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THE SALTERS' HALL CONTROVERSY OF 1719

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THE SALTERS' HALL CONTROVERSY OF 1719

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For my beloved Tiffany

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PREFACE

I am indebted to Dr. Gregory A. Wills for his recommendation that I consider the Salters' Hall Controversy for my dissertation, and his insight, which greatly aided my research. I am further indebted to Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin for his willingness to supervise my dissertation. Dr. Haykin's wisdom and mentorship throughout the writing process has been invaluable. I have admired his work on the English Baptists for years, and am delighted to have received his guidance on this project. I doubt that I would have ever completed this project without his help. I would also like to thank Dr. Shawn Wright and Dr. Tom Nettles for their willingness to serve on my committee. I would also like to thank Dr. John Coffey for serving as my external reader.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Suspicion abounded among dissenting ministers in and around London in the days leading up to March 3, 1719. One of Edmund Calamy's friends pleaded with him to be present at the upcoming meeting at Salters' Hall, but Calamy (1671–1732) respectfully declined the invitation.¹ Just one week prior, February 24, 1719, a slim majority of the ministers present at a meeting of the Three Denominations at Salters' Hall voted "that a *Declaration concerning the Trinity should not be inserted in the Paper of Advices*" being sent to the concerned citizens of Exeter.² As Joseph Jekyl colorfully described the matter, "The Bible carried it by four."³ The 57 to 53 vote in opposition to inserting a declaration of faith on the doctrine of the Trinity into the advices being considered set the stage for the March 3 meeting. When the ministers met again that Friday at Salters' Hall, the defeated measure of inserting a declaration on the Trinity was revived. The party in favor of inserting the declaration, who would soon receive the moniker of "Subscribers," insisted on addressing the matter.

¹ Calamy expressly noted that the issue at hand was not the doctrine of the Trinity, but subscription. Therefore, he abstained. Calamy was not alone in his assessment. Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist, was present at the Salters' Hall meetings and was a Subscriber. In a letter to Elisha Callendar, a Baptist minister in Boston, Massachusetts, Wallin maintained that even though some anti-Trinitarians were present at Salters' Hall, the majority present, including the Non-subscribers, were not. Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life, With Some Reflections on the Time I Have Lived In*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 2:414–15; Isaac Backus, *A History of New England Baptists with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 491.

² *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and agreed upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately assembled at Salters-Hall* (London: John Clark, 1719), 18–19.

³ William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Whiston* (London: Printed for the author, 1749), 1:220.

When the Subscribers' request to reconsider the matter went unmet, "they withdrew from our Assembly," reported a Non-subscriber, "and went *by* themselves, to subscribe their Names to a certain *Roll of Paper*, wherein was contain'd (as we were told) the *first Article* of the *Church of England*, and the 5th and 6th *Answers* in the *Assembly's Catechism*."⁴ In a more colorful, but potentially apocryphal account, it was claimed that during this verbal scuffle someone shouted: "*You that are against Persecution, come up Stairs!* Which was pretty evenly balanced by one on the other side, calling out, *You that are for the Doctrine of the Trinity, stay below!*"⁵ The Non-subscribers continued to meet and consider the advices while the Subscribers apparently withdrew.⁶ Following the March 3 meeting, the two groups never met together again. A pamphlet war ensued, contributing to what is often referred to as the Salters' Hall Controversy.⁷

History of Research

The question surrounding the events at Salters' Hall in 1719, as well as in

⁴ *Authentick Account*, 19. The page is mistakenly numbered 16 in some copies of *Authentick Account*.

⁵ *An Account of the late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salters-Hall. Occasioned By the Differences amongst their Brethren in the Country: With Some Thoughts concerning the Imposition of humane Forms for Articles of Faith. In a Letter to the Revd. Dr. Gale*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Roberts, 1719), 10. This potentially apocryphal exchange is depicted in an image entitled "The Heretical Synod at Salters-Hall," which is placed on the page before *The Anatomy of the Heretical Synod of Dissenters at Salters-Hall* in Thomas Lewis, *The Scourge in Vindication of the Church of England* (London, 1720), 359.

⁶ According to *Authentick Account*, the two groups remained together through the third point of their advices. The work then recounts their separation and an attempt to reunite the body of ministers: "Thus far we remained on *March 3d*. And then thought fit to adjourn further Consideration on these Advices till the following *Tuesday, March 10th*; ordering a Summons to be sent to every one of the Brethren who had withdrawn from us; which was accordingly done. We did particularly hope to have their Help in the IVth Article; and to have calmly debated, every Sentence and Word in it. Some Changes we our selves have made from what it was, both in *Substance* and *Form*; and, tho it looks to us, as it now stands, a very *Christian* and *reasonable Rule* of Conduct, yet we were not so set upon having our own Way, but we should have readily received any thing that had been clear and convincing, in order to have changed our Minds." *Authentick Account*, 7–8.

⁷ Thomas Hearne compiled a helpful list of works from 1712 to 1719 related to the various controversies leading up to and including Salters' Hall. Hearne published the work under the pseudonym "Philanagnostes Criticus." See [Thomas Hearne], *An Account of all the Considerable Pamphlets That have been published on either Side In the present Controversy, Between the Bishop of Bangor, and Others* (London: James Knap[ton], 1719).

much modern historiography, is what the source of the controversy really was. Salters' Hall has been viewed as a watershed event in English Dissent, marking the theological decline of the Presbyterians and the General Baptists, as the majority of both groups were Non-subscribers.⁸ Were the ministers present divided merely over requiring subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases? Or, were the Non-subscribers opposed, not merely to subscription, but to the doctrine of the Trinity? Some Subscribers and concerned onlookers feared that it might be the latter. Many historians have stated that subscription, and not the Trinity, was the source of disagreement. Yet even some of these historians seem to see heterodoxy lurking in the background among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall.⁹

While historians of the period generally recognize that the Salters' Hall meetings were of vital importance in the history of English dissent, there are few detailed treatments of the historical events surrounding Salters' Hall, and even fewer that consider at length the nuanced theological content in the primary source material. The result is a great need not only for a retelling of the story of the Salters' Hall meetings, but also for an assessment of the broader issues related to the doctrine of the Trinity and subscription to creeds and confessions of faith. The Salters' Hall meetings demand careful examination in the light of current historical and theological research.

⁸ There was also a political element at work here. MP John Shute Barrington, a well-known defender of Dissenting interests, and friend of James Peirce of Exeter and John Gale, was concerned that a heated debate among London Dissenters would be very damaging to their cause. A bill had been introduced in December 1718, by Lord Stanhope which would repeal the Schism Act of 1714 if passed. Barrington was concerned that the Trinitarian controversy in Exeter might hinder the passage of the bill. According to Roger Thomas, Barrington put together a set of advices in order to keep the peace in Exeter, and put them before "an unofficial committee of ministers and gentlemen on 5 February." Regarding the bill, Roger Thomas notes that it was "Introduced to the House of Lords on 13 December, it received the Royal assent on 18 February, the day before the first meeting at Salters' Hall." See Roger Thomas, "The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters' Hall Debate," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4, no. 2 (October 1953): 170, 168n3.

⁹ This is particularly true of Michael R. Watts's account of Salters' Hall. See Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 376–77.

Joseph Ivimey's nineteenth-century assessment of the Salters' Hall meetings primarily emphasized the fact the English Particular Baptists were almost entirely Subscribers. Ivimey tended to attribute the Particular Baptists' relative strength to their orthodoxy, and the demise of the English General Baptists to an inclination towards Socinianism until they disappeared as a movement in England. Ivimey did, however, correctly note that not all of the Non-subscribers were anti-Trinitarians, but simply believed that subscription "was an infringement upon their Christian liberty."¹⁰

Adam Taylor argued for two schools of thought among the General Baptists in the late-seventeenth century. One group wanted utter precision while the other was more hesitant to use extrabiblical, philosophical language. The first group consisted of men like Thomas Monck and those who affirmed *An Orthodox Creed*. The latter was comprised of those who preferred the General Baptist *Standard Confession* of 1660. Taylor recognized that the evidence suggested greater complexity than most historians have acknowledged: the non-subscription tradition among English General Baptists existed prior to the eighteenth century.¹¹ This idea of two different approaches or schools of thought among the General Baptists on the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases will be considered in greater detail for its significance at Salters' Hall.

In 1819, the *Baptist Magazine* published a centennial "History of the Conference at Salters' Hall," which presented the controversy primarily as a sign of

¹⁰ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists: Comprising the Principal Events of the History of Protestant Dissenters, From the Revolution in 1668 Till 1760; and of the London Baptist Churches During that Period* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:160–71.

¹¹ Adam Taylor, *The History of the English General Baptists* (London: Printed for the author, 1818) 1:364–65. It is worth noting, and probably worth exploring, that Thomas Helwys in his 1611 confession uses the words "person," "Trinity," and "subsistence." Thomas Monck and the Midlands General Baptists who affirmed *An Orthodox Creed* seem to follow Helwys in using such language, while the *Standard Confession* (1660, 1691) does not. I am not inclined to interpret this as theological deviance in any way, particularly for English General Baptists such as Thomas Grantham who is thoroughly orthodox. But it does seem to demonstrate a hesitancy among some of the most orthodox English General Baptists to impose extra-biblical terms.

theological decline. The author correctly noted the theological contributions of key figures such as William Whiston and Samuel Clarke. Reflecting on the religious landscape at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the author concludes that “it is deeply affecting, in reading over the names of the Presbyterian ministers, a century ago, who were indeed the glory of the land, to perceive that they unconsciously introduced principles which have ‘eaten like gangrene,’ till the congregations over which they presided have wasted to a shadow, and bear the marks of a disease which will speedily terminate in death.”¹² The author’s assessment is keen in identifying that certain principles were introduced prior to and were present at Salters’ Hall that would prove to be the theological undoing of many English Presbyterians. Yet this also leaves open the possibility that many of the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall were largely orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, but that they introduced principles which ultimately led to their demise.

Most theologically conservative scholars in the twentieth century viewed the event as a symbol of theological decline among the English General Baptists and Presbyterians at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Many historians assume, however, that non-subscription necessarily entails theological deviation. This leads them to discount many of the earliest accounts of Salters’ Hall, which includes notable observers such as Edmund Calamy and Edward Wallin. Both men maintained that the debate was not about the doctrine of the Trinity but about subscription. The declension-model histories seem reluctant to believe these early accounts. That is likely due, in part, to later theological declension among some of the Non-subscribers, but this approach tends to read later historical trends into an earlier event.

W. T. Whitley provided the most thorough analysis of Baptist involvement at

¹² “History of the Conference at Salters’ Hall, On the Doctrine of the Trinity, In 1719,” *Baptist Magazine*, 1819, 110.

Salters' Hall.¹³ According to Whitley, it was remarkable that the Baptists were even invited to participate in the meetings. Whitley surmised that John Shute Barrington, friend of the Baptist John Gale, was partly responsible for the Baptists' presence at Salters' Hall. Also, John Sharpe had been sent by the Western Assembly to see what would come of the appeal from Exeter.¹⁴ Once present, the Baptists, General and Particular, "kept their places, and they voted. Alongside the Two Denominations were the Baptists. They never surrendered the position gained." Furthermore, they were not a monolith: "When the meeting split into two, Baptists attended each, and voted; and their votes counted."¹⁵ Yet Whitley's most valuable contribution may be his analysis of the Baptist signatories of the two sets of advices sent to Exeter—one by the Subscribers and the other by the Non-subscribers.¹⁶ Fred J. Powicke had created a system for classifying the various signatories involved in the controversy. Using Powicke's system of classification, Whitley provided further details about the Baptists involved. Some of the Baptist signatories had remained either unidentified or misidentified by Ivimey. The historical and biographical details provided by Whitley are of great value in determining who the participants at Salters' Hall were.

Alexander Gordon delivered an address in 1902, "The Story of Salters' Hall." Gordon maintained that whatever the disagreements were between the Subscribers and

¹³ [W. T. Whitley], "Salters' Hall 1719 and the Baptists," *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 5 (1917): 181–89.

¹⁴ [Whitley], "Salters' Hall and Baptists," 175. Whitley notes, "The appeal from the Exeter Presbyterians was naturally taken to the Committee, and in the ordinary course would not have concerned the Baptists at all. But there were two points of contact. Sharpe had been officially sent by the Western Assembly to see what would happen; and John Shute Barrington, the driving force on the Committee, was a friend of John Gale the Baptist. And so it happened that when all the London ministers were convoked at Salters' Hall to hear a draft letter of advice prepared by the Committee, the Presbyterians and Independents found several 'Anabaptist teachers' there also" (177).

¹⁵ [Whitley], "Salters' Hall and Baptists," 178.

¹⁶ Of course, both groups were technically subscribers in the sense that they subscribed to their respective set of advices sent to Exeter. Both of which included confessional statements.

the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, they were both in agreement that local congregations should ultimately be able to determine how to deal with their ministers and their theology. According to Gordon, this shared conclusion successfully secured the right to private judgment for individual congregations, but the increased concern about the potential presence of anti-Trinitarianism among Dissenters significantly reduced their political influence. Gordon also noted a significant shift in James Peirce's assessment of the presence of anti-Trinitarian views among Protestant Dissenters from 1710 to 1717. In 1710, Peirce defended the orthodoxy of Dissenters on the doctrine of the Trinity in his work *Vindication of Dissenters*. A second edition of the work appeared in 1717 and the section regarding the Dissenters' orthodoxy had been removed. Gordon believed that the publication of Samuel Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* had altered the theological landscape among Protestant Dissenters so that Peirce could no longer claim a thoroughgoing orthodoxy.¹⁷ By Peirce's own admission, Clarke's work had significant influence.

Powicke rejected the notion that the Salters' Hall Controversy represented or foreshadowed decline since, as he argued, theological deviation did not necessarily result in decline. In "An Apology for the Nonconformist Arians of the Eighteenth Century" Powicke contended that "there was more love in the congregation, and more goodwill to men, and more zeal for social service than there had been in the days of Peirce—things which, according to the New Testament, are not exactly significant of decline."¹⁸ Powicke further argued that the numerical decline in the churches that survived, and in the churches that went extinct, was no greater among the Non-subscribers than the Subscribers.

¹⁷ Alexander Gordon, "The Story of Salters' Hall," in *Addresses Biographical and Historical* (London: Lindsey Press, 1922), 126–28.

¹⁸ Fred J. Powicke, "An Apology for the Nonconformist Arians of the Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 1, no. 2 (1917): 106.

One of the most detailed treatments of the Salters' Hall in the twentieth century was Roger Thomas's "The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters' Hall Debate." Nearly every examination of Salters' Hall subsequent to Thomas's publication has benefited from his thorough research. Thomas reconstructed the various meetings at Salters' Hall and summarized the major works related to the controversy.¹⁹ Thomas's bibliographical information is rich and helpful. But Thomas, by his own admission, made no attempt to analyze the theological content of the debate: "It is no part of this paper to deal with the theological doctrines that gave rise to the disputes at Salters' Hall."²⁰ But the theological doctrines that gave rise to the disputes at Salters' Hall are essential for an adequate understanding of the historical events, and therefore must be explored.

One of the most insightful explorations of Salters' Hall was Michael Watts's brief section on the controversy in his renowned work *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*. Watts briefly analyzed the various political, historical, and theological issues at play in the controversy. He also noted the various theological tributaries to the debates, from Samuel Clarke, Thomas Emlyn, and William Whiston to the Bangorian and Exeter Controversies. In many ways, Watts's treatment of Salters' Hall is careful, well-researched, and nuanced. But Watts also provided bold interpretations of the Salters' Hall Controversy. Watts asked, "How can we account for the divergent paths taken by the Presbyterians and the General Baptists on the one hand, and by the Congregationalists and the Particular Baptists on the other?" Watts provided several answers. First, the General Baptists' "literalism" on practices such as feet washing and anointing with oil "also made them suspicious of doctrinal statements not

¹⁹ Thomas, "Non-Subscription Controversy," 162–86.

²⁰ Thomas, "Non-Subscription Controversy," 163n1.

based on Scripture.”²¹ Second, the General Baptists’ “neo-Arminianism predisposed them to look more favorably than their Calvinist brethren on liberal trends in theology.”²² Finally, and related to the second point, Watts was convinced that Arminianism was merely a “halfway house between Calvinism and Arianism” for Presbyterians.²³ For Watts, it was as if Arminianism almost certainly leads to Arianism.²⁴ This notion looms large in Watts’s understanding of Salters’ Hall.²⁵

David Wykes has written a wonderful entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* on Salters’ Hall.²⁶ This dissertation will, in many ways, concur with many of Wykes’s conclusions in his assessment of Salters’ Hall.²⁷ For example, Wykes insightfully notes the connections between the Exeter and Bangorian Controversies and what occurred at Salters’ Hall. Furthermore, following Roger Thomas, Wykes also rightly understands and skillfully explains the political elements at play in the early eighteenth century. Regarding non-subscription, Wykes even notes the orthodox non-

²¹ Watts, *Dissenters*, 376.

²² Watts, *Dissenters*, 376.

²³ Watts, *Dissenters*, 376.

²⁴ It is difficult to interpret Watts any other way. In another place he writes, “It was, moreover, the younger Presbyterian ministers who were most ‘inclined to the Arminian scheme,’ and their acceptance of Arminianism led, as it did in the case of many General Baptists, to a readiness to first tolerate and then embrace Arian views.” Watts, *Dissenters*, 377.

²⁵ Watts’s argument does demonstrate great nuance elsewhere. For example, Watts insightfully notes, ‘In other words, the majority of Presbyterian and General Baptist ministers took their stand on the sufficiency of Scripture, the majority of the Congregationalists and the Particular Baptists insisted on subscription to a Trinitarian creed.’ This is an important and demonstrable point. Therefore, my concern is not with his argument as whole, but with his conclusions which do not seem to necessarily follow the evidence he provides.

²⁶ David L. Wykes, “Subscribers and the Non-Subscribers at the Salters’ Hall Debate,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95681>.

²⁷ Elsewhere Wykes somewhat surprisingly calls into question the overall significance of the debate in the history of English Dissent. See David L. Wykes, “The Salters’ Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent,” in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters’ Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 31.

subscription tradition in Baxter. However, Wykes pays significantly less attention to similar connections among Baptists, particularly the General Baptists who were heavily influenced by Thomas Grantham's views on subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. This dissertation provides greater clarity on the connections between the General Baptist Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall and the writings of Grantham and Joseph Hooke. Of course, it would be impossible to consider the General Baptists' views on subscription and the doctrine of the Trinity without some consideration of the lengthy controversy surrounding Matthew Caffyn, which will be explored.

Most recently, Regent's Park College, Oxford has published a helpful collection of essays on the Salters' Hall Controversy.²⁸ There are notable contributions in this volume from Stephen Holmes, David Wykes, Stephen McKay, Peter Shepherd, Malcolm B. Yarnell III, and myself on a wide range of issues related to the controversy. Yarnell is convinced that what was at stake at Salters' Hall was not the doctrine of the Trinity, but the requirement of subscription to creeds and confessions of faith that utilize extrabiblical language and philosophical terms.²⁹ Addressing Salters' Hall and the larger question of subscription, particularly as it related to the Baptists, Yarnell asks, "Is there something else besides boundless libertarianism and binding confessionalism? Is there a *via media* that results in neither the loss of one's spirit nor the loss of one's soul? Is a concurrent embrace of classical orthodoxy along with scriptural sufficiency and freedom of conscience even possible?"³⁰ Without addressing all of the historical and theological nuances of the Salters' Hall Controversy, Yarnell's assessment corresponds with many of the earliest accounts of the debate, namely, that the debate centered primarily on

²⁸ Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*.

²⁹ Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Point in Question at Salters' Hall: Baptists Contending for Trinity, Scripture and Freedom," in Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*.

³⁰ Yarnell, "Point in Question," 124. In his essay, Yarnell intentionally considered the question of confessional subscription from a historic Baptist perspective.

subscription rather than the doctrine of the Trinity itself. The contributions of Wykes and Holmes are also quite helpful.³¹

The Salters' Hall Controversy of 1719 was an important episode in the history of English dissent, but the details of the controversy, particularly the individuals involved and their theological arguments, have been largely neglected.³² The controversy and the events surrounding it are usually relegated to serving as proof of the growth of anti-Trinitarianism at the turn of the eighteenth century, particularly among the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians. However, a deeper survey of the primary source materials surrounding the controversy at Salters' Hall reveals that anti-Trinitarianism is only part of the story. Subscription to extrabiblical confessions and creeds was also central to the narrative, and the two issues were not always directly related. Those who questioned the doctrine of the Trinity usually held the non-subscription view. But among the orthodox Trinitarians, some held the non-subscription view and some did not. Opposition to subscription cannot serve to identify an anti-Trinitarian.

Studying the historical context helps clarify the issues at play. Related controversies occurred at Exeter, which preceded and ultimately precipitated the events in London at Salters' Hall in 1719. Controversy regarding the doctrine of the Trinity simmered under the surface in Exeter as early as 1716, and erupted into a full-blown controversy by 1718. This controversy, in turn, led to controversy on the grander scale in

³¹ Wykes, "Salters' Hall Debate," 31–61; Stephen Holmes, "The Doctrine of the Trinity, Then and Now: Reflecting Dogmatically on the Salters' Hall Debates," in Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*, 11–29.

³² Two somewhat recent dissertations have explored elements of the controversy, particularly the issue of subscription. See Charles Scott Sealy, "Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century Presbyterianism" (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010); Anthony David Garland Steers, "'New Light' Thinking and Non-Subscription amongst Protestant Dissenters in England and Ireland in the Early 18th Century and Their Relationship with Glasgow University and Scotland" (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2006).

London at Salters' Hall as ministers there attempted to determine how best to advise concerned parishioners in Exeter. The Salters' Hall conflict must be viewed in connection with the controversies in Exeter, the Bangorian Controversy, and the larger context of English anti-Trinitarianism, the expansion of *adiaphora* to include the doctrine of the Trinity, and anti-subscriptionism. This dissertation attempts to take all of these factors into account.

A Taxonomy for Salters' Hall

The Salters' Hall Controversy cannot be explained by simplistic interpretations. Those present at Salters' Hall may be divided into Subscribers and Non-subscribers, but those categories, particularly that of Non-subscriber, cannot be synonymous with either orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Two categories, heterodox and orthodox, cannot encompass the broad spectrum of views present at Salters' Hall.³³ To better understand the events and the people present, there must remain the likelihood of one being opposed to subscription, but also being orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. For this was certainly the case for a host of figures who became known as Non-subscribers. One must account for this element of complexity.

There may be a better method for understanding Salters' Hall. In a letter to

³³ Colligan divided the ministers into a "conservative party" and a "progressive party." The conservative party "thought that the pre-eminent subject of discussion was safeguarding the doctrine of the Trinity." J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1913), 55. The progressive party, "progressive in theology, but from a modern estimate, very conservative in its view of Scripture, desired the Bible alone, 'the inspired writing in the very letter thereof,' to be made a standard of Faith and a test of membership" (55). Colligan went on to say, "Again, the conservative party argued that subscription to the Trinity was an essential boundary of Faith and Communion. The progressive party replied that the question was not one of individual belief, but whether human interpretations of Scripture (and they had come to regard Creeds as such) should be made a test of Christian communion. These were the two fundamentals of the two parties at Salters' Hall, and although not discussed during the meeting, the principles of each were tacitly recognized by each other" (55). Colligan's assessment is somewhat helpful insofar as he notes that the Subscribers and Non-subscribers viewed the controversy from different vantage points. The Non-subscribers were intent on defending the sufficiency of Scripture and opposing the imposition of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. The Subscribers believed the best course of action was confessing their faith in the doctrine of the Trinity through subscription so as to demonstrate their orthodoxy. Colligan's assessment is mostly accurate on these points. Yet his division of the ministers into a "conservative party" and a "progressive party" cannot account for the diversity of views among the Non-subscribers. One wonders if Colligan was reading early twentieth-century Protestant liberalism back into the early eighteenth century.

Samuel Mather dated July 28, 1731, John Walrond of Ottery claimed, more than a decade after the Salters' Hall Controversy, that there were "three sorts" of Dissenters in England: "those who have fallen into Arian or Arminian errors;" those that are "very sound;" "and a middle sort, the most numerous, that profess the same faith, but are so indifferent about it, and indulgent to the erroneous, that they seem to be with us in principle, but with them in interest, loving them better with their errors, than others with the truth as it is in Jesus."³⁴ Walrond was one of James Peirce's fiercest foes at Exeter, which precipitated the Salters' Hall meetings. But Walrond's point is instructive for a balanced interpretation of the events in London. For at Salters' Hall there seems to have been an orthodox or "very sound" party, a much smaller heterodox party, and a numerous "middle sort" that was orthodox in belief but either indulgent of heterodoxy or hesitant to enforce subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. The middle sort is key to understanding Salters' Hall.

Walrond's taxonomy ultimately proves more helpful than simply identifying an individual as either heterodox or orthodox. It recognizes the complexity of this transitional period in English Dissent and opens the door for the possibility of one being theologically orthodox in personal belief, but somewhat latitudinarian or at least hesitant to require subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. In what follows, Walrond's taxonomy will be employed as a helpful aid in more closely examining some of the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists present at Salters' Hall.³⁵ There were

³⁴ John Walrond, "Letter to Samuel Mather, July 28, 1731," *Christian Examiner* 5, no. 5 (September-October 1828): 369.

³⁵ The General Baptists at Salters' Hall, as identified by Whitley, were: John Savage, Joseph Jenkins, Joseph Burroughs, Lewis Douglas, Isaac Kimber, Nathaniel Foxwell, John Ingram, John Gale, Thomas Kerby, Thomas Slater, Amos Harrison, James Richardson, Richard Tuddeman, and Matthew Randall. Whitley does not identify Burroughs, Kimber, or Gale as General Baptists in his list of names with biographical information. They are undesignated. But each man is associated with Paul's Alley, Barbican, which was somewhat unaffiliated. Burroughs, Gale, and Kimber rarely if ever appear in the Assembly or the Association minutes. There is a point regarding Kimber worth pursuing further. The Minute Book of the Barbican Church shows Kimber as being 'Recd from Wild Street Nov 5 1722.' If this is when Kimber came to the Barbican Church, then it causes one to question if Kimber should be technically be counted

theologically orthodox and heterodox parties at Salters' Hall, but most telling is the numerous middle sort that opposed the requirement of subscription, particularly to extrabiblical words and phrases, while personally affirming the doctrine of the Trinity.

Methodology

This dissertation explores the relationship between theology, particularly the doctrine of the Trinity, and subscription, which will reveal that in the early eighteenth century one's view of subscription did not necessarily indicate one's position on the doctrine of the Trinity. By thoroughly mining the primary source material, the objective is to accurately reconstruct the events surrounding Salters' Hall, identify some of the main figures on both sides of the debate, and explore the theological underpinnings of the controversy. To understand the theological underpinnings of the controversy, the writings of figures such as Richard Baxter, Thomas Grantham, John Locke, Samuel Clarke, William Whiston, and others must be considered. The writings of Locke, Clarke, and Whiston provide immediate context to the Salters' Hall Controversy. The writings of Grantham and Baxter demonstrate an orthodox, non-subscription tradition which potentially helps explain some of what occurred at Salters' Hall.

Thesis

At the Salters' Hall meetings of 1719, the relationship between theology and subscription was immensely complex, particularly for orthodox Trinitarians. Anti-Trinitarians were more likely to oppose subscription than orthodox Trinitarians, but one's opposition to subscription did not necessarily indicate opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity itself. Many of the orthodox Trinitarians, particularly the General Baptists and Presbyterians, there, held to the anti-subscription tradition exemplified by Grantham and

among the General Baptists, if he was a member of a Particular Baptist church through 1722, three years after Salters' Hall. See [Whitley], "Salters' Hall and Baptists," 172–89; E. A. Payne and Leonard J. Maguire, "The Baptist Church near Barbican," *Baptist Quarterly*, 39, no. 3 (2001): 142.

Baxter.³⁶ There were anti-Trinitarians present at Salters' Hall, but they cannot be identified solely by their view on subscription. In other words, to be an anti-Trinitarian was to be a non-subscriptionist, but to be a non-subscriptionist was not necessarily to be an anti-Trinitarian.

³⁶ Clint Bass insightfully notes regarding Thomas Grantham, "Though Grantham himself used traditional language to describe the Trinity, he was, at the same time, cautious of other traditional language: 'some terms in the Creed of Athanasius are so hard to be understood, that we think they ought not to be imposed as necessary.' Had Grantham been at Salters' Hall in 1719, he might have been a Non-subscriber." Clint C. Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633–1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2013), 188–89. Regarding Baxter, see Paul C. H. Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter's Puritan Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth Century Context* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 156–90.

CHAPTER 2

PRELUDES TO SALTERS' HALL

In February 1719, over one hundred dissenting ministers gathered at Salters' Hall in London to determine how they might advise the Presbyterians in Exeter who were concerned that their ministers held heterodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹ Yet the roots of the controversy extend back into the failed "Happy Union" of the English Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the early 1690s and the Bangorian Controversy, focused on Bishop Hoadly, from 1716–1721. While the controversy at Exeter is directly related to Salters' Hall, there are several key threads that run through each of these events that help make sense of the controversy at Salters' Hall: subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, changing views on the doctrine of the Trinity, and what doctrines are considered essential to Christian belief. The writings (and persons) of William Chillingworth, Richard Baxter, John Locke, William Whiston, and Samuel Clarke were influential in these controversies. Furthermore, figures such as MP Shute Barrington, James Peirce, and Moses Lowman were directly involved in the Bangorian, Exeter, and Salters' Hall controversies. Therefore, since Salters' Hall must be understood in light of these tributaries, they must be briefly considered.

Chillingworth and Locke

Opposition to compulsory subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases in the English context preceded the Salters' Hall Controversy by nearly a full century. In the late-1630s, William Chillingworth voiced his opposition to subscription in his

¹ The request for advice came from "the thirteen" but it is also surmised that James Peirce may have also appealed to John Shute Barrington for help in the matter.

controversial work *The Religion of Protestants A Safe Way to Salvation* (1638). The work was primarily intended as a response to Edward Knott's *Mercy and Truth, Or Charity Maintain'd by Catholiques* (1634), in which Knott maintained that salvation did not extend to those outside of the Roman Catholic Church. Chillingworth rejected Roman Catholic claims of doctrinal uniformity, and consequently also rejected Knott's narrow view of salvation. As Mortimer explains, "Chillingworth had come to accept that the opinions of Christians varied in the past, and that they might never cohere in the future. In his opinion, heaven was wide enough to contain men of conflicting views."² Therefore, "Chillingworth set out to show much more clearly that individual sincerity, not church communion or even correct doctrine, was crucial for salvation."³ It was the sincerity of the individual, for Chillingworth, that determined one's salvation, not any ecclesiastical authority. A similar notion would appear much later in the writings of Bishop Benjamin Hoadly.⁴

Chillingworth attributed the prevalence of schism among Christians to their insistence upon infallibility in matters of doctrine, which produced not only schism, but even persecution.⁵ His solution for schism and persecution was as follows: "Take away these Walls of separation, and all will quickly be one. Take away this *Persecuting, Burning, Cursing, Damning* of men for not subscribing to the *words of men*, as the words of God: Require Christians only to believe Christ, and to call no man master but him only; Let those leave claiming Infallibility that have no title to it."⁶ Chillingworth

² Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73.

³ Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 73.

⁴ D. O. Thomas, "Benjamin Hoadly: The Ethics of Sincerity," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 15 (1996): 71–88.

⁵ Warren Chernaik, "Chillingworth, William," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed December 22, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5308>.

⁶ William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1638), 198. Chillingworth notes in the margin that this idea is not unique to him as it

believed that Christians ought to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, rather than being forced to subscribe to the extrabiblical words and phrases of confessions and creeds that, Chillingworth believed, went beyond the Bible. Chillingworth summarily asked, “For why should men be more rigid then God? Why should any error exclude any man from the Churches Communion, which will not deprive him of eternall salvation?”⁷

Chillingworth’s views on religious toleration had likely been influenced by his reading of Actonius, Grotius, and some Socinian writings.⁸ Francis Cheynell, who became Chillingworth’s mortal enemy, associated Chillingworth’s work with Socinianism in his *Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme* (1643). Even Chillingworth’s death in 1644 did not put an immediate end to Cheynell’s critique, for in the same year Cheynell published *Chillingworthi novissima, or, The sicknesse, heresy, death and burial of William Chillingworth*. For Cheynell, Chillingworth was only advancing the Socinian cause, and his arguments had to be soundly defeated.⁹

Though despised by Cheynell, Chillingworth was “one of Locke’s favorite authors.”¹⁰ Locke commended Chillingworth for his emphasis on the necessity of forming one’s beliefs on the basis of one’s reading and interpretation of Scripture.¹¹ Like Chillingworth, Locke emphasized the importance of personal belief, rooted in the

can be found in Actonius’s *Stratagemata* and Zanchius’s last *Oration*.

⁷ Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants*, 210.

⁸ Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 72.

⁹ McLachlan interestingly comments, seemingly affirming Cheynell’s critique of Chillingworth, that even though Socinianism as a distinct movement did not survive in England, many of its principles did. McLachlan wrote, “Out of the dust-hole of extinct Socinianism’ there were, in fact, scattered far and wide the imperishable principles of toleration and rational scriptural exegesis: the former a fundamental presupposition of modern civilization, the latter the necessary condition of all progress in the study of the Bible.” Herbert John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 339.

¹⁰ John Marshall, “Defining and Redefining Heresy up to Locke’s *Letters Concerning Toleration*,” in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Lowenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.

¹¹ Chernaik, “Chillingworth, William.”

interpretation of Scripture, rather than mere fideism. Locke's intent was not "privatized religion," but to emphasize each individual's responsibility to arrive at the truth through one's own study of Scripture.¹² Locke wrote,

If I must believe for myself, it is unavoidable that I must understand for myself. For if I blindly and with an Implicit Faith take the Pope's interpretation of the Sacred Scripture, without examining whether it be Christ's Meaning, 'tis the Pope I believe in, and not in Christ; 'tis his Authority I rest upon; 'tis what he says I embrace: For what 'tis Christ says, I neither know nor concern my self.¹³

Locke's views on doctrine and religious toleration would prove to be highly influential among Dissenters. While the primary source material that came out of the Exeter and Salters' Hall Controversies seem to engage with the thought of Chillingworth more than Locke, Locke's views certainly were influential,¹⁴ though Chillingworth may be quoted more.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Chillingworth or Locke's advocacy for religious toleration was driven primarily by radical religious skepticism. While they might have held heterodox views on some Christian doctrines, "they appealed to [human] uncertainty and fallibility to undermine the case for persecution."¹⁵ As Coffey contends, particularly regarding Chillingworth, "These devout sceptics did not doubt the truth of Christianity, but they acknowledged the real possibility that they themselves might misunderstand or misrepresent the truth."¹⁶ It was because of this that

¹² Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *John Locke's "Letters of Gold": Universal Priesthood and the English Dissenting Theologians, 1688–1789* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2017), 48.

¹³ Yarnell, *Locke's "Letters of Gold,"* 8–9.

¹⁴ Sell has a very helpful section on "indispensable minimum of belief" and the influence of Locke. See Alan P. F. Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines* (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 1997), 186–201.

¹⁵ John Coffey, "Scepticism, Dogmatism and Toleration in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Persecution and Pluralism: Calvinist and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Europe 1550–1700*, ed. Richard Bonney and D. J. B. Trim (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2006), 163.

¹⁶ Coffey, "Scepticism, Dogmatism and Toleration," 163. Though I do not entirely share Coffey's view of Chillingworth as a "devout" skeptic, his point is instructive nonetheless. Chillingworth's arguments in favor of toleration are based upon human fallibility, rather than any sort of radical religious skepticism.

“Chillingworth saw no reason why Protestants should be bound by every word of Luther or Calvin, any more that Roman Catholics should be bound by all the assertions of their theologians. On matters necessary to salvation made plain in Scripture, certainty was desirable and possible, but on secondary matters things were different.”¹⁷ In this way, Chillingworth, and Locke after him, differed from more radical religious skeptics like Thomas Hobbes, who favored freedom of conscience while simultaneously affirming the power of civil magistrates to enforce external religious conformity.¹⁸ Dissenting thought in the early eighteenth century went more the way of Chillingworth and Locke than the way of Hobbes.

Richard Baxter, Creeds, and Subscription

Richard Baxter had an unmistakable influence at Exeter and Salters’ Hall as his writings were regularly referred to, and the influence of his thought seems quite apparent.¹⁹ Baxter referred to himself as a “meer Christian.” Paul C. H. Lim notes that the title was first employed by the English Socinian John Biddle, not Baxter.²⁰ Baxter used the term to denote a sort of strict biblicism that emphasized the supremacy of Scripture over all confessions, creeds, and councils. While many English Protestants might have shared Baxter’s views in principle, Baxter went beyond merely affirming the supremacy of Scripture to regularly critiquing the bishops involved in the councils at Nicaea and Ephesus. The intended purpose of Baxter’s attacks on early church councils was to demonstrate not only that councils may err, but to expose the immoral qualities of

¹⁷ Coffey, “Scepticism, Dogmatism and Toleration,” 165.

¹⁸ Coffey, “Scepticism, Dogmatism and Toleration,” 159.

¹⁹ James claimed that Baxter’s opposition to subscription was misconstrued by the Presbyterians of the eighteenth century, and that he was ultimately in favor of it. James’s assessment seems incomplete. See T. S. James, *the History of the Litigation and Legislation Respecting Presbyterian Chapels and Charities in England And Ireland between 1816 and 1849* (London: Hamilton Adams, 1867), 185.

²⁰ Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 240.

“thuggish” bishops such as Cyril of Alexandria.²¹ As Lim explains, “Baxter saw sanctification or ‘laborious holiness’ as an existential proof of the theological pudding. Seeing the utter absence of such saintly dispositions and behaviors at Nicaea and Ephesus was what turned Baxter off from being enthusiastic about the doctrines formulated therein.”²² The intended goal was to undermine validity of confessions, creeds, and extrabiblical language on Christians through the requirement of subscription. Baxter provocatively asked, “*Did the Primitive Church require Subscription to all our 39 Articles, or to any more than the words of Scripture?*”²³ The cumulative effect of Baxter’s critiques, however, was that his own orthodoxy was called into question.²⁴

Baxter’s polemic against creeds and councils as well as his emphasis upon a sort of strict biblicism, seemed to echo the arguments of Best, Biddle, and Hobbes.²⁵ Lim notes that John Cotton, John Owen, and others were well aware of the moral deficiencies of some early church bishops, but they never left the reader with the sense that they might not affirm the doctrines propounded at Nicaea, Ephesus, or Chalcedon. The same could not always be said of Baxter, which led some to question Baxter’s theological orthodoxy. Furthermore, it was not uncommon in the eighteenth century for critics of the Athanasian Creed and its Christology to critique the tactics and moral character of Athanasius himself.²⁶ William Whiston employed this method in many of his writings, including his aptly titled work *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery* (1712).

Baxter’s consistent concern was ecclesiastical unity rather than theological

²¹ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 255.

²² Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 248.

²³ Richard Baxter, quoted in Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 247.

²⁴ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 247.

²⁵ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 240–62. This is a major point in Lim’s discussion of Baxter.

²⁶ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 248.

uniformity.²⁷ He maintained his hope for some sort of ecclesiastical unity, even after the Glorious Revolution and the Toleration Act of 1689.²⁸ Baxter's desire for unity often led him to oppose the stringent theological precision of theologians such as Owen and Cheynell, which Baxter believed bred unnecessary division. Related to Baxter's desire for unity was his opposition to creedal subscription. Baxter boldly asserted in 1654, "No particular Words in the World are *Essentials* of our Religion."²⁹ N. H. Keeble notes regarding this statement, "What lay behind these words was a deep-seated suspicion of creedal formulae, confessions, and platforms."³⁰ Baxter exhibited a strong primitivist impulse, which, he believed, required a return to the doctrinal simplicity of the early church. Baxter concluded, "The great cause of our uncharitable censures and divisions, hath been departing from the Antient simplicity of Faith, and also from the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures, to be the Rule and Test of Faith."³¹ For Baxter, the essentials of the Christian faith could be summarized in the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments.³² These, he believed, were sufficient tests of orthodoxy. When it was objected that Papists and Socinians could subscribe to these statements, Baxter shockingly replied, "So much the better, and so much the fitter it is to be the Matter of our Concord."³³ Yet as Lim rightly points out, one would be remiss to overlook the rest of what Baxter said:

If you are afraid of Communion with *Papists* and *Socinians*, it must not be avoided

²⁷ Paul C. H. Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity: Richard Baxter's Puritan Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

²⁸ N. H. Keeble, "'Take Heed of Being Too Forward in Imposing on Others': Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Baxterian Tradition," in Lowenstein and Marshall, *Heresy, Literature, and Politics*, 297.

²⁹ Richard Baxter, quoted in Keeble, "Take Heed," 282.

³⁰ Keeble, "Take Heed," 282.

³¹ Baxter, quoted in Keeble, "Take Heed," 282.

³² Keeble, "Take Heed," 284.

³³ Baxter, quoted in Keeble, "Take Heed," 284.

by making a new Rule or Test of Faith which they will not Subscribe to, or by forcing others to Subscribe to more than *they* can do, but by calling them to account whenever in Preaching or Writing they contradict or abuse the Truth to which they have Subscribed. This is the Work of the *Government*.³⁴

Such was Baxter's view of subscription and his desire for unity. He certainly was not a proto-Unitarian in his desire for unity and his opposition to subscription. But Baxter did not believe the multiplication of creeds and confessions or the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases to be the answer to stamping out theological heterodoxy.

Keeble contends that Edmund Calamy bequeathed the "Baxterian or moderate Presbyterian tradition" to the eighteenth century.³⁵ Roger Thomas referred to eighteenth-century iterations of Baxter's ideology as "expanded Baxterian liberalism."³⁶ It is worth quoting Keeble at length, as Calamy will feature somewhat prominently in the discussion of Salters' Hall:

It was Calamy who, in his *Abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History of his Life and Times* (1702) and its successors, transformed Baxter's autobiographical papers into a history of nonconformity and a comprehensive record of the lives of ejected ministers. He was, however, doing something more. In his work on the *Reliquiae [Baxterianae]*, and in his own three-volume *Defence of Moderate Non-conformity* (1703–5) . . . he passed the Baxterian tradition to the eighteenth century. While in the *Defence* Calamy has effectively abandoned Presbyterian aspirations toward a national church for an independent church polity . . . he remains committed to toleration of varieties of individual opinion and practice. "The Aim and Drift of our Holy Institution [of the Church], is not to bring Men to an exact Agreement and *Uniformity* in all Particulars" but to recognize that conscience, "the Great Engine by which God hath mainatin'd Religion in the World," cannot be coerced. No more "is necessary to make a Man a member of the Church, than is necessary to make him a Good Christian." There speaks Baxter's "meer Christian."³⁷

³⁴ Baxter, quoted in Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity*, 163.

³⁵ Keeble, "Take Heed," 297.

³⁶ Thomas further commented, "'Expanded' because Baxterianism was later largely seen through the eyes of John Locke, who pursued the same aims of simplification and intelligibility with a somewhat greater consistency, and with a humbler estate of what Scripture and Reason could achieve." Roger Thomas, "The Break-up of Nonconformity," in *The Beginnings of Nonconformity: The Hibbert Lectures* (London: James Clarke, 1964), 59n2.

³⁷ Keeble, "Take Heed," 297; Roger Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," in *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 134–35.

As Calamy carried Baxter into the eighteenth century, the Baxterian tradition, particularly as it relates to a sort of creedal minimalism and opposition to the requirement of subscription, would be significant at both the Exeter and Salters' Hall controversies.³⁸

The “Happy Union”

Baxter's influence was also recognizable in the “Happy Union” of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, which came to a rather unhappy end. The beginning of the Happy Union represents Baxter's desire for greater unity even after the it became apparent that comprehension would not occur. The dissolution of the Happy Union represents some of Baxter's earlier concerns about antinomianism, which resurfaced in the early 1690s. Beyond these connections with Baxter, the failed Happy Union, particularly in London, provides some context to the divide that existed between the English Presbyterians and Congregationalists, which was also apparent at Salters' Hall in 1719. Wykes points out that in the country they continued to work together.

There had been some interest in cooperative efforts among the English Presbyterians and Congregationalists for several decades prior to the Happy Union in the spring of 1691. It was “the intensification of persecution in the early 1680s” that had kept the two groups from greater cooperation.³⁹ The primary driving force for union was the need to financially support ministers whom local churches were unable to support. This need led to the creation of the Common Fund among Presbyterians and Congregationalists in London in 1690. The Happy Union itself was founded upon a

³⁸ The influence of Baxter does in fact seem to loom large at Salters' Hall in particular. Baxter is cited in some of the pamphlets that came out of the Salters' Hall Controversy, which certainly demonstrates a connection between the opposition to subscription at Salters' Hall, and Baxter's opposition to subscription. Baxter had been dead for less than thirty years when the controversy occurred. Therefore, while it would be a mistake to see Baxter as some sort of proto-Unitarian, as his opposition to heterodoxy was clear, it would also be an overreaction to such claims to see Baxter's approach to subscription as having no influence at all at Salters' Hall. This point is further bolstered by the connection that Keeble makes between Baxter and Calamy. See *A Letter to Mr. Robinson* (London, 1719), 13.

³⁹ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 290.

document entitled *The Heads of Agreement* (1691). As Watts notes, “These proposals were in turn subsequently endorsed by associations of ministers in Devon, Hampshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, the West Riding, and probably elsewhere.”⁴⁰

It did not take long, however, before differences between the two groups, which the *Heads of Agreement* left unresolved, became sources of conflict. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists disagreed on matters related to communion and church membership, but as Thomas contends, this was not the major source of contention.⁴¹ The major source of contention was ordination, including who should be ordained and who has the power to ordain.⁴² The Presbyterians preferred an educated clergy whose ordination lay in the hands of ordained ministers. The Congregationalists, by contrast, had less strict expectations regarding education, and permitted individual congregations to be responsible for ordaining their own clergy. The *Heads of Agreement* favored an approach more akin to the Presbyterian system, which required not only sufficient gifts for the ministry, but also the involvement of other local ministers in

⁴⁰ Watts, *Dissenters*, 290.

⁴¹ Thomas, “Presbyterians in Transition,” 113–15?

⁴² According to Bogue and Bennett, at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the English Presbyterians tended to ordain candidates for the ministry in groups and groups of ministers served in their ordination without the aid of the congregation. The example they give is the ordination of Edmund Calamy alongside six other ministers: Joseph Bennett, Thomas Reynolds, Joseph Hill, William King, Ebenezer Bradshaw, and Joshua Bayes. The candidates were questioned from the directory of the Westminster Assembly, but apparently presented their own confessions of faith. David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, From the Revolution In 1688, To The Year 1808* (London: Printed for the authors, 1809), 2:121–22. When the Non-subscriber Obadiah Hughes was ordained by Joshua Oldfield, he too presented his own confession of faith. Obadiah Hughes, *A Confession of Faith, Deliver'd At the Old Jewry, January 11th, 1720/21, By Obadiah Hughes, At his Ordination* (London: Emanuel Matthews, 1721), 14. Benjamin Grosvenor also presented his own confession of faith when he was ordained by Daniel Williams. Benjamin Gravenor [later Grosvenor], *A Confession of Faith, Deliver'd at the Ordination*, in Daniel Williams, *The Ministerial Office: Wherein The Importance, Difficulty, Nature and Necessity of that Office, are considered* (London: John Lawrence, 1708), 8–9. Many more examples could be given. The primary point here, however, is that even if their confession of faith was influenced by other confessions of faith, they were often altered and presented in the ministerial candidates' own words rather than a mere subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Sealy contends that “English Dissenters generally did not require that their ministers subscribe a confession,” but goes on to give examples of a couple of exceptions, including the Subscriber Daniel Wilcox and a heated interaction with Henry Read. Charles Scott Sealy, “Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century Presbyterianism” (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010), 36–37.

assessing a ministerial candidate's capacity for ministry.⁴³

Tension on the issue of ordination rose to a particularly high level when a Welsh Congregationalist preacher by the name of Richard Davis began to preach in an area with established Dissenting churches.⁴⁴ Davis had been ordained by the Congregationalist Thomas Cole a year prior to the signing of the *Heads of Agreement* and had refused to allow other ministers to be involved in the ordination. Furthermore, Davis was sending out laymen, with no ministerial education, as preachers.⁴⁵ Presbyterians, Anglicans, and even some Congregationalists took issue with Davis's methods. While even some Congregationalists were not pleased with Davis's ministerial efforts, his circuit preaching and use of lay preachers brought the Presbyterians' and Congregationalists' disagreements on ordination back to the fore.

There had also been great consternation, particularly for Richard Baxter, at the republication of the Antinomian Tobias Crisp's works in 1690. Baxter had written vociferously against Antinomianism in the previous decades. In response to the republication of Crisp's works, Baxter published *The Scripture Gospel Defended*, which was directed against Antinomianism. Richard Davis had been accused of Antinomianism by his opponents who were less than pleased with not only his methods but his theology. When Baxter died in December of 1691, Daniel Williams took up Baxter's cause against Antinomianism with the publication of *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* (1692). Williams also became one of Davis's greatest opponents, and charged Davis with

⁴³ *Heads of Agreement Assented to by the United Ministers In and about London: Formerly called Presbyterian and Congregational* (London: Tho. Cockerill, 1691), 6–8; Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 114–15. Thomas seems to indicate that there had been other instances of this approach among the two bodies prior to the publication of the *Heads of Agreement*.

⁴⁴ For an in-depth treatment of Davis, see Stephen Pickles, *The Revival of Religion in Northamptonshire and the Neighboring Counties under the Ministry of Richard Davis (1658–1714)* (Bethersden, England: James Bourne Society, 2015).

⁴⁵ Watts, *Dissenters*, 293.

Antinomianism before the London ministers in May 1692.⁴⁶ Davis had been summoned to appear before the London ministers because of the controversy surrounding him. He was also a recipient of the Common Fund.⁴⁷ When it was decided to address the controversy surrounding Davis, a deputation from London was sent to Kettering, which Davis perceived to be an imposition since the London ministers had no jurisdiction there. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Williams's *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* was published during his relentless attempt to deal with Davis's supposed Antinomianism. Williams had apparently been working on the book prior to the controversy with Williams, but the book was published during the controversy, and was prefaced by a testimonial signed by London Presbyterian ministers. As Thomas remarks, "Coming out when it did and prefaced by such a testimonial, it looked like a Presbyterian manifesto and the Congregationalists treated it as such."⁴⁸ After some published responses from the Congregationalists, the matter came to a head in 1694 through the shared Pinner's Hall lecture, when Nathaniel Mather preached two sermons against Williams's supposed Arminianism, a charge often lodged against his predecessor Baxter. When it was Williams's turn to preach at Pinner's Hall, he responded to Mather's sermons. Williams and Mather's sermons were subsequently published, but it was Williams who was ultimately voted out of the Pinner's Hall lectureship.⁴⁹ Williams, along with the Presbyterian ministers William Bates, John Howe, and Vincent Alsop, also left the Pinner's Hall lecture to set up a separate lectureship at Salters' Hall, which would meet on the same day and hour as the Pinner's Hall lecture.⁵⁰ The controversy continued when

⁴⁶ Watts, *Dissenters*, 295.

⁴⁷ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 117.

⁴⁸ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 118.

⁴⁹ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 119.

⁵⁰ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 119.

Williams was accused of immorality and then Socinianism. Edmund Calamy and others came to Williams's defense and cleared him of these charges.⁵¹

The Happy Union, at least in London, was finally dissolved near the end of 1695. While the Congregationalists had minimal involvement in the Common Fund beginning in 1692, they did not set up a separate Congregational Fund until 1695, which signified the final dissolution of the Happy Union in London. Presbyterians and Congregationalists outside of London, however, continued to have a more amicable relationship.⁵² "But as far as the London-based leaders of the two denominations were concerned," writes Watts, "co-operation was henceforward restricted to the furtherance of the political interests of Dissent."⁵³ This can be seen through both groups involvement in the body of the Three Denominations that met in London in the following century at Salters' Hall.

Watts helpfully summarizes the dissolution of the London Congregationalists and Presbyterians at the end of the seventeenth century:

The theological consensus which for thirty years had ostensibly united the Presbyterianism of the Westminster Confession and the Congregationalism of the Savoy Declaration was thus shattered. Presbyterian charged Congregationalist with Antinomianism, Congregationalist charged Presbyterian with "Arminianism" or even "Socinianism," and the Happy Union disappeared in acrimonious controversy.⁵⁴

This must be seen as part of the historical context of the London Presbyterians and Congregationalists when they met, and primarily ended up on differing sides, of the issue of subscription and the doctrine of the Trinity at Salters' Hall in 1719.

⁵¹ David L. Wykes, "Williams, Daniel," in *ODNB*, accessed November 20, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29491>.

⁵² Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 121; Watts, *Dissenters*, 297.

⁵³ Watts, *Dissenters*, 297.

⁵⁴ Watts, *Dissenters*, 296.

Samuel Clarke and William Whiston

The writings of Samuel Clarke and William Whiston were influential at both the Exeter and Salters' Hall Controversies.⁵⁵ Whiston and Clarke exhibit a more rational form of theological primitivism than one would find in the writings of Baxter. Furthermore, both Whiston and Clarke seem to reject classical Trinitarianism. Baxter's concern seems to have been primarily with the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases although seemingly affirming classical Trinitarianism. For Whiston and Clarke, the problem was not merely the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, but the classical doctrine of the Trinity itself.⁵⁶ Therefore, Clarke worked to undermine the doctrine by reexamining pertinent biblical texts, and Whiston sought to undermine the doctrine by demonstrating that an Athanasian view of the doctrine of the Trinity was an innovation foreign to early Christianity.⁵⁷

Whiston was, by all accounts, a brilliant student from an early age.⁵⁸ In 1686,

⁵⁵ Pfizenmaier refers to Whiston, Newton, Clarke, and those who opposed the Athanasian Creed as a standard of orthodoxy as "another kind of Dissenter." Pfizenmaier explains, "Yet there existed in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain another kind of Dissenter, and these Dissenters raised their voices privately, and some publicly, some remained within the Church of England, others were expelled. Their Dissent was centered upon the standard Athanasian formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity." Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, "Why the Third Fell Out: Trinitarian Dissent," in *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660–1832*, ed. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 17. Gibson maintains that the theological influence of Thomas Emlyn on the early eighteenth century is typically undervalued. See William Gibson, "The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn, 1703–1705," *Journal of Church and State* 48, no. 3 (2006): 525–39.

⁵⁶ Pfizenmaier argues that Whiston and Clarke's understanding of doctrine of the Trinity are distinct from one another in significant ways, which he believes better explains why Whiston was removed from his position at Cambridge, and why Clarke was able to retain his role as pastor at St. James Westminster. Pfizenmaier, "Why the Third Fell Out," 21.

⁵⁷ Philip Dixon maintains that the work of Samuel Clarke and William Whiston on the doctrine of the Trinity was a result of the influence of Isaac Newton. Of Newton, Dixon writes, "By 1672 he had become convinced that the prevailing trinitarian doctrine of three coequal persons was not the teaching of the Scriptures or the early Church . . . on the contrary the doctrine of the Trinity was a fraud perpetuated by Athanasius and a corruption of the original Apostolic preaching." Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 180; Maurice Wiles makes a similar claim with convincing evidence. See Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93.

⁵⁸ A portrait of William Whiston held by the National Portrait Gallery was painted by Sarah Hoadly (1676–1743). Sarah Hoadly was the wife of Benjamin Hoadly, Bishop of Bangor and well-known controversialist in the "Bangorian Controversy." That Sarah Hoadly painted a portrait of Whiston is even more fascinating when one considers Whiston's harsh critique of Benjamin Hoadly's acceptance of preferment in the Church of England.

he entered Clare College, Cambridge, where he graduated with a BA in 1689 and an MA in 1693. Whiston read Isaac Newton's landmark work *Principia mathematica* (1687), and the two eventually became friends. Newton's work was foundational for Whiston, not only in the realm of the natural sciences, but also in theology.⁵⁹ Whiston served first as a tutor at Cambridge but, beginning in 1709, served as professor there in Newton's place. Whiston was officially elected as professor of mathematics, replacing Newton upon his departure, in 1710. Whiston served in this role until he openly published his heretical views on the doctrine of the Trinity. He was expelled from his lectureship and the university in 1710.⁶⁰

Whiston continued to publish works on cosmography, but he also published works on the Bible and theology, frequently focusing on the doctrine of the Trinity. Dixon characterizes Whiston's views on the doctrine of the Trinity as "a form of Eusebianism," which shared Arianism's ontological subordination of the Son to the Father, but differed from Arianism in that Whiston did not deny the Son's eternity. For Whiston, the notion of three co-equal or consubstantial persons within the Godhead was inconsistent with the teachings of the earliest Christians. Whiston based this upon his belief that *The Apostolical Constitutions* was a first-century document that was representative of the earliest Christian beliefs on the doctrine of God.⁶¹ If this was the case, and Whiston certainly believed it to be, then an Athanasian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, represented by the Athanasian Creed, was a later innovation that

⁵⁹ As Wiles notes, "The fact that many of the leading Arians at the beginning of the century were also the leading scientists of the day was no coincidence. They saw a connection between their scientific work and their religious writings, and were right to do so. The revolutionary advances that were being made in scientific thought were based on the readiness to challenge older, traditional views, to take careful note of the empirical data and to reason with rigorous precision on the basis of them. It was the same basic method that these individual sought to apply to theology: they applied it to both natural and revealed theology." Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 158.

⁶⁰ Stephen D. Snobelen, "Whiston, William," in *ODNB*, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29217>.

⁶¹ Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 181.

must be rejected in order to get back to a sort of primitive Christianity. This is precisely what Whiston maintained in his massive, four-volume work *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (1711).

In *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, Whiston detailed what he believed to be the “*Athanasian Interpolation and Forgery*.”⁶² Whiston discredits Athanasius’s moral character throughout in an effort to strengthen his case for accusing Athanasius of forgery.⁶³ For Whiston, Athanasius’s character is unquestionably poor, which he reasons, calls Athanasius’s credibility into question. Yet “the Cause of Orthodoxy does so very much depend on *Athanasius’s Reputation & Reasonings*,” wrote Whiston, “that he *must* be vindicated; and all the most violent *Suspensions* in the World *must* be run down and stifled; if not by Argument and Evidence, yet by High Words and over-bearing Authority.”⁶⁴ The interpolation and forgery of which Whiston accuses Athanasius is the anathematization of the word “created” in the Nicene Creed. According to Whiston, Nicaea avoided the issue, but Athanasius inserted the word “created” in the anathemas thereby anathematizing the Arians when the Council of Nicaea had not.⁶⁵ Whiston summarizes his accusation this way:

Athanasius therefore, who affirm’d that that Council did *Anathematize* those that said our Saviour was *Created*, and who inserted that Part of their *Anathematism* into *Eusebius’s* Copy to his Diocese, and into his own and his Council’s Copy to *Jovian*, was guilty of a known and willful Falsity and Interpolation in this important Matter, and of Propagating a Notorious Forgery over the Christian World.⁶⁶

Whiston’s conclusion on the matter was that Athanasius should be rejected as an

⁶² William Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery In a Letter to Mr. Thirlby of Jesus-College in Cambridge* (London, 1712), 17.

⁶³ In a fascinating passage, Whiston essentially accuses Athanasius of hagiography in his *Life of Antony*. Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, 10.

⁶⁴ Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, 16–17.

⁶⁵ Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, 18.

⁶⁶ Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, 28.

authority on the matter, which Whiston believed would undermine the doctrine of the consubstantial Trinity.⁶⁷ This would, in turn, permit a return to what Whiston believed was the primitive doctrine of God. As Dixon rightly notes, this was considered a continuation of the Protestant Reformation which would “only be complete when the last relic of Popery, the consubstantial Trinity, was removed. Then, and only then, would the original, pristine, authentic doctrine of Christ and his Apostles prevail.”⁶⁸

Samuel Clarke’s work likely had a greater impact than Whiston’s on the Exeter and Salters’ Hall controversies.⁶⁹ Like Whiston, Clarke was also friends with Isaac Newton. Clarke’s rise in the academy and in the Church of England was meteoric. Dixon notes, “Clarke was highly regarded as a theologian and, after Locke’s death, was acclaimed as the leading metaphysician in England.”⁷⁰ Clarke’s Boyle Lectures in 1704 and 1705 were highly acclaimed. But it was Clarke’s *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) that became his most well-known work and the one that caused the most controversy. The work was clearly influential in the Exeter and Salters’ Hall controversies, as it caused ministers and students in dissenting academies to reassess the use and accuracy of extrabiblical language when considering doctrine of the Trinity.

In *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity*, Clarke considered some 1,251 texts, which he believed were nearly all of the biblical texts pertinent to doctrine of the Trinity.⁷¹ As the title of Clarke’s work suggests, the Bible, not the philosophers, should

⁶⁷ Whiston, *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery*, 29.

⁶⁸ Dixon, ‘*Nice and Hot Disputes*,’ 181.

⁶⁹ Dixon, ‘*Nice and Hot Disputes*,’ 182.

⁷⁰ Dixon, ‘*Nice and Hot Disputes*,’ 183.

⁷¹ One should not miss the importance of the fact that Clarke’s work focused primarily on pertinent biblical texts; his argument was intended to be a scriptural one. Certainly, his methodology must have had great appeal to many Protestant Dissenters. Thompson notes, “Clarke’s book was a characteristic post-Reformation attempt to prove classical Trinitarian doctrine on the basis of Scripture alone.” David M. Thompson, “Theology and the Bible,” in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 2, *The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1689–1828*, ed. Andrew C. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 319n44.

determine the Christian doctrine of God. Clarke wrote, “*The Books of Scripture* are to Us Now not only *the Rule*, but *the Whole and the Only Rule of Truth* in matters of Religion.”⁷² Furthermore, any appeal to ancient writers must be done only for the purpose of clearing up any misunderstanding one might have. Appeals to ancient writers, Clarke maintained, should never be for the purpose of “supposing that Christ has taught any thing, which, after the strictest inquiry and most careful examination, they cannot find to be delivered in his Doctrine.”⁷³ Clarke cited “the excellent *Mr Chillingworth*” with whom he agreed: “*I do not understand the Doctrine of Luther or Calvin, or Melanchthon. . . . The Bible, I say, the BIBLE only, is the Religion of Protestants. Whatsoever else they believe besides it, and the plain irrefragable, indubitable consequences of it; well may they hold it as a matter of Opinion.*”⁷⁴ Clarke’s narrative of Christian history and doctrine demonstrated his belief that Christians had moved from doctrinal simplicity and purity in the times of the apostles to unbiblical complexity, human imposition, and a lack of charity in his day.⁷⁵ What was needed, in Clarke’s estimation, was a continuation of the Reformation’s *sola Scriptura* principle and the application of that principle to the doctrine of the Trinity. That is precisely what *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* was intended to do.

Clarke’s conclusion regarding the doctrine of the Trinity was that “the true Scripture doctrine . . . lay between the extremes of tritheism and Socinianism.”⁷⁶ Contra Arianism, Clarke affirmed the eternity of the Son. He also concluded from Scripture that the Son is worthy of worship because of his unique role as mediator, not because he

⁷² Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* (London: James Knapton, 1712), v.

⁷³ Clarke, *Scripture-doctrine of Trinity*, ii.

⁷⁴ Clarke, *Scripture-doctrine of Trinity*, x–xi.

⁷⁵ Clarke, *Scripture-doctrine of Trinity*, viii–ix.

⁷⁶ Dixon, ‘*Nice and Hot Disputes*,’ 185.

was consubstantial with the Father. Accordingly, “The *reason* why the *Son* in the New Testament is sometime stiled *God*, is not so much upon Account of his *metaphysical Substance*. How Divine soever; as of his *relative Attributes* and divine *Authority* over *Us*.”⁷⁷ However Clarke’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity might be styled or categorized, he clearly affirmed the ontological subordination of the Son to the Father.

Clarke was less overt in his diminution of the Son and the Spirit than Whiston. But his work seems to have had much greater influence, which may be due in part to the overwhelming biblical data he surveyed. This feature certainly impressed James Peirce, who wondered why other theologians did not take up Clarke’s method.⁷⁸ At Exeter and Salters’ Hall there were multiple accusations that one party or another was following Dr. Clarke’s scheme. Even if one did not embrace an Arian, Socinian, or Eusebian doctrine of God after reading Whiston or Clarke, one might have still come to the conclusion that the Bible was not clear enough on the doctrine of the Trinity or that since the Bible did not use words such as consubstantial, men should not be forced to subscribe to confessions of faith that used extrabiblical words and phrases.

The Bangorian Controversy

As early as 1705 Benjamin Hoadly caught the attention of the English government and the Church of England with a sermon in opposition to the doctrine of passive obedience.⁷⁹ But it was his two successive publications in 1716 and 1717 that ignited the controversy surrounding Hoadly, Bishop of Bangor. The two works were *A Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors* (1716) and *The Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ* (1717). In both works, Hoadly opposed the

⁷⁷ Clarke, *Scripture-doctrine of Trinity*, 296.

⁷⁸ James Peirce, *The Western Inquisition: OR, A Relation of the Controversy, Which has been lately among the Dissenters in the West of England* (London, 1720), 8.

⁷⁹ P. B. Hessert, “The Bangorian Controversy” (DPhil diss., University of Edinburgh, 1951), 26.

English government's involvement in punishing its citizens for their religious beliefs. According to Hoadly, this was the realm where Christ ruled and reigned. Therefore, civil governments had no jurisdiction in this arena. As Stephen Taylor explains, "He highlighted the issue of authority and made the right of private judgment *the* distinguishing characteristic of Protestantism."⁸⁰ There was little opposition to Hoadly's ideas when they were applied strictly to the government. Hessert notes, "The application in the 'Preservative' of this proposition to the government in its deposition of James II did not provoke any extreme opposition: the theory of non-resistance was then dead in practice."⁸¹ "But when, in the sermon, he applied that same proposition to the Church he stirred a hornets' nest of opposition."⁸² Hoadly wrote critically,

But to claim a *Right* to stand in *God's* Stead, in such a Sense, that *They* with all their Infirmities, and *Prejudices*, and *Mistakes*, about Them, can absolutely and certainly, *Bless* some, or with-hold a *Blessing* from *Others*; and that *God Almighty*, hath obliged *Himself* to *Bless*, or *not to Bless*, with their *Voice* alone: this is the *Highest Absurdity*, as it puts a *Power*, which nothing but *Infallibility* can support, into the Hands of *Men*, remaining Weak, and Fallible; and, as I think, the *Highest Blasphemy*, as it supposeth *Almighty God*, to place a *Sett of Men* above *Himself*, and to put out of his own Hands, the disposal of his own *Blessings* and *Curses*.⁸³

For Hoadly, only God could punish a man for his theological beliefs.

Yet there was more at stake in the Bangorian controversy than Hoadly's claim that the magistrate should not punish citizens for their theological beliefs. As in Whiston and Clarke, there was an emphasis not only on the role of the magistrate in theological matters, but also a rejection of a confessional interpretation of Scripture. In his extensive study on the controversy, Starkie concludes that the Bangorian Controversy was not

⁸⁰ Stephen Taylor, "Hoadly, Benjamin," in *ODNB*, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13375>.

⁸¹ Hessert, "The Bangorian Controversy," 33.

⁸² Hessert, "The Bangorian Controversy," 33.

⁸³ Benjamin Hoadly, *The Works of Benjamin Hoadly, D. D.*, ed. John Hoadly (London: John Hoadly, 1773), 1:593.

“primarily” about “the relationship between the church and the state.”⁸⁴ “Nor was it primarily about religious toleration”; according to Starkie, “The question at issue was what kind of church the established church was. The Bangorian controversy was about ecclesiology . . . understood as a branch of dogmatic theology, not as a theory of management.”⁸⁵ One should not miss, however, the emphasis in the controversy upon a rejection of dogmatic theology, which was related to religious toleration for Dissenters. The Bangorian Controversy was certainly viewed this way by the Anglican Thomas Lewis in his assessment of the Exeter and Salters’ Hall Controversies in *The Anatomy of a Heretical Synod of Dissenters at Salters-Hall* (1719). Lewis wrote concerning James Peirce’s notion that “no religious Test is to be subscrib’d to, but what is express’d in the Words of Scripture”:

This is a right *Levelling Independent* Principle, and I congratulate the Bishop of B[angor] and his Admirers upon the Compliment, as the Patrons and Promoters of it: A Freedom from *Impositions* and an Universal *Liberty* was formerly the *Cry*; and what was the Event, but such a Spawn of rank detestible *Heresies*, such scandalous *Immoralities*, such a Complication of horrid *Villanies*, that were quite unheard of before.⁸⁶

For Lewis, there was a direct connection between the claims made for religious toleration at Exeter, Salters’ Hall, and the Bangorian Controversy.

James Peirce, who was the central figure in the Exeter Controversy, also understood the Bangorian Controversy to be primarily about religious toleration. Andrew Snape, one of Hoadly’s greatest opponents in the Bangorian Controversy, had invoked James Peirce’s name (as well as Edmund Calamy and Thomas Bradbury) for not coming to the defense of John Calvin when Hoadly had cast aspersions upon Calvin. Peirce’s

⁸⁴ Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716–1721* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2007), 190–91.

⁸⁵ Starkie, *Church of England and Bangorian Controversy*, 190–91.

⁸⁶ Thomas Lewis, *The Anatomy of a Heretical Synod of Dissenters at Salters-Hall*, 2nd ed. (London: Charles Rivington, 1719), 8, 10.

response was telling for it not only showed where Peirce stood on that controversy, but it also encapsulated Peirce's views on matters relating to toleration, subscription, and the authority of confessions, creeds, and councils in general. Regarding Calvin, Peirce replied that he had no interest in or need to defend Calvin on every point of doctrine. Peirce wrote, "We esteem him as an excellent person, but yet a fallible one; and never pretend to undertake the defence of any thing merely because he said it or did it."⁸⁷ Peirce continued, "We follow him, as far as we perceive he followed Christ; and we leave him, where we think he left that great pattern. . . . is there no possibility of valuing a man, without making an oracle of him?"⁸⁸ Peirce's view of external human authority in the interpretation of Scripture extended well beyond Calvin. For Peirce, it was "high time to discard all uncertain and fallible authorities, and to depend upon plain reason and scripture."⁸⁹

Peirce was also not hesitant to take sides in the controversy. Snape had wanted Peirce, Calamy, Bradbury, and others to side with him against Hoadly. For Peirce, however, to side with Snape was to stand against himself and in favor of persecution. It was Hoadly, Peirce averred, who had "laid the ax to the root of persecution."⁹⁰ Therefore, Peirce did not disguise his position in the matter when he provocatively wrote, "Assure yourself, Sir, when such admirable pens, as those of the Bishop of *Bangor*, Dr. *Whitby*, Mr. *Sykes*, Mr. *Burnet*, and Mr. *Pyle*, are employ'd in the defence of that truth They will never meet with any discouragement from us, while we are in our sense. May they

⁸⁷ James Peirce, *The Dissenters Reasons for not writing in behalf of Persecution. Design'd For the satisfaction of Dr. Snape in A Letter to Him*, 3rd ed. (London: John Clark, 1718), 28.

⁸⁸ Peirce, *Dissenters Reasons*, 28–29.

⁸⁹ Peirce, *Dissenters Reasons*, 29.

⁹⁰ Peirce, *Dissenters Reasons*, 24.

still go on, and prosper.”⁹¹ As if his stance had not been strong enough, Peirce went on to add:

We rejoice to see the foundations shaken and the fabric sinking, as we never doubted but it would sometime or other. We are pleased to see . . . you begin to cry out for help. And believe it, we will not, at this time of day, abandon a noble principle which we have always held, either to gratify your persecuting humour, or even to secure the reputation of our much admir'd *Calvin*.⁹²

Peirce rejoiced at the potential downfall of Snape's ideology in the Bangorian Controversy. He constantly maintained the right of the individual to interpret Scripture in accordance with conscience and without the imposition of any human authority, ancient or modern. All the while, Peirce claimed to be following the Reformation's *sola Scriptura* principle. Many of these same themes would come to the fore in the Exeter Controversy as well.

Moses Lowman, who was numbered among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, also engaged in the Bangorian Controversy through the publication of a couple of works. According to Ruston, Lowman became assistant minister at the Presbyterian Chapel at Grafton Square, Clapham, in 1710, and then the pastor in 1714. Lowman remained there as pastor until his death in 1752.⁹³ Lowman wrote twice in defense of the dissenting cause in 1718 in response to Sherlock, one of Hoadley's fiercest opponents.⁹⁴ Lowman was likely a regular contributor to the *Occasional Paper*, which was intensely focused on the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.⁹⁵ He entered the controversy only

⁹¹ Peirce, *Dissenters Reasons*, 25.

⁹² Peirce, *Dissenters Reasons*, 30.

⁹³ Alan Ruston, "Lowman, Moses," in *ODNB*, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17097>.

⁹⁴ Moses Lowman, *A Defence of the Protestant Dissenters in Answer to the Misrepresentations of Dr. Sherlock, in his vindication of the Corporation and Test Acts* (London: John Clark, 1718); Lowman, *The Principles of An Occasional Conformist, Stated and Defended* (London: John Clark, 1718).

⁹⁵ Andrew C. Thompson, "Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment in Early Hanoverian Britain," *Historical Journal* 45, no. 2 (2002): 336.

because Sherlock had invoked the names of several Dissenters, including James Peirce, and had characterized them as a grave danger to both the church and the government.⁹⁶ Lowman utterly rejected such a notion. He asked, “How then can it hurt the Peace of any, who upon this Principle [of opposition to imposition in religious matters], must peaceably enjoy their own Opinions and Practice?”⁹⁷ Lowman sought to defend the interest of Dissenters against what he believed to be any form of human imposition, which might provide some insight as to why he sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall.

MP John Shute Barrington, a known defender of dissenting interests in parliament, was also involved in the Bangorian Controversy as well as the Exeter and Salters’ Hall Controversies. He was likely the author of *The Layman’s Letters to the Bishop of Bangor* (1716). In it, the author considered at length the arguments of the Nonjurors in the controversy, but ultimately praised Hoadly for his defense of religious toleration and English subjects’ ability to resist the imposition of any doctrine that could not be found in Scripture. Furthermore, the author contended that the Nonjurors’ notions of civil obedience are mistaken. One must not communicate with the Church of England in order to be a loyal citizen of England and a devoted servant of the monarchy. The author maintained, seemingly in agreement with Hoadly, that “a true member of the Church of *England*, a Nonconformist who will hazard his Life and Fortune for his King and Country, is more of the Church of *England* than he who communicates with it, and is ready to destroy it.”⁹⁸ In sum, the author argues against the doctrinal infallibility of Bishops and the Church of England in order to defend the dissenting cause with an eye towards the repeal of penal laws targeting Dissenters. This political element certainly played some role in the Salters’ Hall Controversy, in which Barrington played a key role.

⁹⁶ Lowman, *Defence*, 4.

⁹⁷ Lowman, *Defence*, 25.

⁹⁸ *The Layman’s Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Roberts, 1716), 43.

James Peirce, Joseph Hallet, and the Exeter Controversy

By his own account, James Peirce held a classical understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity until sometime around 1713.⁹⁹ In retrospect, Peirce believed that he had been “bred up in a scheme, of which I can now make nothing else but *Sabellianism*.”¹⁰⁰ When Peirce first heard about the writings of Whiston and Clarke, he avoided reading them, but discussion of them was “very much increasing” until he encountered a friend who “reproach’d” him for his “sloth.”¹⁰¹ So Peirce purchased Clarke’s *Scripture-doctrine* and Whiston’s works and began to read them. He was mesmerized by Clarke’s method of Scripture citation, and finally “saw clearly” that he “must depart with some beloved opinions, or else quit” his “notion of the authority of the holy scriptures.”¹⁰² Peirce committed to read the Bible more carefully, and concluded that the classical doctrine of the Trinity was not taught clearly enough in the Bible to be made “a fundamental article of the Christian faith.”¹⁰³

Peirce soon became concerned about some practical matters related to his new beliefs. If he rejected the consubstantial Trinity, or at least did not think it expressly taught in Scripture, then his prayer and his preaching must be altered as well. Peirce’s solution was to resort almost exclusively to scriptural words.¹⁰⁴ This led Peirce to eliminate the doxology he had formerly used at the end of his prayers. Of course, this all came to a head in time after Peirce was unanimously chosen to serve three dissenting congregations in Exeter in 1713.¹⁰⁵ By the time that Peirce accepted this position, he had

⁹⁹ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 8.

¹⁰² Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 8.

¹⁰³ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Bogue and Bennett, note Peirce’s embracing heterodox views prior to moving to Exeter,

already ceased using the doxology in prayer and had become “thoroughly convinc’d that the common doctrine was not according to the scriptures.”¹⁰⁶ Consequently, according to Peirce, he never used the doxology in his prayers at Exeter and committed to only speak of the doctrine of the Trinity in scriptural terms.

The controversy at Exeter began in 1716 when concerns arose over Hubert Stogdon’s theology of the Trinity.¹⁰⁷ Stogdon had been educated in Exeter at Joseph Hallet’s academy.¹⁰⁸ In November 1716, Stogdon openly confessed to John Lavington, the youngest minister in Exeter, that he had come to affirm Samuel Clarke’s “new scheme” on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁰⁹ Clarke’s scheme had come to prominence in 1712 with the publication of *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity*. Whiston’s works *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery* (1712) and *Primitive Christianity Reviv’d* (1712) appeared in print the same year as Clarke’s seminal work, and their influence had been noted in Exeter. One Exeter citizen wrote, “Upon the coming out of Mr. *Whiston’s* Books, these new Notions about the *Trinity*, were toss’d about by Mr. *Hallet’s* Academicks, with too much Fondness.”¹¹⁰ The people of Exeter were convinced that Hallet’s academy was to blame for the spread of heterodoxy there, and likely would have shared Bogue and Bennett’s assessment: “The students of Mr. Hallet, had Whiston’s and Clarke’s books put into their hands as masterpieces of theological skill; and while they should have been

and state concerning Peirce’s difficulties there: “If Mr. Peirce was made to drink the cup of wormwood and gall, he had himself alone to blame for disingenuously professing to be what he was not [an orthodox Trinitarian].” Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:232.

¹⁰⁶ Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ In a letter dated October 29, 1717, Stogdon wrote to Samuel Clarke: “Ten thousand thanks to you for the benefit I have received from the incomparable work, your *Scripture-doctrine*: and it has in great measure delivered me from the fetters which prejudice, education and tradition had thrown on my reason and understanding.” Stogdon, quoted in Thomas, “Presbyterians in Transition,” 156n2.

¹⁰⁸ Allan Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter 1650–1875* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1962), 80.

¹⁰⁹ Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter*, 80.

¹¹⁰ *An Account of the Reasons Why Many Citizens of Exon Have Withdrawn from the Ministry of Mr. Jos. Hallet and Mr. James Peirce* (Exon, England: Jos. Bliss, 1719), 4.

applying their minds to the study of the great doctrines of the Gospel, they were amusing themselves with those pernicious speculations, and poisoning their souls with the arian heresy.”¹¹¹

Hallet and Peirce came under suspicion for heterodoxy as well. Peirce and Hallet, apparently aware of Stogdon’s heterodox views, sent him off to a neighboring county with a letter of recommendation for his ordination to the ministry. The letter was dated July 15, 1717, and it included the name of John Withers who was also a minister in Exeter. Their recommendation for Stogdon’s ordination was a source of great tension between Hallet, Peirce, Withers, and many of their congregants. Another source of consternation was Peirce’s refusal to include the doxology giving “Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as One God” at “the close of the Psalm or Hymn.” Peirce refused to continue this practice, believing that it was unscriptural.¹¹² The cumulative effect being that many of the citizens of Exeter began to not only be concerned about the spread of heterodoxy among their youth, but they also began to question the orthodoxy of their ministers.

By January 1718, a standing “Committee of Thirteen” along with a few other citizens of Exeter went to their ministers and requested that they defend the deity of Christ in a sermon.¹¹³ In September 1718, at an assembly of the United Ministers of

¹¹¹ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:233. It should also be noted that those who embraced the new scheme “began to boast of their *Numbers*, and of their *Strength* among the *Ministers*, even defying the Assembly to take Cognizance of it.” *Account of the Reasons*, 5. Powicke noted that, according to John Fox, some of the students at Hallet’s academy “had read and talked themselves into something like Arianism even before Mr. Peirce came in 1713, the tutor’s son [Joseph Hallet, Jr.] being their leader.” Fred J. Powicke, “Arianism and the Exeter Assembly,” *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 7, no. 1 (1916): 42.

¹¹² *Account of the Reasons*, 6.

¹¹³ *Account of the Reasons*, 5. The Committee of Thirteen consisted of James White, Samuel Munckly, Benjamin Brinley, Francis Lydston, Henry Walrond, Anthony Vicary, John Stephens, Edmond Cock, Mark Burridg, Thomas Jeffery, John Vowler, John Pym, and Jerome King. See *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Differences among the Dissenters at Exeter Relating to the Doctrine of the Ever Blessed Trinity, So far as gave Concern to some of the London Ministers* (London: John Clark, 1719), 22–23. Jerome King is not listed in a *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, according to Brockett, because he had recently died. See Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter*, 89.

Devon and Cornwall, each of the ministers present stood and professed his belief in the doctrine of the Trinity in his own words. It was the “General Sence of the *Assembly, That there is but One God; and that the Father, word and Holy Spirit is that One God.*”¹¹⁴ Yet, as Brockett explains, “Peirce openly declared his belief in the subordination of Son and Holy Ghost to God the Father, the first time he had done this in public.”¹¹⁵ The Committee of Thirteen met with Hallet, Lavington, Peirce, and Withers in November 1718 in order to ascertain their beliefs on the doctrine of the Trinity. The ministers were asked to affirm either the “general sense” of the previous assembly meeting, the answer to the Fifth and Sixth Questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, or the First article of the Church of England. The Committee of Thirteen noted, “But we had no satisfaction to either of the said Proposals from three of our four Ministers; but instead thereof one of them expressly declared for a Subordination.”¹¹⁶ Almost certainly, Lavington had complied while Hallet, Peirce, and Withers did not.¹¹⁷ Peirce likely was the one who openly declared his belief in the subordination of the Son and the Spirit.

A neighboring minister, John Walrond of Ottery, had sent a letter to William Tong, pastor at Salters’ Hall, in the summer of 1718. In the letter he expressed his concern about the spread of Arianism at Exeter. The Committee of Thirteen, having made their concerns known to several neighboring ministers, including Walrond, would eventually appeal to some of the ministers in London themselves. But Walrond’s letter is important because in it Walrond not only conveyed his concerns about Exeter, but also stated that it was his understanding that Arianism has spread among the London ministers

¹¹⁴ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 5; Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter*, 87.

¹¹⁵ Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter*, 87. It is somewhat unclear whether this occurred at the assembly meeting in September, or at a later meeting between Peirce and the Committee of Thirteen in November, 1718. *Account of the Reasons* seems to state the latter. See *Account of the Reasons*, 6.

¹¹⁶ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 21–22.

¹¹⁷ Withers later affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity. Brockett, *Non-Conformity in Exeter*, 93.

as well.¹¹⁸ Tong thought the contents of the letter so important that he gathered twenty-five ministers to meet at Salters' Hall to discuss the letter and draft a response. Their response, which was premised upon how they would respond "if ever we should be called that ungrateful Task," included five recommendations. First, "not to suspect any among us to be infected with these Errors unless we have good Ground." Second, "not to be harsh or hasty with those that are doubtful and wavering, but to give them Time and what Assistance we can for their better Information and Establishment." Third, "to represent to them faithfully and seriously the great Danger of denying the proper Godhead of *Christ* and of the *Holy Ghost*, and the malignant Influence it must have into the very Vitals of the Christian State and Worship." Fourth, that those who maintain such errors will not be recommended "to the Office of the Ministry by Ordination." Fifth, "if any already in the Ministry shall fall into that pernicious Error, and persist in it, and teach Men so, it will become our Duty, as we have Opportunity, to warn People of them."¹¹⁹ Many of the ministers present at this meeting, which preceded the infamous meetings at Salters' Hall by approximately six months, were listed among the Subscribers in 1719.¹²⁰ At this point, however, they do not recommend subscription to those at Exeter.

The Committee of Thirteen at Exeter also appealed to London ministers on November 22, 1718.¹²¹ The reply from London did not arrive until January 6, 1719, and included the names of Edmund Calamy, Jeremiah Smith, William Tong, Benjamin Robinson, and Thomas Reynolds.¹²² The recommendation from London at that time was

¹¹⁸ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 9.

¹¹⁹ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 11–12.

¹²⁰ It is worth noting that in these initial recommendations which were affirmed by twenty-five ministers, many of whom went on to be Subscribers in the Salters' Hall Controversy the next year, they did not recommend subscription to a confession of faith. If the "Mr. Hunt" who is a signatory, is in fact Jeremiah Hunt of Pinners' Hall, then he is the lone Non-subscriber present at this meeting.

¹²¹ Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, 89.

¹²² Each of these men, Calamy excluded, were Subscribers at the Salters' Hall Controversy.

for neighboring ministers to be brought in to help advise.¹²³ They concluded that there are some theological errors so serious in nature that churches are justified in withdrawing from their ministers if they hold such views. Furthermore, they maintained that denying the consubstantial deity of Christ was in opposition to Scripture and the “common Faith of the reformed Churches.” And finally, that it is the duty of ministers to oppose dangerous errors and “give reasonable satisfaction” of their own theological soundness.¹²⁴

It was at this point that James Peirce appealed to his London friend and member of Parliament, John Shute Barrington, a well-known defender of Dissenting interests. A bill had been introduced in December 1718 by Lord Stanhope that, if passed, would repeal the Schism Act of 1714. Barrington was concerned that the Trinitarian controversy in Exeter might hinder the passage of the bill.¹²⁵ Barrington had good reason to be concerned since Peirce had been directly referenced in December of 1718, in the House of Commons as denying the doctrine of the Trinity.¹²⁶ As Wykes notes, “The identification of one of the most widely known defenders of Dissent as denying the Trinity was immensely damaging, for it could be said Dissenters not only opposed the Anglican Church order, but were a threat to Christianity itself.”¹²⁷ Consequently, Barrington put together a set of advices in order to keep the peace in Exeter, and put them

¹²³ Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, 89. These ministers were John Ball of Honinton, William Horsham of Topsham, Samuel Hall and John Moore of Tiverton, John Walrond of Ottery, Josiah Eveleigh of Crediton, and Joseph Manston of Lympstone.

¹²⁴ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 27–28.

¹²⁵ Roger Thomas notes, “Introduced to the House of Lords on 13 December, it received the Royal assent on 18 February, the day before the first meeting at Salters’ Hall.” See Roger Thomas, “Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters’ Hall Debate,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4, no. 2 (October 1953): 168n3.

¹²⁶ David L. Wykes, “Religious Dissent, the Church, and the Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, 1714–1719,” in Cornwall and Gibson, *Religion, Politics and Dissent*, 177–78.

¹²⁷ Wykes, “Religious Dissent,” 178.

before “an unofficial committee of ministers and gentlemen on 5 February.”¹²⁸ The advices then went before the Committee of the General Body of the Three Denominations, which approved the advices after debate and some changes. It was then decided by the Committee to put the advices before the gathered body of London ministers of the Three Denominations. The intended goal, according to Calamy, was to add weight to the final decision.¹²⁹ This ultimately led to the infamous meetings at Salters’ Hall.¹³⁰

Thomas Lewis, in his assessment of Salters’ Hall also took the occasion to impugn the methodology of James Peirce’s use of only biblical terms:

Under the Umbrage of the *Bible* Mr. *Pierce* lyes snug, and hatches *Heresie* out of the Words of Scripture it self; and by this means he *sobs* the Oracles of *Hell* upon his Audience, instead of the Doctrine of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and *Texts* his Congregation with *Chapter* and *Verse*, into the Ways of Destruction: He baits his *Traps* with the *Parings* of Scripture, and the *Fragments* of Religion, and uses the Word of God as Men do their *Tobacco*, he *chews* it without the Grace of *Digestion*, and *spits* it out again.¹³¹

It would be difficult to accuse Peirce of deception, for he was rather open about newfound beliefs. But Lewis was likely correct in his assessment that resorting to only using scriptural language to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity could serve as a disguise for heterodox theology.

¹²⁸ Thomas, “Non-Subscription Controversy,” 170.

¹²⁹ Thomas, “Non-Subscription Controversy,” 171.

¹³⁰ The matter in Exeter continued even after the appeal to the London ministers moved to the larger Body of Three Denominations. In May 1719, at a meeting of the United Brethren of Exon and Devon, the majority of the ministers gathered went beyond the action of the Subscribers at Salters’ Hall by subscribing to three declaration on the doctrine of the Trinity: the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the answers to the Fifth and Sixth Answers to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the “September formula,” which was the “general sense” regarding the doctrine of the Trinity among those gathered. Powicke further noted that “strict orthodoxy,” from 1719 until 1753, “became the *sine qua non* of ordination” within this association. Circumstances changed in 1753 when Micaiah Towgood of Exeter led the assembly to no longer require a confession of the consubstantial Trinity. See Powicke, “Arianism and Exeter Assembly,” 36–38.

¹³¹ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 7.

Conclusion

By the time the Three Denominations met in February of 1719 to consider sending advice to Exeter, a variety of factors were already at play that created ideological divides as well as theological and political concerns. Historically, the failed Happy Union, the Bangorian Controversy, and the Exeter Controversy served as the backdrop of the meetings at Salters' Hall.¹³² Inextricably linked to those events and controversies were issues related to religious toleration and the requirement of subscription to confessions of faiths and creeds as seen in Chillingworth and Baxter, with Baxter representing an orthodox non-subscriptionism. The theological writings of Whiston, Clarke, and others, which had clearly been embraced by some at Exeter, created concerns that some of the ministers in London had also imbibed Whiston's sentiments and Clarke's scheme. At play also for several years leading up to 1719, and in the months just prior to the February meeting, were political concerns about religious toleration in general and the repeal of the Schism Act of 1714 in particular. In sum, there were a variety of theological, philosophical, and political tributaries that flowed into the meetings at Salters' Hall. These factors led the men present at the Salters' Hall meetings to respond to the events in various ways, deeming certain actions more necessary than others. Some of the men were concerned to demonstrate their orthodoxy. Others were primarily interested in maintaining religious liberty. Certainly, some who held heterodox beliefs on the doctrine of the Trinity concealed their heterodoxy behind an opposition to the extrabiblical words and phrases contained in confessions of faith and creeds.¹³³ Each

¹³² Another cause for concern might have been the resignation of Martin Tomkins, who resigned from his congregation at Stoke-Newington due to accusations of heterodoxy. See Martin Tomkins, *The Case of Mr. Martin Tomkins. Being an Account of the Proceedings of the Dissenting Congregation at Stoke-Newington, Upon Occasion of a Sermon Preach'd by Him July 13, 1718* (London: John Clark, 1719); J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1913), 53.

¹³³ On May 6, 1719, after the meetings at Salters' Hall, Peirce, Hallet, and Hallet Jr., along with some other ministers, subscribed a document rejecting the charge of Arianism. Powicke, "Arianism and Exeter Assembly," 41.

of these factors, however, must be taken into account in order to properly interpret what occurred in the spring of 1719 at Salters' Hall.

CHAPTER 3

RECONSTRUCTING SALTERS' HALL

The meeting at Salters' Hall, consisting of Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists was convened in order to help solve a controversy. But the meetings at Salters' Hall became a controversy of its own as the ministers in London were divided on how to respond to the issue in Exeter. Their division did not fall solely along denominational lines. The Baptists, Presbyterians, and Independents were divided on this: whether or not ministers ought to be required to subscribe to extrabiblical words and phrases delineating the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly when a minister's orthodoxy might be in doubt. Fifty-seven of the ministers there were opposed to requiring subscription. Fifty-three ministers were in favor of this requirement, and of recommending it to those in Exeter.¹ The two parties, who became known as "Subscribers" and "Non-subscribers," sent two separate sets of advices to Exeter.² Neither group's advice had any influence in Exeter, as it arrived after a decision had already been made to remove the pastors in question there.³ A newspaper and pamphlet war quickly ensued as members of each party sought to not only declare their orthodoxy, but also to provide their account and interpretation of what had occurred at Salters' Hall.⁴

¹ To add greater clarity, those convened at Salters' Hall disagreed about whether or not they should subscribe to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Fifth and Sixth Answers to the Westminster Shorter Catechism themselves to demonstrate their orthodoxy to those in Exeter, as well as those within the Church of England who might have called their orthodoxy into question.

² By the time that the advices were sent to Exeter, the number of Subscribers had grown to 78 and the number of Non-subscribers had grown to 73.

³ Their advices likely would not have had much influence even if they had arrived on time since the Exeter Presbyterians were appalled by the involvement of "Anabaptists" at the Salters' Hall meetings.

⁴ Even the bookseller John Clark could not remain free from accusation. He was accused of being money-hungry and implored to pick a side. The accusation came because Clark printed books and

A simple survey of the primary source material that came out of the Salters' Hall Controversy reveals that already in 1719 there were disagreements as to how to interpret the events. Was the issue at hand subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases? Or, was opposition to subscription a thinly veiled disguise for anti-Trinitarianism? These are the questions that this chapter seeks to answer. In order to answer them there are several items that must be taken into account. First, the Exeter Controversy serves as the immediate background to the controversy in London. Second, it is necessary to briefly recount the proceedings at Salters' Hall before interpreting them. In order to do so, one must have some understanding of the political setting just prior to the 1719 meetings. Third, one must take into consideration some of the earliest accounts of Salters' Hall, particularly the accounts of the revered ministers Edmund Calamy, a Presbyterian who abstained from the controversy, and Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist Subscriber at Salters' Hall.⁵ The views of Isaac Watts and Thomas Lewis will also be considered. Fourth, it must be noted that there is an orthodox, non-subscribing tradition among the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians connected to Thomas Grantham and Richard Baxter respectively. In the end, it can reasonably be concluded that even if there were a few anti-Trinitarians among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, many were opposed to the additional requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases—not the doctrine of the Trinity.

pamphlets on both sides of the controversy. See *A Letter to Mr. John Clark, Bookseller; Upon His Printing on both Sides in the present Debates among the Dissenting Ministers* (London: T. Cox, 1719).

⁵ Wykes rightly claims that those who might have served as a unifying force were absent from the meetings. Calamy refused to attend the meetings even when his attendance was requested. Thomas Hollis Sr. and Benjamin Stinton had died prior to the controversy. The primary figures left to lead the two parties were the bitter opponents Bradbury and Barrington, and neither man could be accurately described as a statesman. David L. Wykes, "The 1719 Salters' Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent," in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 57. Along these lines, Drysdale commented, "Some of the most eminent of the London ministers who were summoned to Salters' Hall Synod refused to go, and declined to interfere as judges in the Exeter disputes; assured, as things then stood, that their interference would only result in increased bitterness and divisions." A. H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline, and Revival* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1889), 503.

The Salters' Hall Controversy is a complex episode in a transitional period in English Dissent at the turn of the eighteenth century. The General Baptists demonstrate this well. It is often highlighted when analyzing Salters' Hall that all but one General Baptist, Abraham Mulliner, opposed subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet there is great difficulty in determining precisely why the majority of the General Baptists were opposed to subscription. Did these General Baptist Non-subscribers have qualms about the doctrine of the Trinity itself? Or, were they merely opposed to subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases? Might it have been some sort of combination of the two? In essence, why did nearly all of the General Baptists present at Salters' Hall side with the non-subscribing party in opposition to subscription to a declaration on the doctrine of the Trinity?

A simplistic understanding of Salters' Hall and English General Baptist history might lead one to interpret their non-subscription as a sign of their rejection of the Trinity. After all, the General Assembly of General Baptists had received multiple accusations over several decades of Matthew Caffyn holding a heterodox Christology. Surely this might have some bearing on how one interprets Salters' Hall. To this it might be added that the General Baptists in some regions did tend towards theological decline, particularly on the doctrine of the Trinity, in the decades following Salters' Hall. Again, this could be significant for understanding their non-subscription. Yet are the Caffyn controversy and some General Baptists' later inclinations towards heterodoxy sufficient cause for interpreting the events at Salters' Hall as a demonstration of heterodoxy? A reappraisal of Salters' Hall, and the English General Baptists, for example, seems to indicate that such a simplistic interpretation is untenable.⁶

⁶ There were two divergent streams among the General Baptists on the issue of subscription. Thomas Monck and the Midlands General Baptists seemed to favor a strict orthodoxy that employed the language of the ecumenical creeds. This approach seems to have also been favored by the General Association, which split from the General Assembly over the controversy surrounding Matthew Caffyn. When the two groups attempted to reunite in 1704/5, it was on the basis of a more creedal approach to defending orthodoxy. See Clint C. Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 51–71. By 1719, however, nearly all of the General Baptists at Salters' Hall favored non-

Furthermore, as Stephen Copson has insightfully noted, “There is a great regional diversity in eighteenth-century England.”⁷ This is pertinent to Salters’ Hall as the General Baptists present there, who were primarily from London and some of whom were not regularly involved in the General Assembly or the General Association, may not be representative of General Baptists throughout England. If some of the General Baptists present at Salters’ Hall are not representative of the group as whole, and if there is diversity among the General Baptists in the early eighteenth century, then it is worth asking, “Can historians be guilty of projecting back a national and consistent character for General Baptists at this period?”⁸ Clint C. Bass argues something akin to this regarding the Caffyn controversy:

A small group of Melchiorites were present among the General Baptists for much of the latter seventeenth century, but this group remained small and was, for the most part, limited to the southeastern counties of Kent and Sussex. Grantham and most General Baptists upheld an orthodox understanding of the Godhead. . . . The tendency to magnify the Caffyn controversy has led to misrepresentation. The vast majority of General Baptists in the latter seventeenth century were not Arians, let alone Socinians, nor was mere head knowledge or the sovereignty of reason the driving force behind their doctrine. Their theology was not characterized by detached speculation, but rather, it required a full surrendering of their person, consuming their whole lives, both their minds and their emotions, as they sought to discover what the scriptures had to say. Their theological approach was one that was still largely characterized by their Puritan roots.⁹

These suggestions by Copson and Bass should be considered. Have historians magnified the Caffyn controversy to the point of misrepresentation? Also, have historians read later

subscription, seemingly in opposition to the legacy of Monck and Joseph Hooke’s adamant defense of confessional Christianity that employed creedal language. For a further discussion of these “two divergent steams” among the General Baptists, see Jesse F. Owens, “Salters’ Hall and the English General Baptists: A Reappraisal,” in Copson, *Trinity, Creed, and Confusion*, 81–85. For a discussion of Monck’s creedal defense of orthodox Christology, see Jesse F. Owens, “Matthew Caffyn, Thomas Monck, and English General Baptist Creedalism,” *Criswell Theological Review* (forthcoming).

⁷ Stephen Copson, “Stodgdon, Foster, and Bulkeley: Variations on an Eighteenth-Century Theme,” in *Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Baptist Life and Thought*, ed. John H. Y. Briggs (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 56.

⁸ Copson, “Stodgdon, Foster, and Bulkeley,” 56.

⁹ Clint C. Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633–1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2013), 213.

theological developments among the General Baptists back into the early eighteenth century? It certainly seems that the Caffyn controversy and later theological heterodoxy among some General Baptists have been applied to the group as a whole, which could tend to skew one's interpretation of Salters' Hall. This is merely one example of the complexity of interpreting Salters' Hall. Further examples will be considered below.

The Dates

There are seven key dates for understanding the Salters' Hall Controversy, each occurring between February and April of 1719. February 19 was the first official meeting at Salters' Hall when "the *Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers* in, and about, *London*, were called together, to consider a Paper, containing *Advices for promoting Peace, &c.* Which Paper was recommended to them by their *Committee of Three Denominations.*"¹⁰ As the previous quote notes, the advices set before the entire London body had been put forth by a committee representing the three denominations. The ministers present on February 19 agreed to consider this set of advices paragraph by paragraph.

February 24 was the second meeting at Salters' Hall, "at which Time the Names of all present were set down and then called over one by one; each *Denomination* being to approve or disapprove of such as were reputed to belong to them."¹¹ After the advices were debated for several hours it was agreed upon by a majority vote of fifty-seven to fifty-three "that a *Declaration concerning the Trinity should not be inserted in the Paper of Advices.*"¹² As Joseph Jekyl, a somewhat biased observer, interpreted the outcome, "The Bible carried it by four."¹³

¹⁰ *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and agreed upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately assembled at Salters-Hall* (London: John Clark, 1719), 18.

¹¹ *Authentick Account*, 18.

¹² *Authentick Account*, 18–19.

¹³ William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Whiston* (London, 1749),

The third meeting at Salters' Hall, which resulted in the division of Subscribers and Non-subscribers, occurred on March 3. The issue of inserting a declaration concerning the doctrine of the Trinity was revived at this meeting even though it had been at least temporarily set aside in order to finish going through the advices.¹⁴ The group in favor of inserting the declaration, which would ultimately be identified as the Subscribers, was not satisfied with the proceedings.¹⁵ Therefore, "Instead of this, they withdrew from our Assembly, and went *by themselves*, to subscribe their Names to a certain *Roll of Paper*, wherein was contain'd (as we were told) the *first Article* of the *Church of England*, and the 5th and 6th *Answers* in the *Assembly's Catechism*."¹⁶ In a more colorful, but potentially apocryphal account, it is claimed that during this verbal scuffle someone shouted: "*You that are against Persecution, come up Stairs!* Which was pretty evenly balanced by one on the other side, calling out, *You that are for the Doctrine of the Trinity, stay below!*"¹⁷ The Non-subscribers continued to meet, with Joshua Oldfield continuing to moderate, and consider the advices while the Subscribers

220.

¹⁴ Bogue and Bennett argue that the matter was no longer about inserting a declaration on the doctrine of the Trinity into the advices, but on a separate declaration altogether of each minister's personal affirmation of the doctrine. See David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, From the Revolution In 1688, To The Year 1808* (London: Printed for the authors, 1810), 3:227.

¹⁵ According to Daniel Wilcox's account, the Non-subscribers, who had opposed the insertion of a declaration of faith on the doctrine of the Trinity at the previous meeting, were upset that some of the ministers present had treated them as if they were against the doctrine itself. To which those in favor of it replied that the suspicion could be immediately removed if they would subscribe a declaration of faith at that moment before any other proceedings in business. Wilcox maintains that First Article of the Church of England and the Fifth and Sixth Questions of the Assembly's Catechism were recommended. It was at this time that the "Subscribers" went up into the gallery and subscribed while the rest remained below. See Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719), 6–9.

¹⁶ *Authentick Account*, 19. The page is mistakenly numbered "16" in some copies of *Authentick Account*.

¹⁷ *An Account of the late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salters-Hall* (London: J. Roberts, 1719), 10. The second call for those in favor of the doctrine of the Trinity to stay below was apparently made by Thomas Bradbury. Roger Thomas, "Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: The Salters' Hall Debate," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4, no. 2 (October 1953): 174n1. There is some disagreement about who went up and who remained below. According to Bradbury's own account, those who withdrew—that is, the Subscribers—went up. See Thomas Bradbury, *An Answer to the Reproaches Cast on Those Dissenting Ministers Who subscrib'd their Belief of the Eternal Trinity. In a Letter to John Barrington-Shute, Esq* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719), 15.

apparently withdrew.¹⁸ Following the March 3 meeting the two groups never met together again.¹⁹

On March 9 the Subscribers met to finalize their advices, which were to be sent to Exeter. The Non-subscribers met for the same purpose on the very next day, March 10. The Non-subscribers' advices to Exeter were dated March 17, but the Subscribers' advices were dated April 7. Both sets of advices arrived too late as a decision had already been made in Exeter.²⁰ James Peirce and Joseph Hallet had been locked out of their churches by the Exeter Committee of Thirteen on March 6.

The Advices

The separate sets of advices and accompanying letters bear some resemblance, but also differ on key points. Both groups were in agreement that there were some doctrines so essential to the Christian faith that if rejected by a minister, the congregation was justified in withdrawing from that minister, or the minister should withdraw from that congregation.²¹ Such cases should be “managed *clearly, calmly*, and in the *Fear of*

¹⁸ According to *Authentick Account*, the two groups remained together through the third point of their advices. Then it states, “Thus far we remained on *March 3^d*. And then thought fit to adjourn further Consideration on these Advices till the following *Tuesday, March 10th*; ordering a Summons to be sent to every one of the Brethren who had withdrawn from us; which was accordingly done. We did particularly hope to have their Help in the *IVth Article*; and to have calmly debated, every Sentence and Word in it. Some Changes we our selves have made from what it was, both in *Substance* and *Form*; and, tho it looks to us, as it now stands, a very *Christian* and *reasonable Rule* of Conduct, yet we were not so set upon having our own Way, but we should have readily received any thing that had been clear and convincing, in order to have changed our Minds.” *Authentick Account*, 7–8.

¹⁹ Wilcox maintained that at this meeting the number of Subscribers was greater than the number of Non-subscribers. He supposed there were approximately 50 Non-subscribers and 60 Subscribers. Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 9.

²⁰ A majority of the ministers in the Devon and Cornwall association did reply to the advices from the subscribing ministers at Salters' Hall after their meeting in May of 1719. They wrote, “We, the united ministers of Devon and Cornwal, are very sensible of the great service you have done to the common cause of Christianity in so open and vigorous an opposition to the dangerous error relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, which of late has been so industriously propagated, and take this opportunity, now that we are assembled together, to express our joy in the harmony that is between us, and our thanks for your seasonably interposing in a matter of so great importance.” Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:229.

²¹ *Authentick Account*, 5, 10; *A True Relation Of Some Proceedings At Salters-Hall By Those Ministers Who Sign'd The First Article of the Church of England, and The Answers to the Fifth and sixth Questions in the Assemblies Shorter Catechism. March 3. 1719.* (London: John Clark, 1719), 11, 15.

GOD, with Meekness and tender Compassion towards *all* with whom they are concerned.”²² Both groups affirmed that ministers should be directly addressed by those in their congregation, and then assemblies or neighboring ministers if necessary.²³

The primary difference in the two sets of advices appeared near the end of each. The Non-subscribers affirmed, “We think the Protestant Principle, that the *Bible is the only and the perfect Rule of Faith,*” and that no one should “condemn any Man upon the Authority of Humane Decisions, or because he consents not to Humane Forms or Phrases.” Instead, he is only “to be censured, as *not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation,* when it appears that he contradicts, or refuses to own, the *plain and express Declarations of Holy Scripture,* in what is there made necessary to be believed, and in Matters there solely revealed.”²⁴ Yet this should not be interpreted as a total rejection of the value of human words and forms. The Non-subscribers contended, “We further advise, that Catechisms and other Summaries of Christianity, and Expositions of Scripture by wise and learned, tho’ fallible Men, should be regarded as great Helps to understand the Mind of God in the Scriptures.”²⁵

Whereas both groups were clear that each congregation must determine what doctrines are worth dividing over, the Subscribers went further:

As we have with very good Reason declared the Right of the People to judge what those Doctrines are that will justify them in withdrawing from their Minister, so we take the Freedom to declare it as our Judgment, That *the Denying of the true and proper Divinity of the Son of GOD and the HOLY SPIRIT, viz. that they are One GOD with the Father, is an Error contrary to the HOLY SCRIPTURES and*

²² *A True Relation*, 13.

²³ The two sets of advices differ slightly in emphases here but seem to be similar in the main. *Authentick Account* strongly emphasizes the necessity of certainty and multiple witnesses who are willing to testify against the minister privately if necessary. See *Authentick Account*, 7. *A True Relation*, instead of emphasizing the necessity of certainty and witnesses, although “care” and “caution” are recommended, moves more quickly to calling “for the Advice of Neighboring Ministers.” See *A True Relation*, 13. Again, they are similar in the main but differ in emphases.

²⁴ *Authentick Account*, 8–9.

²⁵ *Authentick Account*, 9.

The Subscribers wanted those in Exeter to know that they affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, and believed that, when rejected, it was an error worth separating over. They further declared their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity by including and subscribing to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles. This was inserted at the beginning of *A True Relation*. They further noted that they had subscribed to the Fifth and Sixth Answers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.²⁷

It can be concluded from this that the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall shared some similarities in their advices to Exeter. The Subscribers went to great lengths to demonstrate their own orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁸ The Non-subscribers, as will be noted in more detail below, were concerned to contend for their orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, but their advices focused primarily on the steps they thought fit for dealing with the disputes in Exeter. Yet the question of whether or not their lack of subscription necessarily served as a thinly veiled disguise for heterodoxy remains unanswered.

²⁶ *A True Relation*, 16.

²⁷ *A True Relation*, 8, 17.

²⁸ The disagreement about what needed to be accomplished at Salters' Hall is apparent in a work entitled *Plain Dealing*. I have found no work with stronger rebukes and accusations than this work. One quote demonstrates that the author understands the issue at hand to be the doctrine of the Trinity: "It began first among those of the Church of *England*, since which, some of the *Dissenting Ministers* have been poyson'd therewith, which causes no small Pain and Grief of the Heart to those who are *Orthodox* in the Faith. This making such a Noise in the World, it was at length thought necessary that the *Dissenting Ministers of London*, under the three Denominations, should meet at *Salter's-Hall*, there to consult Measures, how to remove that Scandal that was thrown upon 'em by the Enemies of the *Christian Religion*, where accordingly it was propos'd that a *Declaration* should be publicly subscrib'd by all those Gentlemen in the Ministry, in Order to convince the World, that they did believe the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, in the same Sense that all the Protestant Churches in the World do. This was accordingly done by several, whose Hearts were right with God, and yet there were many at the same Time, who would by no Means be prevail'd upon, or give their Consent to subscribe their Names thereto, to the great Triumph of the *Arians* and *Socinians*." *Plain Dealing: Or A Friendly Reproof to the Reverend Mr. William Bush and Mr. David Jennings, Both Dissenting Ministers near Wapping; for Refusing to Subscribe the Declaration for the Ever Blessed Trinity* (London: S. Popping, 1719), 4–5. The author of this anonymous pamphlet may have been William Clarke, who later published a work which seems to indicate that he was the author. See William Clark, *Party Revenge: Or, Mr. William Clarke's Narrative of His Case and Sufferings* (London: A. Woodcock, 1720).

A “Scandalous Majority”: Salters’ Hall by the Numbers

The total number of Subscribers and Non-subscribers varies based upon which event is being considered and which publication is being consulted.²⁹ For example, approximately 110 people voted at the meeting on February 24, with fifty-seven being opposed to “a declaration concerning the Trinity” being “inserted into the paper of advices,” while fifty-three were in favor of it.³⁰ These numbers are largely undebated except for whether or not some of the ministers who voted should have been permitted to vote.³¹ There seems to be no surviving list of the original fifty-three Subscribers and fifty-seven Non-subscribers, while these men are almost certainly numbered among each group in the larger lists.

In *An Authentick Account*, which contained the Non-subscribers’ account of the proceedings at Salters’ Hall as well as their advices to Exeter and their reasons for not subscribing on March 3, seventy-three Non-subscribers’ names are listed. In *A True Relation*, which was the Subscribers’ account of the events at Salters’ Hall as well as a list of ministers who subscribed to the First Article of the Church of England and the answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, seventy-eight ministers are listed as subscribing to these doctrinal statements. Whereas sixty-one ministers signed the advices and accompanying letter (dated April 7) sent to Exeter.

One of the more thorough accounts of the numbers of ministers present at Salters’ Hall is provided by Thomas Bradbury. Bradbury, a Subscriber, divided those

²⁹ It was claimed by the author of *An Account*, presumably John Shute Barrington, that Bradbury referred to the Non-subscribers as a “scandalous majority.” Bradbury denied the charge and called it a “scandalous falsehood.” *An Account*, 11; Bradbury, *Answer to the Reproaches*, 11.

³⁰ *Authentick Account*, 18–[19]. Page 19 is incorrectly numbered page 16 in the original.

³¹ Roger Thomas provides a detailed account of the back and forth between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, *Flying Post*, and the *Weekly Journal and Saturday Post*. No vote was taken at the March 3 meeting when the Subscribers withdrew from the meeting, but they claimed to have been the larger party at the meeting. See Thomas, “Non-Subscription Controversy,” 172–77.

present at Salters' Hall into four categories: "Pastors of the Churches in London," "Their Assistants," "Ministers of the Country," and "Preachers totally unfix'd."³² In his accounting, Bradbury removed those in the third and fourth categories of assistants and preachers not connected with a particular congregation believing that these men should not have voted. Having done so, Bradbury concluded that the number of Subscribers, fifty-three, should be reduced to forty-seven. Taking the same approach with the Non-subscribers, Bradbury concluded that their number was reduced to twenty-six, a drastic reduction.³³ Bradbury further whittled down the numbers by counting only the pastors in London, and concluded that there were twenty-five or twenty-six London pastors among the Non-subscribers, and forty-one London pastors among the Subscribers.³⁴ When counted this way, Bradbury concluded that the Subscribers were actually the majority at Salters' Hall. In the end, however, Bradbury's accounting seems to have had little influence on either the debates themselves or how the controversy at Salters' Hall was perceived by the broader public.³⁵

Salters' Hall can also be viewed along denominational lines by looking at the total number of subscribing and non-subscribing ministers from each denomination. By using Powicke's list, Wykes has concluded that, among the Subscribers listed in *A True Relation*, there were twenty-seven English Presbyterians, three Scottish Presbyterians, thirty-one Congregationalists, one General Baptist, eleven Particular Baptists, and five whose designation are uncertain. The total number of Subscribers listed in *A True*

³² Bradbury, *Answer to the Reproaches*, 14.

³³ Bradbury, *Answer to the Reproaches*, 14. Bradbury noted in the following sentences that another minister had rightly corrected his accounting, but he had only wrongly excluded two or three on either side.

³⁴ Bradbury, *Answer to the Reproaches*, 15.

³⁵ Powicke, in his list of Subscribers and Non-subscribers, divides the men up essentially according to Bradbury's designations. See Fred J. Powicke, "The Salters' Hall Controversy," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 7, no. 2 (1916): 112–22.

Relation was seventy-eight. Among the Non-subscribers, according the *An Authentick Account*, the totals for each denomination were as follows: forty-nine English Presbyterians, zero Scottish Presbyterians, eight Congregationalists, twelve General Baptists, two Particular Baptists, and two whose designation are uncertain. The total number of Non-subscribers, according the *An Authentick Account*, was seventy-three.³⁶

Early Accounts of Salters' Hall

When William Tong called together twenty-five ministers to meet informally at Salters' Hall on August 25, 1718, to respond to John Walrond's letter concerning Exeter, they stated rather clearly in their response that they were not aware of any great progress of Arianism among their ministers in the greater London area: "We cannot say that we have no Apprehension of the breaking forth of the liker Errors here, but we know of none among us, hitherto that have *openly* avowed them, and of but very *Few* that own themselves to be in Doubt and Suspence about them."³⁷ Just six months prior to the controversy at Salters' Hall, some of the leading Presbyterian ministers in and around London could confidently declare that there was no great outbreak of Arianism among their ministers. Certainly, much could have changed during the course of those six months, but the statement is rather intriguing for this consideration of the prevalence of heterodoxy among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall.

To return to the central issue at hand, the debate following Salters' Hall centered on what the source of the disagreement between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers really was. Were the Non-subscribers merely opposed to requiring subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases and orthodox in their understanding of the

³⁶ Wykes, "1719 Salters' Hall Debate," 44; Powicke, "The Salters' Hall Controversy," 112–22.

³⁷ *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Differences among the Dissenters at Exeter Relating to the Doctrine of the Ever Blessed Trinity, So far as gave Concern to some of the London Ministers* (London: John Clark, 1719), 11.

Trinity? Or, was their opposition to subscription merely a disguise for their heterodox views on the Trinity? Subscribers and onlookers alike questioned the orthodoxy of some of the Non-subscribers from the outset. But the Non-subscribers openly declared their orthodoxy. They contended that they were opposed to compulsory subscription rather than a historic, Christian theology of the Trinity.

The Non-Subscribers' Account

The Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall were insistent that they were not opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. In their letter to Exeter dated March 17, 1719, they wrote,

We add our earnest Supplications that God would accompany them [the advices] with his Blessing to establish Peace and Truth amongst us: And freely declare, that we utterly disown the *Arian* doctrine, and sincerely believe the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and the proper Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we apprehend to be clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures; But are far from condemning any who appear to be with us in the Main, tho' they should chuse not to declare themselves in other than Scripture-Terms or not in Ours.³⁸

Some took issue with this language, desiring even greater clarity on the doctrine of the Trinity, which could be found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism or the Thirty-Nine Articles.³⁹ As one critic insightfully noted, the Non-subscribers were willing to use extrabiblical words and phrases in this declaration.⁴⁰

On the potential charge of heresy, the author of *An Authentick Account*, likely Benjamin Grosvenor, wrote on behalf of the Non-subscribers that even if they had subscribed they likely would have been accused of hypocrisy. The Non-subscribers claimed that they had opposed Arianism from the pulpit and in the press. If this were not enough, they reasoned, then what would subscription accomplish? “We say, if we must

³⁸ *Authentick Account*, 15–6.

³⁹ *Plain Dealing*, 11–12. Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist Subscriber at Salters' Hall, in a letter to Elisha Callender, a Baptist pastor in Boston, uses the very same words “proper divinity” by which he seems to mean that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. See, Isaac Backus, *A History of New England Baptists with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 491.

⁴⁰ *Plain Dealing*, 11.

be suspected, merely because we would not subscribe what our Brethren would have us; why may we not be suspected of *Hypocrisy* after we have done it? And then pass in the world for *Arians*, and *Cheats* into the Bargain.”⁴¹ While the Non-subscribers were displeased with the seeming imposition of the Subscribers, they ultimately attributed the approach of the Subscribers to the influence of the Anglicans whom they believed had since abused the Subscribers’ subscription after the events at Salters’ Hall.⁴²

The Non-subscribers seemed to believe, maybe somewhat naively, that Scripture words were the best way to oppose heresy and maintain peace. They were convinced that history and reason proved men’s words “more liable to *different* Interpretations, than the *Words of Scripture*.” The basis for this belief was that “all may fairly think themselves *more at Liberty*, to put their own Sense upon *Humane Forms*, than upon the words of the *Holy Ghost*.”⁴³ The Non-subscribers further questioned the effectiveness of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. They asked, “What Assurance could we have that all who subscribed meant precisely the *same sense*, any more than if they had made a Declaration in *express Words of Scripture*?”⁴⁴ The Non-subscribers’ point here was not entirely without warrant as can be clearly seen in Daniel Waterland’s *The Case of Arian Subscription Considered* (1721). Waterland argued against those within the Church of England who held Arian sentiments but signed the Thirty-Nine Articles according to their own sense of the articles and the pertinent passages of Scripture relating to the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Waterland, this approach to subscription was first promoted by Samuel Clarke in introduction to the first edition of *Scripture-doctrine* (1712). These remarks were removed from later editions, but

⁴¹ *Authentick Account*, 22–23.

⁴² *Authentick Account*, 28.

⁴³ *Authentick Account*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Authentick Account*, 25.

Waterland was convinced that many of Clarke's followers continued to harbor Arian sentiments while subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles.⁴⁵

When compared to the situation among the Dissenters at Salters' Hall, this is a rather intriguing comparison. For Waterland, the concern was that some within the Church of England held Arian sentiments, but subscribed to the Thirty-Nine articles according to their own sense of the words rather than the sense of the original authors. The Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall did not take this approach. Instead, they refused to subscribe to the words and phrases of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Shorter Catechism. Without drawing any specific inferences from this, it is worth taking this somewhat parallel situation into account.

At least one other item stands out in the Non-subscribers' listed reasons for not subscribing on March 3, 1719. In the postscript, they raised a concern that if they were to subscribe to extrabiblical words and phrases, they would then be required to defend not only the Bible but also the language of the creeds. The Non-subscribers asked, "Will it not give great *Advantage* to the *Adversaries* of the Scripture Doctrine, when We are obliged to defend not only the Doctrine *itself*, but the *Humane Words* made necessary to explain it?" They continued, "It cannot be but new Questions will be started, and New Pointes arise to be defended; all which would be Difficulties needlessly brought upon Ourselves, and create Disputes among those who embrace the Truth, and might join in supporting it."⁴⁶ From this, it appears that at least some of the Non-subscribers felt the weight of Clarke's and others' critiques so that even if they rejected Arianism and Clarke's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, they were concerned about the added dimension of defending extrabiblical words and phrases.

⁴⁵ Daniel Waterland, *The Case of Arian Subscription Considered: And Several Pleas and Excuses for it Particularly Examined and Confuted* (Cambridge: Corn[elius] Crownfield, 1721), 8–9.

⁴⁶ *Authentick Account*, 30–31.

Two Subscribers: Edward Wallin and John Barker

Edward Wallin (1678–1733), a well-respected Particular Baptist minister, was numbered among the Subscribers at Salters’ Hall. By all accounts, including that of the renowned John Gill, Wallin was a thoroughly orthodox, godly minister.⁴⁷ Gill preached Wallin’s funeral sermon and said of him, “Besides a large experience of the grace of God, and a considerable share of light and knowledge in the great truths of the Gospel; he had an heavenly skill to lay open the wretchedness and miserable state and condition of sinners by nature, and to set forth the glory of Christ in his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice.”⁴⁸ Wallin accepted the call to pastor the Maze Pond congregation in London at the age of twenty-seven, which he pastored until his death twenty-seven years later. Wallin’s son, Benjamin, followed him as pastor at Maze Pond with their pastoral tenures there covering nearly three-quarters of the eighteenth century.⁴⁹

Wallin recounted the Exeter and Salters’ Hall controversies in 1720 in a letter to Elisha Callendar, a Baptist Minister in Boston, Massachusetts. In the letter Wallin provided a balanced interpretation of Salters’ Hall, noting that there may have been some anti-Trinitarians present, but that the majority were orthodox, and concerned primarily with maintaining Christian liberty. After recounting the insistence of one party to subscribe a declaration of their faith in the Trinity, and the other party’s desire to continue

⁴⁷ John Gill, *Job’s Creed: or, Confession of Faith. A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Mr. Edward Wallin, who Departed this Life June 12, 1733 in the 55th Year of his Age. Preached June 18* (London: Aaron Ward, 1733). Of course, Gill was also an ardent defender of the doctrine of the Trinity in the decades after Salters’ Hall. Gill even critiqued the Independent Subscriber Thomas Ridgley for a perceived weakness in Ridgley’s treatment of eternal generation thirty years after Ridgley’s death. Ridgley sided with the Subscribers and defended their recommendation of subscription. Thomas Ridgley, *The Unreasonableness of the Charge of Imposition Exhibited against Several Ministers In and About London, Consider’d* (London: John Clark, 1719); Alan P. F. Sell, *Christ and Controversy: The Person of Christ in Nonconformist Thought and Ecclesial Experience, 1660–2000* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 41–42;

⁴⁸ Gill, *Job’s Creed*, 42–43.

⁴⁹ Terry Wolever, “Edward Wallin (1678–1733); Benjamin Wallin (1711–1782),” in *The British Particular Baptists*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Terry Wolever (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2018), 4:45.

considering the advices paragraph by paragraph, Wallin addressed the issue at hand. His account is worth quoting at length:

Some of the too warm among the non-subscribers would fain fix the odious charge of persecution on the other, while they again, with full as much warmth, would fix the charge of Arianism upon them. But this severity is not allowed by the greatest part of either side of the question; and I hope time will produce a better temper in both parties As I am satisfied that some among the non-subscribers are gone too far into some of the distinctive notions of Arius, so I think some of the subscribers have given too much ground to jealousy, they intended to set up those forms as a test of orthodoxy, and the signing of them as necessary to persons being useful in the ministry. But I dare say for the much greater part of both sides, that they intended no evil to their differing brethren; and that it was a zeal for the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real divinity of our Saviour, which made some subscribe the articles, and not any desire to impose upon others; and that those who refused the subscription, did it with a design to maintain Christian liberty, rather than any design to encourage or promote Arianism. There is no great difference in the number of either side; but I think there are not so many of our denomination among the non-subscribers as are on the other side; and though I cannot say that there are none of our ministers who too much favor the new scheme, yet I may venture to say in general, that our ministers, especially those of the Particular [Baptist] denomination, are sound in the faith, as to the real divinity of Christ, and the true doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Therefore those who upbraid you with their being contrary, act either from prejudice or misinformation. But such have been the visible consequences of this difference, that brotherly love and charity, that indispensable ornament of the Christian religion, have been greatly lost in these debates.⁵⁰

Wallin's firsthand account provides several helpful insights. First, as Calamy noted, tempers and suspicion abounded during and after the meetings at Salters' Hall. Second, there were some anti-Trinitarians present at Salters' Hall. Third, the majority of the ministers at Salters' Hall were not anti-Trinitarians. Fourth, the disagreement at hand was primarily about what was most necessary at that time—subscription as a means of demonstrating one's personal orthodoxy, or, continuing with the examination of the advices to be sent to Exeter. Therefore, according to Wallin, Salter's Hall should not be understood primarily as an acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Presbyterian Subscriber John Barker, who followed the celebrated Matthew Henry as pastor at Hackney, seems to have agreed with Wallin: the majority of

⁵⁰ Backus, *History of New England Baptists*, 492–93.

the Non-subscribers were not anti-Trinitarians, and the disagreement at hand was as to what the most suitable course of action was in reference to Exeter. Barker, if he was indeed the author of *A Conciliatory Letter Relating to the Late Proceedings at Salters-Hall*, wrote, “And here I must for my own part profess I know it of many, and I believe it of the rest, who subscrib’d the Advices, and did not subscribe the Articles of Faith, that they are sound Trinitarians, and have the very same Sentiments of this Doctrine with the Brethren on the other side.”⁵¹ Barker admitted that he thought subscription to a confession of faith fitting considering the situation at Exeter and the growth of heterodox opinions in England, which he primarily attributed to the writings of Samuel Clarke.⁵² However, he did not conclude that the Non-subscribers were heterodox because of their desire to continue with a document primarily aimed at maintaining peace at Exeter.⁵³

That is not to say that Barker thought the Non-subscribers’ course of action most fitting. Even if the two groups had come together to consider the advices set before them, Barker thought addressing the doctrine of the Trinity necessary and even unavoidable.⁵⁴ He wrote concerning those who followed Clarke’s scheme set forth in his *Scripture-doctrine*: “These Novelists conceal themselves under the plain and express Declarations of Scripture, and cry down humane Forms as burdensome Imposition, that they may lie the more obscure, and less expos’d to View.”⁵⁵ It was for this reason that Barker sided with the Subscribers.⁵⁶ Yet he repeatedly encouraged the Subscribers and

⁵¹ *A Conciliatory Letter Relating to the Late Proceedings at Salters-Hall* (London: Richard Ford, 1719), 11. The work is often attributed to Barker, but does not bear his name anywhere in the publication. The author does make clear that he was present at the Salters’ Hall meetings and was indeed a Subscriber.

⁵² *Conciliatory Letter*, 9, 14.

⁵³ *Conciliatory Letter*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Conciliatory Letter*, 14.

⁵⁵ *Conciliatory Letter*, 15.

⁵⁶ Barker is said to have later disowned his subscription at Salters’ Hall, though it is unclear why Barker would have disowned his subscription. However, if Barker was indeed the author of the *Conciliatory Letter*, this would not come as a complete surprise since Barker regularly laments the

Non-subscribers to not think ill of or accuse one another. Nor did he think subscription to the most detailed confession of faith could remedy the situation. Barker explained, “Only let it be remembered here, for the Caution of both Sides, That Persons may be Heterodox under sound Expressions, and Orthodox under those which are uncommon and unapt.”⁵⁷ Barker concluded from the events at Salters’ Hall that the group of ministers was simply too large and too diverse to avoid suspicion and jealousy.⁵⁸ Yet he hoped for a reunion among the ministers, and the triumph of Trinitarian orthodoxy.⁵⁹ From this it is apparent that Barker, a Subscriber, thought Clarke’s new scheme a real problem that was gaining adherents. But he did not conflate non-subscription with an adoption of Clarke’s views. This enabled him to encourage both groups to defend the classical doctrine of the Trinity, which he seems to have genuinely believed both groups affirmed, and to not impute ill motives to one another because of the inflammatory events at Salters’ Hall.⁶⁰

Therefore, according to the Particular Baptist Edward Wallin and the Presbyterian John Barker, the issue at stake at Salters’ Hall, particularly for the Non-subscribers, was not one’s personal belief in the doctrine of the Trinity but the best manner for advising those at Exeter. Consequently, neither man concluded that the Non-subscribers’ chosen course of action was intended to disguise their opposition to consubstantial Trinity. These first-hand accounts, from Subscribers nonetheless, must be reckoned with in one’s understanding of Salters’ Hall.

divisions caused by Salters’ Hall. Maybe he lamented his participation in the events altogether. See Alan Ruston, “Barker, John,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed November 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1404>.

⁵⁷ *Conciliatory Letter*, 19.

⁵⁸ *Conciliatory Letter*, 23.

⁵⁹ *Conciliatory Letter*, 25, 26.

⁶⁰ *Conciliatory Letter*, 26. Barker even concluded his work with a brief confessional statement: “But that the World may know we differ not really in Doctrine or Judgment concerning the DIVINE TRINITY, we profess, that, we believe, That the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST, are the One, Eternal, Living, and True God: To whom be Glory and Dominion for ever” (26).

Onlookers: Edmund Calamy, Isaac Watts, and Thomas Lewis

The respected Presbyterian pastor Edmund Calamy, who refused to involve himself in the controversy by joining either party, contended that the issue at Salters' Hall was subscription and not the doctrine of the Trinity. A Mr. Chalmers urged Calamy the day before the March 3 meeting to be present in order that he might help defend the cause of orthodoxy. Yet Calamy was resolute that the issue at stake was not the doctrine of the Trinity. "I told him," Calamy wrote, "as for the true eternal divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, I was very ready to declare for it, at that time or any other, and durst not in conscience be at all backward to it." He continued, "But I could upon good grounds assure him, that was not the point in question among those that were to meet together on the day following."⁶¹ Chalmers, who apparently had been present at the meeting, upon his return visit with Calamy, "was convinced most fully that I [Calamy] was in the right, and he [Chalmers] was in the wrong."⁶² According to Calamy, the point in question at Salters' Hall was not the doctrine of the Trinity.

Isaac Watts's view of the controversy was similar to Calamy's. Although Watts's personal views on the doctrine of the Trinity have been called into question, his interpretation of the controversy is worth considering. Watts was notably absent from the meetings at Salters' Hall. In a letter to Cotton Mather that appears to be dated February 10, 1720, Watts attributed his absence from these meetings to ill health, which had apparently kept him from other meetings among Dissenters as well.⁶³ Yet Watts commented to Mather that, after reading many of the pamphlets on both sides and conversing with chief participants on both sides of the meetings at Salters' Hall, he would

⁶¹ Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life, With Some Reflections on the Time I Have Lived In*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 2:414–15.

⁶² Calamy, *Historical Account of My Life*, 2:416.

⁶³ Isaac Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather, February 10, 1720, Benjamin Coleman papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, <https://www.masshist.org/collection-guides/digitized/fa0288/b1-f7-i3#1>.

not have sided with either. Furthermore, in the wake of the controversy, Watts remarked, “Matters have been carry’d on in my opinion to extremes on both sides, & I have labour’d what I could toward a reconciliation.”⁶⁴ Watts seemed to have little immediate success in his efforts towards reconciliation.

When Watts surveyed the accounts of Salters’ Hall, he concluded that none of them accurately portrayed the events because they were slanted due to their being written by men on either side of the controversy. Watts lamented that he could not bring himself to write a fuller account of the controversy for Mather. He further lamented, “I am sorry to say that some of my Brethren who write in this Controversy have too much anger mingled with their zeal.”⁶⁵ Yet Watts was quick to conclude that “several Ministers in ye West-country [likely Exeter] have departed from the common faith of the Trinity & entered into Dr. Clarks scheme or approached neer it.”⁶⁶ He did not deny the influence of Samuel Clarke’s *Scripture-doctrine* in the West of England, but he did reject the notion of any sort of widespread anti-Trinitarianism among the dissenting ministers in London. Watts even claimed that the subscribing ministers shared his view: “yet ye subscribing Ministers of London themselves do generally believe there are very few of their Brethren at London that are chargeable with this; perhaps there may be three or four of which they have suspicion.”⁶⁷ In Watts’s estimation, the Non-subscribers refused subscription not because of their opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, but partly because of the disorderly actions of the Subscribers who did not follow the rules of the meeting. The further reason for their refusal to subscribe, according to Watts, was “for fear also lest these words should be made a Test to exclude all persons from ye Communion or from

⁶⁴ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁶⁵ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁶⁶ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁶⁷ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

the Ministry that would not comply with them.”⁶⁸

Watts’s next comments are particularly insightful as he attempted to focus on the key difference between the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers. Watts maintained,

The chief difference in short lyes here, The seventy ministers that did subscribe generally believe the Athanasian Scheme necessary to salvation; & therefore they think it necessary that faith should professed in words as best containing the Athanasian sense. The seventy Ministers that did not subscribe the articles, but signed this Paper of Advices do not think the Athanasian Scheme so necessary, tho I know not one that was present in that meeting who is enclined to Arianism, & I’m perswaded almost all of them believe the Athanasian to be true.⁶⁹

In Watts’s estimation, the “chief difference” between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers was that the former believed the “Athanasian Scheme necessary to salvation” while the latter did not.⁷⁰ Watts had remarked earlier in his letter to Mather that few if any of the London ministers had embraced Clarke’s scheme in *Scripture-doctrine*, but here he highlights a significant difference between the two parties that potentially demonstrates the effects of decades’ of debates concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.⁷¹ Even when some men believed the doctrine, according to Watts, they might not think the affirmation of the “Athanasian Scheme” essential to salvation.

Watts did express concern about the approach of the Non-subscribers. If the Subscribers had “made the door of Communion . . . too narrow,” the Non-subscribers had “made it unreasonably wide” by “maintaining that a profession of the meer words of

⁶⁸ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁶⁹ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁷⁰ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁷¹ Watts’s claim is intriguing for a variety of reasons. First, had the doctrine of the Trinity come to be considered *adiaphora* for some of the Non-subscribers? Second, Locke raised similar concerns about the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, that it was not taught clearly enough in the Bible to be considered essential to salvation. Locke further claimed that the Bible nowhere states that the doctrine is essential to salvation. Third, while McLachlan’s case is likely overstated, this would seem to affirm his claim that even when Socinianism was not embraced in the English context, its effects could be seen in the marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity. See Herbert John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 338–39.

Scripture are sufficient, especially in points of pure revelation.”⁷² While Watts maintained on multiple occasions in his letter to Mather that he would not have sided with either party if he had been present, Watts seemed to side with some of the Non-subscribers whom he claimed did not believe the Athanasian scheme essential to salvation. Watts explained, “For tho I think ye Athanasian Scheme in general to be the best I have ever yet seen, I cannot think it necessary to salvation; for great & good Men are certainly gone to Heaven that have differ’d from it.”⁷³ Essential to salvation, in Watts’s estimation, was an affirmation of the omniscience and omnipotence of Christ as well as his satisfaction for sin, his mediation, and intercession before the Father. In Watts’s own words, one needed to simply “believe him [Jesus] to be of a nature so far superior to all Creatures as to answer these purposes.”⁷⁴ If one were to affirm these truths, yet not believe Christ to be “equall with God the Father,” Watts wrote, “I cannot think this Man shall be excluded from Heaven; however his notions may happen to be inconsistent with each other.”⁷⁵ It may be concluded from this letter that Watts seems to share the view that he attributes to some of the Non-subscribers, namely, an affirmation of consubstantial Trinity while simultaneously believing that the Athanasian scheme was not essential to salvation.

Thomas Lewis (1689–c.1729), a High-Church Anglican, was involved in the Bangorian Controversy where he denounced Benjamin Hoadly and other latitudinarian Anglicans. In 1717, Lewis began publishing *The Scourge, in Vindication of the Church of England*, which appeared every Monday. In *The Scourge*, Lewis incessantly attacked the Low-Church party, Roman Catholics, and Dissenters. He was convinced that Hoadly and other Anglicans who shared his views would destroy the Church of England because of

⁷² Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁷³ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁷⁴ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

⁷⁵ Watts, Letter to Cotton Mather.

their tolerance of, and seeming affinity for, Dissenters. This was most evident in his work *The Danger of the Church Establishment of England from the insolence of the Protestant Dissenters* (1718).

While Lewis had little patience for the Hoadly party in the Bangorian Controversy, he had even less patience for Protestant Dissenters. During the Salters' Hall Controversy, Lewis published *The Anatomy of the Heretical Synod of Dissenters at Salters-Hall* (1719). As the title suggests, Lewis viewed the outcome of Salters' Hall as an affirmation of heterodoxy. This might lead one to conclude that Lewis's critique was reserved for the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. Even though they bore the brunt of Lewis's attacks, Lewis demonstrated his distaste for Dissenters as a whole, and the Presbyterians in particular. One of Lewis's major critiques of Dissenters was that they were inclined towards schism. In Lewis's estimation, the Dissenters divide, subdivide, and separate "till they had made the *Church* no bigger than it was at first, a *small Grain of Mustard-Seed*, for every Party confin'd the Kingdom of Heaven to its own *Conventicle*."⁷⁶ Lewis claimed, regarding the Presbyterians, that they were hungry for power and that when they ascended to power they abused it as much as anyone else. Lewis wrote, with an almost palpable disgust, "In short, the *young Lady of Geneva* is every Jot as Tyrannical as her Mother *the old Whore of Babylon*, as Dogmatical in her Sentences, as Cruel and Inexorable in her Executions, as Infallible and Unaccountable in her Claims, and as Imperial in her Decrees."⁷⁷ Regarding kings and creeds, Lewis wrote further of the Presbyterians whom he had identified as "the *young Lady of Geneva*": "She values a *King* no more than a *Cobler* upon a *Stall*, and *Creeds*, *Canons*, and *Councils*, are

⁷⁶ Thomas Lewis, *The Anatomy of a Heretical Synod of Dissenters at Salters-Hall*, 2nd ed. (London: Charles Rivington, 1719), 23.

⁷⁷ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 6.

no more in the Hands of an *Assembly of Divines*, that an Egg-shell in a Storm upon the Bay of *Biscay*.”⁷⁸ Clearly Lewis had a very low view of Dissenters as a whole.

Considering the overall outcome of the Salters’ Hall Controversy, consisting of “*Presbyterians, Independents, and Anabaptists*,” Lewis concluded that “after they had *sought the Lord by Prayer and Meditation*, it was carried by a Majority for Mr. *Peirce* That *the Bible only in the Letter thereof was to be made the Standard of Faith, and that all Religious Tests were to be express in the very Words of Scripture*.” In sum, according to Lewis, “so the *Trinity in Unity*, and the *Three Christian Creeds* were voted away.”⁷⁹ Yet Lewis did not fail to see a distinction between the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers: “It must be confess’d that there was a pretty strong Opposition made by Mr. [Thomas] *Bradbury*, and some others, that were for a Declaration of Faith to be *subscrib’d* by the whole *Dissenting Ministry*.”⁸⁰ On the whole, however, Salters’ Hall was yet another example of the scourge that was the Protestant Dissenters.

Lewis believed that swift action needed to be taken against the Non-subscribers, which some Subscribers might have feared would be the conclusion of the matter. Lewis’s solution was not a veiled suggestion either. He boldly recommended, “What I propos’d, was to represent these *Hereticks* in their own Colours, to *awaken Authority* to beware of its worst and most dangerous Enemies, and to force them to that *Modesty and Orthodoxy* by Severity of *Laws*, to which all the Strength of *Reason* in the World can never persuade them.”⁸¹ The Non-subscribers, whom Lewis believed to be heretics, needed to be punished with penal action with the intent of persuading them to embrace orthodoxy.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 6.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 13.

⁸⁰ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 13.

⁸¹ Lewis, *Anatomy of Heretical Synod of Dissenters*, 36–37.

For Lewis, Dissenters as a whole were problematic. Yet according to Calamy, Wallin, and Watts the primary disagreement at hand at Salters' Hall was the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. The Non-subscribers also denounced Arianism and affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity. The views of Calamy, Wallin, Watts, and the Non-subscribers can be called into question, but they must be seriously considered for a balanced interpretation of the Salters' Hall Controversy.

The Complexities of Interpreting the Salters' Hall Controversy

There are a variety of factors that contribute to the complexity of interpreting the Salters' Hall Controversy. This is particularly true as it relates to the connection between subscription and one's views on the doctrine of the Trinity. Should non-subscription be understood as a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, or was it possible to be a Non-subscriber and affirm the doctrine of the Trinity? The situation is significantly less complicated for the Subscribers, but should subscription at Salters' Hall be understood as both an affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity and compulsory subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases? Furthermore, how should one view an individual such as James Conder, who managed to be numbered among both the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers?

The complexities are potentially even greater when considering the complicated web of relationships between Subscribers and Non-subscribers both before and after the Salters' Hall meetings. This can be seen in the Presbyterian ministers Daniel Wilcox and Henry Read who served together at Monkwell Street from 1718–1723. Wilcox was a notable Subscriber and Read was a Non-subscriber. Yet both served the same congregation. A similar example can be found in the life and ministry of Benjamin Stinton, whose ministry overlapped with many of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, particularly the General Baptists. The examples of Conder, Read, Wilcox, and Stinton demonstrate only a portion of the complexity of interpreting the Salters' Hall

Controversy.

John Conder: Signer on Both Sides

John Conder served as an assistant at Hare Court from 1710 until his death in 1746.⁸² Little is known about Conder, but he was well known in 1719 for his singularity in siding with both the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. In *The Layman's Letters to the Dissenting Ministers of London*, the author, who supported the Subscribers at Salters' Hall, addressed Conder directly with "A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Conder, on his Signing on Both Sides." Conder was critiqued for taking "aim at a Thing which can never be obtained, the Reconciling of Opposites, and of Two Different Parties" by siding with both.⁸³ Such a position was not only untenable, according to the author, but it would prove unsuccessful as one cannot reconcile "Truth and Error" and none of the ministers would be swayed by Conder's inconsistent conduct.⁸⁴ The author further critiqued Conder's actions as unbecoming for a minister to be characterized by such uncertainty and indecision.⁸⁵ The letter ended with a call for Conder to clarify his position by either choosing a side or by justifying his actions "with Reasons so clear and evident, as may remove all our Doubts, and prove that you have acted like an Honest and Good Christian."⁸⁶

It is difficult to know precisely what to make of Conder's siding with both the

⁸² Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, In London, Westminster, and Southwark; Including the Lives of Their Ministers, From the Rise of Nonconformity to the Present Time* (London: Printed by the author, 1810), 3:288. There is a bit of a discrepancy in Wilson's dating as he lists Conder on a table on page 279 as serving until 1744, but then later notes that Conder served at Hare Court until his death in 1746.

⁸³ *The Layman's Letters to the Dissenting Ministers of London; With List of their Names on Both Sides: Consisting of A Letter of Thanks to those Divines who Subscribed the Declaration for the Trinity. A Letter of Perswasion to those Ministers who Refused it. And a Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Conder, who Sign'd on Both sides* (London: Joseph Marshall, 1719), 16.

⁸⁴ *Layman's Letters*, 17.

⁸⁵ *Layman's Letters*, 17.

⁸⁶ *Layman's Letters*, 18.

Subscribers and Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. He was the only minister to do so. It may only demonstrate one man's fickleness. But it is possible that Conder's actions further demonstrate the complexities of Salters' Hall and the reality that many different issues were at stake, not merely an affirmation or denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. For Conder both affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity in the clearest credal language, but he also sided with the Non-subscribers in their opposition to the requirement of subscription. At the very least, Conder serves as another example of the fact that Salters' Hall precludes binary interpretations.

Henry Read and Daniel Wilcox

Daniel Wilcox began serving as an assistant at Monkwell Street under Samuel Doolittle in 1706. Upon the death of Doolittle in 1707, Wilcox became the pastor at Monkwell Street and served in that role until 1733. Wilcox was a staunch defender of the doctrine of the Trinity and subscription. In 1717, Wilcox published a work entitled *The Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words* in which he defended not only the Westminster Confession of Faith, but also the value of using confessions and creeds to try men's orthodoxy.⁸⁷ The work itself was set up in the form of a catechism. After providing a biblical precedent and defense for confessionalism, Wilcox asked in Question Thirteen: "*Upon what Accounts is the Form of sound Words drawn up by the Assembly, in the Confession of Faith and Catechism, a Proper Test of Orthodoxy and Error?*" Wilcox answered this question by contending that the Westminster Confession of Faith and the accompanying catechisms simply assert what is found in Scripture with great clarity. Clearly aware of former doctrinal debates and seemingly anticipating the debates at Salters' Hall, Wilcox went on to address why subscription to biblical passages alone was an insufficient text of orthodoxy. Wilcox wrote, "If so, none among the various Sects

⁸⁷ Daniel Wilcox, *The Duty of Holding Fast to Sound Words* (London: John Clark, 1717).

that call themselves Christians could be counted Erronious, as they all pretend to own the Bible, and will not refuse to subscribe it, and yet retain their various and contrary Sentiments.”⁸⁸ In Wilcox’s estimation, subscription to confessions and catechisms, particularly those produced at Westminster, was not to call “them *from* the *Scripture*, but a putting them to the Tryal in what Sense they understand the *Scripture*.”⁸⁹ When one differs from the Westminster Assembly “in the important Articles between the *Orthodox* and *Arminians*, he plainly confirms that Suspicion.”⁹⁰ Clearly Wilcox was in favor of the requirement of subscription to confessions of faith.

It should not come as a surprise that Wilcox was numbered among the Subscribers at Salters’ Hall. What is unique, however, is that Henry Read, Wilcox’s assistant at Monkwell Street, was numbered among the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. Read served alongside Wilcox from 1718–1723.⁹¹ With Wilcox’s strong views on subscription, it is difficult to imagine an amicable relationship between the two men. According to Wilson, Wilcox dismissed Read in 1723 because he believed his preaching “to be in the Arminian strain.”⁹² Apparently a portion of the congregation was so displeased with Wilcox’s decision that they left Monkwell Street and joined a Mr. Brown at Old Jewry. Wilcox was eventually able to overcome this situation and continue to effectively pastor at Monkwell Street.

The Wilcox and Read account further demonstrates the complexities of

⁸⁸ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 11.

⁸⁹ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 11.

⁹⁰ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 11.

⁹¹ Thomas provides a different account and timeline here. According to Wilson and Powicke, Read did not even arrive at Monkwell Street until 1718 and remained until 1723 or 1724. According to Thomas, Read was Monkwell Street in 1716 and Wilcox’s 1717 *Duty of Holding Fast* was a defense of his decision to remove Read from assisting him. See Roger Thomas, “Presbyterians in Transition,” in *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 152; Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 3:204; Powicke, “The Salters’ Hall Controversy,” 120.

⁹² Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 3:204.

Salters' Hall, for this example reveals a pastor and his assistant siding with different parties at Salters' Hall. With Wilcox's ardent defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and the use of compulsory subscription for the purpose of safeguarding orthodoxy, it is not difficult to see how after Salters' Hall he might have had some difficulty continuing to be assisted in the ministry by Read. What seems unlikely, however, is that Read was opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is unknown why Read sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, but surely it was not because he opposed the doctrine of the Trinity or was indifferent about it. Certainly, Wilcox's concerns about Read's inclination to some form of Arminianism do not imply that Read had become heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity or indifferent to it.⁹³ If that were to be the case, how did Read continue to minister at Monkwell Street without forcing Read out sooner? Read remained at Monkwell Street for four years after Salters' Hall. Surely this, at the very least, further demonstrates the complexity of interpreting the Salters' Hall Controversy.

Benjamin Stinton and His General Baptist Friends

One figure further demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between one's view of subscription and personal orthodoxy at Salters' Hall: the well-respected Particular Baptist leader, Benjamin Stinton (1677–1719). Stinton died on February 11, 1719, just eight days before the first meeting at Salters' Hall. One cannot help but wonder how Stinton might have influenced the General and Particular Baptists at Salters' Hall if he had been present. Stinton regularly attempted to foster greater unity between the General and Particular Baptists. As Whitley described, "He deliberately tried to draw together all the Baptists, ignoring the theological distinction of Particulars and

⁹³ Wilcox does on one occasion use the word "Arminian" potentially as a synonym for heterodox. Just a few sentences prior, he sets "Arminian" in contrast to "Calvinist" but later sets "Arminian" in contrast to "Orthodox." Of course, this would not be entirely unique to Wilcox, but potentially provides some insight to how he uses the word and why he might have thought Read's doctrinal views to be dangerous. Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 11.

Generals.”⁹⁴ In 1713, Stinton called together both General and Particular Baptists in what would eventually become the Hannover Coffee House meetings. Present at the earliest meetings were not only General and Particular Baptists, but men whose names are numbered among the subscribing and non-subscribing ministers at Salters’ Hall. The General Baptists present at this meeting, who were also present at Salters’ Hall, were Thomas Kerby, John Savage, Abraham Mulliner, Lewis Douglas, and Joseph Jenkins.⁹⁵ In 1717, less than two years prior to Salters’ Hall, Nathaniel Foxwell, Benjamin Stinton, Edward Wallin, Mark Key, John Noble, Thomas Dewhurst, Lewis Douglas, Benjamin Ingram, and Abraham Mulliner together contributed to the repairs of a baptistry at Horsleydown for shared use. Also in 1717, Stinton and Nathaniel Hodges, both Particular Baptists, joined the General Baptists Foxwell and Mulliner in assisting in the ordination service of Joseph Burroughs.

Stinton also vehemently opposed the exclusion of General Baptists from what would eventually become the Particular Baptist Fund. Stinton gave seven reasons for his opposition. First, it would create endless debate about who truly was or was not a Particular Baptist. Second, some Baptists preferred to not go by either designation, and some Baptist congregations were made up of both Generals and Particulars. Third, the Presbyterians and Independents did not have such limitations, which would make the Baptists appear unnecessarily divisive. Fourth, the exclusion of General Baptists “only guards against the Errors of one kind, and not those of another kind, which may be equally dangerous and pernicious.”⁹⁶ Fifth, it might keep certain “wealthy and generous gentlemen” from giving to the fund. Sixth, it would disrupt several attempts at greater

⁹⁴ W. T. Whitley, “Benjamin Stinton and His Baptist Friends,” *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 1, no. 4 (1910): 196.

⁹⁵ Whitley, “Benjamin Stinton and Baptist Friends,” 196. The Particular Baptist Subscribers present were David Rees, John Skepp, and John Noble.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Stinton, quoted in Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists From The Reformation To The Beginning of the Reign King George I* (London: Printed for the editor, 1740), 4:354.

unity between the General and Particular Baptists. Seventh, the article of exclusion was unnecessary as each minister's orthodoxy, whether General or Particular Baptist, could be considered on a case-by-case basis.⁹⁷ These items demonstrate both the catholicity of Benjamin Stinton, and the complexity of the relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy as well as subscription and non-subscription in the early eighteenth century.⁹⁸

An Orthodox, Non-Subscribing Tradition

In a letter to Samuel Mather dated July 28, 1731, John Walrond claimed, more than a decade after the Salters' Hall Controversy, that there were "three sorts" of Dissenters: "those who have fallen into Arian or Arminian errors"; those that are "very sound"; "and a middle sort, the most numerous, that profess the same faith, but are so indifferent about it, and indulgent to the erroneous, that they seem to be with us in principle, but with them in interest, loving them better with their errors, than others with the truth as it is in Jesus."⁹⁹ It was Walrond who had been one of James Peirce's fiercest foes at Exeter. But Walrond's point is instructive for a balanced interpretation of Salters' Hall. For at Salters' Hall there seems to be a largely orthodox, non-subscribing party, which, for the General Baptists and Presbyterians in particular, finds its historical and theological roots in Thomas Grantham and Richard Baxter respectively.

Thomas Grantham

Thomas Grantham (1633–1692) was one of the foremost English General Baptist theologians of the seventeenth century. Grantham was thoroughly orthodox in his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. In his *magnum opus*, *Christianismus*

⁹⁷ See Crosby, *History of English Baptists*, 4:350–56.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Arnold, "Benjamin Stinton (1677–1719)," in Haykin and Wolever, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:40.

⁹⁹ John Walrond, "Letter to Samuel Mather, July 28, 1731," *Christian Examiner* 5, no. 5 (September-October 1828): 369.

Primitivus (1678), Grantham even reprinted the Nicene Creed. Elsewhere in *Christianismus Primitivus* Grantham wrote, “But that the Son (I speak now in respect of his Divine Essence only) and the Holy Spirit are Eternal, as the Father is Eternal, or consequently of the same Nature or Essence, may be gathered from these Testimonies.”¹⁰⁰ Grantham went on to quote a variety of texts that demonstrated that the Son was consubstantial with the Father regarding his deity.

Yet Grantham was hesitant to require others to use extrabiblical words and phrases. According to Grantham, the word “Trinity” was in “no way offensive to Christianity.”¹⁰¹ Yet he concluded, “It is not necessary to impose words upon any Man which God himself hath not used, by which to make known himself. Yet truly this term, *The Trinity*, hath a very near affinity with the Language of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰² This hesitancy led Grantham scholar, Clint Bass, to reasonably conclude, “Had Grantham been at the Salters’ Hall meeting in 1719, he might have been a Non-subscriber.”¹⁰³ Grantham serves as an example of an orthodox, non-subscribing tradition among the English General Baptists.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus: Or, The Ancient Christian Religion* (London: Francis Smith, 1678), bk. 2, pt. 1, 40.

¹⁰¹ Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, 40.

¹⁰² Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, 40.

¹⁰³ Bass, *Thomas Grantham*, 189.

¹⁰⁴ The English General Baptist Joseph Hooke carried Grantham’s legacy on subscription into the eighteenth century. Hooke was an ardent defender of orthodoxy, demonstrated by his work *The Socinian Slain With The Sword of the Spirit* (1700), which was a reply to Daniel Allen’s *The Moderate Trinitarian* (1699). In 1729, ten years after the Salters’ Hall Controversy, Hooke published a work entitled *Creed-Making and Creed-Imposing Considered; And The Divinity of Christ, And The Doctrine of the Trinity Defended* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1729). In it, Hooke was strongly in favor of the composition of creeds and confessions of faith. Hooke wrote, “God *makes* the Creed; and Man declares it, according to the best of his Understanding; and calls it a *Creed*, a Thing to be believed.” Hooke, *Creed-Making*, 3. Furthermore, Hooke was in favor of separating from and even expelling pastors who rejected essential biblical doctrines such as the Trinity. He was resolutely opposed to any unity or fellowship that was not “founded in our faith” (7). But Hooke followed Grantham on subscription: “This is my Judgment, concerning imposing of *Creeds*, or *Confessions of Faith of human Composure*; and I have, upon divers Occasions, declared my self to be against imposing *such Creeds*; wherein I agree with the *blessed Mr. Grantham*, and many others, both antient and modern Writers of good Esteem in the Church” (10).

Richard Baxter

The influence of Richard Baxter loomed large at Salters' Hall. Concerning John Shute Barrington, Roger Thomas wrote, "He would know and approve of Baxter's principle of reducing fundamentals to a minimum in the interests of peace and unity, and he would know too, that many Presbyterians, the most numerous denomination in London, were Baxterians in this sense."¹⁰⁵ What Thomas is referring to is the well-known account of Baxter's opposition to, what he perceived to be, the multiplication of essential Christian doctrines. Baxter believed that this only led to greater strife and division. Baxter's influence on Salters' Hall is particularly apparent in *A Letter to Mr. Robinson* (1719). The author wrote concerning an "imposing Spirit": "Mr. *Baxter* . . . gives us an Instance of this High Church Temper in his Time, that bears a very near Resemblance to the Creed-making Disposition that prevails at this Day among us."¹⁰⁶ Regarding religious toleration in England, Baxter saw great danger in "Enumerating Fundamentals . . . and desired that they might propose to Parliament the [Apostle's] Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, as a sufficient Test; but this would by no Means go down with such Orthodox Men as Doctor *Owen*, Doctor *Cheyne*, Doctor *Goodwin*, Mr. *Nye*, and Mr. *Sydrach Symphon*."¹⁰⁷ They were concerned that "a Socinian or a Papist . . . would subscribe all this. Why then, says Mr. *Baxter*, so much the better, and so much the fitter to be the Matter of our Concord: We are not to avoid Communion with Papists or Socinians by making new Rules of Faith or forcing Men to subscribe to more than they can conscientiously do."¹⁰⁸ This spirit seems to have been prevalent at Salters' Hall.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, "Non-Subscription Controversy," 168.

¹⁰⁶ *A Letter to Mr. Robinson* (London: T. Warner, 1719), 13.

¹⁰⁷ *A Letter to Mr. Robinson*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Letter to Mr. Robinson*, 15.

Conclusion

The case for the majority of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall being theologically orthodox regarding the doctrine of the Trinity but opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases is strong. There certainly were some anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall.¹⁰⁹ The decades following Salters' Hall saw an increase of anti-Trinitarianism throughout England, particularly in the Church of England, among the Presbyterians, and among the General Baptists. Yet the proliferation of anti-Trinitarianism in the decades following Salters' Hall does not necessarily entail a wholesale theological deviation from the doctrine of the Trinity among the Non-subscribers. The history of eighteenth-century English Dissent proves that this latitudinarian spirit, which pervaded Salters' Hall, did open the door even wider for theological deviation. The *sola Scriptura* principle, which was in many cases more akin to *nuda Scriptura*, could not stem the rising tide of heterodoxy. No matter how well-intended the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall were, if they hoped to maintain any sort of theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, their categorical opposition to subscription proved unwise.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Burroughs (General Baptist), Benjamin Avery (Presbyterian), and Nathaniel Lardner (Independent) are the most likely anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall, though there is some doubt concerning Burroughs. That is not to say that others may not be added to the list through further examination. Powicke maintained that Benjamin Avery and Nathaniel Lardner were Arians while John Gale, Samuel Chandler, Henry Read, and James Read (brothers) "may be classified as doubtful." Powicke, "Salters' Hall Controversy," 123.

CHAPTER 4

THE “VERY SOUND”

The theological orthodoxy of the Subscribers at Salters’ Hall was never called into question, even if their motives were. Using Walrond’s taxonomy, the majority of these men, if not all of them, would constitute the “very sound.” They not only affirmed theological orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, but they were willing to demonstrate their orthodoxy by publicly subscribing to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Furthermore, they thought it right and necessary for the entire body of Dissenters gathered at Salters’ Hall to do the same, with the intent of including their subscription in the advice they sent back to Exeter. For many of the Subscribers in the Salters’ Hall Controversy, particularly many of the ones considered in this chapter, the controversy was indeed about the doctrine of the Trinity.¹ As David Wykes has helpfully stated, “Yet for the subscribers it was about the Trinity, and those who refused to subscribe for reasons of conscience or principle were always vulnerable to the accusation that they rejected the Trinity.”² This will become quite evident in the writings of Thomas Bradbury, Daniel Wilcox, and John Cumming.

The orthodox Subscribers wanted to include an affirmation of the doctrine of

¹ The anonymous author of a work written against William Bush and David Jennings unrelentingly asserts that the two men’s siding with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall could only mean that they had embraced Arianism or Socinianism. The author even calls for their parishioners to excommunicate them as heretics. See *Plain Dealing: Or A Friendly Reproof To the Reverend Mr. William Bush, And Mr. David Jennings* (London: S. Popping, 1719).

² David L. Wykes, “The 1719 Salters’ Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent,” in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters’ Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 58.

the Trinity with their subscription for at least a couple of reasons. First, they wanted to clear themselves of any charge that they harbored Arian sentiments, which had been brought up in the House of Commons a few months prior. Thomas Bradbury, apparently aware of this, explained after the Salters' Hall meetings: "It was pleaded that our adherence to the Doctrine of the *Trinity* had been call'd in Question in both Houses of Parliament; that we are charg'd in several Pamphlets with receiving the *Arian* Notions."³ Word had apparently spread in the west, near Exeter, that many of the ministers in London harbored Arian sentiments. Therefore, the Subscribers wanted to thoroughly clear themselves of these charges. Second, and directly related to the first point, the orthodox Subscribers believed that subscribing to a confessional statement on the doctrine of the Trinity and including it in the advices, would clear them of the charge of Arianism, and would add weight to their advices. To quote Bradbury again, "These Advices were designed for those that *did* believe a Trinity, a Profession of our Faith was likely to give 'em a greater Weight."⁴ These seem to be the primary driving forces behind the Subscribers' desire to subscribe their names to Trinitarian doctrinal statements, which they intended to include in their letter of advices to Exeter.

In what follows, the lives and writings of five Subscribers will be explored in order to gain a better understanding of the "very sound," orthodox Subscribers. The five men that will be considered are Thomas Bradbury (Independent), Daniel Wilcox (Presbyterian), John Cumming (Scottish Presbyterian), Abraham Mulliner (General Baptist), and David Rees (Particular Baptist). Bradbury played a key role in the Salters' Hall Controversy. Wilcox, like Bradbury, wrote in defense of the Subscribers and

³ Thomas Bradbury, *An Answer to the Reproaches Cast on Those Dissenting Ministers Who subscrib'd their Belief of the Eternal Trinity. In a Letter to John Barrington-Shute, Esq* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719), 17.

⁴ Bradbury, *Answer to the Reproaches*, 17. Bradbury further notes that he proposed to "the Body of Independents," for these reasons, that a declaration of belief in the doctrine of the Trinity should be subscribed.

expressed his views on the controversy. Cumming wrote extensively on the doctrine of the Trinity soon after the controversy. Mulliner never addressed the meetings at Salters' Hall, but is worthy of consideration since he was the only General Baptist Subscriber. David Rees is fairly representative of the Particular Baptist Subscribers. Together, these men give us a clearer picture of the subscribing party gathered at Salters' Hall. Through their writings one will see not only their personal orthodoxy, but the ways in which they sought to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. Again, this is a reminder that for many of the Subscribers, for all of the talk about non-subscription, the controversy at Salters' Hall was primarily about the doctrine of the Trinity.

Thomas Bradbury (1676/7–1759)

Few, if any, of the ministers present at Salters' Hall were more strident in their defense of orthodoxy than the Independent minister Thomas Bradbury, who had been viewed by some as a controversialist prior to his involvement in the pamphlet war that came out of Salters' Hall.⁵ Bradbury was heavily involved in defending the freedom of Dissenters, which is most clearly evidenced by his annual sermon on November 5, marking King William's arrival in England and the Gunpowder Plot. He did not shy away from debate in print on lesser issues, so it is not surprising that Bradbury's defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and his critique of the Non-subscribers was straightforward and unreserved. Bradbury's contribution to the pamphlet war following Salters' Hall was unmatched in volume by any other Subscriber.

Bradbury was born at Alverthorpe to Peter and Mary Bradbury. His father was

⁵ Bogue and Bennet presented Bradbury in a much more positive light, and wished that the ministers at Salters' Hall had followed his advice: "It would have been well, if they had listened to the advice of Mr. Bradbury, who proposed, that instead of meeting as a council, they should repeatedly assemble for fasting and prayer; that they should then choose a few of the wisest and best of their number, and send them down to Exeter, to see and hear upon the spot, and give such counsel for the maintenance of the truth and harmony, as an accurate and personal knowledge of the whole should dictate." David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, From the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808* (London: Printed by the authors, 1810), 3:246.

a tailor by trade and member of a dissenting church. Bradbury attended Timothy Jollie's dissenting academy, and began preaching in 1697 as needed for a church at Beverly. His first ministry position began in 1699 when he served as an assistant to Richard Gilpin at Newcastle upon Tyne and then Benjamin Bennet who succeeded Gilpin. Bradbury also served as an assistant to John Galpin at Stepney prior to being ordained as the minister at Fetter Lane in 1710.

Bradbury had his first opportunity to preach in 1697 for the church at Beverly when the congregation was without a pastor; one of the members present expressed disappointment that Bradbury was the preacher for that day. The disappointment seems to have been primarily due to Bradbury's youth, and the accompanying expectation that he would not be a very good preacher because of his age and inexperience. Bradbury was understandably unsettled by this response, but soon managed to overcome his fears. Bradbury reportedly said later of the event, "I bless God, from that hour I have never known the fear of man."⁶ Bradbury's involvement at Salters' Hall seems to confirm the truth of this claim. For at Salters' Hall, and in the debate that followed, Bradbury regularly employed the most severe language against those whom he deemed his theological opponents.⁷ This was particularly true of his interaction with John Shute Barrington.

As a member of parliament, Barrington was a renowned defender of the English Dissenters.⁸ He worked to secure the repeal of the Occasional Conformity and

⁶ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:490.

⁷ Stoughton described Bradbury as "a man of war in theology no less than politics." John Stoughton, *History of Religion in England from the Opening of the Long Parliament to 1850*, 4th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 5:418.

⁸ Andrew C. Thompson notes the role of Barrington and Calamy in their printed defenses of Dissent. See Andrew C. Thompson, "Toleration, Dissent, and the State in Britain," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 2, *The Long Eighteenth Century, c.1689–1828*, ed. Andrew C. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 265–66.

Schism Acts.⁹ Barrington had some involvement in the Bangorian Controversy, but he was uniquely concerned with the controversy at Exeter, which quickly made its way to London. Barrington and James Peirce had some cordial interaction prior to the controversy, but Barrington's involvement at Salters' Hall was likely less about Peirce and more focused on protecting the public image of Dissenters. When news of the controversy arrived in London, Barrington helped put forth the set of advices that came under consideration by the ministers of the three denominations gathered at Salters' Hall. Certainly, Barrington hoped that the advices would be well received by the ministers and cooler heads would prevail in the matter. Thomas Bradbury made certain that Barrington's hopes went unrealized.

Barrington and Bradbury became fierce opponents in the wake of Salters' Hall. The two men did not mince words. Barrington's involvement at Salters' Hall was as a layman. Therefore, he was not numbered among the Subscribers or Non-subscribers, but he clearly sided with the Non-subscribers who were fairly satisfied with his advices. Bradbury was more directly involved at Salters' Hall as a subscribing minister and a driving (and occasionally unwelcomed) force among the Subscribers. The extremely contentious interaction between the two men becomes even more alarming when one considers the fact that Barrington was not only revered among Dissenters for defending their cause, but had actually been a member of Bradbury's congregation. This should not be missed. Thomas Bradbury, who referred to John Shute Barrington as "a trifling Malcontent," was Barrington's pastor. If Barrington was the author of *An Account of the Late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salters-Hall* (1719), which he likely was, then he was by no means innocent in the matter. The author said of Bradbury, questioning both his character and apparently some former statements on the Athanasian

⁹ David L. Wykes, "Religious Dissent, the Church, and the Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, 1714–1719," in *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660–1832*, ed. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 179–81.

Creed:

There was, indeed, some *Affinity* between being a *facetious Companion* and a *witty Preacher*; between the *Levity* of a *Jest*, and *Whipt-Cream Divinity*; and it may be accounted for, how the *Laugh of Conversation* should froth over again, and trifle pleasantly in a *Pulpit*. How agreeably pretty was an Expression of this Gentleman concerning the *Athanasian Creed*, that it was a *twirl of Words fitter for a Chymist than a Christian*? Who at that Time could have thought it, that he himself should set up for a *Twirslter*, and practice the *Chymist* upon his Neighbours, who had been unsufferably Witty against *Imposture*? . . . The Solemnity of the *Cloak* cannot conceal the Humour of the *Bottle*; and the Familiarity of plain *Tom*, will never be able to throw off an Acquaintance into the Distance that is due to reverend *Tom*, tho' guarded with all the Artillery of his *Spiritualities*.¹⁰

If this was indeed Barrington, the men who had formerly had some friendly interaction as pastor and layman, had become bitter, public enemies.

The author of a 1715 work, believed to be Daniel Defoe, the famed author of *Robinson Crusoe*, openly rebuked Bradbury for his invectives against Queen Anne at the succession of King George.¹¹ Bradbury believed that King George would be much more favorable to religious liberty for Dissenters, and he showed little restraint in rejoicing at King George's ascension to the throne after Queen Anne's death. Defoe believed that Bradbury's sermons encouraged violence against his political opponents, which Defoe thought unbecoming of a minister. Defoe, who simply referred to Bradbury as "Thomas," noted that Bradbury had, in times past, been referred to as "a Preacher of Righteousness."¹² For Defoe, such a title could no longer be descriptive of Bradbury's character or preaching. Defoe accused him of preaching "the Doctrine of Devils" for

¹⁰ *An Account Of the late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers At Salters-Hall*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Roberts, 1719), 27–28. There are several claims that Thomas Bradbury could be seen drinking after his November 5 sermons lauding the ascension of King George. One satirical publication notes his drinking and singing and refers to him as "merry Tom Bradbury." See *A Modest Apology for the Reverend Mr. Thomas Bradbury In a Letter to the Dissenting Layman* (London: J. Roberts, 1719), 8–9.

¹¹ P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2016), 153–54; John Handby Thompson, "Bradbury, Thomas," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3169>.

¹² Daniel Defoe, *A Friendly Epistle By Way of Reproof From one of the People called Quakers, To Thomas Bradbury, A Dealer in many Words*, 6th ed. (London: S. Keimer, 1715), 6.

supposedly encouraging his hearers to “return Evil for Evil.”¹³ Defoe’s critique was scathing, relentlessly impugning Bradbury’s character because of the content of his preaching.

Defoe was not alone in his concern about Bradbury’s character. In 1722, a dissenting layman petitioned the dissenting ministers to confront Bradbury and even bar him from the Pinners’ Hall lecture.¹⁴ The layman was grateful for Barrington’s work on behalf of Dissenters, believing he had “done more for the *Dissenters*, and sacrific’d more to their Interest, than any other Man in the Kingdom!”¹⁵ Bradbury, by contrast, the author believed, had only stirred up strife by publishing “Hear-says.”¹⁶ So the layman asked, “But I submit to the Judgment of every *Dissenting Minister in London*, whether a black Gown or Cloak ought to be a protection to a Man, who *cast’s Firebrands, Arrows, and Death at his Neighbor, and crieth, am I not in Sport?*”¹⁷ Having thoroughly examined Bradbury’s accusations that Barrington and others were either Arians or at least complicit in protecting Arians, this laymen pleaded,

Gentlemen, the Eyes of the World are upon you, and the Credit of the Dissenting Ministers lies at Stake; if after what has been now laid before you, this Man is to be own’d as a Brother, admitted to your Pulpits, and continued among the Preachers of the Merchants Lecture at *Pinners-Hall*, without acknowledging his Offences against God and his Neighbor, and making Satisfaction in the best Manner he can; I am afraid our Enemies will say, that whilst we have been contending for the Orthodox Faith, we have lost the very Remains of *Moral Virtue*.¹⁸

The author’s final claim about maintaining orthodoxy and losing virtue is rather intriguing and pertinent to both Thomas Bradbury in particular and the controversy at

¹³ Defoe, *A Friendly Epistle*, 29–30.

¹⁴ *An Appeal to the Dissenting Ministers, Occasioned by the Behaviour of Mr. Thomas Bradbury* (London: J. Peele, 1722), 32.

¹⁵ *Appeal to Dissenting Ministers*, 6.

¹⁶ *Appeal to Dissenting Ministers*, 6.

¹⁷ *Appeal to Dissenting Ministers*, 6.

¹⁸ *Appeal to Dissenting Ministers*, 32.

Salters' Hall in general. Bradbury was vigilant in contending for orthodoxy, but his critics consistently rebuked him for a lack of grace and character befitting of a minister. Bradbury "artfully endeavour'd to cover his immoral Conduct towards his Neighbors, by pretending a more than ordinary Zeal for the Truths of the Gospel."¹⁹ Bradbury certainly was not lacking in zeal.

Yet how did Bradbury perceive his zeal for orthodoxy, and what did he believe was at stake in the Salters' Hall Controversy? He styled himself as following in the footsteps of John Owen, who had opposed John Biddle and other anti-Trinitarians in the previous century.²⁰ For Bradbury, nothing less than the gospel itself was at stake. To undermine the doctrine of the Trinity, which Bradbury believed was the essence of the non-subscribing cause, was to undermine the doctrine of salvation. Therefore, Bradbury was willing to endure all opposition in order to defend the gospel: "But a Concern for the Salvation of Men, and a Conviction that *this* is promoted by a Belief of the Gospel, will make a Minister push thro all, and leave his Reputation where he leave his Soul; in the hands of him who will be a *faithful Witness*."²¹ He was satisfied with his lot in life because he had, despite his opponents' critique of his methods and character, "*kept the Faith of Jesus, and not denied his Name*."²²

As noted above, Bradbury was well acquainted with scorn, and he did not withdraw in the face of opposition because he believed himself to be on the side of truth and Christ himself. Bradbury wrote,

Tis no new thing for me to be *taken up in the Lips of Talkers*, and become *the Song of the Drunkard*: and as I was unmov'd in the last Reign by all the Violence of a Party which is not the Scorn of Providence; so I bless *the God of my Father*, who

¹⁹ *Appeal to Dissenting Ministers*, 24.

²⁰ Thomas Bradbury, *The Necessity of Contending for Revealed Religion: With a Sermon on the Fifth of November, 1719* (London: H. Woodfall, 1720), viii.

²¹ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, iv.

²² Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, iv.

has *counted me worthy to suffer Shame* from another Quarter, for the *blest Cause* that ever was in the World.²³

He did not spend much time addressing the fact that many of his opponents' critiques were more about his character than his doctrine. He encouraged and consoled his fellow Subscribers by arguing that the attacks against them were "merely because you had the Honesty to believe what you had subscrib'd, and the Courage to subscribe what you have believ'd."²⁴ The Subscribers, Bradbury contended, were willing to openly declare their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Non-subscribers were not. Bradbury did not disguise his view that many of the Non-subscribers were being insincere in their affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Bradbury openly accused those who championed charity and sincerity of deceit:

When a Person in one part of his Book brings a Scheme to destroy the *Athanasian Creed*, and in another tells us it's consistent with it; 'tis such a pulling down and propping up, confounding and maintaining the same thing, that I must think after all this Jumble, such a Writer has no more Pretence to *Sincerity* than he has to *Orthodoxy*.²⁵

He further quipped, "A *Sincerity* that deceives the World, and a *Charity* that abuses it, are the Grievances of our day; and tho they are called by the Name of the Spirit, are indeed no better than the *Lusts of the Flesh*."²⁶ For all of the talk of charity and peace among the Non-subscribers, Bradbury believed they were subversively undermining the gospel. With such an important matter at stake, Bradbury spoke firmly and directly.

Bradbury corresponded with the New England divine Cotton Mather about the controversy surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. Bradbury published Mather's letter in *The Necessity of Contending of Contending for Revealed Religion* (1720). According to Bradbury, Mather was deeply concerned by the reports in New England about the

²³ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, iv.

²⁴ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, iv–v.

²⁵ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, vii.

²⁶ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, vii.

controversy, so he wrote to Bradbury. It is somewhat difficult to decipher which controversy Mather primarily has in mind, Exeter or Salters' Hall. It certainly may be that he is addressing both since they are directly related. The letter is dated September 7, 1719, but many of the details Mather gives sound more specifically related to the Exeter controversy than anything that had come out of Salters' Hall by that time. However, Mather shared Bradbury's concerns, believing that there could be no "All-sufficient SAVIOUR" without him being "in his *Essence* one with the Infinite and Eternal God, and so, *equal with God*."²⁷ In language strikingly similar to that which Bradbury employed, Mather forcefully stated,

They can't see, that it is any other than a *Spurious Charity*, and the noble Principle of *Catholick Charity* miserably misapplied and prostituted unto evil Purposes, when it extends unto such a Latitude, that we must admit all sorts of *Hereticks*, and even *Mahometans* themselves, to our *Communion*; and compel us to *communicate* with all those whom it would be an unjust thing to *persecute*.²⁸

Mather's assessment of the situation must have confirmed, if not emboldened, Bradbury's strident opposition to the Non-subscribers.

Even into the mid-1720s, Bradbury found himself at odds with Isaac Watts.

Watts impugned Bradbury's character and what he saw as a consistent quarrelsomeness.

Watts wrote,

Look back to your contentions with many of your brethren in the ministry, and many gentlemen in the world, and tell me if there be any one minister this day in London who hath been so often in the fire of contention, and embroiled in so many quarrels as Mr. Bradbury. Assure yourself, Sir, the world will not always believe that all your antagonists were the angry and quarrelsome men, and that Mr. Bradbury was ever innocent and peaceful.²⁹

The men exchanged rhetorical blows through letters and in print for several years.

Bradbury was unsettled by Watts's writings on the doctrine of the Trinity. Watts was

²⁷ Cotton Mather, quoted in Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, xx.

²⁸ Mather, quoted in Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, xxii–xxiii.

²⁹ Isaac Watts, *The Posthumous Works of the Late Learned and Reverend Isaac Watts, D. D.* (London: T. Becket, 1779), 2:172.

primarily concerned with Bradbury's character, believing it possible to defend the doctrine of the Trinity with greater charity as other ministers had done. Yet Bradbury remained relentlessly focused on defending the doctrine of the Trinity against those with whom "the divinity of Christ evaporates into an attribute."³⁰ Bradbury inquired of Watts, "Do you think that the ministers of London are to stand still while you tear in pieces eight great articles of their faith?"³¹

The preceding accounts are paradigmatic of how Bradbury was often perceived and how he perceived himself and his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Bradbury was stringently orthodox. He was convinced that all of the calls for charity and peace were merely cloaks for heterodoxy. Bradbury pithily claimed concerning Salters' Hall and the aftermath, "a Scheme of Peace threw us all into a State of War."³² The war was fought in print and Bradbury was more than ready to take up arms and even lead the charge. Unlike Edward Wallin, Edmund Calamy, and Isaac Watts, Bradbury believed, from the very beginning of the controversy, that the doctrine of the Trinity was at stake and that the Non-subscribers were undermining it.

Despite his regular resort to name-calling, Bradbury's trinitarian theology was sound. Somewhat surprisingly, Bradbury, though thoroughly orthodox, did not typically use words such as "essence" or "substance" in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity.³³ Of course, he certainly affirmed these terms by his subscription at Salters' Hall. Bradbury even commended the writings of Daniel Wilcox and John Cumming on the doctrine of

³⁰ Bradbury, quoted in Watts, *Posthumous Works*, 2:206.

³¹ Bradbury, quoted in Watts, *Posthumous Works*, 2:207.

³² Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, vii.

³³ This is also true in his confession of faith at his ordination. See Thomas Bradbury, *A Confession of Faith, at the Publick Ordination of Thomas Bradbury. London, July the Tenth, 1707. With an Exhortation to Minister and People. By Mr. John Shower* (London: B. Mills, 1707).

the Trinity.³⁴ But Bradbury's efforts were less focused on theological polemics and more focused on the politics of the controversy. Wilcox, on the other hand, was keenly focused on the theological details of the debate.

Daniel Wilcox (1676–1733)

One of the most significant works produced during the Salters' Hall Controversy was a four-part work entitled *The Noble Stand* (1719–20), written by the Presbyterian minister Daniel Wilcox.³⁵ In 1703, Wilcox was ordained as a minister of the congregation at Abbots-Reading with the notable ministers William Tong and Benjamin Robinson, both Subscribers at Salters' Hall, presiding over the service alongside a couple of other ministers. By 1706, Wilcox had begun serving the Monkwell Street congregation as an assistant to Samuel Doolittle who died soon thereafter. Upon Doolittle's death, Wilcox became the pastor at Monkwell Street where he served for the rest of his ministry.

Wilcox was apparently known as a kind and faithful minister, but also determinedly orthodox. This can be observed throughout his published sermons. Yet even prior to Wilcox's public preaching ministry his orthodoxy was on display. His ordination sermon from 1703 was later published as a work entitled *The Sum of Christianity in a Confession of Faith* (1715). The faith that Wilcox confessed at his ordination was historically Trinitarian and accorded with standard reformed soteriology. It was essentially an abbreviated summary of the Westminster Confession. His strident orthodoxy became even more apparent in his work *The Duty of Holding Fast to Sounds Words* (1717), which was an argument for the validity and use of confessions of faith in teaching and as tests of doctrinal orthodoxy. According to Wilcox, confessions of faith are intended to be public declarations of what a church or group of churches believe the

³⁴ Bradbury, *Necessity of Contending*, v.

³⁵ While the first and second parts are printed separately, every version of the work that I have found combines the third and fourth parts into a single volume.

Bible teaches about essential doctrines. Wilcox believed that this was a direct application of Paul's admonition to Timothy to "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13).

In this work, Wilcox demonstrated a deep awareness of the doctrinal controversies of his day. He was familiar with the objection that confessional subscription was more befitting of Papists than Protestants. Wilcox did not deny that Papists had abused the concept, but he was not ready to abandon what he believed to be a biblical practice simply because it had "been abused by Papists on one side, and is now so much decry'd by Protestants of loose Principles on the other."³⁶ The "Protestants of loose Principles," to whom Wilcox referred often wanted to replace confessional tests of orthodoxy with Scripture tests. Wilcox puts their common objection in the form of a question: "But is not the Bible or Scripture, Test sufficient, and the subscribing this, enough to denominate a Man Orthodox?" To which Wilcox replied with a rather direct "No." He contended that since no one would refuse to subscribe to the words of the Bible, Scripture words alone were an insufficient test. Furthermore, requiring subscription to a confession of faith was not intended to call people away from Scripture, "but a putting them to the Tryal in what Sense they understand the Scripture."³⁷ Being a Presbyterian, Wilcox recommended the use of the Westminster Confession of Faith for this purpose, but he also confessed his admiration for the "Ancient Creeds."³⁸

Wilcox had not wavered in his strident defense of orthodoxy by 1719, which is apparent in *The Noble Stand*.³⁹ Wilcox's publication was sparked by an account of the

4. ³⁶ Daniel Wilcox, *The Duty of Holding Fast to Sounds Words* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1717),

³⁷ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 11.

³⁸ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 8.

³⁹ The first part of *The Noble Stand* was apparently submitted by Wilcox for publication in the *Flying-Post* on March 21, but did not appear. Wilcox believed that its publication was stopped by either the Non-subscribers or some who sympathized with them. See Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719), 34.

Salter's Hall Controversy published in the *Whitehall Evening Post* on Saturday, March 14, 1719.⁴⁰ The newspaper heaped praise upon the Non-subscribers for affirming that “*the Scriptures are the only and perfect Rule of Faith and Practice, so they should be the only Standard of Truth and Orthodoxy.*”⁴¹ Yet, as they noted in their advices to Exeter, they affirmed the value of creeds, confessions, and catechisms, but opposed their use for doctrinal test. Furthermore, they denounced Arianism and “declared for the Doctrine of the *ever blessed Trinity*, as deliver'd in the *Holy Scripture.*”⁴² Finally, the Non-subscribers contended for “stating Doctrines, *only* to be known by Revelation in the words of Revelation only, when designed for a Standard and Test.”⁴³ Wilcox took exception not only with the newspaper's praise of the Non-subscribers, but also that they did not distinguish between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers. It was as if the Non-subscribers represented the entire body of dissenting ministers, and that their advices were approved by the entire body. Wilcox endeavored to set the record straight.

Wilcox's title *The Noble Stand* seems to have been a somewhat sarcastic play on the *Whitehall Evening Post's* commendation of the Non-subscribers as the truly noble party. The work began with a detailed account of the various meetings at Salter's Hall, although he openly admitted that he only attended the March 3 meeting when the ministers separated.⁴⁴ But Wilcox quickly moved to questioning whether or not the Non-subscribers' actions were truly noble. He did so by taking the newspaper entry section by section. As it related to all doctrinal tests being in Scripture words only, Wilcox, as expected, claimed that such a rule would never suffice for identifying heretics since no

⁴⁰ Wilcox transcribes the entirety of the *Whitehall Evening Post's* account near the beginning of part one of *The Noble Stand*. I have also transcribed the entire account in appendix 1.

⁴¹ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 4.

⁴² Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 4.

⁴³ Wilcox, *Duty of Holding Fast*, 5.

⁴⁴ Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand. Second Part* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719), 32.

heretic would oppose the very words of the Bible. What mattered was, as Wilcox had argued in 1717, the sense in which a person understood the biblical text. Confessions, creeds, and catechisms served this purpose well, Wilcox believed. On the doctrine of the Trinity itself, Wilcox wanted to know that when these ministers professed to believe in the “Proper Divinity of Christ” they meant “he is of the *same Essence* with the *Father*.” If this was what they meant by their use of “proper divinity,” then Wilcox asked, “Where was the harm of being open and speaking out?”⁴⁵ His fear was that this was indeed not what they meant, and that their words were intended to deceive.

Unlike the *Whitehall Evening Post*, Wilcox was also unimpressed with their denunciation of Arianism, “a Doctrine dead and buried many hundred Years ago.”⁴⁶ What were the Non-subscribers’ beliefs about Clarke’s “new scheme”? For Wilcox, that was the pertinent question. Wilcox wrote, “They disclaim’d the *Arian* Doctrine: Well, But is the *Arian* Doctrine in the account, and the Doctrine of the *New Scheme*, as it is called, concerning the ever blessed Trinity, one and the same?”⁴⁷ The Non-subscribers’ affirmation of “the Doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity, as delivered in Holy Scripture” provided no sense of certainty for Wilcox since Samuel Clarke’s “new scheme” was put forth most clearly in a work entitled *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity*.⁴⁸ What was needed, in Wilcox’s estimation, was a theologically precise statement on the doctrine of the Trinity for the ministers to subscribe to. Otherwise, “they that are for an *Inequality* and *Subordination* of Persons, may say they are for the Doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity as delivered in the Holy Scripture, and so seem to declare the Common Faith of

⁴⁵ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 17.

⁴⁶ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 15.

⁴⁷ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 15.

⁴⁸ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 15.

Christians, when they only mean a Scheme of their own.”⁴⁹

Wilcox also took exception with the insinuation that subscription to the First Article of the Church of England and the answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions in the Westminster Shorter Catechism would be a rejection of the foundation of the apostles and prophets.⁵⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* had presented the Non-subscribers’ opposition to confessions and creeds being used as a test as an affirmation of the “Protestant principle” *sola Scriptura*. In Wilcox’s estimation, this was a deeply flawed understanding of the principle, and impossible to live in accordance with. He asked, “May not the Doctrine reveal’d in Scripture be truly express’d in other words? If not, of what use are *Expositions, Sermons, and a Publick Ministry?*”⁵¹ Surely none of the Non-subscribers, most of whom were either ministers or preachers, would oppose biblical exposition and preaching. The Non-subscribers even used “human words” in their own declaration since “Trinity” and “Proper Divinity” are never expressly used in Scripture.⁵² From this Wilcox concluded that the Non-subscribers should not then be opposed to the use of “sound words” for a trial or test of orthodoxy since their soundness is based upon their being in accord with Scripture.

Furthermore, if words other than those found in Scripture are impermissible for tests of orthodoxy, how will any Arian or Deist be discovered? Wilcox sarcastically exclaimed, “Lo! *Freethinkers* of every kind proclaim a *Jubilee!* as long as this Rule stands, no Heretick or Heresy shall be known any more in the Christian Church forever.”⁵³ Wilcox went on to provide an example from the words of Jesus recorded in

⁴⁹ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 15–16.

⁵⁰ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 19.

⁵¹ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 20.

⁵² Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 23.

⁵³ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 22.

John 10:30, where Jesus stated, “I and my Father are one.” Considering how this particular passage might be distorted and used to disguise heretical doctrine, Wilcox surmised, “that is, in a *Sabellian’s* Mouth, *One Person*, under divers Names; in the Mouth of an *Arian* and *Socinian*, One in Consent and Will, in opposition to One in Essence; with Dr. *Clark* ‘tis One in *Power*, but still with a Subordination and Inequality of Nature.” Whereas, “in the common *Faith* and Confession of the Churches of Christ, ‘tis One in *Essence*, *Power*, *Consent*, and *Will*, ONE and the same GOD with the *Father*, though a *distinct Person*.”⁵⁴ Wilcox’s point was quite clear: the use of Scripture words alone would never expose heterodox interpretations of Scripture. He pointed to Nicaea to further confirm his point. He wrote, “Confessions of Faith were always hateful things to *such* as found themselves pinch’d by them.”⁵⁵ In sum, though hoping better of his fellow ministers, Wilcox suspected that a suspicion of confessions usually stemmed from heterodox belief.

Wilcox was a thoroughly orthodox London Presbyterian minister. He was by all indications admired by his congregation and many of his peers, including one minister outside of his denomination, the Particular Baptist Samuel Wilson. Wilcox died on April 11, 1733, and James Wood, a Presbyterian Subscriber at Salters’ Hall, preached Wilcox’s funeral sermon to Wilcox’s Monkwell Street congregation on April 22. Fittingly, Wilcox’s final sermon text was Psalm 31:5: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (KJV). Wood adopted this as his text. The published version of the sermon is prefaced with Wood’s admiration for Wilcox, and his commendation of the man to Wilcox’s congregation. The Particular Baptist Samuel Wilson also preached a funeral sermon at Monkwell Street on May 20, marking Wilcox’s death and ministry. Wilson had apparently been converted under Wilcox’s ministry, or at

⁵⁴ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 27.

⁵⁵ Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, 32.

least begun to fall under conviction of his sin through Wilcox's preaching.⁵⁶ From the sermon, it also seems that Wilson had regularly attended to hear Wilcox preach for some time.⁵⁷ Lamenting the great loss of his beloved friend and mentor, Wilson preached from Acts 20:38 (KJV) where Paul was departing from the Ephesian elders, and Luke records, "Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." Wilson, reflecting on Wilcox's influence on his own life, remarked to Wilcox's congregation: "So you will, I persuade my self, easily excuse me, if, as a Debt of Gratitude to his memory, I drop a Tear or two of Affection on his Hearse, and cry out, with the Prophet on a like Occasion, *My Father! My Father! The Chariot of Israel and the Horsemen thereof.*"⁵⁸ Wilcox's determined orthodoxy was equally matched by his service as an affectionate minister.

On the whole, Wilcox's four-part project *The Noble Stand* attempted to undermine the Non-subscriber's supposed advocacy for the "Protestant principle" of *sola Scriptura*. Wilcox's treatment of newspaper publications and pamphlets concerning Salters' Hall were unmatched in thoroughness. His typical approach was to address these works, whenever possible, line-by-line in order to show their inconsistencies as well as how the Non-subscribers' methodology aided in the proliferation of heresy rather than promote a Protestant understanding of the supremacy of Scripture in doctrinal matters. Wilcox was forceful in his argumentation, but seemingly more tactful than Bradbury. This may account for the respect that many ministers had for Wilcox prior to and after the

⁵⁶ Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 3:206. John Gill preached a funeral sermon for Wilson in 1750 and noted Wilson's admiration for Wilcox and Wilcox's influence on him. See John Gill, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Revd. Mr. Samuel Wilson, Who departed this Life October 6, In the Forty-eighth Year of his Age, Preached October 14, 1750* (London: G. Keith, 1750), 45. For an earlier account of Wilson, see "Memoir of the Rev. Samuel Wilson; Formerly Pastor of the Church in Goodman's Fields, London," *Baptist Magazine* 11, no. 4 (1819): 141–45. For a more recent treatment of Wilson, see Terry Wolever, "Samuel Wilson," in *The British Particular Baptists*, edited by Michael A. G. Haykin and Terry Wolever (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2018), 182–209.

⁵⁷ Samuel Wilson, *The Blessing of a Gospel Ministry; Consider'd in a Sermon Preach'd at the late Reverend Mr. Daniel Wilcox's Meeting Place* (London: Aaron Ward and H. Whitridge, 1733), 4.

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Blessing of a Gospel Ministry*, 5.

controversy, which is exceedingly apparent in his death in 1733.⁵⁹

John Cumming (1685–1729)

At the time of the Salters' Hall Controversy, John Cumming pastored at Founders' Hall, Lothbury, a Scottish Presbyterian congregation in London.⁶⁰ He had begun his service there in 1716 after the death of Robert Fleming, who had pastored the church since 1698. It was apparently Fleming's dying request that Cumming succeed him as pastor. Cumming had assumed the role of pastor at Founders' Hall in June of 1716, but by the end of 1717 he was engaged in the controversy surrounding Bishop Hoadly's sermon "The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church of Christ." Cumming took exception with some of the arguments in Snape's reply to Hoadly so he published a sermon he had preached in response to Snape.⁶¹ By 1719, Cumming had been drawn into the controversy at Salters' Hall where he sided with the Subscribers. Cumming wrote in defense of subscription as well as the doctrine of the Trinity, and in opposition to the dangers he saw in the Non-subscribers' approach to subscription. Yet his replies, though firm and direct, remained amicable even during his debate with the Presbyterian Non-subscriber John Evans.

Cumming's massive work *The Grounds of the Present Differences, Among the*

⁵⁹ Wilcox's *Christ's Claim of the Heart* (1714) was preached during John Billingsley's catechizing lecture. In it, Wilcox implored his hearers to give their hearts to Christ. John Billingsley was a Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall. Wilcox said concerning him in 1714, "You are Happy in your Choice of that Reverend Minister, at whose Feet you have plac'd your Selves to be Train'd up in the Truth as it is in Jesus: Whose Age, and Experience, and Learning, and Grace, eminently fit him to Teach you the Way of the Lord, the Good and Right way. And as from the Love to God and Christ, and your Immortal Souls, he is capable of no greater Joy than to see you as his Children walking in the Truth; let him not miss of it, as to any one under his Care!" Daniel Wilcox, *Christ's Claim of the Heart: A Sermon Preach'd to the Society of Young Men Belonging to Mr. Billingsley's Catechizing Lecture at Mr. Shower's Meeting-Place in the Old Jury, December 27th, 1714* (London: Joseph Marshall, 1715), 6.

⁶⁰ Wilson surmises that Cumming might have been of Irish decent. See Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 2:487.

⁶¹ John Cumming, *The Conspiracies of Evil-Designing Men against the real Interests of Christ's Kingdom . . . and their Disappointments. A Sermon Preach'd at Founders-Hall, November 5, 1717. Containing Brief Remarks on some passages in Dr. Snape's late Vindication* (London: A. Bell, 1717).

London Ministers (1720) may be the clearest, most thorough examination of the theological issues at stake among the ministers at Salters' Hall.⁶² Cumming's work dealt heavily with the role of "Scripture-Consequences" in the debate and their importance to Christian doctrine. Cumming sought to show not only how the consequences of Scripture were essential to Christian doctrine, but to demonstrate that the affirmation of such was binding upon professing Christians, especially ministers. If this was the case, Cumming reasoned, then subscription to a confession of faith that affirmed these Scripture consequences could not be considered imposition any more than the requirement of subscription to Scripture itself. For these reasons and others, Cumming concluded that there was very little, if any, significant agreement among the Subscribers and Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. Each of these elements of Cumming's argument will be considered.

Before considering these elements, however, it should be noted that Cumming was hesitant to attribute ill motives or heterodox beliefs to all of the Non-subscribers. He held out hope that some of them were overly zealous for Christian liberty, but simply failed to balance their zeal for liberty with a zeal for safeguarding orthodox doctrine.⁶³ John Evans, who had written a work directed to Cumming on Scripture consequences, might have been one of the Non-subscribers that Cumming held out hope for.⁶⁴ Evans's work was addressed throughout *Grounds of the Present Differences*. According to Wilson, Cumming was friends with John Evans, with whom he sparred in print, until his

⁶² John Cumming, *The Grounds of the Present Differences, Among the London Ministers. In Two Parts* (London: John Clark, 1720).

⁶³ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, v, vii–viii.

⁶⁴ John Evans, *A Letter to Mr. Cumming Concerning the Regard Which ought to be had to Scripture-Consequences*, 2nd ed. (London: John Clark, 1719). The work was a response to a previous work from Cumming on the same subject. See John Cumming, *Advice to Christians, to contend for the Faith once delivered to the Saints. A Discourse to a Society of Young Men in Jewen-Street; On Easter-Monday, 1719* (London: J. Darby, 1719).

death in 1729. Evans apparently visited Cumming on his death bed.⁶⁵ Evans noted in his work that he and Cumming had had cordial conversations on the subject in private. So Cumming held out an olive branch to any Non-subscribers who wished to express their affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity in their own words, but in the same sense of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Thirty-Nine Articles.⁶⁶ However, Cumming's optimism about the personal beliefs and motives of the Non-subscribers did not restrain him from addressing the great danger he perceived in permitting only the express words of Scripture to be binding on doctrinal matters such as the Trinity.

Cumming's Trinitarian orthodoxy was unquestionable. He rejected accusations that the doctrine of the Trinity, which he described as the Father, Son, and Spirit "being *one in Nature, Substance, or Essence*," resulted in Tritheism. Cumming insisted that "there is but *one God*, and that the incommunicable *Characters* and *Perfections* of the eternal Godhead, are applied, and do belong to these *Blessed Three*, in the same absolute and supreme Sense, and yet . . . *these three are One God!*" According to Cumming, "The *Unity* of God is an *Unity of Nature*; and that there cannot be *divers Natures, Essences, or Substances* in the Godhead. So that *if these Three are One God*, they must *necessarily* be of *one Essence or Substance*."⁶⁷ And if the Father, Son, and Spirit were of a singular essence, then all forms of ontological subordination of the Son or Spirit were to be rejected as heterodox.

While thoroughly orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, Cumming's most significant contribution to the debates that followed Salters' Hall was his focused discussion of "Scripture-Consequences," which was at the heart of the debate. To be clear, Cumming's intent was to show that the doctrine of the Trinity was a Scripture

⁶⁵ Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 2:492.

⁶⁶ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, ix–x.

⁶⁷ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 164–65.

consequence, which was the first major move in his argument. He proceeded, however, to demonstrate that Scripture consequences, or the direct implications of the Bible's clear teachings, were binding upon Christians to believe. John Locke and some of the Non-subscribers had rejected such claims.

For Cumming, the consubstantial Trinity was an undeniable consequence of Scripture. That is, the consubstantial Trinity was an undeniable implication of many biblical passages, and the Bible as a whole. He maintained that there may not be a passage in the Bible that contains the words of the early church creeds or the Reformed confessions on the doctrine of the Trinity verbatim, but the doctrines contained in those creeds and confessions were clearly taught there.⁶⁸ Cumming characterized the Non-subscribers' appeal to the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* as an "Arian Plea" in the sense that even if they did not affirm Arianism, the plea was the same. Cumming noted, "The Arians demanded a *Text* in which the *Son* is in so many Words said to be of the *same Substance* or *Essence* with the *Father*. The *Macedonians* ask'd *Where is it written that the Holy Ghost is GOD?* and the *Eutychians*, *In what Scripture are the two Natures of Christ to be read?*"⁶⁹ The Non-subscribers, he believed, followed a similar line of argumentation.

Cumming insisted that such an approach could never make sense of Scripture because it could not "reconcile those Places that seem *contradictory*."⁷⁰ Following the early church theologian Theodoret, Cumming recommended the analogy of faith as the solution to dealing with such passages. The analogy of faith would help the reader resolve these seeming contradictions by moving beyond the plain words on the page to considering the sense of the words within the context of the whole Bible. He again

⁶⁸ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 10.

⁶⁹ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 5.

⁷⁰ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 8.

referenced Theodoret, who applied this to the person of the Son: “He observes that if we take these Words, *My Father is greater than I*, simply, and not consider that they are to be understood *Oeconomically*, we shall presumptuously conclude that the *Son* is in all Respects *Inferior* to the *Father*.”⁷¹ But Jesus’ statement must be reconciled with other statements where he claims equality with the Father, which required a reading of Scripture that went beyond the mere words on the page. It required Scripture consequences.

The issue for Cumming, however, was not restricted to the doctrine of the Trinity. Cumming surmised that his interlocutors’ approach of restricting doctrine to that which is taught in the plain words of Scripture would undermine the value of Scripture altogether. This would, in turn, delegitimize nearly all Christian doctrine. Cumming critiqued those who reduced the biblical text to mere words for pretending that “God had given us a Revelation of simple *Word* or *Ideas* which we can neither connect together, nor deduce any thing from.”⁷² This was what the early “hereticks” had done. “But the *Orthodox* Fathers proved that these Men abused the Scriptures” since “they reduc’d them to a Heap of insignificant *Words* or *Sounds*.”⁷³ From this “heap of insignificant words,” no doctrine could be formulated or defended. The early Church Fathers were not content with such an approach. They insisted on a definite sense in which Scripture should be understood, and by which doctrine should be assessed. In response, “They press’d upon the *Hereticks*, that the *Sense* of Scripture, and not the *Sound* of Words was the Matter of their Faith.”⁷⁴

Following what he believed to be the teaching of orthodox Christians

⁷¹ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 8.

⁷² Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 6.

⁷³ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 6.

⁷⁴ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 6.

throughout history, Cumming argued that Scripture consequences possessed binding authority. The authority of such consequences, which he even referred to as “*Scripture-Revelations*,” possessed the same authority as Scripture since they were directly derived from Scripture. Therefore, just as Scripture is binding for the Christian, so true “*Scripture-Consequences*,” or “*Scripture-Revelations*,” are binding.⁷⁵ As Cumming explained, “The *Respect* we claim to them is upon this Account, that they are *virtually* contain’d in, and a *part* of the *Scriptures* themselves.”⁷⁶ Cumming readily admitted that such an approach could be abused, which he conceded the Roman Catholic Church had done, but the potential for abuse did not negate the proper use.

Many of the Non-subscribers had claimed that required subscription to confessions or creeds that contained extrabiblical words and phrases was an imposition of fallible human authority. Such an approach placed the words of fallible men over the words of God. One Non-subscriber wrote in the *Occasional Paper*, “These Consequences must then be always distinguish’d from the Authority of the Holy Scriptures themselves: And how useful soever they may be for Instruction or Persuasion, THEY CAN NEVER HAVE AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE MENS FAITH.”⁷⁷ Cumming rejected such a notion and replied that the Non-subscribers’ position made the individual the final arbiter of truth. According to Cumming, if there were not genuine Scripture consequences, and the meaning of Scripture was determined by each individual’s capacity of reason, then it followed that it was not Scripture that was authoritative, but the reader whose “private *Apprehension* fixes a *Divine Authority* on some Consequences, *irrespectively* and

⁷⁵ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 15. A doctrine could not simply be claimed as a consequence of Scripture if it were a false doctrine. Errors were not to be considered true Scripture consequences.

⁷⁶ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 14.

⁷⁷ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 22.

independently on what they are in themselves.”⁷⁸ Scripture consequences must be true, Cumming believed, irrespective of whether or not an individual apprehends them from reading the Bible. It is worth quoting Cumming at length on this point:

And now I appeal to all Mankind, whether this be not to lay an unconscionable *Stress*, not on *Scripture-Consequences*, but on Man’s own *Eyesight*? And whether, if this Reasoning will hold, all the Authority of the *Scripture itself*, relative to us, is not to be resolv’d into *our Apprehensions* of it? For it the Authority of just and lawful *Consequences* from Scripture, arises, *not* from anything in themselves, but from *our Judgment* concerning them; by Parity of Reason, the Authority of Scripture, with Respect to us, arises *not* from what *it is* in itself, but from what *we take it to be*. So that Things must come to this at last, That all the *Authority* of the inspir’d Writings over *ever Man*, that is, Their Power to *command*, and *require Obedience* in the Name of God, is founded not on their *divine Original*, not upon the *Nature* and Evidence of what they reveal, but upon the *Judgment* which *ever Man* forms of them.⁷⁹

Cumming’s critique attempted to turn the Non-subscribers’ argument back on them. Whereas they had claimed that making Scripture consequences binding placed fallible humans above Scripture, Cumming argued that their approach was dependent upon the reader’s private judgment. This, he argued, makes man the final arbiter of truth rather than Scripture.

Cumming saw great danger in the Non-subscribers’ methodology. Consequently, he flatly rejected Evans’s and other Non-subscribers’ claim that there was only a slight difference between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers positions on the matter. The variance between the two philosophies could not be greater in Cumming’s estimation. Cumming contended that there are true Scripture consequences, so tied to the text itself, that they bear the same authority as Scripture. Such consequences could, therefore, be binding upon believers regardless of whether or not they apprehended them. The Non-subscribers’ approach, on the other hand, required an “*infallible Interpreter*.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 23.

⁷⁹ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 23–24.

⁸⁰ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 112.

Not only did this undermine the core doctrines of Christianity, including the doctrine of the Trinity, it undermined the basis for religion altogether. As Cumming put it, “*The new Plea strikes at the grand Principles of NATURAL RELIGION; and renders the Creed of a Deist, as uncertain as the Faith of a Christian.*”⁸¹ For Cumming, these were the “grounds of the present differences among the London Ministers,” and the differences were vast and consequential.

Abraham Mulliner (1671–1739)

Abraham Mulliner, pastor of White’s Alley, Moorfields, where he served for nearly forty years (1699–1739), was the only subscribing General Baptist at Salters’ Hall.⁸² Mulliner had endured turbulent times at White’s Alley alongside Joseph Jenkins under the pastorate of Joseph Taylor. In 1699, after Taylor had preached his sermon he denounced the church, and departed for another congregation at Devonshire-square. A portion of the White’s Alley congregation followed him there. Mulliner had departed for Chichester, but was called by the congregation at White’s Alley where he was elected as pastor in 1700.⁸³ Concerning his duties as a pastor, “it was the chief, the most constant, and the most laborious part of his life, in which he ceased not, for the space of about forty

⁸¹ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 52.

⁸² Crosby records Mulliner’s death as May 31, 1739. Mulliner is buried in London at Bunhill Fields.

⁸³ Adam Taylor, *History of the English General Baptists* (London, 1818), 1:332–34. There is a discrepancy between Taylor and Crosby on the date of Mulliner’s assumption of the role of pastor at White’s Alley. Taylor maintains that Mulliner was unanimously elected as pastor in 1703. Crosby records that Mulliner was ordained at White’s Alley in 1700 with no mention of his time at Chichester. Thomas Crosby, *History of the English Baptists* (London, 1740), 4:405. There is an important entry worthy of further exploration regarding Mulliner, Chichester, Richard Drinkwater, and Matthew Randall at the end of article on William Carey in *Baptist Quarterly*. According to the entry, George Smith encountered Matthew Caffyn in prison where he became acquainted with Caffyn’s heterodox views. A Thomas Croucher apparently embraced Caffyn’s views and Mulliner opposed him. According to the note, Caffyn’s followers were expelled and formed a “rival group” that met at Chichester in 1721. Among those who gathered at Chichester, were Matthew Randall and Richard Drinkwater. Both of these names are listed among the General Baptist Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. This narrative is based upon “a few fragments” gathered by Josiah Thompson in 1770 about the Baptist Church at Chichester. See W. Taylor Bowie, “William Carey,” *Baptist Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1943): 174.

years, to watch for the welfare of mens souls, and warm them with many tears.”⁸⁴

Mulliner and White’s Alley played an important role in the General Association of General Baptists, which had been formed due to concern over the General Assembly’s handling of the Matthew Caffyn controversy. Mulliner and the White’s Alley congregation were numbered among those in the General Association, with the early General Association meetings held at White’s Alley. Mulliner was regularly involved in the General Association meetings in the early 1700s. He appears as a signatory of a *Brief Confession* (1703), which explicitly defended a historically orthodox view of the Trinity. The first and third articles on the Godhead and the Second Person of the Trinity, were thoroughly orthodox, and clearly based upon the Thirty-Nine Articles. The First Article read,

We believe and are very confident, That there is one, and but one Living and True GOD, who is from Everlasting to Everlasting and changeth not; without Body, parts, or Passions Essentially present in all Places, of Infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the make and preserver of all things in Heaven and Earth, visible and Invisible; and in this Divine and Infinite Being, or Unity of the Godhead, there are three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of one Substance, Power and Eternity: but as for all other Doctrines that are contrary and opposite to this abovesaid Article, we abhor and solemnly protest against them.⁸⁵

The Third Article stated concerning the Son:

That the second Person in the Trinity is the only Begotten Son of God, who did in the Fulness of Time take to himselfe of our nature and Substance in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of whom in respect of the Flesh, he was made; and soe is true God and true Man, our Emanuel, Christ.

Mulliner affirmed both of these statements. His orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity was never questioned. When one also considers his role in the General Association, his affirmation of the *Brief Confession* (1703), and his subscription at Salters’ Hall, Mulliner appears to have been orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, he was willing

⁸⁴ Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:405.

⁸⁵ *Brief Confession* (1703), in Clint C. Bass, *The Caffynite Controversy* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 179–80.

to impose extrabiblical words and phrases explicating the doctrine of the Trinity when deemed necessary. Unfortunately, there are no known extant works by Mulliner so it is difficult to detail his assessment of the Salters' Hall Controversy or his personal defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Little is known about Mulliner except small snapshots provided in the White's Alley church book and the minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists. Mulliner sided with the General Association in opposition to the General Assembly's handling of the Caffyn controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity. He was the lone General Baptist Subscriber at Salters' Hall. Records of Mulliner often associate him with theologically orthodox Particular Baptists, but he never left the ranks of the General Baptists. He associated with and was accepted by his fellow Particular Baptists in London, some of whom were Subscribers at Salters' Hall. Mulliner even served as moderator at a meeting of General and Particular Baptists at the Hanover Coffee house in September of 1716. He was also invited to attend the funeral of Mark Key, a Particular Baptist pastor and Salters' Hall Subscriber, along with several other Particular Baptist ministers, including John Gill. However, he remained among the General Baptists until his death in the late 1730s. Mulliner seems to have remained thoroughly orthodox while continuing to minister among his General Baptist brethren.⁸⁶

David Rees (1683–1748)

David Rees, a Welshman by birth, served as pastor of the Particular Baptist church at Church Lane, Limehouse, for forty years.⁸⁷ He was ordained to the ministry

⁸⁶ As late as 1737 the General Baptist Non-subscriber Joseph Burroughs preached at White's Alley for Mulliner. Some have questioned Burroughs's theological orthodoxy later in his life. Joseph Burroughs, *The Sinfulness of Neglecting Acknowledged Duties. A Sermon Preached at the revd. Mr. Mulliner's in White's Alley, Little Moor-Fields, on New Year's Day, Jan. I. MDCCXXXVII* (London: J. Noon, 1737).

⁸⁷ Joseph Stennett Jr., *The everlasting Covenant the best Support, under all Afflictions, and at a dying Hour. A Sermon Preached at Limehouse, June 2, 1748. At the Funeral of the Reverend Mr. David Rees* (London: John Ward, 1748), 42.

there on February 19, 1706, and Joseph Stennett I preached the ordination sermon. Rees published several helpful works on subjects such as infant baptism, the financial maintenance of ministers, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁸⁸ It was in his work on the Westminster Shorter Catechism that Rees most clearly displayed his theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity as well as his Calvinist views on election and predestination. Though there is little in Rees's published works on the doctrine of the Trinity, his views seem to be fairly representative of the majority of the London Particular Baptists at that time. The overwhelming majority of the Particular Baptists present at Salters' Hall were numbered among the Non-subscribers. Rees is emblematic of that trend.⁸⁹

In 1729, Rees published *A Modest Plea for the Maintenance of the Christian Ministry* in which he made a biblical case for the financial support of Christian ministers by their congregants. Rees said very little about the doctrine of the Trinity in this work, although an orthodox view of the Trinity seems rather implicit in his references to the Father, Son, and Spirit. What is more intriguing in this work is the endorsement contained within the work. Rees dedicated the work to Thomas and John Hollis, but the endorsement immediately following his dedicatory epistle is signed by twenty-two dissenting ministers. As Rees was a Particular Baptist, some of the names listed are unsurprising, names such as Samuel Wilson, John Noble, and John Gill. Other Subscribers, such as Thomas Bradbury (Independent), Abraham Mulliner (General Baptists), and Jabez Earle (Presbyterian), were also listed. But Edmund Calamy and Isaac Watts, who had remained uninvolved in the controversy a decade before, were listed

⁸⁸ Gill references Rees's work on infant baptism: John Gill, *The Divine Right of Infant Baptism, Examined and Disproved* (London: J. Ward, 1749), 20.

⁸⁹ Stephen McKay provides a helpful treatment of Rees and the other Particular Baptists at Salters' Hall. McKay also addresses the "trajectory" of the Particular Baptists demonstrated at Salters' Hall. See Stephen McKay, "Mistaken Identity or Suitable Nicknames: The Case of the Particular Baptists at Salters' Hall," in Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*, 87–106.

among the ministers who recommended the works. Several Non-subscribers recommended the work as well, including three Presbyterians: John Evans, Benjamin Grosvenor, and William Harris. While this particular work of Rees said very little explicitly about the doctrine of the Trinity, it is nonetheless intriguing to see several Non-subscribers listed among those who recommended the work.

Rees's views on the doctrine of the Trinity are most clearly expressed in his work *A Free and Sober Enquiry Into the Truth of Certain Paragraphs Contained in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1736). The work was a response to a recent revision and publication of the Westminster Shorter Catechism that altered the catechism on key points, including the doctrine of the Trinity and election and predestination, but was published under the same title. Having seen other "laudable attempts" at further abridgment of the catechism before, Rees picked the work up. However, he was "surprisingly disappointed" to see "the very Foundations torn up by the Roots, and Materials of a very strange Mixture placed in their Room."⁹⁰ With a sense of humility, Rees had intended to let those with greater acumen respond to the publication, but was encouraged by "some intimate Friends" to publish on the matter.⁹¹

Even in 1736 Rees's assessment of the theological state of the ministers of his day remained somewhat optimistic. The "Reviser" of the catechism had apparently claimed that the majority of the ministers of his day shared his view, which Rees deemed heterodox. Rees believed that he was "wrong in his calculation."⁹² But Rees was not naïve. He believed that abler men should also reply to the revision, and defend the doctrine of the Trinity so that their efforts "might either stem or divert the Torrent; or, at

⁹⁰ David Rees, *A Free and Sober Enquiry into the Truth of Certain Paragraphs in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. Occasioned by A Late Revival of it, by an Anonymous Author, to render it fitter for General Use* (London: Aaron Ward, Richard Ford, and John Gray, 1736), iv.

⁹¹ Rees referred to himself in comparison to other pastors and able theologians as "a Person of Obscurity, and far meaner furniture." Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, v, vi.

⁹² Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, vii.

least check the Violence and Rapidity of the Progress of the *New Scheme*.”⁹³ Rees commented that the “New Scheme” was hardly new. It was “a crude Collection of Heathenish Notions, fram’d into a System of stupid and *lifeless Morality*.” To make matters worse, “And all this injuriously father’d on *divine Revelation*; but comes very far short of the Spirit, and vital Power of *true Christianity*.”⁹⁴ With so much at stake, Rees felt compelled to reply.

Rees did not assess all of the changes in the catechism. He focused primarily on the centrality of divine revelation to Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity, and election and predestination. On divine revelation, Rees maintained that it was necessary for a right understanding of God. Too many in his own day placed great stress on the power of human reason, but Rees argued that the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers arrived at certain truths, not primarily by the power of human reason, but by the mediated influence of the Hebrews. Furthermore, Rees saw the elevation of human reason as the source of many of the contemporary theological disputes. Men had placed human reason over the Bible, and even returned to the ancient writings of the Greeks and Romans instead of Scripture.⁹⁵ The “Light of Nature,” Rees wrote, “will never lead any person” to the central teachings of the Bible.⁹⁶

Rees’s discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity is brief, but he clearly affirms the teachings of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This certainly does not come as a surprise since at Salters’ Hall he subscribed his name to a document containing the

⁹³ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, vii-viii.

⁹⁴ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, viii.

⁹⁵ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 14. In an attempt to demonstrate the weakness of unaided human reason, Rees quickly pointed to “Natives” and “Negroes” as examples of the baseness of mankind “devoid of all Improvements and Advantages from *Revelation*, and destitute of all the Polishing and Culture of Education.” Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 15.

⁹⁶ Rees is directly referencing the resurrection of the body here, but just prior points to doctrines such as the immortality of the soul and “its Existence in a separate State,” by which he means eternal punishment or reward. Just afterwards, Rees discussed the doctrine of the Trinity within the context of divine revelation. Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 16–17.

answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions in the catechism. He surmised that the author of this revision edited this section to avoid the use of the term “*Persons*.” Rees was deeply concerned that the revision removed any reference to the eternality of the Son and Spirit. Instead, the revision stated that, “*this ever blessed Trinity were entirely united, in completing the most glorious of all God’s works.*”⁹⁷ Rees believed that this was intentionally ambiguous so as to not make any claim that the Son and Spirit were eternal beings, and thereby make the catechism more appealing to those who had adopted heterodox views.

Much had changed in the first four decades of the eighteenth century among English Dissenters. When Rees assessed the theological landscape, he concluded,

And this, in my humble Opinion, is one Way of accounting for the great Defection of our Day, and the *surprizing Variation* there is in the Principles of *Protestant Dissenters*, from what they were forty Years ago: ‘Tis owing to their listening too much to the *natural Dictates* of their own *darken’d Minds*, and laying aside, in a great Measure, the Use of their *Bibles*.⁹⁸

Rees’s claim is rather intriguing on this point since, as he had noted before, many had decried the use of creeds in order to return to the Bible. Rees concluded that many had given up on both. The problem had begun in the Church of England as “the Gentlemen of the *Establishment*” moved away from “the primitive Purity and Strictness of their *Articles*.” But “now the *Dissenters* are so complaisant as to follow them, as fast as they can.”⁹⁹ Rees was determined to not be numbered among them. Joseph Stennett Jr. ably summarized Rees’s ministry in his funeral sermon: “At a season when the proper divinity of our Saviour, and other very important truths of the christian religion were deserted by

⁹⁷ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 18.

⁹⁸ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 40.

⁹⁹ Rees, *Free and Sober Enquiry*, 40. Rees’s comment about the growing complacency concerning essential Christian doctrines such as the consubstantial Trinity sounds similar to John Walrond’s assessment of the “middle sort” of Dissenters. See John Walrond, “Letter to Samuel Mather, July 28, 1731,” *Christian Examiner* 5 no. 5 (September-October 1828): 369.

some, and but very coolly defended by others, with whom he had maintained a long friendship, he honestly and bravely stood his ground, and publickly, and with great strength of argument, defended these principles.”¹⁰⁰

Abnormalities among the Subscribers

There were several abnormalities among the orthodox Subscribers at Salters’ Hall. At least one of the Subscribers, Thomas Harrison, a Particular Baptist, eventually conformed to the Church of England. Harrison had pastored the Particular Baptist Church at Little Wild Street from 1715–1729. He was also a founder of the Particular Baptist Fund in 1717. In 1729, Harrison’s church permitted an assistant to preach in his stead on Sunday mornings, and kept Harrison’s salary the same. However, reports began to surface that Harrison was attending an Established Church and had intentions of conforming. Harrison did in fact conform in 1729, having changed his views on baptism and having informed Little Wild Street of the change and his intentions.¹⁰¹ As Wykes notes, Harrison was not the only dissenting minister to conform to the Church of England at that time, but he was one of only a few Subscribers to do so.¹⁰² His orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, however, was never in question.

Another abnormality among the orthodox party at Salters’ Hall was Samuel Bourne. There were apparently three men by this name, a father, son, and grandson, during the time of the Salters’ Hall Controversy. Powicke was convinced that the Samuel Bourne who sided with the Subscribers must have been the father, since the son “had already shewn himself opposed to subscription.”¹⁰³ Wykes seems to disagree, believing

¹⁰⁰ Stennett, *everlasting Covenant*, 43.

¹⁰¹ Harrison detailed some of the reasons he conformed in a sermon he preached in September 1729. See Thomas Harrison, *A Sermon Deliver’d in the Parrish-Church of St. Leonard’s, Foster-Lane, On September 14. 1729*. (London: Theodore Sanders, 1729).

¹⁰² David L. Wykes, “Harrison, Thomas (1693–1745),” in *ODNB*, accessed September 30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12450>.

¹⁰³ Fred J. Powicke, “The Salters’ Hall Controversy,” *Transactions of the Congregational*

that the Samuel Bourne who was a Subscriber at Salters' Hall became an Arian after the controversy by considering the subject more thoroughly and reading Samuel Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine*. If this is the case, then Samuel Bourne would be a rare case of Subscriber who later embraced heterodoxy.

Three Subscribers at Salters' Hall, all of whom were Presbyterians, were said to have denounced their subscription within a few years of the controversy.¹⁰⁴ The three Presbyterian ministers were John Barker, Jabez Earle, and Daniel Mayo.¹⁰⁵ Mayo and Barker both served the Presbyterian congregation at Hackney from 1714, with Barker succeeding Mayo after Mayo's departure in 1723.¹⁰⁶ Jabez Earle pastored the Presbyterian church at Drury Lane, Westminster, which moved to Hanover Street, Long Acre, from 1706–1762. It is somewhat surprising that Earle sided with the Subscribers at Salters' Hall since he was a contributor to the more liberal leaning *Occasional Papers* from 1716–1718. According to Wykes, an Andrew Gray told the Principal of Glasgow University in 1725 that Barker, Earle, and Mayo “have now disown'd their subscription and say they are sorry for what they did.”¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The Subscribers at Salters' Hall seem to have been driven primarily by their zeal for safeguarding orthodoxy rather than a spirit of imposition, although it is not

Historical Society 7, no. 2 (1916): 115.

¹⁰⁴ Bogue and Bennett's strenuous defense of the Subscribers cannot account for some of these complexities. They wrote, “The subscribers, on the contrary, were perfectly united in their views, and in consequence there is a consistency in their decisions and their counsels.” Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:244.

¹⁰⁵ David L. Wykes, “Subscribers and the Non-Subscribers at the Salters' Hall Debate,” in *ODNB*, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95681>.

¹⁰⁶ On Mayo, see Alan Ruston, “Mayo, Daniel (1672–1733),” in *ODNB*, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18454>. On Barker, see Alan Ruston, “Barker, John (1682–1762),” in *ODNB*, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1404>.

¹⁰⁷ Wykes, “Subscribers and Non-Subscribers at Salters' Hall.”

difficult to see how tempers flared and suspicion abounded when harsh accusations and words were published by men like Thomas Bradbury and those who attacked him. Bradbury's temperament was by no means the norm among the Subscribers. These men categorically disagreed with accusations that a request for subscription to confessional statements that contained extrabiblical words and phrases was in opposition to the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*. Wilcox and Cumming fervently argued that the Bible is more than a collection of words and phrases. Scripture has a definite sense or meaning. Therefore, they saw no purpose or value in subscribing to the mere words of Scripture. They wanted to know in what sense the Non-subscribers understood Scripture. For the Subscribers, as clearly seen in the writings of John Cumming, the consubstantial Trinity was a clear consequence of Scripture. It was their conviction that the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the answers to the fifth and six questions of the Assembly's Catechism accurately conveyed the Bible's teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity, so they affirmed these statements by subscribing their names to them. They thought this the most suitable way to safeguard orthodoxy within their own ranks, and the best way to demonstrate their orthodoxy to Parliament and in their advices to Exeter.

CHAPTER 5

THE HETERODOX

John Walrond identified the heterodox as “those who have fallen into Arian or Arminian errors.”¹ The number of outright heterodox ministers listed among the Non-subscribers is quite small even when one takes into account a given minister embracing heterodoxy in the decades after Salters’ Hall. In other words, examining those ministers who clearly affirmed some form of anti-Trinitarianism, such as a subordinationist Christology, reveals very few ministers of this variety among the Non-subscribers. Of course, those ministers who did embrace heterodoxy at some point were almost exclusively Non-subscribers. Fred Powicke, while unsure about the Christology of several of the ministers, only identified Nathaniel Lardner and Benjamin Avery as being heterodox.² Alan Sell argued that Lardner and Avery were the only “decided Arians” at Salters’ Hall.³ Wykes seems to have added one minister to this list, a Subscriber, by the name of Samuel Bourn.⁴ There is some uncertainty concerning Bourn since there was a father and a son by this name during the time of the Salters’ Hall Controversy. The father (1648–1720) was orthodox, but he died not long after the controversy. Samuel Bourn

¹ John Walrond, Letter to Samuel Mather, July 28, 1731, *The Christian Examiner* 5, no. 5 (September-October, 1828): 369.

² Fred J. Powicke, “The Salters’ Hall Controversy,” *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 7, no. 2 (1916): 120, 121. Powicke also noted that John Gale, Samuel Chandler, James Read, and Henry Read (brothers) could be considered “doubtful” as Arians. Powicke, “The Salters’ Hall Controversy,” 123.

³ Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent, and Nonconformity* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2004), 18.

⁴ David L. Wykes, “Subscribers and the Non-Subscribers at the Salters’ Hall Debate,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95681>.

(1689–1754), his son, openly embraced heterodoxy around the time of the controversy. If the younger Bourn was the Samuel Bourn listed among the Subscribers, then he would be the rare example of a Subscriber who embraced heterodoxy. However, this seems unlikely since the younger Bourn had refused to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith at his ordination, which was prior to the meetings at Salters' Hall. Some have also called into question the orthodoxy of the General Baptist Joseph Burroughs, believing that he eventually embraced Socinianism.⁵ Burroughs did in fact permit the infamous anti-Trinitarian Thomas Emlyn to debate at Paul's Alley, Barbican, but there is little convincing evidence otherwise of him embracing Socinianism.⁶

The lack of outright anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall may be instructive concerning the progress of Arianism and Samuel Clarke's "new scheme" among London

⁵ Powicke, "The Salters' Hall Controversy," 117.

⁶ Burroughs was one of the best educated ministers among the General Baptists. His father was a member of the Virginia-street Particular Baptist Church, London, but the church eventually joined with Paul's Alley, Barbican. Burroughs father ensured that his son received a good education, which included the University of Leiden, where Burroughs began his education in 1708. Burroughs was an occasional preacher at Paul's Alley from 1713–1717. When the thoroughly orthodox minister Richard Allen died in 1717, Burroughs was ordained at Paul's Alley. General Baptists Abraham Mulliner and Nathaniel Foxwell and the Particular Baptists Benjamin Stinton and Nathaniel Hodges partook in the ordination service. Burroughs pastored Paul's Alley from 1717–1761, nearly forty-five years.

The major concerns about Burroughs orthodoxy are connected to his ministry at Paul's Alley. First, James Foster served as co-pastor with Burroughs at Paul's Alley from 1722–1744. In 1720, at the height of the Trinitarian controversy that came on the heels of Salters' Hall, Foster published *An Essay on Fundamentals, With a Particular Regard to the doctrine of the Ever-Blessed Trinity*. In this work, Foster argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a fundamental Christian doctrine. His argument, seemingly echoing Locke, was that a doctrine had to be both expressly taught in the Bible and "indispensably necessary in order to Mens obtaining that Happiness which is promis'd in the Christian Covenant." But Foster was not merely pointing out that some Christians might be ignorant of the doctrine. Foster seemed convinced that one could reject the doctrine without ramification. Consequently, "a Disbelief [in the Trinity] is not in itself inconsistent with any Man's Christianity, nor will destroy his Title to the Favour of God, and eternal Life." James Foster, *An Essay on Fundamentals, With a Particular Regard to the doctrine of the Ever-Blessed Trinity* (London: John Clark, 1720). Foster went on to show that the most common Trinitarian proof-texts could be opposed by reasonable arguments from the Unitarians, which Foster believed demonstrated the doctrine of the Trinity's lack of overwhelming clarity, unseating it as an essential Christian doctrine. Second, Burroughs permitted the known anti-Trinitarian Thomas Emlyn to preach at Paul's Alley. Certainly, this might have been a demonstration of charity on Burroughs's part, but it causes one to question whether or not Burroughs shared Foster's views.

As will be clear below when considering John Gale, it is important not to assert guilt by association. Foster and Emlyn's views are not necessarily Burroughs's views. In fact, Burroughs's sermons seem to demonstrate theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity. But Burroughs left himself open to the charge of heterodoxy by co-pastoring with Foster and permitting a known anti-Trinitarian to preach at Paul's Alley.

Dissenters in 1719. By all accounts, some form of subordinationist Christology had taken hold among some of the ministers in the west of England due to the direct influence of James Peirce and others. Peirce had altered some elements of the worship to exclude explicit Trinitarian references, which he thought went beyond the bounds of Scripture. To be sure, the controversy at Exeter was indeed about the doctrine of the Trinity, and heterodoxy had made significant inroads among the ministers there and some of the students in Hallet's academy. However, there seems to have been very little of this among the Dissenters in and around London in 1719. Certainly, that would change in the years and decades following the controversy, but outright heterodoxy seems to have been only a minor feature among the ministers gathered at Salters' Hall. Even if more heterodox ministers are identified among the Non-subscribers through further research, the overall number will remain quite low compared to the 151 names listed among the Subscribers and Non-subscribers.

Some of the most likely heterodox ministers in the Salters' Hall Controversy were Nathaniel Lardner, Benjamin Avery, Jeremiah Hunt, and Samuel Chandler.⁷ Avery and Chandler were Presbyterians. Lardner and Hunt were Independents in 1719, but Hunt later joined the Presbyterians, which may be telling in and of itself.⁸ In what follows, the lives of Lardner, Avery, Hunt, and Chandler will be briefly considered as well as what is known of their theological convictions, particularly their beliefs regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and the issue of subscription. The influence of Locke, William Whiston,

⁷ This is not to say that they were the only ministers who embraced heterodoxy prior to or after the Salters' Hall Controversy. However, it seems that a very strong case can be made for each of the four embracing heterodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, either prior to or in the decades following the meetings at Salters' Hall.

⁸ The point often made here is that Presbyterianism and Independency became increasingly less accurate descriptors of one's ecclesiology as the eighteenth century progressed. Instead, one's identification with the Independents or Presbyterians became more indicative of one's views of issues such as confessional subscription. See Roger Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," in *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), 167; David Wykes, "The 1719 Salters' Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent," in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 59–60.

Clarke, and some of the Dutch Remonstrants on their views of the Trinity and the supposed imposition of subscription should not go unnoticed.⁹ However, what will become most clear through the examination of these ministers is that, while heterodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity were rare among the Non-subscribers, they did exist even if in their earliest stages.

Nathaniel Lardner (1684–1768)

Nathaniel Lardner was by far one of the most prolific authors among the ministers at Salters' Hall. His collected works span some twelve volumes. In 1699, Lardner had briefly studied in London under Joshua Oldfield, pastor and moderator of the 1719 meetings at Salters' Hall. He soon moved to Utrecht for further studies, and then to Leiden before returning to London in 1703.¹⁰ His earliest literary output was as a contributor to the *Occasional Papers* and later to the *Old Whig*. Lardner's contribution to these two publications clearly demonstrated his opposition to the imposition of confessions and creeds, which both publications consistently opposed. Lardner's opposition to the requirement of subscription was further demonstrated by his siding with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. However, there was nothing overtly heterodox in Lardner's early writings or published sermons. In fact, the most explicitly heterodox material in the Lardner corpus is from a 1730 letter on whether the Logos supplied the human soul in the person of Christ.¹¹ The letter was not published until 1759, and even

⁹ J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1913), 28–38. Haley explores the Dutch influence on English toleration in the seventeenth century. See K. H. D. Haley, "The Dutch Influence on English Toleration," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 4, no. 4 (June 1989): 255–65.

¹⁰ Lardner apparently returned to London with Daniel Neal and Martin Tomkins. Tomkins would later be involved in his own theological controversy, which occurred just prior to the controversy at Salters' Hall. Neal, who may be best known for his work as a historian, married Lardner's sister, Elizabeth, in 1708. Neal was also an Independent minister at Jewin Street (formerly at Loriner's Hall), and notably absent from the Salters' Hall Controversy. See Laird Okie, "Neal, Daniel," in *ODNB*, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19817>.

¹¹ Nathaniel Lardner, *A Letter Writ in the Year 1730. Concerning the Question Whether the Logos supplied the Place of a human Soul in the Person of Jesus Christ* (London, 1759). The work was published anonymously, but Lardner's biographers confirm that it was written by him. See Andrew Kippis,

then, it was published anonymously.¹²

While Lardner was most well known as an author, he did serve as an assistant minister for some time. Lardner first assisted his father, Richard Lardner, an Independent minister, in 1721 at Hoxton Square. In 1729, however, Lardner joined the Presbyterians and assisted William Harris at Poor Jewry Lane, Crutched Friars. Upon Harris's death in 1740, Lardner was urged to serve as Harris's replacement as pastor; Lardner declined. He was never formally ordained. Some have speculated that this was due to his timidity concerning confrontation and confessional examination.¹³ Lardner was not highly regarded as a preacher presumably due to his significant hearing loss, which likely effected the cadence and tone of his speech. This limited his influence as a lecturer and preacher.

Lardner's hearing loss did not diminish his literary output and success. The work that garnered the most attention during his lifetime was his multi-volume work *The Credibility of the Gospel History* (1727–55), which grew out of Lardner's Tuesday evening lectures at Old Jewry. It was through these volumes that Lardner gained notoriety as a patristics scholar and defender of the faith. The work sought to demonstrate the historicity of the Gospel accounts corroborating their testimony with other ancient sources. David Thompson said regarding Lardner's expansive treatment of the historicity of the Gospels in his *Credibility*, "In effect, he was a one-man Jesus seminar for the eighteenth century."¹⁴ Lardner even defended miracles against the attacks of Deists in his

The Life of Nathaniel Lardner, D. D. (London: J. Johnson, 1788), lviii.

¹² According to Wiles, Martin Tomkins, who was accused of heterodoxy earlier in the century, had seen Lardner's letter prior to its publication and written a reply. Tomkins died in 1755, prior to the publication of the letter. See Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154n480.

¹³ Alan P. F. Sell, "Lardner, Nathaniel," in *ODNB*, accessed December 23, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16069>.

¹⁴ David M. Thompson, "Theology and the Bible," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 2, *The Long Eighteenth Century, c.1689–1828*, ed. Andrew C. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 314.

work *A Vindication of Three of Our Blessed Saviour's Miracles* (1731). In this way, Lardner became known as something of a defender of Christianity.

Yet Lardner was unquestionably heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. It is unclear whether or not he had embraced heterodoxy by the time of the Salters' Hall Controversy. As David Wykes, Simon Mills, and others have rightly noted, the Salters' Hall Controversy caused many ministers to reexamine their beliefs on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁵ Many did so through reading Samuel Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine*, which examined nearly one thousand passages that Clarke thought pertinent to the doctrine of the Trinity. Clarke's conclusion regarding the person of Christ was akin to Arianism. Lardner took a similar approach in examining various biblical texts related to the person of Christ, but he came to a different conclusion than Clarke. Whereas Clarke had affirmed a form of Arianism which rendered Christ neither fully God nor fully man, but an intermediate being, Lardner concluded that Jesus Christ was fully man yet highly exalted by God. In other words, Lardner embraced a form of Socinianism, which he referred to as "Nazaren" rather than Socinian.¹⁶

Lardner's argument that Jesus was fully human, though highly exalted by God, was rooted in his study of Scripture. As Mills convincingly argues, Lardner's Socinian views were not built primarily upon arguments from reason. Instead, his views were argued from pertinent biblical texts. Mills writes, "Lardner's primary strategy in the *Letter*, however, was not to argue that the Arian doctrine is irrational, but rather, he claimed, to 'enter upon the consideration of the Scriptures say of the person of our Saviour.'"¹⁷ Yet Lardner also firmly believed that the Arian position was in opposition to

¹⁵ Wykes, "Subscribers and Non-Subscribers at Salters' Hall"; Simon Mills, "Scripture and Heresy in the Biblical Studies of Nathaniel Lardner, Joseph Priestly, and Thomas Belsham," in *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, c.1650-1950*, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 91.

¹⁶ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 51.

¹⁷ Mills, "Scripture and Heresy," 91.

reason. Responding to the notion that the Logos served as the soul in the person of Christ, Lardner wrote, “It is not reasonable, that so great a being should submit to unconsciousness, or any such like debilitation. Consequently, it cannot be required by God. It is incongruous to all just notions of things, that any other spirit, beside a human soul, should be made subject to infirmities of human flesh.”¹⁸ Lardner’s treatment of Scripture was primary in his examination of Arianism and Clarke’s new scheme, but reason also played an important role.

Lardner’s *Letter* was structured as a response by “Philalethes” to a letter received from “Papinian.”¹⁹ Lardner noted that the letter had been written nearly thirty years before, but had been concealed in a cabinet.²⁰ He also noted that since then Papinian had died. It is believed that Papinian was none other than John Shute Barrington, Member of Parliament, defender of Dissenters, and vital figure in the Salters’ Hall Controversy.²¹ Lardner’s intent seems to have been to convince Barrington of his views, and to show him the errors in Clarke’s scheme. To those who might ask why Lardner had waited so long to publish his reply, and had done so after Barrington’s death, Lardner simply stated, “I would answer in the words of Solomon: *There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.*”²² Lardner thought 1759 a fitting time to publish his views on the person of Christ, even though he published them anonymously.

In his *Letter*, Lardner admitted that he had previously believed that the human soul of Jesus was replaced by the Logos.²³ However, he had been plagued by the plain

¹⁸ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 22–23.

¹⁹ Joseph Priestley was apparently converted from Arianism to Socinianism by reading Lardner’s *Letter Writ*, and held Lardner in high regard as the “prince of divines.” See Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 148.

²⁰ The preface to the letter is dated February 12, 1759. Lardner, *Letter Writ*, x.

²¹ Kippis, *Life of Nathaniel Lardner*, lviii.

²² Lardner, *Letter Writ*, iv.

²³ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, vii, 2.

testimony of Scripture to the exaltation of Christ, which Lardner saw as a “very considerable difficulty” for his position.²⁴ For if the pre-existent Logos dwelt within the person of Christ, Lardner could not reconcile the possibility of his exaltation. Lardner wrote,

But I was at a loss to conceive, how that high being, *the first, and only intermediate derived being, by whom God made the world*, should gain any exaltation by receiving, after his resurrection, and ascension, a bright resplendent human body, and being made the King and Lord of all good men in this world, and the judge of mankind, and, if you please to add likewise, being made higher than the angels, to whom, according to the same hypothesis, he was vastly superior before.²⁵

Lardner resolved this great difficulty by letting go of the notion that the pre-existent Logos replaced the human soul of Christ. He also rejected the accompanying belief that Christ was an intermediate being. For Lardner, Jesus Christ, though highly exalted above all other beings, was a man comprised of merely a human body and a human soul.

Lardner provided a rather simple assessment of the person of Christ. Having assessed a catena of biblical texts, Lardner contended, “From all that has been said, it appears, that Jesus is a man, appointed, anointed, beloved, honoured, and exalted by God, above all other beings.”²⁶ For Lardner, this conclusion was firmly supported by the testimony of Scripture, particularly the many references to Jesus Christ as a man. Jesus referred to himself as the “*Son of man*.” Even after the ascension, he is referred to in Acts 17:31 as a man. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:5, in his discussion of Jesus as the perfect mediator between God and man, referred to him as “the man Christ Jesus.” Peter also referred to Jesus as “a man approved of God among you by miracles” as he spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 2:22. Lardner went further and pointed out how the author of Hebrews on a couple of occasions compares Christ’s likeness to the rest of mankind (Heb 2:17;

²⁴ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 2.

²⁵ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 2–3.

²⁶ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 39.

4:15).²⁷ According to Lardner, the necessary conclusion was clear: Jesus Christ, though exalted by God above all beings, was a man in the truest sense, possessing a human body and soul, contra Arianism. In some ways, Lardner embraced the logic of Chalcedon regarding the humanity of Christ while rejecting Chalcedon's accompanying affirmation of the consubstantial deity of Christ. Having concluded that Jesus Christ must have had a human body and soul, Lardner asked, "For what else is a man?"²⁸

Central to Lardner's Christology was his rejection of the pre-existence of Christ. This required that he respond to the objections of both Arianism and orthodox Trinitarianism. He had to address the notion that Christ was "sent" by God, that Jesus was in the "form of God," that he was "before" Abraham, that he shared the "glory" of God, that he was the "Son of God," and John's reference to the seemingly pre-existent "Word" in the beginning of his Gospel account. Lardner contended that Jesus' being sent by God was no definite reference to his pre-existence as it might simply denote purpose. After all, Lardner pointed out, John the Baptist was "sent from God" (John 1:6).²⁹ On Paul's reference to Jesus being in the "form of God," Lardner concluded that this simply referred to the miraculous aspects of his "divine mission."³⁰ Lardner also rejected any claim that Jesus' statement in John 8:58 regarding his being "before Abraham" was a reference to His pre-existence: "But really he there only represents his dignity, as the Messiah, the special favour of God toward him, and the importance of the dispensation by him."³¹ In John 17:5 Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify him with the glory He had with Him "before the world existed." Lardner denied any implication of pre-

²⁷ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 4–5.

²⁸ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 4.

²⁹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 19.

³⁰ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 12.

³¹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 14.

existence by arguing that this glory was “always designed for the Christ by the immutable purpose of God.”³² Of course, Lardner had to address John’s use of Logos in John 1, which was a foundational text for orthodox Trinitarianism and Arianism. Lardner seemingly had no choice but to argue that the Logos was the Father. For this interpretation he appealed to John’s reference to the Word being God and then to verse 3, which pointed to the creation of the world. Lardner then asked, “Who should this be, but God the Father, the one living and true God, the author of life and all being? Are there more creators than one?”³³ Lardner further noted regarding John’s reference to “the Word,” “he does not mean a being separate from God, and inferior to him, but God himself, which is the same as God, even the Father, who alone is God, nor is there any other.”³⁴ Finally, Lardner rejected the commonly accepted notion that the title “Son of God” in reference to Jesus Christ conveyed any sort of deity. He stated, “Sonship is a term of nearness, dearness, and affection. In general, Jesus is the Son of God, or eminently so, as he is, so far as we know, the person in all the world most dear to God the Father.”³⁵ Central to Lardner’s work was a rejection of the pre-existence of Christ. His response to the aforementioned biblical passages and concepts often had orthodox Trinitarianism in mind, but Lardner’s focus was primarily on undermining Arian Christology.

Lardner realized that Arians and orthodox Trinitarians alike might appeal to the miracles of Christ to assert that Christ was more than a man. Lardner dedicated an

³² Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 15–16. As Lardner did throughout the *Letter*, he appealed to the interpretation of Hugo Grotius of this passage for confirmation.

³³ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 24–25.

³⁴ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 27.

³⁵ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 31. Lardner went on to provide five other particular examples of how the term *Son of God* was fitting for Christ without it conveying any notion of deity or pre-existence. This included His “miraculous conception and birth,” His “especial commission,” His resurrection, His exaltation, and His pouring out spiritual gifts on the apostles. See Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 31–35.

entire postscript in his *Letter* to his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. His response to the objection concerning miracles was that Jesus performed miracles by the immediate work of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ The disciples also performed miracles by the power of the Spirit.³⁷ Lardner was resolute in his assertion that the Holy Spirit was none other than the Spirit of God. He was equally resolute that the Spirit of God was not the third person of the Trinity. In fact, Lardner maintained that the Holy Spirit was not a personal being at all, but rather, “a gift, a power, a privilege, and blessing, rather than a person.”³⁸ He asked, “Why is God’s Spirit a person more than his Providence, or his Grace, or Mercy?”³⁹ Therefore, the same Spirit that empowered Jesus to perform miracles also aided the disciples and the early Christians. Furthermore, the Spirit was nothing more than the powerful blessing and work of God—not a personal being.

Lardner also had several theological concerns about the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry if Christ did not possess a human soul. Without a human soul, how can one make sense of the temptation of Christ, Lardner wondered. For if the pre-existent Logos had taken the place of the human soul in the person of Christ, Lardner did not think his temptation real:

For how was it possible, that he should be under any temptation, to try the love of God to him, by turning stones into bread! or by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. How could all the glories of this world, and the kingdoms of it, be any temptation to him, who had made all things under the supreme being? Had he forgot the glory and power, which he once had?⁴⁰

Lardner seems to have thought that Arianism was no better off in explaining these matters than orthodox Trinitarianism. It might be that Arianism had an even greater

³⁶ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, vii–viii. Here, Lardner noted how Clarke’s sentiments were not dissimilar to his own.

³⁷ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 128.

³⁸ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 103.

³⁹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 110.

⁴⁰ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 6.

dilemma since it rejected the consubstantial deity and the true humanity of Christ. For Lardner, however, who was more focused proving the humanity of Christ, the only way that Jesus could really sympathize with mankind in the matter of temptation was for him to be “a man as we are” as Hebrews 2:15, 17 seemed to indicate.⁴¹

Another of Lardner’s theological concerns with Arian Christology was the agony of Christ. He could not make sense of Jesus’ “agony in the garden” if he possessed only a human body. He also could not comprehend “the dark, yet glorious scene of his sufferings on the cross and the concluding prayer there: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*”—if his human body was indwelt by the pre-existent Logos.⁴² Lardner even went beyond the cross to the empty tomb in his critique of Arianism. He did so in the context of Paul’s comment to the Philippians concerning knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection (Phil 3:10). “But what is there extraordinary in the resurrection of Christ, according to the *Arian* hypothesis?,” he asked. “Is it anything extraordinary, that the Logos (in the *Arian* sense of that word,) should raise the body, in which he has acted, and suffered for a while?”⁴³ According to Lardner, there was nothing extraordinary about the resurrection of Jesus Christ if Arian Christology were true. Lardner’s critique here, was in part, due to his understanding of the significance of the resurrection for the Christian. If Christ did not possess a truly human body and soul, then Lardner concluded that the resurrection had little to no import for the resurrection of the Christian. He stated, “But I do not see, that such a resurrection can so fully assure us of our own, as if we suppose Christ to be a man like unto us.”⁴⁴ For this reason and many others, Lardner maintained the full (and mere) humanity of Christ, consisting of a human body and soul.

⁴¹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 5.

⁴² Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 7–8.

⁴³ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 44.

⁴⁴ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 44.

Lardner's Christology also had a practical bent. By practical it is meant that the full humanity of Christ has direct implications for Christians. Lardner had several concerns here. His primary concern, however, was that both Arian and orthodox Christologies remove the moral force that might be conveyed through the earthly example and obedience of Christ. Lardner claimed, "And the making the Logos to be the soul of Christ does really annihilate his example and enervate all the force, which it should have upon us."⁴⁵ This was one of the great disadvantages of Arian Christology, since it substituted the Logos for the human soul of Christ. It made Jesus unlike mankind and rendered his example of no effect. Regarding the "*Arian* scheme," Lardner said, "it deprives us of the force of our Saviour's example. We are common men. But he is supposed to be the most perfect spirit, next to God. How should any temptation, from the things of this world, affect such a being? How should he be tempted, in all respects, as we are?"⁴⁶ Lardner concluded, "It could not be. It is altogether irrational."⁴⁷ According to Lardner, then, Arian Christology, which he seems to have viewed as nearly synonymous with Clarke's scheme, was theologically untenable and had damaging implications for Christian morality.

It was quite common for those who held heterodox Christologies to argue that their views were consonant with Scripture and even the earliest Christians, contending that Trinitarianism was imported into Christianity through pagan philosophy. Whiston, whom Lardner named on several occasions in his *Letter*, had argued something similar early in the eighteenth century. Whereas the argument concerning the importation of pagan philosophy into Christianity was often made against orthodox Trinitarians, Lardner employed it against Arian Christology. He wrote, "The notion of an inferior Deity, pre-

⁴⁵ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 8.

⁴⁶ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 43.

⁴⁷ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 43.

existing, and then incarnate, seems to have been brought into the Church by some of the learned converts from Heathenism, who had not thoroughly abandoned the principles, in which they had been educated.”⁴⁸ Lardner further speculated, “Perhaps likewise, they hoped by this means to render the doctrine of Christ, more palatable to heathen people, especially, their Philosophers.”⁴⁹ But Lardner had a distrust of the fourth and fifth century councils and their creeds altogether. He referred to the Athanasian Creed as “very hard to be believed.”⁵⁰ Lardner pointed out that many orthodox Trinitarians were willing to critique bishops and councils from the ninth and tenth centuries, yet they were unwilling to critique those from the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵¹ He insisted,

If we may judge the *articles*, taught by the Bishops and Clergy of *the ninth and tenth centuries*; we may for the same reason judge concerning those decreed by the Bishops and Clergy of the fourth and fifth centuries. For neither were they Apostles, but at the utmost no more than *successors of the Apostles*. And if it should appear, that they taught and recommended any articles, which are no part of *the faith, once delivered to the saints* by Christ’s Apostles, such articles may be rejected by us.

On the doctrine of God, Lardner’s distrust of the creeds, councils, and early church fathers is apparent. In a rather intriguing move, Lardner commended the monotheism of the Jews, particularly their reading of the Old Testament, instead of the post-Apostolic Fathers. He asked, “Is it not better to say, that *Justin* [Martyr] was mistaken, than that the Jewish people were mistaken in such a thing as this? For *Justin* was a convert from heathenism, and had been a Philosopher, and brought along with him many prejudices, which might hinder his rightly understanding the Old Testament.”⁵² Lardner would have much sooner trusted the Jews than the post-Apostolic Fathers.

Like Peirce, Lardner had initially been deeply influenced by the writings of

⁴⁸ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 52–53.

⁴⁹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 53.

⁵⁰ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 175.

⁵¹ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 174.

⁵² Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 56.

Clarke and had embraced a variety of Arian Christology. He too, like Peirce, rejected the validity of using the common doxology rendering praise to the Father, Son and Spirit, finding no precedent for it in the Bible.⁵³ Unlike Peirce, however, Lardner had been more guarded in his heterodoxy, which eventually moved beyond Arianism to Socinianism. Lardner claimed to have arrived at Socinianism primarily through reading the Bible and some of the best commentaries, rather than through reading Socinians or unitarian tracts.⁵⁴ Clarke's commentary on the Bible in *Scripture-doctrine* had been influential, and clearly played a vital role in the early decades of the eighteenth century. But Lardner soon found much of Clarke's biblical interpretation, particularly on the pre-existent Logos, untenable. He wrote regarding Clarke, "I cannot forbear saying, that his interpretations of texts are generally false, arising, as from some other causes, so particularly, from an aversion to *Sabellian*, or *Socinian* senses: some of which may be absurd or unnatural." Lardner continued, "But I much prefer *Grotius*'s interpretations, upon comparison, above *Dr Clarke*'s."⁵⁵

Whereas Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine* played an important role in the Exeter controversy, and had likely been somewhat influential at Salters' Hall (at least in the aftermath), by 1730 Lardner had moved beyond Clarke's Arianism to Socinianism. For Lardner, Christ was not a semi-divine being, but the most exalted man. He thought it impossible "that so glorious and perfect a spirit should undergo such diminution by being united to an human body" without the human body being "swallowed up by this great soul."⁵⁶ But he hesitated to broach the subject publicly because of his desire for harmony

⁵³ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 176.

⁵⁴ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 55.

⁵⁵ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 54. In the following sentences Lardner explained that he preferred Grotius's interpretations to the Socinians. He thought Grotius was more highly education. He also believed that later Socinians had benefitted and borrowed from Grotius.

⁵⁶ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 22.

among Christians. So Lardner longed for a day when “Papal power and tyranny” would “sink” and “Imposition upon conscience” would be “abolished.”⁵⁷ Therefore, while it is unclear precisely where Lardner was in his theological transformation in 1719 at Salters’ Hall, it is not difficult to see why he was numbered among the Non-subscribers. He went well beyond most of the Non-subscribers theologically, but he stood with them in opposition to subscription. For Lardner, non-subscriptionism was indeed a safeguard for free enquiry and Trinitarian heterodoxy.

Benjamin Avery (1684–1764)

The Presbyterian minister and physician Benjamin Avery sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. In fact, not long after the Salters’ Hall Controversy, Avery left the ministry altogether to serve as a physician. Avery was born at Newbury, Berkshire in 1684. Some have speculated that Avery might have been educated by James Peirce, the key figure in the Exeter controversy, when Peirce served at Newbury from 1700 to 1713. This might explain Avery’s apparent fondness for Peirce, which is most clearly evidenced in Avery’s publication of fifteen of Peirce’s sermons posthumously. Avery’s time as a minister was short lived. He served as an assistant to Thomas Frekey and then to John Munckley at Bartholomew Close, London, until 1720 when he quit the ministry. As a physician, Avery seems to have been quite successful in his work as he was selected to work at Thomas Guy’s hospital.

Avery published very little of his own work under his own name. This makes it somewhat difficult to directly assess Avery’s personal beliefs. A sermon of Avery’s on Micah 6:5, delivered in November 1713 and published in 1714, celebrated the Glorious Revolution, comparing the deliverance of the Dissenters during the reign of William III to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.⁵⁸ The sermon gives little to no insight into

⁵⁷ Lardner, *Letter Writ*, 178.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Avery, *A Sermon Preach’d the Fourth of November, 1713. On Micah vi. 5.*

Avery's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Like many other English Dissenters who preached celebratory sermons around November 5, Avery called his hearers to remember God's goodness during William's reign and to hope for further deliverance. Of course, Queen Anne, who proved to be no friend of Dissenters, would die in August 1714, and George I would ascend to the throne. Avery's sermon called on his hearers to not forsake the remembrance of those better days and to hope for even better days of greater freedom.

Even after leaving the ministry, Avery continued to be an avid defender of Dissenters and the expansion of religious toleration. An early demonstration of Avery's interest in religious toleration was his contribution to the *Occasional Papers*, which were published monthly from 1716 to 1719. It is almost universally agreed that Avery was a contributor to the *Occasional Papers*, but it is difficult to determine who the author of a given essay was since the author was never identified. The essays initially engaged in matters related to the Bangorian controversy, and sided decisively with Benjamin Hoadly in favor of increased toleration in religious matters.⁵⁹ Roger Thomas noted that the *Occasional Papers* "not only welcomed Hoadly's writings in the Bangorian Controversy; they also afford an excellent source for the study of 'Hoadly mania,' if that be the appropriate term, for it was a very sober mania."⁶⁰ What Thomas meant by this was that there was a sense of optimism that a "new spirit" would prevail. Commenting on this sense of optimism, particularly among younger dissenting ministers, about religious toleration surrounding Hoadly, and the expression of it in the *Occasional Papers*, Thomas further noted, "It only wanted time before there must be a serious conflict among Dissenters between the old immovables and the new invincibles. When the conflict came,

(London: John Clark, 1714).

⁵⁹ Colligan noted that Hoadly wrote a preface for the collected works of Samuel Clarke in 1738. See Colligan, *Arian Movement*, 38.

⁶⁰ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 155.

it was a conflagration.”⁶¹ The *Occasional Papers*, which Avery contributed to, likely played an important role in bolstering opposition to the perceived imposition of confessional subscription to human words and phrases.⁶²

Avery’s defense of dissenting interests can also be seen in his contribution to the *Old Whig* and his role as Chairman of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. The *Old Whig* was a weekly publication from March 1735 to March 1738.⁶³ The *Old Whig* defended what the authors believed to be “consistent Protestantism.”⁶⁴ The earliest essays argued stringently against the dangers of popery, which, as Thompson points out, had been the focus of a series of lectures given at Salters’ Hall in 1735 by many of the contributors to the *Old Whig*. Opposition to Roman Catholicism, which was inherent to Protestantism, was a key component to the Non-subscribers’ opposition to subscription. For anti-Trinitarians, anti-Catholicism was employed in opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity as it was often compared to the doctrine of transubstantiation. Through this publication, Avery and his fellow writers sought to defend the Protestant Dissenters against the dangers of popery, which included the requirement of confessional subscription.⁶⁵ Just as the *Old Whig* was beginning, Avery served as chairman of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies beginning in the mid-1730s. The position had been previously held by a London banker by the name of Samuel Holden. According to Goring, “Many London Presbyterians were impatient at the slowness of his [Holden’s] methods and agitated for a more active policy of lobbying M. P.s. Foremost among these

⁶¹ Thomas, “Presbyterians in Transition,” 155.

⁶² Andrew C. Thompson’s treatment of the influence of the *Occasional Papers* and the *Old Whig* in this development is quite helpful. See Andrew C. Thompson, “Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment in Early Hanoverian Britain,” *Historical Journal* 45, no. 2 (2002): 333–56.

⁶³ Thompson, “Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment,” 336.

⁶⁴ *Consistent Protestantism* was the subtitle of the publication.

⁶⁵ Thompson, “Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment,” 343.

advocates was Benjamin Avery.⁶⁶ Holden's failure to push hard enough for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts resulted in his removal as chairman.⁶⁷ Avery apparently led an intensified push to have the Test and Corporation Acts repealed.⁶⁸

While there is very little published in Avery's name, he had some of Peirce's works published, some of which were explicitly heterodox. Avery clearly had a deep affection for Peirce and Peirce's works. Avery lamented Peirce's "undeserved sufferings in the last years of his life, from the unprovoked fury and malice of his avowed enemies and bigoted neighbors."⁶⁹ He even commissioned an epitaph for Peirce's grave. The Latin inscription was rather lengthy. During the inscription process, "Mr. Gey," the minister of the chapel where Peirce was to be buried, refused to permit the inscription to be placed at Peirce's grave because he disagreed with Avery's assessment of Peirce's character and beliefs. Avery printed the entirety of the proposed inscription with an English translation in his preface to a publication of fifteen of Peirce's sermons.⁷⁰ Avery described Peirce as "a most diligent inquirer after truth."⁷¹ He praised Peirce's "learned writings." He also noted that Peirce's inquiry after truth led him to new sentiments, presumably on the doctrine of the Trinity, but Peirce concealed these beliefs. That is, until they were brought to light. Then, "no views of advantage or disadvantage could prevail with him not to profess them publicly."⁷² According to Avery, Peirce's intent thereafter was to apply

⁶⁶ Jeremy Goring, "The Break-up of Old Dissent," in *English Presbyterians*, 176.

⁶⁷ David L. Wykes, "Avery, Benjamin," in *ODNB*, accessed October 8, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/923>.

⁶⁸ Goring, "Break-up of Old Dissent," 177.

⁶⁹ James Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons on Several Occasions, Eight of which were never before printed. To which is added A Scripture Catechism: Or, The Principles of the Christian Religion laid down in the Words of the Bible* (London: John Noon, 1728), iv.

⁷⁰ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, vi–vii.

⁷¹ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, vii.

⁷² Samuel Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism. Being and Explication of The Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer*, 3rd ed. (London: Dan. Carpenter, 1767), 3.

“himself chiefly to explain the sacred scriptures.”⁷³ “*The reverend Mr. Gey*” complained of Peirce’s “*heretical obstinacy*,” believing that his writings were not “learned” since they were heretical.⁷⁴ He rejected the idea that Peirce was “pious” because he “taught errors.”⁷⁵ He would not even permit Peirce’s marker to refer to him as “reverend” since he “was not lawfully ordained.”⁷⁶ In response to Gey’s critique of Peirce, Avery said concerning Peirce, “I really can have no more doubt, that he had an habitual prevailing awe and reverence of God upon his mind, a sincere and ardent love to truth, and a steady uniform regard to virtue, that I have that he could read.”⁷⁷ Avery clearly had a deep respect for Peirce’s acumen and his piety.

Yet Avery’s theological sympathies are not entirely unknown. Something of his own beliefs comes out in his preface to Peirce’s sermons. Avery, reflecting on how Peirce was treated, emphasized the fallibility of man. Here Avery echoes much of what had been said in the *Occasional Papers* and even by other Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. For Avery, like Peirce and others, the fallibility of man was a strong argument against the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. Human fallibility was the reason men should exercise modesty in their apprehension and enforcement of doctrine. Avery appealed to and sided with William Chillingworth, whom he thought embodied doctrinal modesty, against the vociferous attacks of Francis Cheynell in *Chillingworthi Novissima*, which Avery believed was the epitome of doctrinal pride. By contrast, Avery praised the latitudinarian spirit of Hoadly. Avery seemed to long for a political and theological environment in which men like Peirce could openly

⁷³ Avery is likely referencing Peirce’s commentary on various passages and his paraphrases of Colossians, Philippians, and Hebrews.

⁷⁴ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, viii.

⁷⁵ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*.

⁷⁶ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, viii–ix.

⁷⁷ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, ix.

hold their beliefs without recourse.

Furthermore, it should not go unnoticed that in Avery's publication of Peirce's *Fifteen Sermons* he also appended Peirce's Scripture catechism. The catechism had been published during Peirce's lifetime, but not under Peirce's name. The title of "Scripture Catechism" was quite intentional as Peirce only asked questions he thought the Bible warranted, and the answers he provided to those questions were often direct quotations from Scripture. Nonetheless, Peirce's heterodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity remains evident. Peirce affirmed monotheism by noting that there is one God. However, he clarified his view by asking, "Who *is this one God?*" The answer that Peirce provided, based upon 1 Corinthians 8:5, 6, and Ephesians 4:6, was, "Tho' there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods man, and lords many) yet to us there is but *one God, the Father*, of whom are all things, and we for him. *One God and father* of all, who is above all, and thro' all, and in you all."⁷⁸ Regarding the person of Christ, Peirce affirmed that he is the Son of God and even his eternity.⁷⁹ His qualms with the consubstantial deity of Christ, like many others who rejected the doctrine, can be seen in his discussion of worship being offered to Christ. Peirce affirmed that angels worship Christ and that humans are to honor him, but he contended that any honor offered to Christ ultimately terminates in the Father. Peirce asked, "*Does this honour terminate ultimately in Christ?*" He answered by quoting Philippians 2:11: "Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the *glory of God the Father*."⁸⁰ Here, Peirce's somewhat standard subordinationist Christology becomes apparent.

Avery's views on the doctrine of the Trinity in 1719, during the Salters' Hall Controversy, are uncertain. However, he clearly saw fit to quit the ministry after the

⁷⁸ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, 418.

⁷⁹ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, 421.

⁸⁰ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, 442.

controversy to pursue other endeavors. This involved not only his medical practice, but his continued, and increased, role in defending the dissenting cause through the *Old Whig* and his work as chairman of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. It would be difficult to conclude that Avery did not share Peirce's subordinationist views with his unqualified admiration for Peirce and his republication of Peirce's heterodox catechism. Avery hoped that Peirce, and others like him who were opposed for their "most diligent" inquiry "after truth" would be held in "everlasting remembrance."⁸¹ Taking all of this into account, it would appear that Avery was at least opposed to subscription in 1719, and heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity by the time of his publication of Peirce's *Fifteen Sermons* in 1728.

Jeremiah Hunt (1678–1744)

Jeremiah Hunt was one of only a handful of Independent ministers numbered among the Non-subscribers. His orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity has been called into question by many. It seems rather clear, however, from some of Hunt's posthumously published sermons that he was indeed heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. Hunt's earliest education was at Thomas Rowe's academy. Hunt then went to Edinburgh University, and from there to the University of Leiden. Upon his return to England around 1704, Hunt served as an assistant to John Green at Tunstead prior to serving as minister of the Independent Congregation at Pinners' Hall beginning in 1707.⁸² As it relates to Salters' Hall, one of the more prominent members of Hunt's Pinners' Hall congregation was John Shute Barrington who, after the Salters' Hall Controversy, left Thomas Bradbury's congregation for Hunt's.⁸³ Hunt had a lengthy ministry at Pinners'

⁸¹ Peirce, *Fifteen Sermons*, vii, xii.

⁸² M. J. Mercer, "Hunt, Jeremiah," in *ODNB*, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14196>.

⁸³ Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," 167.

Hall, serving the congregation there until his death in 1744. The majority of Hunt's published works are sermons preached at Pinners' Hall.⁸⁴

Hunt's funeral sermon in 1744 was preached by Lardner, whose heterodoxy was noted in detail above. Lardner held Hunt in high esteem as a minister, pious mentor, and theologian. Lardner said of Hunt's preaching, "His great concern all along has manifestly been to attain the true sense of Scripture, and faithfully to make known what he judged to be the will of God to those whom he had undertaken to instruct and admonish."⁸⁵ Of Hunt as a pious mentor, Lardner stated, "There are not a few, both near and afar off, men of good understanding, of different ages and stations in life, who will readily stand up, and acknowledge, that there is no man, from whom they have received more useful hints concerning the important subjects of virtue and religion, than from him."⁸⁶ Yet Lardner's comments on Hunt as a theologian will be most helpful for our purposes. Lardner concluded that Hunt's "liberal education" in Holland made him "less offended at the different opinions and manners of men."⁸⁷ Hunt's open-mindedness certainly did not extend to the "infidelity" of Deists.⁸⁸ Lardner praised Hunt for not concealing his theological sentiments:

It was his constant care to represent the true sense of Scripture, and the doctrine, which according to the best of his judgement was conformable to it. Nor could he ever be induced to conceal or disguise what he thought to be the truth, for the sake

⁸⁴ Jeremiah Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes of God*, 4 vols. (London: George Benson, 1748–49). These sermons were collated and published posthumously by George Benson. Nathaniel Lardner also references this series of sermons on the attributes of God in a footnote of his published sermon preached at Hunt's funeral. He says of them, "I have likewise an authentic account of another set of sermons, preached not long after his settlement at Pinners-hall. It is the copie of a letter sent by him to a judicious Divine, with whom he had contracted a pleasing acquaintance, during his stay in Norfolk." Nathaniel Lardner, *A Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall. On Occasion of the Death of the Late and Reverend Jeremiah Hunt, D. D.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1745), 33. Lardner included a portion of the letter, which referenced his sermons that "proved God" before treating "the attributes of God."

⁸⁵ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 34.

⁸⁶ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 39.

⁸⁷ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 24, 26.

⁸⁸ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 44.

of popular applause, or to avoid, or silence censures of mistaken and prejudiced men.⁸⁹

Lardner also commended Hunt for bequeathing “rational religion” to his congregation, which, in his estimation, consisted primarily of “the more knowing and understanding Christians.”⁹⁰

Hunt’s sermon on the unity of God from Deuteronomy 4:39 displays his heterodox Christology as well as the role of reason in his theological method. The sermon began with something like a medieval theistic proof for the existence of one God. Hunt stated, “There is no idea [the idea of God’s existence], that we have, more easy and simple.”⁹¹ Hunt was careful to note that some lay too much stress on reasoning, but he continued to argue how the existence of a singular, “supreme,” and “infinitely perfect” being corresponded with human reason.⁹² Again, Hunt seemed to echo Anselm’s ontological argument, which would not necessarily cause one to question Hunt’s orthodoxy. But as the sermon continued, it became increasingly apparent that Hunt’s argument for the unity of God ruled out the possibility of God being Triune.

When Hunt reached the person of Christ his heterodoxy was readily apparent. No orthodox Trinitarian would have disagreed with Hunt’s preliminary assessment of the unity of God since even they would have contended for God’s singular essence but the plurality of persons within the Godhead. Yet this was not Hunt’s point concerning the unity of God. Hunt believed that only the Father was God in the fullest sense. Hunt openly stated that there was “ONE GOD, *the Father, of whom are all things; and we in him: and one Lord Jesus Christ* [that is one Mediator].”⁹³ There is a way of reading Hunt

⁸⁹ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinnars-Hall*, 36.

⁹⁰ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinnars-Hall*, 38, 37.

⁹¹ Hunt, *Sermons on Being and Attributes*, 2:53.

⁹² Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:55.

⁹³ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:60. Brackets original.

on this point that might still appear to be orthodox Trinitarianism, but Hunt was clear that he meant only the Father was God. Hunt spent much of the sermon discussing what he believed to be the idolatry of attempting to worship God through mediators or visible representations of God.⁹⁴ The problem with this, in Hunt's estimation, was that "they forgot the first cause; or, at least, paid worship, that terminated in Beings, which the first cause had made."⁹⁵ This was idolatry and contrary to "true reasoning."⁹⁶ But God had appointed Christ as the one true mediator between God and man. Therefore, since Christ had been appointed by God as mediator, it was acceptable to worship the Father "through *Christ the Mediator*."⁹⁷ Lest his hearers misunderstand him, Hunt expressly stated that worship terminated in the Father. He stressed, "When we worship Christ, let us remember, that that worship should be terminated in the Father. For we worship Christ, *as the son; as the lamb slain and put to death*: and designed to be so, before the ages began to roll."⁹⁸ Christians were to worship the Father through Christ since "God *alone* is the supreme object of worship."⁹⁹ Hunt further explained, "And as there is *one* God, the supreme object of worship; so *there is only one mediator between God and man; the man Christ Jesus*."¹⁰⁰ The notion of "worshipping God *through Jesus Christ*," Hunt stated, "is the settled [sic] way and fixed method of worship: which the Christian doctrine has prescribed to us."¹⁰¹ To worship the one true God through another mediator was idolatry,

⁹⁴ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:63.

⁹⁵ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:63.

⁹⁶ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:65.

⁹⁷ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:60.

⁹⁸ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:70.

⁹⁹ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:60.

¹⁰⁰ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:60–61. Of course, the latter part of Hunt's statement here is drawn directly from 1 Tim 2:5.

¹⁰¹ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:61.

and “in diminution to the honor of the one true mediator, whom alone God has expressly appointed.”¹⁰² Hunt’s understanding of the unity of God, which he consistently noted was drawn from reason and Scripture, negated the possibility of the person of Christ being understood as consubstantial with the Father.

While Hunt rejected the consubstantial deity of Christ, his Christology seems to have been more akin to the Arianism of Clarke than the Socinianism of Hunt’s friend and admirer Lardner. Whereas Lardner had rejected an interpretation of the Logos in John 1 as a reference to Christ, Hunt embraced the orthodox Trinitarian view that John’s Logos is a reference to the pre-existent Son. Hunt observed, “*In revelation*, he describes his great character, represents him as *the word, by whom he made the world*: and therefore, he is worthy of being the *mediator* of mankind.”¹⁰³ This seems to indicate Hunt’s belief in the pre-existence of the Son even though he rejected any notion of his consubstantial deity. Hunt’s apparent belief in the pre-existence of the Son can also be seen in his sermon *Mutual Love Recommended Upon Christian Principles* (1728). In his discussion of Philippians 2:4–9, where Paul exhorts the Philippians to consider the humility of Christ, Hunt asked,

Did love invite our Lord to quit the glory he had with the father before the world began, and to condescend to dwell among men in the state, wherein they all had sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God, cloath’d in feeble flesh, and liable to all our sinless infirmities and mortality . . . Did he come from heaven, and the bosom of the father, to teach us how to practice aright mutual love, by his own example, as well as by his doctrine, and shall not we carefully attend to him, and constantly copy after him?¹⁰⁴

From this it is clear that Hunt affirmed the pre-existence of Christ while simultaneously rejecting his consubstantial deity with the Father. Hunt even seemed to permit the

¹⁰² Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:67.

¹⁰³ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:68–69.

¹⁰⁴ Jeremiah Hunt, *Mutual Love Recommended Upon Christian Principles* (London: T. Cox, 1728), 30–31.

worship of the Son as the mediator between God and man as long as the worshipper kept in mind that his worship ultimately terminated in the Father, which, according to Hunt, was the one true God.¹⁰⁵

In his funeral sermon for Hunt, Lardner emphasized not only Hunt's personal piety, but his desire for his congregation to be marked by a sincere love for God. Hunt believed that biblical doctrine should bring about moral transformation. Genuine moral transformation, in Hunt's estimation, could not be achieved apart from the God of the Bible as revealed in Scripture. Lardner said of Hunt, "The Bible was his principle studie [sic]. And the knowledge, in which he most excelled, was the knowledge of the Scriptures."¹⁰⁶ While Hunt deviated from orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity himself, he saw the Deists as the true infidels and a great threat to Christianity due to their tendency to undermine the veracity of biblical revelation.¹⁰⁷ For however high a view Hunt had of human reason, and he certainly had a high view of human reason, he believed that revelation "comes into our aid, and sets it [reason] in a clear light."¹⁰⁸ Hunt concluded that the consubstantial Trinity was at odds with both reason and Scripture.

Nothing in Hunt's publications prior to the Salters' Hall Controversy indicate that he was heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity in 1719. It is difficult to say precisely when he transitioned from orthodox Trinitarianism to Arianism. As noted above, Lardner said of Hunt in his funeral sermon that Hunt was not prone to conceal his views. Furthermore, Lardner stated that Hunt's series of sermons on the being and attributes of God were "preached not long after his settlement at Pinners-hall." Hunt began his ministry at Pinners' Hall in 1707. Whatever the timeline might be, it is clear that he

¹⁰⁵ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:70.

¹⁰⁶ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 44.

¹⁰⁷ Lardner, *Sermon Preached at Pinners-Hall*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Hunt, *Sermons on the Being and Attributes*, 2:72.

viewed Christ as a pre-existent, subordinate being through whom God created the world and through whom Christians offer worship to the Father. This is expressly clear in his posthumously published sermons, and is further demonstration that while there were only a handful of men who already were, or were trending towards, anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall, there were a few.

Samuel Chandler (1693–1766)

The Presbyterian Non-subscriber Samuel Chandler's views on the doctrine of the Trinity are somewhat obscure as he did not tend to outright deny the consubstantiality of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Chandler, however, clearly felt quite comfortable around anti-Trinitarians such as Nathaniel Lardner and Samuel Bourn, even recommending an anti-Trinitarian catechism penned by the latter.¹⁰⁹ For whatever ambiguity there might be concerning Chandler's personal views on the doctrine of the Trinity, his opposition to subscription to creeds could not be more plain. Chandler believed that the clergy, particularly those who participated in ecumenical councils, tended to only obscure the gospel message. For Chandler, the message of the gospel could be summarized in the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed—a view which bore a striking resemblance to the teachings of Richard Baxter.¹¹⁰

Chandler was educated under the instruction of Samuel Jones at a dissenting academy where he met future Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Secker, who was also a student there.¹¹¹ Chandler and Secker apparently shared a house together in London for a

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Bourn, *Lectures to Children and young People in a Catechetical Method, Consisting of Three Catechisms* (London: Richard Ford, 1738).

¹¹⁰ Goring lists Chandler among the "New Scheme Preachers" and even refers to him as foremost among the "heterodox [dissenting] divines." Goring, "Break-up of Old Dissent," 181. Of the "New Scheme Preachers," Goring insightfully notes, "In theology they were Arminian, in philosophy Lockean, in churchmanship Baxterian" (181).

¹¹¹ Chandler also befriended and came to the aide of Philip Doddridge in 1733, when Doddridge was prosecuted for teaching without a license. See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Chandler, Doddridge and the Archbishop: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Ecumenism," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 1, no. 2 (November 1973): 47.

time after Secker's return from his studies in Leiden.¹¹² In London, Chandler became the assistant at Old Jewry in 1726 before becoming co-pastor there in 1729. Chandler served at Old Jewry until his death in 1766.¹¹³ He had begun his ministry in 1716 at Peckham, where he was serving during the controversy at Salters' Hall.¹¹⁴

Whereas some ministers were concerned about the rise of Arianism among Dissenters and in the Church of England through the influences of Whiston, Clarke, and others, Chandler's earliest publications focused primarily on defending Christianity against the attacks of Deists. His published work focused primarily on defending the historicity of the Bible and the possibility of miracles.¹¹⁵ His *Plain Reasons for Being a Christian* (1730) likewise sought to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity. Throughout Chandler's writings there is a consistent strain of emphasis on the reasonableness of Christianity. This was certainly due to his concern about the rising influence of Deism, which—even in the 1730s—Chandler seems to have seen as a greater threat to Christianity than the rise of Arianism or Socinianism. In one place, referring to the writings of the Bishop of London, Chandler quite clearly indicated that he saw Arianism and Socinianism as within the bounds of Christianity. Again, referencing the writings of the Bishop of London, Chandler affirmed that the “Socinians, Arians, Athanasians, Sabellians, Pelagians, Arminians, Calvinists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, &c.” all “agree in the Substance of Religion, and in the

¹¹² John Stephens, “Chandler, Samuel,” in *ODNB*, accessed October 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5109>.

¹¹³ Stephens, “Chandler, Samuel.”

¹¹⁴ Chandler also demonstrated a great concern for the poor. Chandler had been involved in the founding of the Society for the Relief of Necessitous Widows and Fatherless Children of Protestant Dissenting ministers in 1733. He also took over the administration of the *Regium Donum* in 1761. See Stephens, “Chandler, Samuel”; John Stephens, “Samuel Chandler and the *Regium Donum*,” *Enlightenment and Dissent* 15 (1996): 57–70.

¹¹⁵ Samuel Chandler, *A Vindication of the Christian Religion. In Two Parts* (London: Samuel Chandler, 1725); Chandler, *A Vindication of the Antiquity and Authority of Daniel's Prophecies, And their Application to Jesus Christ: In Answer to the Objections of the Author of the Scheme of Literal Prophecy consider'd* (London: John Gray, 1728).

necessary Enforcements of the Practice of it.”¹¹⁶ For whatever Chandler’s personal beliefs were on the doctrine of the Trinity, he clearly did not perceive Arians, Socinians, and Sabellians as a threat to Christianity. For Chandler, the Deists were the greatest external threat. Considering Chandler’s discussion of Arians, Socinians, and Sabellians above, he apparently did not consider them as an outside threat at all since he believed they affirmed the essentials of the Christian faith.

Unlike Hunt, Chandler did not directly deny the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father. He simply did not tend to address the matter, particularly in creedal language. Chandler’s typical approach was to address the life and ministry of Jesus with as much scriptural language as possible. He did so intentionally. In the preface to his catechism, Chandler wrote, “*The following Catechism is what I propose to teach and explain. ’Tis short, and I hope easy to be understood. I have endeavored to make it unexceptionable to all Parties, and if I could have forseen a single Expression, that would have offended any serious Christian, I would willingly have altered it.*”¹¹⁷

Chandler set his catechism in contrast to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which he thought children could not understand.¹¹⁸ It was “Meat for strong Men, *and not* Food for Children.”¹¹⁹ Chandler intentionally avoided creedal language in hopes of both being useful for children and gaining “acceptance” with “all Parties of Christians.”¹²⁰

Chandler’s ambiguity on the doctrine of the Trinity was particularly apparent in his discussion of the person of Christ in his catechism. In answer to the question “*What do you understand by Christ’s being the only Son of God?*,” Chandler wrote, “By

¹¹⁶ Samuel Chandler, *The History of Persecution, In Four Parts* (London: J. Noon, 1736), 426.

¹¹⁷ Samuel Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism. Being An Explication of the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Noon, 1752), iv.

¹¹⁸ Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism*, iv–v.

¹¹⁹ Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism*, v.

¹²⁰ Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism*, v, vi.

Christ's being *the only son of God*, I mean, that God was his Father in *so peculiar and extraordinary* a Manner, as he never was of any Creature whatsoever; and that his Body was immediately formed by the Power of God, without the ordinary Laws of human Generation." In answer to what it meant for Christ to be called "our Lord," Chandler wrote, "Call Christ *our Lord*, because he is appointed by God his Father to be the universal King and Governor; and in an especial Manner the Lord and Governor of all Christians who believe in him."¹²¹ Somewhat surprisingly, later in Chandler's catechism he refers to the Holy Spirit as the "*divine Person*." Nonetheless, Chandler was typically ambiguous on the doctrine of the Trinity, and by all appearances, intentionally so.

Chandler's ambiguity on the doctrine of the Trinity can also be observed in his heated exchange with the Independent minister John Guyse.¹²² The exchange began after Guyse's publication of two sermons dealing with the proper way of preaching Christ.¹²³ Chandler took exception with Guyse's work because he perceived that Guyse had been uncharitable, and had created an unnecessary divide between preaching about the person of Christ and preaching Christ's moral imperatives.¹²⁴ Chandler, sounding very much like Baxter, accused Guyse's approach of trending towards something akin to antinomianism, which Chandler believed, undermined the moral imperatives of Scripture.¹²⁵ Guyse's method of preaching Christ, Chandler claimed, focused on "meer faith" almost to the

¹²¹ Chandler, *A Short and Plain Catechism*, 7.

¹²² In a rather intriguing turn of events, Guyse collaborated with Isaac Watts in writing a preface to Jonathan Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (London, 1737).

¹²³ John Guyse, *Christ the Son of God, the great subject of a Gospel Ministry, opened and recommended*, 2nd ed. (London: Richard Hett, 1730).

¹²⁴ Samuel Chandler, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Guyse, Occasioned by his Two Sermons Preached at St. Hellens, On Acts ix. 20* (London: John Gray, 1730), 4, 9, 13.

¹²⁵ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 24, 25. Chandler spoke highly of Daniel Williams, who took up the cause of Baxter in the antinomian controversy of the 1690s. See Samuel Chandler, introduction to *The History of the Inquisition*, by Philip van Limborch, trans. Samuel Chandler, 2 vols. (London, 1731), 1:91.

exclusion personal piety and virtue.¹²⁶ For his part, Chandler preferred to preach the commands and example of Christ, believing that they were more important than speculating about the consubstantiality of Christ. Chandler wrote, “For instance, the precise distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as they all subsist in one divine nature, and are the only one God is, I think, of very little importance for us to know, because ’tis incomprehensible, and cannot be understood and known by us.”¹²⁷ When Chandler discussed those ministers who prefer the concept of “filiation” to “eternal generation,” he seemed to place himself outside of both camps, implying that he did not affirm either. Guyse had described eternal generation as “an act always acting, but never acted.” Chandler’s critique of Guyse’s description of eternal generation, beyond its obscurity, was that it left the Son without his “true and proper subsistence.”¹²⁸ Chandler argued instead for the completed generation of the Son. In a rather confusing section, he connected the generation of the Son in time with the resurrection, but he also stated that he did not deny “the proper Deity of our *Lord Jesus Christ*.”¹²⁹ Chandler’s views here are difficult to categorize, but his main point is rather clear: he thought Guyse’s Trinitarian approach to preaching Christ tended “to set men loose in their regard to practice.”¹³⁰ According to Chandler, then, a “plain practical” sermon was better suited for preaching since such sermons tended “to make men fear, and love, and serve God and Christ.”¹³¹

As noted above, Chandler’s ambiguity on the Trinity was due in part to his aversion to creedal language. Yet his aversion to creedal language was directly related to

¹²⁶ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 24.

¹²⁷ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 27–28.

¹²⁸ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 34.

¹²⁹ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 32, 33.

¹³⁰ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 23.

¹³¹ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 24.

his suspicion of councils and creeds as well as his utter disdain for creedal subscription.¹³² He referred to those in his own day who sought to impose the creeds of councils as “Council-mongers.”¹³³ For Chandler, creedal subscription was the greatest threat to Christianity from within. In his introduction to Limborch’s *History of the Inquisition*, Chandler leveraged the arguments of Hoadly on the supreme authority of Christ for his opposition to subscription.¹³⁴ In his lengthy work *The History of Persecution* (1736) Chandler explored persecution first among pagans and then among Christians up through the present day.¹³⁵ What he concluded was that the majority of persecution, particularly the persecution associated with councils, was driven by the clergy’s self-interest and ill motives rather than a genuine zeal for biblical doctrine.¹³⁶ He went so far as to say that the majority of the doctrines “anathematized as Heretical” had “been generally invented, and broached, and propagated by the Clergy.”¹³⁷ According to Chandler, even if councils had any sort of binding authority, which he absolutely rejected, their lack of charity undermined their creeds.¹³⁸ Doctrinally, however, Chandler argued that “the third and fourth General Councils determined the Use of the Word PERSON in an infinitely different Sense from what the two first did.”¹³⁹ Chandler’s overarching point was that if councils disagree on important points of doctrine then there must be some criteria for assessing them. For his part, Chandler apparently would have

¹³² Chandler’s most thorough treatment of the early church and the early ecumenical councils can be found in his introduction to Limborch’s *The History of the Inquisition*.

¹³³ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 423.

¹³⁴ Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 89–90.

¹³⁵ Philip Doddridge is said to have commended the work to the students in his academy. Nuttall, “Chandler, Doddridge and the Archbishop,” 47–56.

¹³⁶ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 419.

¹³⁷ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 431.

¹³⁸ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 431.

¹³⁹ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 423.

been satisfied to forsake the doctrines of councils altogether and simply judge doctrines by reason and Scripture.¹⁴⁰ In fact, Chandler recommended something along these lines in private discussions with three Bishops in an attempt at comprehension in the 1740s.¹⁴¹

Regarding creedal subscription in particular, Chandler maintained that it was an imposition upon men's consciences, it stifled freedom and inquiry, and it was inadequate mechanism for guarding the truth. Subscription was an imposition and inquisition into the consciences of men in such a way that if one refused to subscribe it was considered "a certain Mark of Heresy and Reprobation" accompanied by "the Infliction of all spiritual and temporal Punishments."¹⁴² The requirement of subscription stifled enquiry and freedom, since a person would not be inclined to search for the truth "when his Betters have drawn up a Religion for him, and this kindly saved him the Labour and Pains."¹⁴³ Creedal subscription was also, according to Chandler, an inadequate mechanism for guarding the truth. Chandler wrote, "Subscriptions of Articles of Faith can never be looked on properly as Guards to real Truth, but as Guards to certain prevailing Principles, whether true or false. And even in this Case they are wholly ineffectual."¹⁴⁴ Chandler sought to further demonstrate the inadequacy of subscription to guard the truth by arguing that dishonest ministers would subscribe to whatever was necessary to maintain their benefices.¹⁴⁵

Somewhat unsurprisingly, Chandler recommended Scripture as "the best

¹⁴⁰ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 424.

¹⁴¹ Nuttall's account of this is fascinating and worthy of further consideration. Nuttall, "Chandler, Doddridge and the Archbishop," 5.

¹⁴² Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 437.

¹⁴³ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 433.

¹⁴⁴ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 432. In his introduction to Limborch's *History of the Inquisition*, Chandler referred to the common notion of orthodoxy as "the established idolatry of their Country." Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 435–36.

Security of Truth and Orthodoxy.”¹⁴⁶ Chandler’s estimation of the result of doing away with creedal subscription and language was rather idealistic. If creedal subscription and language were forsaken, Chandler concluded, “We shall lose only the Incumbrances of Religion, our Bones of Contention, the Shackles of our Consciences, and the Snares to Honesty and Virtue; whilst all that is substantially good and valuable, all that is truly divine and heavenly, would remain to enrich and bless us.”¹⁴⁷ Christians would focus only on Scripture, “and the only Inquiry would be, What is the Sense of Scripture? What the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles?”¹⁴⁸ Longing for such a day, Chandler announced, “Away with this Folly and Superstition! The Creeds of the Fathers and Councils are but human Creeds, that have all the Marks in them of human Frailty and Ignorance.”¹⁴⁹ Then one’s status as a Christian could finally be determined by obedience to the Bible, and not by “Trials” governed by creeds.¹⁵⁰

When Chandler assessed the Salters’ Hall Controversy, his assessment was nearly identical to his assessment of all attempts to require subscription throughout Christian history. Salters’ Hall was simply another iteration of the long history of imposition and inquisition among Christians. Chandler believed that the meetings among the ministers in London began with a sense of charity with the goal of peace, but quickly turned into a creedal test of orthodoxy. What made the situation worse, in Chandler’s estimation, was that the tests of orthodoxy included articles not only from the Westminster Assembly but also from the Church of England. Chandler claimed, “This proposal was considered by many of the Ministers, not only as a thing unreasonable in it

¹⁴⁶ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 438.

¹⁴⁷ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 438.

¹⁴⁸ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 439.

¹⁴⁹ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 441.

¹⁵⁰ Chandler, *History of Persecution*, 441.

self, thus to make Inquisition into the Faith of others, but highly inconsistent with the Character of Protestants, dissenting from the national Establishment; and dissenting from it for this Reason amongst others, because the established Church expressly claims *an Authority in Controversies of Faith*.¹⁵¹ When the call for subscription was opposed by the majority present, the Subscribers, whom Chandler refers to as “Zealots,” called for fasts and preached and prayed against the rise of heresy.¹⁵² The “two great Evils” that the Subscribers preached against, Chandler notes, were “*Nonsubscription and Arianism*.”¹⁵³ However, the warmth of the controversy soon cooled, “the Cry of Heresy was seldomer heard,” and concerns about the endangering of the Church “gradually ceased.”¹⁵⁴

Samuel Chandler was less forthright in his heterodoxy than ministers such as Nathaniel Lardner and Jeremiah Hunt. His efforts were more concentrated on his defense of Scripture and his opposition to the authority of creeds and councils in doctrinal matters than in the promotion of heterodoxy. This was due in part, if not primarily, to his belief that Deists and the “hyper-orthodox” were a greater threat to the Christianity than Arianism, Sabellianism, or Socinianism.¹⁵⁵ The Deists undermined revealed religion, and the hyper-orthodox godliness and virtue. Chandler affirmed in no uncertain terms the necessity of divine revelation for Christianity, and the essential practice of virtue for the Christian. For Chandler, “Godliness and virtue is the great end of all the gospel-dispensation. ’Tis the main design of Christ’s coming into the world to recover men to

¹⁵¹ Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 92. The rather fascinating development that Chandler’s comments here cannot account for is the number of ministers who conformed after the Salters’ Hall Controversy.

¹⁵² Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 92.

¹⁵³ Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 92.

¹⁵⁴ Chandler, introduction to *History of Inquisition*, 92. The controversy was somewhat revived in the 1740s with Chandler’s response to several works on subscription. His arguments were fairly similar to what has been considered above. See Samuel Chandler, *The Case of Subscription To Explanatory Articles of Faith, As A Qualification for Admission into the Christian Ministry, Calmly and Impartially Review’d* (London: J. Noon and Jos. Davidson, 1748).

¹⁵⁵ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 28.

the worship and service of God.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, one’s status as orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity was meaningless if “his life be immoral” and he be “habitually vicious.”¹⁵⁷ “He is an heretick in practice,” said Chandler, “which is the most criminal heresy he can be guilty of.”¹⁵⁸ With his suspicion of councils, creeds, and subscription, as well as his emphasis on orthopraxy over orthodoxy, it is not hard to see why Chandler was numbered among the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall.

Conclusion

Heterodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity had made significant inroads within the Church of England at the turn of the eighteenth century. But the rise of heterodoxy was not limited to the Established Church. Three years prior to the events in London at Salters’ Hall, the influence of William Whiston and Samuel Clarke were felt in Exeter as the citizens there were deeply concerned that their ministers and the students in Hallett’s academy had embraced a form of Arianism. Whether or not Clarke’s “new scheme” and Arianism are identical forms of Trinitarian heterodoxy is somewhat irrelevant here. What is abundantly clear is that James Peirce had openly embraced a heterodox view of the Trinity, which was influenced by the writings of Whiston and Clarke. Heterodoxy was a live issue in Exeter.

But more pertinent here is how prevalent heterodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity were at Salters’ Hall. What should be apparent is that very few of the non-subscribing ministers at Salters’ Hall held heterodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity in 1719. Lardner, Avery, Hunt, and Chandler are among the best candidates for those who held heterodox views of the Trinity. Yet even some of these men may not have

¹⁵⁶ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 20.

¹⁵⁸ Chandler, *Letter to John Guyse*, 20–21.

embraced forms of anti-Trinitarianism until the decades after the Salters' Hall Controversy. This seems to only further strengthen the claims of Calamy, Wallin, and others that the Salters' Hall Controversy was *primarily* about subscription, and not the doctrine of the Trinity. Even though heterodoxy was spreading in England in the early decades of the eighteenth century, and would indeed make significant inroads among Dissenters by the middle of the century, there is little evidence of this among the Non-subscribers in 1719.

CHAPTER 6

A MIDDLE SORT

John Walrond identified a third category of Dissenters in his 1731 letter to Samuel Mather, which seems quite fitting for an accurate understanding of Salters' Hall. For Walrond, this third category was "a middle sort" who were "the most numerous."¹ Walrond went on to describe them as those who, "profess the same faith, but are so indifferent about it, and indulgent to the erroneous, that they seem to be with us in principle, but with them in interest, loving them better with their errors, than others with the truth as it is in Jesus."² Walrond's assessment of a "middle sort" is rather fascinating, and quite helpful for making sense of Salters' Hall. At Salters' Hall it seems that many of the non-subscribing ministers were theologically orthodox, which is apparent by examining their published works, but opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases as a demonstration of one's orthodoxy. This "middle sort" consists, then, of theologically orthodox Non-subscribers whom Walrond believed were unnecessarily "indulgent to the erroneous."³

¹ John Walrond, "Letter to Samuel Mather, July 28, 1731," *Christian Examiner* 5, no. 5 (September-October 1828): 369.

² Walrond, "Letter to Samuel Mather," 369.

³ Historians have often pointed to those who imbibed the generous spirit of Richard Baxter in the eighteenth century as adopting his "Middle Way." See Roger Thomas, "Presbyterians in Transition," in *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 127–35; R. K. Webb, "The Emergence of Rational Dissent," in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22, 29–31. The primary difference in Walrond's description of the middle sort is that it includes a seemingly high level of indifference among certain Dissenters on the doctrine of the Trinity. It would appear that many of the middle sort of Dissenters among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall were not indifferent to the doctrine of the Trinity altogether but were less certain (and maybe even less dogmatic) on how to explain doctrines such as eternal generation. They were not indifferent on the consubstantial deity of the Son or Spirit with the Father, but were willing to say no more than what they believed Scripture clearly explained concerning their divine relations.

The great danger of this position, however, was being accused of heterodoxy. Certainly, many of the pamphlets produced by Subscribers during the Salters' Hall Controversy demonstrate this possibility. Thomas Bradbury, Daniel Wilcox, and John Cumming, to name a few, were thoroughly convinced that the issue at stake at Salters' Hall was not subscription, but the doctrine of the Trinity. Alan Sell rightly noted concerning the theological position of affirming classical Trinitarianism while opposing subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, "It was the easiest thing in the eighteenth-century world for a person of such a charitable and peaceable disposition to find himself labelled by the orthodox as at least a fellow-traveller with the heterodox."⁴ Again, this truth is borne out clearly at Salters' Hall. David Wykes's assessment of Philip Doddridge could be aptly applied to some within Walrond's middle sort: "Like his tutor [David] Jennings, he was a moderate but orthodox in doctrine, an orthodoxy characterized by an undogmatic Calvinism: what Roger Thomas described as moderate orthodoxy, where moderation consists not of a reduced orthodoxy but a reduced dogmatism."⁵

Without the notion of a middle sort, or the possibility of being theologically orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity but opposed to subscription, one will end up with a distorted view of Salters' Hall. A minister's orthodoxy cannot be determined by simply seeing if he was numbered among the Subscribers or the Non-subscribers. As was hinted at earlier in an attempt to reconstruct Salters' Hall and provide an initial assessment, the matter is more complex than that. Five minister help demonstrate Walrond's middle and the complexity of interpreting Salters' Hall: Presbyterian Joshua Oldfield (1656–1729), General Baptist John Gale (1680–1721), Presbyterian John Hughes (1668–1729),

⁴ Alan P. F. Sell, *Christ and Controversy: The Person of Christ in Nonconformist Thought and Ecclesial Experience, 1660–2000* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 25.

⁵ David Wykes, "The 1719 Salters' Hall Debate: Its Significance for the History of Dissent," in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 53.

Presbyterian Benjamin Grosvenor (1676–1758), and the Presbyterian John Evans (1679/80–1730). Each of these Non-subscribers demonstrate the real possibility of being orthodox in one’s theology of the Trinity, but opposed (sometimes vehemently) to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases.

Another point of clarification should be added here and will be explored in more detail below. There was diversity even among the orthodox Non-subscribers in their reasoning for opposing the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. For some Non-subscribers, the doctrine of the Trinity was a thoroughly biblical concept that they affirmed, and they wanted others to affirm, but they would not impose extrabiblical words and phrases such as “consubstantial” on their fellow ministers, primarily because they were not in the Bible. For other orthodox Non-subscribers, the doctrine of the Trinity was a biblical concept that they thought necessary to affirm and for others to affirm, but they were less concerned that the doctrine be elucidated with creedal language. The issue here was related to biblical perspicuity and what could truly be inferred from Scripture regarding Trinitarian relations.⁶ For some of the Non-subscribers, the doctrine of the Trinity was a biblical concept, but the creedal formulae of the doctrine was less clear in the biblical text, and therefore, not incumbent upon ministers to affirm. Stephen Holmes has argued this point rather convincingly. Holmes notes regarding the perspicuity of Scripture on the doctrine of the Trinity:

If what is meant by “the doctrine of the Trinity” is such a practice of speech and devotion that implicitly and unconsciously recognized the Son and the Spirit as divine, then the strong perspicuity thesis has some force: one has to work hard to ignore the plain sense of Scripture if one wished to deny the propriety of using a threefold divine name, or offering prayer and worship to the Son.⁷

⁶ Some ministers were likely influenced on perspicuity by either the writings of Locke or the Dutch Remonstrants. For the Remonstrant doctrine of perspicuity, particularly in the writings of Simon Episcopius and Étienne de Courcelles, see Keith D. Stanglin, “The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity: Remonstrants and the Transition toward Modern Exegesis,” *Church History* 83, no. 1 (March 2014): 38–59.

⁷ Stephen Holmes, “The Doctrine of the Trinity, Then and Now: Reflecting Dogmatically on

James Peirce and some of his fellow ministers at Exeter rejected even this account of the doctrine of the Trinity. Peirce in particular refused to pronounce the doxology giving glory to the Father, Son, and Spirit, thinking it unbiblical. And while some at Salters' Hall might have followed Peirce, which is clear in the previous chapter, the majority of the Non-subscribers would have utterly denounced Peirce's views, which they apparently intended to do in their condemnation of Arianism in their advices. Yet many of the Non-subscribers' views on the doctrine of the Trinity and the perspicuity of Scripture are likely better captured by Holmes's presentation:

On the other hand, the task of explaining how the Son and the Spirit can be worshipped without compromising a fundamental commitment to monolatry and monarchy proved to be a difficult one; this, finally, was the achievement of the Cappadocians and Augustine, although it remained incomplete in certain ways even then. If by "doctrine of the Trinity" we mean this developed account of how it is possible to adequately relate the claim of singularity, indeed simplicity, of the divine life with the real existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we might well argue that this is adiaphoric. It is easy, that is, to derive from Scripture such claims as God is one, and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each to be worshipped, and such claims must be held; it is much harder to derive exegetically accounts of how substances relate to persons, so holding rightly to such ideas is less important.⁸

Here, Holmes seems to capture the views of many Non-subscribers quite well. As will be seen, many Non-subscribers affirmed an orthodox understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, consequently believing that the Father, Son, and Spirit should be worshipped, but were less dogmatic on the requirement of the divine life being defined in extrabiblical terms. The long-term viability of such a position will be the subject of the next chapter. This chapter focuses on the orthodox Non-subscribers, their affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and their opposition to subscription.

Joshua Oldfield (1656–1729)

Joshua Oldfield was one of the oldest ministers present at Salters' Hall, already

the Salters' Hall Debates," in Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*, 25.

⁸ Holmes, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 25.

in his sixties by the time of the meetings, and he was certainly one of the oldest Non-subscribers as many of them tended to be the younger ministers in and around London. It was likely due to Oldfield's age respectability that he was selected to serve as moderator of the meetings. Oldfield continued in the role of moderator even after the group which became known as the Subscribers withdrew. As Ruston notes, some blamed Oldfield for the split between the two groups due to his parliamentary decision to proceed with a consideration of the advices.⁹ Oldfield was a Presbyterian, and it should be remembered that the majority of the Presbyterians who were either present at Salters' Hall or later signed their names to one of the sets of advices sided with the Non-subscribers. Yet Oldfield's decision to side with the Non-subscribers was not due to any concerns he had about the doctrine of the consubstantial Trinity. Oldfield defended the doctrine, albeit primarily in scriptural terms, but nonetheless with clarity as to what his beliefs were. Furthermore, Oldfield had been intimate friends and ministered with Subscribers such as William Tong and William Lorimer. As will be seen, there is no reason to doubt Oldfield's orthodoxy. His decision to side with the Non-subscribers was due to his opposition to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases.

The majority of Oldfield's published works were sermons. Oldfield's lack of publications was not due to his lack of ability.¹⁰ His academy at Southwark and Hoxton was apparently very well respected.¹¹ Oldfield had been educated at both Oxford and

⁹ Alan Ruston, "Oldfield, Joshua" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* (Oxford: University Press, 2004-), accessed November 12, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20681>.

¹⁰ Ruston, "Oldfield, Joshua."

¹¹ John Spademan, William Lorimer, and Jacques Cappel all taught at this, which was said to have been started due to some dissatisfaction with the academy of the Irish Presbyterian John Ker. As will be noted below, the Presbyterian Non-subscriber Benjamin Grosvenor attended this academy. The Presbyterian William Lorimer, who also taught at the Hoxton academy, was a Subscriber at Salters' Hall. His name often appears first in the lists of Subscribers. See William Harris, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death Of the late Reverend Joshua Oldfield, D. D.* (London: Richard Ford, 1730), 34; Mark Burden, *A Biographical Dictionary of Tutors at the Dissenters' Private Academies, 1660–1729* (London: Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, 2013), 97–98, <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/sed/religionandliterature/online-publications/a-biographical-dictionary/>.

Cambridge, but had not received a degree from either since, as a Dissenter, he refused to subscribe to the entirety of the Thirty-Nine Articles.¹² He later received an honorary D. D. from the University of Edinburgh. One of Oldfield's publications that was not a sermon was *A Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse of God; And of the Father, Son, and Spirit: And of Our Concern with Them* (1721).¹³ The work appeared in print just two years after the meetings at Salters' Hall and conveyed Oldfield's sentiments on the doctrine of the Trinity as well as his views on theological language and the requirement of subscription. What will become apparent through a consideration of this particular work is Oldfield's clear affirmation of the consubstantial Trinity, but also his emphasis on the use of analogical language in theology. The end result, for Oldfield, was an affirmation of the consubstantial Trinity, and a hesitancy to enforce subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases.

Oldfield's *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse of God* grew out of a sermon he had preached at Globe Alley, Maid Lane, Southwark. In the work, Oldfield demonstrated his high view of Scripture, which he referred to as God's "*inspired Word*."¹⁴ For Oldfield, Scripture was a sure testimony of God's Word. It was as if God had spoken directly in Christ as he did with his disciples. Oldfield wrote, "What the *Divine Wisdom* speaks in the written Word, and what is *certainly* agreeable to it, should be to us, in a Manner, as if we heard GOD *in* and *with* Christ, more immediately speak it."¹⁵ Since this was the case, in Oldfield's estimation, Scripture "is to be taken and

¹² Wykes helpfully reminds that education at Oxford and Cambridge remained open to Dissenters during this period, but Dissenters could not receive degrees from either university since they would not subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. See David L. Wykes, "The Contribution of the Dissenting Academy to the Emergence of Rational Dissent," in Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion*, 103.

¹³ Joshua Oldfield, *A Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse of God; And of the Father, Son, and Spirit: And of Our Concern with Them* (London: E. Matthews and R. Ford, 1721).

¹⁴ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 49.

¹⁵ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 61.

submitted to, as a sure Direction, and binding Rule, for our Thoughts, Words, and Actions, as from Him who is our undoubted *LORD*, and perfectly *knows all Things*.”¹⁶ In another place, and in a similar vein, Oldfield concluded, “we should so believe the Holy Scriptures, as if we heard *GOD in Christ*.”¹⁷ Oldfield unabashedly affirmed a high view of Scripture, which was quite common among the Non-subscribers.

But Oldfield also pointed out the Bible’s use of analogical language in reference to God. Oldfield is worth quoting at length here:

That we pretend not to define, or describe, or conceive of *GOD*, or of the *FATHER*, *SON*, and *SPIRIT*, in this or that Respect, just as They know Themselves, or as They are in Themselves, and with relation to One another; but only as we are capable, and as may be sufficient for Us, however, at present. It is, generally, enough for our Use and Service, to know some distinguishing Properties, or Marks, and Characters of Things, without going far into their Nature, and much more without our knowing it thoroughly. *All Things are*, indeed, to *GOD*, not only *naked*, without Covering, but opened to their innermost Recess; when as no *Creature* is thus *manifest* to us, how much less the *CREATOR*?

Oldfield recognized the limits and inadequacies of human language when attempting to theologize about the triune God. He did not seem to suggest that nothing definitive should be said about the doctrine of the Trinity, but that the matter should be approached with great humility and restraint. Yet Oldfield’s point here should not be interpreted as an attempt at evading the point in question, namely, the consubstantial Trinity. As will be manifestly clear below, Oldfield gladly affirmed the doctrine. Even his discussion of analogical language led him to affirm the consubstantial Trinity, noting the similarities and differences between the common usages of such terms and their use in reference to the Father and the Son.¹⁸ For Oldfield, the very concept of analogical language in theology seemed to require an admission on the part of ministers and theologians that they could not plumb the depths of or perfectly describe the very nature of the triune

¹⁶ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 61.

¹⁷ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 63.

¹⁸ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 23–24.

God.

Yet Oldfield did in fact defend the consubstantial Trinity. This can be seen in his discussions of the Son and the Spirit as well as in his treatment of “the blessed three.”¹⁹ In reference to the Incarnation of Christ, Oldfield wrote, “*GOD has been manifested in the Flesh.*” Elsewhere, and on multiple occasions, Oldfield discussed the two natures of Christ. He wrote regarding Christ’s titles and natures:

and He is likewise call’d the WORD, who was in the Beginning with GOD, and was GOD; who being made in the Flesh, and in the Humane Nature dwelling amongst us, is nam’d Emmanuel, GOD with us; but in relation to his Humane Descent, frequently the SON of Man, and, sometimes, of David, but so as to be at the same Time his Lord; with respect to both Natures together, the MESSIAS, the CHRIST, JESUS, and Our LORD JESUS CHRIST.²⁰

It is clear from this that Oldfield affirmed the two natures and singular person of Christ. And while he primarily used biblical language when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, he did use the term “essence” in reference to the divine nature. Oldfield referred to the Son as God’s “Eternal, Uncreated SON.”²¹ But he said of the Son’s essence: “I mean, not only that the FATHER’s Essence is uncreated, but that of the SON is likewise.”²² Oldfield even seems to have argued for the aseity of the Son. Therefore, while somewhat guarded in his use of extrabiblical words and phrases in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, Oldfield strongly affirmed the consubstantial deity of Christ.

Oldfield also defended the consubstantial deity of the Spirit. Regarding the title “SPIRIT of GOD,” Oldfield argued, “This does by no means exclude him from being GOD, together with the FATHER, and the SON.”²³ Against those who might claim that the title Spirit of God might imply some sort of subordination or who might construe the

¹⁹ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 48.

²⁰ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 16.

²¹ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 51.

²² Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 26.

²³ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 30.

Spirit as a force rather than an intelligent being, Oldfield argued that He was God. He further contended that the Spirit was in no way a created being. For this, he appealed to Scripture: “But we nowhere find, in the Sacred Writings, that the SPIRIT Himself was made.”²⁴ The Spirit, according to Oldfield, is an uncreated being consubstantial with the Father and Son.

Oldfield’s views on the consubstantial Trinity came into greater focus when he considered the three persons of the Godhead in their diversity and unity. The three can be seen in the Jesus’ baptism, and the three are invoked in the baptismal formula that Jesus’ gives to his disciples.²⁵ But their distinctness as Father, Son, and Spirit, Oldfield believed, should not obscure their unity. Oldfield maintained that “the *Ever Blessed Three*” were “*really distinct*” but “*not divided*.”²⁶ Regarding their unity, Oldfield argued for something like *perichoresis* when he wrote, “One of Them is not, indeed, either of the Other; but yet is *with* Them, and is *in* Them.”²⁷ Their unity can also be seen in their inseparable operations, as Oldfield explained:

Thus all Things are made, maintain’d, manag’d, and govern’d in a *special* Way by the FATHER, yet not without the other TWO; not as if He needed to have His own Sentiments confirm’d by Theirs, or His Work of creating, sustaining, and governing all Things, to be eas’d by their Assistance; yet it is more abundantly pleasing to see the concurring Sentiments and Work of Those, who are so united with Him, and have likewise infinite Perfections, appearing by their Discernment, Inclination, and Acting.²⁸

The unity of the three also permeated Christian worship. Appealing to the notion of coming to the Father by the Spirit through the Son, Oldfield wrote, “And in *thus* coming we may see yet more of GOD in *each* of the Blessed THREE, *with whom we have to do*,

²⁴ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 32.

²⁵ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 15.

²⁶ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 32–33.

²⁷ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 33.

²⁸ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 39.

not only in all the *Kinds* and *Parts* of Prayer, but also in Hearing, Reading, Singing of Psalms, Baptism, the LORD's Supper, and the Exercise of Discipline, and *whatever else may be done to the Glory of GOD.*"²⁹ For Oldfield, against those who might see the consubstantial Trinity as an exercise in theological speculation, the doctrine was an all-encompassing one which had direct implications for the worship of God and the life of the Church.

Oldfield was equally clear, however, that one should exercise caution when reflecting on or expounding the divine nature. God had revealed himself in Scripture, but the Christian should be careful not to go beyond what God had revealed. Oldfield pleaded with his readers in regards to the biblical record of the Father, Son, and Spirit: "Here we should, with utmost Caution, if at all, adventure tho' but one Step farther than what we can see to be contained in the scriptural Discoveries, as being either the whole, or some Part of GOD's Meaning in them." He continued, "What need have we, especially in such Depths, to steer by the Scriptures, not presuming to be wise *above what is written*, but remembering that *the secret Things belong unto the LORD our GOD; but those Things which are reveal'd belong unto us, and to our Children for ever; that we may do what He requires.*"³⁰

Oldfield would go on to argue throughout the work for a classical understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, but his caution here is telling. He was not arguing for a sort of doctrinal ambiguity that would shelter Arians and Socinians. But he did request that great care be exercised in theological reflection on the doctrine. He recommended, "That we rest contented with a more *general Sense* of scriptural Discoveries (especially those relating to the FATHER, SON, and SPIRIT) rather than

²⁹ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 47–48.

³⁰ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 19. Oldfield is appealing to and citing portions of 1 Cor 4:6 and Deut 29:29.

venture upon *Particulars*, that are not so certainly contained in what we would *so* expound; nor yet more plainly declar'd in other Places of Scripture."³¹ A fitting example of Oldfield's point here would be his discussion of eternal generation. As noted above, Oldfield maintained that the Son was equal with the Father, and that they both possessed the singular divine essence, but he asked, "*We know not the Works of GOD, who maketh all: And shall we pretend to know how the SON of GOD, who is not made, is from His FATHER?*"³² According to Oldfield, the biblical concept of Christ as the "*Only Begotten SON*," which was an employment of analogical language, could only take one so far in his understanding of the relationship between Father and Son. So, Oldfield could affirm the consubstantial deity of Christ, but also claim, "It, therefore looks as if GOD were no Ways intending, by the Character of a *Begotten* or an *Only Begotten SON*, to let us into the Secret, HOW His Son was from Him."³³ From this it seems that Oldfield was satisfied with a certain level of mystery in divine relations. He intentionally limited his explication the doctrine of the Trinity to what he believed God had revealed in Scripture.

The result of Oldfield's methodology was not to locate the doctrine of the Trinity within the realm of theological *adiaphora*. Nor did Oldfield oppose deep reflection on the doctrine. Instead, he recommended that Christians search Scripture to see what God had revealed regarding the doctrine, and its implications for the Christian's understanding of and obedience to the triune God. If Christians would search the Scriptures diligently with an eye towards obedience, Oldfield believed, then they might "better understand, and have in Readiness for Use, what is offer'd to shew *the Uncreated Being, and Creating Power, with other Divine Perfections of the Sacred Three*."³⁴

³¹ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 19–20.

³² Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 27.

³³ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 27–28.

³⁴ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 59.

But Oldfield did indeed desire to limit theological language to what was revealed in Scripture, which had direct implications for his perspective on subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. As noted above, Oldfield did use the word “essence” in reference to the divine nature, and he affirmed that the Father, Son, and Spirit possessed the divine nature from eternity. Yet in his description of the exact nature of the divine relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit, Oldfield preferred the biblical language of “begotten”³⁵ and “proceeding.” Oldfield then directly connected his perspective to the issue of subscription, which he had opposed two years prior at Salters’ Hall. “In short,” Oldfield wrote, “we are not to say any Thing greater of any, or even all of the *Sacred Three*, than what is some Way *certainly* reveal’d: What may seem *probable* to us, is not therefore to be fixed, even in our Minds, as an *Article of Faith*, much less to be given out, and insisted on, as such.”³⁶ Oldfield wrote these words in the shadow of Salters’ Hall; they seem to give readers direct insight into his affirmation of the consubstantial Trinity and his hesitancy concerning the requirement of subscription to doctrinal formulas containing extrabiblical words and phrases.³⁷

What Oldfield desired was unity that was characterized by theological orthodoxy and a keen awareness of the limits of theological language. He believed this would lead to genuine Christian love and charity. His desire for charity and unity in no way implied a minimization of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Consider

³⁵ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 60.

³⁶ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 60.

³⁷ On January 11, 1721, Oldfield officiated the ordination of Obadiah Hughes, a Non-subscriber at Salters’ Hall. Hughes apparently was ordained as an assistant to Oldfield. At his ordination, Hughes presented a confession of faith, which was intentionally comprised primarily of Scripture passages. The work also contains six questions asked of Hughes by Oldfield. Pertinent to interest here, Oldfield asked Hughes his views concerning the Protestant Reformation—to which Hughes replied, “I heartily approve of and bless God for the Reformation from Popery, a Yoke which neither *We* nor our Fathers could ever bear. I believe the Reformation is founded upon two of the Noblest Principles of Christianity; (I mean, the Perfection of Scripture, and Liberty of Private Judgment) which Principles I will always endeavor to Maintain and Defend in the best manner I can.” Obadiah Hughes, *A Confession of Faith, Deliver’d At the Old Jewry, January 11th, 1720/21, By Obadiah Hughes, At his Ordination* (London: Emanuel Matthews, 1721), 14.

Oldfield's description of Christian unity as reflecting the triune life of God, and particularly the Spirit's role in the matter:

Christian Love and Charity is what we must, with all possible Care, maintain and cultivate. This is, at least, one great Lesson we have to learn of *GOD, who is LOVE*. As the FATHER and the SON *conspire*, and are fully united together in ONE SPIRIT, *the SPIRIT of LOVE*, who as such does also *conspire*, and is fully united with Them: So we should earnestly desire and endeavor that we, in the Manner and Measure fit for us, may also be *One as They are*, that we may be *One in Them*; and by Degrees may be *made perfect in One*, as those who are *baptiz'd by One SPIRIT into one Body*; and have been also *made to drink into that One SPIRIT*: Surely then, upon these, with other pressing Reasons, we should most heartily *endeavor to keep the UNITY of the SPIRIT in the Bond of Peace*.³⁸

Christian unity came about, for Oldfield, not by downplaying the doctrine of the Trinity, but through the work of the triune God.

Oldfield epitomized the sort of Non-subscriber who wholly affirmed the classical doctrine of the Trinity, but who was opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases or explications of the doctrine that went beyond what he thought Scripture revealed. One distinct difference between Oldfield's views on the doctrine of the Trinity and Walrond's "middle sort" is that Oldfield was not indifferent towards the doctrine. This is manifestly evident in his detailed treatment and the seeming warmth with which he considered the doctrine. When Oldfield sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall in 1719, he does not seem to have been hiding heterodox opinions. Instead, he acted out of a conviction that compulsory subscription, particularly to confessions or creeds that he believed went beyond what God had revealed, exceeded what Christians could reasonably require of their brethren.

John Gale (1680–1721)

No individual among the General Baptists had a more laudable academic pedigree than John Gale.³⁹ Gale was educated at the University of Leiden where he

³⁸ Oldfield, *Brief, Practical, and Pacific Discourse*, 65.

³⁹ Gale's academic pedigree and circle of influential friends was quite unique among the General Baptists. This might highlight the difference between some London General Baptists, such as Gale

received Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees by the age of nineteen.⁴⁰ Gale soon returned to England where he was celebrated for his *Reflections on Mr. Wall's History of Infant Baptism* (1711), which was a response in several letters to William Wall's *The History of Infant Baptism*.⁴¹ According to Wilson, "This treatise [Wall's] was recommended to Dr. Gale by one of his friends, a member of the Church of England, as perfectly convincing and unanswerable; but the doctor, after perusing it, instead of becoming a convert, determined to answer it."⁴² Gale's *Reflections* was apparently quite convincing to many non-Baptists in the early eighteenth century. Hubert Stogdon, James Foster, and William Whiston are said to have embraced Baptist views on baptism as a result of Gale's work.⁴³

Gale was a member at Paul's Alley, Barbican. The congregation requested that Gale preach more often, and by 1715 Gale was serving as an assistant to Richard Allen and then to Joseph Burroughs. On August 4, 1717, Gale preached a sermon at Barbican entitled "The Insufficiency of External Observances, without Purity of Heart." His sermon text came from Matthew 5:4: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The essence of Gale's argument was that "external observances" were no

and Burroughs, and other General Baptists throughout England. Gale's prominence might have given him some influence with the other General Baptists at Salters' Hall, but he hardly seems representative of the average General Baptist.

⁴⁰ Thomas Crosby, *History of the English Baptists* (London, 1740), 4:366–67. According to Crosby, Leiden offered Gale the Doctor of Divinity degree four years after his return to England. Gale only had to affirm the Canons of Dort. Gale refused to do so.

⁴¹ The work began as several letters, which apparently began circulating in 1705–6. The letters were compiled and published in 1711. Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, In London, Westminster, and Southwark; Including the Lives of Their Ministers, From the Rise of Nonconformity to the Present Time* (London: Printed by the author, 1810), 3:244.

⁴² Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 3:244.

⁴³ It was Stogdon's ordination by the ministers at Exeter, and concerns over his orthodoxy, that, in part, created the controversy there that led to the debates at Salters' Hall in 1719. Stogdon and Foster were both considered for the role of co-pastor alongside Joseph Burroughs in 1724. Foster was ultimately chosen and served at Paul's Alley from 1724–1744. William Whiston was a notable philosopher, historian, and theologian whose writings were regularly in opposition to an Athanasian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Jim Benedict and Alexander Gordon, "Gale, John," in *ODNB*, accessed December 24, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10292>.

guarantee of acceptance with God. After all, Gale reasoned, Jesus was critiquing the Scribes and Pharisees throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and they were renowned for their strict keeping of the Law. Yet their actions were of no value since they lacked “purity of heart,” which Gale seemed to interpret as a sort of evangelical conversion.

Gale clearly had in mind a contemporary example of what he believed to be moribund “external observances,” namely, the multiplication and imposition of essential Christian doctrines. The creation of unnecessary “Boundaries and Conditions of Communion, whether by those in Authority, or by National Churches, or by particular Churches and private Persons, which the Scriptures have not made so . . . are of the same evil Nature and Tendency, and do generally equally render *the Word of God of no effect*.”⁴⁴ Assent to any confession of faith, without purity of heart, Gale reasoned, was useless before God. “For from the whole it very plainly appears,” Gale wrote, “that God Almighty rejects his *own Ordinances*, when they are polluted and defiled, by being perform’d with an impure Heart.”⁴⁵

Gale affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture as “our constant Guide.” Joseph Burroughs said of Gale’s study in preparation to preach, “He spent a very considerable part of his time in the study of the scriptures themselves in their originals, and in comparing them with the versions of various languages, particularly the more antient: whereby he became a great master in the knowledge of the scriptures.”⁴⁶ John Kinch, who preached a funeral sermon for Gale, said of him: “He strictly adher’d to the Scriptures as the perfect and only rule of his faith and practice: and was a zealous asserter and patron of universal liberty, where it tended not to licentiousness.”⁴⁷ Yet Gale’s

⁴⁴ John Gale, *The Insufficiency of External Observances, without Purity of Heart* (London: J. Darby, 1717), 25.

⁴⁵ Gale, *Insufficiency of External Observances*, 27.

⁴⁶ Joseph Burroughs, *A Sermon Preached at Barbican In London, December 24, 1721. Upon the Death Of the Reverend Dr. John Gale* (London: John Darby, 1722), 26.

⁴⁷ John Kinch, *A Funeral Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the late Reverend and Learned*

affirmation of the sufficiency of Scripture was not a cover for heterodoxy or the unending expansion of *adiaphora*.⁴⁸ Gale said regarding the sufficiency of Scripture,

We must not act contrary to them [the Scriptures], nor give up any thing in them; we must not disown what we believe to be true, or profess what we think to be false; we must not do any thing we believe to be sinful, nor omit what we take to be our Duty to please any: for tho we are to follow Peace, we must follow Holiness too, and not become impious, disobedient, and irreligious for the sake of Peace, but on the contrary, always chuse, be the Consequence what it will, to *obey God rather than Man*.⁴⁹

Yet Gale always maintained,

But then in all indifferent matters, *i.e.* in all things not sinful, or contrary to the Word of God, we should be constantly ready to submit our selves and our Practices to others, for the sake of Peace and Concord, and to preserve the Communion of the Saints; and not obstinately insist upon our own Sentiments, to the disturbance of any, and the destroying the Unity of Christ's Body, and breeding, Dissentions, Schisms, and Divisions in the Churches.⁵⁰

From the above citations one can see that Gale was zealous for the sufficiency of Scripture, and was not willing to forsake the teachings of Scripture in order to please those who disagreed with him. Related to this, Kinch noted that Gale was not “afraid to oppose those sentiments he apprehended to be erroneous.”⁵¹ This trait of Gale's was apparent in his response to Wall's defense of infant baptism.

For all of Gale's affirmations of the sufficiency of Scripture, and his seeming orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, what should be made of his cordial relationships with known anti-Trinitarians? Gale was friends with William Whiston, a known anti-

Dr. John Gale: Preach'd December 31. 1721 (London: Aaron Ward, 1722), 27.

⁴⁸ An early biographer of Gale's noted in a posthumous publication of his sermons that Gale embraced the doctrine of the Trinity through his own diligent study, not because of his upbringing or through his formal education. See John Gale, *Sermons Preach'd upon Several Subjects, By the Late Reverend and Learned Dr. John Gale. To which is prefix'd, An Account of his Life*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1726), 1:xiii.

⁴⁹ John Gale, *Universal Charity, the Bond of Christian Unity. A Sermon Preached at Pinner's-Hall* (London: J. Darby, 1718), 27.

⁵⁰ Gale, *Universal Charity*, 27.

⁵¹ Kinch, *Funeral Sermon*, 27.

Trinitarian, and even served as a chairman of Whiston's society alongside the anti-Trinitarian Thomas Emlyn.⁵² The society was dedicated to discovering and promoting primitive Christianity. For Whiston, primitive Christianity was clearly something other than Athanasianism. Yet Gale's interest in primitive Christianity was not the same as Whiston's. Joseph Burroughs said of Gale in his funeral sermon: "he employ'd himself with much diligence in consulting the antient commentators upon the bible, and in reading and digesting the primitive writers of the christian church; for whose interpretations of scripture he shew'd a more than ordinary value."⁵³ Burroughs further indicated that it was Gale's interest in comparing the teachings of the early church with Scripture that led him to join Whiston's society.⁵⁴ Regarding his interest in early Christian writings, an early biographer of Gale said in the preface to a posthumous collection of Gale's sermons: "He also read over and consider'd the primitive writers of the christian church, by which he contracted a just esteem for them, neither approving the conduct of those who slight them, nor that of others who rely too much upon their authority."⁵⁵ Gale seems to have been genuinely interested in discovering the teachings and practices of Jesus, the apostles, and the early church, but he did not embrace Whiston's conclusions concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ.

Gale had little patience with those who supported what he believed to be doctrinal imposition.⁵⁶ Might it be that Gale's position on doctrinal subscription had been

⁵² Benedict and Gordon, "Gale, John."

⁵³ Burroughs, *Sermon Preached at Barbican*, 26.

⁵⁴ Burroughs, *Sermon Preached at Barbican*, 26–27.

⁵⁵ Gale, *Sermons Preach'd*, 1:ix.

⁵⁶ Bogue and Bennett had little admiration for Gale's views on subscription and called his orthodoxy into question: "In the Salter's-hall controversy he took a very active part; and in a pamphlet defended the conduct of the non-subscribers. Whatever praise for liberality is due to the men of his side who believed the doctrine of the Trinity, nothing is due to him and some others but an acknowledgement of honesty in refusing to subscribe what they did not believe; though amidst the thousands of instances of clerical men setting their names to creeds which are contrary to their sentiments, honest may be thought to merit no mean degree of praise." David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, From the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808* (London: Printed for the authors, 1810), 3:423. Bogue and Bennett's

somewhat influenced by Jean Le Clerc and Philip van Limborch, both whom he studied under in Holland?⁵⁷ It was Limborch who, in the 1690s, had thoroughly detailed the dangers of what he called “inquisition” in religious matters. Limborch noted that pagans and Christians were both guilty of persecuting under the guise of protecting religion. We cannot know for sure, but Gale clearly opposed certain forms of confessional subscription which he thought went beyond the teachings of Scripture. Yet there is no evidence of heterodoxy in Gale’s published works. On the contrary, there is an evangelical passion for the importance of active faith and the necessity of conversion. The most natural conclusion, then, is that Gale fit Walrond’s description of “a middle sort” of dissenter in the early eighteenth century. He did not embrace heterodox teachings on the Trinity, but he was opposed to requiring subscription to confessions and creeds. He seems to have felt at least a sort of academic collegiality with men such as Whiston, Emlyn, Le Clerc, and Limborch without deviating from a historic understanding of the Trinity, thereby demonstrating the complexity of interpreting non-subscription at Salters’ Hall.

John Hughes (1668–1729)

John Hughes was a Non-subscriber at Salters’ Hall and minister of the Presbyterian congregation at Ware for nearly thirty years. Hughes would have been one of the older Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. According to John Sherman, who preached Hughes’s funeral at Ware, Hughes was the grandson of George Hughes and the son of Obadiah Hughes, both of whom were ministers and were at some point imprisoned, likely for being dissenting ministers. John Hughes studied at both Geneva and Utrecht before returning to London where he gave an evening lecture for his uncle, “Mr. How.”⁵⁸ This

assessment of Gale is even more fascinating when one considers that their treatment of John Evans and William Harris, both of whom were Non-subscribers, offers no similar critique of their non-subscription or an assertion of heterodoxy (3:449–51, 3:459–60).

⁵⁷ Burroughs, *Sermon Preached at Barbican*, 25.

⁵⁸ John Sherman, *The Righteous Man’s Character and Privilege in Death. A Sermon Occasion’d by the Death Of the Reverend Mr. John Hughes, And publish’d at the Request of the Hearers*

seems to have been the renowned Presbyterian minister John Howe who married George Hughes's daughter, Katherine, in 1655.⁵⁹ This connection is made altogether more intriguing when one considers Howe's involvement in the Happy Union and its demise in the 1690s. Returning to Hughes, he settled as minister of the Presbyterian congregation at Ware where he served until his death in 1729.

Two works written by Hughes, one in 1712 and the other in 1714, consider the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly the deity of Christ. While these works predate the Salters' Hall Controversy by several years, they are pertinent for a consideration of the Non-subscribers there because they directly engage the works of Whiston and Clarke.⁶⁰ Some might contend that Hughes's beliefs could have evolved in the period between their publication and the meetings in 1719. That Hughes's views might have evolved is certainly possible, and cannot be ruled out. But the scope and depth of Hughes's arguments in favor of the consubstantial deity of Christ, in direct opposition to the very arguments of Whiston and Clarke, makes such a contention highly unlikely. As will become apparent, Hughes had weighed the arguments of Whiston and Clarke and found them wanting. Therefore, it seems most likely that these two works from 1712 and 1714 represent Hughes's mature views on the deity of Christ. If this is the case, and there is no reason to think that it is not, then Hughes represents yet another Non-subscriber for whom the classical doctrine of the Trinity was no barrier to subscription in 1719. Though his reason for opposition to subscription there will remain somewhat obscure, his clear,

(London: T. Cox, 1729), 35. Sherman was a Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall and followed Hughes as pastor at Ware.

⁵⁹ David P. Field, "Howe, John," in *ODN*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13956>.

⁶⁰ There is a work apparently written in 1718 by Hughes in response to Thomas Bennet's work on the Trinity, of which Hughes was apparently critical. I have not been able to access the work at this time. It is referenced in Colligan and appears in the English Short Title Catalogue. See John Hughes, *Remarks on Dr. Bennet's Discourse of the Trinity, with a peculiar regard to our Saviour's Divinity* (London: R. Ford, 1718); J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1913), 41.

warm-hearted affirmation of the consubstantial Trinity should not be called into question.

Hughes's *An Essay Towards Some farther Evidence of our Saviour's Divinity* (1712) came about because of what he believed was the revival of Arianism in the writings of Whiston and Emlyn.⁶¹ It was not until Hughes published the second and third parts of the work in a single volume in 1714 that he engaged the writings of Clarke.⁶² Even then, Hughes's treatment of Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine* appeared primarily in an appendix.⁶³ Hughes had also lived through Trinitarian debates of the 1690s and the publication of the Unitarian Tracts. Consequently, Hughes saw the works of Whiston, Emlyn, and Clarke as a revival of those debates. And even though he seemed to find some novel material in Clarke, he believed the implications of Clarke's arguments to be essentially the same as those in the former debates.⁶⁴ In reference to the current debates, Hughes stated what he believed to be the "Question in dispute":

'tis not whether Christ is in Scripture styled God; for tho' some of the Unitarians deny this, others of them do allow it: nor is it whether (supposing He was never so styled in Scripture) He may not pass under this Denomination as well as *Moses*, *Angles* and *Magistrates*; but whether this is to be understood of Him in a figurative Sense, as 'tis of the forementioned Parties, or in a literal one, and so as to be in reality the Supream God, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as well as a

⁶¹ John Hughes, preface to *An Essay Towards Some farther Evidence of our Saviour's Divinity* (London: John Lawrence, 1712), [1, 2].

⁶² John Hughes, *An Essay Towards Some farther Evidence of our Saviour's Divinity. With Some Remarks on Mr. Whiston's and Dr. Clark's Notions on this Subject* (London: John Lawrence, 1714).

⁶³ Hughes's treatment of Clarke's scheme was relatively brief. While he did engage some of Clarke's work directly, he dealt primarily with the implications of Clarke's theology, much of which was similar to his treatment of Arianism elsewhere. Hughes admitted that Clarke had shored up some of the weaknesses inherent to Arianism, particularly on the atonement, but Hughes still believed that his argument still held good even in light of Clarke's modifications. Hughes, *Essay . . . With Some Remarks on Whiston and Clarke*, 143.

⁶⁴ In an appendix to the second work on Christ's divinity, Hughes said concerning Arianism and Clarke's scheme in light of Scripture: "And in fact, throughout the sacred Books, we read but of one God, All-knowing and Almighty, and but of one Creator of the Universe. Whereas according to the Doctor's Scheme, as well as that of the *Arians*, we ought to have been told, there were at least two Gods, and two Makers of the World: the one, Supream and Chief Manager; and the other, subordinate to the former, and His grand Agent or substitute." Hughes, *Essay . . . With Some Remarks on Whiston and Clarke*, 140. From this is apparent that while Hughes does view Clarke's scheme as distinct from Arianism in some ways, many of the implication of Clarke's work was the same.

Creature?⁶⁵

Hughes then proceeded to explain how the Unitarians, Socinians, and Arians viewed Christ's being styled "God" in Scripture, particularly, whether it was intended to be interpreted figuratively or literally. Hughes wrote,

The Unitarians will have it He is only so in the former Sense [figuratively], with this difference, that whereas the *Socinians* pretend He is a meer Man, and never existed before his Incarnation; the *Arrians* affirm He was before his becoming Man a Superangelical Creature, by whom, as by an Underagent, the real Deity form'd the rest of the Universe.⁶⁶

Therefore, against the Unitarians, Socinians, and Arianism, Hughes sided with the "Orthodox" who "assert Him [Christ] to be God in the sublimest Sense of that Word."⁶⁷ Hughes added, "And that Christ is not a bare titular God, but the Supream, is what I presume may be clear'd to the Satisfaction of many in the ensuing Method."⁶⁸

Hughes's arguments in favor of the consubstantial Trinity in these two works were far from novel.⁶⁹ The majority of Hughes's defense focused on the Son being consubstantial with the Father, and Hughes employed many standard arguments in favor of the classical understanding of Christ's divinity. These included Christ's miraculous works, his casting out devils, and his bestowing the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Hughes noted, Christ conducted himself as if he were God, he accepted worship when it was rendered unto him, and he offered infinite satisfaction for sins.⁷¹ Hughes thought,

⁶⁵ Hughes, preface to *Essay*, viii.

⁶⁶ Hughes, *Essay*, 8.

⁶⁷ Hughes, preface to *Essay*, viii.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *Essay*, 8.

⁶⁹ This is not to say that there are not some speculative concepts in Hughes's essays. At one point, Hughes put forward the possibility of two simple persons but one complex person in regards to the Incarnate Christ. Hughes noted that he might be charged with affirming a version of Nestorianism, but contended that this was not necessarily his personal view. It was primarily put forward as a potential response to the claims of the Unitarians. Hughes, preface to *Essay*, xi–xiii.

⁷⁰ Hughes, *Essay*, 27–72.

⁷¹ Hughes, *Essay*, 73–89.

however, that the clearest demonstrations of the deity of Christ were his prophecies and his very claims about himself.⁷² Regarding the latter, Hughes contended, that Jesus unreservedly styled himself as equal with the Father.⁷³ Again, these were not novel arguments, which Hughes was aware of. The lack of novelty in his arguments seems to further confirm his claim at the beginning of the first essay that much of what was found in Whiston, Emlyn, and Clarke only echoed former arguments against the consubstantial deity of Christ.

Hughes's orthodoxy was apparent throughout both works. Hughes firmly believed that the consubstantial deity of Christ was the clear teaching of Scripture, which was evidenced in a variety of ways including the miraculous works of Christ, his titles, the worship he willingly received, and Jesus' very own words. Regarding Jesus' response to Philip's request for him to reveal the Father to the disciples in John 14:7, 8, Hughes noted, "Now had Christ studiously sought for a *collateral* way of setting Himself out as One with the Father, could He have done it more *lively* or *fully* than by the foregoing Paragraph? Had not He been in a peculiar Sense the same with the Father, might He not have been seen and known while the Father was not?"⁷⁴ Seemingly in response to the Socinians, Hughes added, "And how could He be *One and the same* with the *Father* thus far, if He was no more than a Creature?" And seemingly in response to the Arians, He added, "For the most perfect of meer Creatures, from a Necessity of Nature, cannot but be *infinitely inferior to, and different from* the Father."⁷⁵ As Hughes made clear

⁷² Hughes, *Essay*, 90–115.

⁷³ Hughes, *Essay*, 96–97.

⁷⁴ It is intriguing that Hughes cited the controversial theologian and commentator Daniel Whitby on several occasions when he thought fitting. But Hughes also seems to have had some concerns about Whitby's interpretation of certain key texts including John 14, which some interpreted Jesus as meaning that his works were merely displays of the Father's wisdom and power, including Whitby. Hughes pointed out in a note, "'Tis surprising that so great a Critick as Dr. Whitby should put this Gloss upon it." Of course, Whitby eventually rejected classical Trinitarianism in the latter part of the decade. Hughes, *Essay*, 103.

⁷⁵ Hughes, *Essay*, 103.

elsewhere, there is no “middle sort of Being” between God and creature.⁷⁶ The conclusion that Hughes drew from this was that when Scripture depicted Jesus as God it must have meant, as Jesus himself seemed to claim, that he was equal with the Father.

Hughes also appealed to the atonement as a demonstration of the consubstantial deity of Christ. Hughes understood the atonement as substitutionary satisfaction for sin as opposed to the mere excitement of divine mercy.⁷⁷ Hughes explained, “Now the Satisfaction Christ made to God by his Sufferings, was intended not to excite his Mercy towards us, but in a way of Reparation to his Justice; we may be assured both from Scripture and Reason.”⁷⁸ The atonement, Hughes believed, required “infinite satisfaction” and further evidenced the divinity of Christ.⁷⁹ No creature, even a “Superangelical Creature” as in Arianism, could provide infinite satisfaction for sin.⁸⁰ Socinianism, Arianism, and Unitarianism all fell short of the biblical depiction of Christ’s death as an infinite satisfaction for sin. Hughes wrote, “So that from what has been insisted on, it is very plain, the Satisfaction Christ paid to God for our Sins, was an Infinite one; else it could not have suited the Divine Honour to have accepted thereof, nor that of Christ to have pretended to it; and surely non but an infinite Being could make and infinite satisfaction.”⁸¹ From this Hughes concluded, “No wonder therefore if, agreeably to this Notion, we find the Blood and Death of Christ set forth as the Blood and Death of *God Himself*.”⁸² Hughes’s understanding of the atonement, then, further demonstrates his

⁷⁶ Hughes, *Essay . . . With Some Remarks on Whiston and Clarke*, 138.

⁷⁷ Hughes, *Essay*, 85, 86.

⁷⁸ Hughes, *Essay*, 86.

⁷⁹ Hughes, *Essay*, 82. Hughes did not conceive of the atonement as an exact payment of a debt, but as “a sort of Equivalent offer’d to God, *in lieu of* such Punishment.”

⁸⁰ Hughes, *Essay*, 88.

⁸¹ Hughes, *Essay*, 89.

⁸² Hughes, *Essay*.

high Christology, and his affirmation of the consubstantial deity of Christ.

Hughes was adamant in both works that the Son “had the same Divine Nature with his Father.”⁸³ If this were not the case, he reasoned, then Jesus could not have told his disciples that to see him was to see the Father, and he could not have told his opponents that to know him was to know the Father. Regarding these sorts of sayings from Jesus in the Gospels, Hughes stated,

And that hereby Christ design'd a great deal more, and no less than his having the same Divine Essence with the Father; which tho' in it self invisible, yet seeing Him in his Human Nature, He having also a Divine one; they did by consequence see Him who was God, and so in this way they saw the Father also: that this, I say, was his Intent, is farther evident from the immediate mention he makes of *his being in the Father, and the Father in Him*; which plainly intimates He would have the former understood with relation to their Unity of Essence, which their mutual existing in each other does import.⁸⁴

After a long series of rhetorical questions in which Hughes argued that Christ is immense, omnipresent, omniscient, almighty as well as the proprietor, governor, and judge of the world, he concluded, “Now how is it possible that Christ should have an Equal capacity with the Father for the governing and judging of the World, as it seems here intimated by his being entrusted with so great an Affair, had He not the same Divine Essence?”⁸⁵

Hughes did argue in his second work that the Son's nature was derived from the Father from eternity by necessity. He placed great emphasis on the notion of necessity. Regarding Hughes's language of derived in reference to the Son, he argued that the Son was both derived and underived. Hughes explained, “And tho' Christ consider'd as a Person necessarily deriving from the Father, must in this respect be accounted a deriv'd and dependent one; yet consider'd as a Person equally necessary and

⁸³ Hughes, *Essay*, 101.

⁸⁴ Hughes, *Essay*, 104.

⁸⁵ Hughes, *Essay*, 105–12.

essential to the Godhead with the Father, so He is to be conceiv'd the same supream, independent and underiv'd Deity."⁸⁶ While Hughes's language of derivation seems somewhat concerning, his writing directly against Whiston, Emlyn, and Clarke, as well as his consistent emphasis on the Son (and Spirit) possessing the divine nature from eternity, seems to indicate a thoroughgoing orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity.⁸⁷

Considering Hughes's views on the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly his consistent affirmation of the deity of Christ, why did he side with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall? The answer to that question is somewhat unclear. Hughes consistently used the words *person* and *essence* in reference to the Father, Son, and Spirit in his writings.⁸⁸ Yet at Salters' Hall he opposed the subscription recommended by the Subscribers who withdrew from the meeting. The combination of Hughes's willingness to not only affirm but also defend the consubstantial Trinity, even using theological terms such as *essence*, could be telling. It might be that Hughes's personal approach to defending the doctrine of the Trinity was one matter, but the requirement of others to affirm the same terms, particularly on the occasion of the proposed subscription at Salters' Hall, was another matter. It is worth noting that Hughes intentionally avoided appealing to the early Church Fathers in his two works. He intentionally appealed primarily to Scripture, stating very early in the first work that the Fathers were capable of erring. Therefore, instead of appealing to them he would appeal to the Scriptures, just as the Fathers had done.⁸⁹ Hughes also seems to have adopted this methodology in response to Whiston's attempt to

⁸⁶ Hughes, *Essay . . . With Some Remarks on Whiston and Clarke*, 132.

⁸⁷ Hughes says just prior to the previous quote, "So that tho' the Father is most justly esteem'd the Supream Person in the Godhead, yet is He no more the Supream God than the Son or the Spirit, supposing they derive from Him by Necessity of Nature; because not one of them exclusive of the rest, but including each other are the Supream God. And therefore thus consider'd, they are all equally Supream." Hughes, *Essay . . . With Some Remarks on Whiston and Clarke*, 132.

⁸⁸ There are far fewer references to the Spirit since Hughes's aim is to defend the consubstantial deity of Christ. Nonetheless, Hughes does on several occasions reference the three persons of the Godhead as subsisting in the singular divine essence.

⁸⁹ Hughes, preface to *Essay*, [4].

undermine the doctrine of the Trinity by arguing that the Fathers did not uniformly affirm the consubstantial Trinity.⁹⁰ In the end, Hughes thought appealing to Scripture rather than the Fathers a better and more consistently Protestant way of addressing the matter.

Hughes claimed, “*But were it [Christ’s “supream Divinity”] only to be gather’d from thence [in Scripture] by clear consequence, this surely were enough.*”⁹¹

Sherman, who admitted to not having known Hughes intimately, having only moved to Ware near the end of Hughes’s life, said concerning Hughes’s views on the “Protestant Principle” in his eulogy:

He never allowed himself to censure any man for differing from him in point of judgment, and this part of his conduct did not proceed from want of regard to truths of an important nature, but from a hearty love to this truly Christian and Protestant Principle, that every one in the affair of conscience and salvation, has a right to judge for himself, which no one man, nor any sett of men, however dignified, ought to infringe.⁹²

Sherman’s eulogy of Hughes provides some insight into Hughes’s perspective on the issue of subscription at Salters’ Hall. It would appear from Hughes’s own writings that he was thoroughly orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. It would also seem from Hughes siding with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall and Sherman’s comment above concerning Hughes’s beliefs about the “Protestant Principle” that he was opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. In sum, Hughes further demonstrates the vast “middle sort” of ministers at Salters’ Hall who were orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, but unwilling to require others to confess the doctrine in extrabiblical terms.

⁹⁰ Hughes, *Essay*. Whiston also believed that the Apostolical Constitutions was a legitimate expression of early Christian belief, which Hughes was aware of. See Hughes, preface to *Essay*, [5].

⁹¹ Hughes, preface to *Essay*, [3].

⁹² Sherman, *Righteous Man’s Character*, 37. Yarnell’s discussion of the Protestant principle is succinct and helpful. See Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “‘The Point in Question’ at Salters’ Hall: Baptists Contending for Trinity, Scripture, and Freedom,” in Copson, *Trinity, Creed and Confusion*, 128–32.

Benjamin Grosvenor (1676–1758)

Benjamin Grosvenor was one of the leading Presbyterian ministers in London. He sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. Grosvenor's surname was Gravenor, but he later adopted Gravenor and then Grosvenor.⁹³ Some have speculated that this was due to his father's financial troubles.⁹⁴ Grosvenor was converted at the age of ten under the preaching of a Baptist minister. According to Ruston, he was eventually baptized by the revered Particular Baptist Benjamin Keach.⁹⁵ It was at Timothy Jollie's academy in the early 1690s that Grosvenor adopted Presbyterian views. Grosvenor began his ministry as an assistant to Joshua Oldfield in 1699. He then became a lecturer at Old Jewry in 1702, and one of six preachers at the Merchant's Lecture at Salters' Hall in 1716.⁹⁶ He served in this capacity until 1749.⁹⁷ Grosvenor eventually became the pastor of the Presbyterian congregation at Crosby Square where he served from 1704 to 1749. He was awarded a D. D. by the University of Edinburgh in 1730.

There is no clear sign of heterodoxy in Grosvenor's published works, nor does he seem to have ever been accused of being heterodox on the doctrine of the Trinity. The renowned dissenting minister Daniel Williams preached Grosvenor's ordination sermon. The ordination itself had almost certainly occurred prior to 1704 when he became the pastor at Crosby Square. In 1708, Williams published two ordination sermons, the one he had preached at Grosvenor's ordination and the other he had preached at the ordination of Samuel Wright.⁹⁸ Wright, another Presbyterian Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall, also

⁹³ A short memoir of Grosvenor in *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* has his name spelled as "Grovesnor." See "Brief Memoirs of Dr. Grovesnor," in *Protestant Dissenters Magazine* 4 (1797): 201–5.

⁹⁴ Alan Ruston, "Grosvenor, Benjamin," *ODNB*, accessed December 3, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11666>.

⁹⁵ Ruston, "Grosvenor, Benjamin."

⁹⁶ John Barker, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Benjamin Grosvenor, D. D.* (London: J. Buckland, 1758), 34.

⁹⁷ Barker, *Sermon*, 35.

⁹⁸ Daniel Williams, *The Ministerial Office: Wherein The Importance, Difficulty, Nature and*

served as an assistant to Grosvenor at Crosby Square beginning in 1705.⁹⁹ Appended to Williams's ordination sermons were Grosvenor's and Wright's confessions of faith, which they presented at their ordination. Both Grosvenor's and Wright's confessions of faith, given over a decade prior to the controversy at Salters' Hall, were orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity and clearly influenced by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Grosvenor confessed regarding the Trinity, "I believe therefore, according to the Scripture-Revelation, that in the Deity of the God-head there is the *Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and that these Three are One, the same in Substance, equal in Power and Glory.*"¹⁰⁰ There is little if anything questionable about Grosvenor's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity at this stage in his life.

There is a preface to Grosvenor's confession of faith that contains several pertinent assertions concerning his understanding of the supremacy of Scripture in determining doctrinal matters.¹⁰¹ Grosvenor referred to the Bible as "*the Religion of Protestants,*" and the Bible itself as "the Form of Sound Words."¹⁰² He further stated, "*All other Forms are no further sacred to us, than as they lead us into the Sense, and present us with some Scheme of Scripture-Religion, and the setting up any other Forms as the Standard of Truth, is not only departing from the Simplicity of the Gospel, but opposing it.*"¹⁰³ According to Grosvenor, over a decade prior to the Salters' Hall

Necessity of that Office, are considered (London: John Lawrence, 1708).

⁹⁹ Barker, *Sermon*, 32. Barker succeeded Wright as Grosvenor's assistant in 1709. In 1726, Edmund Calamy (1698–1755) left his role as assistant to his father, Edmund Calamy (1671–1732), to serve as Grosvenor's assistant (32).

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Gravenor, *A Confession of Faith, Deliver'd at the Ordination in Williams, Ministerial Office*, 8–9. At this time, Grosvenor's name was still Gravenor. I have retained the usage of Grosvenor for the sake of simplicity and clarity.

¹⁰¹ It is difficult to say precisely when this preface was written. While Grosvenor's ordination was almost certainly prior to his becoming the pastor at Crosby Square, which would mean that the confession was also composed at that time, the preface may have been written for the purpose of publication in 1708.

¹⁰² Chillingworth had famously referred to the Bible alone as the religion of Protestants.

¹⁰³ Gravenor, preface to *Confession*, [2].

Controversy, and even within the context of the publication of his orthodox confession of faith, he vehemently opposed making confessions of faith the standard of truth. As he would argue throughout his life, Grosvenor believed that the use of man-made confessions as the standard of truth was more consistent with Roman Catholicism than Protestantism.¹⁰⁴ Along these line, Grosvenor stated his position, “*For my own part, I think any Man may as well pretend to make a New Bible for me, as to force upon me his Sense of it; whether I can possibly discern it after all means used or no; and that not by showing me a Scripture-Reason, but a Faggot or a Prison.*”¹⁰⁵ Grosvenor saw a clear connection between the imposition of man-made confessions, even when a man remained unconvinced from Scripture, as ultimately leading to persecution.¹⁰⁶

What is abundantly clear in Grosvenor’s writings is his absolute insistence on being known as a Christian rather than being known by any other name or title. He stated in the preface to his confession of faith, having opposed using confessions as standards of truth,

*I say this on purpose to declare that I am a Christian, that is, one who calls no Man Master but Christ Jesus. Next to the Name of Christian, indeed, I profess to glory in that of a Protestant, that is, one who Protests against the Imposition of any other invariable, infallible Rules of Faith and Practice than the Word of God.*¹⁰⁷

In a work published in 1728, Grosvenor explored the biblical origins and significance of the name not only to the person of Christ, but to the believers at Antioch. He echoed Baxter on the notion of going under the title “Christian” and no other denomination:

¹⁰⁴ It should come as no surprise that Grosvenor was a contributor to the *Occasional Papers* and the *Old Whig*, both of which opposed the imposition of man-made confessions which was typically presented in both publications as synonymous with Roman Catholicism. See Andrew C. Thompson, “Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment in Early Hanoverian Britain,” *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 333–56.

¹⁰⁵ Gravenor, *Confession*.

¹⁰⁶ Grosvenor noted at the end of the preface to his confession of his faith that he would remain open to changing his views on doctrinal matters if he was convinced from Scripture. Gravenor, preface to *Confession*, [2].

¹⁰⁷ Gravenor, *Confession*.

Mr. *Baxter* in answer to those who query'd what party he was of—'I will tell you, I am a CHRISTIAN, a MEER CHRISTIAN, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of, is the Christian Church; and has been visible, wherever the Christian Religion and Church has been visible. But must you know what Sect or Party I am of? I am against all Sects and dividing Parties.—I am sorry that you are not content with meer Christianity, and to be a Member of the Catholick Church, and hold the Communion of Saints, but that you must needs also be of a Sect, and have some other Name.'¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, Grosvenor, following Baxter, was not interested in denominational names or the names of "Scholars." He said concerning the latter, "And since we take our Religion from the great Master, to take a Name from one of his Scholars, is an honour too great for any of them, and an affront to the master Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁹ This seems to have been a consistent principle for Grosvenor throughout his life.

Building on the concept of Christ as the Christian's master, Grosvenor argued that Christ alone could judge in matters of conscience and salvation.¹¹⁰ To bear the name of Christ was to follow the example and doctrines of Christ, and not to be bound by party beliefs or doctrines. Grosvenor wrote, "But every true Christian, should scorn to take his name from *Luther*, or *Calvin*, or *Arminius*, or *Zwinglius*;—we are none of their Children, nor Servants; neither are they our masters. If I am of their mind in any thing, it is not

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Grosvenor, *An Essay on the Christian Name: Its Origin, Import, Obligation, and Preference to all Party-Denominations* (London: John Clark, 1728), 53.

¹⁰⁹ Grosvenor, *Essay on the Christian Name*, 28.

¹¹⁰ When Grosvenor preached the Presbyterian Non-subscriber William Harris's funeral, he noted Harris's love for writers of the previous century, but commended him for his unwillingness to be "enslaved by any implicit Attachment to the Authority of any Man." Benjamin Grosvenor, *God's Eternity the Mourner's Comfort. A Sermon Preached at Crutched-Fryars, June 8, 1740. On Occasion of the Death of the late Reverend Dr. William Harris. To which is added, A Funeral Speech delivered at the Interment, By O[b]badiah Hughes, D. D.* (London: Richard Hett, [1740]), 31–32. Harris is worthy of further consideration as he has a rather large published corpus. Of particular interest here is a work on the Old Testament presentation of the Messiah published in 1724. When Harris considered Isa 9:6, he noted the reference to the Messiah as "the mighty God." Harris argued that in the Bible there are "those *who are called Gods*, and him who is *God by nature*." When he came to apply this distinction to the person of Christ he wrote, "But then this word is us'd of him who is really so, and is *by nature God*; who has the divine nature in him, and the proper perfections which belong to it; for *God* is a term which absolutely consider'd, signifies all perfection, as well as relatively to us, supreme dominion; and this is the true and proper sence of the word. Now, the Messiah is called God, not in the large and figurative sence, as idols and magistrates are so called; but in the strict and proper sence: He is really so, and not only nominally; with respect to his nature and essence, and not merely by his title and office: So he is represented in the new testament as *God over all*, and as the *great God*, and the *true God*." William Harris, *Practical Discourses On The Principal Representation Of The Messiah Throughout the Old Testament* (London: E. Matthews, 1724), 334–35.

because it is theirs, but because it is Christ's." He continued, "Their so judging, is no reason of my judging so too; but because, I take it to be the mind of Christ. If their ministry brought me to know the Doctrine of Christ, their ministry did, at the same time, bring me the Name *Christian*."¹¹¹ In Grosvenor's estimation, men were worthy of "double honour" insofar as they taught people the doctrines of Christ, "but to wear their names is an honour only due to Christ their master and ours."¹¹²

Grosvenor's funeral sermon was preached by the Presbyterian Subscriber John Barker.¹¹³ Barker said concerning Grosvenor's theological convictions, "His judgment and faith, in the doctrines of the christian religion, were steady and unshaken."¹¹⁴ But Baker also highlighted Grosvenor's distaste for "controversy" and "ensoriousness." Barker quoted from Grosvenor's diary, "I thank God, (says he in his diary,) for that temper of mind and genius, which has made it natural to me to have an aversion to bigotry. This has improved constantly with my knowledge. And the enlarging my mind towards those who differ from me, has kept pace with my illumination and intellectual improvements."¹¹⁵ Grosvenor then wrote, "*Agree to differ*, is a good motto."¹¹⁶ By all indications, it was indeed Grosvenor's motto.¹¹⁷ Barker provided another piece of

¹¹¹ Grosvenor, *Essay on the Christian Name*, 31.

¹¹² Grosvenor, *Essay on the Christian Name*.

¹¹³ Barker was a Subscriber at Salters' Hall. As noted above, Barker is said to have later disowned his subscription. It is also believed that he was the author of a "conciliatory" account of Salters' Hall. Barker wrote for *Occasional Papers*, which regularly opposed doctrinal imposition in the years just prior to the Salters' Hall, which makes his subscription there all the more surprising. Barker also preached against Catholicism and popery with several other notable Non-subscribers in 1730s.

¹¹⁴ Barker, *Sermon*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Barker, *Sermon*, 36. The citations from Grosvenor's diary likely were not part of Barker's sermon when he delivered it. He seems to have come across Grosvenor's diary after the sermon was preached, but before it was published (24).

¹¹⁶ Barker, *Sermon*, 37.

¹¹⁷ Grosvenor is said to have remarked that of all of his published works, his favorite was *The Temper Of Jesus Towards His Enemies And his Grace to the Chief of Sinners* (London: J. Clark, 1712). According to Barker, Grosvenor's *The Mourner: Or, The Afflicted Relieved* (London: Richard Hett, 1731) was the most well received. Barker, *Sermon*, 37. Barker's assessment proved true as *Mourner* went through eighteen editions. Ruston, "Grosvenor, Benjamin." A 1792 edition of the work included a printed private

information that might give some insight into Grosvenor's fervent opposition to what he believed to be censoriousness and bigotry, which he regularly connected to the spirit of Roman Catholicism. Barker noted that in 1695 Grosvenor studied Hebrew under a French refugee by the name of "Monsieur *Capell*."¹¹⁸ Capell had apparently been professor of Oriental languages at Saumur, but he had fled with his family and only a few books to escape "*popish* cruelty" after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Barker noted that it was around this time that Grosvenor doubted whether or not he should go into the ministry, in part, because of the disputes among Christians. Grosvenor's natural aversion to controversy and his interaction with Monsieur Capell might have been instrumental in Grosvenor's opposition to the perceived imposition of confessional subscription.

Something of Grosvenor's own values and attributes were extolled by Grosvenor in his eulogy of his dear friend and fellow Non-subscriber William Harris. Grosvenor said concerning Harris's death,

CHRISTIANITY has lost a Defender of its Faith, against those, who look back upon *Paganism* with a wishful Eye; and those, who want *another Gospel than that we have received*; a Gospel without its *peculiar Doctrines*, or, consisting purely of Promises without any Commands. *Liberty and Truth* have lost an able *Advocate*, and the *Protestant Religion* a Champion.¹¹⁹

Many of the attributes which Grosvenor mentioned here have already been covered. One outstanding and noteworthy point is Grosvenor's emphasis on the moral commands and obligations that he believed were essential to a fully orbed gospel. He said concerning the title of Christian, "It is a Name of *obligation upon every one* that wears it. It obliges to depart from iniquity."¹²⁰ Grosvenor's emphasis on the moral commands in Scripture was

letter by James Hervey to a friend commending the work.

¹¹⁸ Barker, *Sermon*, 29. This is likely a reference to Jacques Cappel (1639–1722) who, according to Burden, was known to Locke. See Burden, *Biographical Dictionary of Tutors*, 97–99.

¹¹⁹ Grosvenor, *God's Eternity*, 20.

¹²⁰ Grosvenor, *Essay on the Christian Name*, 32.

not unique to him and can be found in the writings of many other pastors and theologians of his time. It is often noted that as the eighteenth century progressed, more latitudinarian pastors and theologians emphasized the moral commands found in Scripture and the moral example of Jesus and deemphasized his divine attributes. Grosvenor's published works, many of which were sermons, did indeed emphasize the commands of Scripture seemingly more than doctrines such as the Trinity.¹²¹ Yet this emphasis seems more pastoral than theologically subversive for Grosvenor. It has been suggested that Grosvenor was the author of the Non-subscribers' account of Salters' Hall. If Grosvenor was the author of *An Authentick Account*, then the final words of the publication are fitting here. Having opposed the authority of the creeds, the author wrote,

Nor should Men be led into *curious Enquiries* about those Things, in which even *Superior Capacities* lose themselves, and by which the Minds of People will be taken off from the plainer Truths and Duties of Religion. And what will *Truth* itself avail if it be not improved into *Holiness*; or if it be made Instrumental to destroy or abate that *Charity* which is the *Bond of Perfectness* and the *fulfilling of the Law*.¹²²

For Grosvenor, then, what he deemed theological speculation often led to doctrinal imposition and tended to downplay the importance Christian holiness and charity. Taking all of this into consideration, it should come as no surprise that Grosvenor, who appears to have been orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall.

John Evans (1679/80–1730)

John Evans was a Presbyterian minister, historian, and Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall.¹²³ He was the son of John and Katherine Evans. His mother, Katherine, is

¹²¹ This is observable in an early nineteenth-century publication of Grosvenor's sermons published by John Davies, and recommended by the well-known historian David Bogue. See Benjamin Grosvenor, *Sermons by Benjamin Grosvenor. D. D.*, ed. John Davies (Isle of Wight, England, 1808).

¹²² *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and agreed upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately assembled at Salters-Hall* (London: John Clark, 1719), 32.

¹²³ According to Thompson, Evans was also a contributor to the *Occasional Paper*, which

said to have been the widow of the Independent minister Vavasor Powell.¹²⁴ Evans's father was an ejected minister who pastored a dissenting congregation that included Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians.¹²⁵ Evans was educated under Thomas Rowe in London and then Richard Frankland at Rathmell, Yorkshire. Upon his father's death he was taken into the home of a Mrs. Hunt. It was during this period that, as William Harris noted at Evans's funeral, he read the entirety of Matthew Poole's *Synopsis* in Latin. He also "read over all the christian writers of the three first centuries under the direction of the learned Mr. *James Owen*, and made judicious extracts of what related to the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, which were of great use to him."¹²⁶ Evans was ordained at Wrexham in 1702, but eventually moved to Hand Alley, Westminster, to serve as Daniel Williams's assistant and then joint-pastor.¹²⁷ He succeeded Williams in 1716. As a historian, Evans had hoped to write a history of Nonconformity from the time of the Reformation up until the English Civil War, but he was unable to complete the project prior to his death. Daniel Neal used Evans's material and completed the project. Evans also created a valuable catalogue of material related to Baptist, Presbyterian, and Independent congregations in England and Wales from 1715–1729.¹²⁸ As a theologian, Evans seems to have been orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, but firmly opposed to "tyranny and imposition."¹²⁹ Evans further demonstrates the prevalence of doctrinally

regularly published essays against doctrinal imposition. See Thompson, "Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment," 336.

¹²⁴ Alsager Vian (rev. S. J. Skedd), "Evans, John," in *ODNB*, accessed December 16, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8962>.

¹²⁵ Vian, "Evans, John."

¹²⁶ William Harris, *Finishing the Christian Course, considered and argued. A Funeral Sermon, Occasion'd by the Death Of the late Reverend John Evans, D. D.* (London: Richard Ford, 1730), 33.

¹²⁷ According to Bogue and Bennett, Matthew Henry assisted in his ordination. Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:450.

¹²⁸ The Evans MS is housed at the Daniel Williams Library. Evans's list can be seen in T. S. James, *The History of the Litigation and Legislation respecting Presbyterian Chapels and Charities in England and Ireland between 1816 and 1849* (London: Hamilton Adams, 1867).

¹²⁹ Harris, *Finishing the Christian Course*, 40; Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*,

orthodox Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall.

Of particular importance is Evans's *A Letter to Mr. Cumming*.¹³⁰ In this work, both Evans's orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity as well as his rejection of the binding nature of Scripture consequences are observable. The work was addressed to the Presbyterian Subscriber John Cumming. Evans maintained that the Subscribers and Non-subscribers agreed on the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. He added, "Nor have I heard any of our Brethren deny the Truth of those Deductions and Consequences from Scripture, which are express'd in the *first Article* of the Church of *England*, or the *two Answers* of the *Assembly's Catechism*."¹³¹ Concerning his own views, Evans contended that he did not differ from Cumming and the Subscribers on the doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in "those propositions." Evans even thanked Cumming for his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and assumed he would also agree with anything else Cumming had to say about the doctrine.¹³² Towards the end of the work, Evans addressed a publication from Thomas Reynolds, Benjamin Robinson, Jeremiah Smith, and William Tong on the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³³ Each of these men were Presbyterian ministers and Subscribers at Salters' Hall. Evans affirmed Robinson's entire section on the doctrine of the Trinity, which was thoroughly orthodox. Evans even said, "What he has produc'd

3:451.

¹³⁰ John Evans, *A Letter to Mr. Cumming, Concerning the Regard Which ought to be had to Scripture-Consequences*, 2nd ed. (London: John Clark, 1719).

¹³¹ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 5.

¹³² Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 6.

¹³³ Thomas Reynolds et al., *The Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity Stated and Defended* (London: John Clark, 1719). Tong was the pastor at Salters' Hall. It should also be remembered that each of these men, plus Calamy, wrote a letter of advice to Exeter, dated January 6, 1719, regarding the controversy there prior to the matter being taken up by the entire body at Salters' Hall. The authors also attempt to correct a misconception that the work was written in response to the Salters' Hall Controversy. They claim that the work was mostly written prior to the controversy. See *A Plain and Faithful Narrative Of The Differences Among the Dissenters At Exeter Relating to the Doctrine of the Ever Blessed Trinity, So far as gave Concern to some of the London Ministers* (London: John Clark, 1719), 24–26, 31.

upon all the Articles, is the Matter of my Faith.”¹³⁴ Evans also stated that the Non-subscribers with whom he had spoken with also affirmed Robinson’s account of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³⁵

Yet Evans also pointed out that he shared Robinson’s opinion on what can be said concerning the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture. Robinson stated on multiple occasions that he would not attempt to explain how the Father, Son, and Spirit were to be distinguished from one another or the meaning of words such as begetting, begotten, and proceeding. Robinson was satisfied to leave such matters to those who were “more bold and daring than we.” Robinson was willing to say that “the *Father* is not the *Son*, nor the *Son*, the *Father*; nor either of these the *Holy-Ghost*.”¹³⁶ But he followed that statement with, “Thus far the serious plain Christian, may venture into this awful Mystery of the Blessed Trinity: but whatever positive and bold *Propositions*, or whatever subtil and ensnaring *Questions*, are design’d to carry him further that this; he will do best for his own Safety and Comfort, as well as for the common Peace, to avoid and keep clear of them.”¹³⁷ Robinson’s restraint when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity did bear a striking resemblance to the arguments of many Non-subscribers, including Evans.

From his own admission, Evans did seem to believe that the consubstantial Trinity was a doctrinal consequence of Scripture. He agreed with John Cumming on this point. Where Evans and Cumming disagreed was on whether or not Scripture-consequences were binding beliefs and a part of the divine revelation, which Cumming

¹³⁴ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 22.

¹³⁵ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 22.

¹³⁶ Robinson, “The Question *stated*, and the Scripture Evidence of the Trinity,” in Reynolds et al., *Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity*, 21. Robinson’s approach is somewhat surprising in its own, but particularly within the context of the larger work when considering the other contributors. Robinson seemed to share the sentiments of the Non-subscribers rather than the Subscribers, which was pointed out in a response to Robinson. The work argues that Robinson’s sentiments were known prior to the meetings through a work he published in 1710. See *A Review of the Case of Liturgies, and their Imposition* (London: J. Clark, 1710); *A Letter to Mr. Robinson* (London: T. Warner, 1719).

¹³⁷ Reynolds, *Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity*, 21–22.

affirmed and Evans denied.¹³⁸ Evans defended his view this way: “Because there is a Mixture of the reasoning of fallible Men in the Collection of them [Scripture-consequences], along with the infallible Declarations of the Word of God, which must, in some Measure, weaken the Force of them, in comparison of the Primary Truths from which they are derived.”¹³⁹ In other words, the fallibility of men in arriving at Scripture-consequences is what distinguished them from “the principles from which they flow.”¹⁴⁰ Scripture-consequences, in Evans’s estimation, could not be made binding since they were arrived at through the reasoning of fallible men.

Evans was careful to point out that he was not recommending a sort of spiritual laziness whereby a Christian would not bother searching Scripture to ascertain its teachings on doctrines such as the Trinity. On the contrary, he encouraged Christians to diligently search Scripture and the sense of the biblical text.¹⁴¹ He encouraged ministers to convince their hearers of the sense of the biblical text and its accompanying Scripture-consequences. But he equally argued that some Scripture-consequences were hard to arrive at, which Evans thought said something about their importance. He summarized his point with a pithy maxim, “I APPREHEND, that the *Importance* of Scripture-Consequences must chiefly be measured by the Plainness and Easiness of their Deduction from it.”¹⁴² He further explained his position, “My Reason is, the Perfection of Revelation, and the designed Use of it for the Benefit of *all* Mankind. Would it not impeach the Perfection of Scripture, if any Thing of Great Importance to Salvation, and our Acceptance with God, should not either be most express in it, or so clearly deducible

¹³⁸ John Cumming, *The Grounds of the Present Differences, Among the London Ministers, Part I* (London: John Clark, 1720), 19.

¹³⁹ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 10–11.

¹⁴¹ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 8.

¹⁴² Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 12.

from it, as to be obvious to every honest Mind?”¹⁴³ According to Evans, then, the importance of a Scripture-consequence could be determined by how plainly it was taught in Scripture since “Scripture was intended to make the Illiterate, as well as the most Learned, *wise unto Salvation*.”¹⁴⁴ For Evans, importance was determined by plainness.

Much of Evans’s argument was based upon the individual’s ability to see a given Scripture-consequence after diligent study. Cumming, in his reply, noted the subjectiveness of Evans’s approach.¹⁴⁵ Evans was willing to maintain communion with someone who affirmed “the express declarations of Scripture,” had diligently searched Scripture, and “taken Pains to understand the Mind of God in his Word.”¹⁴⁶ He did not see how he could deny that such a person was a “credible Professor of Christianity” even if they differed with him on Scripture-consequences related to the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴⁷ He would attempt to convince such a person to adopt his own views, and would not permit him to disturb the peace within the congregation, but he would count him a “Fellow-Christian.”¹⁴⁸

Evans would not force any Christian to subscribe to extrabiblical words and phrases regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. His views on this point, and really his decision to side with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall, can be summarized well in a single quote that appeared near the end of his *Letter*: “And if any, in this Subject of pure Revelation, shall chuse not to go one step beyond Scripture, or shall decline to use any particular Word about it, which is not found in Scripture, as *Person*, or *Essence*, or

¹⁴³ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 12–13.

¹⁴⁴ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Cumming, *Grounds of Present Differences*, 23–24.

¹⁴⁶ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 21.

Substance; this shall not make the least Abatement of my Brotherly love to him.”¹⁴⁹

Evans seems to have affirmed the consubstantial Trinity, and he did not seem categorically opposed to convincing others of his views as well, but Evans was unwilling to require others to affirm extrabiblical words and phrases concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. He did not see fit to defend the truth against false “humane Explications” with “*other humane Explications*.”¹⁵⁰

Abnormalities among the Middle Sort

There are a few abnormalities worth noting concerning the “middle sort” at Salters’ Hall. First, each of the figures considered above were Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. But one Subscriber stands out as an oddity among his fellow Subscribers, particularly for his contribution to a publication that regularly opposed imposition in doctrinal matters, which many deemed subscription to be. Second, Richard Parkes, one of the few Particular Baptist Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall is worthy of brief consideration. Third, several of the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall eventually conformed to the Church of England, which is worthy of some consideration.

Jabez Earle

Jabez Earle was numbered among the Subscribers at Salters’ Hall, but he wrote for the *Occasional Paper*, which consistently opposed doctrinal imposition, in the years just preceding the controversy.¹⁵¹ This would make him something of an anomaly among

¹⁴⁹ Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Evans was willing to contend with those who opposed the clear teachings of Scripture. He wrote, “If any person pretend, indeed, to give such *humane Explications*, as we apprehend inconsistent with that which is declared expressly in Scripture, and subversive of it; without doubt we ought, as far as we are called to it, to oppose such humane Explications, and to show their Inconsistency with the Words of Scripture; but I cannot think it the most likely Way to make a successful Defence of the Truth, to adopt *other humane Explications* in the stead of those, so as to make it necessary to defend them, as well as the express Declarations of Scripture” Evans, *Letter to Mr. Cumming*, 14. Evans argument here is quite similar in content and phrasing to a section in *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and agreed upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately assembled at Salters-Hall* (London: John Clark, 1719), 31.

¹⁵¹ Thompson, “Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment,” 36.

the Subscribers as well as among the other contributors to the *Occasional Paper*. It is difficult to reconcile Earle's contributing to the *Occasional Paper* with his decision to side with the Subscribers. It was later reported that Earle, as well as a couple of other Subscribers, had disowned their subscription.¹⁵² Earle was also one of several dissenting ministers who preached against Roman Catholicism in the early 1730s.¹⁵³ The other ministers either were, or likely would have been, Non-subscribers. Jabez Earle seems to have been a Subscriber who would have fit Walrond's designation of a "middle sort" of Dissenter.

Richard Parkes

There were only two Particular Baptist Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, Nathaniel Hodges and Richard Parkes. If one were to construe non-subscription as necessarily entailing doctrinal deviation, it would be difficult to account for Parkes's presence at Particular Baptist Board meetings in the early 1720s.¹⁵⁴ Richard Parkes is numbered among those present, including the formidable defender of Trinitarian orthodoxy, John Gill. The other subscribing Particular Baptists present were John Noble, Mark Key, Edward Wallin, David Rees, and Edward Ridgway. It is possible that Parkes changed his mind in the months or years after Salters' Hall. But it is intriguing that he sided against the vast majority of his brethren at Salters' Hall, and was then numbered among them just a few years later. This could indicate that Parkes was orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity even though he sided with the Non-subscribers, but sided with them for another reason.

¹⁵² David L. Wykes, "Subscribers and the Non-Subscribers at the Salters' Hall Debate," in *ODNB*, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95681>.

¹⁵³ Earle also preached with the Non-subscriber John Evans in 1727. See John Evans and Jabez Earle, *Two Sermons Preached at Old Jewry* (London: J. Clark and R. Hett, 1727).

¹⁵⁴ "Minutes from 1724, 'The Baptist Board'," *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 5, no. 2 (1916): 97–103.

Conformers

Edmund Calamy noted that there were some Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall who conformed to the Church of England after the controversy. Drysdale posited that "numbers more [of young ministers] fell back into the Established Church, as if sickened with the strife, or despairing of the success of the 'cause.'"¹⁵⁵ Calamy wrote, "It was easy to be observed, and much taken notice of, that most that conformed about this time, complained much of a spirit of imposition working among the Dissenters, which discovered itself in the proceedings at Salters' Hall, and on other occasions, after the debates about the Trinity grew warm."¹⁵⁶ Walter Wilson stated concerning those Non-subscribers who conformed: "This was strange conduct in gentlemen who had lately protested against subscription to one article, and whose minds must have experienced an extraordinary revolution to be able in so short a time to swallow thirty-nine."¹⁵⁷ Certainly some Subscribers, such as Thomas Harrison, conformed as well, but the willingness of Non-subscribers to subscribe to the entirety of the Thirty-Nine Articles was a surprising development.

The Dutch Influence and the Role of Dissenting Academies

When considering the Non-subscribers' staunch opposition to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, particularly as a test of faith, the Dutch influence via the Universities of Leiden and Utrecht cannot be overlooked. Nor can the writings of John Locke and Benjamin Hoadly. According to Griffiths, between 1690 and 1705 the Presbyterian Fund supported nine students who attended Utrecht and one at

¹⁵⁵ A. H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline, and Revival* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1889), 506.

¹⁵⁶ Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life, With Some Reflections On The Times I Have Lived In* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 2:506.

¹⁵⁷ Wilson, *History and Antiquities*, 3:382.

Leiden.¹⁵⁸ It was at Leiden that Presbyterian and Independent ministers, and even Baptists such as John Gale, directly encountered an expanded sort of religious toleration. Gale had studied under Limborch and Le Clerc while at Leiden, both of whom had written against doctrinal imposition. Samuel Chandler, the heterodox Non-subscriber, demonstrated his familiarity with and affinity for Limborch's *History of the Inquisition*.¹⁵⁹ Certainly, Locke's writings at the end of the seventeenth century and Hoadly's writings in the years just prior to the Salters' Hall Controversy had significant influence on dissenting views of religious toleration as well.

Some dissenting ministers had been exposed to the writings of Locke, Le Clerc, and Grotius in dissenting academies. John Jennings's academy, where Philip Doddridge studied, was one such example.¹⁶⁰ Burden notes,

According to Doddridge, Jennings 'knew that Nurseries of Bigots are the Devil's Magazines,' and sought to form his students with a 'Catholick Temper' by encouraging them to take their religious notions directly from the Bible. Jennings reminded his students of 'the Limitation of our Faculties and the Imperfection of all human Knowledge.' He encouraged them to study 'those Histories which represent Imposition, Persecution and party Zeal, in the most natural and so the most odious Colours.'¹⁶¹

Jennings's brother, David Jennings, was an Independent minister, friend of Doddridge, and also a Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall, and likely shared something of his brother's sentiments.¹⁶² Therefore, some dissenting ministers were inculcated with an opposition to

¹⁵⁸ O. M. Griffiths, *Religion and Learning: A Study in English Presbyterian Thought from the Bartholomew Ejections (1662) to the Foundation of the Unitarian Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 54.

¹⁵⁹ Philip van Limborch, *The History of the Inquisition*, trans. Samuel Chandler, 2 vols. (London, 1731).

¹⁶⁰ As Isabel Rivers has detailed, Doddridge's teaching methods were deeply influenced by Jennings. See Isabel Rivers, "The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures (London: William's Trust, 2003).

¹⁶¹ Burden, *Biographical Dictionary of Tutors*, 297.

¹⁶² David Jennings was one of the few Independent Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall. Jennings was a minister and tutor. He had been educated under Isaac Chauncy and then Thomas Ridgley and John Eames. Ridgley was a Subscriber at Salters' Hall. Jennings's father was an ejected minister, and David Jennings is said to have "gloried in being the *immediate* descendant of a confessor for the liberty of conscience." Samuel Morton Savage, *Good Men dismiss'd in Peace. A Sermon Occasioned by the Death*

imposition, including subscription, in dissenting academies. In the case of Jennings and Doddridge, future Presbyterian ministers embraced broader views of religious toleration under the tutelage of Independents.¹⁶³

Conclusion

In his work *Religion and Learning* O. M. Griffiths asserted, “No doubt the majority of the non-subscribing ministers at Salters Hall were at least tolerant of Arianism.”¹⁶⁴ Yet Griffiths’s assertion does not seem to correspond with the fact that there were many orthodox Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall who denounced Arianism in their advices to Exeter.¹⁶⁵ It is beyond dispute that some of the Non-subscribers did embrace heterodox opinions on the doctrine of the Trinity either prior to or in the decades after Salters’ Hall. But to claim that the majority of the Non-subscribers were tolerant of Arianism, when they directly denounced Arianism and even wrote in opposition to Arianism, as in the case of Joshua Oldfield and John Hughes, seems unlikely. Such an argument must be built upon an assumption that the majority of the seventy-eight Non-subscribers were completely dishonest in their denunciation. Furthermore, the first-hand testimonies of Edward Wallin, John Barker, and Edmund Calamy would indicate that the majority of the Non-subscribers were orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity and merely

Of the late Reverend David Jennings D. D. (London: J. Buckland, 1762), 34. Jennings became the pastor of an Independent congregation at Wapping in 1718. He was a strong proponent of liberty of conscience, which is likely why he sided with the Non-subscribers at Salters’ Hall. He, like Philip Doddridge, with whom he was intimately acquainted and regularly corresponded, exposed his pupils to a wide variety of theological perspectives as a part of their learning. Regarding Jennings’s own theological views, Samuel Morton Savage said of him, “his sentiments came nearest to Calvinism, as what he thought, in the main, to be the obvious doctrine of Scripture, and the preaching of which God had always most remarkably own’d and succeeded” (39). Jennings preached Isaac Watts’s funeral and also edited and published his works. See also Alan Ruston, “Jennings, David,” in *ODNB*, accessed December 17, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14755>.

¹⁶³ This adds some level of complexity to the narrative, that the Presbyterians became more latitudinarian and even heterodox, while the Congregationalist remained orthodox as the eighteenth century progressed. See Russell E. Richey, “Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?,” *Church History* 42, no. 1 (1973): 71–72.

¹⁶⁴ Griffiths, *Religion and Learning*, 128.

¹⁶⁵ *Authentick Account*, 15.

opposed the demand for subscription.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England Baptists with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 492–93; *A Conciliatory Letter Relating to the Late Proceedings at Salters-Hall* (London: Richard Ford, 1719), 11; Calamy, *Historical Account*, 2:414–16.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

If, for the Non-subscribers, the Salters' Hall Controversy truly was about opposition to subscription rather than opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, then how does one explain the theological declension of the English General Baptist and the English Presbyterians? The majority of the ministers involved in the controversy from these two denominations opposed subscription. Furthermore, Presbyterian and General Baptists' open opposition to the consubstantial Trinity later in the eighteenth century has been well documented. This could incline one to read later heterodoxy back into the events of 1719. However, such an interpretation is not necessarily accurate. That is not to say that some of the Non-subscribers were not already trending towards heterodox beliefs. As noted in chapter 5, some of the Non-subscribers may have already embraced heterodox beliefs on the doctrine of the Trinity by the time of the controversy, or would do so in the decade or so after the controversy. But their deviation from Trinitarian orthodoxy need not be universalized so that non-subscription on the whole would be viewed with suspicion. Orthodox non-subscriptionism, similar to that of Richard Baxter and Thomas Grantham in the latter part of the seventeenth century, was alive and well at Salters' Hall. Non-subscription was not a cover for heterodoxy for the majority of the Non-subscribers. It was an understanding, even if misguided, of the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*. What seems to have happened in the decades after Salters' Hall was that the "middle way" of Baxter and Grantham gave way to the philosophical and theological trends of the eighteenth century. As Stephen Holmes so aptly explained, "If this is right, then the famous alleged divergence between the churches of the Subscribers and Non-subscribers following Salters' Hall can be understood without impugning the

orthodoxy of the Non-subscribers; they may well have been faithful Trinitarians, but their lack of subscription made that position insecure and unstable.”¹ In sum, the middle way gave way.

One of the major issues in the Salters’ Hall Controversy was the meaning of the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*. The Non-subscribers regularly appealed to the principle as did the Subscribers. Both groups believed in the sufficiency of Scripture. However, the Non-subscribers tended to be more critical of extrabiblical words and phrases, many of which were derived from the early ecumenical councils and creeds. For example, the Non-subscriber John Hughes defended the classical doctrine of the Trinity against the attacks of William Whiston, Thomas Emlyn, and Samuel Clarke not by appealing to the early church Fathers, but by examining Scripture. Hughes’s methodology was intentional. He believed that Whiston misused early Christian writings, particularly ante-Nicene works, to defend his heterodoxy. So Hughes, following what he thought to be the Protestant principle, circumvented early Christian writings altogether and appealed to Scripture alone. As Maurice Wiles has noted, a similar example can be found in Edmund Calamy’s series of sermons on the Trinity.² Calamy had mostly avoided the controversy, but he did attempt to defend the doctrine of the Trinity “to prevent its being hereafter said that the Dissenters did not at this time appear against Arianism, when it so much threatened us.”³ Calamy noted regarding the role of the early church Fathers that he did not “think the proof of the Trinity should be fetched from the Fathers, but from the Scriptures.”⁴ There seems to have been a strong desire among some

¹ Stephen Holmes, “The Doctrine of the Trinity, Then and Now: Reflecting Dogmatically on the Salters’ Hall Debates,” in *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters’ Hall Debates of 1719*, ed. Stephen Copson (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2020), 28.

² Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 140–41; Edmund Calamy, *Thirteen Sermons Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1722).

³ Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 141.

⁴ Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*. As Wiles points out, Calamy went on to argue that the ante-Nicene

Dissenters to defend the doctrine of the Trinity without the aid of the early church Fathers' writings. This may have been a response to figures such as Whiston weaponizing ante-Nicene writings against the consubstantial Trinity as well as a sincere desire to defend the doctrine solely from Scripture.

Whatever the case might have been, one wonders if such an appeal to Scripture without the aid of the early church Fathers, the creeds, or the Protestant confessions contributed to the theological decline of the English Presbyterians and General Baptists. Was their demise hastened by a rapidly changing theological milieu and a misguided appeal to *sola Scriptura*? As Holmes has argued, there is great danger in reading just the Bible.⁵

The effects of the controversy were not immediately apparent but became clear in the decades following the 1719 meetings at Salters' Hall. David Bogue and James Bennett accurately noted the long-term theological decline that followed the controversy:

Suffice it to say, that this unhappy controversy proved the grave of the presbyterian congregations, and of those of the general Baptists. Though like the forbidden fruit which did not produce the immediate destruction of the body, but rendered the even certain at a future time, so the effects of Arianism, though at first scarcely visible, gradually produced desolation and death.⁶

While Bogue and Bennett seem to see Arianism more afoot at the time of the controversy, which seems to be an overstatement of the case, they are accurate in noting the Salters' Hall Controversy, in retrospect, was a precursor to significant theological change among the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians. However, to reiterate a vital point, the theological declension of the General Baptists and the Presbyterians need not

Fathers affirmed the consubstantial Trinity by exploring their writings.

⁵ Stephen R. Holmes, "The Dangers of Reading Just the Bible: Orthodoxy and Christology," in *Exploring Baptist Origins*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood (Oxford: Centre for Baptist Studies, 2010), 123–37.

⁶ David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, From the Revolution In 1688, To The Year 1808* (London: Printed for the authors, 1810), 3:249.

be seen as monolithic. Their theological declension might be attributable to different causes.⁷ Bogue and Bennett speculated that the theological decline of the English Presbyterians was attributable to a lack of fervency in the next generation of ministers and laypersons to defend the doctrine of the Trinity.⁸ Watts and Holmes attribute the theological decline of the English General Baptists, at least in part, to their hermeneutics. There is certainly some merit to each of these arguments.

For the orthodox Subscribers at Salters' Hall there were at least two concerns. First, they wanted to demonstrate their orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity. The Subscribers thought their advices to Exeter would carry more weight if the orthodox there were reassured by their affirmation of the consubstantial Trinity. It seems that they also wanted to demonstrate their orthodoxy to the broader population since it had recently been called into question. Second, at least a portion of the Subscribers believed the issue at stake at Salters' Hall was indeed the doctrine of the Trinity and not subscription. The controversy at Exeter was indeed about the doctrine of the Trinity, which played an important part in the suspicion that swelled at Salters' Hall. This concern is easily observed in the writings of men such as John Cumming, Thomas Bradbury, and Daniel Wilcox. Each man, particularly Wilcox and Cumming, strongly defended the classical Trinity as if it were under assault at Salters' Hall. For these men, and likely a host of other Subscribers, the issue at Salters' Hall was indeed the doctrine of the Trinity. But not all of the Subscribers shared their view. The Particular Baptist Edward Wallin and the

⁷ For example, English Presbyterian ministers were, on the whole, more educated than General Baptists ministers, excluding a small minority of men such as John Gale and Joseph Burroughs. Presbyterian ministers were often educated in dissenting academies where they were exposed to more liberal education. Such was not the case for the majority of English General Baptists, particularly those outside of London. Furthermore, Presbyterian congregations tended to consist of wealthier laypersons than General Baptist congregations. The overall point, here, is that even if the English Presbyterians and the English General Baptists trended towards heterodoxy towards the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century, they may have travelled different paths to get there. The one thing they seem to have in common is their opposition to the requirement of subscription to confessions and creeds containing extrabiblical words and phrases.

⁸ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, 3:248.

Presbyterian John Barker both claimed the majority of the Non-subscribers opposed subscription rather than the doctrine of the Trinity. Nonetheless, there was a contingency of Subscribers who believed that, like at Exeter, the issue at stake was the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Subscribers who feared that what was at stake was the doctrine of the Trinity were not entirely wrong. Nathaniel Lardner, Jeremiah Hunt, Benjamin Avery, and Samuel Chandler either directly opposed the doctrine of the Trinity in their own writings or republished the works of men who did. Further research might reveal that they had opposed or had doubts about the consubstantial Trinity in 1719. It is clear, however, that by 1730 Lardner had embraced a heterodox Christology. Jeremiah Hunt, Lardner's mentor, also taught that the Son was ontologically inferior to the Father. Avery republished some of James Peirce's sermons, which also had a heterodox catechism written by Peirce appended to it. Avery deeply revered Peirce even in spite of his heterodoxy with no known critique of Peirce's views, and a seeming affirmation of them by the publication of his catechism. Chandler did not personally publish anything in direct opposition to the classical doctrine of the Trinity, but he did recommend Samuel Bourn's heterodox catechism. Chandler's own views on the Trinity were suspect. Even those Subscribers who believed that the Non-subscribers primarily opposed subscription rather than the doctrine of the Trinity admitted that there were likely a few anti-Trinitarians among the Non-subscribers. Again, it is unclear when each of these men embraced heterodox views, but that they had by 1719 or did within a decade or two adds some legitimacy to the concerns of some of the Subscribers that what was at stake at Salters' Hall was the doctrine of the Trinity.

Yet opposition to subscription should not be interpreted primarily as opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity. A simple survey of the writings of Joshua Oldfield, John Hughes, Benjamin Grosvenor, John Evans, and even John Gale seems to indicate that many of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall wholly affirmed the

consubstantial Trinity, but opposed the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. The English General Baptist Thomas Grantham was thoroughly orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity; he even reprinted the Nicene Creed in his *Christianismus Primitivus*, but he was hesitant to require ministers to affirm extrabiblical language. Though somewhat different, Baxter held similar views to Grantham, as did Calamy, who was firmly rooted in the Baxterian tradition. Therefore, while there might have been a very small contingency of Non-subscribers who questioned the classical doctrine of the Trinity, the majority affirmed the doctrine but opposed subscription. Later trends towards Trinitarian heterodoxy should not necessarily be read into the events of 1719. That is not to say, however, that the Salters' Hall Controversy is unrelated to the theological decline of the English Presbyterians and General Baptists later in the century. Opposition to subscription in a rapidly changing philosophical and theological setting in eighteenth-century England likely did not aid these groups in promoting and defending orthodoxy.

It is certainly possible that other Non-subscribers held heterodox views, particularly prior to or immediately after the controversy. Nonetheless, even if other anti-Trinitarians are discovered through further research, it seems unlikely to change the overall point that the majority of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall held orthodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity and were opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. Consequently, one cannot oversimplify this complex event and period in history so as to imply that non-subscription necessarily entails opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity. In retrospect, one may doubt the wisdom of their non-subscriptionism, but their orthodoxy should not immediately be called into question because of their non-subscription.

APPENDIX 1

WHITEHALL EVENING POST, SATURDAY,
MARCH 14, 1719

We hear that the *Dissenting Ministers* in and about *London*, after several Meetings at *Salters-Hall*, did on the 10th [March, 1719] Instant, come to the Resolution, That *as the Scriptures are the only and perfect Rule of Faith and Practice, so they should be the only Standard of Truth and Orthodoxy*. They have also asserted the Usefulness of Humane Compositions, such as Catechisms, Confessions, and other Summaries of the *Christian Religion*, for Instruction and Edification; but not for Authority, as *Tests* of Truth, or Warrants for Condemnation of our Brethren, which are to be taken only from *Holy Scripture*.

They did at the same time finish some *pacifick Advices*, tending to promote Truth and Peace among all Protestants. They disclaimed the *Arian* Doctrine, and declared for the Doctrine of the *ever blessed Trinity*, as deliver'd in *Holy Scripture*,

We congratulate these Gentlemen upon the Honour of declaring in a Body against known Error, and at the same time, of making so Noble a Stand against the Root and Cause of all Error and Warrels, *viz.* the going off from the Authority and Declaration of Scripture, the true *Form of sound Words* which we are to *hold fast*, and substituting into their Room, and imposing Humane Compositions as the Test of Truth and Orthodoxy. And that according to the true *Protestant* Principle they declare themselves *built upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets*, and not upon the Foundation of *Councils, Synods, and Assemblies of Fallible Men*.

We are very well inform'd, that the Differences in their debating about this *Declaration* which have been so much talk'd of, were only about the *Time and Order*

wherein the Declaration against *Arian* Doctrines should be made, and in what *Words*, Scriptural or Humane, and not about the Doctrines themselves, as some have falsely reported: And that it has been carried for stating Doctrines, *only* to be known by Revelation in the words of Revelation only, when designed to be a Standard and Test.

This is well known to be the Sentiment of the Generality of them, and has been so for many Years, and is ready to be defended by them, as occasion requires.¹

¹ Quoted in Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand* (London, 1719), 4–5.

APPENDIX 2

FLYING POST, SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 1719

We are well assured that what follows ought to be join'd to the Account that was inserted in the *White-Hall Evening Post* of Saturday last, in order to disabuse the World as to what is there imputed to the Dissenting *Ministers* as a *Body*.

On *Tuesday, March 3* a considerable. a considerable Number of Ministers met at *Salter's-Hall*, according to Adjournment, to consider a Paper of Advices (First offer'd by certain Gentlemen) to be sent by the Ministers of Churches, in, and about *London*, as their Advices to the People of *Exeter*, how to carry it with Reference to their Ministers, whom they suspected of unsoundness in the Doctrine of the Trinity.

This Meeting was open'd with loud Complaints of some present, that they were under a Charge or Suspicion without Door, as *Anti-Trinitarians*, because in the last Meeting, they had been against a Declaration of *Faith* in the Trinity, to be inserted among the Advices to be sent to *Exeter*: Urging that to infer that they were against the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity* it self, because they had Voted against inserting a Declaration of it; was such a Reproach upon them, as they were not willing a Moment to lye under.

Twas then offer'd, that if they thought it so great a Reproach to be suspected as they complained, and were sensible of the wrong Step they had taken in opposing the Declaration of their Belief of the *Holy Trinity*, Antecedent to their proceeding to any thing else.

This appeared more necessary, because the Disciples of Dr *Clarke* made their Boasts, that the most considerable of the Dissenting Ministers were in the same Sentiments with them; and that they were gaining ground every Day: High-Church

Sermons and Pamphlets boldly upbraided the Dissenters without Distinction as *Anti-Trinitarians*, in order to Prejudice the People and Government against them: And they were inform'd upon the Spot, by Good Evidence, that one of the Judges in the *Western Circuit*, had taken Notice in his Changes to the Grand Juries, of what was Reported of the Dissenters, as gone off from the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*, as a matter belonging to their Inquiry.

Any Body will hence see, that 'twas of a Thousand Times greater Importance, for the Ministers of *London* to endeavor to satisfy the World of their own Soundness in an *Article of Faith*, the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*, than under pretence of the *Order* of the Day (which they that made might easily; and in this Case with the highest Grace set aside) under Poor a Pretence, to go upon the Consideration of Advices to *Exeter*, which it could not be pretended that the Churches there had desired, and which 'tis certain they would not regard, unless they that joined in the Advices given, joined also in an open and satisfactory Declaration of their Faith in the *Trinity*, for which they were contending.

Much Time was spent in Speeches against a present Declaration, of no Significancy, but to shew that those who made them had no mind to it at all.

To bring the Debate to an Issue, 'twas mov'd, as many as *pleas'd* should Declare their Belief of the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*, in the Words of the *First Article* of the Church of *England*: And the *Fifth* and *Sixth Answers* in the *Assemblies Catechism*, which are as follows:

The *First Article* of the Church of *England*, of Faith in the Holy *Trinity*.

There is but one Living and True God, from Everlasting, without Body, Parts or Passions; of Infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all Things, both Visible and In visible; and in Unity of this Godhead, there be Three Persons of one Substance, Power and Eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The *Fifth* and *Sixth Answers* in the *Assembly's Catechism*.

There is but one only, the Living and True God. There are three Persons in the

Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are One God, the same in Substance, Equal in Power and Glory.

These which we hope without offence may be call'd *Forms of Sound Words*, were propos'd.

1st. To prevent all Objections that might be made against any Private or New Composition.

2. Because the *First Article* of the *Church of England of Faith in the Holy Trinity*, is one of those which all *Ministers* among the *Dissenters*, are oblig'd to Subscribe by the *Act of Toleration*, without which they are not allow'd the *Benefit* of that *Act*: And they who had Subscrib'd it as an *Article of Truth*, and continu'd of the same Mind, could not be thought averse upon a just Occasion to do it again; and what could speak an Occasion more just and Urgent, than the Purposes which such Subscription was the most effectual if not the only method to serve, *viz.* to Stop the Mouths of Enemies; quiet the Minds of Friends; and roll of the Reproach Complain'd of as not to be Suffer'd.

3. The Answers in the *Assemblies Catechism*, relating to the Trinity the Dissenting Ministers are suppos'd to Teach the Children under their Charge, and therefore till the Contrary is signify'd may be also supposed to believe themselves.

For these Reasons, the forms above written and no other were offer'd: and the Body of *London* Ministers to the Number of *Threescore*, Personally and distinctly Subscrib'd both the *Articles* and *Answers*, as expressive of the Scripture Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which therefore they heartily believe, and gladly bore their Publick Testimony to.

These Sixty without pretending to impose upon any, invited their Brethren to join with them in the same Declaration and, Subscription, but could not have the satisfaction of obtaining it, instead of this while the *Former* in the Gallery were Subscribing a Declaration of their *Belief* in the *Trinity*, the *Rest* below Stairs proceeded by themselves to the Consideration of the Paper of Advices, as most agreeable to their

Inclination; and pass'd 'em as they pleas'd. Upon which they that Subscrib'd had nothing left 'em to do, but as the *Body* or Majority of the Ministers of *London* in this Days Meeting, in a Solemn Message from the Gallery, by Two of their Members to *protest* against the Proceeding of the Rest in their Absence, and so, the Moderator being warn'd to leave the Chair, they Adjourned to *March* the *9th*. And left the Place.

They that refus'd to Subscriber the foresaid *Article* and *Answers* concerning the *Trinity* staid behind, to the Number of *Fifty*, of which as far as I can learn, near on Third could not be reckon'd Stated *Ministers* in, or near *London*, that is, in the *Parishes* within the *Bills of Mortality*: And how many above Half the *Fifty* were Pastors in City or Country? Besides *London Ministers*, 'tis certain there were several from far, out of several Counties, and whether they were *Collected* to serve the Purposes of any that might send for 'em? or whether they set out pretty much at a Time from their respective Abodes, and met together at *Salter's-Hall* by chance, they knew not before Hand why or wherefore, as Demonstration is wanting must be left to every one to determine for himself, according as he sees the Greatest Probability. Be this as it will, what is represented with so assuming an Air, in the *White-Hall Evening Post* before mentioned, as *resolved*, and *asserted*, and *finished*, and carryd, &c. is after all to be understood only as what was done by the *Non-Subscribers* by themselves: Begun in the Evening of *March* 3. after the Separation; and finish'd *March* 10. in a Separate Meeting. The Honour of what was so worthily done, in Pursuit of the *Noble Stand*, is entirely their own. The *Subscribing Ministers* were not in their Secret; unto their Separate *Assembly* form'd upon the Foot of going upon *Heads of Advice* as of greater Importance than Signing an *Article of Faith*, their *Honour* was not *United*.¹

¹ Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand: The Second Part* (London, 1719), 7–19. Wilcox noted that these words were added somewhere in the post, presumably at the end: “In this Light, we have several Remarks to make on the *account mention'd*, which for want of Room must be refer'd to the next.”

APPENDIX 3

FLYING POST, THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 1719

Whereas in the *Flying-Post*, of *Saturday March 21*, there was published some Account of the Proceedings of the *Dissenting Ministers at Salters-Hall March 3*. Several who were then present having complain'd of several Misrepresentations of *Fact*, and Insinuations in that Account, Injurious to many concern'd; and that they are ready to make good this charge against it, if maintain'd: This is agreeable to that *Justice* and *Impartiality* which this Paper will always maintain, to signify their complaint to the World; and to assure that the farther Remarks promised to be made, shall not be Published in this Paper.¹

¹ Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand: Second Part* (London, 1719), 20.

APPENDIX 4

WHITEHALL EVENING POST, SATURDAY,
APRIL 18, 1719

Some of those Dissenting Ministers whose Names are Published in a late Pamphlet entitled, an *Authentick Account*, &c. think themselves obliged to assure the World, that the reputed Author of a Pamphlet entitled, *The Noble Stand*, was present at our Meetings but one Day; when the Body met Five Days: And that he is one who has despised the Judgment and Advice of the Brethren of his Denomination, upon a former Occasion: And in what he has now Published, has made very gross misrepresentations of Fact in most Material Circumstances, not only in the other Days, but the Day in which he was present. This, a particular Representation (if it be though needful) will make evident from the *Original Minutes*, which remain with the Body, and not with the Part which broke off from them. And the Reasoning also will be consider'd, if the World should take so much Notice of it, as to deserve an Answer.¹

¹ Daniel Wilcox, *The Noble Stand: Second Part* (London, 1719), 28.

APPENDIX 5

LIST OF MINISTERS WHO WERE SUBSCRIBERS OR NON-SUBSCRIBERS AT SALTERS' HALL

Subscribers

The following ministers are listed as Subscribers by Powicke and Whitley.¹

P William Lorimer	P Jere[miah] Smith	I Peter Goodwin
P Samuel Pomfret	P W[illiam] Tong	I Richard Pain
P B[enjamin] Robinson	P Tho[mas] Reynolds	P Samuel Bourne
I Tho[mas] Bradbury	P John Mottershead	P Harman Hood
P Joseph Hill	PB Tho[mas] Harrison	? James Gillespy
P Daniel Wilcox	P John Newman	I Ph[ilip] Gibbs
P Ja[be]z Earle	I Thomas Loyd	? William Benson
P James Wood	I George Davy	PB John Toms
PB John Skepp	I John Sladen	I Peter Bradbury
? William Curtis	P James Matthews	I Thomas Charlton
P John Barker	P Zachariah Merrill	I Joseph Tate
P John Beaumont	P Francis Freeman	P Emmanuel Ellerker
PB Da[vid] Rees	I Tho[mas] Mi[t]chell b	I? Lachlan Ross
I John Nesbitt	I Robert Bragge	? John Foster
I Matthew Clark	I Thomas Ridgley	I George Burnett
PB John Noble	I John Asty	I John Conder
PB Edw[ard] Wallin	I John Foxon	? William McClatchy
ScP James Anderson	ScP John Cumming	I John Hubbard
I John Killinghall	P James Galloway	? Merriman Norris
I John Lewis	PB Thomas Dewhurst	? James Wildman
P Isa[ac] Bates	ScP Patrick Russel	I John Mitchell
PB Mark Key	P W[illiam] Chapman	I Henry Francis
I Samuel Harris	I Thomas Masters	? Richard Glover
PB Edward Ridgway	GB Abra[ham] Mulliner	PB Joseph Matthews
P William Hocker	P Daniel Mayo	P William Bushnell
? John Ollive	PB John Sharpe	I Stephen Crisp

¹ These lists are drawn directly from Powicke and harmonized with Whitley's assessment of the Baptists at Salters' Hall. Powicke's list includes significantly more detail than what is provided here. See Fred J. Powicke, "The Salters' Hall Controversy," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* 7, no. 2 (1916): 112–22; [W. T. Whitley], "Salters' Hall 1719 and the Baptists," *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 5, no. 3 (1917): 181–89.

Non-Subscribers

The following ministers are listed as Non-subscribers by Powicke and Whitley.

P Joshua Oldfield	P John Sheffield
P William Harris	P Simon Brown
P John Evans	GB John Savage
P Samuel Wright	P Benjamin Grosvenor
P John Ratcliff	P Samuel Rosewell
GB Joseph Jenkins	GB Joseph Burroughs
P George Smyth	GB Lewis Douglas
I Jeremiah Hunt	GB Isaac Kimber
PB Sir Nathaniel Hodges	P Benjamin Andrews
PB Richard Parkes	GB Nathaniel Foxwell
I David Jennings	P William Bush
P Christopher Taylor	P Thomas Cotton
GB John Ingram	P John Hughes
P Thomas Sleigh	I Moses Lowman
P Thomas Leavesley	P Richard Rigby
P Edward Bearne	P Samuel Chandler
P Richard Biscoe	P Gabriel Barber
P William Jacomb	P Samuel Highmore
P John Bradley	P Samuel Clark
P Samuel Oldfield	P or I John Eaton
P Ebenezer Roscoe	P Joseph Baker
P John Billingsley	P Samuel Baker
GB John Gale	P Clerk Oldsworth
GB Thomas Kerby	P James Read
P Henry Read	P Joseph Bennett
P Benjamin Avery	P Daniel Burgess
P Thomas Newman	I John Conder
P William Hocker	P Thomas Petkin
P William Sheffield	P Robert Billio
I Nathaniel Lardner	P Samuel Savage
P John Cornish	P John Cambden
P Obadiah Hughes	I Arthur Shallet
? Thomas Slater	I Robert [query Thomas] Lamb
GB Amos Harrison	P Quintus Naylor
P John Sharman	I Thomas Simmons
GB James Richardson	GB Richard Tuddeman
GB Matthew Randall	

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ABSTRACT

THE SALTERS' HALL CONTROVERSY OF 1719

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The Salters' Hall Controversy (1719) was a key event during a transitional period in English Dissent. The controversy has often been viewed as a demonstration of the theological decline of the General Baptists and Presbyterians. A careful consideration of the Salters' Hall Controversy, however, reveals that the issue at hand for the Non-subscribers was not the doctrine of the Trinity, but the requirement of subscription. Consequently, a minister's siding with the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall should not immediately be interpreted as opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity. Orthodox non-subscriptionism was a live option at Salters' Hall.

Chapter 1 explores the history of research on the controversy, and introduces a taxonomy for considering the controversy. The taxonomy is drawn from John Walrond of Ottery's 1731 assessment of Dissenters as being of three sorts: orthodox, heterodox, and a "middle sort." Chapter 2 looks at the preludes to the Salters' Hall Controversy within Dissent and the Church of England. Chapter 3 attempts to retell the story of Salters' Hall, providing the details of the events, while also providing insight into the earliest interpretations of what the central issue of the controversy was, namely, subscription or the doctrine of the Trinity. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 employ Walrond's taxonomy to explore the theological views of various ministers involved in the controversy. Chapter 3 focuses on the orthodox Subscribers, many of whom viewed the controversy as being about the doctrine of the Trinity. Chapter 5 looks at several of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall

who embraced heterodoxy either prior to or after 1719. Chapter 6 looks at some of the orthodox Non-subscribers who were orthodox on the doctrine of the Trinity, but opposed subscription at Salters' Hall. The concept of "a middle sort" helps explain the large number of theologically orthodox Non-subscribers and is vital to a balanced interpretation of this important event. Chapter 7 aims at more fully interpreting the Salters' Hall Controversy, focusing primarily on why the various groups either favored or opposed subscription there.

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