestors were in promoting Works of this nature, the advancement of *Religion* in foreign Regions, even beyond their own Power, and Jurisdiction. Nor need I to mention how some others do make this very thing an Essential Mark of the *Catholic Church*, and from thence would prove their *Religion* true, and ours, at the same time, false.¹⁴⁷

Failure to proselytize in the colonies meant a rejection of the English heritage of spreading the Gospel, a rejection of what Godwyn considered the glorious past of his English ancestors. Moreover, Godwyn hinted that missionary activity had a political, as well as spiritual side. Godwyn perceived the growing competition between European powers in the Americas as having a conspicuous religious tint. While England, France, Spain and the Netherlands vied with one another to create economically profitable colonies, they also vied with one another for the souls of the individuals living in those

¹⁴⁶ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, (ii – iii).

colonies, namely the African slaves brought there to labor and the Native Americans who inhabited the lands from which the European nations carved their colonies. One gets the sense from reading Godwyn that he believed religions and religious sects found evidence of God's grace in the number of souls they "saved." The greater the number of adherents, the more God favored that group.

Concluding the introduction, Godwyn makes clear his audience. He declared,

We are only charged with the *Neglect* [of proselytizing], I shall not add the opposing of it; that being the *Crime* of such degenerated *English*, who with that air, have imbibed the *Barbarity* and *Heathenism* of the Countries they live in: And with whom, through the want of Discipline, *Christianity* doth seem to be wholly lost, and nothing but *Infidelity* to have come in its place.¹⁴⁸

Godwyn's use of "we" clearly excludes Barbadian slave owners. They were people outside Godwyn's society. They were "degenerated English," people who had apparently sacrificed the refinement and religion usually conferred to Englishmen. As such, these slave owners were "barbarians" and "infidels," the same terms that English writers had used to describe unattractive characteristics of Native Americans and Africans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

These statements regarding Barbados's slave-owning residents sound similar to the comments Godwyn made about Virginia's vestries. Virginia's vestries were dangerously close to countering the authority of the Crown and its agents in Virginia. They had usurped power not meant for them to wield. Barbados's slave owners, to Godwyn, had also rejected their proper position in English society. Their actions had divested them of some measure of their previous Englishness.

¹⁴⁸ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, (iv).

In order to convince his readers that non-whites deserved a place in the Church of England, Godwyn first set out to prove that “the *Negro's, etc.* have naturally an *equal Right* with other Men, to the *Exercise and Privileges* of Religion.”¹⁴⁹ While many historians have shown the various ways in which English slave owners dehumanized the enslaved, a poignant example comes from the Barbados law codes of 1661. Barbadian slave owners characterized Africans as “an heathenish, brutish and dangerous people.”¹⁵⁰ In 1676, Barbadian slaves were legally denied access to skilled craft professions, and, in 1681, deemed “wholly incapable of conversion to Christianity.”¹⁵¹ Godwyn consistently set out proofs that he used as logical justifications for pleading that the enslaved be allowed in the Church of England. Godwyn’s first proof, and the one most important to his argument, stated:

1. *First*, That *naturally* there is in every Man an equal *Right to Religion*.
2. *Secondly*, That *Negro's* are Men, and therefore are invested with the *same Right*.
3. *Thirdly*, That being thus qualified and invested, to deprive them of the *Right* is the *highest injustice*.¹⁵²

Conspicuously, the proof ended with a condemnation of the people who deprived the enslaved access to Christianity. Godwyn’s plea for the inclusion of Africans and Native Americans in the Church of England was the vehicle he used to attack the wealthy slave owners of Barbados.

¹⁴⁹ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, (xi).

¹⁵⁰ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 239.

¹⁵¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 242 – 249.

¹⁵² Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 9.

Godwyn combined biblical and religious justifications with what he believed were scientific and logical rationales to prove to his readers that blacks were humans as equally deserving of Christianity as white Englishmen. Godwyn rejected the slave owners' citations of Biblical passages that supposedly showed the inhumanity of individuals of African descent. He claimed that Barbadian slave owners readily cited that Africans were unworthy of Christian teaching because they lacked the necessary "humanity" to understand Christian religion.¹⁵³ Godwyn dispatched these slave owners' claims as "contrary to the sense and judgment of the whole World, both *Jews* and *Christians*, who have gone before."¹⁵⁴ To Godwyn, Africans and their descendants were men just as the English. Moreover, blacks possessed the same bodily figures, the same limbs, voice and countenance, the same abilities of discourse and trade as whites. Many of the enslaved on Barbados even displayed better managerial and business skills than many of the English on the island. How then, in Godwyn's words, were "they not truly men?"¹⁵⁵ Essentially, Godwyn seemed to present an early counter-argument for eighteenth-century debates regarding the Great Chain of Being. As historian Winthrop Jordan states, the Great Chain of Being was used to rationalize the inferiority of people of African descent. By placing Africans lower on the Chain, Europeans justified their enslavement and the

¹⁵³ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 14. Godwyn claims that slave owners declare Africans to either be of a pre-Adamite race of men or descendants of the cursed Ham. In either scenario, slave owners assert that Africans are outside the pale of Christianity and are ineligible for entry to it. These ideas used by slave owners to dehumanize Africans have been analyzed by numerous historians; for instance see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966) and Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550 – 1812* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

¹⁵⁴ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 16 – 18.

¹⁵⁵ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 9 – 13.

denial of their humanity—including a denial of the validity of African religious beliefs or the right to join as equals with whites in Christian religious practices.¹⁵⁶

Godwyn asserted that slave owners developed elaborate rationalizations of Africans' dehumanization out of their desire for profits. Godwyn cited that slave owners declared that the different complexion and manners of Africans justified their bondage. These assumptions pronounced blacks to be essentially un-English and ineligible for the same spiritual or temporal rights granted to Englishmen. Slave owners actively sought ways to dehumanize Africans and their descendants because it was in their economic interest to maintain a perpetual source of servile labor. To have a labor force that could be brutalized and essentially uncared for allowed slave owners to spend a minimal amount of money maintaining the health of their laborers without having any moral qualms.

Godwyn cited a series of logical continuances of the slave owners' rationalization that Africans should be dehumanized in order to show their absurdity. Godwyn contended that if complexion alone classified Africans for dehumanization, then that same logic could allow people with complexions different from the English to create other standards of beauty that could potentially dehumanize Englishmen in those other cultures. Godwyn also contended that if skin color was the defining characteristic of humanity, then should not correct formation of the body also be? However, English society allowed individuals with deformities access to religion and treated them as spiritual equals. Moreover, God did not consider countenance, stature, or physical

¹⁵⁶ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 219 – 234.

features when He saw men; God only looked upon the heart. Any attempt by men to prejudge the spiritual quality of others was usurping the powers only God possessed. Therefore, slave owners who off-handedly refused to allow enslaved men and women access to Christian instruction headed dangerously close to exciting God's wrath. Godwyn also noted that slave owners used the enslaved's lack of knowledge of the English language and English manners as reasons to deny religious instruction, claiming that the enslaved lacked the intellect to understand the meaning of Christian services. Godwyn hyperbolically asserted that if ignorance and poor conduct were the measurements for eligibility for Christian instruction, then many Englishmen who lacked education and refined manners should have been excluded from the Church of England as well. Godwyn also used examples from English and Christian history to justify his position, citing that early Christians made no distinctions of complexion, national origin, or slave status when determining who could be admitted to their congregations. Egyptians and Ethiopians were among the first converts to Christianity, and early Church leaders like Saint Augustine were North African.¹⁵⁷

Following the same logic, Godwyn argued that a state of bondage could not alter an individual's access to religion. Godwyn declared that bondage did not alter the substance of an individual, and since religion was a choice of the mind rather than a state of the body, enslavement did not negate an individual's ability to express true religious devotion. Godwyn added that if slavery did "un-soul" men, then a ruler could then un-soul any of those under his dominion, and a slave that ran away to freedom could provide

¹⁵⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 20 – 37 and 57.

himself with a soul. As in his earlier arguments, Godwyn remarked that these abilities to grant or withhold souls from beings were not the abilities of men, but of God alone. The controls of the slave owner only extended to the body of the slave. Owners had no control over the mind or spirit. The control of the body by another did not diminish the agency of the slave to retain control over his mind. Therefore, the enslaved remained free to believe what they wanted. Moreover, if slave owners actually believed they had these powers—beyond being a tacit renunciation of their purported Christian faith—Godwyn declared how incredibly cruel they were who willfully denied others the capacity to possess souls and achieve salvation. Again using counterexamples to support his arguments, Godwyn stated that if slavery denied the right of individuals to religion, then any enslaved Englishman would thereby be denied his right to practice Christianity. Godwyn also noted that enslaved individuals were equally subject to the wrath of God as free individuals. The enslaved, therefore, had a right to Christian religion because they shared equally in the consequences of not worshipping God in the correct manner. Additionally, God commanded all men, regardless of their worldly station, to serve Him, and Godwyn cited several Biblical examples of people proselytizing their servants.¹⁵⁸

Barbadian slave owners, according to Godwyn, argued that Christianity would inculcate the enslaved with dangerous ideas, and that to educate the enslaved in Christian religion would be to incite rebellion and provide a “*ready way to have all their Throats cut.*” Godwyn countered slave owners’ fears by declaring that Christianity inspired

¹⁵⁸ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 27 – 30, 61, 69 – 73 and 102 b. The publisher of *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* incorrectly paginated a portion of the text. Pages that should be numbered 113 through 128 were numbered 97 through 112. Consequently, there are two sets of pages numbered 97 through 112. I chose to demarcate the second, and incorrectly numbered, of these two sets by giving the published page number followed by a “b.”

virtue in all people, and that slaves given the gift of Christian instruction would become better servants. However, Godwyn did not give any explicit reason why the enslaved would respond to Christianity in this way other than simply affirming that violence and disobedience contradicted the teachings of Christ. Implicit in his argument, however, was the fact that slaves' conversion to Christianity would be coupled with their continual domination by Englishmen. This facet of Godwyn's argument was illustrated by the tenuous connection he made between Spanish conversion of Native Americans and his desired conversion of Africans in English colonies, saying that Barbados's slave population would become, like the Native Americans under Spanish dominion, more docile after exposure to Christianity.¹⁵⁹ Like the Spanish, English slaveholders would be better able to dominate their laborers if they added Christianity to their litany of social controls. Clearly, Godwyn's concern with the lives of the enslaved did not extend to making an argument for the enslaved using Christianity—or any other aspect of English culture—to alleviate themselves of domination by others.

Godwyn's questionable proof supporting the benefits of Christian instruction for the enslaved had another inherent fallacy. By making the pronouncement that Christianity would induce docile behavior, Godwyn opened the door for weary slave owners to negate his assertions. Slave owners, even if the enslaved were allowed access to Christian teachings, still determined whether the behavior of the enslaved was good or bad. If slave owners declared that Christian slaves "misbehaved" or committed criminal acts, they could use these declarations—whether true or false—as "proof" that conversion

¹⁵⁹ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 74 – 75, 107 b – 111 b, and 131 – 132.

did not influence behavior positively, thereby effectively preventing further religious instruction. Godwyn seemed unaware of this potential trap in his argument.

Godwyn's entire premise of the necessity for missionary activity to the enslaved rested on some clearly ethnocentric assumptions. Godwyn asserted that individuals living outside of English society wanted to be part of it when they saw it. Their desire to share in Englishness depended heavily on a yearning for Christian salvation once introduced to the religion.¹⁶⁰ Statements like this reveal Godwyn's inability to see and understand the world of Barbados's enslaved population. Some historians state that enslaved Africans on Barbados who understood that their European owners legitimated their enslavement because they were not Christians actively sought to convert to their masters' faith in hopes of achieving freedom. While some enslaved men and women may have desired to become Christians, certainly not all—as Godwyn intimates—did. Many Africans brought to the Americas retained their religious beliefs after initiation into American slavery and continued to practice their religions even when directed not to do so by slave owners.¹⁶¹ Historians now note that Caribbean slave owners consistently attempted to prevent the enslaved from practicing religions different from their own. These slave owners' actions did not discourage the enslaved from expressing their spirituality in the ways they wanted. Rather, the enslaved practiced other religions clandestinely, or combined elements of owners' religious worship into their own in order

¹⁶⁰ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 102.

¹⁶¹ Puckrein, *Little England*, 81; Roger Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 23.

to give the appearance of practicing “acceptable” religions.¹⁶² The actions taken by the enslaved to use Christian instruction to their advantage in numerous ways disproves Godwyn’s assertion that Christianity would make the enslaved more docile, and indicates that Godwyn did not know the enslaved’s intentions as well as he stated he did.

As might be expected from his position within the Church of England, Godwyn did not accept the religious beliefs and spiritual convictions of the enslaved if they were not what he deemed to be properly Christian. While, as historian Michael Craton notes, Godwyn’s Anglican religious doctrines included many aspects that resembled doctrines and practices within African religions—use of symbols, imagery of sacrifice, and a reverence for certain written holy words—Godwyn could not get past his own religious convictions to admit that the enslaved could have their own equally valid interpretations of divine beings and spirituality.¹⁶³ Godwyn’s belief in Christianity and his devotion to the Church of England taught him that Anglican Christianity was the true path to salvation. The complete acceptance of the Christian God as the divine was the crux of his faith. Godwyn also missed the possibility that many enslaved individuals could outwardly proclaim desires to become Christians simply for the perceived benefits it could grant, rather than truly accept Protestant Christian theology.

¹⁶² Bastide, *African Civilisations*, 12; Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 114; Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 7 – 9; Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah and the Caribbean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 2 – 3.

¹⁶³ Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 264.

Godwyn also maintained that proselytizing the enslaved would not change the master-slave relationship. While Godwyn did condemn the physical abuses slave owners inflicted, he asserted that Christianizing the enslaved did not diminish the authority of the slave owner.¹⁶⁴ In no way can one interpret Godwyn as an abolitionist or as harboring sentiments against slavery as an institution. Godwyn's repeated citations of Biblical examples of individuals converting their servants and slaves indicate his moral acceptance of one's absolute ability to control the body of another. Godwyn even cited the laws of Virginia and Maryland in the 1660s and 1670s that codified that baptism caused no change in one's status. Godwyn believed Barbadian slave owners should have adopted similar laws to make the slave system better for both the enslaved and owners.¹⁶⁵

The lack of mentioning any of the above points seems surprising given Godwyn's detailed proofs of the humanity of the enslaved. Not addressing any of these topics, and presumably not noticing their existence, indicates that Godwyn's true intent in writing *The Advocate* had little to do with genuinely attempting to make life—and the afterlife—better for the enslaved. Godwyn stated that his first chapter of *The Advocate* shows “That the *Negro's, etc.* have naturally an *equal Right* with other Men, to the *Exercise and Privileges* of Religion, of which 'tis most unjust in any part to deprive them.”¹⁶⁶

Throughout the chapter Godwyn chastised slave owners for their role in denying the enslaved access to the Church of England, declaring owners “barbarous” and

¹⁶⁴ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 139.

¹⁶⁵ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 140 – 141.

¹⁶⁶ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, (xi).

“inhumane” for doing so.¹⁶⁷ The remaining three chapters continued to berate slave owners for their behavior towards their enslaved laborers. Simply measuring the amount of space Godwyn used to argue for the rights of the enslaved versus the space he used to argue against the actions of slave owners clearly shows that his intent was to damn slave owners in the eyes of the English public.

Godwyn focused his work on removing what he believed was the growing and corrupting power of the wealthy in colonial English societies. In Godwyn’s eyes, as colonial slaveholders increased their wealth and influence on English politics and society, they could inculcate their same rejection of Christ for profit to the rest of British society. The sugar revolution allowed Barbadian planters to achieve far greater amounts of wealth from their small landholdings. Sugar production also raised the demand for slave labor and tied Barbados more closely with English slave traders as well as merchants transporting and selling their agricultural products over seas. Historian Gary Puckrein notes the Barbadian slave system created a situation where the government was run by a small minority that could not depend on the majority of Barbadians to support the government. This unstable political environment forced those in charge of the government to look to England for protection and military support.¹⁶⁸

Godwyn also was likely aware that by the last quarter of the seventeenth century many Barbadian plantations were owned by absentee owners who resided in England. Some of these men had lived for a time in Barbados and returned to England once their

¹⁶⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 78.

¹⁶⁸ Puckrein, *Little England*, 70 – 87, 124 – 125.

plantations were up and running. Others were foreign investors from England who wanted simply to capitalize on the profits of the sugar trade. In either case, absentee owners also would have had a significant voice among the English public.¹⁶⁹ Partly because some were absentee owners living in England, Barbadian slave owners, unlike their counterparts in the Chesapeake, had a strong influence in Parliament. Many Barbadian plantation owners were the sons of gentry families. This group of politically well-positioned Englishmen with ties to Barbados sugar production—and therefore Barbadian slavery—teamed with English merchants importing sugar to create an interest lobby in Parliament “more influential than any other colonial interest.”¹⁷⁰ It is no wonder that many in England would hold similar views about the enslaved as did Barbadian slave owners. Godwyn admitted that Africans and their descendants were assumed to be slaves in English minds: “These two words, *Negro* and *Slave*, being by custom grown Homogenous and Convertible, even as *Negro* and *Christian*, *Englishmen* and *Heathen*, are by the like corrupt Custom and Partiality made *Opposites*.”¹⁷¹ By 1680, at least in Godwyn’s eyes, English society presumed all Africans to be slaves or potential slaves and, as such, heathens outside the Anglican religious community. Godwyn may have had a skewed vision of English—or at least Londoners’—equation of blacks with slavery. In the words of historian Philip Morgan, people of African descent were “everyday sights” in late-seventeenth-century London, and Englishmen had experienced 200 years of

¹⁶⁹ Puckrein, *Little England*, 65.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 216. For a discussion of the influence of the West Indian sugar interest in British politics see also Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* and Beckles, *White Servitude*, 19 – 22.

¹⁷¹ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 36.

sporadic contact with Africans.¹⁷² Even if English men and women generally had some contact with Africans, the numbers of Africans in England in the late-seventeenth century may not have been very large. Historian Alden Vaughan states that the numbers of Africans in England at the time were “extremely small.”¹⁷³ Given his statements about what Englishmen believed, in Godwyn’s mind English public opinion clearly linked blacks to slave status. Because of this construction of English public opinion, Godwyn’s words not only tried to counteract these connections in English minds, they attempted to dispel the cultural presuppositions that formed their supports.

Godwyn attacked the crux of the slave owners’ world. He stated that slave owners constructed an identity for themselves and their enslaved that met their economic goals. By denying that the constructed identity was valid, Godwyn challenged the slave owners’ creation of plantation economics. Godwyn intimated that slaves’ souls were essentially equal with those of slave owners.¹⁷⁴ This idea broke down the tenet of the English as an elect people. As historian Edward Bond has shown, seventeenth-century Englishmen conceived themselves as having a personal relationship with God that implied that the English people were specially favored by the Divine and that their religious system would someday prevail over all others.¹⁷⁵ To Godwyn, however, the English were a body of co-religionists, people who believed in the same things and

¹⁷² Philip D. Morgan, “Encounters with Africans and African-Americans circa 1600 – 1780,” in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 159 – 160.

¹⁷³ Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 78.

¹⁷⁴ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 15.

worshiped in the same ways. There was no prerequisite of a certain national origin or specific cultural characteristics for membership in Godwyn's version of Anglican congregations. If the enslaved adopted Anglican Christianity with its indoctrination of behavior and morals, they would essentially become English. Certainly, Godwyn's definition of correct behavior and correct worship were the same as those the Church of England traditionally promoted. Rather than being signals of national origin, these attributes indicated the presence of God's grace. Since God only looked at the souls of men, any man possessing the right sort of religious belief exhibited God's grace.

Historian David Brion Davis correctly recognizes Godwyn's lack of concern with black Barbadians. Davis states that Godwyn's concern was the growing commercial spirit in English society, a spirit that confused "spiritual liberty with a total freedom from duty and external restraint."¹⁷⁶ When the Crown gave permission to plant the colonies, the Church of England adjusted its liturgy to make the baptizing of adults easier so the Gospel could readily be spread to all non-Christians residing in the colonies. However, Godwyn declared that the "enemies of Goodness," the slave owners in the colonies, made that proposition useless by refusing to admit any Africans into their congregations, thereby directly countering the wishes of the Crown and Church.¹⁷⁷ Not only was proselytizing commanded by the government and church, it was a requirement of Christianity.¹⁷⁸ By not trying actively to convert Africans, slave owners, according to Godwyn, neglected their Christian duty to spread the Gospel. When individuals had the

¹⁷⁶ Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 339 – 340.

¹⁷⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 96 – 97.

¹⁷⁸ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 89, 98 and 101 b.

ability to carry out God's wishes and refused to do so, they were "evil" according to Godwyn.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, denying others the right to salvation was unjust, "barbarous," and "inhumane." Proselytizing should fall under the requirements slave owners had to provide for the health of their enslaved laborers.¹⁸⁰ Godwyn took his accusations further, stating that slave owners' actions that condemned the enslaved to eternal damnation purloined the rightful powers of God, thereby making slave owners guilty of the greatest sin: playing God.¹⁸¹ Godwyn effectively denied the slave owners' Christianity.

Godwyn stated throughout *The Advocate* that Barbadian slave owners sinned by making profit their God.¹⁸² By doing so, Godwyn again tried to prove that Barbadian slave owners were no longer Christians. These slave owners substituted the Christian God with Mammon.¹⁸³ The denial of the Christian God in favor of profit marked slave owners as closet nonbelievers, outwardly professing their Christian faith while devoting their lives solely to the accumulation of material wealth. Thereby, Godwyn used a two-pronged attack against slaveholders in Barbados, first trying to deny their Christianity outright, then attempting to question the validity of their professed faith. The combination of the two, Godwyn hoped, would convince the English public of the evils of their colonial counterparts.

¹⁷⁹ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 76 and 143.

¹⁸⁰ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 78 – 79.

¹⁸¹ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 79 and 89.

¹⁸² Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 39 and 135.

¹⁸³ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 103 b.

However, it must be remembered that Godwyn did not declare that slave owning caused the deification of money. Rather it was Barbadian slave owners' particular attitude accompanying their plantation economy based on slavery that Godwyn found offensive. Slave owners' refusal to submit to their assigned duty to proselytize the enslaved signaled the owners' denial of Christ. Moreover, since the Crown and Church of England sanctioned proselytizing, refusal to partake was also a denial of those institutions' authority to control English subjects. To Godwyn, the presence of slavery in a culture did not necessarily promote un-Christian and un-English attributes in individuals. Barbadian slaveholders' obsession with wealth had contaminated their minds and hearts, corrupting all aspects of their society including how they treated their slaves.

Davis fails to examine the repercussions of this denial of Christianity. To seventeenth-century Englishmen, Christianity was a defining characteristic of national identity. Historian Forrest G. Wood states that early modern Europeans used their religious beliefs to help characterize nationhood.¹⁸⁴ The English were no exception. Historian Edward Bond cites that the English constructions of both their religious and political identities were conflated, and that acceptance of English Protestantism was central to national identity.¹⁸⁵ Government and the Church of England mutually supported one another and created a crown-church complex that maintained the social

¹⁸⁴ Forrest G. Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 5 – 12.

¹⁸⁵ Bond, *Damned Souls*, 15.

order.¹⁸⁶ By declaring that Barbadian slave owners' actions displayed their inner contempt for and rejection of Protestant Christianity, Godwyn attempted to remove their status as Englishmen. If Godwyn could convince the English public that these men in Barbados were not acting as Englishmen should, Godwyn could potentially convince his audience that Barbadian slave owners had no right to their possessions and independence on the island, effectively returning Barbados to the complete control of the Crown and its right arm, the Church of England.

Godwyn made this attempt overt. His language used to describe the slave owners portrayed them as outside English "civilization." Godwyn called slave owners' refusal to proselytize heathens, "*a rejecting of the Faith, [which] makes the Oppressor become WORSE than an INFIDEL.*" Slave owners' attempts to acquit themselves of any injustice toward the enslaved by trying to dehumanize them made the owners blasphemous. The slave owners' brutal treatment that killed and disfigured the enslaved was equated with the worst barbarities of non-Christian Turks and the most savage of inhuman creatures. As he did in Virginia, Godwyn also attacked the Barbadian vestries, proclaiming them to be "made up . . . of sordid Plebeians, the very Dregs of the *English Nation.*"¹⁸⁷

When Godwyn directed the creation of an engraving to accompany *The Advocate* his condemnation of Barbadian slave owners remained overt. He wanted English Caribbean slave owners portrayed as blasphemous murderers killing slaves who sought Christianity. Godwyn wanted this image juxtaposed with scenes of both Puritans and

¹⁸⁶ Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: The Colonial Church of England during the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 10 – 11.

¹⁸⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 98 b – 99 b, 105 b, 107, and 112.

Catholics proselytizing the enslaved.¹⁸⁸ Not only were English slave owners guilty of horrid abuses of the enslaved that risked damnation, but they also acted worse than the political and spiritual enemies of the Church of England. Statements such as these were meant to make the English public perceive colonial slave owners as not only bad men, but men who had forsaken the civilizing influences of English nationhood. To Godwyn, Barbadian slave owners did not act like proper Englishmen. Instead, they allowed their lust for wealth to drive them toward a degraded state of being, the equivalent of those devoid of Christian teachings and moral discipline.

Essentially, Godwyn's rhetoric placed the enslaved on a moral plane higher than the slave owners. Godwyn portrayed enslaved Africans on Barbados as innocents who only needed the helping hand of Anglican Christianity to lead them to "civilization." He portrayed the slave owners as corrupt individuals desirous of instant wealth. Godwyn's obvious moral affinity for the innocent and potentially pure made the clear argument that the enslaved, rather than the slave owners, should be part of English society. Godwyn made this sentiment overt by declaring that proper Christian instruction would inculcate the enslaved with English customs and cause them to act like Englishmen, thereby creating the "solid benefit and satisfaction arising from the unquestionable *Fidelity and Integrity of a virtuous Servant*." Christian instruction, according to Godwyn, would make the enslaved more civilized and simultaneously transform slaveholders from supporters of "*Turkish and Heathenish Licentiousness, and even all Irreligion and Atheism*" into pious and virtuous Christians. These benefits, Godwyn stated, greatly

¹⁸⁸ Godwyn, *The Revival*.

outweighed any monetary benefits that the enslaved's labor could procure.¹⁸⁹ Following the logic of Godwyn's argument, Christianizing the enslaved would bring them into English society. It is clear from Godwyn's writings that the enslaved would remain slaves after accepting Christianity, but he is persistently ambiguous about whether the enslaved would essentially become English—even if enslaved—after conversion.

Godwyn's efforts to deny the Christianity of Barbadian slave owners attempted to do more than convince the English public that they were bad people. To Godwyn, the public's disapproval would pressure the slave owners into acting with certain behaviors sanctioned by the Crown and its spiritual counterpart, the Church of England. Godwyn used the emotional appeals of one group denying the most basic spiritual rights of another to try to enforce the authority of the monarch and church.

Given Godwyn's ethnocentric statements regarding Barbadian slaves' need of English customs in order to be civilized, it is doubtful that Godwyn really envisioned a colonial society where black slaves would be fully equals to English masters. His constant ambiguity regarding how blacks would be incorporated into English society makes it more likely that Godwyn portrayed Barbadian slave owners as morally corrupt and degenerate in order to place pressure on them to conform to the Crown's and Church's wishes. As in the case of Virginia, Godwyn appeared to fear the growing political and social power of the economic elites of Barbados. The slave owners that Godwyn ridiculed occupied all of the chief political seats in the colony's General Assembly and Council to the Governor. Additionally, the wealthiest—and not

¹⁸⁹ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 144 – 146.

incidentally largest—slaveholders also dominated judgeships and commanding positions in the colonial militia, reinforcing their political stronghold on the colony. The power of the wealthy slave owners had grown so in Barbados that the franchise had been restricted to only a handful of voters in each parish. By consolidating land ownership in the hands of a few and simultaneously imposing a property requirement for voting, the most prosperous sugar producers all but guaranteed themselves to be the only men eligible to vote. The wealthiest slaveholders also contrived to control the actions of less wealthy whites by using patronage to distribute lesser political, judicial, and military offices to their supporters. As early as 1643, Barbados’s wealthy planters had enough political influence to renounce the Lord Proprietor and cease paying quitrent taxes to him. By controlling the politics of the colony, the wealthiest slave owners could effectively inhibit the amount of influence that the royal governor could exert on the populace. Often Barbadian legislators and executives simply ignored, evaded, or intentionally misinterpreted directives from the Crown. Controlling politics also allowed the wealthiest Barbadians to inhibit the influence of the Church of England in the colony. By refusing to redraw parish boundaries, the economic elites maintained only eleven Anglican clergymen for a population that in England would have required forty.¹⁹⁰

Historian Gary Puckrein asserts that “the political bonds that held the plantocracy together were forged in their efforts to maintain control over the colony’s servile inhabitants and in their endeavors to resist the centralizing tendencies of powers in the

¹⁹⁰ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 80, 93, 98 – 100, and 103; Taylor, *American Colonies*, 216; Puckrein, *Little England*, 24 and 42.

mother country.”¹⁹¹ This plantocracy owned approximately half of the island’s population as servants and slaves. Their production of sugar, which had given them their wealth, also drove the price of land so high as to make it too expensive for those with limited means. Consequently, the numbers of small freeholders on Barbados dropped dramatically after mid-century. Moreover, the plantocracy’s power manifested itself in the parish structure as well. In 1648, Barbados’ vestries were granted the power to appraise and sell any real or personal estate of indebted people within their boundaries. Since the vestries, as in Virginia, were comprised of the wealthiest men in district, this system allowed the most affluent to take advantage of their poorer neighbors and consolidate more land and merchantable goods. Also as in Virginia, the same men who made Barbados’ laws sat on its vestries. The material and political inequalities that plantation slavery and the cultivation of sugar produced could only be maintained with active support from the government.

As a result, Barbadian slaveholders who controlled the island’s politics and economics developed and implemented political values that differed from the traditional values espoused by the king and his religious supporters in the Church of England. In England, political leaders since the Henrician Reformation had treated those who protested and questioned with “paternalistic indulgence,” at least listening to their complaints, even if not agreeing with them or taking any direct action to affect change. The goal of this system was to create a society where a large portion of the population would have a vested interest in maintaining and supporting the current political leaders.

¹⁹¹ Puckrein, *Little England*, 25.

As historian Nancy Rhoden states, this was a central reason for the close ties between the Crown and the Church of England—the two bodies worked to mutually support one another and make both stronger in the eyes of the English citizenry. In Barbados, however, the presence of a large enslaved population and the desire to maintain power in the hands of a minute body of plantation owners caused a need to demand complete and immediate subordination to authority from all within the society. It was why Barbadian politicians did not tolerate religious dissenters who threatened the peace, why they did not allow the conflicts of the English Civil War to create lasting divisions among the ruling group, why white servants were forced to attend church services and black slaves disallowed from them, and why all ideas that could promote restlessness among the enslaved were severely and quickly put down.¹⁹²

Morgan Godwyn ended *The Advocate* with his suggested remedies to this situation. He stated that colonial slave owners looked to London for approval and that if Londoners and the merchants with whom the slave owners did business showed moral repugnance at their actions, the slave owners would willfully and quickly adjust their behavior to match what London demanded.¹⁹³ To convince the London and greater English public, Godwyn pleaded that ministers preach to their congregations about the necessity of including individuals of African descent in the church, of ministers baptizing their own slaves, and slave owners in England baptizing their slaves. If English slave owners refused to provide access to religion to their enslaved workers, then Godwyn

¹⁹² Puckrein, *Little England*, 39, 62, 80 – 87, 91 – 103; Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism*, 10 – 11.

¹⁹³ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 153.

entreated that those slaves should be freed from bondage.¹⁹⁴ At the same time, Godwyn directed that ministers within the colonies should be freed from the control of colonial vestries by providing them with sufficient pay, life-long benefices, and assured stations in churches in England after a tour of years in the colonies since it was “against reason that any innocent Man should, as if for some great Villany, be condemned to perpetual Exile amongst a People utter Enemies to his Profession.”¹⁹⁵ These were essentially the same compensations Godwyn asked for when deriding the vestry system in Virginia. Godwyn’s purpose had not changed greatly in the intervening decade. His focus remained combating abuses of power from wealthy and influential colonial elites. Godwyn simply adjusted his complaints to match the system of plantation agriculture and racial slavery he observed on Barbados. Therefore, historians who analyze Godwyn and his writing exclusively for insights into either Virginia or Barbados miss much of Godwyn’s point and his importance to the development of colonial British attitudes regarding slavery, race and national identity.

The key differences in Godwyn’s writings about Virginia and Barbados are his more vehement attacks of Barbadian elites and his overt attempts to convince the English public that Barbadian slave owners—some of the wealthiest men in the seventeenth century British Empire—were outside the pale of English society and believed in a set of moral and spiritual doctrines subversive to the proper running of English society. Not only were Barbadian slave owners wealthy men in the British Empire, they also

¹⁹⁴ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 153 – 154.

¹⁹⁵ Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 154.

controlled some of the most complex economic operations in the pre-industrial society. They controlled farms to produce sugar cane, mills to crush the juice from the cane, boiling houses to evaporate the juice into sugar, and distilleries to produce rum, creating multiple products using only their own manufacturing facilities.¹⁹⁶ Such men, according to Godwyn, needed to be hemmed in and controlled, rather than allowed to corrupt the remainder of English society. The degree of independence these men possessed had made them not need to rely on the Crown and Church for help, protection, or validation. Godwyn intimated a fear in his writings that if these attitudes were left unchecked and spread throughout English dominions the governing authorities of the Crown and Church would no longer have the ability to hold power effectively.

Godwyn continued to press his views on the English public for at least five years. His next two major publications, *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate* and *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, document the same antagonisms Godwyn felt toward Barbados's slave holding elites. In *A Supplement*, Godwyn asked the question whether Englishmen prefer "Religion and the Glory of God, with the good of Souls" to "worldly Self and Filthy Lucre" in an attempt, once again, to play to the emotions of the English public and excite them to condemn Barbadian slaveholders.¹⁹⁷ Godwyn played on the English public's sense of self and identity directly by declaring that Algerian pirates who captured and enslaved Europeans possessed more religious zeal, and by implication were better people, than Barbadian slaveholders because they attempted to convert their slaves

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 208.

¹⁹⁷ Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Advocate*, 5.

and promised them freedom if they converted. Finally, Godwyn reiterated his overarching contention that the mammonism of the slaveholders, if left unchecked, would seep into the lives and hearts of the people in England, corrupting English society.¹⁹⁸

Trade Preferr'd Before Religion expressed some of the same sentiments. In the introduction, Godwyn stated that King James II had asserted that all of his subjects should have access to Anglican Christianity. Denying any subject this access was an “abomination which both threatens and calls aloud for Vengeance from Heaven upon the most wicked Authors: Unless Your Majesty’s extraordinary Piety and Goodness shall suddenly interpose, and so at once put a stop to the Sin and to the Judgment.”¹⁹⁹ Godwyn intimated here that it was an attack on the authority of the monarch to disobey the order to proselytize non-believers, as well as clearly challenging the king to exercise his authority to control the actions of all his subjects. As in earlier works, Godwyn also presented Barbadian slave owners as un-Christian, announcing that they had “Atheistical tempers.”²⁰⁰

While Godwyn restated some of his major criticisms of Barbadian slaveholders presented in *The Advocate*, the tones of *A Supplement* and *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion* were much more conciliatory. The majority of *A Supplement* was spent

¹⁹⁸ Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Advocate*, 6 (note) and 10 – 12.

¹⁹⁹ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd before Religion*, (iii – iv). The publisher of the text did not paginate the introduction. I have assigned my own page numbers to identify the location of the material in the text and demarcate those page numbers in parentheses.

²⁰⁰ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd before Religion*, 6 a. The publisher of the text paginated the Preface with the numbers one through twelve. However, when the main body of the text begins, he starts the pagination with one. Therefore, there are two sets of pages one through twelve. I have chosen to demarcate the first set – the pages of the Preface – by including an “a” after the publisher’s page number. The pages of the main text are cited simply with the given page number.

providing ways to bring errant slave owners back into what Godwyn considered the correct fold. Godwyn declared that only three things were needed to allow for proselytizing the enslaved: a law ensuring the rights of property to slave owners, encouragements to ministers to preach inclusion, and prohibitions of slaves working on Sundays and practicing polygamy.²⁰¹ Rather than focusing on the evils of the slave owners, Godwyn instead stressed how other Englishmen could rectify the slave owners' wrongs and convince them to stop acting solely for profit. Godwyn kept his stinging remarks about Barbadian slave owners to a minimum and his efforts to instruct slave owners and inculcate a stronger sense of loyalty to the Church of England's authority took obvious precedence over his overt condemnations, belying Godwyn's intention that he desired to see a return of complete authority of Crown and Church in English colonial society.

In *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, Godwyn used a different tactic to diffuse some of his virulence toward Barbadian slave owners. Godwyn presented the sermon as a study of Biblical testimony about the proper role religion should take in one's life. Godwyn cited numerous Biblical verses outlining actions that Church authorities had deemed sinful. At one point, Godwyn even outlined how refusal to promote Christianity to non-believers for the sake of profit was complicit with each of the seven deadly sins.²⁰² However, Godwyn made no direct connection between the actions of Barbadian slave owners and his scriptural examples regarding guilt of these sins. Godwyn only connected

²⁰¹ Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Advocate*, 3 – 4, 7 – 10.

²⁰² Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 9 – 11.

the refusal to proselytize the enslaved with a general refusal to promote Christianity halfway through the sermon.²⁰³ Admittedly, listeners could have easily interpreted the sermon as an indictment against slaveholding practices in the British Caribbean well before this point. However, Godwyn's explicit silence regarding those he strongly condemned in *The Advocate* is noteworthy. When Godwyn finally does make the connection between Biblical precedents and current practices of Barbadian slaveholders, he quickly recast the blame for the situation on the English public as a whole, rather than focusing his attack on slave owners particularly. Godwyn averred that it was the "profound *Silence*" of the English public that allowed one small group of individuals to act in ways detrimental to society, and that it was the responsibility of the English public to enact changes.²⁰⁴ Godwyn further dispersed blame by asserting that refusal to proselytize caused the Church of England to fail the Protestant Reformation and condemned the English nation as unjust and without piety.²⁰⁵

These attempts to disperse blame were Godwyn's attempts to make his message more palatable to his audience. By including himself—implicit in his statements is the idea that blame resides with the entire English nation and its state church—Godwyn lessened the biting edge of his attacks. Godwyn himself provided some evidence for why he would need to reduce the bitterness of his accusations. In the Preface to *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion* Godwyn cited that others had censured him in the past for his

²⁰³ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 15.

²⁰⁴ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 18 – 20.

²⁰⁵ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 24 – 26.

strong denunciations of Barbadian slave owners.²⁰⁶ In addition, in *The Advocate* and “The State of Religion in Virginia,” Godwyn described how local elites bullied and threatened ministers into complying with their ideas about the role religion should take in the community.²⁰⁷ The pressure colonial elites placed on Godwyn apparently caused him to alter the tone of his arguments from 1680 to 1685. Godwyn declared that colonial slaveholders verbally abused and intimidated ministers who attempted to convert enslaved Africans or attempted to convince other whites they should instruct the enslaved in Christian religion. Godwyn stated that elites had the influence in their communities to defame ministers and thereby force them out of their parishes. He also asked that colonial governors be obliged by the Crown to provide the ministers protection from abusive vestries. By 1685, Godwyn felt so pressured that he opened a sermon chastising colonial slaveholders for their abuses of authority by stating, “I Cannot but foresee, that I shall fall under so small danger of Censure, as well for my first preaching, as now publishing this Discourse.” Godwyn continued, stating

I must also look to undergo as far as possible, the utmost Effects of the Rage and Malice of those incensed MAMMONISTS from abroad; who, I am to expect, will not fail, by their Agents and Partizans, to dispense to me the sharpest Revenge and Mischief, that such Enemies of *Christianity* can contrive against a Promoter of it.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 1 a.

²⁰⁷ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 97 b; Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 169 – 170.

²⁰⁸ Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 97 b; Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” 169 – 170; Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 9; Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd before Religion*, 1.

Godwyn obviously felt threatened by colonial elites and their supporters in England, and his literary career, therefore, provides a clear and powerful example of the influence Barbadian slaveholders could wield over those who attacked them.

After the mid-1680s, Godwyn largely disappeared from the remaining literature of the period, only to return, likely posthumously, in a 1708 publication by Francis Brokesby. Brokesby printed a letter written by Godwyn some years earlier in which he gave his support for establishing the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.²⁰⁹ Shortly after his 1685 sermon, apparently, Godwyn either became disheartened with his lack of success convincing the English public to pressure colonial elites into submitting to the authority of the Church of England or stopped having any receptive audiences.

²⁰⁹ Brokesby, *Some Proposals*, 1 – 3.

Chapter IV

An Explosive Cleric: Morgan Godwyn and Colonial American History

Morgan Godwyn defined his career in the Church of England by protesting colonial elites' abuses of power. Godwyn disliked Virginia's parish leaders' use of their political and social influence to control church services and dictate to priests what they would preach to their congregations. Godwyn found Barbadian slaveholders' lust for Mammon so excessive that it blinded them to their duties to the Church of England, caused them to rationalize dehumanizing Africans and Native Americans, and, he argued, restricted them from entering the Church of England. In both instances, Godwyn's arguments focused on what he felt were the excessive powers colonial elites exercised in their societies. Godwyn believed that these men usurped powers to direct individuals within English society from the dual authorities of the Crown and Church. To Godwyn, colonial elites' attempts to exercise these powers—such as determining without check what a minister could preach to his congregation or who could enter into the state-supported religious institution—were direct actions against the authority of the king and his spiritual supports in the Church of England. Not only were colonial elites guilty of overstepping their proper bounds in society, but they also verged on committing treason, directly and openly rejecting the hierarchy of social and governmental authority that had been English tradition since the Henrician Reformation.

Analyzing the development of Anglicanism, historian Frederick Quinn states the major issues of the seventeenth-century Anglican Church dealt with “defining the power

of kings and their relationship to the church, an issue with implications on where temporal loyalties would lie, but with few spiritual ramifications.”²¹⁰ These disputes over the proper role of the king in religious ceremony and church hierarchy spilled into the political realm. The English Civil War, even if not fought solely to decide the question of the king’s place in English religious society, reinforced the connections between the king, the gentry, and the Church of England, creating a governmental-religious structure where both church and state worked together to ensure that the king maintained political supremacy and the Church of England remained the dominant religious sect in the country.²¹¹ Religious disputes after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 played out in political realms. After 1660, English political officeholders were required to participate at least minimally in the Anglican Church, and dissenting sects had to register their places of worship with the state in order to be monitored.²¹²

Godwyn’s arguments display these trends in late-seventeenth-century English religion and politics. Godwyn’s desire to see the Church of England and the Crown exercise more authority in colonial societies fits the situation Frederick Quinn describes. Godwyn reacted strongly and vehemently to what he perceived as individuals attempting to grasp additional powers for themselves at the expense of the Crown and Church. Godwyn could not accept a situation where, as historian Herbert S. Klein states, clergymen, as agents of the state church and Crown, constantly had to win popular

²¹⁰ Frederick Quinn, *To Be a Pilgrim: The Anglican Ethos in History* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 100.

²¹¹ Quinn, *To Be a Pilgrim*, 113.

²¹² William L. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12 – 13.

endorsement from parishioners to keep their congregations.²¹³ His rhetoric portraying these individuals as usurpers, outcasts, and degenerates attempted to convince the English public to support Crown and Church initiatives and authority over individual colonial upstarts.

The language of Godwyn's rhetoric and the style of his arguments also indicate that he challenged whether colonial elites belonged in English society at all. Godwyn's consistent efforts to distance Virginia's vestrymen and Barbados's slaveholders from the "norm" of English society denote that Godwyn believed these individuals were different from himself. They did not possess the proper attitudes or display the proper actions of English men. Godwyn possessed a straightforward and well-defined understanding of what it meant to be an English subject. His ideas seem largely based upon his experiences and the national events he would have witnessed during his childhood and his formative years at Oxford. The conflicts over who should control English government and what sort of religious sentiments would be tolerated had to have a deep impact on Godwyn's intellectual development. That his family had for generations been aligned with the Crown through the Church of England certainly influenced Godwyn's thinking as well. As historian John R. Gillis states, "the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity,

²¹³ Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 111.

namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.”²¹⁴

Essentially, Godwyn defined Virginia’s vestrymen and Barbados’s slaveholders as outsiders—people who did not share the same cultural traits as the rest of English society. Historians often discuss ideas of identity in terms of individuals being labeled as same or Other. Mechal Sobel, for instance, says that Englishmen in colonial America inflated the danger that Native Americans and Africans posed to English society by fashioning them as “Others” in order to justify their subjugation.²¹⁵ To the English in colonial America, Native Americans and Africans were dangerous to the foundation of new English societies precisely because they held different cultural values. English commentators often described these differences as the lack of “civilization,” Christianity, proper government, or dress and fashion—all terms normed around how English society was structured. To the English, differences proved other peoples’ inferiority, and they were given labels such as “savages,” “heathens,” “infidels,” and “idolaters.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

²¹⁵ Mechal Sobel, “The Revolution in Selves: Black and White Inner Aliens,” in *Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Personal Identity in Early America*, eds. Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, and Fredrika J. Tente (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 171 – 2.

²¹⁶ James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39 – 42; James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 385; Anthony S. Parent, *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660 – 1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 110 – 111; David Brion Davis, *In the Image of God: Religion, Moral Values, and Our Heritage of Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 133 – 134; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: WW Norton and Co., Inc., 1975), 130 – 155; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550 – 1812* (WW Norton and Co. Inc., 1977), Part One; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492 – 1800* (New York: Verso, 1997), 1 – 27; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17 – 71, 225; Gary B.

Historians' discussions of identity in colonial America focus almost exclusively on how Europeans perceived Native Americans and Africans as different from themselves. Some historians, such as James Axtell and David Eltis, remind readers that Native Americans and Africans also developed exclusive attitudes of cultural or national identity and saw Europeans as "outsiders." Also, Europeans' definitions of identity often ordered Europeans themselves into a hierarchy of "best" and "worst" nations.²¹⁷ Certainly Morgan Godwyn exemplified these beliefs. His refusal to admit the spiritual equality of African religious beliefs, his deep-rooted belief in the right of the English monarch and Anglican Church to rule English society, and his abhorrence of dissenters from the Church of England all indicate that Godwyn perceived his version of English civilization to be the pinnacle of human progress. Godwyn's words reveal his sentiments of cultural superiority. Godwyn stated the polygamy of the enslaved on Barbados was barbarous and that slaveholders had the duty to educate the enslaved in the proper manners of the English people—namely that slaveholders had a duty to eradicate un-English behaviors among the enslaved in order to make them more like the English and therefore more "civilized."²¹⁸ Godwyn further described his ideas of cultural identity when defining the correct role of a Christian. He asserted that the covenant forged with

Nash, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000), 141 – 155.

²¹⁷ James Axtell, *Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1 – 4; Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 80 and 225.

²¹⁸ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* (London: 1680), 33 – 34; Morgan Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro's and Indians Advocate* (London: J.D., 1681), 7; Morgan Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion* (London: 1685), 6.

God required Christians to proselytize and spread Christianity to infidels.²¹⁹ Non-Christians were outsiders to Godwyn who must be actively pursued in order to introduce them to “correct” thinking and bring them into “civilized” society.

Godwyn’s comments on identity correlate with historians’ discussions of Godwyn regarding developing ideas of race and white supremacy stemming from Europeans’ interactions with Africans during the Atlantic slave trade. In this context, Godwyn’s comments regarding identity support historians’ assessments that place him in a nebulous area. While historians such as Winthrop Jordan and Lester Scherer correctly state that Godwyn vehemently advocated a certain level of spiritual equality for Africans, the general European assessment that Africans were barbaric still strongly influenced his thinking.²²⁰ Godwyn’s ideas of cultural identity and the superiority of his version of “English” society could have been used to support a belief in white supremacy. Simultaneously, however, Godwyn’s stress on incorporating Africans and Native Americans into the Church of England—to Godwyn, a defining feature of English identity—indicated that race may not have been as important as ideology and belief in determining who could enter the dominant society.

However, the example of Morgan Godwyn also shows that the same rhetoric about identity could be used within an intra-cultural setting. Numerous times Godwyn connected the actions of colonial Englishmen with those of England’s enemies, stating,

²¹⁹ Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 98 and 101 b; Morgan Godwyn, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” (London: 1680), 172.

²²⁰ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550 – 1812* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), 229 – 230; Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America 1619 – 1819* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 33.

for instance, that English colonial slaveholders who refused to allow their slaves access to Christian religion were guilty of the same sins as the Spanish who murdered Native Americans and the Dutch who gave up devotion to God for devotion to profit.²²¹ Godwyn equated these men with England's two largest European rivals, playing to popular concerns that Spain and Holland wanted to destroy England by reducing its trading and colonizing potential. Godwyn clearly and repeatedly stated that "civilized" Englishmen did their duty to proselytize the Anglican version of the Christian faith. Those who did not share in Anglican theology or proselytize to non-believers were not part of the English nation according to Godwyn's definition. Godwyn also employed the same language of the "other" when describing these wayward colonial Englishmen, calling them "barbarous," "inhumane," "thieves and cut throats," "infidels," and equating them with non-Christian "heathen" peoples like the Turks and Algerians. Godwyn extended his name-calling to political opponents as well, describing supporters of the Commonwealth as "Atheists and Imposters" whom Christ would one day smite for their blasphemy. As historian Jon Butler states, the political and social conflicts between the Church of England and dissenting Protestants helped foster sentiments among Anglicans that they were superior to those who disagreed with their spiritual perspective.²²² As Godwyn's case proves, some Englishmen in the late-seventeenth century held concepts of identity that potentially excluded members of their own society from full membership and acceptance. Godwyn's conception of English identity had more prerequisites than

²²¹ Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 3.

²²² Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, (iv), 20, 79, 87, 112, 105 b, 129; Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Advocate*, 2 and 6; Godwyn, *Trade Preferr'd Before Religion*, 15; Jon Butler, *Awash is a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 26.

simply being born in England, or being the descendant of an Englishman. To Godwyn, being “English” meant possessing certain religious and political beliefs, and expressing those beliefs within strictly defined confines of a government headed by the Crown and a religion under full control of the Church of England clergy.

Godwyn’s conception of national identity would have had great effects on English society in the seventeenth century. If adherence to the Church of England was a prerequisite for status as an English citizen, then any religious dissenters—Quakers, Puritans, or Catholics for example—should have been denied full civil rights. Godwyn’s ideas, therefore, complicate the discussion of how seventeenth-century Englishmen debated and questioned how religion and politics should be united. Given Godwyn’s arguments, apparently the idea that religious affiliation and political power should be so tightly connected as to prevent those who were not “proper Anglicans” from possessing any real authority was not absurd. Moreover, that Godwyn continued to promote this interpretation of national identity through published writings for at least five years, and speak out against the abuses of those who challenged the authority of the Crown and Church of England from the mid-1660s through at least the mid-1680s signals that his ideas found a substantial and supportive audience. Historians need to consider that ideas of identity were constantly being challenged in seventeenth-century English societies, and to explore further the repercussions of those challenges. For instance, as David Eltis mentions, conceptions of identity “are central to determining the form migration takes,

who will become migrants, and what their ultimate destination will be.”²²³ Intra-cultural concepts of identity definitely affected more aspects of individuals’ lives than migration. Historian Michal J. Rozbicki illustrates that elites in England looked upon the wealthy colonial planters with disdain from the seventeenth century through the American Revolution, declaring that their colonial counterparts were uncouth and rustic imitators of the English gentry. However, Rozbicki only indicates that this name-calling was central to the development of colonial elites’ identity.²²⁴ Morgan Godwyn’s critiques of colonial elites denote that the conflicts arising from differences in perception of identity were rooted in questions of who should exercise political and social influence, who rightly possessed justification to rule, and who most closely exhibited “correct” English behaviors, not just a competition for the top rung of English social hierarchy.

What may be most telling about Godwyn’s influence on English identity at the end of the seventeenth century is that the only one of his messages that seems to survive his career is his desire to proselytize non-Christians in the American colonies. From the last quarter of the seventeenth century, English men and women increased their efforts to spread the teachings of the Church of England to non-believers. Anglicans desiring to proselytize non-believers established the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in 1698 and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in

²²³ David Eltis, “Identity and Migration: The Atlantic in Comparative Perspective,” in *The Atlantic World: Essays on Slavery, Migration, and Immigration*, eds. Wim Klooster and Alfred Padula (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2005), 116.

²²⁴ Michal Rozbicki, “The Curse of Provincialism: Negative Perceptions of Colonial America Plantation Gentry,” *The Journal of Southern History* 63 (Nov., 1997): 727 – 752.

1702.²²⁵ Both organizations, but especially the SPG, sent missionaries to England's colonies to spread Christianity to enslaved Africans and nearby Native Americans, the same groups Morgan Godwyn declared needed access to Anglican Christianity in the 1680s.

While it would be stretching the evidence to assert that Godwyn's words spawned the religious sentiments in the English public that led to the creation of the SPCK and SPG, his arguments for proselytizing apparently resonated with England's population at home and abroad. In 1708, Francis Brokesby included a letter written by Godwyn in his publication *Some Proposals towards Propagating of the Gospel in Our American Plantations*. Brokesby used Godwyn as a popularly known ecclesiastical authority on the value of missionary activity in the Americas.²²⁶ Bishop William Fleetwood, in 1710, spoke out to his congregation about the necessity of slaveholders providing Anglican Christian instruction for their enslaved workers. In an effort to combat the divisive influence of religious dissent within English societies, reforming bishops within the Church of England focused on proselytizing to create a more unified church presence using the SPCK and SPG as their vehicles.²²⁷

It is reasonable to state that Godwyn's message of proselytizing non-believers in the New World fell upon receptive ears in England. Focusing solely on spreading Anglican Christianity allowed religiously devout men and women an avenue to express

²²⁵ Quinn, *To Be a Pilgrim*, 113 – 115.

²²⁶ Francis Brokesby, *Some Proposals towards the Propagating of the Gospel in Our American Plantations* (London: Three Golden Flower-de-Luces, 1708), 1 – 3.

²²⁷ Klein, *Slavery in the Americas*, 114 – 115; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 32 – 33.

their spiritual views while working to expand the influence of English society among other cultures. However, converting non-Christians and bringing them into the Church of England was the least radical of Godwyn's messages. The missionary efforts of the SPG, no matter how successful they were at convincing people to join the Church of England, did not directly challenge the authority of slaveholders. SPG missionaries had to be allowed by slaveholders to attempt to convert the enslaved, and of course parish vestries could decide whether they would allow missionary work to occur within their parish and be sponsored by their ministers. Because the SPG included laity in its leadership, the same people Godwyn argued should not have authority over church matters now had a state-sponsored organization within which they were encouraged to exercise a say. The lay members of the SPG included merchants and vestrymen from both the colonies and England. Incidentally, SPG officials ruled that Virginia already possessed enough of an Anglican influence that the organization would not assist the colony.²²⁸

Morgan Godwyn's lasting contribution to English society was considerably different than what he had hoped to achieve. His writings and sermons tapped into the public's desire to spread its religious beliefs, but failed to instill a sense that English society ruled by the authority of the Crown and Church of England was threatened by the actions of colonial elites and their friends in England who had large economic interests in the colonies. Godwyn's larger contribution is to those seeking to understand his contemporary society from times and places far removed from seventeenth-century England, Virginia, or Barbados. Godwyn's unique criticisms of colonial elites show that,

²²⁸ John K. Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690 – 1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 122 – 124.

in seventeenth-century English societies, enslavement of Africans and subjugation of Native Americans was indelibly tied to the conflicts between Englishmen over political and religious authority.

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