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Congregationalism and the Social Order: John Goodwin's Gathered Church, 1640-60

by ELLEN S. MORE

In 1644 the Puritan lawyer and parliamentary pamphleteer, William Prynne, voiced a question much on the minds of moderate Puritans: Would not congregationalism 'by inevitable necessary consequence subvert... all settled... forms of civil government... and make every small congregation, family (yea person if possible), an independent church and republic exempt from all other public laws'?¹ What made Congregationalism seem so threatening? The calling of the Long Parliament encouraged an efflorescence of Congregational churches throughout England. While differing in many other respects, their members were united in the belief that the true Church consisted of individually gathered, self-governing congregations of the godly. Such a Church was answerable to no other earthly authority. The roots of English Congregationalism extended back to Elizabethan times and beyond. Some Congregationalists, in the tradition of Robert Browne, believed in total separation from the Established Church; others, following the later ideas of Henry Jacob, subscribed to semi-separatism, believing that a godly remnant remained within the Established Church. For semi-separatists some contact with the latter was permissible, as was a loose confederation of gathered churches. During the English civil wars and Interregnum, the Church polity of most leading religious Independents actually was semi-separatist.²

¹ William Prynne, *Twelve Considerable, Serious Questions Touching Church Government* (1644), Question 5, A2r. The following article is a revised version of a paper given at the annual meeting of the American Society of Church History at the American Historical Association annual meeting, Washington, DC, 1982. I am grateful to my commentators, Richard L. Greaves and Dewey D. Wallace and my fellow panelist, Pamela B. Volkman, for useful and generous remarks made at that time. I am equally obliged to the following readers of subsequent drafts: Theodore Brown, T. Kent Gulley, Ronald Herlan, Tina Isaacs, Donald Kelley, Sears McGee, Paul Seaver, Bonnie Smith and Perez Zagorin.

² For a discussion of the early dissenting tradition that emphasises the cultural continuum linking semi-separatism to Puritanism, see Patrick Collinson, 'Toward a broader understanding of the early dissenting tradition', in C. R. Cole and M. E. Moody

The voluntarism implicit in Congregational churches represented instability, disorder and illegality to the contemporary mind. Many commentators in the 1640s worried over the possible ill effects of tolerating ecclesiastical voluntarism in any form.³ Of particular concern – beyond purely theological considerations – were the potentially divisive effects of even limited toleration on the traditional institutions of household and parish.⁴ With the possible exception of Thomas Edwards, no one was more troubled by these issues than William Prynne. In 1644 and 1645 he actively campaigned for the imposition of a parliament-sponsored, national Presbyterianism. His pamphlets harped constantly on the inevitable social disintegration that congregational polity would produce. According to Prynne, its destabilising effects would be felt by the family, the neighbourhood, the parish, the state. These 'implacable contestations', he declared, would disrupt every level of the social hierarchy: 'We shall have an Independent church-government in one part of a family, parish, county, kingdom; a Presbyterial in another; an Episcopal in a third... What confusion, distraction...schisms, tumults, this licentiousness (for I cannot stile it freedom of conscience) would soon inevitably ingender.'⁵

Prynne's general attacks were aimed at a very specific target, the gathered church of the Independent minister John Goodwin. Goodwin, vicar of St Stephen's, Coleman Street, London until his ejection by parliament in 1645, was a well-known – even notorious – exponent of

(eds), *The Dissenting Tradition: essays for Leland H. Carlson*, Athens, Ohio 1975, 3–38. Also see B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, Oxford 1971; Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, Cambridge 1977, 1–15; Robert S. Paul, 'Henry Jacob and seventeenth century Puritanism', *The Hartford Quarterly* vii (1967), 92–113; John Von Rohr, 'The Congregationalism of Henry Jacob', *Congregational History Society Transactions* xix, 107–22. Tolmie rightly stresses the distinctness and importance of Jacob's semi-separatism. It must be reiterated that Congregationalism refers to polity, not theology; not all Congregationalists were Calvinists, as John Goodwin's church and the General Baptists demonstrate. See Tolmie, op. cit. 91–8; cf. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, Oxford 1978, 94–9, where 'Independent' is used as the generic term, 'Congregationalist' and 'separatist' as subspecies. This schema obscures the association of religious Independency with the Cromwellian Triers and Ejectors, something many separatists rejected.

³ Collinson, 'Broader understanding', 10–15; Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, Stanford 1970, passim; Tolmie, op. cit. 31–3.

⁴ See, for example, the debate between the separatist Katherine Chidley and Thomas Edwards over Edwards's charge that toleration would threaten the patriarchal authority of fathers and masters, discussed in Ian Gentles, 'London Levellers in the English Revolution: the Chidleys and their circle', this JOURNAL xxix (1978), 284. Cf. Valerie Pearl, 'London's counter-revolution', in G. E. Aylmer (ed.), *The Interregnum: the quest for settlement*, London 1972, 31, for the fear of sectarianism among London's substantial citizens; Wilbur K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, Cambridge, Mass. 1938, iii.

⁵ William Prynne, *Independency Examined, Unmasked, and Refuted by Twelve New Interrogatories* (1644), 4, 5. Also by Prynne on the toleration issue were *A Full Reply* (1644); *Truth Triumphant over Falsehood* (1645); and *Twelve Considerable, Serious Questions* (1644). Prynne's paramount concern, especially in *Truth Triumphant*, was the defence of the lawful government's right to establish a uniform religious polity; cf. William Lamont, *Marginal Prynne*, London 1963.

religious toleration, a 'new' Arminian after 1648 and a defender of the execution of Charles I.⁶ Goodwin's writings repeatedly reverted to the subject of his gathered church. Indeed, his most significant personal relationships, apart from his immediate family, seem to have been drawn exclusively from this source. The first members of what was to become Goodwin's gathered church began meeting privately at his Coleman Street quarters around 1635. By 1645 the congregation had matured into a fully formed Church with Goodwin as its preacher. By 1649 the Church was one of the most important in London. Although its members did not follow Goodwin in abandoning Calvinism until the early 1650s, they did – like Goodwin – actively pursue religious toleration and the victory of the Cromwellian Independents. Between 1649 and 1653 the Church's heightened influence could be measured by its members' successful entry into municipal and national politics, their pamphleteering, and their office-holding. The Church dissolved shortly after the Restoration in 1660.⁷

Close examination of Goodwin's church provides a vantage-point from which to test Prynne's prediction of the social and political impact of Congregationalism. Many historians, while eschewing Prynne's hysterical tone, have echoed at least some of his conclusions. Christopher Hill and Patrick Collinson, for example, despite differences of emphasis, have suggested that Congregationalism was profoundly divisive.⁸ Christopher Hill has suggested that the 'transition from parish to sect was a shift from a local community to a voluntary organization', a process described as leading to the secularisation of the parish (in Hill's words). More recently Patrick Collinson sketched some of the dimensions of 'social puritanism', meaning in part the 'love and mutual support which the godly might otherwise have looked for among kindred and neighbours', had not the community of the saints supplanted these older support groups. Did Congregational polity threaten the social order? As we will see, Goodwin's gathered church did act as a solvent of some traditional institutions. St Stephen's Coleman Street parish, like others in London at the time, was torn apart by the effort to accommodate a Congregational church within its parochial bounds.⁹ Religious uniformity and patriarchal authority,

⁶ For a discussion of the intellectual origins of the new Arminianism, see my 'John Goodwin and the origins of the new Arminianism', *Journal of British Studies* xxii (1982), 50–70.

⁷ For a fuller treatment of the history of Goodwin's gathered church, see my 'The new Arminians: John Goodwin and his Coleman Street congregation in Cromwellian England', unpublished PhD diss., University of Rochester 1980.

⁸ Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, London 1964, 493; Collinson, 'Broader understanding', 24. Also see Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 116–19.

⁹ Another parish divided over similar issues was St Dunstan's in the East, home of one of Goodwin's followers, William Allen. Robert Brenner, 'Commercial change and political conflict: the merchant community in Civil War London', unpublished PhD diss., Princeton 1970, 372–7. Two other examples, St Bartholomew Exchange and St Michael Crooked Lane are cited by W. A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church*, London 1900, ii.

too, were sorely tested in certain individual families as a result of divided congregational allegiances.¹⁰

Yet the congregation's effects were also constructive. As an institution it functioned in a creative, innovative way. To borrow a phrase used in another context by John Bossy, Goodwin's church resembled an artificial, extended kin group, both secular and spiritual in nature.¹¹ That is to say, as the church evolved from a casual to a more permanent body it transformed itself from a primarily religious association to a nexus of social, political and spiritual bonds. When thriving, such a church would be a powerful force for social and political change in the interest of its members. Admittedly, the vitality of gathered churches depended on the continued presence of a strong spiritual guide such as Goodwin. Nevertheless, at a time of general social instability in London and throughout England, churches like Goodwin's filled a significant institutional as well as personal vacuum.

The socio-political values of Goodwin's followers bore a complex relationship to their evolving theological beliefs. Under Goodwin's guidance, the church successively adopted the ideals of Congregationalism and liberty of conscience, the two pole stars of their political allegiances in the 1640s. Arminianism would come later during the heady days of the Commonwealth. To some extent, this progression mirrored a parallel unfolding of political values amenable to their needs as London tradesmen and citizens: contractualism and political meritocracy. Still, it is possible that without the example of Goodwin's rejection of the doctrine of predestination, his followers would not have turned to Arminius. In general, their religious and social ideas reinforced one another. Common values infused and gave shape to their collective actions. Goodwin himself, however, was probably the greatest influence on their particular theological choices.

The collective life of Goodwin's church thus poses some special problems for the historian. Any reconstruction must take into account both

130-49. Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, Oxford 1957, 134-8, also cites the case of St Mary Aldermanbury.

¹⁰ See below, nn 15, 16. However, cf. Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655-1755*, Cambridge, Mass. 1969, 181-7, for the strong role afforded parents in the choice of one's spouse.

¹¹ John Bossy, 'Blood and baptism: kinship, community and Christianity in Western Europe', *Studies in Church History* x (1973), 129. Bossy juxtaposes 'natural' extended kin groups, i.e. those linked by consanguinity, to 'artificial' extended kin groups, meaning kin-like relations not based on blood ties, such as the godparent relation. I use the phrase in the latter sense, although it is true that some of the families of Goodwin's congregation cemented their congregational loyalty through intermarriages among their children. See below, p. 224. See John Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe', *Past and Present* xlvii (1970), 58-9, n. 27, for an earlier use of the term 'artificial kin group'. Cf. Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, New Brunswick, NJ 1982, 30-56 for a discussion of the declining importance of blood ties and their subsumption under the rubric of 'neighborliness' (Wrightson's term).

Goodwin's uniqueness as a leader and his followers' own hierarchy of values and sense of collective identity. These, as well as Goodwin's moral force, gave coherence to his followers' perception of themselves and their circumstances. The method to be utilised here is 'collective biography', defined as the life history of the group as a whole.¹² The following is a reconstruction of the collective history of John Goodwin's gathered church. By analysing its social and political impact it may be possible to refine our ideas about the social effects of Civil War Congregationalism. In the process it may also be possible to construct an institutional history in which the remains of the church's inner life can be seen behind the surface of its outward face and actions.

I

The first phase of the congregation's collective life lasted ten years, a period marked by consolidation of loyalties and internal organisations. Between 1635 and 1645 the church determined the pattern of its inner life. By the end of this period its members had mastered the delicate balance between its twin ideals: congregational loyalty and discipline on the one hand; liberty of conscience on the other.

The external social characteristics of the congregation can be documented with at least fair precision. The names of many, though not all, of Goodwin's followers have come to light. In 1647, 1652 and 1660 the congregation published three distinct declarations in defence of the church. The signatures appended to these declarations are a source of twenty-nine names not including Goodwin's; last wills and testaments and the testimony of informed observers provide twenty-one more. In all, I have recovered the names of forty-six men and four women representing, I believe, the active core of the church.¹³ The others, consisting of the

¹² On the subject of biography, see Mark Pachter (ed.), *Telling Lives*, Washington, DC 1979, especially Leon Edel's essay 'The figure under the carpet'. On prosopography, see Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus* (1971), 46.

¹³ The titles of their three public declarations with the lists of signatories are as follows: *An Apologeticall Account of Some Brethren* (1647), Robert Smith, Mark Hildesley, Robert Saunders, Thomas Devenish, William Mountague, William Allen, Joseph Gallant, Thomas Lambe, Daniel Taylor, James Paris, Thomas Norman, Bartholemew Lavender, Richard Preice, Thomas Morris, John Price, Richard Arnald; *The Agreement and Distance of Brethren* (1652), John Goodwin, Thomas Lambe, John Price, Daniel Taylor, George Foxcroft, William Allen, Richard Arnald, William Godfrey, Hamond Brend, John Dye, Joseph Hutchinson, Thomas Tassel, George Cook, Samuel Sowthen; *A Declaration on Behalf of the Church of Christ Meeting in Coleman Street* (1660), Richard Pryor, John Weekes, John Wightman, George Backlar, (Joseph Hutchinson), Edward Addenbrook. Besides the names listed above, the following have been identified as members of Goodwin's gathered church sometime between 1639 and 1660: Captain Thomas Alderne, (George) Appletree, Richard Atkins, Henry Brandreth, Mistress Mary Browne, Thomas Chaplain, Tobias Conyers, Thomas Firmin, Mrs Goodson, Mrs Sarah Goodwin, Luke Howard, Nathaniel Lacy, Barabara Lambe, Samuel Lane, David Lordell, Henry Overton, Isaac Penington Jr, Richard Price, Edmund Rozier, Thomas Rudyard and Lawrence Steel. William Walwyn's *Just Defense* (1649) alone cites the names of fourteen members.

anonymous and probably transient mass of Goodwin's auditory or the less visible kinfolk of recorded church members, cannot be identified in the historical record. The former do find a place in some church members' wills, however. These wills distinguish between 'the poor of Mr Goodwin's church' and the 'poor of Coleman Street parish' in their charitable bequests.¹⁴ Yet the anonymous auditors referred to in the wills, while requiring notice, do not qualify for inclusion among the active membership or as part of the inner history of the church. They left no record of their individual affiliation with the congregation. Not that all those who can be identified assumed a leading role in the church. However, all of them did affiliate themselves publicly with its spirit and ideals at some time during its more-than-twenty years' span.

A large proportion of Goodwin's following was drawn from his own parish. For the full lifespan of the church, fifteen members are known to have been parish residents.¹⁵ This accounts for half the members for whom residential data were found. The proportion rises to 60 per cent when members with family ties with the parish are also included.¹⁶ Three of the Church's staunchest members and close personal associates of Goodwin lived within minutes of Goodwin's quarters; the father-in-law of at least one of Goodwin's daughters also lived in the parish. Furthermore, with the exception of the years 1645-1649, the congregation met continuously at either St Stephen's Church or at the Goodwin family quarters in Coleman Street. Despite its opposition to parochial polity, Goodwin's gathered church retained a parochial character.¹⁷

Recent work in the field of urban geography, or 'social ecology', provides some guidance for an analysis of conditions in the St Stephen's Coleman Street parish. Students of the social ecology of early modern

¹⁴ Prerogative Court of Canterbury (hereinafter cited as PCC), ms Nabbs, 48 (will of Mark Hildersley); PCC 11, 127 (will of Henry Overton); PCC Mico, 77 (will of John Goodwin).

¹⁵ These included: Alderne, Chaplain, Cook, Dye, Foxcroft, Gallant, Sarah Goodwin, Hildesley, Lavender, Mountague, Overton, Penington, John Price, Smith and Taylor. Penington and Dye did not continue to live in the parish, but their acquaintance with Goodwin's church is traceable to their years there. Cf. Guildhall Library, London, (hereinafter cited as GLL), ms 4457/2; Churchwarden's Accounts for St Stephen's Coleman Street, 1639/40; GLL, ms 4458/2, fos. 114-51, Vestry Minutes, St Stephen's Coleman Street. See also T. C. Dale (ed.), *The Poll Tax for London in 1641*, transcribed for the Society of Genealogists, London 1935; PCC Aylett (will of Daniel Taylor); Brenner, 'Commercial change', 389-92.

¹⁶ Cf. Wrightson, *English Society*, 56, 57. Robert Saunders was Henry Overton's father-in-law; Richard Price and Richard Price were respectively, John Price's uncle and brother.

¹⁷ John Price and Daniel Taylor both lived in Swan Alley; Mark Hildesley and William Mountague, probably Goodwin's daughter's father-in-law, lived in Coleman Street as did the Goodwins. Of the fifteen non-residents, five lived in parishes bordering on the river (Allen, Arnald, Devenish, Godfrey and Lacy); four lived in parishes by London Wall (Addenbrook, Conyers, Morris and Wightman). The remaining six lived in parishes toward the centre of the City (Backlar, Brandreth, the Lambes and Hutchinson).

cities, beginning perhaps with G. Sjöberg, have formulated several general models of pre-industrial urban development. With respect to London, however, scattered or missing sources plus great difficulties in interpreting them make local studies, e.g. of parishes, treacherous and generalisation more so. With these caveats, we may note a few features that most scholars seem to agree on: the heart of London, its interior parishes, was notably better off in terms of percentages of substantial householders and lower population density, fertility and mortality rates than peripheral parishes near the river or the Wall. However, it is often noted that even in well-to-do parishes, the better neighbourhoods adjoined sections of the deepest poverty. Thus the social articulation of all parishes was complex, not uniform. Although data do not exist for the assessment of households in St Stephen's Coleman Street during the Civil War period, sufficient information is available for most of the parishes surrounding it to allow at least a general picture of its social ecology to be drawn. Parishes surrounding the southern half of the parish averaged 22.25 per cent of substantial households; those surrounding the northern half, that is, parishes beyond London Wall, averaged only about 2 per cent substantial households. These figures suggest two conclusions concerning St Stephen's Coleman Street: that the parish as a whole was typical of all those lying near the Wall in its relative poverty; but, that its greatest poverty was concentrated disproportionately in its northern half, that section lying beyond the Wall.¹⁸ The social ecology of the parish thus resembled a combination of two parishes in one.

Like most parishes, however, St Stephen's contained neighbourhoods of the well-to-do in close proximity to the narrow alleys of the indigent, what Valerie Pearl has called 'the social intermingling of rich and poor'. St Stephen's was also the largest intra-mural parish in London. Stowe characterised its central thoroughfare, Coleman Street, as 'a large and fair street, on both sides built with divers fair houses'.¹⁹ It ran from Lothbury

¹⁸ Substantial households here are defined, following Robert Finlay, *Population and Metropolis*, Cambridge 1981, 77, as property valued at £20 or above in the tithe assessment of 1638, Cod. Lambeth ms 272, transcribed by T. C. Dale (ed.), *The Inhabitants of London in 1638*, 2 vols., London 1931. According to Dale's introduction, p. iv, these were 'moderated' valuations, i.e. assessed at 75 per cent of value; Ronald W. Herlan, 'Social articulation and the configuration of parochial poverty in London on the eve of the Restoration', *Guildhall Studies in London History* xi (1976), 43, 44 n. 5.

¹⁹ Valerie Pearl, 'Change and stability in seventeenth-century London', *The London Journal* v (1979), 7, 8; John Stow, *The Survey of London* (1598), repr. London 1929, 254. For 'social ecology', see G. Sjöberg, *The Pre-industrial City, Past and Present*, New York 1961. See also Finlay, *Population and Metropolis*, 1-19, 168-71; Emrys Jones, 'London in the early 17th century: an ecological approach', *The London Journal* vi (1980), 128; Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, Oxford 1976, 1-16; Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700*, Toronto 1972, 17; John Patten, *English Towns, 1500-1700*, Folkestone 1978, 35-8; M. J. Power, 'East London housing in the seventeenth century', in Clark and Slack (eds), op. cit. 237-62. Wilbur K. Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480-1660*, London 1960, 39, 52, placed St Stephen's Coleman Street parish in the category of 'highly favoured' parishes with respect to charitable benefactions.

on the south through the parish to Moorfields at its northern end. Just west of the parish stood the Guildhall. Blighted tenements crowded the many alleyways cutting into and across Coleman Street; according to one estimate, 102 tenements had been built between 1603 and 1637, contributing to the parish's reputation for poverty and overcrowding. By 1659-60 St Stephen's was one of twenty City parishes containing serious pockets of poverty, receiving in the winter of 1659-60 a total of £43 19s. 8d. in supplemental funds for the parish poor. Over 70 per cent of the householders eligible to sit on the general vestry lived on the main thoroughfare, Coleman Street.²⁰

Not surprisingly, amid such social variety, the parish produced both London's Puritan Lord Mayor, Isaac Penington, and the Fifth Monarchist rebel, Thomas Venner. The contrast between Penington and Venner, as between the prosperous thoroughfare of Coleman Street and the narrow alleys flowing into it, is a symbolically potent one. For, in its politics as in its population, the parish's diversity demands our notice. Nonconformity of differing degrees coexisted uneasily there. On the one hand, the parish had a just reputation as a breeding-ground for religious heterodoxy. As early as the 1520s a group of Lollards and proto-Lutherans around Coleman Street were known to be distributing heretical literature both in London and as far away as Buckinghamshire. The sectarian traditions evident in the sixteenth century apparently persisted for, in the 1630s, Baptist, separatist and semi-separatist conventicles all reportedly were meeting in the alleyways off Coleman Street. On the other hand in 1639, a particularly notorious tub preacher, Samuel How ('the Cobbler'), even provoked a rebuke from John Goodwin for his opposition to a learned ministry,²¹ a neat demonstration both of the range of dissent to be found there and of Goodwin's intermediate place within it.

Clearly, by the year of Goodwin's arrival there, the parish was a well-known haven for sectarianism. The parish vestry, too, although far from the radicalism of a conventicle, had a reputation for Puritan sympathies of many years' standing. This reputation has been traced to the vestry's successful campaign to acquire the impropriation rights to the living in 1590. An unusual financial arrangement with the parish vicar

²⁰ David Kirby, 'The parish of St Stephen's Coleman Street, London: a study in radicalism, c. 1624-1664'. Unpublished BLitt diss., Oxford 1969, 1-3, estimated that approximately 70 of the 90-100 men eligible to sit on the general vestry lived in Coleman Street itself. Also *ibid.* 7, 16. For an estimate of 394 titheable units and about 1,400 communicants in the parish on the eve of the Long Parliament, see Alice E. McCampbell, 'The London parish and the London precinct, 1640-1660', *Guildhall Studies in London History* xi (1976). Based on poll tax records, Kirby calculated 278 houses and 102 tenements in 1641. See also Herlan, 'Social articulation', 48, 49. I owe the McCampbell citation to Professor Ronald W. Herlan, who has kindly shared some of his findings concerning collections for the poor of St Stephen's parish based on Corporation of London Records Office MS 35B, fos 28, 38, as cited by Herlan in personal correspondence (15 June 1983).

²¹ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, London 1964, 28, 33; Samuel How, *The Sufficiency of the Spirit's Teaching* (1640).

allowed the vestry remarkable power to discourage unwanted applicants: to an acceptable minister they consented to pay both the living (a meagre £11) and a supplement of £39. Even so, not until 1624 did the vestry arrange for the election of a truly popular Puritan vicar, John Davenport. But then it appointed two in succession; Davenport's ministry was followed by John Goodwin's in 1633. Both men drew large crowds to hear their sermons; neither was, however, at the time of his call to the parish, a nonconformist. Significantly, both men eventually exceeded the limits of the vestry's tolerance for nonconformity. Neither man ever succeeded in establishing *de facto* Congregationalism while a vicar there. Despite (or, possibly, because of) the socially volatile character of the parish, control of church affairs remained in the hands of conventional, not radical, Puritans.²²

The origins of Goodwin's gathered church, if they are to be found at all, can be located within the increasingly complex religious ferment – suggested by the situation at St Stephen's – common to all of London in the 1630s. Conventicles and Bible study groups abounded despite the best efforts of William Laud. As a powerful and controversial preacher, Goodwin began to attract a following even before his formal call to St Stephen's in 1633. According to the later account of the prominent Baptist preacher and merchant, William Kiffin, Goodwin's preaching attracted attention almost from the start. As an apprentice in the 1630s, Kiffin was a friend of Goodwin's future followers, John Price and Henry Overton. As the latter two lived in St Stephen's Coleman Street, it seems likely that the nucleus of the group formed around that time, an informal auxiliary to Goodwin's formal ministrations as vicar of the parish. Testimony from two other followers – neither one a parish resident – suggests that, from its earliest period, the incipient congregation also included non-residents of the parish.²³

Socially and theologically the profile of Goodwin's gathered church reflected the polarities and tensions of its home parish. On its periphery stood the anonymous, the poor, the occasional auditor; its core group, on the other hand, consisted of men of middling and even of substantial means. The latter did not come up to the standard of London's greater merchants. Still, the scattered evidence suggests that a sizeable minority of the congregation lived at a level far above many of their neighbours.²⁴

²² Isabel Calder, *The New Haven Colony*, New Haven, Conn. 1934, 2; idem, *The Letters of John Davenport*, New Haven, Conn. 1937, 2. For information on leading parishioners in the 1620s and 1630s, see David Kirby, 'The radicals of St Stephen's Coleman Street, 1624–1642', *Guildhall Miscellany* (April 1970); More, 'New Arminians', 29–38; Dorothy Ann Williams, 'London Puritanism: the parish of St Stephens's Coleman Street', *Church Quarterly Review* clx (1959), 467; Edwin Freshfield, 'Some Remarks upon the... Parish of St. Stephen's Coleman Street', *Archeologia* 1 (1867). Echoing Williams, I would not choose to characterise the parish leaders as 'radicals'.

²³ More, *op. cit.* 26–8, 60, 61.

²⁴ Nine of the eleven Goodwin followers listed in the poll tax return for Coleman Street ward in 1641 were above the median assessment £2 9s., Dale, *Poll Tax*. Two church

This impression receives reinforcement from an analysis of the members' occupations and status. Here, again, the nature of the sources limits the precision of conclusions that can be drawn. As Richard Grassby and others have noted, in the case of commercial men the loss of control by the guilds over freemen's actual economic activities makes it difficult to know just what – regardless of Company affiliation – any individual bought, sold or manufactured. Without additional corroborating evidence, the occupational categories described in wills must therefore refer to status and type of activity rather than to a particular commercial speciality. Finally, a gap in probate inventories from 1614 to 1666 makes it impossible even to establish the net wealth of individuals whose wills have survived. Nevertheless, it may be possible at least to sketch occupational categories and the socio-economic level at which these men and women were accustomed to live.²⁵

Of the twenty-eight men (excluding Goodwin) for whom occupational data exists, eighteen – almost two-thirds – engaged in domestic trade, whether as shopkeepers, manufacturers or a combination of both. Ten of these were freemen of companies concerned with the outfitting or cloth trades. Others were a tavern keeper, brewer, baker, confectioner, provisioner, silkman and bookseller.²⁶ Four more were merchants with ties to overseas trade.²⁷ Five would have been classified by contemporaries as professionals: one schoolmaster, one barber-surgeon, one scrivener and two ministers.²⁸ Two, Henry Brandreth and Isaac Penington, Jr, were

members – George Foxcroft (£80) and Mark Hildesley (£50) – lent substantial sums to parliament in 1641; four others, John Goodwin, Bartholemew Lavender, William Mountague and Henry Overton, lent between £5 and £10 apiece, PRO, State Papers Domestic (hereinafter cited as PRO/SPD), 16/492/76. Unfortunately, the tithe assessments recorded for 1638 do not include St Stephen's Coleman Street, so relative standings based on housing are impossible, Dale, *Inhabitants of London*.

²⁵ Richard Grassby, 'The personal wealth of the business community in seventeenth-century England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series xxiii (1970), 221–3; Patten, *English Towns*, 153. On wills as social indices of a general rather than a precisely quantifiable nature, cf. Susan Amussen, 'Inheritance, women and the family economy: Norfolk, 1590–1750', paper presented at the Cornell University Colloquium on Customary Law and Social Structure, December 1981, 5.

²⁶ The information in this and nn 27–8 was derived from the following: More 'New Arminians', 88–91; Brenner, 'Commercial change'; Kirby, 'The parish of St Stephen's'; Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*; Murray Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe, Soapboiler, and Thomas Lambe, Merchant, General Baptists', *Baptist Quarterly* xxvii (1977), 4–13; and Valerie Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution*, Oxford 1961. These included Thomas Chaplain, Joseph Hutchinson, Thomas Lambe, John Price, Richard Preice, Henry Rozier, Thomas Rudyard, Daniel Taylor, John Weekes, John Wightman. The other seven were Mark Hildesley, keeper of a tavern famous as a meeting place for leading Independent politicians, Richard Arnald, William Mountague, Hamond Brend, Samuel Sowthen, Henry Brandreth and Henry Overton. I have omitted females from these figures since none, to my knowledge, was active in a trade independent of husband or family.

²⁷ Thomas Alderne, William Allen, George Cook, George Foxcroft.

²⁸ Joseph Gallant, Bartholemew Lavender, Richard Price, Robert Smith and Tobias Conyers.

classified as gentlemen.²⁹ Some of those engaged in trade, Daniel Taylor for example, also invested in land or the London housing market and might also be classified as leaseholders.³⁰

In general then, the majority the Goodwin's followers inhabited the milieu of the middling London trader. Still, eleven of the twenty-seven, a considerable minority, lived at a social or economic level for which the term 'middling' cannot suffice. Whether because of professional training and skill or economic viability, these eleven of Goodwin's followers had a somewhat higher standing than the rest.³¹ For example, using Grassby's benchmark figure of £500 gross assets (i.e. without deducting for debts *post mortem*) as the division between a greater and a lesser tradesman for London in this period, the wills of five church members place them squarely in the higher category, exclusive of land or leases.³² Such a high proportion of the relatively well-to-do placed Goodwin's followers at a social distance from those attached to many other gathered churches in Civil War London. But then, Goodwin's own social characteristics – Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, vicar of a London parish, gross assets of well over the £500 mark – closely resembled those of the leading Puritan ministers of his day, not the lay preacher of a separatist church.³³ Nevertheless, lack of wealth was no bar to pre-eminence in the church. John Price, for example, was among the most active and visible of the congregation's leaders. Yet he never amassed much money and probably died in debt.³⁴ At its height, the congregation consisted of petty tradesmen, upward-striving merchants and professionals, a mixture that may have had a significant impact on their social and political views. As will become clear in subsequent pages, their confident belief in spiritual liberty and social meritocracy informed many of their political activities.

In any case, any social diversity that may have characterised Goodwin's church was overcome by the measures it adopted to foster internal cohesion. The internal organisation of the church seems to have been designed to maximise individual participation and loyalty to the group.

²⁹ PCC, Administration Act Book, 1673, 53. At the other extreme, the future Quaker, Luke Howard, was a shoemaker.

³⁰ PCC Aylett, 348 (will of Daniel Taylor). Thomas Devenish, a soldier, was also the keeper of Winchester House. The occupations of two other members of the Army, Nathaniel Lacy and Robert Saunders, are unknown.

³¹ Smith, Gallant, Lavender, R. Price, Foxcroft, Taylor, Brandreth, Overton, Hildesley, Allen and Penington.

³² Grassby, 'Personal Wealth', 225. PCC 11/127 (wills of Henry Overton); PCC Aylett, 348 (will of Daniel Taylor); PCC Nabbs, 48 (will of Mark Hildesley); PCC 1684 137 (will of Thomas Lambe); and PCC 11 284 (will of William Allen).

³³ PCC Mico, 77 (will of John Goodwin). I am grateful to Professor Richard Greaves for first suggesting that the estimate of the congregation's social status be revised upward. See also Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe', *idem*, *Triumph of the Saints*, 114. Some index of relative social standing among independent churches, while a difficult undertaking, is badly needed.

³⁴ PCC 1673/63 (will of John Price). Luke Howard was a shoemaker, although his membership of the congregation was too brief to compare him to John Price.

By 1639, a little more than a year before the calling of the Long Parliament, the congregation formally constituted itself as a gathered church. It assumed the organisational profile of its mature period. Procedures for admitting new members, electing officers, decision-making and enforcing that social and spiritual code known as the 'discipline' were established.³⁵ The impetus for these intensified efforts at organisation probably came from Goodwin. Between 1640 and 1645, he was deeply engaged in a futile effort to transform his parochial church into one governed internally along Congregational lines. The heart of this effort was an attempt to limit access to the communion table to the spiritually meritorious. Beyond that was Goodwin's vision of Congregational society, one in which congregants voluntarily placed themselves under the care of their pastor. Goodwin believed, paradoxically, that Congregationalism would be less disruptive than mandatory parochialism. For, if conscience prevented anyone continuing with the church, that person could 'withdraw himself without any inconvenience from their communion with far less trouble and inconvenience than ordinarily a man upon a dislike of his parochial pastor can remove out of one parish into another'. Ultimately, however, he hoped to merge his two churches. The attempt was doomed to fail at St Stephen's where the vestry was unwilling to share its authority with outsiders. Within the voluntary setting of his gathered church, the results were far more gratifying. As Goodwin's relations with his parish grew distant or even hostile, his attachment to his congregational followers grew deeper.³⁶

Informality pervaded the organisation and day-to-day operation of the church. Its consistory, never so called by the church itself, included lay and clerical teachers, church wardens, elders and Goodwin himself as preacher. Church elders regulated admission to communion. Nevertheless, they were never set above or apart from the rest of the membership in any church document. Such reticence (or tact) reflected Goodwin's own attitude. For example, he hoped that church members 'shall be tried and sentenced by those who know not how soon it may be their own case to be tried and sentenced by him again'. Elders and church wardens were

³⁵ John Goodwin and John Price, *M.S. to A.S. with a Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (1644), 72-4; letter of Barbara Lambe to Richard Baxter, 12 Aug. 1658 in *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, appendix III, 51. Mrs Lambe's husband, Thomas Lambe, and John Price seem both to have been lay elders and preachers to the congregation. Goodwin never fully described the polity of his church. John Sadler, did give such an account in J.S., *Flagellum Flagelli* (1645), 18. Richard Arnard, Samuel Sowthen and Thomas Tassel were named as church-wardens in PCC Aylett, 348 (will of Daniel Taylor).

³⁶ John Goodwin, *Innocency and Truth Triumphant Together* (1644), 8. For a discussion of Goodwin's conflicting loyalties, see More 'New Arminians', ch. iii passim. Also cf. Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 114. In this context, it would appear that Tolmie may be mistaken in interpreting Luke Howard's remarks that in 1642, 'I was as it were received as a member of Goodwin's church'. Tolmie, took the date and Howard's qualifying phrase to suggest that Goodwin's gathered church was not meant. Actually Howard is corroborating the indirect evidence that some sort of church - apart from the parish - existed at least this early, Tolmie, op. cit. 214 n. 41.

identified as such in letters, last wills and testaments or in the description of outsiders; but no member of the church ever publicly referred to any member as a church officer, nor did the church's three public collective declarations differentiate among the signatories by office. One of these, written in 1652, contained fourteen signatures. None of the signatories was identified as a church officer; rather, the document was signed 'in the name and by the consent of the church'.³⁷ Within the circle of the church, hierarchy was de-emphasised in favour of a rough equality of the spiritually meritorious.

The members' concern to balance liberty and authority was reflected in their handling of admission of new members. Some congregations, including this one apparently, at their founding adopted a covenant as a testament to their spiritual commitment and common ideals. Later on, prospective members would be asked to submit to the covenant as a sign of spiritual solidarity. Goodwin's church knowingly deviated from the latter practice. They encouraged subsequent members to 'confess with the mouth... the work of faith in the heart'. They did not impose a covenant of their own devising. Like the gathered churches examined by Dr Nuttall, Goodwin's followers hoped to avoid an imposition on the consciences of new members who could not yet feel about the church what older members had come to believe.³⁸

More complex was the congregation's attitude towards its female members. Of their status within their own families, little is known. Evidently some wives were named as executrices in the surviving wills of male church members. Of the six surviving wills of married men in the congregation, five (Henry Overton, John Goodwin, John Price, Thomas Lambe and William Allen) named as executors either their wives alone or wives and sons jointly. In the case of Daniel Taylor who by-passed his wife as executrix, Taylor's marriage was his second and had occurred only two years before his death. Overton, for his part, bequeathed all his bookseller's stock to his wife, apparently assuming she could carry on alone or use it to attract a second husband. Unfortunately, this evidence is far from conclusive; the practice of naming a wife as executrix was becoming much more common and at any rate, not confined to Independents.³⁹

Females were sometimes admitted to the church's fellowship on an individual basis, not simply on the strength of kinship or marriage to a member of the congregation. In one celebrated case, the church was called upon to defend itself against the charge of impurity for holding their meetings in a parish church building, an accusation levelled by Samuel

³⁷ Goodwin, *Innocencies Triumph* (1644), 17; John Goodwin, Thomas Lambe, et al., *The Agreement and Distance of Brethren* (1652).

³⁸ John Goodwin, *A Quære Concerning the Church-Government Practiced in the Separate Congregations* (1643), 2-13; John Goodwin, *Innocencies Triumph* (1644), 17. Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, 110, 116.

³⁹ The last observation was made to me by Professor Paul Seaver, private communication, 4 Aug. 1983.

Chidley, a leader of the Duppa-Chidley separatist church. Behind this charge lay a much thornier issue: the Duppa-Chidley church counted as a member, one Captain William Goodson; Mrs Goodson, his wife, belonged to the Goodwin church. Captain Goodson charged that Goodwin's congregation should be spiritually outcast for using an episcopally sanctified meeting house. How, he worried, could he live in spiritual communion with a wife who attended church in such a setting? Chidley agreed. Goodwin confined his comments to a general defence of the right of any church member to 'communicate' with whomever he or she wished. The implication was clear. Mrs Goodson belonged to the church, not as part of William Goodson's family, but as an individual. Nevertheless, despite evidence that women were permitted to join the church either with or without spouses, no woman ever signed one of the church's declarations. They were not barred from participation in the congregation's discussions preceding decision-making; yet they seem to have been disqualified from voting, office-holding or publicly representing the church.⁴⁰

On this issue, the church stood slightly to the right of centre among gathered churches of the period. Quakers, of course, were outstanding in regard to the role and responsibilities afforded women. At the other end of the spectrum, some Congregationalists like the Independent John Sadler and the Congregational Broadmead church at Bristol barred women from office-holding or even from direct speaking to the church.⁴¹ Goodwin's followers came closest to resembling the practice worked out by Henry Jacob's church where, as was the practice in many General Baptist churches, too, women were free to speak but not to hold office. Still, the fact remains that no woman of Goodwin's church ever engaged in a public defence of the church or in evangelising missions in the provinces or, to present knowledge, in any public role at all.⁴²

⁴⁰ D[avid] B[rown], *Two Conferences Between Some of Those that are Called Separatists and Independents Concerning their Different Tenets* (1650), preface, 1, 9-12. For another account of the Goodson matter, see Gentles, 'London Levellers', 289; Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 22.

⁴¹ J[ohn] S[adler], *Flagellum Flagelli* (1645), 19; Claire Cross, 'Popular piety and the records of the unestablished churches, 1460-1660', *Studies in Church History* xi (1975), 289-90. For the more radical end of the spectrum, see Phyllis Mack, 'Women as prophets during the English Civil War', *Feminist Studies* viii (1982); Claire Cross, 'He-goats before the flock: a note on the part played by women in the founding of some Civil War churches', *Studies in Church History* viii (1972), 195-202; Pamela B. Volkman, 'From heroics to dissent: a study of the thought and psychology of English non-conformity, 1600-1700', unpublished PhD diss., University of Rochester 1983, ch. vi ('Religious roles: giftedness and the woman minister'); and Richard L. Greaves, 'The role of women in early English nonconformity', *Church History* lii (1983), 299-311.

⁴² For Henry Jacob see Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints*, 14. In contrast, see the moving account of the career of Katherine Chidley in Gentles, 'London Levellers', 284-94.

II

In 1645 the congregation involuntarily entered the period of its greatest activity and influence. Goodwin's effort to make St Stephen's into a congregational church had torn the parish vestry apart.⁴³ Many leading parishioners opposed him, supporting instead a more hierarchical, Presbyterian polity. Worse still, the same issues were being played out on the national stage of parliament. Supporters of the Presbyterian Scots, parliament's military allies against the king, were campaigning hard to impose a uniform Presbyterian religious settlement on the whole nation. Goodwin became one of their first victims. The combined opposition of his parishioners and parliament's Committee for Plundered Ministers resulted in his removal from his parish.⁴⁴

This result was not entirely unfortunate. Although Goodwin was deprived of the major portion of his income, his gathered church did attempt to support him by voluntary contributions. For them Goodwin's removal from St Stephen's was a boon of sorts. He suddenly became, and for the first time, theirs exclusively. More important, for the first time they were a fully independent church with no formal ties to any parochial or gathered church other than the rent they paid for the use of parish buildings.⁴⁵ Separation from the parish church thus reinforced the bonds of cohesion among the members of Goodwin's church. The contents of their wills give some indication of the way their personal contacts reflected this closeness. Of the eight existing wills, five disclose marriages among the children of members; a total of six different families were party to these alliances.⁴⁶ The wills drawn up before the congregation's dissolution suggest their increasing closeness. All left bequests to Goodwin, to the poor of the church and to various 'dear friends' among the membership. The will of Daniel Taylor was outstanding in this respect citing twelve of Goodwin's followers as brethren, friends and as business associates.⁴⁷ Taylor was, next to John Price, the congregation's outstanding lay leader. His will portrays him as the hub of various relationships among members, spiritual, social, economic. This was the congregation's private face.

All the testators, moreover, seemed to share a common sense of socio-economic place. Where an estate consisted of real as well as moveable

⁴³ More 'New Arminians', 63ff.; Tolmie, op. cit. 111-14.

⁴⁴ BL Add. ms 15/669, fos 65, 75, *Proceedings of the Committee for Plundered Ministers*, i; John Goodwin, *Innocencies Triumph*, 14-19.

⁴⁵ Freshfield, 'Some remarks', 23, 27.

⁴⁶ Last wills and testaments of Henry Overton, John Price, Mark Hildesley, John Goodwin and Sarah Goodwin.

⁴⁷ PCC Aylett, 348. Both of Taylor's business partners also lived in St Stephen's parish. Taylor was a close friend of the leading Independent politician Robert Tichborne and the brother-in-law of London Militia Captain Thomas Juxon; personal communication of Professor Mark Kishlansky. I am grateful to Professor Kishlansky for making available to me a copy of Juxon's journal from Dr Williams's Library, London.

wealth, and even when the titles to these country estates were secure (not, for example, a result of investing in the market for delinquents' estates), older sons – unlike sons of gentry – always received money rather than land. The wills indicate that, where possible, the money was dispensed during the testator's lifetime. One reason for this practice was the desire to avoid tying up money in the notoriously corrupt and inefficient Court of Orphans. The other is more complex. These Londoners defined themselves not in terms of land, the highway to gentrification, but according to the urban imperatives of a mercantile milieu. Sons were to be apprenticed, daughters to be married. In either case, cash would do the most good by providing money for admission to a livery company or an adequate dowry.⁴⁸ The will of Daniel Taylor, whose widow's family were Surrey gentry, explicitly articulated this attitude. In his instructions for the upbringing of his children he insisted that they not be moved from London. He hoped that his sister would act as guardian for the children, not his widow (a second wife of less than two years standing). In either case he urged the children's guardian to remain in London 'so the friends and kindred of my children may have the better opportunity often to visit them'. He further stipulated that his daughters not be sent to boarding school and that his sons 'may be brought up in some honest calls... and ... not live like a drone but be serviceable to God and... country in their generation'. Here, one might claim, is a mentality of civic Puritanism. So it is. Yet by the time Taylor wrote his will, he and the congregation were no longer Calvinists. Taylor's piety reflects his sense of community more than his theology.⁴⁹

The congregation's deepening involvement in the politics of religious toleration was perhaps the most surprising change in its collective behaviour after 1645. In this its members followed the lead of their minister. Goodwin wrote pamphlet upon pamphlet in defence of religious toleration. So did his follower John Price, although his contributions took the lower road of personal attacks on his opponents, something Goodwin never did. Price, Daniel Taylor and others of the congregation also were busy behind the scenes, making overtures to Oliver Cromwell and even

⁴⁸ Charles Carlton, *The Court of Orphans*, Leicester 1974, 45–8. Wills of Daniel Taylor, Thomas Lambe, William Allen, Mark Hildesley and John Goodwin. Also cf. R. G. Lang, 'Social origins and social aspirations of Jacobean London merchants', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series xxvii (1974), 28, 29, in which he supports Professor Willan's views in favour of the social integrity (my phrase) of the London merchant class and cautions against exaggerating the proportion of those who not only purchased country estates but also tried to discard their mercantile identities. Also see Richard Grassby, 'Social mobility and business enterprise in seventeenth-century England', in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (eds), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, Oxford 1978, 355–81, esp. at pp. 358, 367, 368; and Wrightson, *English Society*, 30.

⁴⁹ Will of Daniel Taylor. Weber's hypothetical link between predestinarian Calvinism and worldly success by now has been modified or altogether abandoned, e.g. Paul Seaver, 'The Puritan work ethic revisited', *Journal of British Studies* xix (1980), 52, 53; and C. John Sommerville, 'The anti-Puritan work ethic', *Journal of British Studies* xx (1981), 70–81.

allying with the Levellers in the campaign against the Presbyterians. Their efforts included some judicious spying, as a pro-Presbyterian writer later charged, on the sermons delivered by Presbyterian ministers. Significantly, their activity as informers also extended to their erstwhile allies, the Levellers, whose apparently incautious words they eagerly reported to the men around Cromwell.⁵⁰ Thus, by fair means and foul, they gained the trust of Cromwell and the Army Independents. By 1648, when Cromwell's forces were in clear command of London and on the brink of a purge of their enemies in parliament, Goodwin's followers were instrumental in arranging meetings among representatives of the various supporters of the Army in London. At one such meeting where Daniel Taylor and others were present, the draft of what would become the *Second Agreement of the People* was written. It represented a compromise position on electoral representation and on religious toleration between the more radical Levellers and the Independents. Goodwin himself took part in the Whitehall debates at which the *Second Agreement* was debated before the Army's leaders. Finally, when the Levellers broke with Cromwell after the debates, Price and others in the church joined with several outsiders to publish *Walwyn's Wiles*, a libellous attack on their former Leveller ally, William Walwyn.⁵¹

The actions of Goodwin's followers did not go unnoticed. Walwyn's retort in the *Just Defense* of 1649 accused them of bearing a 'secret malice' towards him for 'making somewhat bold' to criticise Goodwin's writings. In all, he accused fourteen different members of the church of a political conspiracy – both jointly and as individuals – against him and in support of the Cromwellians. Walwyn was not the first to attack the congregation. For many years they were the target of hostile critics who resented their clannishness and protectiveness toward Goodwin. As early as 1641, a clerical opponent of Goodwin referred to the 'foul, lying and slanderous mouths of those factious sectaries his followers'. Another opponent in 1645 called them a 'conventicle', a term loaded with connotations of the secretive, the heretical, the socially outcast. Again in 1645, a London schoolmaster declared that Goodwin's 'Independent proselytes do too much magnify, if not...deify you for them'. The following year, a Presbyterian attack on Goodwin called for the congregation to give him up to Satan, an outrageous slur. This insult provoked what was to be the first of the congregation's three public declarations. If the intensity of the antagonism they aroused is any measure, their collective presence surely

⁵⁰ For Goodwin's intervention in the toleration controversy of 1644–8, see More, 'John Goodwin'. Cf. *Walwyn's Just Defense* (1649), 1, 2, 6, 7, 16; Joseph Frank, *The Levellers*, Cambridge Mass. 1955, 81; *A Declaration of the Congregational Societies of London* (1647); John Lilburne, *Legal Fundamental Liberties* (1649), in A. S. P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty*, repr. Chicago 1965, 342, 343; Sir Charles Firth, *A Regimental History of Cromwell's Army*, Oxford 1940, ii. 571, 72.

⁵¹ More, 'New Arminians', 142–6; Lilburne, op. cit. 342–50; Frank, op. cit. 169, 70; John Lilburne, *Second Agreement of the People* (1648), in Woodhouse, op. cit. 361, 362.

was being felt. Walwyn's *Just Defense*, the latest in this series, pointedly went on to accuse them of growing 'to a mighty interest, as distinct as the Jews of Amsterdam; and much to the same ends of gain, but with greater aim of power and dominion'.⁵²

Paradoxically, their public personality, assertive, defensive, even arrogant, contrasted with the continued good harmony of their inner counsels. By this time, Goodwin's was not the only reputation at stake. The congregation's uncompromising response to criticism shows that they saw that clearly. By closing ranks against outsiders they accomplished what many less stalwart churches did not: for nearly twenty years they survived without schism. One reason was the respect they felt for Goodwin. Just as important, they were remarkably tolerant of religious diversity among their own members. Here was the soft and gentle interior of a rough and impervious exterior. One former member, for example, who left because of a dispute over the role of human will in the salvation of sinners, departed on the friendliest of terms. He published an account of his differences dedicated to 'the much esteemed auditory of Master John Goodwin' who would, he knew, pit 'man and truth' rather than 'man and man'.⁵³ A broad spectrum of opinion existed within the congregation. For several years, for example, believers in infant baptism co-existed with those who held that only adult re-baptism was lawful. These General Baptists eventually did secede, but only after years of soul-searching over the lawfulness of schism for the sake of a closed communion. More surprising than diversity among the members was the disparity between many of their views and those of Goodwin, their spiritual leader. Their declaration of 1652, an explanation and defence of their new-found Arminian views, makes this explicit. It took Goodwin at least several years to convince most of his followers to modify their Calvinist theology. 'Far be it from us', they wrote, 'to obtrude any of our notions upon thee or any other man: We desire a liberty of judging for ourselves; and therefore cannot reasonably prescribe unto others.'⁵⁴

Such declarations also reflect the congregation's recognition of the public identity they had acquired. The victory of Cromwell and the founding of the Commonwealth in 1649 allowed them to capitalise on this reputation in other, more practical ways. As a group they had given loyal service to the Independents; as a group, by and large, they were rewarded. Of the thirty-six men known to be active church members after 1649,

⁵² *Just Defense*, 29-32; George Walker, *Socinianism in the Fundamental Point of Justification Discovered* (1641), 8, 9; William Prynne, *A Full Reply* (1644), 17-24; John Vicars, *Reverend Sir, Having Lately Received from You* (1645), 3; *An Apologeticall Account*, title page.

⁵³ *An Apologeticall Account*, 3; Samuel Lane, *A Vindication of Free Grace* (1645), Breviate; *The Agreement and Distance* (1652).

⁵⁴ The schismatics shared Goodwin's Arminianism; hence the designation 'General Baptist'. The secession was led by Thomas Lambe and William Allen. In 1658, after five years' existence, the Lambe-Allen church dissolved, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Appendix III, 51ff; Goodwin and Lambe et al., *The Agreement and Distance*. For an account of Goodwin's conversion to Arminianism, see More, 'John Goodwin', 56-66.

eighteen held elective and/or appointive offices under the Commonwealth. Of the eighteen, ten had held some parish, municipal or national office before. The remaining eight were new to office-holding. In all cases, their office-holding under the Commonwealth represented increased power, visibility, or the potential for financial gain.⁵⁵ Offices ranged from those accruing from the outright spoils of victory (Committees for the Compounding of Delinquents' Estates or the Sale of Dean and Chapter Lands, Customs and Excise Commissions), to positions of great political power. Mark Hildesley, for example, was appointed to the High Court of Justice, the Commission of Triers and Ejectors of Clergy and the Customs Commission. He also gained election to the London Board of Aldermen.⁵⁶ Six of the sixteen office-holders invested in the market for royalists' sequestered estates or the Excise farm.⁵⁷

It is in this context that the congregation's conversion to Arminianism must be analysed. What forces subtly affected its collective rejection of Calvinism and its accompanying conversion to Arminianism? The process was not completed until the early years of the Commonwealth, a time of development for the church. As I have shown elsewhere, Goodwin abandoned Calvinism several years prior to his adoption of a form of

⁵⁵ It remains to be investigated just how far religious tolerance by, and personal connection with the Cromwellian Independents improved the economic and social status of London's separatists and independent congregations. That investigation is beyond the scope of this paper. The following men had held modest offices before: George Foxcroft, John Price, Joseph Gallant, Daniel Taylor, Nathaniel Lacy, George Cook, Thomas Alderne (St Stephen's Coleman Street select or general vestry); William Allen and Thomas Morris (assessor and collector for parliament, 1642, respectively). Mark Hildesley was on the St Stephen's select vestry, a church-warden, and was already a member of the London Common Council prior to the Army's victory in 1648. The remaining seven include: Henry Brandreth, Thomas Lambe, Edmund Rosier, Samuel Sowthen, Joseph Hutchinson, Richard Arnald and Hamond Brend. Richard Price may have been on the Common Council in the early 1640s, PRO/SPD 16/453, fos 37ff., Assessors to Raise Money for Parliament from Coleman Street Ward; PRO/SPD 4458/1, fos 114-51, St Stephen's Coleman Street Vestry Minute Books; Journal of the Common Council of London (hereinafter cited as JCC), 41x, fos. 8-65. See also More, 'New Arminians', Appendix B; Kirby, 'The radicals', 105.

⁵⁶ A. B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, i. 60, 84, 161; S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*, London 1913, ii. 282; William Challen, *Register of Marriages*, Croydon 1927, 49; *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding of Delinquents' Estate*, i. 172, 173, 183, 204, 443, 475, 523, 818; ii. 1307; iii. 1769, 2199. William Shaw, *A History of the English Church*, London 1900, ii. 516-17; will of Daniel Taylor.

⁵⁷ The six included Lacy, Richard Price, Foxcroft, Brandreth, Hildesley and Lambe. For investment in delinquents' estates see Ian Gentles, 'The management of Crown lands, 1649-1660', *Agricultural History Review* xix (1971), 5-41; H. J. Habakkuk, 'The parliamentary army and the Crown lands', *Welsh History Review* iii (1967), 403-26. For the excise farm see Brenner, 'Commercial change', 509-10; Kirby, 'The Parish of St Stephen's', 104; M. P. Ashley, *Financial and Commercial Policy under the Cromwellian Protectorate*, London 1934, 51-4, 62-5; *HMC, 7th Report, House of Lords Calendar*, 6 March 1949, 71. For Richard Price, a scrivener, these investments may have represented the natural extension of his regular business activities. See Geoffrey Holmes, *Augustan England*, London 1982, 5, 118-19 for a discussion of the evolution of the 'scrivener'.

Arminianism around 1648 or 1649. His conversion was influenced by the arguments for religious toleration of Protestant rationalists such as Acontius. Goodwin gravitated towards Arminianism largely because of its capacity to dignify human reason and conscience with a full measure of spiritual significance. Its compatibility with Acontian rationalism was crucial to his conversion. The motivation of his followers may have been somewhat different. They took another two years or so to convince.⁵⁸ Under Goodwin's guidance, they were eventually converted to the Arminian beliefs that Christ died for all men; that all men have the capacity to believe in Christ's redemptive powers; and that, therefore, whoever so believes will be saved. In short, they were slowly persuaded to deny unconditional predestination and to accord some role to the human will in the process of salvation.⁵⁹ These beliefs nicely complemented the congregation's ideal of liberty of conscience. It is suggestive that their conversion coincided with the creation of the English Commonwealth and their own emergence as a public political presence. Arminianism reinforced their faith in social and political meritocracy, an ideology to which they paid explicit homage during the Commonwealth. Moreover, the relatively sudden, indubitably gratifying rise in the social and political fortunes of Goodwin's followers between 1649 and 1653 very likely accelerated their acceptance of Arminianism's conditionalism, its 'self-help' implications.⁶⁰ Indeed, concern for religious, social and political meritocracy increasingly appeared in the congregation's public statements and political activity under the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, Goodwin's personal conversion to the doctrine probably proved crucial, the necessary (albeit insufficient) spur. Their respect for Goodwin in addition to their recent social and political successes gave them the confidence that was the cornerstone of their conversion.

III

There is not space to examine the full range of actions by the congregation during their few years of political prominence. Nine out of the sixteen office-holders were elected to the London Common Council between 1649

⁵⁸ More, 'John Goodwin', 56-8.

⁵⁹ See Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and counter-revolution', in Conrad Russell (ed.), *The Origins of the English Civil War*, London 1973, 119-43; More, op. cit. 50, 51, 68-70; Carl Bangs, 'Arminius and the Reformation', *Church History* xxx (1961), 158-63; Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, Chapel Hill, NC 1982, 79-111. I am grateful to Nicholas Tyacke for sending me his chapter 'Arminianism and English culture', in A. C. Duke and C. A. Tansie (eds), *Britain and the Netherlands*, The Hague 1981, ch. vii, 94-117.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Goodwin's tract, *The Pagan's Debt and Dowry* (1651) for a theological discussion of the tenet that all men and women have the capacity to choose salvation although (manifestly, to Goodwin) not all do so. See More, 'John Goodwin', passim; and Tyacke, 'Arminianism and English culture', passim, for discussions of the connections between Arminianism, 'anti-determinism' and Enlightenment theology.

and 1653; five representatives of the London Baptists were also elected and usually allied themselves with Goodwin's people.⁶¹ (Former royalists and supporters of a treaty with the king were barred from officeholding and voting in the wake of the king's execution, accounting in part for this heavy representation by the Independents.) A summary of their actions in the Common Council can shed light on their politics generally. Five issues took up most of their time: reform of the City's finances and appointments policy; reform of the City's provisions for orphans and the poor; expansion of the franchise; rejuvenation of the London economy; and public maintenance of the ministry. These choices were at once idealistic and pragmatic. They confronted the realities of London politics and the ideal of what the late twentieth century might term 'equal opportunity'. They indicate the dimensions of the role newly appropriated for itself by Goodwin's church: rightful heir to the leadership hitherto assumed by those 'natural' leaders of London so recently debarred from politics by the Independents' victory.⁶² Reform of the City's finances, for example, required taking control of the City Treasury or Chamber from the more conservative Board of Aldermen. This would have achieved two goals. By putting the Chamber into their own hands they might restore order to City finances; by then insisting that the customary fees for bureaucratic office be deposited in the Treasury rather than in the pockets of the Aldermen, they might also side-step the Aldermen as dispensers of patronage. City jobs would then be open to 'such good citizens as are fit for the magistracy', whether or not they possessed the necessary emollients.⁶³

More revealing was John Price's attempt, as part of his successful campaign for election to the Common Council, to broaden the franchise for the offices of mayor, sheriffs and members of parliament. Such elections were conducted by the members of Common Hall, an institution made up in theory of all the liveried members of the London Companies; all but the Companies' oligarchies were excluded from such elections. Mere freemen were unable to vote.⁶⁴ From the 1640s until 1650 the freemen had

⁶¹ In the 1649 elections, Mark Hildesley moved up from the Common Council to the Aldermanic Board. Cf. Austin Woolrych, 'The Calling of Barebones Parliament', *EHR* lxxx (1965), 500-1, 509-10; J. E. Farnell, 'The usurpation of honest London householders: Barebones Parliament', *EHR* lxxxii (1967), 24-31, 42; Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament*, Cambridge 1974, 382 n. In particular, see JCC 41x, 11/49, 9, 10/50, 2, 3, 6/51. Farnell lists Praise-God Barebones, Lt-Col Thomas Fenton, Richard Shute, Samuel Moyer and William Steel as Baptist allies of the 'Goodwin Independents'.

⁶² D[aniel] T[aylor], *Certain Queries* (1651). Also cf. Ronald W. Herlan, 'Poor relief in London during the English Revolution' and Valerie Pearl, 'Puritans and poor relief: the London Workhouse, 1649-1660', in Pennington and Thomas (eds), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, 206-32.

⁶³ JCC 41x, 12, meeting of 11 December 1649; Farnell, 'The usurpation', 32; More, 'New Arminians', 292, 293. Melvin C. Wren, 'The Chamber of London in 1633', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series i (1948), 49-51. Most of these abuses were the rule - not the exception - at least since the reign of James I.

⁶⁴ The number of London freemen has been estimated recently to be at least 30,000

campaigns for the franchise. The Companies and the City's governors resisted them. In 1650 the Common Council received a petition on behalf of the freemen presented by John Price. Price and the former Leveller, John Wildman, subsequently argued the merits of their petition before the Council. Their argument may be summarised as follows: a 'just subjection' of a people ought to be founded on their 'ancient liberties'. In the case of 'freemen of the City of London paying scot and lot', these included the right to vote for their governors. They did not make the principle of absolute natural rights the mainstay of their claim. Price especially argued from the more complex idea that such rights were not inherent in an individual but in a particular legal status, in this case the status of ratepaying freeman. If one's political rights were defined by one's status, then it was imperative that the employment of such rights be insured by the unprejudiced operation of the laws governing them.⁶⁵

There was a close parallel here to the congregation's recently adopted Arminian theology. That theology did not hold that all persons will be saved, only that conditions exist which, if fulfilled, ensure salvation for anyone fulfilling them. Likewise, if a man fulfilled the qualifications for bureaucratic office, he should not be disallowed on impertinent (i.e. pecuniary) grounds. If a man paid taxes and fulfilled the conditions of citizenship, he ought not be denied his legal right to vote. Contractualism in politics echoed conditionalism in theology.

In politics, as in theology, the congregation's ideals were embedded in its social reality. As John Price later wrote in praise of Oliver Cromwell, he was a just ruler, 'a fellow-subject to the law'. Price admiringly insisted that for Cromwell, 'relations, family, consanguinity, mere policy or outward respects... steer him not in preferring men to honour and trust; he honours those whom God honours'. This accorded well with Price's own views: men 'that are fit for places of government should be drained from the dregs, sifted from the bran of the ordinary sort of people'.⁶⁶ One might add further, this idealisation bore a strong resemblance to the congregation's perception of its own recent history: Cromwell had indeed honoured 'those whom God honours'.

by Pearl, 'Change and stability', 13. Liveried freemen were estimated to number about 4,000, or approximately 12.5%. Cf. Perez Zagorin, *The Court and the Country*, New York 1969, 128; and Valerie Pearl, *London*, 50.

⁶⁵ *London's Liberties in Chains* (1650), frontispiece, 6; *News From Guildhall* (1650), 1-3, 12; JCC 41x 35, 36, 39, 40; Margaret James, *Social Problems and Policy During the Puritan Revolution*, London 1930, 196-223. The story has a postscript: on 4 November 1651, Common Council passed an act to broaden the membership of Common Hall. The Rump promptly ordered the measure suspended until the Council of State could study it, thus deflecting City reformers' gains: James, op. cit. 232; Farnell 'The usurpation', 39; Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 292. For a broader perspective on the urban franchise issue see Derek Hirst, *The Representative of the People?*, Cambridge 1975, 92-100.

⁶⁶ John Price, *Tyrants and Protectors Set Forth* (1654), 23, 31, 32, 35.

IV

Between 1653 and the Restoration Goodwin's gathered church suffered a severe and irreversible decline. The disintegration after nearly twenty years' growth seem to have resulted from factors both internal and external to the congregation. In 1653 it experienced the only major schism in the history of the church. Under the leadership of William Allen and Thomas Lambe, a group of about twenty broke away to form a General Baptist communion. Although the new church dissolved after five years, the breach within Goodwin's church seems never to have healed. William Allen never returned to it; Thomas Lambe returned briefly but at the Restoration began attending the Established Church.⁶⁷ Four other men previously associated with Goodwin's followers moved beyond Arminianism to become Quakers or Socinians.⁶⁸ Four others, all previously active in the church's affairs, moved out of London to the suburbs or the country.⁶⁹ Finally, and perhaps most important, seven church members – including some of Goodwin's staunchest supporters – died between 1649 and 1660.⁷⁰

In more general terms, the transition from Commonwealth to Protectorate coincided with, and perhaps exacerbated, a pronounced and debilitating loss of purpose by the church. There was little place for the congregation in public life after the dissolution of the Rump, particularly with the return to office of many better established men who had been kept out of politics under the Commonwealth. Between 1649 and 1654, years of high political purpose in London, nine of Goodwin's followers sat on the London Common Council. After 1653, only two of the original nine remained.⁷¹

The gaps left by death, defection or loss of interest never were overcome by the addition of new recruits. Since the congregation never succeeded in integrating the adult children of its members into the church's public life, it would have needed such recruitment for its rejuvenation. Moreover, the new men who in 1660 signed the church's last public declaration – a disavowal of the radical meeting of Fifth Monarchists headquartered just off Coleman Street – seem to have been younger and without traceable ties to any members of the church, past or present. Aged and unwell,

⁶⁷ *Reliquiae*, 51–2, Barbara Lambe to Richard Baxter; *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Appendix III, 53–4, Richard Baxter to Mrs Barbara Lambe, 22 Aug. 1658; John Goodwin, *Water-Dipping No Firm Footing* (1653); John Goodwin, *Philadelphia, or XL Queries* (1653); William Allen, *An Answer to Mr. John Goodwin his XL Queries* (1653); Thomas Lambe, *Truth Prevailing Against the Fiercest Opposition* (1655).

⁶⁸ Isaac Penington, Jr, Luke Howard, Thomas Rudyard and Thomas Firmin.

⁶⁹ Thomas Alderne, Hamend Brend, Richard Arnald and Thomas Devenish.

⁷⁰ Henry Overton (1649), Robert Smith (1650), Thomas Chaplain (1651), Nathaniel Lacy (1652), John Dye (1655), Daniel Taylor (1655), Thomas Morris (1656).

⁷¹ They were Richard Price and Henry Brandreth. In addition, Mark Hildesley became an alderman.

Goodwin also must have lost some of his powers as a preacher and leader. Besides, there was little time to rebuild before the Restoration forced Goodwin out of London and into semi-seclusion in Essex. The letters contain evidence that Goodwin continued to have some contacts with followers, friends, and fellow clergymen, but nothing suggestive of a genuine church-in-exile.⁷²

Even in its heyday, the church was less a formalised institution than a personal network of associations and loyalties. External pressures – particularly the threat of a Presbyterian political and religious ascendancy in the 1640s – played a major role in keeping the church together. As they struggled to preserve their congregation and consciences they also united in pursuit of social and economic advance. The lack of external political pressure, Goodwin's gradual retreat from political activism, and his followers' own return to political anonymity all helped to dissolve the internal bonds of the membership. Goodwin died in 1666. His church seems to have lost its will to live even before the Restoration forced its dissolution.

Was Congregationalism subversive, as Willian Prynne charged? Did it threaten family, parish or kingdom? If the experience of Goodwin's church is any guide, the verdict must be a mixed one. As the case of Captain and Mrs Goodson revealed, Congregational polity did, indeed, challenge traditional patriarchal norms. The parochial church, too, was put to a severe test by Goodwin's attempts to impose the presence and practices of his gathered church on his parishioners. Politically, while never as radical as the Levellers, the congregation did challenge traditional authority, first, as *de facto* lobbyists for Cromwell and the Army; second, as the political replacements for those barred from office-holding by the Army; and third, as pugnacious defenders of the rights of London citizenship. Yet political influence depended on congregational unity.

To note the destabilising potential of a church such as Goodwin's, however, is not to deny its positive, innovative and stabilising contribution to the social life of Civil War London. Goodwin's Independent church was multi-faceted, a religious, social and political body. While its cohesive bonds still held, its more committed members engaged in business and politics together; their children intermarried. They pursued religious and political goals together, relying on their collective identity and Goodwin's prestige to bolster their political position within London's stratified, status-conscious society. Without Goodwin's prestige and their collective determination it is doubtful that men of their generally insignificant standing could have reaped such disproportionately great benefits from

⁷² John Goodwin, *Triumviri, or the Genus* (1658), sect. 4; PRO/SPD 29 fos 80, 82, 90 (letters of John Goodwin to Sarah Goodwin from Leigh, Essex to Bethnal Green). See also David Masson, *The Life of Milton*, London 1880, vi. 54, 55, 173-7, 181-4; Clement Walker *The Compleat History of Independency* (1660), 113, 120.

the Army's victory. Thus the congregation, viewed as a social institution, must be reckoned a force for stability at least for its own members, a successful adaptation to social and political change.

What, if any, shared social values gave meaning to their actions? Certainly, an extraordinary loyalty to Goodwin for many years was their strongest tie; congregationalism, liberty of conscience and Arminianism also bound them together. In theology, as in politics, theirs was a culture of meritocracy, free access, unhampered effort. They applied their efforts to ensuring themselves spiritual, social and political mobility. Not that they espoused a doctrine of natural rights. A covenantal or contractual ethos of mutual responsibilities and guaranteed reciprocities shaped their conception of social relations. Their hopes for mobility, like their hopes for salvation, rested on this foundation: first, that there be no barriers to the fulfilment of one's individual responsibilities, whether to God, to one's governors or to one's church; secondly, that those who fulfil such conditions be assured a just reward.

Why then, did the stability of the Protectorate prove more destructive to the church than the uncertainty of the Civil Wars and Commonwealth? The secret of its disintegration cannot be known with any certainty. Some hypotheses may be hazarded, however. In its heyday, the congregation balanced the centrifugal values of individual effort and liberty of conscience against the inward pull of loyalty to Goodwin and to the church fellowship. At the height of its collective success, even a detractor, William Walwyn, described the church in the following words:

I had no evil opinion of them...rather I did rejoice to see with what amity and friendship they enjoyed each other's society in a comfortable way, assisting and supporting one another; I was glad they so contentedly enjoyed the exercise of their consciences in a way that was agreeable to their judgments.⁷³

After 1653, lacking both external threat and internal concord, the balance between individual liberty and collective values broke down. Religious doubt, political reverses and perhaps economic ambition proved stronger than Goodwin's muted voice and fading powers. To revise the question with which this essay began, was Prynne right? Did Goodwin's gathered church – indeed Congregationalism itself – promote 'confusion...distraction...schisms'? And, as such, did it constitute a fundamental threat to the state? Certainly, by definition, Congregationalism challenged the theological and social order implicit in parochial organisational structures. Yet, in a more profound sense, at least in the case of Goodwin's church, the relationship of Congregationalism to social order was much more complex than that. Congregationalism both created and counteracted the disorder in the parishes during the Civil Wars and Commonwealth. During the period of maximum disturbance, Goodwin's church not only thrived, it represented one of the few social institutions capable of

⁷³ *Walwyn's Just Defense*, 30.

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transcending the disorder. In the end, social and political stability proved more a threat to Congregationalism than Congregationalism to them. Although Prynne was not wrong, he had missed the point: as the Restoration settlement was to show, a congregation rent by schism could offer no threat to Protectorate or kingdom.