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CONTEST OF CIVILITY: CONFORMITY, DISSENT, AND
THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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CONTEST OF CIVILITY: CONFORMITY, DISSENT, AND
THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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For Amelia:

Her children rise up and call her blessed;

her husband also and he praises her:

“Many women have done excellently,

but you surpass them all.”

Proverbs 31:28–29

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AC* Hall, David D. *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968
- BT* Williams, Roger. *The Blovdy Tenent, of Persecution, for cause of Conscience*. London, 1644
- BTW* Cotton, John. *The Bloody Tenent, Washed, and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe: being discussed and discharged of bloud-guiltinesse by just Defence*. London: Matthew Symmons, 1647
- BTYMB* Williams, Roger. *The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody: By Mr Cottons Endeavour to Wash it White in the Blood of the Lambe*. London, 1652
- CMP* Cobbet, Thomas. *The Civil Magistrates Povver in Matters of Religion* (London: W. Wilson, 1652)
- COP* Hutchinson, Thomas, ed. *A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts-bay*. Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1769
- CRIHS* Staples, William R., ed. *The Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* (1835)
- CRW* LaFantasie, Glenn W., ed. *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*. 2 vols. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988
- DHRI* Chapin, Howard M. *Documentary History of Rhode Island*. 2 vols. Providence: Preston and Rounds Co., 1919
- GF* Williams, Roger. *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrovves*. Boston: John Foster, 1676
- GH* Hubbard, William. *A General History of New England: From the Discovery to MDCLXXX*. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1848
- HM* Hutchinson, Thomas. *The History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay, from the First Settlement thereof in 1628, Until It's Incorporation with the Colony of Plimouth, Province of Main, &c. by the Charter of King William and Queen Mary in 1691*. Boston: I. Thomas, 1774
- HP* *Hutchinson Papers*, 2 vols. Albany, NY: Prince Society, 1865.
- HU* Winslow, Edward. *Hypocrisie Unmasked*. London: Rich. Cotes, 1646

- IN* Clarke, John. *Ill Newes from New-England: or A Narrative of New-Englands Persecution*. London: Henry Hills, 1652
- LNE* Emerson, Everett H., ed. *Letters from New England: The Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629–1638*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976
- LW* Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. 79 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Helmut T. Lehmann, Christopher Boyd Brown, and Benjamin T.G. Mayes. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–
- NR* Norton, John. *The Heart of N-England rent at the Blasphemies of the Present Generation*. Cambridge, MA: n.p., 1659
- RGC* Shurtleff, Nathaniel B., ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*. 5 vols. Boston: William White, 1853
- RRI* Bartlett, John Russell, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*. 8 vols. Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, State Printers, 1856–65
- SD* Gorton, Samuel. *Simplicities Defence against Seven-Headed Policy*. London: John Mackock, 1646
- WJ* Winthrop, John. *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England, 1630–1649*. 2 vols. Edited by James K. Hosmer. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980
- WP* *Winthrop Family Papers*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1976

PREFACE

The apostle Paul commanded, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:18).¹ It is good and right to give thanks at the completion of this long and arduous process that has spanned seven years. I must admit that this entire project was a product of God’s grace to me—grace in the people he placed in my life who shaped me as a historian, guided me through the details of this topic, and encouraged me to persevere to the last page. I cannot express my gratitude enough for these men and women, without whom this dissertation would not exist.

I am thankful for my peers whose advice, and above all, friendship, have helped refine many of the points in this dissertation. I want to thank Ryan Modisette who has often helped me think through my argument. I am undeserving of the frequent kindness he extended to me: listening to me rant, encouraging me to press on, and reminding me of God’s faithfulness. Along with him, I cannot fail to mention my coworkers in the president’s office who have cheered me on, month after month, and now celebrate with me in the job completed. To Caleb, Graham, Anna, Dayna, and Hailey, you have been enormously helpful in the last months of this project with your consolation and joy. I am truly thankful to work alongside you.

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¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible translations come from the ESV.

Weimer, has been especially gracious with her time; she provided early feedback on my prospectus which proved vital for the entire scope of my argument. Dr. Weimer, I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to serve as my external reader. I must also give thanks to Drs. Shawn Wright and Dustin Bruce. Your time, dedication, and willingness to read this project is truly an honor. Dr. Wright, moreover, has played an influential role on my thinking since the earliest days of my MDiv.

Of all the scholars and professors in my life, the most important has been Dr. John Wilsey, my *doktorvater*. It was Dr. Wilsey who introduced me to Roger Williams. He convinced me of the worthiness to pursue my interest in Williams and religious liberty. He provided constant support, incalculable hours of advice, and never relented in his encouragement to me over the last three years. He has been utterly devoted to my success and career. If that was not enough, Dr. Wilsey has carefully read every page of this dissertation, providing me not only with invaluable feedback, but showing me how to think historically. Lord willing, at the end of my career, I know I will look back and see the incontrovertible evidence of John Wilsey's influence on me as a scholar and historian.

I must also thank Dr. and Mrs. Mohler. To Mrs. Mohler, you bestowed upon my wife valuable counsel and encouragement. She frequently told me of how formative you were for her and her thinking during this season. Being married to a PhD student comes with a particular set of challenges, to say the least. Your example, however, benefited my wife in many ways and I know that your influence is felt throughout the entire PhD community. Thank you for your ministry and godliness. Dr. Mohler has been an incredible influence in my life. Your conviction and dedication to God's glory has been one of the greatest lessons I have learned from you. You have shown me what it means to joyfully labor for the cause of Christ and his church. I cannot thank you enough for allowing me to work for you these past four years.

To my mother-in-law, Terri Donner, I cannot express enough my gratitude to you. You provided incalculable assistance to my wife, especially as our family grew

throughout the PhD. You freed us up, gave us breaks, and bore much of this burden alongside Amelia. You have encouraged me during this process, and I can honestly say that without your help and support, this project would not have happened.

To my parents, Marc and Heather, thank you for your love and support for over three decades. You raised me, taught me the importance of hard work and diligence. Your passion for teaching and education has certainly passed on to me and I would not be here if not for your care and love over these many years.

To my children—Mabry, Liesl, and Carson—you helped this project in surprising ways. You kept me humble. You reminded me of what is truly joyful in my life. You filled my days with laughter and happiness that I cannot express. Embracing you and celebrating with you is perhaps one of the sweetest joys as this time comes to an end.

Finally, to my wife Amelia: you are my best friend. You have been there for me every day. You have showered me with encouragement, took on enormous burdens while I worked countless hours. You have sacrificed much and did so with gladness. Every step of the way, you have been there for me. I could not have done this without you—I would not have *wanted* to do this without you. You are my greatest treasure and picture of God’s grace to me. Thank you for all that you did. Thank you for shouldering this burden with me and pressing me to get this dissertation across the finish line; for holding my hand, hearing me vent, and freeing me up to research, write, and bring this degree to a conclusion. Solomon wrote, “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Amelia, you truly surpass them all. This project is dedicated to you.

Cory D. Higdon

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

William Robinson, Marmaduke Stevenson, and Mary Dyer were warned. As soon as they disembarked from their vessel in the Boston harbor, Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer collided with civil authorities. Immediately upon their arrival in 1656, the local magistrates and the General Court banished the trio from the colony's jurisdiction. The bitter welcome, for some reason, did little to deter these three individuals, who quickly provoked the ire of Massachusetts's leaders. They returned to the colony, only to have their ears removed, followed by their second exile—this time under pain of death. They had, indeed, received a thorough warning, and the colony sent a clear signal that these troublemakers, along with all people of their ilk, had no place in what John Cotton called, "*Gods Plantation.*"¹

What was their offence? Nothing less than their religion—they were Quakers, and as such, the colony's civil and religious leaders viewed them with the utmost suspicion, acting swiftly to eject them from Massachusetts' borders. In fact, the General Court, outraged that the Quakers even made their way into Boston harbor, altered the colony's laws in 1658 because of this, "*sect of hereticks . . . which are commonly called Quakers.*" The colonial authorities believed that Quakers presented an insurmountable threat to the established civil and religious order. The 1658 act lambasted Quakers as despisers of government and the "order of God in Church & commonwealth," and sought to curtail any attempt of these pernicious blasphemers to proselytize the people of

¹ John Cotton, *God's Promise to His Plantation* (London: William Jones, 1630), 14. Emphasis is original. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are original.

Massachusetts away from godliness and orthodoxy. As such, the act prohibited access to the harbor of any ship carrying Quakers—if a Quaker made it through the port authorities, they were immediately banished or to be put back on the ship. The act, furthermore, laid out stiff penalties for anyone who harbored Quakers or who helped spread Quaker theology. The colony went further, codifying that “every person that shall publish and maintaine, any Heterodox or erroneous Doctrine, shall be liable to be questioned and Censured by the County Court.”² Not only did the colony put Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer on notice, but all Quakers and any doctrinal defector. It served as an admonishment to any and all religious dissenters: Stay away from Massachusetts.

Despite the cautionary advice and clear repercussions, Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer returned to Massachusetts, and were predictably arrested. The General Court convened and sentenced the three Quakers to death by hanging—though, thanks to the pleading of Dyer’s son, the Court granted clemency to Mary, provided she leave the colony at once. In October 1659, Robinson and Stevenson met the hangman’s noose, condemned as heretics, seditious criminals, and deemed “*felon de se*,” or, as having taken their own lives.³ The General Court tethered the antics of Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer with “their predecessours in *Munster*.” This evoked the 125-year-old memory of the Münster rebellion, which, in the eyes of the Massachusetts leaders, provided ample justification for the banishment and execution of Quakers. The three cages that held the deceased, tortured bodies of the Münster rebellion ringleaders still hang from the cathedral steeple, even after 125 years. It was a warning in Europe to all religious dissenters and fanatics, and the Bay Colony resurrected that scandalous episode as part of

² “An Act Made at a General Court, Held at Boston, the 20th of October, 1658,” in *The Sacred Rights of Conscience: Selected Readings on Religious Liberty and Church-State Relations in the American Founding*, ed. Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall (Carmel, IN: Liberty Fund, 2009), 110–111

³ *A Declaration of the General Court of the Massachusetts Holden at Boston in New-England, October 18. 1659. Concerning The execution of two Quakers* (London, 1659).

their indictment against Quakerism and all religious mavericks.⁴ Indeed, since the colony's founding, its religious and civil leaders equated doctrinal deviation with sedition—they believed that true civility necessitated conformity to a socially prescribed orthodoxy.

Civility in the seventeenth century, as Keith Thomas argued, meant much more than what the contemporary mind might imagine. Civility certainly encompassed manners and mores that the public generally held as part of its culture. Even more, civility during this period meant, according to Thomas, “the existence of a well-ordered political community and the appropriate qualities and conduct expected of citizens.”⁵ Civility was, furthermore, “the dutiful acceptance of established authority,” a commitment to obedience as a primary channel to display, “neighborliness and Christian charity.”⁶ To make an argument about what marked a civil society included a discussion about the virtues and conduct expected of all citizens in order for the community to flourish. For Massachusetts, one individual equated its spirituality and the vitality of its churches with “the Civility of your Commonweale, and the Civility of your Commonwealth, is the spirituality of your churches.”⁷ John Cotton, moreover, argued that without civil laws protecting the establishment of religion and preventing the spread of heresy, that community would certainly crumble from internal fissures and, ultimately, from the outpouring of God's wrath.⁸ Without conformity, there was no unity—without

⁴ *A Declaration of the General Court.*

⁵ Keith Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 5

⁶ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, 12.

⁷ This quote comes from a letter written by Samuel Gorton in the midst of the Gorton controversy. Gorton penned the letter to the authorities in Massachusetts as part of his defense for the various charges he and his followers faced throughout the 1640s. The copy of the letter can be found in Edw. Winslow's *The Danger of Toleration Levellers in a Civill State* (London, 1649), 10.

⁸ *BTW*, 94, 150–151.

unity, the colonial endeavor, which the colonists perceived as a covenant with God, was bound to dissolve.⁹

Four years after the Quaker executions, John Clarke, after a laborious tenure in England, secured the 1663 Rhode Island Charter.¹⁰ Unlike Massachusetts and its execution of religious dissenters, the 1663 Charter embarked on “a livelie experiment.”¹¹ This was no mere governing document—it was intended to establish an idea: “That a most flourishing civill state may stand and best bee maintained . . . with a full libertie in religious concernements.”¹² Where Massachusetts was prepared to extinguish religious discordance with the civil sword and enforce a socially prescribed orthodoxy, Rhode Island departed from the prevailing political theology of the day, asserting instead that “no person within the sayd colonye, at any tyme hereafter, shall bee any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or call in question, for any differences in opinione in matters of religion,” and that all people may, “freely and fully have and enjoye his and their owne

⁹ Historians have well noted the centrality of the covenant to puritan political theology. See David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); James P. Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002); John D. Wilsey, *One Nation Under God? An Evangelical Critique of Christian America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); Daniel T. Rodgers *As a City on a Hill: The Story of America's Most Famous Lay Sermon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Richard M. Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (New York: Continuum International, 2012); Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially p. 39; and Glenn A. Moots, *Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010).

¹⁰ For more on the life, legacy, and role of John Clarke in colonial Rhode Island, see Sydney V. James, *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island 1638–1750*, ed. Theodore Dwight Bozeman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). For an analysis of the intersection between Clarke's religious beliefs and matters of church and state, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty,” *Church History* 75, no. 1 (March 2006): 69–93.

¹¹ *RRI*, 2:4.

¹² *RRI*, 2:4–5.

judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments.”¹³ The codification of this “livelie experiment” long marked the intent and design of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations since its inception. Indeed, the colony’s founder, Roger Williams—who had himself been banished from Massachusetts Bay for his religious beliefs—desired that Providence served as “shelter for persons distressed of conscience.”¹⁴ The colony and its leaders affirmed again and again that “all men may walk as their consciences perswade them, every one in the name of his God.”¹⁵

The experiment was not necessarily novel,¹⁶ nor did it prove immune to the travails that came with a pluralistic society.¹⁷ In fact, both the colony’s legal documents, its leaders, and Roger Williams himself recounted the various controversies and trials that they associated with religious pluralism. Williams noted “Civill Contests” that erupted between Baptists and Quakers; William Arnold, one of the leading founders of the colony, deplored the civil calamities besieging Rhode Island, stating that liberty of conscience served as a “pretence,” which invited “all the scume,” and placed a “heavy burthen upon the land.”¹⁸ The officials of the Town of Providence, moreover, penned a

¹³ *RRI*, 2:5.

¹⁴ *RRI*, 1:22.

¹⁵ *RRI*, 1:190.

¹⁶ Evan Haefeli cautions against ascribing too much originality to Rhode Island or positioning the colony as an American story. See Evan Haefeli, “How Special Was Rhode Island? The Global Context of the 1663 Charter,” in *The Lively Experiment: Religious Toleration in America from Roger Williams to the Present*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 21–36. For earlier colonial and transatlantic manifestations of religious toleration, see Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Haefeli is certainly right to situate Rhode Island’s Charter within the broader context of the seventeenth-century world. The importance of focusing on Rhode Island and its political formulation lay in its proximity, both geographically and theologically, to the puritans in Massachusetts and the broader movement of English Protestantism.

¹⁷ For a helpful introduction to the turbulence wrought by pluralism in Rhode Island, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 45, no. 1 (March 1972): 44–64. Though inciteful, Bozeman’s narrative creates a false dichotomy, namely, that jurisdictions enforcing a religious establishment enjoyed civil stability, whereas Rhode Island’s pluralism necessarily engendered instability. Both Massachusetts and Rhode Island endured significant trials, notwithstanding their different approaches to the question of pluralism.

¹⁸ *CRW*, 2:685; *RRI*, 2:234.

joint letter answering a rebuke from the colony's long-time supporter, Sir Henry Vane. The letter stated that liberty of conscience, though a "sweete cup," apparently made some of its citizenry drunk with inhumanity, vain ambition, and partisan cruelty.¹⁹ Liberty, as it turned out, was an arduous business.

Despite the internal strife experienced in this experiment of religious freedom, Rhode Island attempted to entrench a political society fundamentally at odds with the axioms of seventeenth century Protestantism. By disestablishing the church from the state and ensconcing religious freedom as the colony's cornerstone, it charted a distinct form of civility—that true societal flourishing blossomed when the human conscience, unfettered from the constraints of coerced orthodoxy, voluntarily assented to religious claims. Such a society created, according to figures like Williams, the environment for persuasion, meaningful cooperation, and, over the course of time, protected communities from the fissures and violence of religious persecution.

Thus, by the early 1660s, two bordering jurisdictions in colonial America enacted fundamentally divergent political communities. The story of how these two divergent ideas came to exist in such near proximity to one another is a complex yet vital narrative—one that highlights not only the ideological rise of ideas like religious freedom, but one that explicates the *struggle*. Though Massachusetts and Rhode Island based its *civitas* from a common point of departure, namely, the Christian Scriptures and the natural law, they progressed in completely different directions. Massachusetts perpetuated civility of conformity, a political formulation that fastened society around a mandated theological and ecclesial construct, which the civil state and its magistrates enforced, nourished, and defended. Civility of conformity posited that societal stability necessitated an established orthodoxy around which citizens committed themselves. This was, moreover, not intended as a blind conformity, but a convictional obligation that

¹⁹ *RRI*, 2:287.

emanated from a deeply engrained theological and covenantal matrix.

Conversely, Rhode Island's "liveile experiment" took one of the first steps in a new political tradition called evangelical civility. Unlike civility of conformity, evangelical civility rooted social concord in conscientious freedom. It posited that the surest pathway for political stability required the liberation of the soul from the coercive powers of the state. It also created a free public square where all citizens expressed their deepest convictions without fear of retribution. Liberty had its limits; Roger Williams made that abundantly clear throughout his career, arguing that freedom of conscience did not validate unrestricted behavior, actions, or even words. When a claim to liberty violated the natural law, the state had a compelling interest to delimit the expression of that freedom.²⁰

Though the differences between these two traditions seemed clear, the historical context and arguments made during the early modern period muddled the waters. Proponents of civility of conformity, for example, refuted any accusation that they persecuted individuals for sake of conscience. Indeed, the magisterial stream of political theology that proceeded from men like John Calvin and flexuously flowed into figures like William Perkins, William Ames, and John Cotton, contended for the freedom of the Christian and affirmed that men's laws could not bind the conscience. Some historians or political theorists blithely labeled these seemingly dueling convictions as incoherence, inconsistency, hypocrisy, or theologians merely bound by their time and place in history.²¹ Such assertions failed to give due credence to the complicated yet

²⁰ See, for example, *CRW*, 2:423–424.

²¹ Examples of works that seek to recover a political theology from Reformed and Calvinistic sources that, at times, adopt erroneous historiographical methods are John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*; David VanDrunen, *Natural Law Theory and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Tuininga, "'Because of your hardness of heart': Calvin and the limits of law," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69, no. 3 (2016): 281–294; Tuininga, "The Latent Pluralism of Calvin's Political Theology," *Political Theology* 19, no. 4 (2018): 300–313; see also Bradford W. Littlejohn, *The*

interrelated intricacies that framed the magisterial, or, civility of conformity tradition.

Despite the historical complexities, civility of conformity and evangelical civility did indeed represent two incompatible consortiums. Moreover, they emerged in colonial America as the delegates of two contrasting traditions, which became evident in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. The magisterial and dissenting traditions provided the theological and moral foundations for political life in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, respectively. The idea of religious freedom certainly enjoyed its advocacy among Christians from as early as the third century church father, Tertullian, who wrote, “It is the law of mankind and the natural right of each individual to worship what he thinks proper, nor does the religion of one man either harm or help another. . . . religion . . . should be accepted of one’s own accord, not by force.”²² It was, however, the theological, social, political, and cultural upheavals of the Protestant Reformation that catalyzed a revision of Christian political theology.²³ Soteriological assertions like justification by faith alone, the proclamation of “Christian liberty,” and the proliferation of doctrinal and denominational pluralism forced the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to reexamine the Christendom thesis.²⁴ The contours of the delicate relationship between church and state gripped the minds of magisterial and dissenting

Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

²² Tertullian, “To Scapula,” in *Tertullian Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius*, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 152. For a brief survey of the Christian theological and intellectual origins of religious freedom, see Robert Louis Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

²³ For a fuller treatment of the impact of the Protestant Reformation on Western civilization, see Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed* (New York: Penguin, 2014); Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1960); Carlos M.N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003).

²⁴ For a similar argument, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 172, 341. See also Harro Höpfl, introduction to *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. and trans. by Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vii.

Protestants alike, which left an indelible mark on Protestant political theology and, perhaps more importantly, provided the societal framework for American colonies like Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Rhode Island.²⁵ Thus, the “Citty upon a Hill” envisioned by the Bay Colony puritans, and the “meerly civil” society of Rhode Island’s “livelie” venture, did not appear in a vacuum, nor did these traditions manifest independently. Indeed, civility of conformity and evangelical civility collided with one another in a contest of civility; these traditions, moreover, exhibited their own internal crises and fissures that tested the political viability of conformity and liberty.

The contest of civility, however, never dissipated. On the contrary, the questions that each tradition attempted to answer precipitated throughout American colonialism and potently resurfaced during the earliest decades of the American Republic. The main questions gravitating at the center of this contest came down to this: What, if any, relationship existed between religion and society? What responsibility did the church have towards the state and vice versa? What was in the best interest of the *bonum commune*? How much pluralism could a society sustain before it ruptured? These queries, moreover, linger—they remain unresolved fixtures as this perennial contest continues to saturate much of Western civilization and especially the American public square. Much has certainly changed between now and the seventeenth century—no one in modern America seriously desires the silencing of political and religious dissenters by means of public execution. The applications have changed over time, but the contested nature of these ideas has not. Civility of conformity and evangelical civility continue to be contested, animated by burgeoning intensity, and inseparably coupled to a vibrant history. Present-day disputes over religious liberty, the role of religion in the public

²⁵ The scope of this study focuses primarily on New England, though the relationship between church and state was certainly a question that faced many of the British colonies and continued into the early republic. For a state-by-state analysis on disestablishment and religious freedom, see Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. DenHartog, eds., *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776–1833* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019).

square, and the tension between religious rights and the right to a society free from discrimination all emerged from a centuries-old chronicle—an enduring struggle over the limits of religious freedom and the civility required for human flourishing. These questions besieged early modern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Unsettled then, they remain unsettled today.

To tell this story, chapter two will take up the establishment of civility of conformity in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, specifically assessing events that took place from 1630 to 1646. This chapter will examine the theological and political foundations of the colony that supported the idea of conformity and established orthodoxy. The political theology of the colony, however, endured significant challenges in its early years, including Roger Williams and the especially contentious Antinomian controversy. It also suffered a potential disaster with Old England in the case of Samuel Gorton. These events tested and subsequently entrenched civility of conformity in the Bay Colony while inadvertently nourishing the rise of evangelical civility in its southern neighbor, Rhode Island.

Chapter three discusses the establishment of evangelical civility in the Providence Plantations from 1636 to 1643. The documents and letters of the period showcase, as in the previous chapter, the theological and political foundations for evangelical civility and the place of soul freedom in a well-ordered society. Much like the Massachusetts Bay Colony, however, the Providence Plantations faced a host of controversies that tested the validity of liberty of conscience. These events revealed the difficulties of liberty and the social challenges the colony faced as a result of evangelical civility.

Chapter four, “Contest of Civility, Part One,” delves into the first part of the debate between Roger Williams and John Cotton, which spanned 1644–1647. The method deployed in this chapter will examine the conflict chronologically, showing how these ideas emerged within their specific context in Reformation and revolutionary

England. In addition to the theological, moral, and natural law arguments that surfaced in this debate, this chapter will also give due attention to the ideological streams that influenced Williams and Cotton, who explicitly stated in their works their indebtedness to a tradition of religious and theological thought.

Chapter five, “Contest of Civility, Part Two,” spans the transatlantic controversies Massachusetts faced as a consequence of the tumultuous 1640s. This chapter, considering the years 1646–1652, chronicles the perennial arguments dissenters levied against civility of conformity in the Bay Colony, as well as the seemingly frantic venture the colony took to defend its political theology. The aftermath of the Gorton Controversy and an exposé by the Baptist and Rhode Island agent John Clarke, revealed the continued collisions between the competing notions of civility.

Chapter six returns to Massachusetts, and considers the years 1656–1661, which marked the colony’s fiercest and concentrated encounter with the Quakers. The colony’s actions during this time went beyond persecuting Quakers. Indeed, Massachusetts doubled down on its commitment to civility of conformity, enacting stricter laws on *all* forms of doctrinal deviance.

Chapter seven ends the narrative in Rhode Island, covering the struggles of evangelical civility from 1644 to 1672. As Massachusetts and its efforts for conformity faced a series of entanglements, the promise and hope of liberty came with its own set of challenges in colonial Rhode Island. If freedom of conscience promised peace and greater stability, it also exacted societal tolls as a pluralistic people who disagreed over fundamental questions endeavored to build a colony together. Evangelical civility began to change over time in colonial Rhode Island, as the colonists, led especially by Roger Williams, introduced the concept of order as means to limit expressions of conscience and individual liberty for the sake of communal steadiness.

The final chapter will provide concluding analysis of the thesis, present issues for further study, and contend that the contest of civility in the early modern period did

not dissipate. As John Turner stated in his history of Plymouth Colony, the English settlers of New England “came to speak shared languages of liberty but conflicts about the nature and extent of those liberties remained unresolved. They still are. Present-day Americans cherish liberty but disagree vehemently about its meaning.”²⁶ The history of evangelical civility and civility of conformity are part of that story—that perennial contest for a stable and flourishing society.

²⁶ John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 6.

CHAPTER 2

“GODS PLANTATION”: ESTABLISHING CIVILITY OF CONFORMITY IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1629–1644

In the summer of 1630, eleven ships carrying nearly 1,000 souls arrived at the Massachusetts Bay Colony.¹ These were not the first settlers to Massachusetts’s shores; in 1626, colonists previously funded by the Dorchester Company settled at Naumkeag, which was renamed Salem.² The fleet of 1630, however, marked a new phase in the colonization of New England, distinguishable by political and theological commitments. Politically, the colonists brought with them their colonial charter signed by King Charles I in March 1629.³ Typically, as Ronald Karr distilled, a colony’s charter remained in England, where the leading agents and shareholders of the colony exercised oversight and governance. The Massachusetts Bay Company contravened this custom, instead centralizing the colony’s authority in Massachusetts, not England. They also empowered the settlers, not the shareholders or investors, to elect their officers, thereby having a direct hand in the formation of the colony’s laws and leadership. This made Massachusetts a self-governing colony.⁴ Theologically, the colonists who ventured across the Atlantic in 1630 predominantly came, according to Michael Winship, for a distinctly

¹ *GH*, 132; Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 132.

² Ronald Dale Karr, “The Missing Clause: Myth and the Massachusetts Bay Charter of 1629,” *The New England Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (March 2004), 90. For a history of Salem including its founding, see Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem Massachusetts* (Salem: Sidney Perley, 1924).

³ *RGC*, 1:10–12.

⁴ *RGC*, 1:79, 87; *GH*, 147–148; Karr, “The Missing Clause,” 91; Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 77–78; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 186–195.

religious purpose.⁵ Indeed, the migrants were Puritans who sought the formation of a godly society animated by the law of God. They also came to establish a pure church, unstained by what they deemed as the ecclesial and theological disorders of the Church of England.⁶

Puritanism was a dynamic movement, not monolithic by any measure, and roughly spanned from the middle of the sixteenth century to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries.⁷ As a term, Puritanism encompassed men and women from a range of subgroups—political, social, ecclesiastical, theological, etc.—who sought to purify the various religious and political institutions in England and Scotland.⁸ Important divisions

⁵ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 77.

⁶ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 71; Michael P. Winship, *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson: Puritans Divided* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 3; Francis J. Bremer, *First Founders: American Puritanism in an Atlantic World* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), 1–4; Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 175; Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 55; Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4.

⁷ See David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Winship, *Hot Protestants*; Patrick Collison, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Patrick Collison, *Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Arthur G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford, 1989); Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds., *The Culture of English Puritanism: 1560–1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Everett H. Emerson, *English Puritanism from John Hooper to John Milton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968); Randall C. Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality* (New York: P. Lang, 1995); Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Michael Haykin, “Word and Space, Time and Act: The Shaping of English Puritan Piety,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2010), 38–46.; Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990); Paul R. Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Carl Trueman, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2010); Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

⁸ See F. Ernst Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1965), 28–29. Stoeffler separated Puritanism into four different subgroups with varying aspirations in political or ecclesial reformation. Yet, he argued that the most definable and capacious group were the “Pietistic Puritans,” which denoted those men and women who pursued “preciseness or piety . . . a group of men whose chief interest was personal piety.”

existed between Puritans, usually over ecclesiology. Yet, notwithstanding these divergences, historians generally agreed that what marked Puritanism was its emphasis on piety.⁹ The Puritans pursued a singular devotion to God and summoned churches and the whole of society to live holy lives in accordance with God's law. Renowned Puritan scholar Geoffrey Nuttall argued that Puritanism's emphasis on faith coupled with practice, set them apart as a religious group; Puritanism was a "*theologia pectoris*," or, a religion of the heart.¹⁰ Their theology, according to William Haller, formed a pattern for the entire society to zealously pursue godliness.¹¹ Additionally, Paul Lim outlined four distinctive qualities of Puritanism: they fostered an ethos of individual godliness, communal conversion, avoidance of the profane, and sought an alignment between the churches and the civil order. Laced together, Puritans desired a complete and comprehensive reform of every contour of society.¹²

The Puritans, which included those 1630 migrants to Massachusetts, often met stiff resistance to their calls for reform and, at times, severe persecution.¹³ Winship and Bremer chronicled an increased anti-Puritanism that mushroomed to hostile levels by 1622 when James I banned the proclamation of doctrines associated with Puritanism, especially predestination. Charles I's ascension to the throne in 1625 made matters worse. His theological and political commitments, coupled with his marriage to a Catholic,

⁹ See Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, "The Puritan Ethos, 1560–1700," in Durston and Eales, *The Culture of English Puritanism*, 9, 31. The authors made the case that men like William Perkins, Thomas Helwys, Richard Baxter, and John Bunyan could all be labeled "Puritan" despite their incongruous theologies over church polity, predestination, etc. As Durston and Eales demonstrated, what united the movement was zeal for holiness and how that piety intersected with the broader culture and society.

¹⁰ Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 7.

¹¹ Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 56.

¹² Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty* (London: Brill, 2004).

¹³ See John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000).

caused a heightened angst amongst Puritanism's leaders.¹⁴ Charles also leaned upon the religious direction of William Laud, who became Bishop of London in 1628 followed by a promotion to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. Laud vehemently loathed Puritanism because of its acceptance of predestination and because Puritans hindered the efforts at religious uniformity.¹⁵ As Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury, Laud launched a campaign to rid England of Puritanism.¹⁶ Adrian Weimer, furthermore, noted the Puritan perception of Laud and Charles I: these two men were effectively "undoing the Reformation," and viewed Laud as the antichrist.¹⁷ Other issues, as Theodore Bozeman and Daniel Rodgers rightly highlighted, fed the desire for these "hotter sorte of Protestants" to look elsewhere for refuge, including overpopulation, economic difficulties, and eschatological concerns about an impending divine judgment against England for its failure to enact religious reform.¹⁸ Puritan religious and political convictions, therefore, collided with monarchs and prelates, and the burgeoning contest led many to the conclusion that it was time to leave England.¹⁹

Thus, Massachusetts Bay colonists arrived in New England with a peculiar theological identity and determination coupled with a unique political opportunity. This reality afforded the colonists the chance to systematically inaugurate the kingdom of

¹⁴ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 75.

¹⁵ Bremer, *First Founders*, 23.

¹⁶ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 81.

¹⁷ Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 60.

¹⁸ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 82; Daniel T. Rodgers, *As A City on a Hill: The Story of America's Most Famous Lay Sermon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 28. John Winthrop, Massachusetts's dominant political leader in its first two decades, included these reasons listed by Bozeman in his "Reasons to be considered, and objections with answers," found in *WP*, 2:138–139. The term "hotter sorte of Protestants," was used to describe English Puritans, and was coined by Perceval Wilburn, *A Checke or reproof of M. Howlet's untimely screeching* (London: 1581).

¹⁹ See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 11–12.

God, as they saw fit, in Massachusetts.²⁰ The political independence the colonists pursued, along with their religious mission, shaped their concept of civility of conformity. Understanding how the Puritan colonists conceived of themselves, their project, and their endurance of significant controversies in the colony's first two decades, explained how civility of conformity took the shape that it did, namely, as a political and theological philosophy that prized uniformity around a socially prescribed orthodoxy. The colony's leaders believed uniformity protected the covenantal chords that knit the colonists together and, subsequently, created the type of society that honored God and his law. As the colonists planted themselves in New England, their response to religious dissent highlighted their commitment to conformity, viewing doctrinal discord as commensurate with civil and ecclesial instability. According to the Bay Colony's religious and civil leaders, a truly godly society, nor any community that hoped to flourish, could sustain religious pluralism. Conformity to their established order, if even only outward, ensured the colony's peace, preserved its churches from theological maleficence, and created conditions conducive for faith and piety.

Their uniformity, however, contained some measure of elasticity and a limited tolerance towards theological diversity.²¹ For example, the General Court, along with the colony's ministers, made numerous attempts to convince doctrinal defectors of their errors, and draw them back in a spirit of reconciliation before enacting civil punishments. The colony's agents also indicated that dissenters peacefully lived amongst the communities in Massachusetts, as long as their divergences remained private. Yet, this

²⁰ Bremer, *First Founders*, 5; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 71; John D. Wilsey, *One Nation Under God? An Evangelical Critique of Christian America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 5; Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 31.

²¹ Weimer helpfully noted what she called the "lived politics of toleration" in colonial Massachusetts, which placed the colonists' attitudes towards dissent on a spectrum rather than a binary choice between tolerance and intolerance. See Adrian Chastain Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 2017): 43–76.

elasticity blurred the lines between permissible and impermissible dissent, and the profound disagreement over whether the church or the magistrate had jurisdiction over theological issues only sowed more confusion and frustration. Certainly, as David Hall and John Witte argued, the colonists quickly agreed on a remarkable distinction between church and state within their first year in New England.²² Yet, ambiguity over how that separation worked practically befuddled the laity, ministers, and civil authorities as they faced the challenges of the wilderness and threats to their religious society. These internal conflicts—whether the controversy with Roger Williams or the Antinomians—revealed an underlying instability within Massachusetts’s civility that unintentionally cultivated the religious pluralism it sought to mitigate.²³

The emergence of civility of conformity in British colonial America, therefore, was a complex narrative, situated within the context of a seemingly unstoppable tide of religious pluralism. Despite this, the Massachusetts Puritans remained undeterred, and attempted to plant civility of conformity; after all, they left England out of a sincere sense of duty and divine obligation, truly believing that God was soon to pour out his judgment on all peoples and nations found unfaithful.²⁴ Their actions, moreover, inadvertently engendered the contest of civility that arose in the 1640s, 50s, and early 60s. Understanding their civility, and the consequences that flowed from their ideas, must begin in 1629, tracing the early development of the colony’s theological and political identity. This will provide necessary contextual overlay for the subsequent controversies that besieged the colony in the following decades.

²² Hall, *The Puritans*, 227–228; John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 294.

²³ See Evan Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism: America and the Religious Politics of English Expansion, 1497–1662* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 6–8.

²⁴ Thomas S. Kidd, *American Colonial History: Clashing cultures and Faiths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 87; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 14.

Founding “Gods Plantation”: 1629–1631

Between 1628 to 1629, the English Parliament clashed with its monarch, King Charles I. Bremer described how Parliament, whose membership included a Puritan majority, attempted to work with the fairly new king, trying to find solutions to issues of taxation and, by Parliament’s estimation, arbitrary, unchecked powers utilized by Charles I. Not only had negotiations failed between Parliament and the king, but Charles I advanced an ecclesial agenda fundamentally at odds with the aims of Puritanism. The appointment of William Laud to the see of London in 1628 exacerbated the growing fissures.²⁵ Laud stressed, as Alan Cromartie articulated, three concepts about the Church of England and what he hoped to achieve as the Bishop of London and eventually as Archbishop of Canterbury. First, a healthy state church tolerated no division. Second, the rites, rituals, and ceremonies of the Church of England, which Puritans likened to Roman Catholic spirituality, nourished true piety. The outward acts were not, in themselves, the essence of true religion, but nevertheless provided the channel through which religion could be practiced. Finally, Laud placed the catechism of children as one of the highest priorities for the church.²⁶ While his Puritan detractors would have agreed with his first and third commitments, the issue came down to what kind of religious instruction children received and around which the society was unified. Laud, furthermore, argued against Parliamentary efforts to reduce the king’s authority; for Laud, the monarch enjoyed the privileges of royal prerogative, meaning Charles I could impose taxes with or without Parliamentary consent.²⁷ In short, Laud opposed Puritan theology and the Puritan Parliament’s political endeavors to secure its rights against the potential tyranny of the monarch. The divisions between Charles I and Parliament grew to such an extent that by

²⁵ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 150.

²⁶ Alan Cromartie, “The Mind of William Laud,” in *England’s Wars of Religion, Revisited*, ed. Glenn Burgess and Charles W. A. Prior (London: Routledge, 2011), 98.

²⁷ Mark Parry, “William Laud and the Parliamentary Politics of 1628–29,” *Parliamentary History* 36, no. 2 (June 2017): 149.

March 1629, the king disbanded Parliament, which would not meet again until war broke out with Scotland in 1640.

As Parliament dissolved, and Laud began an intensified effort to rid England of Puritanism, a group of well-connected lawyers, merchants, and members of the aristocracy succeeded in their efforts to receive a colonial charter from Charles I.²⁸ The title of the charter was, “Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England,” and was secured by representatives of the New England Company, now renamed the Massachusetts Bay Company.²⁹ The Company, disgruntled by the political and religious circumstances befalling England, talked about the formation of a Puritan colony in New England.³⁰ From March to July, the colony’s agents began preparing for a voyage, which included recruiting potential colonists, skilled laborers, and especially Puritan clergy.³¹ At the Company’s July session of what was called the General Court, a proposal was made for the Company to relocate the Court—the colony’s governing body—to New England. This broke with the standard custom of English colonies. If this measure passed, the governance of Massachusetts would transfer from a board of shareholders in England to the colonists who migrated to America. Localizing the authority of the colony, according to the advocates of the proposal, provided greater chances at success for the colony’s intent and design, namely, the formation of a godly commonwealth.³² Their experiences in England, coupled with their own religious convictions, animated the foundations of this proposed society.³³

At the July session, the General Court deferred deciding on the proposal until

²⁸ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 81; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 153; Karr, “The Missing Clause,” 90.

²⁹ Karr, “The Missing Clause,” 90.

³⁰ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 147.

³¹ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 153; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 77–78.

³² Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 156; Winship, *Hot Protestants* 77–79;

³³ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 185.

its next meeting in October. Still, the idea of a self-governing, Puritan colony began drawing in potential colonists who could not, for conscience's sake, remain in England. In July, Theophilus Clinton, the Earl of Lincoln, organized a gathering at his estate in Sempringham for those interested in making the journey to New England—in attendance were John Winthrop, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Roger Williams.³⁴ Each of these men exerted tremendous influence on the history of Massachusetts and New England. Three out of the four were clergy, while Winthrop made his living as a lawyer. Winthrop already enjoyed a connection with the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Company, and, at least by May 1629, thought God might be calling him to leave the ever-growing apostate kingdom of England.³⁵

This July gathering, however, solidified Winthrop's intention. In August, he met with eleven other prospective Puritan colonists in Cambridge to discuss two matters: first, they made the case for moving the charter to New England.³⁶ Second, Winthrop presented a tract that distilled the reasons why other Puritans needed to consider the move to a new, godly commonwealth in the Massachusetts Bay. He indicted the "Fountaines of Learning and Religion," which "perverted" children, promoted licentiousness, and created a ministerial class prone to "straine at knatts, and swallowe camels."³⁷ The Reformation in England, in short, failed, and Winthrop summoned likeminded Puritans to join a "honorable and worthy" work—a plan to "helpe raise and supporte, a particular Church."³⁸ This "particular Church" differed from other colonial projects. Indeed,

³⁴ George Hunston Williams, Norman Pettit, and Sargent Bush, eds., *Thomas Hooker: Writings in England and Holland, 1626–1633* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 17; John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 146; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 157–158.

³⁵ *WP*, 2:81, 91–92; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 154.

³⁶ *WP*, 2:151–152; *GH*, 123–124; Karr, "The Missing Clause," 92; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 79.

³⁷ *WP*, 2:139.

³⁸ *WP*, 2:140.

Winthrop persuaded potential colonists that the Massachusetts endeavor departed from the “sloth and security” of Virginia. That colony failed because “their mayne end was Carnall and not Religious. . . . they did not establish a right forme of gouernment.”³⁹

Winthrop, therefore, believed from the onset that Massachusetts needed a fundamentally religious purpose that enjoyed the support of a proper government. The purported Bay Colony faithfully fulfilled its God-ordained design only as it planted a society where government and church coalesced together in a mutual pursuit of righteousness, holiness, and godliness. This was the ideological foundation of Massachusetts’s civility.⁴⁰

The Cambridge meeting, according to Winship, set Massachusetts apart. In fact, with Winthrop emerging as a leading voice for the endeavor, the soon-to-be colonists began framing their experiment around self-governance and an emphasis upon the pursuit of a wholly reformed church.⁴¹ At the Company’s October session, the General Court approved the Cambridge agreement, and elected John Winthrop as the colony’s governor.⁴² The Company looked to Winthrop to lead its efforts, making the growing number of settlers ready for a voyage across the Atlantic by April 1630, just five months away.

By March 1630, Winthrop and the Company’s agents managed to secure ships, supplies, arms, and nearly 1,000 colonists were ready to set sail from Southampton, England for America. As the colonists awaited favorable sailing conditions, Puritans from across England came to see them off, including John Cotton, the famed Puritan minister of Lincolnshire. Cotton contemplated joining Winthrop and the fleet setting sail

³⁹ *WP*, 2:142–143.

⁴⁰ Edwin S. Gaustad, “Colonial Religion and Liberty of Conscience,” in *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson and Robert C. Vaughan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 24.

⁴¹ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 78–79.

⁴² *RGC*, 1:50; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 160; Karr, “The Missing Clause,” 93; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 79.

that year, but he eventually decided against it, hoping to continue efforts of reform within the Church of England.⁴³ Cotton, however, well acquainted with the mission of the colony, delivered a farewell sermon to the gathered settlers, blessing them with a word from the Lord to encourage those who were soon to leave their homes and livelihoods for the New England wilderness. Cotton assured them of God's promises, placing the entire colonial endeavor under the protection of God's providential care. He preached, "They shall dwell there like Free-holders in a place of their owne. . . . [God] promiseth them firme and durable possession, they shall move no more."⁴⁴ Indeed, Cotton comforted them with the hope that the "sonnes of wickedness shall afflict them no more."⁴⁵ Massachusetts was an "*appointment of the Lord*"—this was "*Gods Plantation*," which promised peace, safety, as well as an obligation to fulfill a divine mission.⁴⁶ Yet, Cotton warned his audience that while their hope and trust found consolation in God's mighty promises, these promises were conditional. If, as Cotton argued, the colonists departed from God, turned away from his commands, and their piety decayed, God would remove his protective hand.⁴⁷

John Winthrop echoed these ideas in his *Model of Christian Charity*, which he delivered to the colonists either before their departure, during their voyage, or after their arrival to New England.⁴⁸ Winthrop cast a vision of both hope and obligation; while God

⁴³ Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 63.

⁴⁴ John Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation* (London: William Jones, 1630), 2.

⁴⁵ Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, 2.

⁴⁶ Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, 3; 14.

⁴⁷ Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, 17.

⁴⁸ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 175. Historians continue to debate when and where Winthrop delivered the *Model of Christian Charity*. Hugh Dawson made the case for its delivery prior to their departure. See Hugh Dawson, "John Winthrop's Rite of Passage: The Origins of the 'Christian Charity' Discourse," *Early American Literature* 26 (1991): 219–231; Hugh Dawson, "'Christian Charitie' as Colonial Discourse: Reading Winthrop's Sermon in Its English Context," *Early American Literature* 33 (1998): 117–148. See also Edmund S. Morgan, "John Winthrop's 'Model of Christian Charity' in a Wider Context," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 50 (1987): 145–151; Rodgers, *As A City on a Hill*, especially

provided these beleaguered Puritans a place of refuge across the Atlantic, they also bore a solemn trust to steward the colony and its affairs to the glory of God. Rodgers and Bremer accurately pinpointed “charity” as the central idea in Winthrop’s message: “For Winthrop, it meant that the rule of love and mutual obligation must take precedence above mere calculus of price and market return whenever the public weal is at risk.”⁴⁹ Indeed, Winthrop situated “love among Christians”⁵⁰ as the essential virtue necessary for the colony to thrive. This charity, or love, culminated in disinterested benevolence—the forsaking of one’s individual liberty and personal welfare for the prosperousness of the whole society.⁵¹ Winthrop, moreover, as he stated in *Reasons Considered*, argued that the love required for the colony’s success must express itself “vnder a due forme of Government both ciuill and ecclesiasticall. In such cases as this the care of the publique must oversway all private respects, by which not onely conscience, but meare Ciuill policy doth bind vs.”⁵² Thus, Winthrop correlated the virtues and mores necessary for the flourishing of Massachusetts with a community marked by a rightly ordered ecclesiology and civil government. Their consciences, furthermore, were bound to serve one another rather than their own individual preferences. Winthrop both encouraged his compatriots towards Christian love and wisdom while clairvoyantly predicting the necessary punitive actions against all defectors of this vision: a burgeoning private interest, a licentious individual claim of conscience, or a malnourished civil and ecclesial system, portended the decay and eventual ruin of Massachusetts.⁵³

chapter one wherein Rodgers persuasively argued that the content of the *Model* reflected months of intellectual thinking on Winthrop’s part from late 1629 to 1630.

⁴⁹ Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill*, 7; Bremer, *First Founders*, 26.

⁵⁰ *WP*, 2:292.

⁵¹ *WP*, 2:292.

⁵² *WP*, 2:293.

⁵³ *WP*, 2:293

In other words, *A Modell of Christian Charity* laid upon the colonists a heavy, yet glorious burden. Winthrop wrote that a covenant existed between God and the colonists, drawing upon the covenantal framework of the Old Testament, which, on the one hand, provided God's people with a sense of security. Yet the covenant, on the other hand, demanded much of the Israelites—God summoned them to faithfulness and obedience; he was to be their God and they were to have no other gods before him. The covenant with God framed individual and communal life, directing everything towards the worship of God and his glory. Winthrop believed that the Puritan project in colonial America mirrored this covenantal matrix, which “sealed our Commission,” and demanded “strict performance of the Articles contained.”⁵⁴

It was under the canopy of a covenant that Winthrop declared, “For wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty vpon a Hill, the eies of all people are vppon vs.”⁵⁵ Atop this hill, Massachusetts either shone the glory of a society attuned to God and God's law or, through its covenantal failure, would crumble as God removed his presence from them.⁵⁶ Winthrop intensified the need for charity, love, and a rightly ordered society by coupling those ideas with covenantal faithfulness to God. Failure to the obligations of the covenant resulted in the removal of God's blessing but also fed the “mouthes of enemies to speake euill of the ways of god.”⁵⁷ Before the colonists was a choice: life and goodness, or death and wickedness.⁵⁸ The Massachusetts Puritans carried with them a

⁵⁴ *WP*, 2:294. For more on the covenantal idea of Winthrop's *Modell*, see Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill*, 45. See also Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7; James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 53, 58; and David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁵⁵ *WP*, 2:295.

⁵⁶ *WP*, 2:295; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 81.

⁵⁷ *WP*, 2:295.

⁵⁸ *WP*, 2:295.

conditioned hope of God’s provision and security—his promises remained only as the colony maintained unwavering faithfulness.⁵⁹

Taken together, *Gods Promise* and the *Model of Christian Charity* provided the ethical framework of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and its civility. This ethic arose from deeply held theological categories of a covenant between God and the colonists. Cotton and Winthrop cast for the colonists the promise that while Massachusetts provided them a place of refuge, their peace and stability hinged upon their faithfulness to God. It was as if, according to Bremer, Cotton and Winthrop knew a “daunting task” lay ahead of these Puritan settlers.⁶⁰ As the colonists planted themselves in New England and encountered the various trials and controversies of the 1630s and 40s, this sense of divine promise and obligation animated their actions. The entrenchment of civility of conformity was only explainable from this distinctly religious purpose for Massachusetts.

The time to transport that religious identity and covenantal mission came on April 8, 1630. The colonists left England for the Massachusetts Bay, spending the next two months crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The first vessels of Winthrop’s fleet arrived on June 14, where they made their way to the small community of Salem.⁶¹ From their arrival in June 1630 to the October 1631 session of the General Court, two important developments occurred that shaped the religious and political culture of this young colony. First, when the colonists entered Salem, they discovered that the community adopted a novel ecclesiology known as Congregationalism.⁶² According to Hall, Salem’s Congregationalism posited that the only true churches were those organized around a

⁵⁹ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 175–176, 184.

⁶⁰ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 182.

⁶¹ *GH*, 132; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 145.

⁶² Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 86; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 147; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*; Baird Tipson, “Invisible Saints: The ‘Judgment of Charity’ in the Early New England Churches,” *Church History* 44, no. 4 (December 1975): 450–471; David D. Hall, “John Cotton’s Letter to Samuel Skelton,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (July 1965): 478–485.

local church covenant between the church and its members.⁶³ For the newly arrived colonists, they would have excitedly anticipated their first church service in New England only to have their expectations crushed by the polity of the Salem church. Samuel Skelton, the minister of the congregation, warmly welcomed the travel-worn colonists to Salem, but refused to grant them participation in the Lord's Supper; he also rejected the request to baptize an infant who was born at sea on the grounds that the child's parents were not members of a true church. As Winship noted, they still belonged to the Church of England, a disordered ecclesial system that disqualified the 1630 settlers from participating in the Sacraments.⁶⁴ Skelton did not deny the religious sincerity or piety of the colonists. On the contrary, the records indicated that Skelton knew several of the colonists well from England; the parents requesting baptism for their newborn, furthermore, were members of John Cotton's church in Lincolnshire. The issue was not their piety, but that they were not covenanted members of a rightly ordered church.⁶⁵ This commitment placed even John Cotton's congregation outside the boundaries of a true, godly church.

While Skelton's refusal smacked of Separatism, and, no doubt, caused offence to Governor and his company, Salem's polity began to spread throughout Massachusetts. By July, Winthrop and the other colonist divided into three settlements, establishing three different congregations in Boston, Watertown, and Dorchester—these churches, moreover, followed the model of Salem's ecclesiology.⁶⁶ Thus, Congregationalism took root in the new communities founded in the summer of 1630. It severed ecclesial

⁶³ Hall, "John Cotton's Letter to Samuel Skelton," 479.

⁶⁴ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 147; *GH*, 117.

⁶⁵ Evidence of the interconnectedness between Skelton and the colonists comes from a letter that John Cotton wrote to Skelton in October 1630. Cotton received news of Skelton's refusal and wrote a letter of reply to Skelton in October, which not only established the personal connections, but provided clarity into the contours of early Congregationalism in Massachusetts. The text of Cotton's letter is found in Hall, "John Cotton's Letter to Samuel Skelton," 480–485.

⁶⁶ *GH*, 186; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 153; Bremer, *First Founders*, 192–193.

connections between Massachusetts's congregations and the parish churches in England, with one notable exception. According to the records of the Boston congregation, the colonists attempted to chart a moderate alternative to the more stringent separatism found at Salem. Boston did not require its first minister to renounce his ordination from the Church of England, nor did it prohibit its church members from attending parish church services if they were back in England.⁶⁷ Both Murphy and Winship noted the political calculations involved in this middle way; the colonists conducted a balancing act between their ecclesial convictions while trying to maintain a positive image with the authorities in England.⁶⁸ Yet, as the colony further established itself, its political and religious leaders viewed their ecclesiology as an extension of their purpose in New England: to establish a godly society marked by reformed and religiously pure churches. John Winthrop was more than convinced about the colony's Congregationalism, arguing that the Church of England violated the ecclesiology prescribed by God in the Scriptures. The New England colonists, with their newfound liberty and having "come to clearer light," created a society marked by genuinely reformed congregations.⁶⁹ John Cotton, furthermore, who converted to Congregationalism sometime between 1632 and 1633, linked the Congregational model with the religious and political flourishing of the entire colony. Congregationalism protected Massachusetts's people from the arbitrary power of bishops and prelates while also emphasizing the need for godliness and religious devotion as prerequisites for church membership.⁷⁰ Indeed, as both Turner and Winship demonstrated, Congregationalism appealed to Massachusetts's colonists because it

⁶⁷ *GH*, 185; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 154–157.

⁶⁸ Murphy, *Conscience and Community*, 31; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 159–160.

⁶⁹ *LNE*, 119–120.

⁷⁰ John Cotton, "Certain Proposals Made by Lord Say, Lord Brooke, and Other Persons of Quality, as Conditions of their Removing to New-England, with the Answers Thereto," in *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558–1794*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 167.

encouraged individual piety and removed perceived clerical tyranny from a congregation's polity.⁷¹

This ecclesiology became even more important with the second development in Massachusetts that occurred at the General Court's October 1630 and 1631 sessions. The colony's charter required that the freemen meet four times a year for its General Court. These sessions dealt with colonial business, passed laws, and provided guidance on civil and religious affairs. At one of the four sessions, the freemen elected a governor, deputy governor, and the court of assistants. These individuals meet monthly as an *ad interim* body to manage the colony's business in between its quarterly General Court sessions.⁷² At the October 1630 meeting, however, the colonists agreed to an alteration: the freemen, instead of electing all the members of the General Court, only elected the assistants, or, magistrates. This body would then elect from its membership the governor and deputy governor.⁷³ What made this change more important was how the colony determined who was a "freeman." Under the original confines of the charter, the freemen were the stockholders of the company; by October 1631, that came to an end. Freemen included all the male settlers who also enjoyed the privileges of church membership. In other words, the October decision enabled settlers to become freemen, opening the door to the governance of Massachusetts to its people, not just a group of shareholders.⁷⁴ A fear of unchecked, capricious power undergirded this decision by the colony's leaders and the settlers.⁷⁵ Yet, it also fastened the civil government with its churches. Only church members could be freemen; only freemen could serve as assistants, and the

⁷¹ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 144; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 180.

⁷² *RGC*, 1:10–12; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 185.

⁷³ *RGC*, 1:79; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 186.

⁷⁴ *RGC*, 1:87; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 186, 195.

⁷⁵ *GH*, 147 – 148; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 188–193.

governor and deputy governor were chosen from that body. As George McKenna argued, Massachusetts made “political leadership contingent on the authenticity of an inward experience.”⁷⁶ After John Cotton’s arrival to New England in 1633, he became an ardent apologist for the Congregationalist mode and connected the importance of this political development with the colony’s commitment to Congregationalism. By making godliness the qualification for political participation, religious devotion became all the more paramount for the colony’s civil and religious leaders to inculcate. Indeed, Thomas Dudley, the Deputy Governor of Massachusetts in 1631, stressed that future colonist to Massachusetts must be “godly men,” vigorous in their religious devotion.⁷⁷ Without godliness, the colony’s interests might fall into the hands of “worldly” men who would elect ungodly civil rulers that lacked holiness, virtue, and the desire to glorify God.⁷⁸ As such, Cotton warned, the colony would succumb to the penalties described in Leviticus 26:17, wherein God declared, “I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.” Without the connection between political involvement and church membership, which required proof of regeneration and sanctification, the maintenance of the colony’s laws would crumble, and fail to achieve the government’s chief end, namely, the flourishing of the churches and the nourishment of piety.⁷⁹

Thus, by 1631, the influx of Puritan settlers led by John Winthrop established themselves in the Massachusetts Bay. They brought with them a theologically defined purpose for planting in New England, which intersected with their adoption of

⁷⁶ George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 28.

⁷⁷ *LNE*, 75.

⁷⁸ Cotton, “Certain Proposals Made by Lord Say, Lord Brooke, and Other Persons of Quality, as Conditions of their Removing to New-England, with the Answers Thereto,” 167.

⁷⁹ Cotton, “Certain Proposals Made by Lord Say, Lord Brooke, and Other Persons of Quality, as Conditions of their Removing to New-England, with the Answers Thereto,” 167; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 198.

Congregationalism and the politics of self-governance. Each of these threads wove together, outlining the contours of the colony's civility. Godliness and holiness were not only qualities expected of church members, but the minimum qualifications for political participation. Care for the commonweal equated with the preservation and promotion of the colony's religious order—religion and civil governance, as John Wilsey described, were “knit together” in a devoted alliance of cooperation.⁸⁰ The year 1631, however, brought with it Massachusetts's first challenge to its civility. The controversy began with the arrival of Roger Williams, and as it intensified, the colony's civil and religious leaders enacted the principle of conformity within its jurisdiction. This marked a watershed series of events for this infant colony, and the consequences precipitated a burgeoning contest of civility for decades to come.

Roger Williams and Civility of Conformity, 1631–1635

When Roger Williams disembarked in Boston in February 1631, the Boston community warmly greeted him and seemed excited about his potential for the furtherance of godliness in Massachusetts. Indeed, in his journal, John Winthrop recorded Williams's arrival, praising him for his zealous piety.⁸¹ Born in London, Williams had a Puritan upbringing and education. He also caught the attention of Sir Edward Coke, the preeminent legal and judicial scholar during the Elizabethan and Jacobean era. Coke employed Williams as his scribe, and, eventually became Williams's benefactor. He paid for Williams to attend college at Cambridge. From there Williams became a chaplain to a prominent Puritan family in east Anglia. With the continued threat of Laudian persecution, and Williams's religious commitments, he decided to leave for New

⁸⁰ Wilsey, *One Nation Under God*, 9. See also Gaustad, “Colonial Religion and Liberty of Conscience,” 29; Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 198.

⁸¹ *WJ*, 1:57.

England.⁸²

Given Williams's distinctly Puritan upbringing, education, and renown as a minister, the Boston congregation immediately offered him a position as one of its teachers. Williams agreed, but upon conditions that the church refused to assent. Williams held to a radical separatism that made Massachusetts's leaders uncomfortable. He believed that in order for Massachusetts's congregations to exemplify the purity they desired, they needed to completely sever ties with the Church of England, and to do so publicly.⁸³ Once the Boston congregation refused Williams's request, he declined their offer and made his way to Salem, because he "durst not officiate to an unseparated people."⁸⁴ Thus, the conflict between Massachusetts and Roger Williams began—he believed the Boston Puritans had not gone far enough in their vision of a godly society marked by reformed churches.

In April, Williams settled in Salem, and as in Boston, the congregation offered him a job to serve as its minister. The Salem church certainly held to more separatist tendencies than the church at Boston; as Turner suggested, Salem inherited its ecclesiology from the Plymouth Colony, which was established in 1620.⁸⁵ The Pilgrims who came to Plymouth were, in fact, separatists. They asserted voluntary church membership based on a covenant between the church and its members and contended that

⁸² For biographies of Williams, see John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Viking, 2012); Samuel Hugh Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1940); L. Raymond Camp, *Roger Williams, God's Apostle of Advocacy: Biography and Rhetoric* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989); Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams: Prophet of Liberty* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001); Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State: Roger Williams and Religious Liberty* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Charles Smull Longacre, *Roger Williams: His Life, Work, and Ideals* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1939); Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962).

⁸³ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 207–209; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 147.

⁸⁴ CRW, 2:630, Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 210; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 147–148.

⁸⁵ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 137–138.

church members ought to elect their own officers. While Boston's Congregational church adopted these two commitments, the Plymouth separatists held a third conviction that the Bay Colony did not: Plymouth dissolved the bonds between its people and the Church of England, labeling the English episcopacy as a false church, antithetical to Christ and his teachings.⁸⁶

Thus, given Salem's affinity for Plymouth separatism, Williams may have found a congregation that he could serve as teacher, if not for the involvement of the Massachusetts General Court. News of Salem's offer to Williams reached the court, which quickly drafted a letter to Salem's local leader and the former governor of Massachusetts, John Endecott. The letter recounted Williams's refusal to join the Boston congregation, distilling Williams's more radical views regarding the Church of England. The General Court also included that Williams had expressed the inappropriateness of the civil magistrate to punish any "breach of the first table."⁸⁷ Magistrates, in other words, could not excise punishment against heretics or those who violated the Sabbath. This indicated that Williams, as early as 1631, already began espousing ideas related to religious liberty. Because of his sweeping separatism, and his political theology, the General Court, according to Winthrop, "marveled" that Salem would select Williams without first consulting the General Court. They asked Salem to stay any decision regarding its employment of Williams until the court discussed the matter and provided further guidance.⁸⁸ After the General Court's rebuke, the Salem congregation rescinded its offer to Williams. The reasons for Salem's revocation and Williams's departure were multifaceted, including local political disputes for control of the church, pressure from the magistrates and the General Court, and, as Winship conjectured, a divergence

⁸⁶ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 10–13.

⁸⁷ *WJ*, 1:62; *GH*, 203.

⁸⁸ *WJ*, 1:62.

between Williams's separatism and that of the Salem congregation.⁸⁹

After Salem reneged on its offer to Williams, he relocated to Plymouth, where he spent the next two years farming and occasionally preaching. In fact, he joined the Plymouth church and served as an assistant to the Plymouth minister Ralph Smith.⁹⁰ His teaching was well received by the Plymouth community; William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth, related his thankfulness for Williams's sermons, blessing God for the "sharpest admonitions and reproofs."⁹¹ Despite his reception and reputation as an able preacher, Williams began to cause trouble in Plymouth. According to Bradford, Williams espoused "strang opinions" that engendered controversy between Williams and the Plymouth congregation.⁹² Williams began ridiculing the idea of Christendom, arguing to Plymouth's leaders that God did not grant the magistrates the power of the sword in religious matters; he also dejected the right of monarchs to take lands away from Native Americans.⁹³ He further indicated that his own separatism outpaced what he found in Plymouth; he stated that while Plymouth colonists professed separatism and had indeed severed their connection with the Church of England, they still allowed for their church members to attend Church of England services if they visited England.⁹⁴ For Williams, the Church of England was antichrist, and no true church could ever allow its members to partake in the religious services of an assembly hostile to God and his prescribed ecclesial order.

The growing disenchantment between Williams and the Plymouth community

⁸⁹ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 315.

⁹⁰ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 148.

⁹¹ William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 2:162.

⁹² Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, 2:162.

⁹³ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 212.

⁹⁴ *CRW*, 2:630; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 149.

led both parties to the conclusion that it would be best for Williams to leave. Before departing Plymouth, however, Williams published his views regarding Christendom, the monarch's theft of Native American lands, and his radical notion of separatism, and gave the document to William Bradford.⁹⁵ Bradford read the letter and passed a copy along to John Winthrop. The Plymouth congregation, moreover, released Williams from his covenantal obligation to their church, resigning him to the leaders of the Bay Colony because Massachusetts had "able men . . . they would better deal with him."⁹⁶ One of these more "able men" was Winthrop, who now possessed written evidence of Williams's positions and, summarily, brought the tract to the attention of Massachusetts's General Court and leading ministers at its December 1633 session. While Williams's treatise was lost, Winthrop wrote a response to the work after the General Court's December 1633 meeting, which not only provided evidence of what Williams espoused but how seriously Winthrop and the General Court took the pamphlet.

Winthrop wrote his response in January, and addressed it to Salem's leader John Endecott because Williams, sometime in the fall of 1633, had returned to Salem.⁹⁷ Winthrop wanted to caution Endecott about Williams and dissuade him from accepting him into Salem's community without confronting Williams over his beliefs. According to Winthrop, Williams "chargeth bothe Kinges and others with blasphemy for calling Europe Christendom, or the Christian world, etc." He also called Charles I the "whore of Rome,"⁹⁸ and maintained that New Englanders had no rightful claim to the land; it belonged to the Native Americans and it must be lawfully purchased from them.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 150.

⁹⁶ *GH*, 204.

⁹⁷ *WJ*, 1:116–117; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 150.

⁹⁸ *WP*, 3:148.

⁹⁹ *WP*, 3:147; Glenn W. LaFantasie, "The Road to Banishment: Editorial Note," in *CRW* 1:15.

Williams, therefore, challenged the entire political theology of Massachusetts and much of the Western world. By his estimation, the church bore a distinct, holy character that had no place in comingling with the affairs of the state, and vice versa. Christ instituted his church as a separate, holy society. Winthrop responded to this by citing several examples from the Bible, drawing a direct connection between the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the sacrament of baptism. “All Israelites,” Winthrop contended, “(good and badd) were called the Circumcision and the people of God.”¹⁰⁰ Circumcision distinguished Israelites from “the Heathen.” Winthrop connected this to how baptism functioned for Christians under the new covenant. He wrote that baptism served as a mark to differentiate Christians from the “Pagan.” Thus, Winthrop argued, “so in the days of Constantine and Jovinian and other godly emperors, the Arians, manichees and other Heretiks were called Christians and that without Offence to the most orthodoxe.”¹⁰¹ Under Winthrop’s model, a nation may bear the name “Christendom” because of infant baptism just as God tied the nation of Israel together under the covenantal sign of circumcision. As Israel held all its people accountable to the covenant, a Christian nation, likewise, must enact laws in accordance with the Scriptures and deal with its citizens as Christians—even those citizens that were not Christian.¹⁰² As to the charge regarding land ownership, Winthrop tethered the colony’s possession of the land to the good pleasure of the Lord.¹⁰³

For Winthrop and the General Court, Williams presented a potential threat to the colony’s established order. Indeed, Winship placed the court’s December meeting and Winthrop’s January letter within their historical context: King Charles I received reports

¹⁰⁰ *WP*, 3:147.

¹⁰¹ *WP*, 3:147.

¹⁰² *WP*, 3:147

¹⁰³ *WP*, 3:149

revealing that Massachusetts departed from the Church of England and violated agreements within the colonial charter. As a result, word made its way back to Massachusetts that England may dispatch an armed force to depose the colony of its leadership and install a colonial governor under the authority of the king. Williams's positions, as Winship noted, "lent the charges credibility."¹⁰⁴ In the aftermath of Winthrop's January letter, Williams retracted his views, assuring the General Court that he only intended the treatise as a private correspondence between himself and William Bradford; he had no intentions of making the positions public.¹⁰⁵ He also swore public allegiance to King Charles I.¹⁰⁶

Williams's confrontation with the General Court, however, was not yet concluded. Indeed, when Williams returned to Salem in the fall of 1633, the congregation again offered him a position as its assistant teacher.¹⁰⁷ Williams accepted, which, as the controversy intensified, drew the entire Salem community into a conflict with the General Court.¹⁰⁸ In August 1634, Samuel Skelton, the leading teacher at Salem, died, making Williams the sole leader of the Salem congregation.¹⁰⁹ Williams's leadership wrought, as LaFantasie and Bremer recorded, a separatist revival in Salem, which included the practice of lay "prophesying," or lay preaching.¹¹⁰ The spiritual condition of Salem began to depart from the rest of the communities in Massachusetts and, in November 1634, the situation deteriorated when the General Court received news that John Endecott, spurred by Williams's preaching, tore out St. George's cross from Salem's militia ensign. The

¹⁰⁴ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 213.

¹⁰⁵ *WJ*, 1:117; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ *WJ*, 1:119.

¹⁰⁷ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 151; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 212–213.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 151.

¹⁰⁹ *WJ*, 1:130; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 214.

¹¹⁰ *CRW*, 1:17; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 250.

cross on the militia flag was a sign of idolatry, according to Williams; to the General Court, however, the event furthered the perception that Massachusetts stood in a rebellious state against the king.¹¹¹ Williams further instigated issues when, in November, he began preaching the same doctrines from his 1633 tract, which he had assured the General Court he would not do.¹¹²

These events placed the Massachusetts General Court in a difficult situation. Winship rightly stated that Williams's status as the minister of the colony's oldest town complicated the possible actions they could take against a man who seemed bent on upending the prevailing theological and political norms of Massachusetts. The mutual relationship between church and state that the colonists achieved also included distinctions of authority; magistrates could not wield ecclesial authority, nor could ministers take up the civil sword.¹¹³ Congregationalism also muddied the waters for the General Court. As Ziff rightly surmised, "The inconvenience of the autonomy of each congregation threatened to cause a schism."¹¹⁴ Indeed, by taking any retributive action against Williams, the General Court may appear as having disregarded the liberty of a congregation to choose its own minister.

The General Court, therefore, proceeded carefully. First, they tried to deal with Williams through ecclesial mechanisms. In April 1635, they invited leading ministers to question and debate Williams in Boston, with the hope of leading him out of his errors.¹¹⁵ One of these ministers had only recently landed in the colony: John Cotton, one of the most famous Puritan preachers in England during the 1620s and early 30s, had arrived in

¹¹¹ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 217; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 250.

¹¹² *WJ*, 1:142.

¹¹³ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 217.

¹¹⁴ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 86–87; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 151; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 218; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 98

¹¹⁵ *WJ*, 1:149; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 219.

Boston in September 1633.¹¹⁶ By October 1633, the Boston congregation ordained Cotton as its teacher. Cotton's theological stature quickly elevated him as a spiritual counselor for the entire Bay Colony. Indeed, when the General Court convened in December 1633 to discuss Williams's letter to Bradford, Cotton was summoned to provide guidance, which became a regular occurrence throughout Cotton's tenure in Massachusetts.¹¹⁷

At the April 1634 conference, the goal was to try and convince Williams of his errors and broker a peaceful, unifying solution to the growing fissure. The General Court endeavored to exhaust itself of all possible means before taking civil recourse against Williams and the Salem congregation.¹¹⁸ The attempt to persuade dissenters out of their errors before utilizing the mechanisms available to the magistrates became a pattern in Massachusetts and provided further complexity to how the colony enacted civility of conformity. As a political philosophy, Massachusetts enforced conformity positively and negatively: positively, the General Court and the religious leaders utilized persuasion as a means through which to ensure uniformity. This method repeatedly surfaced in the subsequent controversies the colony faced, such as the Antinomian Crisis, the Samuel Gorton affair, and during the colony's run-ins with Baptists and Quakers in the 1640s and 50s. Negatively, civility of conformity provided civil authorities the power to dispense with harmful, unorthodox manifestations by dissenters who refused to recant.

Regrettably, the April 1634 meeting between Williams, the General Court, and the colony's leading ministers failed. In July, the General Court issued a rebuke against Salem and its minister for espousing heterodox, the first and foremost of which, according to Winthrop, was that the magistrate had no authority to protect religion and

¹¹⁶ *WJ*, 1:105–107; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 81–82.

¹¹⁷ *WJ*, 1:119.

¹¹⁸ *GH*, 207; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 88.

nourish piety.¹¹⁹ The court, along with the ministers, agreed that Williams's opinions, now expressed throughout his congregation, endangered the colony's civil and religious order. They gave Williams and Salem an ultimatum: they were to repent or face the wrath of the Massachusetts General Court.¹²⁰

Undeterred, Williams, with the approval of his church, wrote other churches in Massachusetts about the General Court's actions. The letter, written at the end of July 1635, asserted two seemingly neutral ideas that, in context, were quite noxious. First, it claimed that Williams, along with the Salem congregation, only raised spiritual matters that had no bearing on the broader civil society. Second, the letter exclusively spiritualized the kingship of Christ, thereby confining Christ's kingly, priestly, and prophetic offices to their expressions in the church.¹²¹ The civil government, therefore, had no God-ordained authority to integrate the kingly functions of Christ's rule with the state. Laws against theological divergence violated the order instituted by Christ. Doctrinal disputes were church matters and fell outside the magistrate's jurisdiction.

The letter's intended effect to unite other churches against magisterial overreach failed. The General Court, furthermore, exacted reprisals against Salem. First, it denied land petitions to members within the Salem community for their continued support of Roger Williams. Secondly, the General Court censured the magistrates and assistants from Salem, not allowing to take their seat on the General Court until "satisfaction" was given about Williams's letter.¹²² In response, Williams concluded that Salem's church must separate entirely from the Bay Colony. In August, he wrote a letter to his congregation, telling them of their predicament and that he would only continue to

¹¹⁹ *WJ*, 1:154.

¹²⁰ *WJ*, 1:154 – 155; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 220.

¹²¹ *CRW*, 1:27.

¹²² *WJ*, 1:155.

lead them if the church shuffled off its attachment to the churches of Massachusetts. Salem elected not to follow their embattled pastor.¹²³ The final blow against Williams came at the October session of the General Court, wherein he was indicted for blasphemy and sedition; the court, summarily, sentenced him to banishment. Just prior to the court passing judgment, it allowed for one more conference between Williams and John Cotton, who tried to persuade him away from his unorthodoxy. Despite this, Williams refused to repent. His congregation, furthermore, excommunicated him and wrote a letter of repentance to the General Court for the problems that congregation caused by providing Williams a pulpit in the Bay Colony.¹²⁴

London was the intended destination for Williams's banishment. The colony, as Winthrop summarized, feared the spread of Williams's teachings, which already drew in some twenty people. If Williams was not swiftly dispatched, the "infection would easily spread into these churches."¹²⁵ Williams sensed a threat to his life; if he was forced to return to London, he might face the policies of Archbishop William Laud, who had increased his campaign to eradicate dissent from within England's borders. As such, Williams fled in the middle of a New England winter and established the town of Providence. The continuation of his story is the subject of the next chapter; but the contest of civility cannot be explained without what happened to Williams and to the communities in Massachusetts from 1631 to 1635. For Massachusetts and civility of conformity, the colony dealt with a particularly contentious set of issues precisely because of how the colony organized its government and churches. Winship concluded that Williams "left the colony's government considerably more capable of coercion than

¹²³ *WJ*, 1:157; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 151; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 221.

¹²⁴ *WJ*, 1:162–163; Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 223–224.

¹²⁵ *WJ*, 1:168.

it had been when he arrived.”¹²⁶ True, Williams had indeed incited a theological controversy in the colony that pushed the General Court to use its authority and suppress religious dissent. But the controversy also raised a host of questions for this infant colony still trying to harmonize its political and theological commitment. Were the Congregational churches autonomous or not? To what extent could magistrates and the General Court usurp the will of a congregation in the selection of its pastor or in the theological beliefs he espoused? How much pluralism could a society sustain before it ruptured? Each of these questions exposed the Massachusetts community to the fragility of its conformity, which, after all, nourished its aspirations as “Gods plantation.” These questions only intensified between 1635 to 1637, when the colony tried to clarify its political theology and, at the same time, endured what became known as the Antinomian Controversy.

Defining and Defending Civility of Conformity: 1635–1637

As the General Court began to take civil action against Roger Williams, a group of ministers gathered in 1635 to try and outline the political theology of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The controversy with Williams exposed important questions about the relationship between Massachusetts’s civil government and its Congregational churches. This group of ministers, which, as Bozeman argued, included John Cotton, formulated what became known as the *Model of Church and Civil Power*.¹²⁷ This text served as a pattern for the colony’s political theology and, as Hall argued, proved

¹²⁶ Winship, *Godly Republicanism*, 208.

¹²⁷ Robert Francis Scholz, “‘The Reverend Elders’: Faith, Fellowship and Politics in the Ministerial Community of Massachusetts Bay, 1630–1710 (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1966), 38–64; Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 169, 172; Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 58; David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism & the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 109, 111.

formative for the *Massachusetts Body of Liberties*, adopted in 1641.¹²⁸

The animating question that framed the *Model* was “how the Civill State and the Church may dispense their several Governments without infringement and impeachment of the power and honor of the One or the Other, and what bounds and limits the Lord hath set between both the Administrations.”¹²⁹ The *Model* asserted throughout its recommendations that a clear distinction existed between the powers of the church and the powers of the commonwealth. To the former belonged the keys of the kingdom; to the latter belonged the power of the civil sword. As such, magistrates possessed, according to the *Model*, no spiritual authority over churches, only a temporal authority. Similarly, ministers exerted no authority over magistrates in temporal affairs.¹³⁰ John Witte interpreted this distinction as providing the “basis for a robust theory of confessional pluralism,” and, moreover, a foundation for “ordered religious liberty and orderly religious pluralism.”¹³¹

The *Model*'s endorsement of jurisdictional distinction did not equate, in any semblance of the idea, with a basis for religious liberty or ordered pluralism. On the contrary, the *Model* understood church and state as partners, laced together by God for the mutual benefit of both the commonweal and the church. Jonathan Chu rightly commented that the relationship between church and state functioned like a harmonized formula that protected the balance of powers between the ecclesiastical and the

¹²⁸ Hall, *A Reforming People*, 111; *WJ*, 2:49; *The Book of the General Lawes and Libertys Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: 1648).

¹²⁹ *BT*, 118. The text of the *Model* only survived because Roger Williams printed it in *The Bloody Tenent, of Persecution, for cause of Conscience*, which begins on page 118. By Williams's notes, the *Model* was written in direct response to the issues between Salem and the General Court in 1635.

¹³⁰ *A Model of Church and Civil Power*, in *BT*, 121–122.

¹³¹ John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228, 293.

temporal.¹³² Hall, similarly, noted that the Massachusetts ministers attempted to create a more durable conception of the relationship between church and state that mitigated the negative realities arising in Old England.¹³³

Indeed, the *Model* stated that flourishing societies sprang from a well-ordered people who exemplified “morall and civill virtues,” which arose from the “vigilant administration of the holy Discipline of the Church.”¹³⁴ Thus, as the churches operated properly, they produced a viceless citizenry; with a virtuous people came an ordered and flourishing commonweal. The churches, moreover, accomplished their end as the magistrates protected congregations from heresy, blasphemy, and theological dissent. A mutual economy existed between church and state. The decay of religion and piety portended the erosion of civil peace.¹³⁵ John Cotton explained, “For these three things do not undermine, but do mutually and strongly maintain one another: authority in magistrates, liberty in people, purity in the church.”¹³⁶ By this, Cotton meant that as the churches inculcated piety, the citizenry of a commonweal lived in liberty, or, in accordance with biblical ethics. This also provided the grounds for the magistrates’ power. He must exercise his authority to build and preserve healthy churches while enforcing laws to keep licentious liberty checked. Also, if churches functioned properly, they stocked the commonweal with godly magistrates who wielded their authority with integrity, cognizant of God’s will for civil rulers. Both the civil and ecclesial governments, therefore, pursued the same end, namely, the glory of God and man’s

¹³² Jonathan M. Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen: The Puritan Adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 6.

¹³³ Hall, *A Reforming People*, 110.

¹³⁴ *BT*, 120.

¹³⁵ *BT*, 135.

¹³⁶ John Cotton, “Letter to Lord Saye and Sele, 1636,” in *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620–1730*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 150.

salvation.¹³⁷ This meant that the magistrate possessed a God-given authority to preserve and protect the churches from ungodliness—he was the “*custos* of both the tables of godliness.”¹³⁸ The *Model* contended that without an established godliness, which meant an enforced religious orthodoxy, a man was incapable of being a “*bonus vir*,” or, a good man.¹³⁹ Similarly, unless a magistrate himself lived in godliness and enforced righteousness, he too was not a “*bonus Magistratus*.”¹⁴⁰

Part of the *Model*'s importance for Massachusetts's civility was the historical context in which it emerged. The General Court, along with the colony's ministers, found themselves in the process of banishing Roger Williams and utilizing the mechanisms of the civil state to rebuke one of the colony's churches. It needed to clarify how the two spheres of governance—the civil and the ecclesial—worked together for the colony's mission of creating a godly society while ensuring that neither the church nor the state breached the walls that God erected between their respective jurisdictions. The *Model* provided the colony a framework for defining the contours of the relationship between church and state. Byrd, moreover, concluded that the *Model* unequivocally solidified religious uniformity as the “vital element of public life.”¹⁴¹ Conformity to the colony's orthodoxy ensured peace and stability while providing conditions for churches to thrive.

This political axiom, however, was scrutinized during the significant challenges Massachusetts faced in the following years. By 1635, not only had the General Court faced the Roger Williams and Salem issue, but transatlantic politics further complicated their attempt to establish God's plantation in New England. Weimer

¹³⁷ *BT*, 125.

¹³⁸ *BT*, 126.

¹³⁹ *A Model of Church and Civil Power*, in *BT*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ *A Model of Church and Civil Power*, in *BT*, 134.

¹⁴¹ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 61.

explained how a mass flux of immigrants descended upon Massachusetts between 1634 to 1635, caused by William Laud's campaign to end Puritanism.¹⁴² The Puritans who came, however, were not monolithic in their theological or ecclesial convictions. Thus, as Laud pushed nonconformity out of England, he inadvertently exported religious and theological pluralism to the Massachusetts Bay Colony—a colony that, by 1635, had clearly articulated its commitment to conformity as a governing principle necessary for the colony's success and faithfulness to God.¹⁴³

In 1636, a religious controversy emerged that engulfed Massachusetts, testing the colony's commitment to civility of conformity and exposed the lengths at which its leaders were willing to go to preserve its theological and political order.¹⁴⁴ Bremer pointed to the increased migrations from 1634 to 1635 as the roots of what became known as the Antinomian Controversy.¹⁴⁵ The most important migrants in this burgeoning crisis were Anne Hutchinson, John Wheelwright, and Henry Vane, all of whom came to Massachusetts between 1634 to 1636. Hutchinson, along with Wheelwright (who was her brother-in-law), came to New England primarily following John Cotton, who was Hutchinson's minister in England. They looked to Cotton as a theologian they not only admired but trusted. Wheelwright, moreover, enjoyed a career as gifted minister who began serving the Boston congregation, though never fully ordained for ministry. Henry Vane hailed from a prominent English family that vehemently disliked his conversion to Puritan and non-conformist tendencies. Politically savvy and

¹⁴² Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 62.

¹⁴³ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 202.

¹⁴⁴ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 193.

¹⁴⁵ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 278–279.

bred for leading in the British aristocracy, Vane quickly ascended to leadership in Massachusetts, being elected governor in 1636.¹⁴⁶

Throughout 1635, Hutchinson began hosting meetings in her home to discuss and apply Cotton's sermons preached in the Boston congregation. Cotton, moreover, exuded joy at Hutchinson's spiritual activity in the community. He believed she pursued the kind of holiness and godliness that Massachusetts needed, and her weekly meetings to reinforce Cotton's sermons and lectures encouraged other colonists to live more godly lives.¹⁴⁷ Yet, during these weekly meetings Hutchinson sowed the seeds that germinated into the Antinomian Controversy. Sincere theological disagreements sprouted concerning soteriology and assurance of salvation between the "Free Grace," or Antinomian party and another faction associated with the covenant of works. The latter of the two was the dominant position in Massachusetts and comported with the colony's Congregational ecclesiology and the relationship shared between church and state. In essence, proponents of the covenant of works connected assurance of salvation with evidence of regeneration. A true believer could rest assured in her eternal state because she could see proof of sanctification in her life—she grew in holiness, purity, and mortified sin. Conversely, the Free Grace party, which included Hutchinson, Wheelwright, Vane, and John Cotton, asserted that assurance of salvation was not rooted in the proof of regeneration. To Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and their disciples, this violated the concept of justification by faith alone through grace alone. For them, the gospel was not reduced to a covenant of works but a covenant of grace, wherein believers did not look to acts of sanctification for their assurance but instead reminded themselves of the completed work that Jesus Christ

¹⁴⁶ Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 279–280; See also J.H. Adamson and H.F. Follan, *Sir Henry Vane: His Life and Times, 1613–1662* (Boston: Gambit, 1973).

¹⁴⁷ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2004), 296; James F. Cooper, Jr., *Tenacious of Their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

accomplished at Calvary.¹⁴⁸ To the covenant of works party, however, Free Grace theology encouraged licentiousness because it removed sanctification from the economy of salvation. Thus, it not only undermined holiness in the church but promoted ungodliness in the entire society. For a colony predicated upon the necessity of righteousness, Free Grace theology undercut the theological and political order of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

At her weekly meetings, Hutchinson not only espoused Free Grace theology, but pitted it against the teachings of other ministers in the colony. She contended that John Cotton was the only preacher in Massachusetts rightly dividing the Word of God, placing the finished work of Christ at the center of a believer's assurance.¹⁴⁹ These meetings continued throughout 1635 and 1636, and Hutchinson began attracting a large and influential following, including the colony's new governor Henry Vane, elected in May 1636. She also began teaching that the Holy Spirit provided direct and personal revelation within a Christian. By October 1636, her following continued to grow, she defended her beliefs by tethering them to John Cotton, and she successfully created a division within the colony over the question of assurance of salvation. It was also in October that John Winthrop began to take notice of the dangers posed by Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and their disciples.¹⁵⁰

Not only did Winthrop notice the theological shifts in his Boston church, but the magistrates of the General Court also concerned themselves with what they viewed as a potential menace to the colony's uniformity. Thus, at the October 1636 session of the General Court, the ministers of the colony converged on Boston to hold private

¹⁴⁸ Cooper, *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 47; Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 63; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 193–194.

¹⁴⁹ Cooper, *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 47.

¹⁵⁰ *WJ*, 1:195–196; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1958), 139; Cooper, *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 48.

conferences with Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and also with John Cotton. Bozeman placed Cotton at the center of the Antinomian Controversy primarily because of the theological and ecclesial leadership he held during the 1630s.¹⁵¹ Cotton shielded Hutchinson and Wheelwright from within the church community in Boston and in the broader colony, while Henry Vane provided political cover. Cotton's willingness to support two members of his congregation that the rest of the colony suspected as heretics, stemmed from two reasons. First, as historians have noted, Cotton had personal connections with Hutchinson and Wheelwright when they lived in England. He knew them as godly folk, devoted to the dissemination of piety and holiness in the community.¹⁵² Secondly, Cotton believed that Hutchinson and Wheelwright did not espouse anything heretical. Indeed, at the October 1636 session of the General Court, Cotton agreed to meet with Hutchinson and Wheelwright to discuss their theology. As Cotton recounted, he heard "no more of their Tenents from them, then what seemed to mee Orthodox, I beleaved, they had been far off from such grosse errors, as were tributed them."¹⁵³ The other ministers of the colony pressed Cotton on this, providing him reports that Hutchinson believed in special revelations of the Holy Spirit and spewed ridicule towards the teachers of the other congregations. Cotton responded by asking for witnesses, which they could not provide. According to Cotton, this tied his hands—he had no grounds to proceed in a heresy trial against Hutchinson or Wheelwright because, in his conferences with them, they espoused orthodoxy and, secondly, nobody could corroborate the accusations of heresy.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 282.

¹⁵² Michael Jenkins, "John Cotton and the Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Profile of Experiential Individualism in American Puritanism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 2 (1991), 325; Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 64–65; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 116–117.

¹⁵³ John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London: Matthew Simmons: 1648), 39.

¹⁵⁴ Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 39–40; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 117.

Furthermore, while Cotton disagreed with other ministers in the colony like Thomas Hooker over the importance of sanctification for assurance of salvation, the divergences, by Cotton's estimation, were minor, and in no way warranted schism. Cotton, however, seemed out of touch with reality. For the rest of the Bay Colony's ministers and magistrates, Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and their followers threatened their godly plantation.¹⁵⁵

The October 1636 session and ecclesial conferences failed to expose religious opinions deemed contrary to the colony's established order but succeeded in providing tinder for the burgeoning contest. On October 30, 1636, Hutchinson's and Wheelwright's followers moved to ordain Wheelwright as one of the teachers in the Boston congregation. This had broad support in the church, both from John Cotton and the colony's governor Henry Vane. Yet, John Winthrop rose in opposition, which effectively killed Wheelwright's installation because the church required unanimous consent for ordaining a minister. Winthrop's objection roused the congregation in a bitter theological dispute, with Winthrop charging Wheelwright of holding heretical positions regarding special revelations of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁶ Wheelwright provided answers to the indictment levied against him, and his answers satisfied the congregation and, to an extent, Winthrop. Still, sensing that Wheelwright's continued presence in the Boston congregation might engender further disputes, Cotton argued that it would be best to dispatch Wheelwright to serve as the teacher of a new church forming that fall at Mount Woollaston.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ *WJ*, 1:196; Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 64–65; Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 295. Indeed, Bozeman helpfully distinguished Cotton's free grace theology from Hutchinson and Wheelwright, contending that the latter exerted a "free grace radicalism." By this, Bozeman meant that while Cotton certainly had his disagreements with other Massachusetts clergy, he did not approach their differences with militant or hostile language and did not think the points of contention threatened the colony's theological uniformity.

¹⁵⁶ *WJ*, 1:196–198; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 118.

¹⁵⁷ *WJ*, 1:197.

The controversy simmered throughout the winter, with the figureheads of the colony now engaging in debates with one another about the theological direction of the colony and the colony's churches. On December 10, 1636, the General Court convened with the purpose of trying to mitigate the discord. Prior to this meeting, the colony's ministers met with John Cotton and posed a series of theological questions to him, attempting to clarify the points of disagreement and how the colony might move forward. Ziff, moreover, added that by pinning Cotton down on his beliefs, they could more accurately gauge how Hutchinson and Wheelwright either followed Cotton's teachings or belied them.¹⁵⁸ The ministers' questions and Cotton's answers were presented to the General Court at this December 1636 session where tempers flared, and the controversy escalated.¹⁵⁹ When the ministers offered their report, Governor Vane expressed "great offence" that the ecclesial leaders of the colony met together without his approval or his presence.¹⁶⁰ One of the ministers replied that it saddened him and the rest of the teaching elders that the governor seemed disposed to thwart their liberties as ministers of the gospel. The minister also told Vane, "Before he came . . . the churches were in peace," indirectly blaming Vane for the present state of affairs in Massachusetts.¹⁶¹ Vane responded, "the light of the gospel brings a sword, and the children of the bondwoman would persecute those of the freewoman."¹⁶² This encounter between a minister and the colony's governor revealed the interplay and interconnectedness of theology and politics in Massachusetts.

¹⁵⁸ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 118.

¹⁵⁹ The questions and answers are recorded in, John Cotton, *Severall Qvestions of Serious and Necessary Consequence, Propounded by the Teaching Elders, Unto M. Iohn Cotton of Boston in New-England. With His respective Answer to each Question* (London, 1647).

¹⁶⁰ *WJ*, 1:203.

¹⁶¹ *WJ*, 1:204.

¹⁶² *WJ*, 1:204; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 120–121.

The session concluded with a sermon by John Wilson, the co-teacher of the Boston congregation who was opposed to Vane, Cotton, and the Antinomian party. According to Winthrop, Wilson preached a sermon of lament, and predicted that Cotton's views and his continued intransigence portended schism for the colony. Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and their followers in the Boston church were the root of the colony's dissention; if left unresolved, the colony would be engulfed by disunity and theological heterodoxy, spelling the end of Massachusetts's godly mission.¹⁶³ Cotton did not take kindly to the accusations levied against him; he felt his views in no way instigated schism, which was a serious charge for a colony committed to civility of conformity. The Boston congregation, moreover, moved to censure Wilson and remove him from his post. Cotton stepped in and stopped the church from taking such drastic measures, but not without publicly rebuking Wilson for his General Court sermon.¹⁶⁴

Massachusetts was on the brink of schismatic collapse.¹⁶⁵ By the end of 1636, Thomas Hutchinson recorded, "religious heats became more violent, and the civil affairs more sensibly affected by them."¹⁶⁶ William Hubbard, fifteen-years-old as these events unfolded, described the beginning of 1636 as the "beauty of Lord" descending upon the colony. Massachusetts walked in the "fear of God, and comforts of the Holy Ghost." They prospered, according to Hubbard, as the church had in the days of the Apostles. That all changed, however, by the end of 1636, when the "wicked one . . . took all opportunities to obstruct their flourishing, either in civil or ecclesiastical respects."¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the Antinomian Controversy, in the span of only three months, had grown from a

¹⁶³ *WJ*, 1:204.

¹⁶⁴ *WJ*, 1:204–205.

¹⁶⁵ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 121.

¹⁶⁶ *HM*, 60.

¹⁶⁷ *GH*, 280.

relatively quiet, local affair to a colony-wide contest that jeopardized the colony's civil and religious order.¹⁶⁸ By January, the growing commotion erupted, which caused political turmoil and moved the magistrates from a posture of conciliation to taking civil action against the Antinomians.

The event that seemed to abundantly increase the intensity was a sermon preached by John Wheelwright in January 1637. The colony declared January 20 a Fast Day. Winthrop detailed the reasons for the fast, which included the poor state of affairs for Protestants in Germany during the Thirty Years' War, the encroachment of Laudian polity on the English churches, and, finally, for the "dissensions in our churches."¹⁶⁹ Wheelwright preached on that Fast Day, at the Boston congregation, and the sermon "divided the whole Country into two ranks."¹⁷⁰ Thomas Hutchinson recorded that Wheelwright's sermon "increase[d] the flame," which defended the doctrines of free grace to their fullest measure while simultaneously condemning the covenant of works party with language "tending to sedition."¹⁷¹ A Fast Day was supposed to draw the community together for prayer and seeking the mercy of God; instead, Wheelwright preached indignation.¹⁷²

Wheelwright's sermon divided the two warring parties with stark language. He claimed that those who supported a covenant of works—that a person provided evidence of her justification by her works of righteousness—abandoned the gospel.¹⁷³ In other words, Wheelwright castigated those who accepted the need of sanctification as evidence

¹⁶⁸ Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 292.

¹⁶⁹ *WJ*, 1:208.

¹⁷⁰ *AC*, 210.

¹⁷¹ *HM*, 57.

¹⁷² Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 295; Weimer, *Martyrs Mirror*, 64–65; Bremer, *First Founders*, 82–83.

¹⁷³ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 103.

for the inward working of the gospel; indeed, he placed them outside the teachings of the gospel itself.¹⁷⁴ He condemned them all as enemies of the gospel and combatants against Christ.¹⁷⁵ Wheelwright then pondered what should happen to these enemies of the truth. He declared, “We must lay hold upon them, we must kill them with the word of the Lord. . . . The Lord hath given true beleevers power over the Nations, and they shall break them in peeces as shivered with a rod of iron.”¹⁷⁶ Understanding the implications of his opining, he called his followers to a holy war. This was not a literal war of violence, but a spiritual war. Still, by framing the issue this way, Wheelwright indirectly placed his opponents on the side of the kingdom of darkness, agents of the antichrist. He knew his sermon encouraged “combustion in the Church and common wealth,” but Christ himself, after all, came to “send fire upon the earth.”¹⁷⁷

Winthrop remembered Wheelwright’s sermon, indicting him for his hostile disposition, which alienated friend from friend, brother from brother, husband from wife, and the state from its churches.¹⁷⁸ Winthrop compared the fault lines between the two parties with the differences between “Protestants and papists” as in other nations.¹⁷⁹ Wheelwright’s message roused the Antinomian, or Free Grace party, according to Winthrop, which disjointed the civil and ecclesial peace of the colony. The Free Grace party preached sedition and threatened the entire society with destruction.¹⁸⁰ Yet, if Wheelwright’s sermon roused the Antinomians, it also reinvigorated their opponents, which now utilized its majority on the General Court to wield the civil sword against the

¹⁷⁴ AC, 162.

¹⁷⁵ AC, 164; Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 292.

¹⁷⁶ AC, 163.

¹⁷⁷ AC, 165.

¹⁷⁸ AC, 209.

¹⁷⁹ WJ, 1:209.

¹⁸⁰ AC, 213.

Antinomians.¹⁸¹

The General Court Responds: March 1637

The General Court meeting in March of 1637 deepened the tumult. The members of the court, according to Winthrop, understood their responsibility at this grave hour, namely, to “suppresse them by civill authority,” who caused all manner of trouble and disunity.¹⁸² Indeed, Winthrop related that the court’s members felt a capacious offense at Wheelwright’s sermon, which, as the magistrates understood it, depicted them as “Ahabs, Amaziahs, Scribes and Pharisees . . . led by Satan.” This was the “Who’s Who” list of the enemies of God’s people, and the magistrates met this assault with swift condemnation. As such, they brought Wheelwright before the court on charges of sedition. During the proceedings, three vital developments transpired that developed the colony’s commitment to civility of conformity. First, the Court determined, in consultation with the colony’s ministers, that the espousal of dangerous heresies unlocked “*Ecclesia inconsulta*,” meaning the General Court could intervene with or without a church’s consent.¹⁸³ If, however, an opinion looked less heretical and posed little to no threat to the civil state, then the court relegated those matters to the specific church where the opinion originated.¹⁸⁴

In principle, this seemed a simple enough idea. The colonists well understood the need to suppress unorthodox theology. Yet, the distinction between heresy and “doubtful opinion” were unclear.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the uproar of the Antinomian affair erupted

¹⁸¹ Bremer, *First Founders*, 83.

¹⁸² AC, 248.

¹⁸³ AC, 283.

¹⁸⁴ WJ, 1:210.

¹⁸⁵ GH, 295.

precisely because little coherence existed over the substantive theological questions at stake. Thus, when Winthrop led the magistrates into the dispute, the very notion of civility of conformity endured significant backlash. Conformity seemed to work when the state directed its coercive powers at one individual or small sect over a broadly agreed upon doctrine like baptism. What happened, however, when civility of conformity met dramatic disagreement and pronounced pluralism? As Jonathan Chu noted, the Massachusetts's General Court found itself in a difficult quagmire when expressions of religious dissent were widespread, rather than expressed through an individual or small band of dissenters.¹⁸⁶

The second development pertained to the dual affiliation of magistrates and deputies as both members of a church and members of the General Court. The magistrates and deputies, before proceeding with Wheelwright, granted themselves ecclesiastical immunity. "No member of the court," Winthrop wrote, "ought to be publicly questioned by a church for any speech in the court."¹⁸⁷ The court acknowledged that its members may "sin" in their actions on the court, but the court atoned for this by placing its members outside the purview of a church's disciplinary authority.¹⁸⁸ This seemed a practical, necessary step for the court to take: how, after all, could its members delve into consequential theological disputes and adjudicate fairly if they feared how their actions or speeches might impact their status as church members? Yet, this, along with the first development, directly contravened the political theology established in the *Model*. Circumstances, however, had changed from 1635 to 1637. Civility of conformity was not static. It changed over time in Massachusetts as its civil and religious leaders confronted the various trials they faced. The Antinomian Controversy required, by their

¹⁸⁶ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 6–7.

¹⁸⁷ *WJ*, 1:210.

¹⁸⁸ *WJ*, 1:210.

estimation, alterations in how the colony proceeded against religious dissent

The third development came in the form of a remonstrance signed by nearly sixty members of the Free Grace party and significant figures in the Boston congregation. Indeed, as Winship noted, the signatories included freemen, officeholders, and men from the original 1630 immigration.¹⁸⁹ These were established figures in the colony and not a fringe group of rabble rousers. They protested the court calling Wheelwright to trial, arguing that his Fast Day sermon, nor any of his teachings, tended towards sedition. If Wheelwright denied that his sermon was seditious, which he did, then the court needed to provide evidence of clamor and uprisings against the government, which they could not. The court, therefore, possessed no authority nor grounds to take action against Wheelwright.¹⁹⁰ Adding to this, the petitioners urged the court to exercise caution in meddling with a preacher of God's Word. If the court exacted retribution on a minister of the gospel, then they persecuted both the pastor and Jesus Christ himself.¹⁹¹ Finally, the signatories joined to these complaints a warning: the actions of the General Court tended to breach the relationship the churches enjoyed with their magistrates and civil authorities. Winthrop and his allies, according to the signatories, seemed to abdicate from their responsibility as "nursing Father[s]," to the churches.¹⁹² While the General court did little with this petition in March, it revisited the matter at its November meeting. It did, however, incite further resentment and set the stage for additional reprisals exacted against those who defected from the prevailing orthodoxy and the colony's religious agenda.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Winship, *Making Heretics*, 128.

¹⁹⁰ AC, 249.

¹⁹¹ AC, 250.

¹⁹² AC, 250.

¹⁹³ HM, 60.

Michael Winship argued that the interrogation and subsequent condemnation of Wheelwright at the March General Court constituted the “defining event of the controversy itself.”¹⁹⁴ The reasons for its centrality extended from the court’s actions in granting itself immunity and the authority to dispense with heretics without “tarrying for the church.”¹⁹⁵ Yet, Winship ascribed to Winthrop and the members of the court the following motivations: “abuse,” “paranoia,” and “covert and overt machinations.”¹⁹⁶ Winship’s narrative, moreover, constantly tried to secularize the motives and actions of the General Court. The court, he argued, transformed a “polarized theological” matter into a “polarized political dispute.”¹⁹⁷ This was a false dichotomy. As will be seen, at the heart of the sedition charge lay enormously theological and religious concerns, including the purity of the churches, the integrity of the gospel, and eschatological apprehensions about God’s judgment.

The General Court condemned Wheelwright for sedition.¹⁹⁸ Winthrop described the atmosphere of the colony in the wake of Wheelwright’s sermon as the “heat of contention” that “over-spread the Countrey.” This necessitated the court to act swiftly and to bring an end to the doctrinal disaster that left “Gods plantation” vulnerable.¹⁹⁹ In his distillation of the court proceeding, Winthrop provided a definition of sedition which clarified how the court both understood Wheelwright’s sermon and the theological issues at stake. Winthrop set the bar of sedition quite low; it was not an act of rousing an insurrection against lawful authority or summoning the people to active and violent resistance. For Winthrop, sedition merely amounted to encouraging disagreement. He

¹⁹⁴ Winship, *Making Heretics*, 106.

¹⁹⁵ *WJ*, 210.

¹⁹⁶ Winship, *Making Heretics*, 106.

¹⁹⁷ Winship, *Making Heretics*, 126.

¹⁹⁸ *WJ*, 1:211; Winthrop, *AC*, 292; *GH*, 282; *RGC*, 1:189.

¹⁹⁹ *AC*, 283.

made use of a Latin phrase, which translated meant, “He is seditious who creates dissension of minds and gives birth to discord.”²⁰⁰ In another Latin phrase, Winthrop defined it as “*esse dissensionem omnium inter se, cum eunt alii in aliud,*” or, when people’s dissenting opinions lead them to disunity.²⁰¹

Operating from this definition, Winthrop cited examples of the religious wars in Germany as evidence of what happened when “dissension in Religion” metastasized. What began as simple sermons, infected the people, and begot “incendiary spirits.”²⁰² The court, and not for the last time, remembered the horrors of the Münster rebellion and drew upon the political theology of Martin Luther, which situated their civility within the broader Protestant theological tradition. Indeed, Luther, in his exposition of Psalm 82, argued that princes must quickly crush any preaching that tended towards disunity or refuted the socially prescribed orthodoxy, “even if they were to preach the pure Gospel, nay, even if they were angels from heaven and all Gabriels at that!”²⁰³

The charge of sedition, therefore, included an inherently theological contour. Wheelwright, by the General Court’s logic, preached opinions contrary to the prevailing doctrinal consensus amongst the colony’s ministers²⁰⁴—and he did so in militant language, summoning the true adherents of the gospel to a spiritual war. Winthrop queried how a community that looked upon one another as “enemies and persecutors,” could possibly pursue the same godly ends that governed the colony’s inception. The only end of the disunity and sedition espoused by Wheelwright was, according to

²⁰⁰ AC, 292. The Latin he used was, *Seditiosus est, qui dissensionem animorum facit & discordias gignit.*

²⁰¹ AC, 292.

²⁰² AC, 294.

²⁰³ LW, 13:64–65.

²⁰⁴ Winthrop noted in his journal that during the court proceedings, the General Court invited the elders of all the churches to testify about their beliefs. They all declared their adherence to the position Wheelwright described as contrary to the gospel. WJ, 1:211.

Winthrop, the disintegration and collapse of the entire colonial order.²⁰⁵

Though the court found Wheelwright guilty, they deferred his sentencing to the November session of the General Court in 1637. In a similar approach to the steps taken against Williams, the court passed on sentencing in the hopes for reconciliation. This reaffirmed a key feature of civility of conformity: While the colony's civil leaders were prepared to act against heresy and sedition, they also employed available means to ameliorate the divergence in hopes of nourishing repentance and reconciliation. The court handed Wheelwright over to the Boston congregation for the purposes of church discipline.²⁰⁶

“The Churches were on Fire”: A Summer of Discontent

Any hopes of reconciliation faded as the summer months progressed. Giles Firmin, a member of the Boston congregation, had been absent from the colony during the outbreak of the controversy. In the summer of 1637, he returned from England to a colony that had significantly changed since he left. Before his ship entered the Boston harbor, a fishing vessel approached, with men who conversed with crew and passengers of Firmin's boat. As they spoke, one of the fishermen relayed the following message about the colony: “The Churches were on fire.” Firmin then recorded, “*When I came on Shoar, I was told, the Heat, the Animosities were so high, that they were ready to lay Hands on their Swords, to draw one against another.*”²⁰⁷

“Every thing is beautiful in its season,” lamented Hubbard, who recorded how

²⁰⁵ Winthrop, *A Short Story*, AC, 299.

²⁰⁶ *WJ*, 1:212; *GH* 282.

²⁰⁷ Giles Firmin, *Panergia A Brief Review of Mr. Davis's Vindication: Giving No Satisfaction* (London: 1693), quotes taken from his letter to the reader. For an insightful article about Giles Firmin, see Susan Hardman Moore, “Arguing for Peace: Giles Firmin on New England and Godly Unity,” in *Studies in Church History* 32 (1996), 251–261.

the colony continued to descend into chaos and dissension in matters of religion.²⁰⁸ Wheelwright and the members of the Free Grace party espoused “grosser errors,” according to Hubbard. The rivalry and heated discontent necessitated a joint effort on the part of the ministers and the civil powers to “suppress and scatter” the Antinomians.²⁰⁹ It was determined, by both sides, that the elections to be held in May could determine the outcome of the entire controversy. The anti-Bostonian faction, headed by Winthrop, organized in advance of the May 1637 election, which nearly led to physical violence in the aftermath of the results.²¹⁰ Henry Vane, before the vote, attempted to read the Boston petition presented at the March session of the General Court and discuss the court’s handling of Wheelwright’s case. Winthrop argued that the elections must occur first. A contentious debate ensued over the appropriateness of reading the petition before the election. Eventually, Deputy Governor Winthrop moved for the election, despite the refusal of Vane and the Bostonian party to proceed with the vote. The majority of those present favored handling the election first before discussing the petition. Vane’s party still refused to move forward, “whereupon the deputy told him, that, if he would not go to election, he and the rest of that side would proceed.”²¹¹ Vane relented but suffered a rout in the vote. Not only did Vane lose his seat as governor, but neither he nor any of his party garnered enough votes to sit on the board of assistants.

The recall on Vane was an indictment of his authority and handling of the entire controversy. Indeed, a letter written shortly after the election, evinced the growing animosity towards Vane, as well as the sensibility of the colonists when it came to conformity and religious dissent. The letter stated that Vane’s actions threatened the

²⁰⁸ *GH*, 296.

²⁰⁹ *GH*, 297.

²¹⁰ *HM*, 76.

²¹¹ *WJ*, 1:215.

entire welfare of New England. His failure to squelch doctrinal defection fueled the burning tensions that scorched the colony. “Divisions are always dangerous,” the letter read, “never safe, never more dangerous than in a new settled government. I am persuaded [Vane] hath kindled those sparks among us, which many ages will not be able to extinguish.”²¹² With the anti-Bostonian party in control of the government, they moved swiftly to try and wrangle the colony back into conformity and to quench the inferno of religious disunity.

Wheelwright and the Boston church, however, did not dissipate or dissolve in the face of the election losses. Indeed, in the days that followed the election, each side began publishing its propaganda with the General Court attempting to justify its actions and the Boston congregation seeking to discredit the court as biased and superseding its jurisdictional boundaries.²¹³ Despite this, John Cotton and Thomas Shepherd elucidated the issues in a pair of sermons that, as Winthrop recorded, made the differences between the two parties appear miniscule: “Indeed, it seemed so small, as (if men’s affections had not been formerly alienated when the differences were formerly stated as fundamental) they might easily have come to reconciliation.”²¹⁴ Yet, at this May session of the court, the deputies, magistrates, along with Wheelwright, magnified the differences. Wheelwright stated that if the court believed him guilty of sedition, he should be put to death; if, moreover, the court proceeded with that course of action, he intended to appeal his case to the king. The court informed Wheelwright of their resolve to defer judgment, yet again, in the hopes that a now scheduled synod in August would provide reconciliation between all the parties.²¹⁵ Winthrop concluded that while the court now

²¹² *HM*, 64–65.

²¹³ *WJ*, 1:216. The works published at this time were Winthrop’s *Short Story* and the text of the Boston church’s petition that they originally presented to the court in March.

²¹⁴ *WJ*, 217.

²¹⁵ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 128.

had enough power to have “crushed” Wheelwright, Vane, and their allies, the court opted for “moderation” out of a desire to see the parties broker peace at the August synod.²¹⁶

That peace was never to come. Indeed, another act made by the court at its May session further enraged the Boston congregation. The court prescribed a penalty on any inhabitant of Massachusetts who might harbor anyone deemed dangerous to the commonwealth.²¹⁷ By dangerous, the court meant anyone sympathetic to the Antinomian party.²¹⁸ This law also included an anti-immigrant provision, designed to keep other potential dissenters out of the Bay Colony.²¹⁹ Thomas Shepherd indirectly preached in favor of the court’s actions; he described that a planned influx of immigrants sympathetic to Vane and Wheelwright tended to horrific “mischief,” and indicted the entire scheme as hatched by cruel, subtle enemies that he compared to Pharaoh in the Old Testament.²²⁰ The level of outrage against the order apparently necessitated a lengthy response from Winthrop, who wrote two tracts defending the colony’s actions. Winthrop’s argument provided further clarity on civility of conformity and how the crucible of the Antinomian Controversy exerted influence on the ideological developments connected to the intersection between church and state.

Winthrop rooted the existence of any government in the consent of the people, including the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Neither king, prelate, nor magistrate wielded an arbitrary power over the people. All political power originated in the will of the people.²²¹

²¹⁶ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 128.

²¹⁷ *WJ*, 219.

²¹⁸ *HM*, 62.

²¹⁹ *RGC*, 1:196; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 129

²²⁰ Thomas Shepherd, *The Parable of the ten virgins opened & applied being the substance of divers sermons on Matth. 25, 1–13* (London: F. Hayes, 1660). Though printed in 1660, the letter to the reader indicated that many of the sermons were preached during the free grace controversy, spanning June 1636–1640.

²²¹ *WP*, 3:422–423.

As such, Winthrop reasoned, “no man hath right to come into us etc. without our consent.”²²² Massachusetts, as a distinct community bound by covenantal obligations to God and to one another, had a vested interest in maintaining the solidarity of its culture, society, and religion, which necessitated certain policies that delimited the influx of undesirables.²²³ The intent of the law yielded insight into civility of conformity. As a political idea, civility of conformity prized unity around a common, socially prescribed orthodoxy—an orthodoxy both in religious doctrines and social mores. Without unity in the deepest things, namely, the things of God and the cultural commitments of the organized community, the society would eventually crumble under the unsustainable weight of pluralism. Pluralism in doctrine and in culture corroded the pillars that upheld a particular social order. Citizenship, as Winthrop reasoned, was contingent upon an outward assent to religious structures and social customs. Winthrop wrote that the anti-immigrant law intended to restrict the existence, or at least, reach of pluralism: “If we conceive and finde by sadd experience that [Wheelwright’s] opinions are such . . . may we not provide for our peace, by keeping off such as would strengthen him and infect others with such dangerous tenets?”²²⁴ He also rhetorically queried that if an opinion was found to cause division, was it not a sin to “receive more of those opinions?”²²⁵ The colony had done this before, Winthrop argued, in the case of Roger Williams. Williams presented a similar threat that the colony now faced; rather than tolerate plurality, the colony, for the sake of its civility, needed to suppress divergence.²²⁶

In September 1637, the ministers of the colony convened a theological synod

²²² *WP*, 3:423.

²²³ *WP*, 3:423.

²²⁴ *WP*, 3:425.

²²⁵ *WP*, 3:425.

²²⁶ *WP*, 3:425.

to provide doctrinal clarity, distinguishing heresy from orthodoxy. By this point, as Ziff noted, John Cotton began to see the error of the Antinomian cause and the need to bring stability back to the colony.²²⁷ A total of eighty “erroneous opinions,” according to Winthrop, met a near unanimous condemnation as doctrines of heresy and blasphemy that endangered the colony as a whole. The synod, furthermore, provided the General Court a roadmap for further procedures against the Antinomian party. Indeed, as of September 1637, the General Court had yet to sentence Wheelwright and had not taken any actions against the ringleader of the entire cause, Anne Hutchinson. Armed with the synod’s theological consensus, the magistrates, led by John Winthrop, saw a clear path forward to finally rid the colony of theological disunity and preserve the colony’s civil and religious order.²²⁸

The November Court

Between the September synod and the November General Court, Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and the Free Grace party continued to spread their teachings. At the November session, the court proceeded by dealing with the leaders who signed the Boston petition first, followed by Wheelwright. The proceedings ended with the questioning and condemnation of Anne Hutchinson. In the court documents, John Coggeshall, a deputy who signed the petition, faced censure for both defending Wheelwright and declaring that Wheelwright was persecuted for his conscience.²²⁹ Others who signed the petition faced a similar fate, and Wheelwright himself, already condemned by the March General Court, now met his sentence. For disturbing the civil peace, the court banished him, giving him fourteen days to arrange his affairs.²³⁰

²²⁷ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 131.

²²⁸ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 134.

²²⁹ *RGC*, 1:205.

²³⁰ *RGC*, 1:207.

Hutchinson's trial presented the court with peculiar challenges. Hutchinson was theologically savvy and was able to answer the questions posed by the General Court. The magistrates also had the same problem that the ministers faced in October 1636 when they tried to have Cotton bring her up for heresy charges: the court could produce no witnesses.²³¹ If they could take any actions against her, then she must espouse something upon which the court could hang a case of blasphemy or sedition. They found their opening when she declared she received special revelations from the Holy Spirit. As a consequence, the court banished her.²³²

In the aftermath, the court documents indicated how the General Court interpreted the entire affair, passing a new set of laws designed to prevent division in the future. Wheelwright, the court decreed, seduced the people of New England, and set the colony on the same path that led to the Münster rebellion in 1534. Had the civil leaders not intervened, the calamities that befell that German city would certainly have repeated themselves in Massachusetts. Given the threat the court perceived in Wheelwright and Hutchinson, they ordered that all those condemned must hand over their munitions and any weapons.²³³ Finally, in a final act, the court decreed that from thenceforth, anyone who spoke ill of the civil authorities faced fine, imprisonment, or potentially banishment, depending upon the severity of the crime.²³⁴ Winthrop's record of the court in November added more about the concept of civility, and the piercing questions over how much pluralism a community could sustain before it erupted. He wrote that "two so opposite parties could not contain in the same body, without apparent hazard of ruin to the

²³¹ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 66.

²³² *RGC*, 1:207; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 135–140.

²³³ *RGC*, 1:211.

²³⁴ *RGC*, 1:213.

whole.”²³⁵ Apparently, for Winthrop, the answer to “how much pluralism” was a negligible amount.

The expulsion of Hutchinson, Wheelwright, and some of their followers, according to Winthrop, offended many within the Boston church. Weimer documented the General Court’s contextual predicament: the magistrates understood that their actions against the Antinomians could be perceived as mirroring the ecclesial courts of Old England that condemned and persecuted puritans. “The Boston Court,” Weimer wrote, “trod a fine line between cleansing the colony of Antinomian impurity and slipping into the persecuting role their detractors had assigned them.”²³⁶ The church demanded information on the banishment of its members—a banishment they thought unlawful and that robbed the church of its jurisdiction in matters of spiritual discipline. In an attempt to assuage the ascending hostility, and to bring closure to the controversy, Winthrop addressed the congregation. In his address, Winthrop reasserted the distinct jurisdictions of the church and civil authority. Though Christ’s kingship ruled over both, they functioned separately in the dispensing of their authority. On the specific question, however, as to why the civil authority banished individuals over theological divergences, Winthrop’s answer placed doctrinal divergences under the court’s jurisdiction as a matter of the common good. He stated, “Those brethren . . . were so divided from the rest of the country in their judgment and practice, as it could not stand with the public peace, that they should continue amongst us. So, by the example of Lot in Abraham’s family, and after Hagar and Ishmael, he saw they must be sent away.”²³⁷ In order to fulfill its covenantal mandate, Winthrop articulated the limits of Massachusetts’s toleration—civility rested on the foundation of uniformity and the strength or weakness of that

²³⁵ *WJ*, 1:239.

²³⁶ Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 66.

²³⁷ *WJ*, 1:257

foundation determined the stability of the entire community. In answering the question of how to balance unity with plurality, Winthrop believed such a balance untenable. Uniformity was tantamount to political viability and to covenant faithfulness.

A number of historical contingencies swirled around the Antinomian Controversy. What might have happened if Wheelwright never preached that Fast Day sermon? What if Henry Vane prevailed over Winthrop in the May 1637 election? Indeed, that latter observation may have set Massachusetts on an entirely different course towards an embrace of measured religious toleration. Yet, Wheelwright did call for holy war; Winthrop and his party won the election, and as a result, entrenched an expansive concept of civility of conformity that far surpassed the ideas originally set forth in the *Model*.²³⁸ Winthrop and his allies, bound by their covenantal understanding of the Massachusetts endeavor, saw in the Antinomian Controversy the fragility of their city on a hill. Yet, in the summer of 1637 as the heat of the controversy multiplied, another group of migrants made their way into Boston. Led by a man named Samuel Gorton, this small band of radical religious dissenters set the stage for Massachusetts's next major conflict that tested civility of conformity.

The Samuel Gorton Affair

Little is known about Samuel Gorton's life prior to his arrival to New England in 1637. Gorton, however, came to New England for the same reason many Puritans had before him: he wanted liberty from the Church of England. Gorton was no Puritan; he held a mystic spirituality that prefigured theological developments asserted by Quakerism in the 1650s.²³⁹ Immediately after arriving, he and his family left for Plymouth. He laid

²³⁸ Winship, *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson*, 5. The point here is not to suggest that Winthrop and his party violated the law. The *Model* was never officially adopted; yet, as has been pointed out, it did serve as a roadmap for early Massachusetts and the formation of its other legal codes like the *Abstract* and eventually the *Body of Liberties*.

²³⁹ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 195–197; Robert Emmet Wall, Jr., *Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), chapter four; Philp F.

the onus of his swift departure on the Antinomian Controversy, writing that Massachusetts's civil authorities wanted to enforce outward conformity to its socially prescribed orthodoxy through fines, imprisonment, banishments, and the loss of liberty.²⁴⁰

Gorton's stay in Plymouth lasted less than two years. He began holding, as Turner noted, religious services and drew a following of Plymouth's residents that included a minister's wife. He also publicly condemned Plymouth's religious separatism as not radical enough, levying similar accusations against the colony that Williams did in 1633. The magistrates publicly whipped Gorton and then banished him from the colony in 1639.²⁴¹ From there, Gorton joined the Providence Plantations, making his way to Portsmouth. Yet again, Gorton and his followers were booted out of the jurisdiction.²⁴² The same pattern emerged in Providence, though Gorton arrived at a time of contention over land disputes and theological disagreements about baptism, the Sacraments, and ecclesiology.²⁴³ The divisiveness in Providence, as Wall argued, provided Gorton an opportunity to gain a larger following; in short order, Gorton led a majority faction with Providence from 1640 to 1641.²⁴⁴ Gorton's spiritualist theology, no doubt, attracted those in Providence who rejected the religious order of Massachusetts. As his theological works bore out, and as Turner observed, Gorton held to a radical equality amongst men and women that also destabilized the social hierarchies of British society. At the heart of

Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), chapter ten; John Donoghue, *Fire under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), chapter twelve, Michelle Burnham, "Samuel Gorton's Leveller Aesthetics and the Economics of Colonial Dissent," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67 (July 2010): 433–458.

²⁴⁰ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 122; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 195; *SD*, 2–3.

²⁴¹ *HU*, 67 – 68; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 122.

²⁴² Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197.

²⁴³ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 123.

²⁴⁴ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 123–124.

this equalizing theology was his insistence on the inward divinity of all humanity. Thus, Gorton ridiculed ecclesial institutions, rejected the Sacraments, and called magistrates “Just Asses.”²⁴⁵

On November 17, 1641, Gorton’s grip on Providence led thirteen men to appeal to Massachusetts for aid.²⁴⁶ The petitioners asked for the General Court to intervene, because Gorton and his followers upended the social order, and, according to the signatories, promoted anarchy in Providence.²⁴⁷ The General Court refused, but left the door open for their aid if the petitioners agreed to submit themselves and their property to the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, thereby expanding the colony’s borders. In September 1642, four Providence settlers accepted the General Courts’ demands; William Arnold, Robert Coal, William Carpenter, and Benedict Arnold, residents of Pawtuxit, annexed themselves to Massachusetts in exchange for the General Court to act against Samuel Gorton.²⁴⁸ Winthrop recorded that the General Court assented for two reasons: first, they wanted to protect the petitioners from violence. Secondly, however, the court viewed this as an opportunity to expand its borders and dispel from New England the “offensive” antics of the Gortonists.²⁴⁹ The following month, the General Court issued a warrant addressed to the Gortonists. It informed Gorton and his followers that the Massachusetts General Court took under its care the lands and livelihoods of the four Providence petitioners, and that the court saw fit to settle the dispute through legal recourse. The letter summoned Gorton to appear before the court to present his case and warned him that if he pursued further disruptive acts, the court would respond in kind.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ *HU*, 54; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197.

²⁴⁶ *CRIHS*, 2:191–193.

²⁴⁷ *CRIHS*, 2:191.

²⁴⁸ *GH*, 344; *WJ*, 2:81; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 124–125.

²⁴⁹ *WJ*, 2:81.

²⁵⁰ *CRIHS*, 2:53.

The Gortonists, however, decided to leave Providence in the fall of 1642, especially after they received word of Massachusetts's involvement.²⁵¹ In November, however, before leaving Providence, Gorton responded to the September warrant, refusing to give answer to the General Court. Indeed, as Robert Wall emphasized, Gorton's main argument in this November letter was that Massachusetts acted beyond its jurisdiction. Regardless of what the four petitioners assented to in September, they did not represent all of Providence; Massachusetts possessed no claim to exercise its authority in a jurisdiction where the majority of its residents did not want to live under the auspices the Bay Colony.²⁵² In addition to the property dispute, however, Gorton also took the opportunity to ridicule the colony's civil government and its religious order. He called their colony a land of hypocrites because of the colony's insistence on established religious order.²⁵³ Their actions against religious dissenters, he reasoned, made them akin to Pontius Pilate, who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁴ Gorton, furthermore, espoused Christological doctrines that the Massachusetts Bay Colony viewed as heretical and blasphemous.²⁵⁵ He also ridiculed, as he had done in Plymouth, the Sacraments, denied the need for ministers, and lambasted magisterial authority in matters of religion.²⁵⁶

The Gortonists removed themselves to a place south of Providence, outside the boundaries of the Providence Plantations and, most importantly, the Massachusetts General Court. Gorton purchased the land, known as the Shawomet, from a Narragansett

²⁵¹ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 126.

²⁵² Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 127.

²⁵³ *SD*, 1.

²⁵⁴ *SD*, 18.

²⁵⁵ *SD*, 18; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197.

²⁵⁶ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197.

sachem named Miantonomi in January.²⁵⁷ One other sachem, however, laid claim to Shawomet. Pumham technically was the chief of the lands Gorton purchased from Miantonomi; but Miantonomi contended that he ruled as head chief of the Narragansetts, with Pumham serving him as a subchief.²⁵⁸ Pumham thought himself cheated out of his lands, but reluctantly signed the bill of sale as a witness.²⁵⁹ Yet, Turner and Wall described how Benedict Arnold, one of the four Providence petitioners to the Massachusetts General Court, remained undeterred in seeing Samuel Gorton arrested by the Bay Colony. Arnold entreated Pumham to travel with him to Boston where, in the spring of 1643, the Narragansett chief informed the General Court that Gorton stole his land through an unlawful purchase.²⁶⁰

The General Court sent letters to Gorton and Miantonomi, demanding their appearance at the General Court's June session. The chief appeared in Boston to provide testimony about the sale of the Shawomet to Gorton. Through his testimony, along with statements from Arnold, Pumham, and another Native American chief named Cutshamekin, it was determined that Miantonomi had in fact proceeded with the sale of land unlawfully. While Miantonomi enjoyed a status as a powerful chief, Pumham still had sovereignty over his lands—a sovereignty violated by Miantonomi and, subsequently, Gorton.²⁶¹ Samuel Gorton, furthermore, refused to appear before the General Court, instead sending, according to Winthrop, letters resembling the November 1642 response. He lambasted Massachusetts's government and churches and indicated

²⁵⁷ *CRIHS*, 2:253–254; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 128.

²⁵⁸ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 128.

²⁵⁹ *CRIHS*, 254.

²⁶⁰ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 197; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 128–129.

²⁶¹ *WJ*, 2:123.

that neither he nor his followers had any plans to surrender their land. They would resist to the point of death, if necessary.²⁶²

Over the next several months, the General Court moved to officially bring the Shawomet property under its jurisdiction. To do this, they conferred with Pumham, offering him protection as a subject of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, if he converted to Christianity and submitted to the colony's authority. Pumham assented, and on June 22, 1643, became a subject of the colony. This now placed the Shawomet lands, at least by the General Court's estimation, well within their boundaries and could, therefore, lawfully prosecute Samuel Gorton.²⁶³

In September, the court sent another letter to Gorton, asking him to appear before the General Court. The warrant informed Gorton that the Shawomet lands now fell under Massachusetts's realm, and that Pumham issued complaints against the Gortonists who illegally possessed his property. Gorton, as expected, refused.²⁶⁴ One of Gorton's followers penned an official response to the General Court—it was, as Wall described, “the most insulting and outrageous correspondence ever received by the magistrates of the Massachusetts Bay.”²⁶⁵ The letter, dated September 15, 1643, described Massachusetts's court as “a mere device of man, according to the ancient custom and sleights of Satan.”²⁶⁶ The Bay Colony's authority derived from the “kingdom of darkness and of the devil,” marked by a delight in taking wisdom from Satan.²⁶⁷ In fact, the letter refuted governmental authority altogether, stating that Massachusetts's laws arose from

²⁶² *WJ*, 2:123.

²⁶³ *RGC*, 2:40.

²⁶⁴ *RGC*, 2:41; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 130–131.

²⁶⁵ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 131.

²⁶⁶ *CRIHS*, 2:261.

²⁶⁷ *CRIHS*, 2:262.

“diviners and necromancers.”²⁶⁸ The churches of the colony, moreover, practiced magic when it performed the Lord’s Supper, arguing that the ministers, or “magicians,” “turned the juice of a poor, silly grape, that perisheth in the use of it, into the blood of our Lord Jesus.”²⁶⁹ It also indicted the General Court for the death of Anne Hutchinson, who was killed in an a Native American raid the previous month. The court had blood on its hands for her death because Massachusetts cast her out, and only for religious differences.²⁷⁰ The letter warned the General Court that “if you put forth your hands to us as countrymen, ours are in readiness for you . . . if your sword be drawn, ours is girt upon our thigh—if you present a gun, make haste to give the first fire, for we are come to put fire upon the earth; and it is our desire to have it speedily kindled.”²⁷¹ The Gortonist reply insulted Massachusetts’s civil government, ridiculed their churches, espoused heretical doctrines, and openly challenged the court’s authority and will.

After receiving this response, the General Court, according to Wall, understood that it dealt with a dangerous problem that moved beyond a mere property dispute to a religious and political threat. The Gortonists were a stain on the entire land of New England, and it was up to God’s Plantation to deal with them accordingly.²⁷² By the end of September 1643, the General Court dispatched Captain George Cook along with a militia of forty soldiers to arrest Gorton and his followers at the Shawomet. They were to forcibly bring them to Boston to answer for their crimes against the colony, which not only included contempt of court, but also a host of theological maladies and errors that the Bay Colony sought to squelch.²⁷³ In October, the militia successfully apprehended

²⁶⁸ *CRIHS*, 2:266.

²⁶⁹ *CRIHS*, 2:268.

²⁷⁰ *CRIHS*, 2:270–271.

²⁷¹ *CRIHS*, 2:263

²⁷² Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 133.

²⁷³ *WJ*, 2:140.

Gorton and eight of his followers at Shawomet, presenting them to the General Court on October 13.²⁷⁴

On October 17, the case against Gorton began, with John Cotton preaching the court sermon. He preached on Acts 19 about the riot in Ephesus instigated by the silversmith Demetrius. After he concluded, the court permitted Gorton to speak, who compared the silver shrines in Cotton's text to "all our ordinances, ministers, sacraments, etc." These, Gorton argued, came as the inventions of men who perverted the purity of Christ's church. Gorton also espoused unorthodox Christology, arguing that Jesus was incarnate in Adam, and, furthermore, discredited the magistracy and all forms of government as institutions of slavery.²⁷⁵ With Gorton's sermon, along with the September 1643 and November 1642 letters, the General Court had plenty of evidence to charge the Gortonists with blasphemy—their Christology, ecclesiology, and political theology were deemed heretical, seditious, and worthy of condemnation.²⁷⁶ Indeed, the General Court considered Gorton's theology the most offensive and dangerous component of the threat he posed to New England.²⁷⁷ The colony's civility demanded action against any and all blasphemy. The General Court condemned them as heretics and blasphemers of Christian doctrine and, subsequently, dangerous to the civil order.²⁷⁸

The General Court, however, waited on passing sentence, instead spending the next several weeks conducting theological conferences with the Gortonists. As in the previous cases against Williams and the Antinomians, the General Court exhausted a number of measures before passing any sentence. John Cotton attempted to reason with

²⁷⁴ *WJ*, 2:143

²⁷⁵ *WJ*, 2:145.

²⁷⁶ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 134.

²⁷⁷ *WJ*, 2:146.

²⁷⁸ *RGC*, 2:51.

the captives about their doctrines. Winthrop also recorded the multiple attempts to bring Gorton and his followers into conformity, “but all was in vain. . . . They would acknowledge no error or fault in their writings.”²⁷⁹ When the time came to sentence Gorton, all but three of the magistrates voted to have him executed; the majority of the deputies voted against execution, which saved Gorton’s neck from the hangman’s noose.²⁸⁰ Instead, the General Court ordered the Gortonists to enforced labor, splitting them up amongst the various towns in the colony in order to keep them from congregating with one another. The court, furthermore, ordered that if the Gortonists began airing their heresies again, or caused any civil disruption, they would be executed.²⁸¹

From 1643 to 1644, the Gortonists conducted their forced labor, but they did not cease from sharing their views and attempting to draw others into what the colony deemed heretical. In fact, letters sent to John Winthrop in February and April indicated that one of Gorton’s followers continued to speak against the colony and its churches, causing trouble in the town of Salem. One of the letters declared, “I feare the lord is offended for sparing the lives of Gorton and his Companions, for if they all be as buisye as this at Salem, there will be much evill seed sowne in the Country.”²⁸² John Endecott confirmed the spread of Gorton’s heresies in Salem, telling Winthrop that it caused “great grieffe vnto vs that heresie doeth spread which at length may proue dangerous.”²⁸³ While ample evidence existed that the Gortonists violated the terms of their sentencing and could be executed, Wall noted the difficult political situation Winthrop faced in the

²⁷⁹ *WJ*, 2:148; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 136–141.

²⁸⁰ *WJ*, 2:149; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 139.

²⁸¹ *WJ*, 2:149; *RGC*, 2:52.

²⁸² *WP*, 4:439.

²⁸³ *WP*, 4:456.

spring of 1644. Various disputes emerged between the magistrates and the deputies. The latter party had accused the magistrates, and by extension, Winthrop, of usurping the powers granted to the deputies and the entire General Court. Winthrop, according to Wall, understood that even if he tried to carry out the executions, the deputies would probably vote him down, which made him politically vulnerable as the May elections approached.²⁸⁴ Thus, instead of carrying out executions, Winthrop ordered the Gortonists to banishment under pain of death.²⁸⁵ Winthrop, furthermore, informed Gorton that the banishment from Massachusetts included the lands of the Shawomet, which the Bay Colony considered as part of its jurisdiction. If, as Winthrop warned, they made an attempt to try and settle there again, they did so “upon peril of your lives.”²⁸⁶

Gorton’s confrontation with the Massachusetts Bay Colony continued into the late 1640s—indeed, in 1646, Gorton and two of his followers hired a ship to take them to London in order to press their case before the Commission for Foreign Plantations.²⁸⁷ The continuation of this story will begin chapter five, but at this point, the colony’s actions against Gorton continued to reveal their commitment to civility of conformity. When the Gortonists espoused heterodoxy, the General Court seemingly dropped its concern about the land issues and the wronged Native American. Gorton scrutinized the name of Christ, the glory of his church, and the godliness of Massachusetts. The General Court could not abide those opinions, and once Gorton and his followers expressed their views, the case against them shifted from a purely secular matter to a weighty theological calamity.

Conclusion

Massachusetts prized conformity as the center of its civility. They tethered

²⁸⁴ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 144–145.

²⁸⁵ *RGC*, 2:57.

²⁸⁶ *CRIHS*, 2:152.

²⁸⁷ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 147.

their reasons for this ideal to fundamentally theological purposes. The Bay Colony was a model, a refuge, and emerged under the auspices of a gracious, covenantal God who expected much from his people in the American wilderness. Concern to preserve the purity of its churches, to promulgate the gospel, and to stabilize its community all undergirded the unwavering, if at times, complex commitment to civility of conformity. Presented here is not a story of bigoted zealots whose hatred for difference fueled an insatiable hunger for militant religion. Their inflexibility towards deviance was coupled with an elasticity to draw more into its number. These examples demonstrated the difficulties inherent in conformity as a political philosophy, even in a society that seemed unanimously united around a common religion and worldview. Still, as they struggled through the various trials of their first two decades, the colony and its leaders entrenched conformity as the staple of its civility.

Yet, in their struggle to create a godly society marked by a unified church, the colony's actions against dissenters from 1635 to 1644, as Haefeli asserted, inadvertently "opened the door to pluralism."²⁸⁸ Indeed, the banishment of Roger Williams, the Antinomians, and Gorton, may have evinced the colony's theological conviction to rid from its borders doctrinal dissent. In their efforts, however, the General Court provided an avenue for a competing political and theological tradition to emerge south of its border. When the General Court banished Roger Williams in 1635, he fled south, and planted what became known as the Providence Plantations. It was there that a novel society appeared, framed around the idea of evangelical civility—a community open to religious dissenters and the establishment of religious liberty. As such, a contest of civility arose out of the efforts of the General Court's banished heretics, who began building their own colony in New England.

²⁸⁸ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 8.

CHAPTER 3

“A SHELTER FOR PERSONS DISTRESSED OF CONSCIENCE”: EVANGELICAL CIVILITY IN THE PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, 1636–1643

Decades after his flight from Massachusetts in 1635, Roger Williams recounted his settlement in the fields between the “Mooshassick and Wanasquatucket” rivers. Forced out of Massachusetts because of his religious beliefs, he, along with his wife and a few other families, planted themselves in the Narragansett Bay and founded the town of Providence. Williams reminisced, “And having in a sense of God’s mercifull providence unto me in my distresse, called the place Providence, I desired it might be a shelter for persons distressed of conscience.”¹ Thus, Roger Williams and his followers erected a colonial endeavor at odds with the prevailing political theology of the day, and, to the utter disdain of the colony’s neighbors. Indeed, a minister in New Netherland, a Dutch colony that practiced measured religious toleration, despised Rhode Island as a den for the “riff-raff” and the “sewer of New-England.”² John Winthrop, moreover, frequently commented on the affairs of the Providence Plantations, viewing the settlements as disordered and breeding grounds for all manner of heresy. He called it “no State, but a few fugitives living without law or government.”³ Despite the ire directed at Williams and the Providence Plantations, he did indeed contribute to the formation of a

¹ *RRI*, 1:22.

² Joannes Megapolensis, “Revs. J. Megapolensis and S. Drisius to the Classis of Amsterdam,” in *Ecclesiastical Records, State of New York*, vol. 1, ed. Edward Tanjore Corwin (New York: James B. Lyon, 1901), 400. For a history of religious toleration in New Netherland, see Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

³ *WJ*, 2:140.

society that guaranteed complete religious liberty. This marked the beginnings of evangelical civility. It was a mutual commitment between citizens to protect and defend the practice and promotion of one's deepest religious convictions in the public square.

While Williams and his followers suffered the ridicule of their despisers in the 1600s, they posthumously enjoyed the acclamations of historians and political scientists who praised their pioneering work. Martha Nussbaum wrote that Williams and the Providence Plantations inaugurated a tradition of respect and peaceable coexistence.⁴ She argued, furthermore, that the early Rhode Islanders believed that the “only” threat to their peace came if churches breached the wall of separation between the secular and the sacred.⁵ James Calvin Davis lauded Williams as the founder of a community dedicated to the tolerance of diversity and the nourishment of a respectful, courteous society.⁶ Teresa Bejan, similarly, claimed that Williams's leadership in Rhode Island departed from the “endemic instability” of his surrounding world and created a place for the liberation of “men's tongues”—a jurisdiction predicated upon “mere civility.”⁷ John Clarke, one of the original settlers of Portsmouth, and the eventual author of Rhode Island's 1663 charter, seemed to confirm what contemporary revivers observed about the character and quality of this colony dedicated to those distressed of conscience. He labeled Rhode Island a stable community, where justice and civility flourished notwithstanding the differences of religion in the colony.⁸

⁴ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 36.

⁵ Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience*, 60.

⁶ James Calvin Davis, “A Return to Civility: Roger Williams and Public Discourse in America,” *Journal of Church and State* 43, no 4 (Autumn 2001): 692.

⁷ Teresa Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Tolerations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 52.

⁸ *DHRI*, 2:18.

The story, however, of religious freedom's rise in Rhode Island was far more complex. Clarke, moreover, wrote his assessment of Rhode Island's civility in a polemical work during the 1650s, which primarily targeted the antics of Massachusetts's policies towards religious dissenters. Thus, Clarke attempted to make the point that despite the welcoming posture towards religious pluralism, the colony of outcasts prospered and enjoyed social cohesion. That, however, seemed far from the realities on the ground. In fact, the story of evangelical civility in the early Providence Plantations evinced a historical pattern about freedom of conscience: religious liberty was, and remains, a difficult political principle to uphold.

Indeed, the records of the Providence Plantations testified to the inward instability of Rhode Island, and its settlers connected the political chaos to the doctrine of religious liberty. William Arnold, one of the original settlers in Rhode Island, declared that liberty of conscience invited "all the scume" to come and live, which wrought a "heavy burthen upon the land."⁹ The colony's longtime friend, benefactor, and the former governor of Massachusetts Henry Vane, lamented the state of affairs in the Providence Plantations, complaining about the news of their discordances that caused numerous altercations and prevented the carrying out of justice. Vane accused the colonists of departing from the love of Christ and the fear of God, which ought to have provided a restraint on licentious liberty.¹⁰ The colony, in a letter responding to Vane's critique, admitted that the "sweete cup" of liberty inadvertently eroded communal obligations between the members of the colony; their liberty caused a hyper-individualism that made life together strenuous.¹¹

⁹ *RRI*, 1:234.

¹⁰ *RRI*, 1:285.

¹¹ *RRI*, 1:288.

The troubles that besieged the Providence Plantations were perceptively noticed by Nathaniel Ward—a minister in Massachusetts, author of the *Body of Liberties*, and an ardent opponent of religious freedom. He believed that religious liberty bequeathed confusion, “thralldomes,” and fissures to the extent that the Devil himself stayed away from the litany of crises that emerged in early Rhode Island. He doubted how a place that secured liberty for all religions could simultaneously guarantee justice, harmony, and any notion of peace or stability.¹² Even Isaac Backus, a proponent of religious liberty in the early American republic, questioned in his history of New England how the Providence Plantations, without “any such state under the gospel,” could survive.¹³ Unlike Ward, Backus contended for the viability of religious liberty; nevertheless, he at least raised the question that Ward, Winthrop, Cotton, and even Williams achingly contemplated: just how much pluralism could the Providence Plantations weather before rupturing?

Thus, attempts to label Rhode Island as a bastion for mutual respect, toleration, and an alternative to the widespread instability of other jurisdictions governed by enforced orthodoxy failed to consider the practical outworking that liberty seemed to engender. Roger Williams attempted to create a society governed by soul liberty a decade before he wrote his famous works on soul liberty. From 1636 to 1642, the Providence Plantations endured enormous instability, infighting, and religious turmoil, even as it promoted evangelical civility. As Theodore Bozeman stated, “Rhode Island suffered the throes which commonly accompany basic social and political innovation.”¹⁴ Bruce

¹² Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggavvam in America* (London, 1647), 21.

¹³ Isaac Backus, *A History of New-England: With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists* (Boston: Edward Draper, 1777), 1:97.

¹⁴ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1972): 45.

Daniels, moreover, contended that the Providence Plantations erupted in controversies over “every possible issue.”¹⁵

The causes for Rhode Island’s numerous crises were multifaceted. Daniels rightly argued that land disputes, creating governments in the American wilderness, and the lack of an aristocratic class, naturally created an environment of friction and schism.¹⁶ In addition to these conditions was religion, which also proved to thwart efforts at unity and social cohesion. Though each of the settlements that made up the Providence Plantations prized liberty of conscience, the dearth of ecclesial structures and religious foundations exerted pressure on the shape of Rhode Island’s culture and society. Indeed, the influx of seekers, and the inability of the earliest settlers to establish a viable church and sustained congregation, helped explain the controversies and fissures the settlements faced in its first decades. Rhode Island and its various towns lacked, in essence, a civil religion. John Wilsey defined civil religion as “a set of practices, symbols and beliefs distinct from traditional religion, yet providing a universal values paradigm around which the citizenry can unite.” According to Wilsey, therefore, civil religion provided the connective tissues necessary for social stability and cohesion that an established religious orthodoxy typically supplied.¹⁷ Peter Gardella also contended that civil religion furnished communities with mores and mutually agreed upon ideals that knit a religiously diverse people together.¹⁸ For the settlers of the Providence Plantations, nothing consequential enough existed to unite the colonists together; no common mission or vision filled the

¹⁵ Bruce Colin Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay: The Colonial Rhode Island Town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 3. See also his article “Dissent and Disorder: The Radical Impulse and Early Government in the Founding of Rhode Island, *Journal of Church and State* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 357–378.

¹⁶ Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity*, 22.

¹⁷ John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 20–21.

¹⁸ Peter Gardell, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

void usually occupied by an established religious orthodoxy. Where Massachusetts subsumed a distinctly theological identity, the Providence Plantations had a vacuum, and the absence of a religious ballast nourished constant conflict. Even under the liberating principles of evangelical civility, freedom for the sake of freedom proved too little a unifying force for the colonists of the Providence Plantations.

Daniels surmised that the lack of order arose from the lackadaisical attitude towards civil solidity amongst the colony's leaders. In other words, figures like Williams failed to exhibit any sustained commitment towards "order and harmony" for the colony, which perpetuated civil chaos.¹⁹ Daniels, however, falsely charged Williams with ambivalence towards the issues of societal order. On the contrary, Williams attempted to develop a cogent social framework fastened to a foundation of ordered liberty. Indeed, Williams believed that true order, peace, and societal flourishing sprang from the guarantees of soul freedom. The lack of order, therefore, had less to do with its emphasis in the minds of Rhode Island's leaders and more to do with the absence of a shared communal identity. Despite the clamor and unrest, each of the settlements in the Providence Plantations disestablished themselves from any religious orthodoxy and guaranteed for its citizenry religious liberty. Providence, Portsmouth and Newport all detached political participation from providing proof of an inward spiritual experience, and Providence, notably, expanded enfranchisement to women, with two women signing the 1640 compact.²⁰ Thus, the Providence Plantations enacted a novel political community organized around scandalous political principles that departed from the theological axioms of the early modern period. Traversing the affairs of the Plantation from its inception to its 1644 Parliamentary charter explained how a colony of outcasts

¹⁹ Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity*, 22.

²⁰ *RRI*, 1:28.

sowed the first fruits of evangelical civility in colonial New England, and how evangelical civility posed its own set of challenges.

Discourses of Banishment: January–August 1636

Prior to the official formation of Providence in August 1636, Roger Williams spent the first months of his exile carving out his survival. Winters in colonial New England were life-threatening in the best of circumstances; Williams now found himself forced to flee into the freezing wilderness, enduring a chill that he said he remembered throughout his life.²¹ Williams, moreover, indicated that his forced winter escape meant that he had to leave behind his wife and children in Salem until he found someplace suitable and safe before they joined him.²² From January to April 1636, Williams sought refuge amongst Native Americans that he had befriended since his arrival to Boston in 1631.²³ During those three months, Williams recounted the loss of his livestock and harvest, his lack of provision, that he knew not what “Bread or Bed did meane.”²⁴ While, trying to survive, he also reflected on the previous four years in New England. He thought about the events leading to his banishment and questioned the treatment he received at the hands of the Massachusetts ministers and civil authorities. As he endured the 1636 winter, Williams began a correspondence with one of the leading figures in Massachusetts who Williams believed spearheaded the campaign against him, namely, John Cotton.

At some point between January and April, Williams wrote a now lost letter to Cotton that apparently critiqued the exploits of the Massachusetts Bay Colony—the

²¹ *CRW*, 2:610; John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul* (New York: Viking, 2012), 213.

²² *CRW*, 2:610.

²³ *CRW*, 2:610; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 214–215.

²⁴ *CRW*, 2:611.

General Court's actions against Williams bespoke a colony afoul of God's will and design, both in ecclesiology and in its treatment of a religious dissenter. While Williams's original letter did not survive, Cotton's response did. Williams's arguments and accusations against Cotton and the Bay Colony can be deduced from what Cotton wrote in response to this banished, seditious heretic.²⁵

Cotton began his letter with a denial: he claimed he had no part in Williams's banishment. That decision rested upon the authority of the magistrates, not the ministers of the colony. Despite this, Cotton declared his approval, writing, "I dare not deny the sentence passed to be righteous in the eyes of God."²⁶ Massachusetts banished Williams, as Cotton confirmed, because of his heretical theology that infected both the ecclesial and civil spheres of the colony's society.²⁷ Thus, Cotton asserted that dissenting theological beliefs, if left unchecked, endangered not only the churches, but portended the decay of the corporeal community and government. In fact, as Adrian Weimer contended, Cotton endeavored to justify the actions of the Bay Colony against Williams's claim that he suffered unjust persecution. The image of Massachusetts as a hostile, violent jurisdiction of persecution not only depreciated the colony's image but cast it in the historical lineage of the church's persecutors throughout ecclesiastical history.²⁸ Instead, as Cotton surmised, Massachusetts had not persecuted Williams as a suffering saint of the gospel, but exacted godly justice against a seditious blasphemer.

The link between unorthodoxy and civil unrest remained a central fixture in Cotton's political theology and in the entire scheme of civility of conformity. Indeed, it

²⁵ Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 90–92.

²⁶ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons*, 1.

²⁷ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons*, 2.

²⁸ Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press), 51–53.

provided much of the justification for civil action against what seemed a matter of human conscience. Often, historians, and even Williams, portrayed civility of conformity as the unjustified “coercion of conscience by government.”²⁹ This assertion, however, created a false dichotomy between the advocates of liberty and the stalwarts for conformity. Nobody, not even the most ardent magisterial Protestants, believed that any human or man-made institution possessed jurisdiction over the conscience. The conscience belonged to God and God alone. Misrepresenting the magisterial position runs the risk of both egregiously simplifying a complex, well-developed political theology and falsely caricaturing the conflict between conformists and dissenters as simply a matter between the conscience’s oppressors and liberators.³⁰

Cotton’s letter also distilled Massachusetts’s ecclesiology, indicating that Williams raised critiques of the Bay Colony’s church order. Hugh Spurgin noted the tight connection between political theology and ecclesiology in the early modern toleration debates.³¹ Williams believed that Massachusetts’s churches inculcated hypocrisy more than true piety. The interconnectedness between church membership and political participation, he asserted, created outward pressure for people to assent to the colony’s orthodoxy rather than encouraging heartfelt, volitional devotion to Christian truth.³² Cotton responded that while some members of the Massachusetts churches abided a “hidden hypocrisie,” this secret abnormality was not as widespread as Williams described, nor did the potential for hypocritical church members undermine the overall

²⁹ Daniels, “Dissent and Disorder,” 359.

³⁰ Cotton’s understanding of the conscience, and the tradition he inhabited, will be fully examined in the next chapter. The interplay between the conscience and the public square was a significant point of contention in the contest of civility and must be rightly understood in order to grasp how conformists pursued theological cohesion between doctrines like the freedom of the Christian and justification by faith alone with coerced orthodoxy.

³¹ Hugh Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), x.

³² Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism*, 47.

verity of Massachusetts's ecclesiology.³³ Cotton, furthermore, declared, "Better to be hypocrites than prophane persons. Hypocrites give God part of his due, the outward man, but the prophane person giveth God neither outward nor inward man."³⁴ This line of discourse regarding hypocrisy and the honor due God's name redounded in the contest between Williams and Cotton in the next decade. For Williams, a burgeoning soteriological concern, coupled with what he understood as a faulty ecclesiology, undergirded his summons for evangelical civility.³⁵ Cotton also carried those same burdens, believing that established religion procured a healthy ecclesial structure and nourished an environment of salvific security—all of which was threatened, he believed, by unfettered heresy, unopposed and unrestrained by the civil magistrates.

Williams's winter letter seemed to have chided the ambiguous relationship Massachusetts's churches still held with the Church of England. He queried how the churches of Massachusetts claimed an inherent purity when they still maintained fellowship with a disordered ecclesiastical system.³⁶ By maintaining a connection with an unclean and corrupt church, Massachusetts Congregationalism, similarly, was anathema—their congregations remained yoked to an antichristian institution.

If the churches of Massachusetts were indeed corrupt, then the colony's government had no place in demanding conformity of its citizens to falsely constituted churches mired in doctrinal and ecclesial corruption. The theological implications over a dispute in the doctrine of the church spilled into the political sphere with profound consequences.³⁷ In response, Cotton denied the need to disqualify applications for church

³³ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons*, 4.

³⁴ *HP*, 2:132.

³⁵ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 16.

³⁶ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 91.

³⁷ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. Cottons*, 8–10.

membership upon an individual's refusal to vouchsafe her attachments to the Church of England.³⁸ He pointed to the Gentile churches of Judea in the book of Acts that admitted Jewish Christians into membership, despite their continued and zealous observance of Old Testament law. The Apostle Paul, moreover, commanded the church at Rome to admit those "weake in the faith" into their membership. For Cotton, the litmus test was not whether a person remained connected to the Church of England but whether that person could, upon due examination, provide evidence of her regeneration.³⁹ Cotton, furthermore, accused Williams of a radical separatism, which summarily led to his banishment. While he agreed with Williams about the Church of England's failings, Cotton reminded him that some of the souls coming to New England had not yet recognized those errors and should not suffer an undo crisis of conscience.⁴⁰

Cotton's response to Williams foreshadowed their literary exchange in the 1640s. Yet, for Williams in the winter of 1636, the letters between himself and Cotton framed his experience in exile. While he languished as a banished outcast in the harshest months of New England's calendar, he thought of his banishment and the political theology required to expunge religious dissent from the confines of a civil jurisdiction. For Williams, a pressing question surfaced in his dialogue with Cotton that bore tremendous influence on his thinking about issues of conscience and the place of dissent in the commonweal. He struggled to grasp why Massachusetts banished him—on what grounds did the civil authorities deprive him of his liberty and remove him from their confines? How could his spiritual beliefs endanger the society? What jurisdiction did the civil state possess over his own individual conscience? Williams asked these prescient questions in the winter of 1636. What he saw in Massachusetts, as reflected in Cotton's

³⁸ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. Cottons*, 5.

³⁹ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. Cottons*, 5.

⁴⁰ Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. Cottons*, 11; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 93.

reply, was a dysfunctional ecclesiology erroneously tethered to the civil state.

Ideas originate from people shaped by their experiences and manifest in their character and disposition. For Williams, his famed writings on religious freedom in the 1640s and 50s flowed from the formative crucible of his banishment, which foisted upon him a life he never intended or imagined. As LaFantasie wrote, “Roger Williams’s banishment from Massachusetts Bay and the founding of Providence change[d] his life in many ways that he had not anticipated.”⁴¹ Indeed, Williams’s reflections on his banishment not only populated his subsequent writings but informed the type of society he tried to establish in Providence in at least three ways. First, Williams seemed convinced that Massachusetts’s civil government had no place in intervening over his spiritual beliefs. What he espoused between 1631 to 1635, he thought, in no way threatened the civil society. Secondly, Williams clarified the nascent separatism in his theology, which not only led him to question the validity of churches altogether, but to view the state establishment of religion as utterly opposed to the teachings of Christ. Established religion curtailed true religious devotion, piety, and thereby rendered to God a false, hollow worship.⁴² Finally, Williams’s letters to and from Cotton signified his concern about coercing the conscience: conformity created hypocrites and failed to secure the proper conditions for authentic faith. The experience of banishment further nudged him towards the idea of liberty and the harmful effects civility of conformity exacted on both individual members of the community as well as the entire society.

As New England began to thaw in the spring months, Williams was joined by some of his followers from Salem, including his family.⁴³ The growing convictions he had about religious establishment and liberty of conscience, which came out in the winter

⁴¹ LaFantasie, editorial note in *CRW*, 1:57.

⁴² W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 48–49.

⁴³ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 220–221.

exchange with Cotton, had added significance. No longer a mere member of a community or an abstract theorist, Williams had to govern and lead. The people leaving the Bay Colony to dwell with him in Providence looked to him for direction and guidance.⁴⁴ Though it was a modest community, Providence enacted the idea of religious liberty and, to a small degree, began to secularize the civil sphere. As he led this novel society in New England, he did so thinking of his banishment. This experience and the formation of his commitment to liberty conscience framed his activities and pursuits and provided the ideological formation of Providence at its founding in August 1636.

“The Devil Was Not Idle”: Liberty’s First Trial in the Town of Providence, 1636–1637

Williams’s abrupt departure in the winter of 1636 made the founding of Providence an unplanned affair with the earliest settlers concerned only with survival. They had no charter from King Charles I, nor would they for almost a decade. These precarious circumstances resulted in the keeping of scant records. As Sydney James described, nobody planned what eventually became the Rhode Island colony, and nobody exuded certainty about the colony’s future until Williams secured the first charter in 1644.⁴⁵ Yet, what the colonists did record, along with Williams’s letters, revealed a simple community life with a bare structure of governance. What they included in these documents—and what they omitted—demonstrated a peculiar society that began to take form in New England. Indeed, in almost every way, Rhode Island’s formation differed from that of Massachusetts: the Massachusetts Bay Company conceived of a Puritan settlement in New England for several years in the late 1620s, whereas Roger Williams and the few who followed him made a rushed decision to flee from the Bay Colony. The

⁴⁴ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 221.

⁴⁵ Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 1.

Massachusetts colonists enjoyed structure and political leadership, which was lacking in the Providence Plantations.⁴⁶ Yet, despite their differences, Massachusetts's colonists and the settlers in Rhode Island were religious outcasts, both seeking refuge and liberty.

Williams's family and some of his followers began arriving to this new tract of land Williams purchased from his Native American friends. This was less a political society and more a gathering of a few families. They did not appoint magistrates or judges. Instead, the heads of each of the families met every other week to consider the various needs for the town's inhabitants, settle any disputes, and protect the "common peace."⁴⁷ In August 1636, the town's leaders signed their first compact—a brief document that left any established religion and even the name of God unmentioned.⁴⁸ The compact outlined a covenantal agreement between the families and the heads of household, which served as the basis of their communal bonds. The migrants agreed for a mutual pursuit of the "public good" and dedicated the settlement to liberty of conscience.⁴⁹ The disestablishment of religion, along with the absence of God's name from the first governing document led historians and political theorists to label Providence and Williams's work as a secularizing endeavor. Timothy Hall concluded that Williams "was a father to the modern 'Secular City;'"⁵⁰ Roland Bainton suggested that Williams and his followers secured the "secularization of the State."⁵¹ James commented that the omission indicated that "nobody" thought religion or religious belief brought any

⁴⁶ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 45.

⁴⁷ *DHRI*, 1:32.

⁴⁸ *RRI*, 1:14

⁴⁹ *RRI*, 1:14; *DHRI*, 1:32.

⁵⁰ Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State: Roger Williams and Religious Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 82.

⁵¹ Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1951), 226.

advantage to their communities.⁵²

These assessments read too much into the first town compact, and wrongly, in James's case, asserted a hyper-secularity in the Providence Plantations. Indeed, later compacts reinserted God's name, and the settlements of Portsmouth and Newport explicitly framed their townships around God and God's law. Securing freedom of conscience, therefore, did not necessarily secularize the various towns of the Providence Plantations. Yet, an ambiguous commitment to the law of God while upholding religious liberty was remarkable and a distinct break from Massachusetts's efforts to build God's plantation in New England. From the onset, the settlers who began moving to the Providence Plantations understood that they wanted to create a society animated by liberty of conscience. They attempted to create a capacious civil framework that could encompass a large plurality of peoples under its canopy. As it turned out, however, they also created the conditions for conflict and disunity.

In May 1637, the families of Providence met its first challenge to its political order. The matter involved Joshua Verin, a rope maker and, presumably, religious seeker who moved to Providence along with his wife Jane as one of the first settlers in the community; they even purchased the tract of land adjacent to Williams. From the formation of Providence in August 1636, Joshua refused to attend any religious services or prayer meetings. These kind of informal gatherings at private residences were the extent of an established religious community in Providence. Williams, however, wrote that the initial dispute with Verin did not arise because of his refusal to attend religious services in the town. On the contrary, Providence afforded its citizens liberty of conscience, and this meant the liberty to refrain from attending religious services.⁵³ Yet, for some number of months, Joshua prevented another inhabitant of Providence from

⁵² James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 37.

⁵³ *CRW*, 1:156.

attending prayer meetings held at Williams's home.⁵⁴ What made this case difficult for Providence to navigate was the identity of Verin's victim: it was his wife, Jane Verin. Williams indicated that Joshua tried to restrain his wife on multiple occasions, finally resorting to "furious blowes" and "trodden her under foote tyrannically and brutishly."⁵⁵ Jane, according to Williams, pleaded her case at a town meeting, wherein a contentious debate ensued over the confines of liberty, evangelical civility, and, to a certain degree, how these principles applied not only to men but to women.⁵⁶ This was no minor incident in a small New England hamlet. Indeed, the episode drew enough attention that Winthrop recounted, "At Providence . . . the devil was not idle."⁵⁷ The details of the case caused significant conflict in Providence and explicated how the earliest colonists in this "livlie experiment" of religious liberty attempted to craft a civility at odds with the rest of New England.

Had the issue not involved Joshua's wife, the case against him seemed straightforward given the settlement's clear commitment to the precepts of evangelical civility. Indeed, evangelical civility in early Providence committed its citizens to a political community organized around liberty of conscience, proselytization, and the freedom to express the deepest religious convictions publicly. This was, at least, the hope. If Verin, breached this civility, then he thrust the entire community into chaos for violating its fundamental political philosophy. The settlement, for the sake of ideological coherence, had no other recourse than to prosecute the assailment against its civility. The fact, however, that it involved his wife complicated the matter.

⁵⁴ *CRW*, 1:156.

⁵⁵ *CRW*, 1:156.

⁵⁶ For a survey of the legal ramifications of the Verin affair, see Edward J. Eberle, "Rhode Island Interest: Another of Roger Williams's Gifts: Women's Right to Liberty of Conscience: *Joshua Verin v. Providence Plantation*," *Roger Williams University Law Review* 9, no 2 (2004): 399–407.

⁵⁷ *WJ*, 1:286.

William Arnold, one of the colony's original settlers and the great-great-grandfather of the turncoat Benedict Arnold, defended Joshua during the dispute. Though himself committed to liberty of conscience, Arnold believed that the settlement's civility had no jurisdiction in the private affairs between a husband and wife. The family, according to Arnold, represented a God-ordained institution with the husband as head of the household. To take civil action against Joshua placed the claims of the individual conscience above the created order God established in the martial relationship. Arnold declared, "Did you pretend to leave the Massachusetts because you would not offend God to please men, and would you now break an ordinance and commandment of God to please women?"⁵⁸ Arnold, furthermore, believed that by wielding the mechanisms of the civil state against Joshua, Providence breached its compact regarding liberty of conscience because Joshua "acted out of the dictates of his own conscience."⁵⁹

Despite Arnold's arguments, the town decided in favor of Jane, indicting Joshua for his actions. As the town record declared, Verin breached the town's covenantal agreement regarding "libertie of conscience." The lack of magistrates and a significant legal code only meant that the town disenfranchised Verin—in short, he lost his voting rights as the head of his household and would not be permitted to secure more property within the settlement's jurisdiction.⁶⁰

The Verin affair marked the first civil action taken in the colony's existence against one of its citizens; and it pertained, no less, than on an issue of soul liberty. It also raised crucial questions about religious liberty, its limits, and the civility that took shape in early colonial Rhode Island. Evangelical civility rested upon a mutual commitment between citizens to protect each other's freedom to believe and publicly express their

⁵⁸ *GH*, 337.

⁵⁹ *GH*, 338.

⁶⁰ *RRI*, 1:16.

deepest convictions. The public aspect of this was vital for the settlement's civility and for Williams's political theology in the subsequent decades. Chris Seiple commented that freedom "did not mean privatized belief, but something the public square had to welcome with great civility."⁶¹ Liberty was not liberty if the culture of the public square, through fear of retribution, dissuaded participation in one's beliefs or the proclamation of those principles. Indeed, as Bozeman observed, this was Williams's chief contention for the rest of his career—that not only did soul freedom provide the conditions for a stable society, it "alone" was the foundation for "lasting civil peace."⁶²

Yet, the pursuit of liberty of conscience as the means to creating a flourishing encountered friction in the case of John Verin. Indeed, two competing claims of liberty arose in this affair, with Jane contending for her liberty to attend religious services while her husband sought to order his home as he deemed fit. Both Arnold and Williams rooted their arguments in the concept of liberty of conscience as well as the created order. For Arnold, God endowed Joshua with the moral and spiritual headship of his family and had the liberty to lead his family according to the dictates of his own conscience. For the civil authorities to act against Verin usurped God's design in both the family and for the conscience. Williams, however, along with the majority of Providence, viewed the freedom of conscience as primary and ontologically *a priori* even before the family and a husband's headship over his wife.

Providence's actions seemed a radical application of liberty of conscience, and their conclusion in this case did not go unnoticed. Indeed, Nathaniel Ward, the prominent minister of Ipswich Massachusetts and author of the colony's *Body of Liberties*, queried how religious pluralism could inculcate justice and civil peace. The idea of liberty

⁶¹ Chris Seiple, "The Essence of Exceptionalism: Roger Williams and the Birth of Religious Freedom in America," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2012): 692.

⁶² Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order," 62.

conscience, by his estimation, only engendered controversy rather than ensuring unity.⁶³ His contention against pluralism captured the sentiment of Providence's detractors. The Verin affair confirmed for the proponents of religious conformity that disestablishment disintegrated the foundations necessary for a stable and flourishing society. As Bozeman rightly suggested, Providence's "chronic instability" flowed from the lack of the "enduring habit of tradition."⁶⁴ By tradition, he meant the prevailing axiom of religious establishment and societally enforced doctrinal conformity. Conformity provided the foundation of civil order.⁶⁵ Thus, the rejection of established orthodoxy, a dearth of political leadership, and an inadequate civil religion left the settlement in a precarious situation that invited the kind of societal fracture that occurred in the Verin affair. The only idea the colonists seemed to unite around was freedom of conscience. Yet, as Daniels rightly argued, that commitment, in and of itself, proved deficient to inculcate the qualities of *communitas* necessary for societal success.⁶⁶ Providence, and the settlements that began to arise around it, moreover, continually supplied their detractors with ample ammunition to levy a full broadside against the idea of evangelical civility and its pledge to soul freedom. Hubbard concluded in the wake of the Verin controversy that "things grew still worse and worse by the increase of their number."⁶⁷ In other words, the vacuum created by the lack of religious establishment led to a burgeoning pluralism in the Providence Plantations, which made the settlements ripe for further disunion and chaos.

⁶³ Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggavvam in America*, (London, 1647), 21.

⁶⁴ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order," 45.

⁶⁵ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order," 53.

⁶⁶ Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity*, 17.

⁶⁷ *GH*, 338.

The Struggles of Freedom in Portsmouth and Newport

March 1638 marked the formation of Portsmouth on Aquidneck Island, south of Williams's settlement at Providence. The inhabitants of Portsmouth fled from Massachusetts in the aftermath of the Antinomian Controversy. Some of them, however, did not leave of their own accord but found themselves banished by the General Court. Anne Hutchinson, her family, and her followers joined William Coddington and others on the expedition to found Portsmouth.⁶⁸ Coddington once served as a magistrate in Massachusetts but left on account of the proceedings against Wheelwright and Hutchinson. Given his experience in government and personal wealth as a merchant, he naturally assumed a mantle of leadership in the community.⁶⁹ In 1640, he recounted in a letter to Winthrop the circumstances of his departure from Massachusetts, speaking of the hardship it was on himself, his wife and children, and prayed that Winthrop never experienced the trials they faced in their flight. Coddington asserted that he left for the peace not only of Massachusetts, but for all of New England—a place he described as a “citty set of a hill” by the will of God. He prayed for the “good of both plantations,” and that a mutual love might bind the various settlements in New England together for the sake of the “Christian world.”⁷⁰

They first made their way to Providence and enlisted the aid of Roger Williams for the suitable location of a settlement, which culminated in purchasing the lands of the Aquidneck Island.⁷¹ Once there, the colonists came together in a compact similar to that of Providence. It differed, however, by specifically mentioning the name of God and God's law as the central pillars of the community: “We . . . covenant to yield all due

⁶⁸ William B. Weedon, *Early Rhode Island: A Social History of the People* (New York: The Grafton Press, 1910), 45–52.

⁶⁹ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 25.

⁷⁰ *DHRI*, 2:169.

⁷¹ *DHRI*, 2:17, 24–26.

honour unto him according to the lawes of God, and so far as in us lyes to maintain the honour and privileges of this place which shall hereafter be ratified according unto God, the Lord helping us to do so.”⁷²

Thus, the Providence Plantations did not secularize society.⁷³ On the contrary, Coddington, sworn in as the first “judge” of the settlement, took an oath to maintain the law of God” in Portsmouth, wherein he also invoked the name of God to help the community thrive.⁷⁴ At its town meeting in February 1639, Portsmouth rededicated itself to pattern its laws according to God and summoned its leaders to adjudicate matters on the basis of the Bible.⁷⁵ Remarkable as the towns of the Providence Plantations were in allowing liberty of conscience, communities like Portsmouth still placed God at the center of their political lives. The settlers agreed to their compact as in the presence of “Jehovah,” and subordinated their lives and livelihoods to the service of one another and to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Their society viewed the Bible as the sourcebook for perfect, prescriptive laws that ought to animate their legal code and system of justice. In fact, when Coddington took the title of “judge,” it harkened the type of leadership exhibited by the righteous Judges in the Old Testament.⁷⁶

Yet, the General Court also described the qualifications of freemen, which were far less restrictive than the Massachusetts model. Enfranchisement only required the consent of the town’s inhabitants along with the willful submission of the applicant to the government. Thus, Portsmouth mandated no spiritual qualification for membership and

⁷² *RRI*, 1:52.

⁷³ Weeden, *Early Rhode Island*, 53. See Sydney James’s argument in *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*, where he argued that “nobody defended . . . the use of religion to benefit human society,” on page 37.

⁷⁴ *RRI*, 1:52.

⁷⁵ *RRI*, 1:63; Weeden, *Early Rhode Island*, 53.

⁷⁶ *DHRI*, 2:19; Weeden, *Early Rhode Island*, 53.

frequently redoubled its commitment to “Libertie of Conscience.”⁷⁷ Portsmouth, therefore, founded a passive religious establishment. The town granted freedom of conscience, yet still sought to unify its people around a common, though uncoerced, religious identity. That effort, however, struggled. The ambiguous religious uniformity created a superficial unity. While they enabled the free expression of diverse religious views and beliefs, they tried to unite that plurality around an undefined religious order. This predicated a contest between various factions that vied for political authority, with each party coming to different answers about the following questions: What were the laws of God? What parts of the Bible ought and ought not to frame the civil laws? Who determined which biblical precepts to apply?

Winthrop described how competing theologies from Hutchinson’s party and the arrival of Baptists, for example, created constant quarrels amongst the inhabitants. Antinomianism, spiritualists doctrines like new revelations given by the Holy Spirit, as James documented, proliferated in Portsmouth. James, furthermore, argued that this religious diversity served as the root of the civil discord experienced in early Portsmouth.⁷⁸ Hubbard also noted the difficulty established churches had at establishing a viable, long-term congregation. Incessant doctrinal disputes frequently split already miniscule religious communities which continued, according to Hubbard, well into the 1640s.⁷⁹ Thomas Lechford wrote that despite the nearly 200 families living on Aquidneck Island, the “Anabaptist” sensibilities of its inhabitants curtailed the establishment of any successful church or ministry.⁸⁰ Another individual, according to Winthrop, argued that women had no souls, and he also recorded that the myriad of religious groups “broached

⁷⁷ *DHRI*, 2:34; *RRI*, 1:118.

⁷⁸ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 26; *DHRI*, 2:47; *GH*, 343.

⁷⁹ *GH*, 343.

⁸⁰ *DHRI*, 2:85–86.

new heresies every year. Divers of them turned professed anabaptists . . . and maintained that there were no churches since those founded by the apostles and evangelists.”⁸¹ Winthrop observed, therefore, not only the spread of Anabaptist theology, but Seekerism. The Seekers believed that no true church existed since the days of the apostles—it was, as a result, a sin of the highest order to establish any church or congregation until Jesus returned.

These trends revealed both the theological culture of early Rhode Island along with the broader societal culture that took form in a community without any thriving, established church. While evangelical civility did not require the absence of physical churches and religious bodies, the lack of those communities was like a ship without ballast. Nothing weighty enough like a shared religious vision or culture stabilized their community, which explained the controversies and fissures that emerged in the late 1630s and early 1640s. Indeed, Chapin suggested that the religious factions which arose engaged in contentious disagreements between each other, creating a hostile civil environment. Each group loathed the thought of submitting to the “civil administration of a religious opponent,” especially when the laws of the settlement could, in theory, suppress a religious group politically at odds with whoever held the reins of civil authority.⁸² Their doctrinal divergences, permitted by the protection of religious liberty, encroached upon the public square with political consequences.

The propensity for controversy, moreover, seemed inevitable given the legal structure, the unclear religious commitment of Portsmouth, and especially the personalities that took up residence in Portsmouth. Though Coddington held much of the political power, Hutchinson, subsequently aided by the arrival of Samuel Gorton,

⁸¹ *DHRI*, 2:47; *WJ*, 2:39.

⁸² *DHRI*, 2:47.

pressured Coddington to release some of his authority by creating a board of elders.⁸³ Coddington understood the necessity of consolidating authority and power from his time as a magistrate in Massachusetts. Yet, Hutchinson asserted that Coddington's local governance rested on false assumptions and faulty theology. She and her followers began resisting his rule, trying to usurp his authority.⁸⁴ Chapin chronicled that while Hutchinson and her followers originally relegated themselves to religious affairs, they soon directed their attention to the political sphere. The laws and statutes of the town's compact caused angst amongst the Hutchinsonian party who thought that Coddington, "was not in sympathy" with their religious views. The laws, moreover, exuded a capacious ambiguity, as Chapin rightly asserted, that could easily lead to a situation where Coddington arbitrarily decreed Hutchinson's religious views as contrary to the law of God.⁸⁵ Hutchinson, therefore, pressed her agenda in the political arena, attempting to detach Coddington from the levers of authority in Portsmouth. Indeed, the political rivalry culminated while Coddington took a trip to Massachusetts in April 1639. In his absence, the other town leaders, led by Hutchinson, convened an assembly wherein they divested Coddington of his authority, and installed a new structure of leadership with Anne Hutchinson's husband as the chief political official. When Coddington returned, he and his followers only had two options: either stay in the town or remove themselves and settle elsewhere on the island. They opted for the latter, and founded the town of Newport.⁸⁶ The Hutchinsonian party created a new compact that removed any mention of the laws of God from its governing document, but subjected the town and its inhabitants

⁸³ *DHRI*, 2:47–48; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 26.

⁸⁴ *DHRI*, 2:51–52; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 26; Weeden, *Early Rhode Island*, 53.

⁸⁵ *DHRI*, 2:55.

⁸⁶ *DHRI*, 2:56; *RRI*, 1:81; Weeden, *Early Rhode Island*, 53.

to King Charles.⁸⁷ Winthrop, ever watchful of the turmoil south of his border, took note of the unrest in his journal and pinned the conflict on the religious plurality of Portsmouth.⁸⁸ He viewed these events as evidence of what happened when communities designed their laws to intentionally hamstring the magistrates from preserving theological and ecclesial peace.⁸⁹ As more settlements appeared in the Providence Plantations, Winthrop continued to comment on the turmoil the various towns experienced. Each time, Winthrop asserted that the source of their conflicts stemmed from the lack of religious uniformity.

The conflicts between Hutchinson and Coddington demonstrated the peculiar tensions within evangelical civility. Portsmouth attempted, on the one hand, to protect freedom of conscience, which nourished religious pluralism in this small community. On the other hand, the town laced its concord around a vague and passive conformity to the God and the laws of the Bible. Yet, even in this scheme, someone had to determine what was and what was not in accordance with the law of God—Hutchinson believed this gave Coddington an arbitrary, and thereby, dangerous authority.⁹⁰ Thus, even the assurance of conscientious liberty failed to provide enough social stability to prevent the political controversies that besieged Portsmouth in 1639. A dispute, emerging from religious fears and animosities, engendered a contest between warring theological factions.⁹¹ The division between the two towns diminished over the course of the year. By February 1640, Coddington successfully consolidated power between Portsmouth and Newport, and guaranteed annual elections for the officers to the General Court.⁹² Still, as

⁸⁷ *DHRI*, 2:58.

⁸⁸ *WJ*, 1:299.

⁸⁹ *DHRI*, 2:52.

⁹⁰ Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 53.

⁹¹ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 26.

⁹² *DHRI*, 2:68.

Chapin argued, the political separation between the settlements dealt primarily with religious disagreements, and those disputes precipitated in the early 1640s.⁹³ Churches continued in volatility, both in Portsmouth and the newly established community of Newport. Indeed, the first congregation in Newport dissolved shortly after its formation due to the divergences of opinion over fundamental theological issues, including hyper-Calvinism, and that God was the cause and author of sin.⁹⁴

These events continued to prove a constant reality of evangelical civility: liberty did not necessarily make good on its promise for peace and stability. In fact, quite the opposite seemed true on the Aquidneck Island. The liberty granted to individual consciences, and the legal rejection of established religion, provided the circumstances that led to the various conflicts and fissures in Portsmouth and Newport. Another factor, moreover, contributed to the turbulence in the Providence Plantations, namely, the people and leading figures involved. A colony made up of zealots and banished religious radicals like Williams and Hutchinson did not lend to the idea of a stable society. This was especially the case when Samuel Gorton made his way to Portsmouth in 1639.

Samuel Gorton and the Providence Plantations

Samuel Gorton caused problems wherever he went in New England. Even the freedom of conscience afforded religious dissenters in the Providence Plantations failed to mitigate any potential controversies between Gorton's religious and political beliefs and civil authorities. After his banishment from Plymouth, Samuel Gorton and his followers made their way to Portsmouth arriving during Hutchinson's takeover of the town from William Coddington. The Gortonists quickly met resistance to their presence on the Aquidneck Island. According to James, Gorton espoused his spiritualists beliefs

⁹³ *DHRI*, 2:84.

⁹⁴ *WJ*, 2:41.

and engaged in quarrels with William Coddington after he resettled in Newport. The disdain Coddington had towards Gorton pertained to his religious teachings as well as his seemingly anarchical views regarding civil government. The tension between Coddington and Gorton especially grew after one of Gorton's female followers beat an elderly female colonist because she trespassed on Gorton's property while seeking a lost cow.⁹⁵ Coddington, after regaining power of the entire island, had Gorton arrested, whipped, and then banished.⁹⁶ Gorton then made his way to Providence sometime in the winter of 1640–1641.

Religious strife and land disputes had caused division amongst the settlers of Providence by the time Gorton arrived.⁹⁷ Theologically, the colonists in Providence suffered the lack of religious cohesion which, as LaFantasie argued, caused their ecclesial controversies between 1639 to 1640.⁹⁸ In March 1639, Ezekiel Holliman, recently removed from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, established the first Baptist church in Providence, beginning with the baptism of Roger Williams, who then baptized Holliman along with about ten other Providence inhabitants.⁹⁹ Yet, the establishment of this church quickly dissolved when after a few months, Williams and several newly baptized congregants split from the Baptist congregation, arguing that only Apostles could administer true baptisms. Thus, all baptisms were false, which also meant that no one possessed authority to establish a church. Soon, as LaFantasie and Caldwell described, the entire community found itself in divisive quarrels over the Sacraments and the

⁹⁵ *HU*, 52–55; John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 197.

⁹⁶ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 30; Robert Emmet Wall, Jr., *Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 122; Backus, *A History of New-England*, 1:118–119; Edward Winslow, *The Danger of Tolerating Levellers in a Civill State* (London, 1649), 54–55.

⁹⁷ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 123.

⁹⁸ LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” in *CRW*, 1:210.

⁹⁹ *DHRI*, 1:94; LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” in *CRW*, 1:210.

legitimacy of churches altogether. LaFantasie rightly surmised that the lack of spiritual unity “left them groping for ecclesiastical doctrine that could provide a cohesive fellowship.”¹⁰⁰ That cohesiveness, however, did not exist in Providence.

Coupled with religious disunity were equally bitter land disputes throughout 1640. Providence had experienced copious growth since its founding—it now boasted a population of about 200.¹⁰¹ In response to its growth, the community reorganized its government into the “Combination,” which vested special authority in four arbitrators, who endeavored for the settlement’s “vnity and peace.”¹⁰² The agreement for the Combination nearly enjoyed unanimous consent from the Providence freemen—John Greene and Francis Weston, along with five other individuals, refused to join the Combination due to unresolved questions over land ownership.¹⁰³ Over the next several months, colonists continued to squabble about property issues, and the Combination seemed incapable of settling the burgeoning contention. Issues of unpenned livestock led to the loss of crops. “Brawling Continually in mr williams medow,” as one settler described it, was the reality of life in Providence.¹⁰⁴ Thus, by the time Gorton arrived in the winter of 1640–1641, the people of Providence were already at each other’s throats over religion and property.

Gorton inserted himself in the communal strife, taking sides in both the theological and land disputes. Hubbard and LaFantasie chronicled how Gorton began preaching his radical, spiritualist beliefs, which incited further division amongst an

¹⁰⁰ LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” in *CRW*, 1:210; Samuel L. Caldwell, *History of the First Baptist Church in Providence, 1639–1877* (Providence: 1877), 6–8 .

¹⁰¹ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 266.

¹⁰² *RRI*, 1:27; see also *DHRI*, 1:110–115 for more contextual analysis regarding the formation of the Combination.

¹⁰³ *DHRI*, 1:116.

¹⁰⁴ Quote from LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” in *CRW*, 211. See also Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 266–267.

already divided town. He taught against the lawfulness of magistrates and ridiculed the fledgling religious communities struggling to establish themselves.¹⁰⁵ He also took sides in the property issue, enjoining his growing number of followers in Providence to protest with John Greene and Francis Weston against the arbitrators of the Combination. After only a few months, Roger Williams wrote John Winthrop in March that Gorton conducted a successful campaign of “bewitching and bemadding” the town of Providence. According to Williams, Gorton not only roused the people against the Combination, but espoused direct revelations given by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁶ William Arnold echoed what Williams said of Gorton, writing in May 1641 that Gorton disqualified himself from citizenship in Providence—as Plymouth and Newport had done previously, Providence needed to banish the Gortonists.¹⁰⁷ Arnold also cited the weak and instable state of Providence in 1641, contending that the society and its civility could not sustain the boisterous, domineering antics of Gorton.¹⁰⁸ Arnold provided numerous reasons why civil authorities needed to act against Gorton and see to his expulsion from the town. He called Gorton a “turbulent person” whose followers slandered the Providence townspeople and their laws. Gorton and his band were “despising and scorning of our Civill State, as it were trampling it under foot.”¹⁰⁹

Arnold anticipated potential objections levied against his summons for Gorton’s banishment. The first potential complaint dealt with issues of conscience, wherein his answer provided insight into how the earliest leaders of Providence understood the limits of liberty and the boundaries of evangelical civility. Arnold

¹⁰⁵ *GH*, 33–34; LaFantasie, “Editorial Note,” in *CRW*, 211–212.

¹⁰⁶ *CRW*, 1:215.

¹⁰⁷ *DHRI*, 1:129.

¹⁰⁸ *DHRI*, 1:129.

¹⁰⁹ *DHRI*, 1:129–131.

responded to the charge of intolerance by contrasting his reasons for ridding Providence of Gorton to that of Plymouth. He argued that no inhabitant molested either Gorton or his followers on matters of religion; instead, Arnold laid the onus of the town's circumstances on Gorton's nefarious perfidy and intolerance towards other religious and political dispositions. He wrote, "They themselves and others of their followers, have rather been troublers and persecutors of the Saints of God that lived here."¹¹⁰ The Gortonists possessed, according to Arnold, an anarchical spirit, resembling "beasts in the shape of men to doe what they shall thinke fit in their own eyes."¹¹¹

For Arnold, therefore, liberty equated not with licentiousness nor an unlimited claim to one's conscientious freedom. Nor did evangelical civility exist without certain societal boundaries, even with its commitment to a liberated public square. The case of Gorton struck at the center of how the Providence Plantations attempted to navigate the tumultuous and, to an extent, uncharted waters of religious liberty. Did a commitment to liberty exclude the possibility of restraints to that freedom? Did the promise of liberty require certain prohibitions? If the answer to either of these questions was "yes," then who determined where those limits existed? Could a tenable ordered liberty exist alongside the malleable subjectivity of human reason, experience, or perceived divine revelations? By the fall of 1641, neither Williams nor Arnold were convinced that Providence's guarantee of liberty possessed the necessary restraints to keep men like Gorton from plunging the entire society into crushing depths of discord. Indeed, by November, Gorton's antics fueled a riot that nearly drew the warring factions in Providence into violence. Williams managed to intervene before anyone was seriously injured.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *DHRI*, 1:131.

¹¹¹ *DHRI*, 1:132.

¹¹² *DHRI*, 1:134; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 123; LaFantasie, "Editorial Note," in *CRW*, 1:214.

Conclusion

After the November riot, Gorton and his followers left Providence, resettled, and soon thereafter were arrested by Massachusetts authorities. Despite this forced departure, Gorton left an indelible mark on nearly every settlement in the Providence Plantations. Indeed, he, along with figures like Joshua Verin, Anne Hutchinson, and the personalities of men like Roger Williams and William Coddington all collided in these first few years of what became the Rhode Island colony. Their escapades tested the hopes and aspirations of liberty. Evangelical civility, which offered the potential of freedom of conscience and a liberated public square to espouse one's deepest convictions, endured enormous travails and trials. If Providence and the surrounding towns were to succeed, it would need a social and cultural framework around which the increasing population could cohere.

Despite the uncertainty of the Providence Plantations' success, the original settlers had, in fact, achieved something historically remarkable. A struggling strand of settlements enacted liberty of conscience, and, in the case of Providence, took legal action against one of its citizens for suppressing a woman's soul freedom. Liberty certainly included perils; but it promised a potential path towards a new civility in the early modern period. It also shaped the ideological and theological development of Roger Williams, who soon engaged in a contest of civility with John Cotton in the toleration debates of the 1640s. The experiences *both* men endured in colonial New England animated their arguments and polemics, exerting tremendous influence on the ideological history of religious freedom.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEST OF CIVILITY, PART ONE: WILLIAMS, COTTON AND THE TOLERATION DEBATE

Roger Williams crossed back across the Atlantic in 1643, making his way to London. He had come to secure an official charter for the Providence Plantations from the appropriate colonial authorities in London. Securing the political legitimacy of the settlements was vital. Without recognition from Parliament, Massachusetts and Plymouth could continue to lay claim to lands held by the Providence settlers and intervene in local affairs as the Massachusetts General Court had done in the Gorton case. Williams, however, had much more than Rhode Island's charter on his mind in 1643. Indeed, when he made the voyage, he brought with him correspondence between himself and John Cotton in the aftermath of his banishment in 1635—letters that distilled Cotton's views regarding liberty of conscience and civility of conformity. Williams was preparing to launch a sustained critique against his treatment at the hands of the Massachusetts General Court between 1631 to 1635.

What follows recounts the development of the contest of civility between Williams and Cotton, chronologically surveying the letters and books produced by these two men between 1643 to 1647. The first phase of their exchange, "making public what was private," examines Williams's initial publications when he arrived in London in 1643 to begin his work at securing Rhode Island's charter. During this time, he published an anthropological work on the Narragansett Native Americans, along with a critique of the Westminster Assembly, which convened in July 1643. Moreover, he also brought with him Cotton's letter written in the winter of 1636 to Williams, wherein Cotton justified Williams's expulsion from Massachusetts and defended the theological and

political verity of the colony's civility.¹ This letter was published and disseminated throughout London in 1643, prompting Williams to write *Mr. Cotton's Letter Printed, Examined and Answered*, circulated in 1644. This was not, however, the only private letter of Cotton made available to the English public. When Williams published *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, also in 1644, he inserted, before the main body of the book, a copy of John Murton's *A Hvmble Svypplication* along with John Cotton's refutation of Murton's thesis. Murton was an English Baptist who found himself imprisoned in the early 1620s because of his Baptist beliefs. He penned *A Most Hvmble Svypplication*, which advocated religious liberty. Sometime after Williams's banishment from Massachusetts, he sent Cotton a copy of Murton's tract, asking Cotton to provide a response to Murton's arguments, to which Cotton obliged.² Williams appended both Murton's *Svypplication* and Cotton's letter of reply at the beginning of the *Bloody Tenent*, using both texts as his starting point in what became, as John Coffey argued, the most important book on religious liberty in revolutionary England.³ Each of these works in this first phase of the debate between Williams and Cotton will be examined. They explained how their ideas emerged within longstanding theological traditions and provided the foundation upon which Williams and Cotton framed their divergent arguments about conformity and liberty.

The second phase probes the substantive positions in *The Bloody Tenent* and Cotton's *The Bloody Tenent, Washed*, published in 1647. It explicates the complex intellectual contours of their debate, which included theology, typology, and natural law

¹ Robert Louis Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 145.

² BTW, 1; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 145; James Calvin Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 17.

³ John Coffey, "The Toleration Controversy," in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 54.

theory. They left few stones unturned, proffering biblical support for their convictions and wielding the natural law as an evidentiary witness for either establishment or disestablishment. Their debate revealed two fundamental and interwoven threads that undergirded the superstructure of their positions: soteriology and the common good. Their experiences in New England, which solidified their beliefs, culminated in this contest of civility.

Making Public What Was Private

When Roger Williams arrived in London in the summer of 1643, he discovered an England quite unlike the one he left in 1630. The English Civil War began that previous fall when Charles I fled London and raised his standard at Oxford.⁴ Despite the tumult of the war, which lasted another nine years, Williams set to work. He had come to England to secure a charter for the Providence Plantations, officially recognizing the settlements of the Narragansett Bay as part of a British colony. To pave the way for his efforts, Williams published his *Key into the Language of America*, a work on the culture and language of the Native American tribes in New England. The *Key* provided Williams instant and favorable notoriety with officials in London who oversaw colonial patents and charters.⁵ While Williams intended the *Key* as a means to gain audiences with the political shareholders in his mission for Rhode Island's charter, the book also contained prescient content that helped explain Williams's disdain of religious establishment in his subsequent literature. He noticed of the Naragansset tribes, "They are remarkably free

⁴ John Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain, 1603–1714* (London: Routledge, 2014), 100. For a history of the English Civil Wars, see Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Penguin Books, 2009); David R. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). For the influx of ideas that emerged in the English Civil Wars, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1972).

⁵ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 11; Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 56.

and courteous, to invite all Strangers in. . . . I have acknowledged amongst them an heart sensible of kindnesses, and have reaped kindnesses again from many.”⁶ He also mentioned that he never witnessed the sins common amongst Europeans, namely drunkenness and a host of other vices.⁷ This struck Williams, who reflected on the virtue of their conduct despite the fact that these tribes “have not so much to restrain them (both in respect of knowledge of God and Lawes of men) as the *English* have.”⁸ Though the Native Americans did not possess the Bible nor the grace of biblical revelation, a natural law governed their society. In some cases, their conduct eclipsed the virtues of Christendom, even though the Natives, as Williams wrote, worshiped the devil.⁹ If established religious orthodoxy provided the surest pathway for a moral citizenry and stable society, how, then, did the Native American tribes flourish? Williams, at this point, left that question unanswered; but his observations prefigured something Williams argued in his later writings about public ethics. The example of the Native Americans, by Williams’s estimation, undermined a support of coerced religious establishment.¹⁰ If a natural law governed the hearts and minds of mankind, then conformity to a socially prescribed orthodoxy was unnecessary to inculcate a virtuous citizenry.¹¹

Williams also published his *Queries of Highest Consideration*, which questioned the political and theological legitimacy of the Westminster Assembly, which

⁶ Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America, or, An Help to the Language of the Natives in That Part of America Called New-England* (London, 1643), 8.

⁷ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 135.

⁸ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 135.

⁹ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 121.

¹⁰ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 11; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 50, 58.

¹¹ Ellis West, “Roger Williams on the Limits of Religious Liberty,” *The Annual Society of Christian Ethics* 8 (1988): 139–140.

began its proceedings shortly after Williams's arrived in London.¹² Unlike the *Key*, Williams published this tract anonymously due to its disputatious content, wherein he indicted the formation of the doctrinal assembly as ecclesiastical malpractice. If, Williams wondered, religion represented "*our first Care*," and that the Reformation of religion constituted the "*greatest Taske*," then why did a civil Parliament instigate such grave matters?¹³ Indeed, Williams began to suggest axiomatic pillars of his political theology that chided against the most fundamental assumptions of his day. The Parliament, Williams reasoned, derived all its power from the consent of the governed. Given that reality, if Parliament decided to intervene in religious matters, declaring an enforced orthodoxy, did this not then invert Jesus' own teachings regarding ecclesiology? Christ, as Williams argued, was head of his church and exerted an unmatched authority over his body.¹⁴ For Parliament to exact control over church doctrine meant that the people's government inextricably tethered itself to dominion over the church and exercised an authority not granted to it by Christ.¹⁵ This authority necessarily lent itself to "spirituall rape," or an ungodly, wicked constraining of the human conscience to worship in a manner contrary to the dictates of a person's faith and conviction.¹⁶ To Williams, the political theology of Parliament that justified the Westminster Assembly exuded a false typological connection between the nation of Israel and England. "Are you *Moses* or *Christ's Followers*? or do you expect," Williams queried, "the coming of the Son of God to set up the Christian *Israel*?"¹⁷

¹² Roger Williams, *Qveries of Highest Consideration* (London, 1643).

¹³ Williams, *Qveries*, Epistle Dedicatory, 3.

¹⁴ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 16.

¹⁵ Williams, *Qveries*, 2–3.

¹⁶ Williams, *Qveries*, 3; Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962), 80.

¹⁷ Williams, *Qveries*, 6.

This disordered ecclesiology also bore soteriological consequences. The unregenerate, Williams reasoned, possessed no ability at the reformation of religion; yet, enforced orthodoxy dictated unconverted participation in the orthodox economy of established religion.¹⁸ Not only did Williams view this as impossible, but he despaired for the souls of the unregenerate, lulled to sleep by their hypocritical and superficial religious commitments. In short, established religion sent people to hell.¹⁹

The soteriological concern, moreover, pervaded both sides in the contest of civility, even as far back as the pamphlet wars between John Calvin and Sebastian Castellio in the aftermath of Servetus's execution in October 1553. What Calvin and Castellio debated in 1554 carried on into the deliberations between Williams and Cotton. Both men copiously cited the contentious exchange between Calvin and Castellio, with the soteriological concerns, similarly, featuring prominently in their discourse.²⁰ John Calvin decried religious liberty as deleterious to salvation and the preservation of the pure faith of the gospel. Without enforced orthodoxy, heresy might run amuck, exposing "the lambs to slaughter" while sparing the wolves. Heretics, Calvin reasoned, drug their victims into the mire of their perverse and hellish doctrines, leading souls into eternal error.²¹ Conversely, Castellio began to lay the foundations for evangelical civility in his response to Calvin. Though Castellio made his hatred of heresy abundantly clear, the

¹⁸ Williams, *Queries*, 4.

¹⁹ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 16.

²⁰ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 18; David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 122; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 146–147. For a more expansive treatment of Calvin's political theology, see Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Matthew J. Tuininga, "The Latent Pluralism of Calvin's Political Theology," in *Political Theology* 19, no. 4 (2018): 300–313; Matthew J. Tuininga, "'Because of your hardness of heart': Calvin and the limits of law," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69, no. 3 (2016): 281–294. For a critique of Tuininga's thesis, see Simon P. Kennedy and Benjamin B. Saunders, "Characterizing the Two Kingdoms and Assessing Their Relevance Today," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 53, no. 1 (April 2018), 161–173.

²¹ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de Sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Servetie Hispani*, in *Concerning Heretics*, ed. and trans. Roland Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 276.

Bible, he asserted, provided the proper means of dispensing with unorthodoxy. His contention for conscientious freedom, therefore, did not eclipse the fundamental convictions of his own worldview and religion.²² A commitment to soul freedom was not mutually exclusive of publicly proclaiming and contending for comprehensive truth claims. Indeed, rather than execute or banish the dissenter, which did nothing for their soul, Christians must “win them by true religion and justice.”²³ In his *Qveries*, Williams placed the matter of salvation at the forefront of his thought when he scandalously concluded that even Catholics warranted conscientious freedom. How else, Williams posited, might Catholics, and all idolaters for that matter, convert to the true gospel if all the Protestant nations of the world adopted a political maxim like England, which banished or executed all theological dissenters?²⁴

Williams, therefore, had a much more pervasive agenda when he came to England in 1643. Not only did he plan to attain the charter for his project in evangelical civility in New England, but he also made the ideological and theological case for it in the multitude of works he published between 1643 to 1644. Part of that endeavor included making public a private correspondence between he and Cotton shortly after

²² Perez Zagorin offered a different interpretation of Castellio, depicting him as not only a proponent of religious freedom in the civil realm, but even within the church. Castellio, therefore, did not view heresy as an objective reality. See Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to The West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), especially chapter 4, “The First Champion of Religious Toleration: Sebastian Castellio,” pages 93–144.

²³ Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics: Whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated*, ed. and trans. Roland Bainton (New York, Columbia University Press, 1935), 132.

²⁴ Williams, *Qveries*, 8; Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75–76. For the soteriological importance in the early toleration and liberty debates, see Nicholas P. Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment: Dissenting Protestants and the Separation of Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joel Coker, “Isaac Backus and John Leland: Baptist Contributions to Religious Liberty in the Founding Era,” in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*, ed. by Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Smith, *The Rise and Decline of American Religious Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 37; Lee Canipe, “‘That Most Damnable Heresie’: John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Baptist ideas of freedom,” *Baptist Quarterly* 40, no. 7 (July 2004): 396, 399. See also, Teresa Bejan, “‘When the Word of the Lord Runs Freely’: Roger Williams and Evangelical Toleration,” in *The Lively Experiment: Religious Toleration in America from Roger Williams to the Present*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 68.

Williams's banishment in 1635, which included the letter Cotton sent to Williams that justified the General Court's actions against him. Once that letter went public, Williams took advantage of his time in London to finally air out his grievances not only against his banishment, but the entire edifice of civility of conformity.²⁵

Reviving the Discourses from Banishment

Though Williams denied his role in the publication of Cotton's private letter, he nevertheless rejoiced in the providence of God that led to the letter's publication while Williams was in London.²⁶ Williams's response questioned the legitimacy and sustainability of any political philosophy that willingly banished faithful, uninjurious citizens who differed in points of doctrine and conscience. How could an apparently godly society deny such people "the common aire to breath in, and a civill cohabitation upon the same common earth?"²⁷ Cotton, in his original letter, argued that the grounds for Williams's banishment came from his civil disturbances and that he was not, in fact, persecuted for sake of conscience. Williams, according to Cotton, bore the responsibility for the consequences of his own actions.²⁸ Williams, however, heard in this response the "language of the Dragon in the lambs lip."²⁹ He linked Cotton to the long line of the church's persecutors who claimed that the obstinate and schismatic nature of Christians explained why they fell under the lash of civil action: "*Gods children*," Williams opined,

²⁵ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 17.

²⁶ Williams, "Letter to the Reader," in *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered* (London, 1644); Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 11; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 145.

²⁷ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 1.

²⁸ John Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons*, 1–2; Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 58; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 11; Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 217.

²⁹ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 5.

“are charged by their enemies to be the authors of their own persecution.”³⁰ Thus, he laid the onus of his banishment and persecution back on Cotton, and that while the magistrates instigated and carried out the civil action against dissenters, Cotton had blood on his hands for his advocacy of the magistrates’ actions.³¹

Williams, furthermore, framed the discussion of his banishment around Massachusetts’s commitment to civility of conformity. The union between the commonweal and the church, Williams surmised, made the colony’s civility tumultuous, dangerous, and inhospitable.³² Cotton contended that Williams’s doctrinal assertions portended the usurpation of the colony’s peace and tranquility—still, the truth of that assessment, according to Williams, hinged on the link between church and state in the Bay Colony.³³ Remove that link, and the charge against Williams dissipated.³⁴ Thus, Williams argued that God ordained the magistrate and civil laws to preserve the peace of the commonweal and nourish its order; he also appointed a “spirituall Government and Governours in matters pertaining to his worship and the consciences of men.”³⁵ God established an unalterable distinction between the two governments and the only threat to civil peace came when people blurred the lines between the two, bringing “all the world into Combustion.”³⁶ Enforced orthodoxy, according to Williams, nourished a set of conditions amenable to civil strife, in the best case, or civil war in the worst.³⁷ Williams

³⁰ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 5.

³¹ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 6; Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 14–15.

³² Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 6.

³³ John Cotton, *A Letter of Mr. John Cottons*, 2.

³⁴ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 11–12.

³⁵ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 10–11.

³⁶ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 10–11; Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 14–15.

³⁷ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 27.

placed at the center of that vital distinction ecclesial and soteriological issues that disqualified any civil state from assuming a posture of authority over spiritual affairs. Established religion, he argued, led the unrepentant to “pretend and assume the name of Christ Jesus,” an identity only granted to the “regenerate and repenting souls.”³⁸

A primary fault line pertained to the issue of typology, and the differences of interpretation regarding Israel in the Old Testament. Williams, in this opening letter of their exchange, declared that the Church and only the Church constituted the antitype of the true Israel in the Old Testament.³⁹ By “true,” Williams meant those Israelites that lived by faith and enjoyed the promise of salvation; not every natural born Israelite, therefore, inherited the promises of God. Between the Old and New Testaments, the nation state of Israel passed away, but the Church of Jesus Christ ascended as the typological fulfillment of the true Israelites who, like their father Abraham, were justified by faith. Williams declared Cotton and Massachusetts’s political theology abrogated that complex biblical reality, and thereby “opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world.”⁴⁰ Expressed here was Williams’s more radical religious separatism that caused the troubles he faced in Salem and Plymouth in the early 1630s; views that also intensified in 1642 after he concluded that there could be no true churches this side of the eschaton. As such, the civil state had no place in attempting to forge a society of religious establishment.⁴¹ Williams, therefore, articulated in this small letter a broader conviction he explicated in his much

³⁸ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 26–27; Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 65; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 12–13.

³⁹ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 214.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Ansvvered*, 45.

⁴¹ Anne G. Myles, “Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood: Roger Williams, Persecution and the Discourse of the Witness,” *Modern Philology* 91, no. 2 (Nov 1993): 134; Hugh Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), x–xi; W. Clark Gilpin, *Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979).

larger works on religious liberty: religion and civil government represented two separate spheres with a dividing wall between them. The activities and obligations of the state must, as Williams argued, remain confined to its side of the “Garden,” and the same principle applied to the church.⁴²

Williams’s response to Cotton’s 1635 letter to him after his banishment represented an opening salvo against the main theological, moral, and political supports for established religion. It provided, for Williams, an opportunity to publicly take up the issue of his banishment from Massachusetts and provide for his readers a narrative not of a godly society in New England, but a deteriorating community, firmly entrenched in persecutory policies against tender consciences. This short rejoinder by Williams, however, marked only the first private letter between he and Cotton to go public in England. The second came when Williams published, in 1644, his *Bloody Tenent of Persecution*.

A Letter of Milk and a Letter of Blood

The opening pages of Williams’s *Bloody Tenent* included the customary letter to the reader, dedications, and letters to other bodies who the author specifically wanted to address. After these letters and the table of contents, Williams did not proceed into his argument about liberty of conscience. Instead, he placed John Murton’s *A Most Hvmble Svpplication* first, followed a response to Murton’s arguments by John Cotton. Williams called Murton’s *Svpplication*, “*Arguments in Milke*.” According to the lore of Murton’s *Svpplication*, as a prisoner at Newgate, he had to write this tract on liberty of conscience with milk, making the parchment easy to smuggle out of the prison because it would have appeared blank. Then, one of his compatriots took the document, held the paper up to a fire, revealing the contents of what Murton wrote. These were then, quite literally,

⁴² Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 15.

arguments in milk, and Williams drew upon that imagery in his description of the *Svpplication*. Milk, being the color white, denoted purity, innocence, and was a source of nourishment. These qualities not only marked the arguments levied in Murton's *Svpplication*, but, as Williams suggested, were paradigmatic of the entire edifice of soul liberty—liberty of conscience promulgated a purer, more peaceful society.⁴³ Cotton's response, however, was a letter of blood—a letter upholding a policy responsible for the slaughtering of men and women only for sake of conscience.⁴⁴

The contest between Williams and Cotton cannot be understood apart from Murton's pleas for liberty of conscience contained in his *Svpplication*. Indeed, Murton's arguments framed the entire discourse between Williams and Cotton. Williams formatted the *Bloody Tenent* as a point-by-point refutation of Cotton's response to Murton's assertions, and Williams drew upon Murton's voice, expanding on his arguments against religious establishment.⁴⁵ Myles, furthermore, demonstrated the importance of Murton's *Svpplication* not only for Williams's statements and theology, but in providing Williams with an image that he developed throughout the *Bloody Tenent*. For Williams, Murton and Cotton represented the figureheads of two contrasting traditions; the former was marked by purity and a desire to worship God in accordance with conscience. The latter, however, was the bloody tenet of persecution.⁴⁶ Cotton's *The Bloody Tenent Washed* adopted a similar methodology of Williams, walking through each argument, which again, sprang from Murton's pamphlet. Thus, understanding Murton's *Svpplication* and

⁴³ James P. Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 160; Myles, "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood," 149–150.

⁴⁴ *BT*, 18–19;

⁴⁵ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 159–160; Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 16–17; Myles, "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood," 149–150; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 149.

⁴⁶ Myles, "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood," 149–153.

Cotton's response to Murton aids in grasping the ideas at stake in the Williams-Cotton debate.

The letter written with milk. Expressing dissent against the established English church did not necessarily commit that individual to religious liberty, or disestablishment. Dissenters, therefore, were not monolithic in their views, whether theological, ecclesiological, or on the relationship between the church and the state. Indeed, Henry Ainsworth, a prominent English Separatist, penned *A Trvve Confession of the Faith*, which he published in 1596. The thirty-ninth point of this confessional document declared that princes and magistrates bore the solemn duty to “suppress and root out by their authority all false ministeries, voluntarie Relligions and conterfeyt worship of God.” He believed God endowed the civil government with broad authority over ecclesial issues to ensure the purest expression of Christianity.⁴⁷ Thus, even amongst some dissenters, there existed a strong propensity towards civility of conformity.

The Baptists, however, arose as the dissenting sect that significantly contributed to the idea of disestablishment in early modern England. Figures like John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and John Murton formulated the clearest, most expansive, and theologically rooted imperatives for religious liberty. While, as Miller helpfully suggested, early English Baptists did not enact change in England during the early decades of the seventeenth century—they did not possess the numbers nor the political influence to dismantle an established practice of religious uniformity—they remained essential for the crucial discussions of religious freedom that took place in Revolutionary England.⁴⁸ Scholars like Miller, Canipe, Clayton, Coker, George, Hamburger, and Grenda all pointed to early English Baptists as the theological and moral wellspring of

⁴⁷ Henry Ainsworth, *A Trve Confession of the Faith* (Amsterdam, 1596). This document does not have page numbers. The particular reference was drawn from point thirty-nine.

⁴⁸ Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment*, 39.

latter dissenters and advocates of disestablishment including Williams, John Milton, John Clarke, John Locke, and, in the eighteenth century, Isaac Backus and John Leland. The “sacred” arguments levied by these seventeenth century figures not only featured prominently in the English debates over religious freedom during the 1640s but provided the most ardent advocates of disestablishment in the early American republic with an armory of arguments and principles that upheld the necessity of evangelical civility.⁴⁹ Indeed, as figures like Murton indicted establishment of religion and strove for disestablishment, they simultaneously developed the concept of evangelical civility.

Murton’s polemic began with both a broadside against civility of conformity and an espousal of evangelical civility. The former, he argued, imprisoned loyal and law-abiding citizens of the Crown. The dissenters who suffered at Newgate prison committed no crime other than their conscientious objection to “practice, in the worship of God, such things as we have not faith in.”⁵⁰ If competing notions of the truth existed, then those divergences, according to Murton, were properly mitigated through free discussions and debates about the “holy Scriptures,” rather than the unjust fettering of faithful citizens who committed no offense against the state or their civil obligations to the kingdom.⁵¹ Murton, therefore articulated a society quite unlike that of the early modern period and at odds with the reigning Protestant tradition regarding political affairs. Where Protestants from Calvin, Beza, and their English heirs asserted a direct connection

⁴⁹ For the influence of English Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic, see: Canipe, ““That Most Damnable Heresie,”” 390; J. Glenwood Clayton, “Thomas Helwys: A Baptist Founding Father,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 8, no. 1 (January 1973): 2–15; Joel L. Coker, “Isaac Backus and John Leland,” 309, 318; Timothy George, “Between Pacifism and Coercion: The English Baptist Doctrine of Religious Toleration,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 1 (January 1984): 30–49; Ole Peter Grell, and Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke, introduction to *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, and Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6; Christopher Grenda, “Faith, Reason, and Enlightenment: The Cultural Sources of Toleration in Early America,” in *The First Prejudice: Religious Intolerance in Early America*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 48.

⁵⁰ Murton, *A Humble Supplication*, 2.

⁵¹ Murton, *A Humble Supplication*, 3.

between the preservation of established orthodoxy with societal peace and stability, Murton, and the dissenting tradition, challenged that entire framework. Society did not flourish under the constraints of conformity but under the freedom of conscience and religious belief.

Murton, therefore, advocated evangelical civility and he did so throughout his work from primarily theologically based arguments. He explicated, at length, Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, which redounded in almost all the polemics, sermons, and literature for and against disestablishment during the seventeenth century; indeed, Williams and Cotton spent dozens of pages each on the exposition and application of this parable and its implications for religious freedom. Yet, Murton's exposition of the parable showed his commitment to the emerging idea of evangelical civility. Nicholas Miller, conversely, framed Murton's contribution in the dissenting tradition under the canopy of a right to private judgment—but that missed the far more fundamental concerns of Murton.⁵² Indeed, Murton believed that the parable of the wheat and the tares meant that the true Church of Christ and those who belonged to the devil were to dwell together in this world—no government should make an attempt to root out the tares lest in the process they also disturb the wheat. From this parable, Murton deduced that established orthodoxy tended towards the very thing Christ warned against in Matthew 13, namely, the potential harm magistrates and civil authorities posed when they tried to eradicate the tares in the civil sphere by use of the civil sword. Instead, God willed, according to Murton, that the tares and the wheat would grow together in this world until the final harvest and that they could potentially grow together without causing harm to the other.⁵³ Murton, furthermore, stressed the soteriological imperative of letting the tares be when he wrote: “They who are now tares, may hereafter become wheat; they that now

⁵² Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment*, 37.

⁵³ Murton, *A Humble Supplication*, 4.

resist him, may hereafter receive him; they that are now in the devils snare, even adversaries to the truth, may hereafter come to repentance.”⁵⁴ Williams echoed this sentiment, showing his reliance on Murton when he wrote, “He that is a *Briar* . . . and *Antichristian* today may be (when the Word of the Lord runs freely) a member of *Jesus Christ* tomorrow.”⁵⁵ Thus, establishment of religion, according to Murton, violated the commands of Christ, and cast society into chaos as it attempted to uproot the tares from the wheat. It also squelched proper avenues for conversion, which came through persuasion rather than coercion.

Perhaps the most searing indictment of religious establishment in Murton’s *Svpplication* pertained to the issues of human conscience. Still relying on Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13 of the wheat and the tares, Murton declared uniformity of religion as a “vileness,” that struck men and women “onely for cause of conscience.” This kind of political theology stood contrary to the Bible and the “law of Christ.” He quoted Matthew 13, “*Let the wheat and tares grow together in the world, until the Harvest,*” enjoining King James to end violent policies directed at otherwise faithful citizens—policies that usurped God’s jurisdictional authority over the human conscience.⁵⁶

Murton’s *Svpplication* was significant because of its claims for full religious liberty in 1620. Furthermore, Williams preserved Murton’s arguments of milk by publishing them in the *Bloody Tenent*, which continued to perpetuate Murton’s ideas decades, indeed, centuries past its initial publication. The summons for disestablishment found within Murton’s work, moreover, provided the foil for John Cotton’s rebuttal, also found within the opening pages of the *Bloody Tenent*. Taken together, both the *Svpplication* and Cotton’s retort framed the rest of the contest of civility between

⁵⁴ Murton, *A Hvmbly Svpplication*, 24.

⁵⁵ *BT*, 39.

⁵⁶ Murton, *A Hvmbly Svpplication*, 4.

Williams and Cotton. Cotton's answer, therefore, clarified, for Williams, the particular issues and divergences at stake between himself and the eminent minister in Boston.

The letter of blood: Cotton and the human conscience. Perhaps the most important part of Cotton's letter was how he discussed the issue of the human conscience. It seemed the most pressing accusation levied against him and the doctrine of conformity.⁵⁷ He wrote, "When we are persecuted for *Conscience* sake, It is either for *Conscience* rightly informed, or for erroneous and blind *Conscience*."⁵⁸ He contended, in the former case, that persecution was always unjust; in the latter case, however, the civil authority could enact punishment only after repeated attempts at persuading the individual of the error of his ways.⁵⁹ Massachusetts practiced these attempts at mitigation—at persuading people out of their public, theological error. They did it with Williams, throughout the free grace controversy, and even extended it to Samuel Gorton. Once those attempts failed, and the church acted against a doctrinal defector, the magistrate properly, and under the God's design, prosecuted the dissenter. Cotton praised this design in his sermon series through the book of Revelation, preached between 1639 to 1640. Indeed, in the process of excommunication, the church extracted the tumor, which allowed the magistrate to surgically sever the deviant from the body altogether, either through banishment or execution. Cotton preached, "It is good to have these two States so joined together, that the simplicity of the church may be maintained and upheld, and strengthened by the civill State according to God."⁶⁰ Thus, a man, after due conviction and warning, left the church and its nursing father no other recourse. He

⁵⁷ Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 149.

⁵⁸ John Cotton, "The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton," in *BT*, 7.

⁵⁹ Cotton, "The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton," in *BT*, 7–8.

⁶⁰ John Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation* (London: Tim. Smart, 1656), 30.

forfeited his place not only in the ecclesial community but in the civil society because of his obstinacy. At that point, Cotton leaned on his distinction between persecuting someone for their conscience versus a conscience rightly informed, insisting that in the latter case, a person now sinned against his or her own conscience. As Cotton concluded, civil action against someone who sinned against their conscience was not only appropriate but required in order to preserve societal stability and ecclesial purity.⁶¹ To label Cotton and the proponents of conformity as persecutors of conscience was a serious charge. Indeed, Adrian Chastain Weimer argued that persecuting the conscience was tethered to the antics of Queen Mary and her bloody reign against English Protestantism.⁶² Thus, by charging Cotton and the Massachusetts authorities as guilty parties in soul rape and conscientious persecution, Williams, through Murton, placed the Bay Colony Puritans in league with the ideals of a Catholic monarch.

The issue of conscience lay at the center of the contest of civility—and the disagreement was far more complex than at first glance.⁶³ The debate between Williams and Cotton cannot be reduced to the conscience’s liberators vs. its persecutors. On the contrary, Cotton’s assertions about the human conscience and the conscience’s relationship to the civil state, reflected a broader commitment about casuistry evident with the Puritan moral and theological tradition. In other words, Cotton’s distinction between a conscience in error and a conscience rightly informed, and how the magistrates ought to deal with consciences rightly informed, did not appear in a vacuum. The two most important theologians of casuistry within the Puritan tradition were William Perkins and William Ames. Their works on casuistry, published in 1596 and 1632, served as

⁶¹ Cotton, “The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton,” in *BT*, 8; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 218.

⁶² Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51–56.

⁶³ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 23–24; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 149; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 218.

standard texts on the issue of conscience in Puritanism.⁶⁴ This is not to suggest that Cotton had Perkins's and Ames's books on conscience open while he drafted his letter against Murton or when he wrote *The Bloody Tenent Washed*. Yet, Cotton was a student of Perkins at Cambridge from 1598 to 1602 and said that Perkins served as one of the most influential figures in his theological development.⁶⁵ Cotton also noted his appreciation of Ames's theology and sermons, citing Ames in *The Bloody Tenet Washed* and his *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*.⁶⁶ While strong connections existed between Cotton, Perkins, and Ames, the broader point asserted here is less about direct indebtedness on the part of Cotton and more about placing Cotton's casuistry in the theological and intellectual stream he inhabited. In other words, when Cotton attempted to justify the magistrate's authority in matters of religion, he was not fishing for an outlandish, contrived rationalization in order to support Massachusetts's civility. Instead, he articulated concepts about the conscience that had already been established within the

⁶⁴ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 2004), 130–131; David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism & the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 144; W.B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5; Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 193; Thomas F. Merrill, introduction to *William Perkins, 1558–1602*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: N.V. Drukkerij Trio, 1966), xx.

⁶⁵ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 16–22; Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 2011), 174; Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 213; Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620 – 1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 298; Joel R. Beeke, "William Perkins and His Great Case of Conscience: 'How a Man May Know Whether He Be The Child of God, or No,'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (Nov 2006): 262; John Cotton, "John Cotton to William Fiennes, Lord Saye and Sele," in *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, ed. Sargent Busch, Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 2001), 244.

⁶⁶ *BTW*, 83; John Cotton, *Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1648), 5, 7, 16, 41; John Cotton, "John Cotton to Thomas Shepard," in *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, 391; Cotton also cited Perkins in *BTW*, 116. For Ames's influence on Cotton and Puritan casuistry, see Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 174; Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" 194; Sargent Bush, Jr., introduction to *The Correspondence of John Cotton* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 2001), 22; Paul R. Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 22.

Puritan theological heritage. The development of the Puritan doctrine of conscience, therefore, not only exerted soteriological significance, but aided and synthesized with their political theology and in their formulation of civility of conformity.

Published in 1596, William Perkins's *A Discovrse of Conscience* asserted a complex web of theological, moral, and natural law affirmations that upheld the freedom of a Christian's conscience with the verity of established, indeed, coerced religion. In defining the conscience, Perkins argued that God endowed all humanity with a conscience, which he placed under the canopy of the understanding, not the will. The faculty of understanding comprehended truth and falsehood, good and evil—the conscience, as a constituent of the understanding, “judge[d] of the goodness or badness of things or actions done.”⁶⁷ The conscience, therefore, functioned as an inward eye-witness—it, “determines or gives sentence of things done, by saying unto us this was done, this was not done, this may be done, this may not be done; this was well done, this was ill done.”⁶⁸ The individual conscience was not, by Perkins's estimation, subject to the authority of the individual mind and heart.⁶⁹ In fact, Perkins believed that the human conscience was “of a divine nature, and is a thing placed of God in the midst between him and man, as an arbitrator to give sentence & to pronounce either with man or against man unto God.”⁷⁰ Thus, an action's virtue or vice, whether that action ought or ought not to be done, and the inward indictment men and women sensed when they knew they committed a wrong, all represented the function of the conscience as it bore witness to the individual's responsibility to God.⁷¹

⁶⁷ William Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience* (Cambridge: Iohn Legate, 1608), in *William Perkins: English Puritanist*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. De Graff, 1966), 5.

⁶⁸ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 6.

⁶⁹ Canipe, “That Most Damnable Heresie,” 394.

⁷⁰ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 6.

⁷¹ Merrill, introduction to *Williams Perkins, 1558 – 1602*, xx; Canipe, “That Most Damnable Heresie,” 393.

Hence, Perkins understood liberty of conscience in a way quite contrary to the modern mind. He certainly believed that Christians, after their conversion, enjoyed “libertie to the conscience, whereby [the conscience] is freedom from all lawes of his owne.”⁷² Yet, God restrained the conscience. Perkins wrote, “Whatsoever we enterprise or take in hand, we must search whether God gives us libertie in conscience, and warrant to doe it.”⁷³ God bound the human conscience to himself—the duty to obey God hemmed in liberty and license providing the parameters of what actions and conduct satisfied the creaturely obligation to worship God and live a life of holiness. Conscientious freedom was not, therefore, an individual freedom to do as one pleased but a freedom, granted by the gospel, to do as *God* pleased.⁷⁴

God, moreover, linked the conscience to himself and placed it under his authority alone: “Men are not fit commanders of conscience, because they are no lords of it, but God himself alone.”⁷⁵ If a law justly applied the law of God, that law only bore a derivative authority in binding the conscience—an authority it derived from God who, through the application of a law, promoted his creational order and thereby human flourishing.⁷⁶ Hence, the viability of a law hinged upon its adherence to the natural law, or, as Perkins described it, *both* tables of the ten commandments.⁷⁷

The fact that Perkins extended the canopy of the “natural law,” or “common law,” to cover both tables of the Decalogue was crucial in his contention that the civil magistrate had lawful authority to enforce an established religion. Laws pertaining to both the right worship of God and the right virtues necessary for society to function were

⁷² Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 31.

⁷³ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 10.

⁷⁴ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 23; Wright, “William Perkins,” 184.

⁷⁵ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 32.

⁷⁶ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 33.

⁷⁷ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 12–13.

indeed binding on the conscience. Perkins carefully articulated to what the conscience was bound—it was not bound to the men who made the laws nor to the laws in and of themselves. Laws could not reach further than the outward man—it was impossible for any external actor to coerce, move, or alter the conscience.⁷⁸ God himself constrained the conscience to laws that personified the ten commandments because they reflected his plan, purposes, and sovereign design.⁷⁹ As Perkins wrote, if a law did in fact emanate from the law of God, then it was no longer a human law, but divine, and as such, could bind the conscience.⁸⁰

This was how Perkins justified the role of the magistrate in matters of religion. His understanding of the conscience, its relation to God, and how civil laws fit into the broader framework of natural law all coalesced, by his estimation, into a workable formula that preserved the integrity of the Christian’s freedom and established religion. If laws “touching articles of faith” nourished worship of God and promoted human flourishing, then those laws exacted the derivative authority over the human conscience precisely because they mirrored the laws of God.⁸¹ Failure, furthermore, to obey such laws, meant that a man sinned, as Perkins argued, in two ways: “First because hee breaks that which in conscience a law of God: secondly, because in disobeying his lawful magistrate, he disobeyed the general commandment of God, touching magistracie.”⁸² In other words, a dissenter, facing the retribution of the state, could not claim that he or she suffered persecution; nor could that individual claim a status as a martyr. That person sinned against his or her own conscience. There was no liberty of conscience to claim in

⁷⁸ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 32; Bradford W. Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 12.

⁷⁹ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 26, 30.

⁸⁰ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 33–34.

⁸¹ Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 34.

⁸² Perkins, *A Discovrse of Conscience*, 34.

this case because God set the boundaries of the conscience's liberty. For Perkins, laws governing religion did not coerce the conscience, nor did they fail, as Littlejohn argued, to adequately preserve the integrity of Christian liberty.⁸³ When a law exhibited the image of God's law, it nullified all claims to conscientious freedom—the conscience was, in fact, bound to that law.⁸⁴ The question, however, remained: Who determined whether a human law rightly manifested the law of God?

The Reformed, Calvinistic tradition wrestled with that question—and the puritan theologian William Ames followed in the footsteps of his teacher William Perkins.⁸⁵ Ames wrote his own work on the human conscience and indicated in the letter to the reader the credit of William Perkins on his own thought and theological reflection.⁸⁶ Ames, furthermore, loomed as a titanic figure in the development of Puritan theology, especially exerting influence on the Puritans who made their way to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His covenantal theology, specifically the covenant between a church and a church member, provided the theological foundations for New England Congregationalism.⁸⁷

⁸³ Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty*, 47.

⁸⁴ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

⁸⁵ Beeke, "William Perkins and His Great Case of Conscience," 262; Merrill, introduction to *William Perkins, 1558–1602*, xvii.

⁸⁶ William Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof* (London: E.G., 1643). This work was originally published in 1632 under its Latin title, *De Conscientia et Ejus Jure vel Casibus*. Ames, to be clear, had his disagreements with Perkins on the conscience, especially the ontology of the conscience. That being said, Ames's work is better seen as an expansion, or development of Perkins's *A Discovrse of Conscience*.

⁸⁷ Keith L. Sprunger, "William Ames and the Settlement of Massachusetts Bay," *The New England Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (March 1966): 66–67. See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939). For a fuller treatment on Ames's theological influence, see Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); Jan van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System: The Intellectual Heritage of William Ames* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

Like Perkins, Ames believed that the conscience served as “mans judgment of himself, according to the judgement of God of him.”⁸⁸ The conscience, therefore, was not directed by the caprice of individual desire but remained “immediately subject to God, and his will,” which meant that it could not “submit it selfe unto any creature without Idolatry.”⁸⁹ Ames also clarified that because the conscience submitted to God and God alone, the only one who could punish the conscience was God.⁹⁰ For God to “bind” the conscience, according to Ames, simply meant submission to rightful authority. The failure to submit “were a sinne.”⁹¹ Again, the subjection of the conscience to God, and the assertion that God alone was its judge, remained a vital point for the magisterial tradition as it defended established orthodoxy.⁹²

Ames asserted an important distinction in his understanding of the conscience, namely, the natural and enlightened consciences. The difference between the two came down to special revelation. Where the natural conscience “acknowledged for law the principles of nature,” the enlightened conscience “acknowledge whatsoever is prescribed in the Scriptures.”⁹³ The distinction between the natural and enlightened conscience became crucial, given that an individual sinned against his or her conscience when that person failed to submit to the inward testimony of his or her own conscience. Thus, when an ecclesial community “inlightened” an otherwise darkened conscience, that person now had the revelatory knowledge of God, and must, therefore, submit to that knowledge, given the conscience’s relationship with God. Despite the revelatory distinction between

⁸⁸ William Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 2.

⁸⁹ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 5.

⁹⁰ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 5.

⁹¹ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 5.

⁹² Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6.

⁹³ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 5; James Calvin Davis “William Ames’s Calvinist Ambiguity over Freedom of Conscience,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 2 (Jun 2005): 339.

natural and enlightened consciences, Ames thought that the natural conscience possessed a capacious ability to ascertain sundry truths.⁹⁴ For example, the principle that “*God ought to be loved,*” populated the hearts of all mankind.⁹⁵

Ames connected this notion of conscience to the responsibilities incumbent upon civil authorities who, according to the ordinances of God, bore the solemn responsibility to enact and enforce righteous laws, reflective of God’s law. In this, Ames rejected the idea of *adiphoria*, or things indifferent. He argued that “whatsoever it is that of its owne nature serves for order or comlinesse, or edification, is not indifferent: for when they doe participate in the nature of goodness, they are not in the middle betwixt good and bad.”⁹⁶ He further contended that laws ought only to prescribe the good. Thus, civil states could not, by Ames’s determination, codify neutral statutes. All laws were either positive or negative—the former promoted virtue while the latter discouraged wickedness.⁹⁷ This line of reasoning complicated assessments made by contemporary historians and political theorists like Bradford Littlejohn, who argued in his book on puritan political theology that *adiphoria* was often deployed as the grant of “liberty to political societies to frame positive laws ‘for the common benefit.’”⁹⁸ Ames, however, wrinkled this interpretation, providing a different view that rejected indifferent laws as a political concept. All laws must reflect the law of God; hence why Ames supported laws against heresy.⁹⁹

Indeed, in book four of *Consciencess & the Cases thereof*, Ames outlined a definition of heresy that necessitated, in his mind, the need for the civil sword. Heresy

⁹⁴ Davis “William Ames’s Calvinist Ambiguity over Freedom of Conscience,” 343–344.

⁹⁵ Ames, *Of Consciencess & the Cases thereof*, 7.

⁹⁶ Ames, *Of Consciencess & the Cases thereof*, 89.

⁹⁷ Ames, *Of Consciencess & the Cases thereof*, 88–89.

⁹⁸ Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty*, 131.

⁹⁹ Davis, “William Ames’s Calvinist Ambiguity over Freedom of Conscience,” 350.

contradicted Scripture in a way that eroded the “summe and substance of faith and manners,” and was held in a disposition marked by “stubbornesse and obstinancie.”¹⁰⁰ This provided the grounds for which Ames justified the magistrate’s role in what, according to dissenters, was a matter of conscience. Obstnacy arose after multiple failed attempts at presenting the person with the truth of the Bible. When a man, presented with his errors from Scripture, remained fixed in his theological divergence, the community could deem him obstinate and, subsequently, a heretic. The accused party had no grounds to acclaim freedom of conscience because his conscience did not properly belong to him—it belonged to God; and, at this point, the conscience was presented with the truth of God’s word, was not enlightened, and summoned that person towards compliance with the truth.¹⁰¹ Massachusetts’s legal system, and what Cotton argued in his responses to Williams, treated suspected heretics this way, trying to convince them of their error before leveraging the mechanisms of the civil state. If these attempts failed, as they had in the case of Williams in 1635, the Antinomians in 1636, and Gorton in 1644, then magistrates could, indeed, must intervene.

Much like Perkins, Ames argued that the law bore a derivative authority over the conscience.¹⁰² The legal code of civil states only bound the conscience in so far as those laws represented either the natural law of God or the law of his revealed will. He argued that “nothing but the law of God doth properly, directly, immediately, and by it selfe bind the conscience.”¹⁰³ This proved crucial in the defense of Massachusetts’s actions against religious dissenters and why John Cotton adamantly refuted Williams’s accusation that the colony persecuted or attempted to coerce the human conscience. If

¹⁰⁰ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 10. This quote came from book four. Unless otherwise noted, the following quotes all came from book four.

¹⁰¹ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 10.

¹⁰² Davis, “William Ames’s Calvinist Ambiguity over Freedom of Conscience,” 351.

¹⁰³ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 166. This quote came from book five.

that accusation stuck, then the colony placed itself outside the orthodox understanding of the human conscience—that it was a faculty bound only to God. Instead, Cotton justified Massachusetts’s political theology because it patterned its laws in accordance with the will of God. As Ames argued, human laws that emanated from divine law, which included laws regarding worship, bound human consciences; such laws shared in the “nature and force of the Divine Law.”¹⁰⁴

Ames—with his understanding of conscience, civil laws, issues of *adiphoria*, and the contours of heresy—posed the following question: “*Whether are Heretikes to be punished by the civil Magistrate?*”¹⁰⁵ He answered that the church, first and foremost, must engage in spiritual warfare against all unorthodoxy, not relying solely upon the magistrate to deal with matters of theological abnormality. Yet, the magistrate, must “represe wicked men that trouble the Church, even with the sword, or with publike and externall power if there be need.”¹⁰⁶ Ames continued that a heretic who manifested public harm, definitively fell under the jurisdictional power of the magistrate. The qualifier “public” was key; Cotton utilized similar reasoning in his political theology and in his defense of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Magistrates only acted against heretics when they aired their pernicious theology publicly. After attempting to draw the person away from his error, furthermore, he may “suffer capital punishment. For that Law *Lev.* 24.15,16. although it bind not Christians as it is a law, yet as it is a doctrine comming from God, it doth belong to the direction of Christians in cases of the like nature.”¹⁰⁷ Again, under Ames’s paradigm, no neutral laws existed; either they reflected the will and justice of God or no. In the case of public heresy, the law of God clearly prescribed the

¹⁰⁴ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 167. This quote came from book five; Davis, “William Ames’s Calvinist Ambiguity over Freedom of Conscience,” 351.

¹⁰⁵ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 12–13.

proper course of action. Indeed, heresy presented a particular threat because, as Ames wrote, nothing less than, “the glory of God, and the safetie of the Church,” were at stake.¹⁰⁸

The preceding contextual foray provides a necessary overlay for the contest of civility between Cotton and Williams. Cotton’s understanding of conscience stood within the stream of the Perkins-Ames tradition. He especially imbibed their conception of the conscience’s relationship with the public square, and the justness of civil action against those who sinned against their own consciences. Indeed, Cotton, in his letter appended to *The Blovdy Tenent*, wrote that while no earthly authority possessed jurisdiction over the conscience, thereby making the magistrate incapable of procuring “true *Religion*,” the state, nevertheless, must restrain blasphemy. Failure to do so tended to the seduction of others to “pernicious errors.”¹⁰⁹ Cotton, moreover, granted that while unorthodox beliefs held privately enjoyed some measure of toleration, God required magistrates to take swift action once those beliefs were publicly expressed.¹¹⁰ For, “Libertie of Conscience,” as Cotton defined it, “is to be granted to men that feare God indeed, as knowing they will not persist in Heresie, or turbulent Schisme, when they are convinced in Conscience of the sinfulness thereof.”¹¹¹

The thought of Perkins, Ames, and how Cotton articulated the Puritan casuistry tradition, made the issues at stake all the more complex, weighty, and deeply imbedded within a pre-modern worldview. As such, this was far more than a dispute between the liberators of conscience and the conscience’s captors; on the contrary, this was a contest marked by competing webs of interconnected theological and moral assertions. This web

¹⁰⁸ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ John Cotton, “The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton,” in *BT*, 13.

¹¹⁰ John Cotton, “The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton,” in *BT*, 12.

¹¹¹ John Cotton, “The Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton,” in *BT*, 14.

not only included the issue of conscience, but how the conscience was tethered to a group of ideas connected in intricate ways—ideas of covenant, typology, biblical interpretation, divergent notions of the natural law, and how all these wove together into competing concepts of civility.

The Contest of Civility: *The Blovdy Tenent* and *The Blovdy Tenent Washed*

With his private letters now made public, and with the publication of Williams's *Blovdy Tenent of Persecution*, Cotton entered the toleration debate that erupted in revolutionary England.¹¹² These two works emerged as representative of the two political societies forming across the Atlantic in New England. John Coffey argued that Williams's book "was perhaps the most influential tolerationist book of the 1640s."¹¹³ Both Williams's and Cotton's works were well known in New England, and not just in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁴ On the contrary, in the disestablishment debates in Revolutionary America and in the early republic, Isaac Backus copiously cited both Cotton and Williams.¹¹⁵ This historical reality contradicts William McLoughlin's contention that Backus did not rely on Williams or have any "use" for his arguments.¹¹⁶

¹¹² For a more expansive history of the toleration controversy in England, see John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000); and John Coffey, "The Toleration Controversy," in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith D. Maltby (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹¹³ Coffey, "The Toleration Controversy," 54.

¹¹⁴ For its influence in seventeenth century New England, see *GH*, 203.

¹¹⁵ Isaac Backus, "An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty, Against the Oppressions of the present Day," in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730 – 1805*, vol. 2, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Carmel, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991), 344–345. Backus, moreover, on a trip to Providence in 1773, recorded in his diary for the first time that he had read "some writings of old Mr. Roger Williams which I was very glad of." That was in February. Later, on September 9, 1773, Backus delivered his *Appeal*, which was his first major treatment of religious liberty. There was little doubt that his reading of Williams earlier that year exerted significant influence on his intellectual and ideological thinking about the topic. See Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus, Volume II: 1765–1785*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), 868.

¹¹⁶ William G. McLoughlin, "Isaac Backus and the Separation of Church and State in America," *The American Historical Review* 73, no. 5 (June 1968): 1400. The basis for McLoughlin's claim was that Backus did not want a complete separation of the church from the state. While he wanted

Indeed, Backus brought a century-old contest between two theologians over the issue of human conscience. Though their debate was crucial in their own time and space, the impact of their ideas pressed on into the American intellectual tradition, as an influential, eighteenth and nineteenth century Baptist dissenter resurrected this early modern contest of civility.¹¹⁷

The letters exchanged between Williams and Cotton, the intellectual and theological traditions they inhabited, and the experiences each man endured in the American wilderness culminated in the production of these two tomes. Their arguments synthesized a constellation of presuppositions, including theology, natural law, biblical hermeneutics, typology, and conceptions of the common good; the product of which encapsulated the pillars for both civility of conformity and evangelical civility. Indeed, in his letter to the reader, Williams set the stage for the clash of ideas that ensued between he and Cotton, writing, “An enforced *uniformity of Religion* throughout a *Nation* or *civill state*, confounds the *Civill* and *Religious*, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that *Jesus Christ* is come in the Flesh.”¹¹⁸ In other words, the contest of civility encompassed the following categories: theology, typology, and divergent visions of the common good.

disestablishment, Backus also desired, as McLoughlin contended, a harmony between the civil and ecclesial spheres; Christianity was a positive good for the society and the state, therefore, had an obligation to protect, nourish, and enable churches to thrive. Williams, however, believed that the presence or absence of Christianity in a civil society was benign. For a refutation of McLoughlin’s thesis, see William R. Estep, “New England Dissent, 1630–1833: A Review Article,” in *Church History* 41, no. 2 (June 1972): 246–252.

¹¹⁷ For more on Backus and the religious freedom debates of his time, see Joel L. Coker, “Isaac Backus and John Leland: Baptist Contributions to Religious Liberty in the Founding Era,” in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*, eds. Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 305–337; Edwin S. Gaustad, “The Backus-Leland Tradition,” in *Foundations* 2, no. 2 (April 1959), 131–152; Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010);

¹¹⁸ Letter to the reader in *BT*. There is no page number.

Theologies of Persecution and Liberty: Interpreting Jesus’s Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

From the first lines of the *Blovdy Tenent*, Roger Williams framed the question of persecution and establishment of religion as an inherently theological one, promising his reader that neither the will of God nor the Bible upheld civil coercion in matters of conscience.¹¹⁹ The theological nature of this debate calls to question historical interpretations that presently depict religious freedom as either a social construct tied to issues of race and empire building, or frame its ascendancy as much more practical than theological.¹²⁰ The Williams-Cotton debate, however, clarified the theological heritage embedded in the history of establishment, disestablishment, and religious freedom.¹²¹ Neglecting the principled arguments for and against freedom of conscience not only engenders an incomplete historical narrative, but also cannot explain why ideas like a civilly enforced religious orthodoxy were difficult to overthrow. Edwin Gaustad rightly contended, “It took deep conviction, not indifference and not calculating cynicism, to dig up those taproots of establishment.”¹²² If evangelical civility, and Rhode Island’s lively experiment were to succeed, the colony needed to do far more than prove the practical possibilities and political viability of a society without an established orthodoxy—it needed to provide, in this early modern context, the theological justification for disestablishment.

¹¹⁹ Letter to the reader in *BT*. There is no page number.

¹²⁰ For the former, see Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Finbarr Curtis, *The Production of American Religious Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); and Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For the latter, see Chris Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Chris Beneke, Christopher S. Grenda, eds., *The First Prejudice: Religious Toleration in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹²¹ Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment*; Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 3.

¹²² Edwin S. Gaustad, “Colonial Religion and Liberty of Conscience,” in *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, eds. Merrill D. Peterson and Robert C. Vaughan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

The Bible served as the moral and commanding sourcebook for both Williams and Cotton. Indeed, George Lee Haskins stated that “unquestionably . . . Englishmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were thoroughly conversant with the Bible and accustomed to looking upon it as authority.”¹²³ Their interpretations, though rooted in the same texts, departed in drastic ways with consequences difficult to overstate.¹²⁴ Where one read the biblical text as proof for established orthodoxy at the point of the civil sword, the other saw in the same passages the need for soul freedom. Williams and Cotton confronted one another on several passages, including Romans 13 and narrative passages found in the Old Testament. Williams, for example, cited the heroics of the prophet Daniel, who refused to pray to the king of Babylon; as a result, the king sentenced Daniel to death in the lions’ den. By citing this text, Williams cast Massachusetts as King Darius, and likened poor religious dissenters as Daniel, who refused, for the sake of his conscience, to pray to an idol.¹²⁵ Romans 13, moreover, received significant treatment from both Cotton and Williams, with Cotton interpreting the text as granting the civil magistrate authority over both tables of the law and Williams arguing the negative.¹²⁶

Perhaps the most significant text in the Williams-Cotton debate, however, was Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares. John Murton explicated the Matthew 13 parable in his *Most Hymble Supplication*, and Cotton responded to that exegesis in his letter to Williams appended to *The Blovdy Tenent*. For the remainder of their contest, the divergent interpretations continued to uphold the pillars of their theological justifications

¹²³ George Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1960), 145.

¹²⁴ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 121.

¹²⁵ *BT*, 20.

¹²⁶ For a full accounting of their warring interpretations on Romans 13, see Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, especially pages 128–154.

for their particular political theology. Indeed, the exegesis of this text fed other doctrinal supports for either establishment or disestablishment, making this text a crucial component of their contest. Two interpretive questions redounded in their works: Who were the Tares? What was meant by the “world”?

The Identity of the Tares. By way of explanation, the parable of the wheat and the tares appeared in Matthew 13:24–30. After the crowds dispersed Jesus was alone with his disciples, they asked him the meaning of the parable, which Jesus explained in Matthew 13:36–40. Jesus’ parable told the story of a farmer and his servants who realized that, after the farmer sowed seeds of wheat in his field, an enemy came and sowed tares along with the wheat. Tares bear a similar resemblance to the wheat crop, and can only be differentiated after the wheat bears its yield. The servants realized that the field contained both wheat and tares and came to their master asking him if they should remove the tares. The master responded, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” (Matt 13:29, KJV). The two were to grow together in the field until the harvest.

When Jesus explained the parable to his disciples, he depicted the wheat as the “children of the kingdom,” and the tares as the “children of the wicked one” (Matt 13:38, KJV). Williams interpreted the tares as grievous sinners, which included idolaters and antichrists.¹²⁷ While his interpretation certainly contained civil consequences, Williams also declared another peculiar aspect of his debate with Cotton, namely, eschatological views of divine judgment coupled with a Reformed commitment to predestination.¹²⁸ The tares, Williams reasoned, were the reprobate predestined for their judgment at Christ’s return. As Hugh Spurgin noted, Williams’s separatist tendencies undergirded his

¹²⁷ *BT*, 47.

¹²⁸ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 18.

insistence for freedom of conscience precisely because the lack of such freedom dismantled the soteriological and ecclesiological economy of God.¹²⁹ A magistrate that attempted to pluck up a tare, therefore, intervened in God’s providential and eschatological plan of divine judgment, and potentially threatened the elect.

Cotton, on the other hand, believed the similarities between wheat and tares, up to the point of fruit bearing, served as grounds to interpret the tares as merely hypocrites.¹³⁰ Indeed, by Cotton’s estimation, because the tares represented hypocrites, they were far less recognizable than Williams depicted them in his exegesis. Cotton concluded from this that tares, therefore, must be tolerated and suffered, “lest some of Gods own Saints, (true wheat) who for a time may degenerate and bring forth like fruit with the Tares, be plucked up with them.”¹³¹ This, like Williams’s interpretation, possessed tremendous consequences for the civil state. As Byrd rightly noted, the toleration of hypocrites meant that “Jesus did not intend the unimaginable—that Christian churches and commonwealths should tolerate even the most destructive of heretics and pagans.”¹³² In other words, the people Williams thought Jesus extended toleration to—the idolatrous, false-worshiping, anti-Christians—were, for Cotton, those who deserved the full retributive weight of the civil magistrate.

The field as the church or the world. The identity of the tares, and the consequences of the divergent interpretations, coincided with another contested aspect of the parable, namely, the identity of the “world.” Williams and Cotton understood this

¹²⁹ Hugh Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition* (Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 47. For more on the influence of the English Separatist tradition on Baptists and their ideas of religious freedom, see Slayden A. Yarbrough, “The English Separatist Influence on the Baptist Tradition of Church-State Issues,” in *Baptist History and Heritage* 20, no. 3 (July 1958): 14–23.

¹³⁰ *BTW*, 40.

¹³¹ *BTW*, 41.

¹³² Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 106.

word quite differently, and the consequences of their divergent interpretations helped, on the one hand, to uphold civility of conformity while, on the other hand, supporting evangelical civility. The Bible, therefore, animated two rival political paradigms with vastly distinct societal outcomes.

Williams took “the world” literally; Cotton, conversely, interpreted it more figuratively, contending that that Jesus never intended that “Antichrist and Antichristians, and Antichristianite should be tolerated in the world, until the end of the world.”¹³³ Indeed, Williams’s assertion that obedience to Christ meant, “to let the *tares* alone,” scandalized Cotton, who believed it his responsibility to “stir up Princes and States,” to uproot the thorn bushes of heresy and idolatry.¹³⁴ For Cotton, connecting the “world” to the church justified the potential existence of hypocrisy in houses of worship.¹³⁵ Indeed, in an ecclesiological distinction from Williams, Cotton believed that there were “unconverted Christians, unconverted Converts” who, nevertheless, enjoyed membership and integration into the life of a church.¹³⁶

Williams, however, dismissed this interpretation. He thought by equating the “world” with the church not only usurped any possibility for civil peace, but also intervened in work of salvation ordained by God.¹³⁷ Ironically, according to Williams, civility of conformity nourished unorthodoxy and supported the dissemination of everything it attempted to prevent. Establishment of religion enforced by the civil sword enabled latent heresy and idolatry to hide under the veneer of outward conformity, which consequently corrupted the church of Jesus Christ with hypocrites. Instead, revealing his

¹³³ *BTW*, 42.

¹³⁴ *BT*, 49; *BTW*, 54.

¹³⁵ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 109.

¹³⁶ *BTW*, 78.

¹³⁷ *BT*, 48.

soteriological concern for disestablishment, Williams wrote that “only works [of] the *All-powerfull* God, by the *sword* of His Spirit in the hand of his *Spirituell officers*,” could repel heresy and “recover a Soule from *Sathan*.”¹³⁸

The interpretive fissures over this parable marked one of the many disparate points of contention between Williams and Cotton. It not only displayed the fundamental theological questions at stake in the debate, but how those theological quandaries spilled into matters of public policy. How two words were interpreted—“tares” and “wheat”—determined whether or not a civil state must use its coercive powers against heretics or whether the state should possess no authority at all in religious affairs. Thus, the politics of conformity redounded with questions about the Bible.¹³⁹ For Williams’s project in evangelical civility to succeed, he first had to untangle the comprehensive biblical and theological commitments regarding religious establishment—commitments that Cotton expounded upon his interpretation of Jesus’ parable.¹⁴⁰ The wheat and the tares, therefore, became one of the most important passages for Williams’s advocacy of religious liberty; for in it, as Williams argued, Christ himself contended for the need of soul liberty.¹⁴¹ Jesus, after all, commanded his servants to leave the tares alone; to, as Williams declared, “let their *Worship* and *Consciencs* be tolerated.”¹⁴² Cotton, however, placed the maintenance of true religion at the center of the magistrate’s duty. Magistrates were, according to Cotton, “Shepherds of the people,” in which Cotton drew from the language of Ezekiel 34. They were to “drive away false Prophets from the Church, whom

¹³⁸ *BT*, 64.

¹³⁹ Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts*, 145; Hall, *Separating Church and State*, 74.

¹⁴⁰ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 87; Spurgin, *Roger Williams and Puritan Radicalism in the English Separatist Tradition*, 9. Wilken *Liberty in the Things of God*, 151.

¹⁴¹ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 88.

¹⁴² *BT*, 48; Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 125–126.

our Savior calleth ravening wolves.”¹⁴³ This hermeneutical move by Cotton pointed to another vital part of this contest of civility, namely, typology.

Typology and the Consequences for Civility

The deployment of typology by both Williams and Cotton created no little confusion amongst their chroniclers. John Barry described Williams’s typological arguments as departing from traditional, orthodox interpretations of the Old Testament, opting instead for an allegorical method.¹⁴⁴ Perry Miller made similar arguments about Williams and typology, writing that “the deeper he progressed into the structure of allegory and metaphor, the more he found the Old Testament a prophetic rather than a factual book.”¹⁴⁵ These assessments inaccurately charged Williams with a view of the Old Testament he nowhere seemed to uphold. Typology, furthermore, does not equate with an allegorical interpretation of a text. Indeed, typology necessitated taking the Old Testament text as authoritative and literal with a fixed point of reference that served as the antitype. Typological hermeneutics connected Old Testament events, figures, or images to their fulfillment, or, antitype, in the New Testament.¹⁴⁶ Williams and Cotton adopted a Christocentric typological hermeneutic when relating to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, along with the covenantal role the kings of Israel played throughout the biblical canon.¹⁴⁷ Anne Myles rightly argued that the point of difference between

¹⁴³ *BTW*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ John Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 326.

¹⁴⁵ Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962), 44.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 214; For more on the Christocentric and incarnational piety of Roger Williams, see Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*.

Williams and Cotton came down to the extent of the antitype's fulfillment.¹⁴⁸ Brooks Holifield, moreover, suggested that while Williams funneled every aspect of the kingdom of Israel, including its laws enforcing orthodoxy, through the person and work of Christ, Cotton, "pressed the point that some types had an exemplary force. The kings of Israel were typical in some respects, exemplary in others."¹⁴⁹ Thus, both Williams and Cotton utilized typology in their political theology; Cotton, however, was more willing to immanentize certain figures in the Old Testament that, while fulfilled fully in Christ, typologically provided paradigms for contemporary political systems. The kingly office of Israel, for example, served as a model that framed the office of magistrates in Massachusetts.¹⁵⁰

Like the parable of the wheat and the tares, this foray into typology generated divergent political consequences with bearing on each man's view of civility. Williams argued that everything from the land promises made to Israel, along with its government, laws, and covenant all functioned as types fulfilled in Christ. As Williams contended, "But now the *Lord Jesus* being come Himselfe, and having fulfilled the former types, and dissolved the *Nationall State* of the *Church*, and established a more *Spirituell government* and *governours*."¹⁵¹ Thus, not only did Williams's view question the validity of established orthodoxy but it undermined the entire theological identity of "Gods plantation"—that "Citty vpon a hill."¹⁵² Indeed, Williams pressed his case, suggesting that any hermeneutic which attempted to apply a type outside of its fulfillment in Christ

¹⁴⁸ Myles, "Arguments in Milk, Arguments in Blood," 137.

¹⁴⁹ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 52.

¹⁵⁰ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 48–49; E. Brooks Holifield, *Era of Persuasion: American Thought and Culture 1521–1680*, ed. Lewis Perry (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 46.

¹⁵¹ *BT*, 130.

¹⁵² John Cotton, *God's Promise to His Plantation* (London: William Jones, 1630), 14; *WP*, 2:295.

overthrew “the very *essentail nature of Types.*”¹⁵³ According to Williams, making the antitype of a king of Israel a civil ruler in seventeenth-century New England belied the purpose and spiritual nature of types in the first place.¹⁵⁴

Cotton responded with a defense of his typological interpretation that upheld coerced orthodoxy and religious establishment. First, Cotton conceded that no contemporary jurisdiction possessed the holiness and status of Israel in the Old Testament. This did, however, diminish the responsibility of Christian kings and magistrates outside of the Old Testament to functionally operate as the kings of Israel. Like David and Solomon, King Charles I or the magistrates in Massachusetts had the responsibility to promote true piety both positively as example and negatively through the use of the civil sword.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, as Cotton declared, “If therefore it was the duty of *Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, and Isaiah*, to reduce the people of *Israel* from their backsliding, because they were an holy people, Surely the like Duty lyeth upon all Godly Christian princes, to reduce their backsliding Chruches to their Primitive Purity.”¹⁵⁶

Cotton, moreover, suggested that Williams may have stressed the antitype to an extreme degree—if the kings of Israel were types of Christ, what about the wicked kings of Israel? If Israel was a type of the pure church, what about the times where Israel rejected Yahweh? In this sense, Cotton argued that while “all Figures in the old Testament have their Accomplishment in the New,” this did not mean that these institutions were entirely foreclosed with the coming of Christ. Indeed, the faithful kings and the periods of covenant obedience in Israel’s history served as exemplary models for present nations, kingdoms, and magistrates. Cotton argued that even a figure like

¹⁵³ *BT*, 202.

¹⁵⁴ Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 151; Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton*, 214–215.

¹⁵⁵ *BTW*, 105.

¹⁵⁶ *BTW*, 72.

Jehosaphat, a good and faithful king, was not a type of Christ but a servant of Christ to the people of Israel. From this, Cotton drew out the implication that temporal kings, or magistrates in Massachusetts, faithfully fulfilled their offices when they took care of the souls under their charge.¹⁵⁷ He wrote that as God granted Israel's kings the trust of stewarding the spiritual care of the people, Christ, likewise, "betrusted with the care of the welfare both of Church and Common-wealth" to the Christian magistrates.¹⁵⁸

Historically, the typological variances between Williams and Cotton further revealed the centrality of the Bible to the contest of civility. It also clarified the fault lines between the two societies envisioned by Williams and Cotton. For Williams, the newly chartered communities of Rhode Island did not look to Old Testament patterns as the foundations for their colony. Doing so, as Williams argued, falsely read the intent of the Old Testament scriptures. He severed the political connections between Israel and Israel's kings with any government.¹⁵⁹ At the incarnation of Christ, all those models and types were fulfilled in him and pointed either to his accomplished work or the church.¹⁶⁰

Cotton, on the other hand, rooted a properly ordered, godly society as typologically connected to the models of the Old Testament. By holding to this connection, he also utilized another principle to dismantle Williams's hermeneutic, questioning the integrity of his views in light of the natural law. Williams, as Cotton estimated, deployed an improper theology and typology that unhitched Jesus from the Old Testament and subsequently violated the created order, or, the natural law. A law pervaded both Old and New Testaments—a statute written on the hearts of all mankind

¹⁵⁷ *BTW*, 54,68.

¹⁵⁸ *BTW*, 73.

¹⁵⁹ Hall, *Separating Church and State*, 74–77.

¹⁶⁰ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 33; Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, 34–35; Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 151.

from every nation. This law was the law to worship and glorify the one true God.¹⁶¹ This precept dominated the legal structures of Old Testament Israel and, according to Cotton, in no way dissipated with Christ's incarnation; the law of Moses, which reflected the natural law, was a law that God inscribed on the hearts of all peoples, regardless of their station or relationship to Christ. How could Williams argue, therefore, that the laws of Moses, especially the enforcement of the first table, had no bearing on any civil society if God enshrined those laws as part of his creational order? This final set of questions pertained to the issue of the common good; tethered to this concept, moreover, was a robust natural law theory.

Natural Law and the Common Good

Roger Williams and John Cotton coupled their theological arguments for their notions of civility to natural law arguments about the *bonum commune*.¹⁶² They both fell comfortably within natural law theory, which necessarily connected to questions surrounding the common good. As William Haller surmised about puritan natural law theory, "The law of nature was said to consist of all those divine decrees which called creation into being and by which it moves. It is a law evident to reason, which is itself a work of God, and this law, though transcended, is by no means invalidated by grace."¹⁶³ Thus, laws in early modern England needed to reflect the law of nature, or natural law. Without this, the civil statute codified unjust legal precepts at odds with God's created order.

This part of their debate evinced the complex threads of moral and ethical reasoning that undergirded their arguments for and against religious freedom. Indeed, the

¹⁶¹ *BTW*, 113.

¹⁶² Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 30.

¹⁶³ William Haller, *Liberty and the Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 77.

natural law and common good components shifted their discourse from abstract theological notions into how Williams and Cotton conceived their political formulations manifesting. This was especially crucial for Williams to lace together with his argument. Without it, he fell into the pitfalls of a circular argument: He would have relied solely on theological reasoning as justification for why the civil state should not engage in matters of theology.¹⁶⁴ This was why natural law thinking in this debate was historically significant. Both Cotton and Williams agreed that the Bible represented the most important sourcebook for their contrasting viewpoints. Their arguments, however, required the mobilization of natural law theory. This does not suggest that Williams, Cotton, nor their respective theological traditions viewed the natural law as an equal authority alongside the Bible for moral and ethical reasoning.¹⁶⁵ On the contrary, natural law thinking served as a complementary epistemological source to verify their theological and typological interpretations.¹⁶⁶

The natural law tradition remains a vast field of study and covers Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions as well as the natural law in the Christian tradition.¹⁶⁷ For the

¹⁶⁴ Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment*, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 31–32. Here, Davis slightly stresses to an extreme degree the equality of natural law theory with the use of the Bible. See also, John D. Eusden, “Natural Law and Covenant Theology in New England, 1620–1670,” *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 5, no. 1 (1960): 1–2.

¹⁶⁶ Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 170.

¹⁶⁷ For works on the natural law tradition, see J. Daryl Charles, *Natural Law and Religious Freedom: The Role of Moral First Things in Grounding and Protecting the First Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2018); J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stephen John Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Robert P. George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Pamela M. Hall, *Narrative and the Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomistic Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Anthony J. Lisska, *Aquinas’s Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomistic View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbury (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); Christopher Wolfe, *Natural Law Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A*

English theological tradition—and specifically, the Puritan tradition—William Ames served as a figurehead, outlining the contours of natural law theory in Reformation England.¹⁶⁸ Ames, along with Cotton and Williams, operated within a Reformed theological heritage that affirmed the depravity of mankind. This depravity not only inhibited the knowledge of God, but it prevented men and women from clearly seeing the law of nature. Natural law, though engraved on the heart of mankind, suffered under the penalty of sin. As Ames wrote, “*The light of understanding is invilved, and obscured with manifold darknesse.*”¹⁶⁹ Yet, Ames developed the concept of Synteresis—a moral capacity, natural to humanity, and integrated within the operations of conscience. As previously argued, Ames understood the conscience as bound to God and testified for or against the human agent’s ethical actions, depending upon the lawfulness or licentiousness of the act. He called Synteresis the “storehouse of Principles,” and defined it as, “A habit of the understanding, by which wee doe assent unto the principles of *morall actions*, that is, such actions as are duty, because God hath willed, or commanded them.”¹⁷⁰ God’s grace, furthermore, preserved the operative function of this moral faculty that provided the “knowledge of many things which wee ought to doe or shun,” notwithstanding man’s total depravity.¹⁷¹

Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ For secondary works assessing Ames’s contribution in the puritan natural law tradition, see Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, especially pages 59–64; Eusden, “Natural Law and Covenant Theology in New England, 1620–1670;” George J. Gatgounis, *Calvin the Magistrate: His Political and Legal Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), especially pages 60–62; Miller, *The New England Mind*, especially pages 186–198. As argued above on the issue of conscience, William Ames loomed large over the entire puritan tradition, especially over New England theologians. Williams and Cotton fit within this tradition, though, they landed in divergent conclusions about what the natural law prescribed.

¹⁶⁹ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 4.

¹⁷¹ Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 4.

As a law “naturally written in the hearts of al men,” Ames believed it directed humanity towards generally accessible virtuous acts, as well as enjoined the conscience away from wickedness.¹⁷² Ames, furthermore, connected this quality of natural law theory to the realm of civil law. Gatgounis argued, “the moral law and the law of nature are contiguous.”¹⁷³ Perry Miller, similarly, contended that for Ames, civil law must adhere to the precepts of the natural law.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Ames unequivocally declared, “Civil law inasmuch as it is right is derived from the law of nature; for that is not law which is not just and right, and that in morality is called right which accords with right practical reason, and right practical is the law of nature.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, the laws, say, of colonial Massachusetts, must coincide with the natural law; a dereliction to connect the two meant that the statute failed to inculcate true morality and also sundered the community from God’s creational order. In this latter reality, the society cannot achieve the pursuit of the common good because its laws opposed the fundamental precepts necessary for human and societal flourishing.

This understanding of natural law appeared in Massachusetts and in the writings of its leaders. John Winthrop, for example, proclaimed, “There is likewise a double Lawe by which wee are regulated in our conversacion one towards another: in both the former respects, the lawe of nature and the lawe of grace.”¹⁷⁶ The law of nature, according to Winthrop, included the general foundations of the moral law, especially love

¹⁷² Ames, *Of Consciences & the Cases thereof*, 5; William Ames, “The Law of Nature,” in *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents*, ed. A.S.P. Woodhouse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 187.

¹⁷³ Gatgounis, *Calvin the Magistrate*, 60.

¹⁷⁴ Miller, *The New England Mind*, 197.

¹⁷⁵ Ames, “The Law of Nature,” in *Puritanism and Liberty*, 189.

¹⁷⁶ John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity*, WP, 2:83.

of neighbor.¹⁷⁷ Cotton, moreover, argued that a properly ordered society patterned its laws from the law of nature which God inscribed on the heart.¹⁷⁸

The connection between natural law and the common good surfaced in the Williams-Cotton debate. As such, the natural law served as a crucial pillar for both civility of conformity and evangelical civility. Williams and Cotton shared the belief that the natural law exuded permanence, prescribed virtue while prohibiting vice, was discoverable, and was contemplated within the human conscience.¹⁷⁹ Yet, they clearly disagreed as to what the natural law demanded with regards to the relationship between church and state.

At this point in their debate, Williams looked to the issues surrounding the Thirty Years' War and the recent outbreak of the English Civil War as an epistemological proof against religious establishment.¹⁸⁰ He contended, from the onset of *The Bloody Tenent*, that conformity violated the law of God, and the violent conflicts plaguing Europe served as proof for his thesis. The natural law must portend flourishing, peace, and stability. Yet, England burned with the flames of religious wars and conflict.¹⁸¹ He wrote of the “most woeful proof,” namely, “the turbulent whiplash of England’s religious travails since Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church in 1534.”¹⁸² In a passage that seemed to abound with frustration, Williams queried how any policy of religious establishment could succeed in Old or New England. Revolutionary England, he wrote, multiplied in doctrinal, ecclesial, and theological plurality; the kingdom’s religious center

¹⁷⁷ Winthrop, *WP*, 2:283.

¹⁷⁸ John Cotton, *A Practicall Commentary, or An Exposition with Observations, Reasons, and Vses upon the First Epistle Generall of John* (London: M.S., 1658), 123–124.

¹⁷⁹ For a development of these categories, see Cory D. Higdon, “Roger Williams, Natural Law, and Religious Freedom,” in *Journal of Church and State* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2021), 85–108.

¹⁸⁰ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 31.

¹⁸¹ *BT*, Letter to the reader, also page 16 and pages 24–26.

¹⁸² *BT*, 64.

splintered. Given the stark disagreements between even the “godly,” as he called them, what hope had any society in attempting coerced religious orthodoxy?¹⁸³ How could any community achieve civility of conformity when doctrinal and theological proliferation abounded?

Williams, therefore, asserted that the peace of the civil sphere must differ wholly from the peace of the church, the former “being meerly and essentially *civill* and *humane*,” while the latter was “of a higher and faree different nature from the Peace of the place or people.”¹⁸⁴ Given this, the only “breach of Civilitie” came when advocates of conformity blurred the lines of distinction between the peace of the state and the peace of the church.¹⁸⁵ In fact, Williams stressed the distinction to such an extent that he argued, “Christianite adds not to the nature of a Civill Commonweal, nor doth want of Christianite diminish it.”¹⁸⁶ Moreover, false religions or damnable heresies posed no corporeal threat to the civil state.¹⁸⁷ The peace, therefore, of towns, cities, and entire nations was not contingent upon the presence or absence of Christianity, nor any religious sect.¹⁸⁸

Williams, no doubt, drew upon his own observations and experiences in New England. His examined and spent time with Native Americans noticing that though they did not worship the God of the Bible, their communities existed in concord.¹⁸⁹ Thus, Williams disabused civility of conformity from two fronts within the natural law tradition. Coerced religious establishment did not secure peace; war, persecution, and

¹⁸³ *BT*, 115.

¹⁸⁴ *BT*, 25.

¹⁸⁵ *BT*, 26.

¹⁸⁶ *BT*, 203.

¹⁸⁷ *BT*, 103.

¹⁸⁸ West, “Roger Williams on the Limits of Religious Liberty,” 139–140.

¹⁸⁹ Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 121, 135.

violence seemed the fruit of civility of conformity, which placed it outside the confines of God's created order. Secondly, however, Williams noted that a different civility, one without established religion, inculcated peace. He stated, "When the most *High God* created *all things* of *nothing*, he saw and acknowledged divers sorts of *goodness*, which must still be acknowledged in their distinct kindes: a good *Ayre*, a good *Ground*, a good *Tree*, a good *Sheepe*, &c."¹⁹⁰ Williams added to this list cities, people, corporations, and families. Thus, Williams contended that notwithstanding the religious sensibilities of a person, he or she, thanks to the discoverability of the natural law, could live peaceably. "It is cleare they may," Williams wrote, "from all *Reason* and *Experience* in many flourishing *Citties* and *Kingdomes* of the World, and so offend not against the *civill State* and *Peace*."¹⁹¹ Though he called idolaters and heretics "ravenous and greedy *Wolves*" in spiritual affairs, Williams hoped in the natural law as a moral government, accessible to all peoples, upon which communities could establish its laws and norms.¹⁹²

Perhaps reflecting on his own banishment from Massachusetts, Williams lamented the status of supposed "*Soule-killers*," or heretics, who apparently posed a threat to the civil sphere.¹⁹³ Massachusetts falsely labeled many people as enemies of the truth and adopted, according to Williams, the following disposition: "This man differs from us, and wee desire not to be troubled." From that came the impulse to remove "godly, useful, and peaceable," people from the "Common Earth in that Wildernesse amongst them."¹⁹⁴ Yet, Williams believed that a society without religious establishment, governed by the natural law, encouraged more faithful citizenship and political

¹⁹⁰ *BT*, 134.

¹⁹¹ *BT*, 67.

¹⁹² *BT*, 67.

¹⁹³ *BT*, 110.

¹⁹⁴ *BT*, 116.

participation. Thus, Williams, at this point, began to develop the natural law argument for evangelical civility. These “*Soule-killers*,” who otherwise lived as faithful citizens, may, “by the grace of *Christ* . . . prove (as *Paul*) *Soule-savers* tomorrow.”¹⁹⁵ In other words, Williams interlocked natural law theory with his soteriological aspirations for converting unbelievers.

Evangelical civility, therefore, adhered to God’s created order by encouraging peace and stability through the liberation of the conscience from the coercive powers of the state. This not only secured the conditions for societal flourishing, but also promoted religious and theological purity. Consciences were now free to respond, as God designed them, to the summons of the gospel of their own volition. Thus, evangelical civility, by Williams’s estimation, framed a public square where evangelism occurred, while simultaneously unifying a religiously diverse community.

John Cotton, on the other hand, viewed Williams’s position as disastrous, both in its departure from God’s created order and for the *bonum commun* of both the church and the state. Cotton situated his natural law arguments around the highest good for government, as established by God in the natural law. God, according to Cotton, established the entire institution and reason for governments to exist. They represented extensions of God’s common grace towards humanity, even in places devoid of churches. “In the very light of Nature,” Cotton wrote, “such nations did erect such and such Governments, and Governments for the good of humane society, and that not onley in worldly matters, But in matters also of Religion.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, the natural law over mankind portended the formation of governments for a twofold purpose: for matters merely civil and for matters regarding religion. Thus, for Cotton, he observed in the other nations of the world a propensity towards religious establishment and the maintenance of religious

¹⁹⁵ *BT*, 110.

¹⁹⁶ *BTW*, 107.

bodies, because religion functioned as a positive good for the community. The “light of Nature” directed all humanity institute governmental structures both in worldly and spiritual matters.

Cotton, though disapproving of nations that established heterodox, nevertheless pointed to jurisdictions where governments organized its citizenry around religious conformity. Despite the pagan and unorthodox nature of these communities, Cotton wrote that “by instinct of Nature . . . took care of the maintenance of that Religion, which they tooke to be of God.”¹⁹⁷ He then bemoaned, “What a shame were it, that Pagan Magistrates should be more careful and zealous of the honour of their Idols, then Christians of the Honour of the knowne true God, the Lord our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier?”¹⁹⁸ Thus, Cotton indicted Williams’s political philosophy as both a rejection of nature’s light and in its godlessness.

Unlike Williams, Cotton believed that religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, amounted to the highest good for a society, which necessitated its protection from the magistrate.¹⁹⁹ “The flourishing of Religion,” according to Cotton, “is the flourishing of the civill State, and the decay of Religion is the decay and ruine of the civill State.”²⁰⁰ While he conceded that the peace of the city contained merely civil and human matters, the society remained inextricably linked to the spiritual vitality of the churches and its Christian community. Church and state, though distinct in operation, authority, and in eschatological importance, existed together in a mutual, natural, and harmonious relationship.²⁰¹ He argued, “The Peace of the Common-wealth will soone be

¹⁹⁷ *BTW*, 108.

¹⁹⁸ *BTW*, 108–109.

¹⁹⁹ *BTW*, 151; James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16.

²⁰⁰ *BTW*, 162.

²⁰¹ *BTW*, 13.

broken, as the Purity of Religion is broken in the Churches.”²⁰² As an evidentiary tool, Cotton cited the example of Israel: When the Israelites forsake God, it not only wrought spiritual calamity, but caused civil and human tumult.²⁰³ God appointed the magistrate, therefore, to protect the purity of religion for the sake of the church and the commonwealth.²⁰⁴

Given this, punitive action, including executing heretics, extended from the “morall, that is . . . universall and perpetuall equity.”²⁰⁵ Civility of conformity was enshrined in the natural law. Cotton restated that this policy of conformity in no way abrogated the natural function of the human conscience. No magistrate nor king held authority over a person’s soul.²⁰⁶ Yet, heresy, blasphemy, or idolatry, especially when espoused in obstinance, fell under the natural, God-ordained canopy of the magistrate’s authority. Failure to act portended the destruction of society. Cotton cited the example of Geneva, writing, “No experience in any age did ever prove it pernicious, to punish seducing Apostates, after due conviction of the error of their Way. Wherein did the burning of *Servetus* prove pernicious to *Geneva*?” or the just execution of many popish Priests to Queen *Elizabeth*, or to the English State?”²⁰⁷ Conveniently missing from this were those Protestants executed under Mary I. The execution of puritans and those of Cotton’s religious tradition complicated his position, and he did not address the apparent contradiction. While Cotton did not provide an answer, Martin Luther anticipated the potential objection. A Catholic ruler, convinced of the Catholic faith, could (and did) adopt the same political theology espoused by Luther and Cotton to suppress Protestant

²⁰² *BTW*, 12–13.

²⁰³ *BTW*, 20.

²⁰⁴ *BTW*, 66.

²⁰⁵ *BTW*, 67.

²⁰⁶ *BTW*, 125.

²⁰⁷ *BTW*, 129.

dissent and execute obstinate Protestant adherents. Luther responded only as Luther would: “What do I care?” He explained that the righteous course of action remained righteous, regardless of how other pernicious and wicked tyrants applied the truth in their jurisdictions. He wrote, “If we were to hold back necessary instruction because of the tyrants, we would long since have had to give up the Gospel altogether. . . . We must not abolish or hide the commandment to stone false prophets.”²⁰⁸ While Cotton did not explicitly explain the seeming irony of his position in the way Luther did, he did indirectly address the quagmire in the same vein of reasoning adopted by Luther.²⁰⁹

Cotton undergirded his position, moreover, with a challenge to Williams’s claim about the general goodness and morality of even the pagan. According to Williams, civility of conformity required a higher virtue and ethic not accessible to the unregenerate; conformity, likewise, did little to convert the unregenerate. Thus, it left people in a hypocritical state of faith, which undermined the entire moral character of the society, exposing it to a potentially sudden calamity. The demands of conformity were, moreover, unnecessary because of the natural law. Cotton, however, rejected these arguments. He asserted that without Christ, and without the civil conservation of religious orthodoxy, good citizenship remained impossible. Religion was the society’s highest good. How, then, could Williams caricature an idolatrous and pagan neighbor as a peaceable and kind neighbor when that person helped “men on to perdition”?²¹⁰ Like Williams, Cotton tethered his natural law theory with his own set of soteriological and eschatological concerns that formed the basis of civility of conformity. A rejection of established orthodoxy violated the law of nature and “the very defect of so needful a Law

²⁰⁸ *LW*, 13:67.

²⁰⁹ *BTW*, 108–109.

²¹⁰ *BTW*, 87–88.

may bring the wrath of God upon the Civil State: as did the defect of a King of Israel.”²¹¹ Blessing and judgment from heaven hinged upon an adherence to God’s created order—for Cotton, that order was civility of conformity.

Taken together, the theological, typological, and natural law arguments wove together in both Williams’s and Cotton’s arguments regarding liberty and conformity. Williams publicly undermined the theological and ethical pillars of conformity, questioning the axiomatic precepts that connected the Bible to the politics of establishment.²¹² He also foisted into this contest the law of nature, contending that reason and experience verified his interpretation of the scriptures. These represented multiple sources levied against the prevailing political theology of the early modern period.²¹³ Not only was civility of conformity theologically erroneous, but it could never secure the peace it promised because it stood in contradiction with God’s creational order. Cotton, however, defended conformity as biblically true and ensconced in the heart of mankind. The Bible and nature, therefore, became the same sourcebooks for radically divergent conceptions of civil and ecclesial societies.

Conclusion

This first exchange between Williams and Cotton encapsulated the contest between two rival notions of civility, and the narrative described presented a complex collision of ideas. Indeed, Williams and Cotton inhabited expansive theological traditions and presented arguments rooted in hermeneutics, biblical authority, natural law reasoning, and the common good of a society. Framed by their experiences in New England, Williams and Cotton brought to this discourse their deepest set of convictions

²¹¹ *BTW*, 151.

²¹² Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 154.

²¹³ Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 32; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 69.

regarding civility. They framed the issues, moreover, in the severest of terms, intensified by the potential societal and eschatological consequences of their divergent positions. Their contest of civility, moreover, did not dissipate, but only swelled into another pamphlet war in the late 1640s and 50s. This continued contest further distilled the faultiness and issues at stake. This time, however, more actors entered the scene, and levied direct challenges to the political projects established in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

CHAPTER 5
CONTEST OF CIVILITY PART TWO: GORTON'S
DEFENSE, ILL NEWS, AND THE
MAGISTRATE'S POWER

The exchange between Roger Williams and John Cotton between 1643 to 1647 did not bring an end to the contest of civility. On the contrary, from 1646 to 1653, Massachusetts found itself having to defend the foundations of its society and the liberty they needed to build God's plantation. Dissenters levied sustained critiques against the Bay Colony's religious establishment and civility, publishing tracts, pamphlets, and books in London during a time when the idea of enforced orthodoxy endured significant challenges in revolutionary England.¹ Figures like Samuel Gorton and John Clarke not only published stories of violent persecution conducted by the magistrates in Massachusetts, but also petitioned Parliament to intervene in colonial affairs—to strip the city on a hill of its authority to enact systemic persecution against dissenting consciences.

During this time, Baptists also began active campaigns in the Bay Colony and, from 1642 to 1646, the General Court had a growing docket of cases with parents refusing to present their children for baptism. The rise of dissent at home, and the transatlantic challenges the colony faced, further exacerbated the contest of civility. In this context, a new list of names began engaging in the debate, showing continuity and nuances in their own understandings of civility and the relationship between church and state. Still, each figure was burdened by the same question that faced Massachusetts and

¹ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education, 2000), 7. See also John Coffey, “The Toleration Controversy,” in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith D. Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), and William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

Rhode Island throughout the previous decades: how much pluralism can a society sustain before it disintegrates? Embedded within their respective answers were key insights into the development of ideas regarding religious liberty, the limits of toleration, and the *bonum commune*. Civility—the customs, institutions, structures, and dispositions required for a well-ordered society—also laid at the heart of this continued contest.²

Samuel Gorton, Edward Winslow, and a New England Crisis

While Roger Williams published his works against civility of conformity, and opened a debate between he and John Cotton, he also managed to secure a colonial patent for Rhode Island in March 1644. With this charter securely in hand, Williams returned to New England and began the difficult process of uniting the fragmented constellation of settlements that emerged in the Narragansett Bay between 1636 to 1644.³ Adding to Williams’s difficulty was the response from Massachusetts: the Bay Colony did not look favorably on Williams’s success in England, which established a colony, protected by the authority of Parliament, that served as a breeding ground for heterodoxy. Summarily, Massachusetts leveraged its power in the region to continue to lay claim to lands in the Providence Plantations, especially Pawtuxit and Shawomet.⁴ Those two specific areas became contested during the Gorton affair, beginning in 1642; the residents of the former signed themselves over to Massachusetts in exchange for support and protection from Gorton. The latter, however, denoted the lands Gorton claimed he lawfully purchased

² See Keith Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Again, the definition of civility in this project relies on Thomas’s work, which defined civility in much more comprehensive terms than mere manners or speech. Civility contained the necessary conditions for societal flourishing. How one defined civility was how one grasped the shape, contours, and institutions of a community. It also determined the kind of character demanded of citizens.

³ *WJ*, 2:197–198; *RRI*, 1:143–146; Sydney V. James *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 59.

⁴ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 59–60; Kenneth W. Porter, “Samuell Gorton: New England Firebrand,” *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September 1934): 434.

from a Narragansett sachem. After Gorton's banishment from Massachusetts in the spring of 1644, the General Court informed Gorton that those lands, located south of Providence, remained under its control. If Gorton or his followers tried to resettle there, they would be arrested and most likely executed. For the remainder of 1644, Gorton and his followers retreated to Portsmouth.⁵

Williams's success at attaining the patent, coupled with sustained efforts by Massachusetts to retain its claims to various lands within the Providence Plantations, reinvigorated Gorton's resolve to reclaim his property.⁶ Sometime between late 1644 and early 1645, Samuel Gorton, along with John Greene and Randall Holden chartered a ship out of New Amsterdam for London. They endeavored to present their case to the Commission for Foreign Plantations, the Parliamentary committee charged with governing the colonies of England.⁷ Over the course of the year, Gorton lobbied for a reversal of the General Court's actions in 1644.

The Gortonists enjoyed a historical context more favorable to their demands, including a burgeoning acceptance of religious toleration as a viable political policy in England.⁸ In fact, news reached the Commission for Foreign Plantations that Massachusetts had, since 1643, enacted systemic persecution against Baptists within the colony's borders. By 1644, Massachusetts codified banishment as the punishment for any apprehended Baptist and ignored a petition signed by merchants of the colony calling for

⁵ *CRIHS*, 2:152; Robert Emmet Wall Jr., *Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 146–147.

⁶ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 147; Porter, "Samuell Gorton," 433

⁷ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 147; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 59

⁸ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 145–147; John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 209; John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1993), 394; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 148–149.

an end to the anti-Baptist laws.⁹ This news troubled the members of the Commission for Foreign Plantations, which included figures like the former governor of Massachusetts Henry Vane. Other members of the committee including the Earl of Warwick Robert Rich, and Samuel Vassall, viewed religious toleration much more favorably. Indeed, this was the same Commission that had, in 1644, granted Williams the charter for Rhode Island.¹⁰ The committee, therefore, decided in favor of Gorton, providing him a letter signed by the Commission to take back to Massachusetts. Gorton remained in London, instead dispatching Holden, along with the letter, to Boston in order to begin the process of regaining their lands.¹¹ While the exact reasons for Gorton's decision to stay in England remained unclear, it seemed that he anticipated a response from Massachusetts. In fact, while the Parliamentary Commission was favorable to Gorton's cause, the letter to Massachusetts's General Court indicated the commissioner's openness to hearing from an agent of the Bay Colony who could answer the charges levied by Gorton.¹²

The first Massachusetts heard of Gorton's success came on September 13, 1646, when Randall Holden triumphantly arrived in Boston's harbor with a copy of the Parliamentary order. Holden was one of Gorton's original followers, and the author of the September 1643 letter to the Massachusetts General Court that castigated the political and theological structure of the Bay Colony.¹³ He was one of the formerly condemned and

⁹ *GH*, 347, 413; *RGC*, 2:85; *WJ*, 2:177; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 148–149; Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 83.

¹⁰ Evan Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism: America and the Religious Politics of English Expansion, 1497–1662* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 227, 240; Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 339; Francis J. Bremer, "Dissent in New England," in *The Oxford Handbook of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume 1: The Post Reformation Era, 1559–1689*, ed. John Coffey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 259.

¹¹ *WJ*, 2:282–283; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 209; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 149.

¹² Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 151, 154; *WJ*, 2:283.

¹³ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 131; *CRIHS*, 2:261–271.

banished radicals alongside Gorton in 1644. Now, however, he returned to Massachusetts with an order from England: relinquish Shawomet to the Gortonists and cease operations outside of Massachusetts's jurisdiction.¹⁴

News of Gorton's triumph shocked the General Court. Indeed, for about a week, John Winthrop refused to allow Holden off the ship moored in Boston's harbor.¹⁵ After consulting with the magistrates and ministers in Boston, the local officials decided it best not to usurp Parliament's authority, thereby reluctantly granting Holden safe passage to the Shawomet. Winthrop recorded that at the next month's session of the General Court, the magistrates and deputies would, yet again, consider what to do with these obstinate heretics known as the Gortonists.¹⁶

For Massachusetts, Holden's return and his free passage through the colony's jurisdiction represented a defining moment. Gorton's actions in London had, for the first time in the colony's history, elicited oversight from authorities in Old England. A commission of non-Massachusetts men overruled the colony's decision against a group of people the General Court viewed as the vilest of heretics. As Wall noted, this development set a "deadly precedent" for a society that had, since its inception, asserted itself as a self-determining, godly society.¹⁷ The Gortonists threatened Massachusetts's civility. How could the city on a hill preserve its theological identity and communal unity if bureaucrats in London stifled the colony's laws designed to reflect a plantation dedicated to God?¹⁸

The General Court took up this question at its October 1646 meeting.

¹⁴ *WJ*, 2:282–283.

¹⁵ *WJ*, 2:2843–284.

¹⁶ *WJ*, 2:284; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 152.

¹⁷ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 152; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 209.

¹⁸ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 152; Porter, "Samuell Gorton," 433–434.

According to Winthrop, a debate ensued amongst the court's officers about the limits with which Massachusetts could defy orders from London. The court, after reading aloud its charter, determined that Massachusetts existed as an institution of "absolute power of government." The magistrates and assistance, chosen by the freemen, possessed an inviolable authority to establish laws, statutes, and mores for the good of the colony. The court concluded that their charter and their form of government made Massachusetts a self-governing colony, rooted in "self-sufficiency." The officers certainly recognized that the Bay Colony derived its authority from the royal charter; they owed allegiance to England. Yet, this did not annul the liberties afforded them in their charter—liberties now threatened by Gorton and the command of the Parliamentary Commission.¹⁹ Indeed, the ministers in Massachusetts, summoned to the General Court's session to provide counsel, framed the case involving Gorton as integrally tethered to the liberty of Massachusetts. If the affair with Gorton remained unchallenged, thereby establishing a precedent of Parliamentary oversight, the ministers warned the court that the colony's liberty was imperiled.²⁰

In response, the General Court selected Edward Winslow to serve as its agent in London, immediately dispatching him to London. Winslow served as a magistrate and former governor of Plymouth colony. The choice of this Plymouth man, to the court, made sense given Winslow's connections in London, his political acumen, and his first-hand experience of the Gortonists when they lived in Plymouth from 1638 to 1639.²¹ The General Court gave Winslow copies of its proceedings against Gorton, along with copies of the germane pages from Winthrop's journal during that recounted Massachusetts's

¹⁹ *WJ*, 2:290–291; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 152–153.

²⁰ *WJ*, 2:294–295.

²¹ *WJ*, 2:295; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 153; Porter, "Samuell Gorton," 434; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 152, 209 – 212.

escapade with the Gortonists.²² These documents helped Winslow when he made his presentation before the Parliamentary Commission. Also included with these texts was a “humble remonstrance and petition” by the General Court, reminding the commissioners of the colony’s liberties and outlined the just actions taken against Gorton and his followers between 1642 to 1644.

The petition to the commissioners reaffirmed the core commitments of Massachusetts’s civility of conformity. The Bay Colony Puritans left England for the cause of liberty—to pattern their society, government, and communities after the Word of God as they saw fit.²³ The Commission’s injunction against Massachusetts in the Gorton affair, as the petition distilled, threatened that precious, sacred liberty.²⁴ The General Court informed the commissioners that their agent, Mr. Winslow, had in his possession the records and letters between the court and the Gortonists that, by the court’s estimation, proved the unworthiness of Gorton and his cause. Gorton and his followers provoked the Bay Colony to action by their civil disturbances, which would have culminated in the “ruin” of the colony had its General Court not intervened.²⁵ The General Court reasoned that they operated well within the boundaries of the colony’s charter by prosecuting Gorton, banishing him from Massachusetts; furthermore, the petition asserted the importance of the court’s authority to uphold justice and the rule of law in accordance with the Bible. The people of Massachusetts belonged to God as his people, and they would give an account for its faithfulness or failure in administering the

²² *WJ*, 2:311; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 155.

²³ *WJ*, 2:310. See also, Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 74. Noll, in discussing the liberty pursued by the New England colonist, distinguished between positive and negative liberty. The latter granted liberty to individuals to do as they pleased, which was not Massachusetts’s aim. Instead, they established positive liberty, which pertained to a communal liberty to construct a godly society together in New England.

²⁴ *WJ*, 2:310–311.

²⁵ *WJ*, 2:311–312.

law of God throughout its jurisdiction.²⁶

With the petition and General Court records in hand, Winslow made his way to London to press the case of Massachusetts before Parliament. Upon his arrival, however, he discovered that Gorton, anticipating a response from Massachusetts, published *Simplicities Defence against Seven-Headed Policy* in 1646. This work read as a documentary history of Gorton's time in New England from his arrival in 1637 to his banishment in 1644. He curated a selection of letters, court documents, and warrants from the Bay Colony, placing them in chronological order, while also inserting his own editorial commentary. Gorton certainly intended this as a polemical work to prove the righteousness of his cause by discrediting the antics of Massachusetts. Despite his intent, the documents he included were reliable copies. Proof of this came when Winslow responded to *Simplicities Defence*. At times, Winslow certainly charged Gorton with fabricating some letters or events, but he did not provide contrary evidence to refute those parts of Gorton's chronicle.²⁷ Instead, Winslow's answer to Gorton in *Hypocrisie Unmasked* mainly critiqued Gorton's narrative because it omitted key pieces of the narrative that incriminated the Gortonists—elements that Winslow incorporated into *Hypocrisie Unmasked*.²⁸ Thus, much of their dispute drew upon similar letters, warrants, and documents exchanged between the disputing parties. The contest revolved around the interpretations of the source materials.²⁹ How the history was interpreted, furthermore,

²⁶ *WJ*, 2:312; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 153–154.

²⁷ See for example, *HU*, 70. Winslow took issue with a couple letters between the Gortonists and the General Court in the fall of 1642; he also rejected the truthfulness of how Gorton described his arrest by the Massachusetts militia. Gorton stated that the militia pointed their weapons at the women and children within the Gortonist community, which Winslow flatly denied.

²⁸ Porter, "Samuell Gorton," 434.

²⁹ Jonathan Beecher Field and Robert Wall both contended that the documents contained in Gorton's work and Winslow's response were, for the most part, accurate and reliable. They correspond with other source materials including the General Court records and Winthrop's journal. The issue was less about the documents and more about how those documents were interpreted and spun by either Gorton or Winslow. See Jonathan Beecher Field, *Errands into the Metropolis: New England Dissidents in*

provided another flashpoint in the contest of civility. Gorton's critique, his success against Massachusetts, and the methods Winslow employed to respond to Gorton set a pattern for Massachusetts's subsequent controversies with the Baptists and Quakers in the next two decades.

Gorton's Defence

While Gorton's primary quarrel with Massachusetts pertained to the loss of his land and the miscarriage of justice against himself and his followers, he pressed the issue of the colony's political theology.³⁰ *Simplicities Defence* served as a "warning to all Christians."³¹ New England adopted a degenerate form of justice that suppressed consciences. This judicial framework subsequently veiled secret sin: "to make themselves appear, in the eyes of men, more holy and honourable in the things of God, then others of their Brethren."³² For Gorton, hypocrisy was the root of New England's sins.

Gorton shared Roger Williams's concerns about religious establishment that Williams expressed in his debate with John Cotton. Indeed, both of them asserted the soteriological dangers of coerced orthodoxy, contending that civilly mandated orthodoxies inhibited conditions for true belief and encouraged hypocrisy. Yet, Gorton's *Simplicities Defence* developed a different means of expressing opposition to New England religious establishment: he delineated his disdain of coerced orthodoxy through "dissenting narrative," turning himself and other Massachusetts dissenters into martyr-like figures who languished for cause of conscience.³³ Dissenters, "walked so, as to do no

Revolutionary London (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009), 52; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 155. Wall, furthermore, called Gorton's reproduction a faithful representation of the events.

³⁰ For the more economic and property elements of Gorton's work, see Michelle Burnham, "Samuel Gorton's Leveller Aesthetics and the Economics of Colonial Dissent, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (July 2010): 433–458.

³¹ *SD*, Epistle to the reader, no page number.

³² *SD*, 1.

³³ Field, *Errands into the Metropolis*, 48–49.

man wrong.”³⁴ Gorton described nonconformists as faithful, law-abiding subjects who differed only in matters of religion. Massachusetts destroyed the livelihoods and, moreover, lives of nonconformist who crossed paths with the ruling classes of the Bay Colony. Indeed, Gorton concluded that Massachusetts deteriorated into a colony bent on taking the “whole Country of the *English* Plantations into their Jurisdictions,” and to establish their religious convictions throughout all New England, even if it meant taking the lives of those who dared to live by the dictates of their own conscience.³⁵

Historically, Gorton’s *Simplicities Defence* became the first in a long line of dissenting narratives levied against the civility of Massachusetts.³⁶ Later dissenters like the Baptist John Clarke, or the numerous Quaker chronicles that appeared in the 1660s, followed Gorton’s method by retelling stories of persecution by the magistrates of Massachusetts. This is not to say that these later dissenters intentionally mimicked Gorton. It indicated, however, that the prevalence of martyrdom accounts became the preferred means of dissenters to try and petition London to intervene in New England. The reasons for the utilization of dissenting narratives, as Weimer and Coffey noted, stemmed from both theological convictions and political contingencies during revolutionary England. Theologically, these dissenting narratives, in the minds of their authors, linked their spiritual cause to suffering and martyrdom, which were viewed as marks of the true disciples of Christ. Summarily, by casting themselves as suffering saints, they framed Massachusetts as in league with Pilate, Nero, and Queen Mary—the persecutors of God’s holy people. Politically, the context of revolutionary England fragmented attempts at religious conformity, which had a double effect: nonconformists began expressing themselves more publicly than they had during the rule of Bishop Laud,

³⁴ *SD*, 7.

³⁵ *SD*, 9; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210.

³⁶ Field, *Errands into the Metropolis*, 49.

and, religious toleration became more popular, especially amongst the New Model Army and its leader, Oliver Cromwell.³⁷

This was the context when Gorton published *Simplicities Defence*, and he continued, throughout his narrative, to present himself, his followers, and other dissenters in the Bay Colony as unjustly treated servants of God.³⁸ Recounting his original arrival to the Bay Colony, Gorton declared that he and his band only came to “injoy the liberty of our consciences,” and described the state of affairs when he disembarked in Boston during tumultuous year of 1637. He drew upon the memory of the Antinomian Controversy and Williams’s banishment in 1635 as supportive evidence, corroborating a pattern in Massachusetts’s actions against dissenters.³⁹ Gorton chronicled the fines, banishments, and loss of liberties that befell doctrinal defectors to Massachusetts’s theological order.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the Antinomian Controversy, moreover, Gorton wrote, “We plainly perceiving that the scope of their doctrine was bent onely to maintain that outward forme of worship which they had erected to themselves, tending only to the outward carriage of one man toward another.”⁴¹ In other words, Massachusetts’s religious

³⁷ Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689*, 6–7, 145–149; Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 85. See also, Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution*, 394; William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 209–210; A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); A.N.B. Cotton, “Cromwell and the Self-Denying Ordinance,” *History* 62, no. 205 (1977): 211–231; Michael Mendle, ed., *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers and the English State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Carolyn Polizzotto, “What Really Happened at the Whitehall Debates? A New Source,” *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (March 2014): 33–51.

³⁸ Philip F. Gura, “The Radical Ideology of Samuel Gorton: New Light on the Relation of English to American Puritanism,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Jan 1979): 95.

³⁹ Sydney V. James, *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island, 1638–1750*, ed. Theodore Dwight Bozeman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 49–50.

⁴⁰ *SD*, 2.

⁴¹ *SD*, 3.

culture prized outward compliance to its ecclesial structures at the expense of a truly inward, convictional devotion.

Gorton seemed determined to caricature conformity in the Bay Colony as a destructive, coercive policy that targeted otherwise peaceful men and women who merely differed on matters of doctrine.⁴² *Simplicities Defence* redounded with what Gorton hoped was bountiful evidence of a rank, intolerable hostility and maliciousness on the part of the General Court.⁴³ Consequently, Gorton likened Massachusetts's political theology with the devastation of Adam and Eve's original sin in the Garden of Eden. Gorton declared, "For we know that the spirituality of your Churches, is the civility of your Commonwealth, and the civility of your Commonwealth is the spirituality of your Churches; the wisdom of man being the whole accomplishment of them both, of which tree you delight dayly to eat."⁴⁴ The "tree" harkened the memory of Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve sinfully ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

As such, he revealed his views about the contours of civility of conformity. By his observation, Massachusetts relied on an unholy alliance between the Commonwealth and its churches. The mutual relationship between the church and state, as Gorton argued, subsequently determined the actions of both institutions, linking the flourishing of the commonwealth with its churches, and vice versa. By using the word "civility," Gorton had far more in mind than mere manners or cultural customs. Indeed, he included under the canopy of civility the colony's self-proclaimed identity as chosen people, "casting reproach" upon all others.⁴⁵ Massachusetts's civility, according to Gorton, was a harsh, anti-Christian political formulation that nourished violence rather than peace, and

⁴² Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210.

⁴³ Gura, "The Radical Ideology of Samuel Gorton," 95.

⁴⁴ *SD*, 10–11.

⁴⁵ *SD*, 22.

hypocrisy rather than sincerity of belief—the members of the General Court were not “men of truth, but base dissembling Hypocrites.”⁴⁶ For Gorton, civility of conformity prevented the Bay Colony from flourishing because it forced consciences either into hypocritical submission or compelled non-conforming dissenters to suffer the penalties prescribed by the civil courts.

Gorton provided for his English audience a description of Massachusetts’s proceedings against him. He had two strategies in this part of the story: first, Gorton depicted Massachusetts as a hardened, intolerant society, drunk with arbitrary power. They were unwilling to hear accused blasphemers offer a defense on their behalf. Indeed, at one point in his questioning before the General Court, Gorton tried to clarify what he believed were misunderstandings of his beliefs from his November 1642 letter. Instead of listening, the General Court commanded him to be silent.⁴⁷ Secondly, he wanted to reveal the level of doctrinal intolerance that permeated Massachusetts’s entire society, whether from their magistrates or from their ministers. Again, context was key. Gorton pressed his case under the shadow of revolution, at a time where many politicians and theologians questioned the validity of religious establishment.⁴⁸ In *Simplicities Defence*, Gorton described how pastors preached sermons that persuaded the magistrates and people to “take away our lives,” using biblical imagery from the Old Testament and Revelation as scriptural justification.⁴⁹ The ministers, after Gorton’s conviction, warned that if anyone provided aid to the Gortonists, “the curse of God would abide both on them and their

⁴⁶ *SD*, 37.

⁴⁷ *SD*, 53. Winthrop’s Journal, conversely, indicated that the General Court did indeed provide Gorton and his followers opportunities to explain their beliefs. Indeed, Winthrop described how the General Court asked the Gortonists several questions, wherein they clarified their beliefs to the point that it satisfied the members of the court that the Gortonists were not, in fact, heretics. They did, however, ask that Gorton recant from his beliefs expressed in his November 1642 letter, which he refused to do. See *WJ*, 2:146–149.

⁴⁸ Field, *Errands into the Metropolis*, 62; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210.

⁴⁹ *SD*, 54, 64.

posterity.”⁵⁰ While this certainly evinced the commitment of the ministers to civility of conformity, the presence of a warning also indicated that they lay classes may have possessed a more tolerant spirit than their political and religious leaders.⁵¹

Gorton’s narrative cast a tremendous shadow on Massachusetts. The colony’s political theology and civility, according to *Simplicities Defence*, departed from Christian teachings and exuded an arbitrary authority that threatened to menace all of England’s American colonies. The book circulated throughout England and made a significant enough impact to provoke prominent theologians like Robert Baylie, Thomas Edwards, and Samuel Rutherford to respond. Each of these men decried Gorton as a dangerous heretic who espoused “strange and horrid opinions,” causing trouble wherever he appeared.⁵² It also fell into the hands of Edward Winslow, Massachusetts’s designated agent who arrived in London shortly after Gorton published his salvo against Massachusetts. In addition to pressing the case before the Parliamentary Commission overseeing the colonies, Winslow also published a response to *Simplicities Defence*, declaring himself duty bound to deny “the many gross and publike scandals held forth.”⁵³ This wolf in sheep’s clothing needed exposing in the courts of English public opinion.

Unmasking Samuel Gorton

Winslow’s response to Gorton included key depictions of Massachusetts’s civility and its conception of liberty. Indeed, in the opening letter to the Earl of Warwick,

⁵⁰ *SD*, 65.

⁵¹ Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 87; and Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵² Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last yeers* (London: T.R. and E.M., 1646), 143–144; Robert Baylie, *A Dissvasive from the Errours of the Time* (London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1645), 116; Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual AntiChrist* (London: J.D. & R.I., 1648).

⁵³ *HU*, 63.

who served as the Governor-in-Chief of English colonies during the revolutionary period, Winslow wrote,

What greater wrong can bee done a poore persecuted people that went into the wilderness to avoid the tyrannical Government of the late Hierarchy, and to enjoy the Liberties Christ Jesus hath left unto his Churches . . . then to be accounted persecutors of Christ in his Saints, yea, to go thither to that end, to become outrageously cruell, barbarously inhumane, uniting together to suck the blood of our Country-men, &c.⁵⁴

From the onset, Winslow framed the issue as one of liberty for the persecuted—but he turned the tables. Gorton now played the part of the persecutor, while Winslow cast Massachusetts as the persecuted, suffering servant of the Lord in the American wilderness.⁵⁵ Winslow reminded the Earl of Warwick that the people of Massachusetts left England in pursuit of liberty—a pursuit hampered by accusations that their civility prompted violence against God’s people.

Thus, two competing notions of liberty emerged in this exchange between Winslow and Gorton, which animated not only this contest in 1646 but disputes in the Bay Colony since its inception and in the ensuing decades. On the one hand, Gorton, and other religious dissenters like Williams, advocated for a liberty defined by evangelical civility—communities flourished and the conditions for volitional, sincere faith only occurred when the conscience enjoyed liberty. Winslow, however, contended for a liberty animated by civility of conformity. Rather than individualizing claims of conscience, liberty defined by conformity was communal: the people of Massachusetts, in the pursuit of liberty, covenanted together to form a particular society, rooted in the law of God.⁵⁶ To achieve this goal, they uprooted from England and replanted themselves in the American wilderness. As such, the appearance of deviation or nonconformity violated this

⁵⁴ HU,.

⁵⁵ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210; Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 15.

⁵⁶ John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 288, 293; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210.

communal liberty to establish God's plantation. Summarily, Massachusetts's civility, as Winslow argued, did not recognize liberty as the capacity to espouse doctrines and beliefs contrary to the societal order.⁵⁷

Winslow's summation of liberty reflected that of other leaders in Massachusetts, including Winthrop, Ward, and Cotton. Winthrop, for example, distinguished between natural and moral liberty.⁵⁸ The former he defined as individual freedom to live as one wished. Men and beasts possessed this kind of liberty, which, as Winthrop argued, was antithetical to order and threatened Massachusetts's godly society. Natural liberty inflamed indwelling carnality.⁵⁹ Moral liberty, conversely, extended from the idea of covenant between God and mankind. This godly liberty resembled the "same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," which liberated sinful flesh from licentious pursuits and instead guided men and women to love, serve, and seek the common good.⁶⁰ Nathaniel Ward, a Massachusetts minister and author of the colony's *Body of Liberties*, made the same argument as Winthrop, stating that true liberty of conscience was "nothing but a freedom from sin, and error."⁶¹ John Cotton, moreover, linked the liberty of the American wilderness not with individual claims of conscience, but a communal liberty to steward in faithfulness to God—to create a righteous commonwealth in New England.⁶²

⁵⁷ *HU*, see the introductory letter to the Earl of Warwick, 61, 89; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210; Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 74.

⁵⁸ *WJ*, 2:238; Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6; Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 43.

⁵⁹ *WJ*, 2:238.

⁶⁰ *WJ*, 2:239; Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 74; Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 47; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Definitions of Liberty on the Eve of Civil War: Lord Saye and Sele, Lord Brooke, and the American Puritan Colonies," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 1 (March 1989): 19.

⁶¹ Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggavvam in America* (London, 1647), 6.

⁶² John Cotton, "Letter to Lord Saye and Sele, 1636," in *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620–1730*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 148; Curry, *The*

Civility of conformity, therefore, necessitated the moral, “positive” liberty that Winslow and his compatriots ardently defended.⁶³ Gorton threatened that liberty by successfully petitioning authorities in London to intervene in Massachusetts’s affairs, reversing its efforts to suppress sedition and dissent. If the colony could not maintain its moral liberty, then its civility would subsequently crumble. Winslow understood these stakes when he traveled to London in 1646 and when he published his defense of the Bay Colony in *Hypocrisie Unmasked*.

To preserve the colony’s liberty, Winslow attempted to assuage his readers about the state of affairs in Massachusetts, especially regarding its posture towards expressions of religious dissent. Gorton’s *Simplicities Defence* outlined an intransigent, hostile society in New England that violently pursued men and women for their theological dissent. To combat this, Winslow first tried to highlight the seditious components in each of the controversies raised by Gorton, which included the incident with Williams and the Antinomians. According to Gorton, Massachusetts persecuted Williams, Wheelwright, and Hutchinson only for their religious beliefs and differences of conscience. Winslow retorted, in the case of Williams, that he suffered banishment because “He held forth in those times *the unlawfulness of our Letters Patents* from the King, &c. would not allow the *Colours of our Nation*, denyed the *lawfulness of a publique oath*.”⁶⁴ While Williams’s religious beliefs certainly undergirded each of these reasons for his banishment, the issue was not the root of the belief but the manifestation of the belief itself, which tended towards sedition. Winslow made the same case in the Antinomian affair, stating that notwithstanding the religious disagreements in

First Freedoms, 4; see also Winthrop’s July 1634 letter to Sir Simonds D’Ewes, wherein he expressed the same idea as Cotton, linking liberty to a stewardship from God, not for individual pursuits but for the entire society. *LNE*, 119–120.

⁶³ Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 74.

⁶⁴ *HU*, 65–66.

Massachusetts during that time, the banishment of Wheelwright, Hutchinson, and their followers pertained to the 1637 Remonstrance. That document, signed by members of the Boston congregation, questioned the legitimacy of the magistrate's actions, which, Winslow concluded, threatened the order of the government. The Remonstrance was a seditious text.⁶⁵

Winslow reasoned that Massachusetts followed this pattern when it acted against Gorton, stressing his seditious actions that, if left unchecked, perpetuated violent civil strife. In fact, Winslow included in his narrative court records from Portsmouth and letters from Roger Williams to John Winthrop. This was a strategic move by Winslow, especially as he tried to make his case before the Parliamentary Commission to reverse its decision. The Commission was well acquainted with Williams, his views on liberty of conscience, and the promulgation of religious liberty in the Providence Plantations—the Commission had recently granted those communities an official charter, including the right to disestablish the society from any established church. The records Winslow provided revealed that not even the tolerant communities of Rhode Island, led by the advocate of soul liberty, Roger Williams, could bear the Gortonist scourge.⁶⁶ Gorton was a “common disturber of the peace of all Societies where hee came,” and wrought agitation and controversy wherever he went.⁶⁷ Winslow, furthermore, reminded his reader that the General Court originally pursued Gorton due to the land disputes around the Shawomet; it was Gorton who “needlessly . . . belched out such blasphemy,” which opened the door to additional charges of heresy against Gorton.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *HU*, 66.

⁶⁶ *HU*, 50–62.

⁶⁷ *HU*, 63.

⁶⁸ *HU*, 77.

The emphasis on seditious behavior did not veil Winslow's disdain of Gorton's theological beliefs. Winslow clarified what he, along with the Massachusetts General Court, viewed as Gorton's blasphemous language that put him and his followers beyond the pale of acceptable toleration. Gorton denied orthodox Christological doctrines, espoused a radical egalitarianism that negated the need for ecclesial offices, and he denied infant baptism.⁶⁹ They also derided the Lord's Supper, questioned the legitimacy of magistrates, rejected the need for ecclesial ministers, and did so from a malicious disposition. The Gortonists, in other words, espoused doctrines that necessitated the use of the magistrate's sword. What other recourse, Winslow queried, did the General Court have at their disposal? What was Massachusetts to do? Surly no sane person in England, Winslow hoped, would tolerate this level of civil disobedience and blasphemous language.

Yet, Winslow pressed the narrative of sedition as the primary trigger that unlocked the mechanisms of the civil state. This does not suggest that Gorton's theological dissent was unimportant, or even secondary to temporal political considerations—Winslow did not attempt to secularize the charges against Gorton. Instead, Winslow tried to distance the General Court from wielding the sword against a mere matter of conscientious objection by tethering public dissent to rebellion.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as Gorton's "narrative of dissent" became paradigmatic for successive dissenting polemics against Massachusetts, Winslow's emphasis on the seditious consequences of divergent doctrines became a staple in the Puritans' defense of conformity during their subsequent struggles against the Baptists and especially the Quakers. As with Gorton and rise of dissenting narratives, context was key for Winslow.

⁶⁹ *HU*, 49; Gura, "The Radical Ideology of Samuel Gorton," 90–93; see also Philip F. Gura, "Samuel Gorton and Religious Radicalism in England, 1644–1648," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (January 1983): 121–124.

⁷⁰ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210.

The breakdown of religious establishment in England and the growing acceptance of religious toleration made Massachusetts's actions against dissenters less palatable in London.⁷¹ Winslow, therefore, claimed that Anabaptists and Presbyterians lived in Massachusetts peaceably and without upsetting the socially mandated orthodoxy. While strict laws existed, especially against Anabaptists, Massachusetts extended toleration as long as these dissenters kept their views private and maintained faithful attendance to their local Congregational church—claims Turner called “considerable exaggerations,” and what Wall described as embellishments of the facts.⁷²

Winslow's rebuttal, however, provided insight into the contours of civility of conformity—how it practically functioned given the existence of pluralism. Civility of conformity contained a measured flexibility for deviating beliefs and doctrines. For example, John Cotton, in a letter sent sometime in the mid-1640s, confirmed what Winslow described in *Hypocrisie Unmasked*. He explained the elasticity of the colony's conformity, writing that Massachusetts granted limited toleration to Anabaptists, Antinomians, and even Seekers.⁷³ Cotton's ecclesiology was key to his political theology. Though Anabaptists, Antinomians, and Seekers would have found the churches of Massachusetts disordered, they nevertheless attended these congregations, if not as

⁷¹ Field, *Errands into the Metropolis*, 62; James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 50; Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 78.

⁷² *HU*, 99, 101; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 210; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 155. Neither Turner nor Wall explained their reading of Winslow on these claims, though that does not discredit the critique. The penal laws against Baptists between 1643–1646, along with actions taken by the delegates of the United Colonies against Baptists during that time revealed a burgeoning hostility towards Baptists in by the middle of the 1640s, and Baptist persecutions would grow in number by the early 1650s. The toleration of Presbyterians referenced by Winslow was the Presbyterian congregation at Newberry. Joshua Coffin, ed., *Facts and Documents concerning the formation of the First Church in Newbury, from its commencement in 1635 to 1674, together with a copy of the Church Records, from 1674 to 1745* (1861). The document is held by the Philips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum. While Winslow accurately reported the existence of this congregation, the congregation did not remain Presbyterian for long. By 1669, the congregation's minister, Thomas Parker, found himself in a dispute with the General Court. The Court declared that Congregationalism was the only way to order churches according to the gospel of Christ. Given Parker's Presbyterian ecclesiology, the General Court removed him from his post and brought the Newberry congregation under the auspices of Congregationalism. See Coffin, ed., *Facts and Documents*, 30, 44–45.

⁷³ *HM*, 133.

members, at least as peaceable neighbors. As a political principle, the inhabitants of Massachusetts were required to outwardly conform to the social and religious parameters deemed essential for the commonwealth's pursuit of pure Christianity. Cotton explained that some within the colony carried themselves privately, without questioning the established order.⁷⁴ He conceded that neither he nor anyone in the colony ascribed to themselves "infallibility of judgement."⁷⁵ In fact, as Cotton argued, "uniformity God never required."⁷⁶ Cotton, however, differentiated uniformity and conformity—the two were not synonymous. Uniformity, which God did not mandate, meant that Massachusetts could permit the existence of a Presbyterian congregation. Conformity, on the other hand, amounted to a political and theological prerequisite, which fastened the society around fundamental doctrinal commitments. Cotton, however, did not define the dividing line between conformity and uniformity. The only measure he provided that moved dissent from permissible to intolerable was the manner with which the dissenter expressed his or her divergence.⁷⁷

Thus, for the sake of stability and the pursuit of a truly reformed church, the colony's laws encouraged conditions favorable to orthodox belief and orthopraxy, while providing some flexibility over matters not regarded as fundamental. Cotton, along with Winslow, furthermore, believed that religious toleration had clear limits, and could not cover those unwilling to submit to the fundamental order of the society. In another letter by Cotton written in the mid-1640s, he stated that forcing people to worship in a manner inconsistent with their conscience was justifiable, and extended from Old Testament examples like Josiah who, in 2 Chronicles 34, "compelled all Israel, or made to serve the

⁷⁴ *HM*, 133.

⁷⁵ *HM*, 133.

⁷⁶ *HM*, 133.

⁷⁷ *HM*, 133.

Lord their God.”⁷⁸ Gorton and Williams believed this only encouraged hypocrisy, to which Cotton answered, “Better to be hypocrites than prophane persons. Hypocrites give God part of his due, the outward man, but the prophane person giveth God neither outward nor inward man.”⁷⁹

Despite his efforts, Winslow unsuccessfully persuaded the Parliamentary Commission for English colonies to reverse its decision: Gorton was granted safe return to his lands; Massachusetts must cease operations outside of its colonial charter.⁸⁰ Wall captured the historical significance of Gorton’s victory, which reminded Massachusetts that its godly project in New England remained fragile. Their civility required an unhampered liberty to inculcate the type of laws and customs necessary for covenantal faithfulness. Gorton denied the colony that liberty. It set a precedent for the Bay Colony as it tried to preserve the liberty and structures of self-governance that marked their endeavors since Winthrop led some 1,000 Puritans across the Atlantic in 1630. The contest of civility took on a transatlantic quality, leaving Massachusetts in a more delicate position than it had been prior to the Gorton controversy.⁸¹ In order to preserve civility of conformity, they not only had to quell dissent within their borders, but to defend their liberty to do so before authorities in London. By 1651, Massachusetts already found itself in that predicament when stories of persecuted Baptists by the colony’s General Court hit the presses in London.

Baptists in the Bay Colony: Clarke, Cobbet, and the Contest of Civility

As the Massachusetts General Court dealt with Samuel Gorton between 1642

⁷⁸ *HP*, 131.

⁷⁹ *HP*, 132.

⁸⁰ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 156; Field, *Errands into the Metropolis*, 63.

⁸¹ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 156; Porter, “Samuell Gorton,” 435.

to 1646, the colony's magistrates and ministers found themselves confronting an increasingly problematic trend throughout several communities: parents withheld their children from baptism.⁸² In 1642, constables admonished a resident, William Witter, for speaking against the doctrine of infant baptism. During the winter of 1642–1643, Lady Deborah Moody, a member of the Salem congregation and gentlewoman, publicly doubted the orthodoxy of infant baptism, which led her to conclude she needed to leave Massachusetts. In 1644 Joseph Redknap refused to present his infant for baptism; while he was summoned to Boston to give an answer for his actions, his wife had their newborn baptized. In 1645, more cases began appearing in town legal dockets: Townshend Bishop appeared before the magistrates for failure to baptize his newborn baby—the magistrates referred him to several elders to admonish him and convince him of his errors. Similar action was taken against another resident, John Wood. Witter found himself before the General Court again for equating infant baptism with worshipping the devil. By 1646, what began as isolated incidents significantly multiplied. Ten separate cases made their way either to the General Court or before local constables, wherein parents refused to baptize their babies.⁸³

These developments troubled Massachusetts's General Court, which swiftly moved to try and prevent the spread of Baptist beliefs. In November 1644, the General Court passed its first anti-Baptist laws. The statute labeled the rejection of infant baptism as intolerable heresy that warranted banishment from the colony. The court placed Baptists within the same tradition as the apocalyptic Anabaptists who took over the city of Münster in 1534–1535. Thus, for the General Court, Baptists did not merely espouse

⁸² Thomas E. Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay: A Case Study of Baptist Dissenters, 1651," *Journal of Church and State* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 312.

⁸³ George F. Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 8 vols., (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1911 – 1921), 1:52, 70, 81, 98 – 99, 101; Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay, 312; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 148; Bremer, "Dissent in New England," 256–257; Francis J. Bremer, *First Founders First Founders: American Puritanism in an Atlantic World* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), 91–93.

false doctrinal beliefs; they were “infectors of persons in maine matters, & the troublers of churches in all places where they have bene.”⁸⁴ William Hubbard commended the passage of these laws, commenting that defectors from established orthodoxy who could not keep their views contained, “deserved to suffer.”⁸⁵

Not everyone, however, welcomed these anti-Baptist laws. News of Massachusetts’s stance against Baptists reached England early in 1645. Stephen Winthrop, John Winthrop’s son who was in England at the time, wrote back to Massachusetts in March, warning the General Court of an uproar against these harsh laws. In August, John Winthrop’s nephew George Downing also described that the anti-Baptist laws “makes us stink everywhere.”⁸⁶ Haefeli accurately noted that Independents and Congregationalists in England included Baptist beliefs under the canopy of tolerable dissent, viewing the rejection of infant baptism as a secondary theological disagreement.⁸⁷ Thus, powerful Independents and Congregationalists in London like the Earl of Warwick, Henry Vane, and Oliver Cromwell looked at Massachusetts’s actions against Baptists with contempt, placing the Bay Colony in a precarious position of falling out of favor with the parties in England who should have been their natural allies.⁸⁸ As Wall argued, Congregationalists in England could not continue their campaign for religious toleration while simultaneously support the intolerant colony of Massachusetts.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *RGC*, 2:85; Bremer, “Dissent in New England,” 257–258; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 339; Buckley, “Church and State in Massachusetts Bay,” 313.

⁸⁵ *GH*, 347; Bremer, “Dissent in New England,” 258.

⁸⁶ *WP*, 5:13, 43 – 45; Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 339; Bremer, “Dissent in New England,” 259; Buckley, “Church and State in Massachusetts Bay,” 313.

⁸⁷ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 227.

⁸⁸ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 227, 240; Buckley, “Church and State in Massachusetts Bay,” 313; Bremer, “Dissent in New England,” 259.

⁸⁹ Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 150.

By October 1645, a half-dozen merchants and well-connected laity within Massachusetts petitioned the General Court to rescind the anti-Baptist laws. The petitioners cited the transatlantic political situation facing the colony, noting that the laws against Baptists invited unwelcomed condemnation from England.⁹⁰ Weimer documented in her study of dissent in colonial New England what she called the “lived politics of toleration.”⁹¹ The politics of toleration clarified the nuances of Massachusetts’s colonists when confronted with doctrinal dissent. Rather than two, polarized categories of those tolerant and those intolerant, the politics of toleration explained the range of responses from Bay Colony residents who considered, as in the case with the anti-Baptist laws, economic and political priorities that warranted a reconsideration of punitive statutes for Baptists. The October 1645 petition reflected the “lived politics of toleration,” and, historically, became increasingly important when the colony contended with the Quakers in the 1650s and 1660s. The laity began involving themselves more in the direction of the colony’s methods for enforcing civility of conformity.

Despite the request from the petitioners, the General Court essentially ignored the appeal. The laws would not be “explained at all.”⁹² Moreover, at the May 1646 session of the General Court, seventy-seven inhabitants of the colony signed a counter-petition. This was an example of the lived politics of conformity, wherein lay freemen encouraged the General Court to enforce the anti-Baptist laws. They desired that the court, with due diligence, might protect the colony from the “increase of many dangerous errors,” and asked that the punishment of banishment be faithfully deployed.⁹³ Attempts

⁹⁰ *RGC*, 2:141, 3:51; Wall, *Massachusetts Bay*, 149; Buckley, “Church and State in Massachusetts Bay,” 313.

⁹¹ Adrian Chastain Weimer, “Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 2017), 47. See also Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 16.

⁹² *RGC*, 3:51.

⁹³ *RGC*, 3:64

to draw the colony into religious toleration, as one of the petitioners warned, proved an unconscionable misstep, and would only allow the devil himself to perpetuate heresies that would draw tender souls away from the truth of the gospel.⁹⁴

The codification of the anti-Baptist laws exhibited a continuity in Massachusetts amongst its leaders and laity when it came to issues of church and state. Civility of conformity required the expulsion of doctrinal defectors like Williams and the Antinomians, whose beliefs introduced an unsustainable pluralism within the jurisdiction. In the same way, the rise of Baptists in the Bay met a similar reaction from the colonists who further entrenched themselves in the politics of conformity.⁹⁵ Their commitment, however, was tested in 1651 by three Baptist missionaries who not only violated the colony's laws but took their narrative of dissent to England. It engendered another contest of civility between conformity's discontents and advocates who continued to disagree over the question: how much pluralism could a society sustain before it fractured?

In July 1651, John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and John Crandall departed Newport, making their way to Lynn, Massachusetts—a community about ten miles northeast of Boston and home to William Witter, one of the first advocates of Baptist beliefs in the Bay Colony.⁹⁶ Clarke, a medically trained emigrant, moved to New England in the summer of 1637 during the heat of the Antinomian Controversy. He was sympathetic to the Antinomians and decided to leave Massachusetts with William Coddington and Anne Hutchinson. He quickly filled important political and religious roles on Aquidneck Island and helped establish a Baptist congregation in Newport.⁹⁷ Rhode Island had become a home for Baptists, who in the early 1650s began sending out

⁹⁴ *WP*, 5:91; Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay," 313.

⁹⁵ Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay," 311.

⁹⁶ Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay," 314.

⁹⁷ James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 21–22; Bremer, "Dissent in New England," 256.

missionaries throughout the region.⁹⁸ Clarke, Holmes, and Crandall attempted to take their Baptist message to Massachusetts, using Witter's home as a base to preach and teach.

Within twenty-four hours of their arrival, two Lynn constables entered Witter's home with a warrant to arrest the three Baptist missionaries. The constables confined them to the local prison, and they were questioned by Lynn's minister Thomas Cobbet. Clarke informed Cobbet and the constables that he did not recognize Massachusetts's Congregationalism as a faithful ecclesiology and that their churches did not follow the commands of Christ. Upon Clarke's outburst against Massachusetts's churches, the constables escorted the three missionaries to Boston where they were questioned and sentenced within the span of a day.⁹⁹ They each had to pay fines; Holmes, however, received a fine and whipping because of his prior history in the Bay Colony. He was an excommunicated congregant of the Salem church, which added to the charges brought against him.¹⁰⁰

After Holmes endured thirty lashes from a three-corded whip, he, Clarke, and Crandall returned to Newport, where news of their persecution began to spread throughout Rhode Island. The events in the summer of 1651 prompted Roger Williams to write a scathing rebuke to the governor of Massachusetts at the time, John Endicott. Williams wanted Endicott to clearly understand the tone of the letter, which Williams described as springing from the "bitterness of soul." He compared the actions of the General Court to Stephen Gardiner and Edmund Bonner, the two Catholic bishops who carried out much of the persecution against Protestants during the reign of Queen

⁹⁸ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 267.

⁹⁹ *IN*, 2–5; Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay," 314–315.

¹⁰⁰ Buckley, "Church and State in Massachusetts Bay," 318–319.

Mary.¹⁰¹

Clarke, furthermore, began compiling a chronicle of the entire affair—a dissenting narrative similar in form to Gorton’s *Simplicities Defence*.¹⁰² The final product was *Ill Newes from New-England or A Narative of New-Englands Persecution. Wherein is Declared That while Old England is becoming new, New-England is become Old*. The title signaled Clarke’s thesis and intent with the narrative, which was published in London in 1652. He appealed to his English audience and especially the members of Parliament to intervene in what was transpiring in Massachusetts Bay. Clarke left for England in late 1651 to conduct business on behalf of Rhode Island due to various political disputes that broke out late that year. While in London, *Ill Newes* hit the press and, as James recorded, became successful enough that Massachusetts implored Thomas Cobbet, the minister in Lynn, to write an official response to *Ill Newes*.¹⁰³

Like *Simplicities Defence*, aspects of Clarke’s narrative need to be read critically. In fact, when Cobbet wrote his answer, *The Civil Magistrates Power in Matters of Religion Modestly Debated*, published in 1653, he questioned several parts of Clarke’s narration, which included inflammatory and harsh comments that Governor Endicott supposedly said, or that that Clarke lied about a promise made to him by the General Court for a public theological disputation about their disagreements over baptism.¹⁰⁴ Yet, Cobbet does not deny much of what Clarke contained in *Ill Newes*, instead penning a defense of Massachusetts’s civility. What follows, therefore, is an analysis of the exchange between Clarke and Cobbet, focusing on the more uncontested aspects of the narrative, giving special attention to the disparate political theologies of these two men.

¹⁰¹ CRW, 1:343–344.

¹⁰² James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 50.

¹⁰³ James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Cobbet’s critiques can be found in his appendix to *The Civil Magistrates Power*, which he titled, *A Brief Answer*. These specific episodes questioned by Cobbet are on page 29.

Their debate provided more insight into the continued contest of civility, showing continuity with prior disputes between the proponents of conformity and the advocates of evangelical civility. Similar to the polemic between Gorton and Winslow, furthermore, Clarke and Cobbet prefigured the clash between the Bay Colony and the Quakers in the late 1650s.

III Newes: The Martyrs of Massachusetts

In his dedicatory, Clarke distilled key aspects of his political theology. He argued that the members of parliament served Christ's as "Sword-bearers" just like the Caesars of Rome, though they "knew it not."¹⁰⁵ God, therefore, established government; the rulers and magistrates served God in a specific capacity to restrain corporeal evils and preserve life. Governments, furthermore, ought to "countenance and incourage . . . such as are faithful, and upright in the land."¹⁰⁶ By this, Clark meant true Christians who proclaimed the true gospel of Jesus Christ, indicating that Clarke viewed Christianity as a societal good that the magistrates needed to protect and nourish. Thus, Clark departed from Williams's view of Christianity in the commonweal. Williams argued that the presence or absence of Christianity in a society in no way determined whether that society flourished or foundered.¹⁰⁷ Clarke, on the other hand, had a much more positive view of Christianity's influence on a society. The civil government must create conditions conducive to authentic belief. While Massachusetts's political and theological thinkers would have agreed with Clarke, he rejected the role of religious establishment in that pursuit. An established state-church, upheld and enforced by the sword, inhibited belief in the gospel. Thus, civility of conformity impeded true belief rather than enabling it.

¹⁰⁵ *IN*, Epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹⁰⁶ *IN*, Epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹⁰⁷ *BT*, 203.

Clarke also appended a letter to the magistrates of Massachusetts at the beginning of *Ill Newes*. He lauded them for their religious zeal, which he believed undergirded their actions against himself and his Baptist compatriots. While he chided them for their actions, he praised the pious motivation, misguided though it was. Yet, Clarke wanted to make two things clear to the magistrates: first, he believed that they enforced an established religion at odds with Jesus' teaching in the New Testament. Second, the means through which they sought to establish this false faith were also gravely misguided. "That order," Clark argued, "cannot be the order of the Gospel of Christ, nor that way his way to maintain it."¹⁰⁸ The political theology of the Bay Colony, according to Clarke, placed too high a status on the magistrate, making him the "chief, and . . . the only Judge in spiritual things . . . and determine what is truth, and what is error and heresie, what is the right way of the worship of God."¹⁰⁹ Thus, Clarke positioned his dissenting narrative to uncover the disordered political life in Massachusetts.

One of the lengthiest portions of *Ill Newes* pertained to Obadiah Holmes, which bore the resemblance of the tale of a martyr.¹¹⁰ Clarke included a letter from Holmes to Baptists in London, wherein he commended his fellow Christians to "*stand fast in that Faith . . . to walk steadfastly in that Order of the Gospell which was once delivered unto the Saints by Iesus Christ.*"¹¹¹ He described himself as a "*Prisoner for Iesus sake,*" and wrote them about his unjust hardships experienced in Boston.¹¹² Context, as always, was key. The intended audience for *Ill Newes* would have recognized

¹⁰⁸ *IN*, Epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹⁰⁹ *IN*, Epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹¹⁰ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 85.

¹¹¹ *IN*, 17.

¹¹² *IN*, 17.

the format of Holmes's letter and its resemblance to martyrdom stories throughout the history of the church; and the Massachusetts General Court, rather than Caesar or a Catholic Monarch, was the persecuting party.¹¹³ Holmes described himself as joyfully joining in the sufferings of Christ, which he endured from the machinations of Massachusetts's magistrates.¹¹⁴

After his whipping, Holmes recounted how John Hazel and John Spurr came to him, shaking his hand and encouraging him.¹¹⁵ These lay people of Massachusetts were moved by Holmes's display of faith. The General Court, according to Holmes, then responded by imprisoning the two men and fining them for shaking hands with a convicted heretic. The magistrates believed that they had hardened Holmes in his sin and exhibited "*much contempt of Authority.*"¹¹⁶ Someone paid their fines, and they were released from prison. Another person, which Holmes described as the "good *Samaritan*," came to him in prison, tending to his wounds. This person, similarly, provoked the ire of the General Court.¹¹⁷ The imagery of the good Samaritan furthered the narrative Clarke intended to create about Massachusetts. In that parable, the religious leaders passed by the Jewish man, leaving him for dead; it was a Samaritan who gave him aid. Clarke, through Holmes's letter, connected the religious and civil authorities in Massachusetts with the religious leaders in Jesus' parable—the leaders who Jesus condemned. These stories revealed the complexities of conformity in Massachusetts. Weimer argued that the

¹¹³ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 87.

¹¹⁴ *IN*, 20.

¹¹⁵ While this section of the narrative must be read critically, there is strong evidence to suggest what Holmes described happened. Cobbet does not question the court's actions against these lay people who extended aid to Holmes. Similar events, furthermore, frequently occurred when the colony dealt with the Quakers in the late 1650s and early 1660s—those episodes were not only recorded in martyrdom narratives but also in the records of the General Court. Thus, there is no reason to believe that what Holmes included here was contrived or fabricated, since Cobbet did not deny it and similar actions were carried out a few years later.

¹¹⁶ *IN*, 22.

¹¹⁷ *IN*, 22.

example of Holmes and the actions of compassionate laity in Massachusetts not only provided encouragement for, in this case, Baptists who read *Ill Newes*. It also, in a small way, legitimized the sincerity and truthfulness of their faith within the broader community. This latter reality not only encouraged compassion from onlookers, but as will be seen in the controversy with the Quakers, encouraged spectators to convert.¹¹⁸

By including Holmes's letter, Clarke wanted to "awaken" his readers and "rouse up the minds, and spirits of many," to not only see the sad state of Massachusetts, but to act against the colony. Clarke concluded that Massachusetts made strangers out of those who practiced godliness; that the Bay Colony concocted trumped up civil charges against mere matters of conscience. He charged them rank hypocrisy, claiming that they pursued liberty of conscience in their flight from England, only to become the wickedness from which they sought refuge.¹¹⁹ Clarke, furthermore, upped the stakes in this contest of civility. Eschatological issues framed his arguments as he implored Massachusetts to see the error of its ways and repent for the "thirsting after the blood of the Innocent, before the Lord come forth to avenge it."¹²⁰ Clarke indicted Massachusetts for an attempt to immanentize the eschaton—to bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God upon that city on a hill.

For Clarke, Massachusetts set itself against the will of God, and he evoked, as Weimer noted, "strongly apocalyptic views that linked Congregationalists, too closely allied with the magistrates, to the false church of Antichrist."¹²¹ Indeed, he compared the spirit of Massachusetts to the mark of the beast in Revelation 13, which forced the inhabitants of Earth "to worship his Image, and that no man might buy, or sell, save he,

¹¹⁸ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 87.

¹¹⁹ *IN*, 23.

¹²⁰ *IN*, 29.

¹²¹ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 78; James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 51–53.

that had the marke, or the name, or the number of his name.”¹²² Massachusetts, like the church’s ancient enemy in Revelation 13, established a jurisdiction hostile to the gospel, marked by nothing other than the vilest policies and wickedness. Godly men and women, who refused to assent to the prevailing orthodoxy of the Bay Colony, suffered the full weight of the Magistrates sword, despite living as peaceful, sober citizens of the colony.¹²³

The final pages of *Ill Newes* contained Clarke’s political theology, wherein he reiterated many of his comments throughout the chronicle. Important to note, however, was how central the idea of believers’ baptism played in his contention against religious persecution. Clarke’s conversionist theology, and his view that only regenerated people enjoyed church membership, necessitated, in his mind, religious freedom. Given his theological convictions, religious establishment, especially civilly enforced religious orthodoxy, constrained the means and conditions through which God intended to draw people into salvation.¹²⁴ Clarke, furthermore, rejected civil dominion over the conscience and any attempts, by outward force, to constrain the individual’s conscience to worship God as he or she believed.¹²⁵ Conformity, Clarke reasoned, created fear rather than piety; it made “hearts and minds not being changed . . . they, I say, are absent, and far from the Lord.”¹²⁶

Rather than creating the conditions conducive to belief, civility of conformity hardened men and women in error, and engendered a hypocritical assent on matters of faith and doctrine. Without freedom of conscience and religious liberty, true faith and

¹²² *IN*, 33

¹²³ *IN*, 34–35; Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 87.

¹²⁴ *IN*, 65.

¹²⁵ *IN*, 68–69.

¹²⁶ *IN*, 69.

voluntary assent to God was an impossibility. For Clarke, the martyr-like tales of Obadiah Holmes and other Baptists in the Bay Colony proved the incompatibility between Massachusetts's polity and God's plan for salvation. *Ill Newes* joined in the contest of civility as an important, polemical work that roused the advocates of the Bay Colony to its defense. Clarke levied serious accusations, and Thomas Cobbet sought to defend civility of conformity as not only a viable political option, but *the* proper ordering of any society.

The Magistrate's Power

After Clarke's *Ill Newes* circulated throughout transatlantic England, Cobbet authored a tract in defense not only Massachusetts's government, but of the necessary role that magistrates played in matters of religion. Cobbet, who called the early 1650s, "polemick times," aspired to guard the fundamental tenets of civility of conformity, especially that magistrates' responsibility to eradicate heresy.¹²⁷ Cobbet, who addressed his dedication to Oliver Cromwell, pleaded with the Lord Protector to view his role in matters of religion as a primary duty of his office. He must lead like David, whose work in preserving true religion contained both positive and negative duties. Positively, David provided for the monetary and societal support of religion, ensuring that it had men to preach and lead God's people spiritually. Negatively, David, in accordance with God's law, prevented the spread of heresy and pernicious doctrines.¹²⁸ Regrettably for Cobbet, the Lord Protector looked upon religious establishment unfavorably; as James stated, Cobbet's *Civil Magistrates Power* was incredibly ill-timed.¹²⁹

Cobbet, in customary fashion of tracts during this time, penned a letter to the reader, which provided crucial insight into the inherently theological convictions

¹²⁷ *CMP*, epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹²⁸ *CMP*, epistle dedicatory, no page number.

¹²⁹ James, *John Clarke and His Legacies*, 50–51.

underlying his views for religious establishment. He believed that Satan himself stirred up opposition to civil authority over spiritual affairs. The devil dismantled the “*glory and crown,*” of the magistrate’s power.¹³⁰ He believed that restricting the magistrate to the second table of the law dishonored God’s created order and inverted the legal priorities of a Christian commonwealth. “*Bodily murtherers,*” Cobbet wrote, “*must be capitally punished, but if the Wine of Intoxicating and Infatuating doctrine of error, vented and broached by corrupt members of the Church, be the Poison of Dragons and venom of Aspes . . . unclean spirits and doctrines must be suffered in the Land.*”¹³¹ The crimes pertaining to the first table, therefore, wrought more disastrous consequences than the commands contained in the second table; indeed, for Cobbet, crimes of the first table engendered unfaithfulness in the second.

Cobbet’s work approached the issue of civility of conformity from a somewhat different angle than other projects similar to his. Indeed, Cobbet spent less time on Old Testament typology between the kings of Israel and early modern princes or magistrates. Instead, he focused on the example of Christ. John Coffey rightly argued that the pattern of Israel marked a central pillar for the concept of religious conformity.¹³² Cobbet, however, provided an example of the New Testament’s importance; he also approached the Old Testament with a differing hermeneutic than merely typological arguments by connecting religious establishment in Israel and in other nations to the natural law.

Cobbet utilized Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in John 2 as his primary New Testament text, contending that this scene showed a fundamental neglect on the part of the priests to tend to religion. He also extended the indictment of neglect to the civil authorities. Christ had, after all, made a whip and used corporeal means to drive out those

¹³⁰ *CMP*, letter to the reader, no page number

¹³¹ *CMP*, letter to the reader, no page number.

¹³² Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 31.

who prevented worship of God. Cobbet also leaned heavily on Romans 13, wherein God, according to Cobbet, established the civil sword for both physical and spiritual purposes.¹³³ He connected, as John Cotton did, the two tables of the law together, making them both subject to the authority of civil rulers. It was the magistrate's duty to promote pure worship and protect the church from the dangers of blasphemy. Romans 13, furthermore, contained Paul's injunction for citizens to submit to their civil rulers, meaning that as the magistrates enacted policies of conformity, even those who inwardly dissented must outwardly conform.¹³⁴ Cobbet used John 2, Romans 13, and other New Testament passages as a warning to all religious and civil rulers. As Cobbet wrote, "Corruptions in religion, outwardly breaking forth, and expressed, they may, yea, and must be restrained and punished by such as are thereunto called."¹³⁵ Without this level of restraint, magistrates opened the door not only to the floundering of the commonweal, but invited the judgment of God against the civil society.¹³⁶ Thus, God called magistrates to serve as "nursing Fathers and Mothers to his Church."¹³⁷

Cobbet, like many before him in the Reformed magisterial tradition, utilized this imagery from Isaiah and applied it to the civil magistrate.¹³⁸ While he upheld that the church could survive without aid from the temporal government—as it did in the pre-Constantinian period—magistrates, nevertheless, provided an service to the churches of

¹³³ *CMP*, 24

¹³⁴ *CMP*, 24–25; *BTW*, 99. For a survey of magisterial interpretations on Romans 13, see James P. Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 133–137.

¹³⁵ *CMP*, 5–6.

¹³⁶ *CMP*, 24.

¹³⁷ *CMP*, 10.

¹³⁸ For a survey of the use of "nursing father" in the Reformed tradition, see James H. Hutson, "'Nursing Fathers': The Model for Church-State Relations in America from James I to Jefferson," in *Lectures on Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*, eds. John W. Welch and Stephen J. Fleming (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2003).

Jesus Christ, tending to them as “nursing fathers,” and curtailing anything that tended to the harm of orthodoxy.¹³⁹ Thus, as Cobbet concluded, civility of conformity was “necessary to the *optimum esse* of the Church.”¹⁴⁰ Like Clarke, Cobbet believed magistrates created conditions conducive to belief. The difference, however, came down to the matter of pluralism. Where Clarke granted pluralism as a necessary precondition for true conversion, Cobbet placed religious divergence beyond the boundaries of toleration. Such religious diversity did not create conditions conducive to belief but threatened the church and its people with pernicious heresy.

As mentioned, a central feature of Cobbet’s argument was the person and work of Jesus Christ. James Calvin Davis rightly argued that, for Roger Williams, his doctrine of religious freedom relied heavily upon an “incarnational piety”—that the theological consequences of the hypostatic union eroded the Old Testament model of enforced religion as practiced by the nation of Israel.¹⁴¹ Christ, in his person, fulfilled the fullness of Israel’s commands and covenantal obligations, and he inaugurated a new age of the church. This new age, moreover, severed any nationalistic tie between God and a particular people, as he had done with the nation of Israel.¹⁴² Yet, the Christological centrality for Williams was also present in Cobbet’s work for religious establishment. Relying on Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in John 2, Cobbet focused on Jesus’ humanity, arguing, “As man he gathered up the small cords, as man he twisted them, and made a scourge of them; as man he laid on with his bodily hand in such sort, as thereby to drive the beast-sellers out of the Temple.”¹⁴³ The use of the whip, furthermore, substantiated a

¹³⁹ *CMP*, 27.

¹⁴⁰ *CMP*, 27.

¹⁴¹ James Calvin Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 22.

¹⁴² Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 27.

¹⁴³ *CMP*, 10.

latter claim made by Cobbet about the appropriateness of carnal weapons used in spiritual affairs. Dissenters like Williams and Clarke objected that in this present covenantal period, the weapons of warfare for Christians were spiritual, not temporal. Why then, Cobbet retorted, did Christ himself use carnal weapons to cleanse the temple?¹⁴⁴ Cobbet also reminded his reader that as Jeus cleansed the temple, the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9: “For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” Christ was the antitype of David and chose to cleanse the temple through the same means available to David, namely, physical force. “Christ could have cast out these out of the Temple,” Cobbet reasoned, “by a word of his mouth, as he did cast Devils out of living temples, of his peoples bodies.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, the physical manner of Jesus cleansing the temple meant that his actions remained, as Holifield noted, exemplary.¹⁴⁶ In other words, magistrates could follow the methods used by Christ in preserving the purity of the faith. Cobbet extrapolated this principle to other Old Testament passages, not necessarily related to the kingly office in the nation of Israel that, nevertheless, served as prescient patterns for civil magistrates.¹⁴⁷ He cited Phinehas’s actions against an Israelite who committed sexual acts with a Moabite woman. He looked to Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18.¹⁴⁸ He also pointed to negative examples in the Old Testament who failed in their duties to preserve the purity of religion. The consequences of Eli’s failure, for example, wrought destruction on the entire nation of Israel.¹⁴⁹ Each of

¹⁴⁴ *CMP*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ *CMP*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 52; *CMP*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*, 48–49; E. Brooks Holifield, *Era of Persuasion: American Thought and Culture 1521–1680*, ed. Lewis Perry (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 46.

¹⁴⁸ *CMP*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ *CMP*, 33.

these examples, for Cobbet, meant that “corruptions in Religion, outwardly breaking forth and expressed may, yea and must be restrained and punished.”¹⁵⁰

Much like John Cotton, Cobbet held a distinction between secondary theological errors and perversions that struck “at the very fundamentals, or vitals of Religion.”¹⁵¹ He also differentiated the manner or disposition of people who espoused error. Some held false doctrines with meekness and a peaceable nature. These, by persuasion, were apt to lay aside their error and reform their beliefs.¹⁵² Others, however, exuded an “insolent, and turbulent” spirit. Where the former enjoyed correction through discourse, the latter required the civil sword.¹⁵³ Cobbet, however, included a measured toleration for religious error. He wrote that churches nor the civil government could move against doctrinal deviance until it manifested outwardly. Once made public, Cobbet assured his reader that Massachusetts made attempts at reconciliation before resorting to excommunication and, subsequently, civil punishment.¹⁵⁴ If attempts at persuasion failed, this “scandalous and Infectious” dissenter must suffer the due punishment of death as prescribed by God in Deuteronomy 13. Civility of conformity, therefore, allowed for defectors to maintain their views privately, within the confines of their homes, as long as they kept those views private.

Perhaps one of Cobbet’s more significant contributions to the discussion of civility of conformity was his extensive use of the natural law. As discussed in the previous chapter, John Cotton used the natural law as an epistemological tool to verify the verity of religious establishment. Cobbet, however, in a significantly shorter work,

¹⁵⁰ *CMP*, 12.

¹⁵¹ *CMP*, 12.

¹⁵² *CMP*, 12.

¹⁵³ *CMP*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ *CMP*, 16.

devoted much more space to natural law as justification for civility of conformity. Puritan and Reformed theologians certainly submitted their arguments to the authority of the Bible; it would, however, be erroneous to conclude that they rejected reason and nature-based arguments, especially on issues of public theology.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Cobbet's copious use of natural law theory evinced the willingness and comfortability of an Oxford-trained Puritan to use both Scripture and reason for his position on religious establishment. Cobbet, moreover, when juxtaposed with the natural law arguments levied by Williams, complicated the narrative of religious freedom as an idea rooted in the creational order. Here were two seventeenth-century theologians deploying both the Bible and the natural law for their positions on political theology; yet they came to completely different conclusions about what the Bible instructed *and* what nature communicated regarding conformity and liberty. Nature and nature's God were used to prove *both* the virtue of freedom or the necessity of coerced establishment.

Surveying various Old Testament passages, Cobbet contended that "it is therefore in the very nature of the thing to be for the Lord, or on his side to punish such corruptions in such offenders."¹⁵⁶ He anticipated an objection that his hermeneutic was void given Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament. Cobbet, however, believed the actions against dissent and religious idolatry in the Old Testament extended from the created order itself—God endowed mankind's nature with an impulse to honor the name of God by ridding heresy from corporeal jurisdictions.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Cobbet argued that

¹⁵⁵ See Lee W. Gibbs, "The Puritan Natural Law Theory of Williams Ames," *The Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 1 (Jan 1971): 37–57; W.J. Torrance Kirby, "Richard Hooker's Discourse on Natural Law in The Context of The Magisterial Reformation," *Animus* 3 (1998): 30–49; David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); J. Daryl Charles, *Natural Law and Religious Freedom: The Role of Moral First Things in Grounding and Protecting the First Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2018), especially chapter two; and J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), especially chapter three.

¹⁵⁶ *CMP*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ *CMP*, 18–19.

religious establishment in the Old Testament, far from being abrogated by Christ's coming, bespoke how God desired mankind to order society and civil laws.¹⁵⁸ God required civil rulers to wield the corporeal sword in order to restrain and punish manifestations of heresy.¹⁵⁹ Cobbet asked his reader to consider the "woeful experience of the looseness, and even profaneness of too many in both *Englands*, amongst whom corruptions in matters of Religion, have taken place, testife."¹⁶⁰ Where Williams cited the "most woeful proof"¹⁶¹ of conformity's effect on a society, Cobbet believed that the evidence concluded the contrary: the lack of religious establishment, enforced by the civil sword, portended the destruction and chaos of societies, with England's recent tumult serving as an example. Operative here was a similar conception of the natural law that Williams had. If an ethical prospect fell under the canopy of the natural law, then that idea must engender peace, stability and flourishing precisely because it adhered to God's creational design.¹⁶² Cobbet believed the recent experiences in England proved that the kingdom, by violating the natural order of sound religious preservation, plunged itself into its civil wars.¹⁶³ He placed significant emphasis on the issue of the *bonum commune*. Civility of conformity provided the surest pathway for societal flourishing. The magistrate, in subduing dissent, prevented unorthodoxy and mischief, which functioned like the removal of a cancerous tumor.¹⁶⁴ Cobbet, similar to Cotton, looked at examples from other nations to conclude that conformity of religion was, in fact, prescribed by the

¹⁵⁸ *CMP*, 34–35.

¹⁵⁹ *CMP*, 23.

¹⁶⁰ *CMP*, 25.

¹⁶¹ *BT*, 64.

¹⁶² See Cory D. Higdon, "Roger Williams, Natural Law, and Religious Liberty," *Journal of Church and State* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2021), 85–108; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 59–64.

¹⁶³ *CMP*, 25.

¹⁶⁴ *CMP*, 33.

natural order.¹⁶⁵ He wrote about the “light of grace,” or the “common light, at least of Nature,” that led even pagan nations to establish a civilly enforced religious orthodoxy.¹⁶⁶ Cobbet did not endorse their false religion; yet, as he wrote,

Though it shew the miserable fruits of mans Fall in this their misguided, and misplaced zeal, yet by these ruines we may judge, that it is a principle deeply engraven in mans heart, that as there should be some to rule, and some to be ruled; some God, and some worship of that God: so by the Law of Nature and Nations, there should be the external exercise of some external coercive power, in cases of prophanations and abuses of the name and worship of that God, who is to be adored.¹⁶⁷

Civility of conformity, for Cobbet, was not merely a convenient political policy; it extended from deeply held theological beliefs *and* a concern for God’s creation mandate.

He extended his discussion of the natural law to the issue of conscience.

Clarke, along with other dissenters like Williams and Gorton, contended that the Massachusetts General Court persecuted men and women for cause of conscience. Cobbet, like Winslow and Cotton, moved to distance Massachusetts’s actions from that accusation. In fact, as Winslow declared in his polemic against Gorton, Massachusetts’s General Court intervened against the Baptist missionaries not “meerly” for matters of conscience, but because their actions threatened the civil and ecclesial peace of the colony. He connected their dissent with sedition.¹⁶⁸ Cobbet, however, emphasized an important aspect of the magistrate’s authority in cases where individuals pleaded for liberty of conscience. Cobbet affirmed that only God ruled over the human conscience. Yet, Cobbet turned to the Old Testament to make the following argument: while God and God alone reigned as lord of the conscience, he bestowed upon the civil rulers a derivative and coercive authority over men and women with regards to worship. Cobbet

¹⁶⁵ *BTW*, 107–108.

¹⁶⁶ *CMP*, 34.

¹⁶⁷ *CMP*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ See his appendix to *CMP, An Answer*, 38–39; Buckley, “Church and State in Massachusetts Bay,” 316.

listed a litany of examples from the Old Testament where rulers like Asa “commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment” (2 Chr 14:4). Josiah, in 2 Kings 23:20 “slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men’s bones upon them.” Darius, in Daniel 6:25–26, furthermore, decreed “unto all people, nations, and languages,” that “in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.”

In each of these examples, Cobbet rhetorically queried if they represented moments where rulers lorded over the consciences of mankind. Instead, as Cobbet averred, they represented acts of conviction and faithfulness to God, ensuring that “gross corruptions in Religion” were eradicated.¹⁶⁹ Whether enacted by Israel’s kings or a pagan ruler like Darius, these episodes in the Old Testament provided “some common light of the Spirit” for conformity of religion.¹⁷⁰ While Cobbet conceded that no human authority could touch the conscience or compel it into belief, civil rulers must “force the outward man,” into conformity for the sake of the common good and for the preservation of the conditions conducive to faith.¹⁷¹

Cobbet contributed to the ideological pillars that upheld civility of conformity, contending that the magistrate’s duty in matters of religion was a theological imperative rooted in the creational order. He evinced the unyielding commitment of conformity’s advocates to an established religious orthodoxy aided by the coercive powers of the civil sword. The natural law arguments, however, were key in understanding the trajectory of conformity in the coming decades, especially during the disestablishment debates in Massachusetts during the revolutionary period. Figures like Phillips Payson, an influential Congregationalist, preached in 1778 ideas about establishment and conformity

¹⁶⁹ *CMP*, 36.

¹⁷⁰ *CMP*, 64.

¹⁷¹ *CMP*, 64.

that resembled Cobbet's *Civil Magistrate's Power*.¹⁷² If evangelical civility was to take root and serve as the pattern for later American political life, it had to overcome a commitment to conformity that was deeply theological and ensconced in a view of nature that necessitated religious conformity.¹⁷³ What Cobbet expressed in the 1653 was not isolated to him. Indeed, Massachusetts recommitted itself to the precepts and foundations of civility of conformity as it dealt with an especially heretical religious sect: the Quakers.

¹⁷² See Phillips Payson, "A Sermon: On the Virtues Essential for Popular Self-Government," in *American Political Writing during the Founding Era, 1760–1805*, Vol 1, eds. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 523–538.

¹⁷³ For the struggles between establishment and disestablishment, and the continued theological and natural law arguments in favor of civility of conformity in Massachusetts, see John Witte Jr., and Justin Latterell, "The Last American Establishment: Massachusetts, 1780–1833," in *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776–1833*, ed. Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019), 399–424. For the broader influence of civility of conformity in the early republic, especially in New England, see Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

CHAPTER 6
CIVILITY OF CONFORMITY AND
THE RISE OF QUAKERISM

The Quakers tested civility of conformity more than any previous dissenting group in colonial Massachusetts. This challenge emerged from political developments after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the intensity of Quaker missionary efforts. The General Court and the colony's ministers attempted to deal with the Quaker dissension as they had done in the past with previous defectors from the colony's religious order. Carla Pestana connected the run-ins with the Quakers in the late 1650s and early 60s to the actions of the colony in the Antinomian Controversy and in their dealings with Baptists like Obadiah Holmes and John Clarke in the 1640s.¹ Yet, as Pestana concluded, the General Court encountered significantly more resistance from the Quakers. She argued that Massachusetts "simply did not have . . . mechanisms for dealing with widespread apostasy."² The Quakers, therefore, presented Massachusetts with the common threat of heresy but through the uncommon means of their relentlessness to joyfully suffer whatever the General Court threw their way.

Quakerism sprang out of the religious teachings of George Fox, a Leicestershire native who began the Quaker religion, or the Society of Friends, in 1647. Larry Ingle's biography of Fox placed this dissenter within the context of revolutionary England, which explained Fox's effectiveness at starting a religious movement that

¹ Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2.

² Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 3.

experienced enormous growth in a short period of time.³ Fox, according to Ingle, began preaching and teaching at a time of religious uncertainty, and his distinctly spiritualist message attracted many dissenters who questioned the validity of the predominant religious order that seemed to have led the nation into a bloody civil war.⁴ Historians like Ingle and Evan Haefeli explained how Fox capitalized on the disenchantment with established religion, teaching about the inner light of the Holy Spirit who provided new revelation and the pathway for spiritual perfection.⁵ This light, as Fox and his disciples demonstrated, was a necessary supplement to biblical revelation; without it, as Sally Bruyneel suggested, the Bible remained a lifeless text.⁶ Indeed, Douglas Gwyn argued that the Quaker movement began as an “epistemological break” from the prevailing religious culture of early modern England.⁷ The inner light, moreover, not only included

³ H. Larry Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For other important works on the rise of Quakerism in the early modern period, see Craig W. Horle, *The Quakers and the English Legal System, 1660–1688* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 289–90.

⁴ Ingle, *First among Friends*, 56–71.

⁵ Ingle, *First among Friends*, 60–61; Evan Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism: America and the Religious Politics of English Expansion, 1497–1662* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 288. For Fox’s doctrine regarding the inner light, see George Fox, *The Short Journals and Itinerary Journals of George Fox*, ed. Norman Penny (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially pp. 1–3, 6, 18, 21–22. For an analysis of the Quaker doctrine of revelation and the inner light, see Lucy Davenport, “Christ Jesus the Covenant of God: Two Views of the Quaker Doctrine of the Light,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 80 (1992): 7–15; Hilary Hinds, “Going Nowhere: The Stranger and the Pilgrim in the Journal of George Fox,” *Quaker Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 84–102; Canby T. Jones, “The Nature and Functions of the Light in the Thought of George Fox,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 39 (1975): 53–71; Clare J. L. Martin, “Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story and Keiethian Controversies,” *Quaker Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 5–22, wherein Martin helpfully demonstrated how the doctrine of the inner light caused internal controversies within the Quaker movement itself; T. Vail Palmer Jr., “Early Friends and the bible: Some Observations,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 80 (1992): 41–55; Glen Reynolds, “Gnostic Metaphysics in the Dynamics of Foxian Light and the Reunion of the Soul with God,” *Quaker Studies* 11, no. 1 (2006): 71–88; Kathleen Thomas, “An Evaluation of the Doctrine of the Inward Light as a Basis for Mission,” *Quaker Studies* 1 (1996): 54–72. For a comprehensive survey of early Quaker theology, see Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, eds., *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought: 1647–1723* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶ Sally Bruyneel, “Margaret Fell and the Second Coming of Christ,” in *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought: 1647–1723*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 108. For the doctrine of the new light and its connection with the Bible, see George Fox, *The Works of George Fox* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 3:143; Margaret Fell, *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences* (London: J. Sowle, 1710), 252.

⁷ Douglas Gwyn, “Seventeenth-Century Context and Quaker Beginnings,” in Angell and Dandelion, *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought*, 13.

a revelatory aspect, but also an apocalyptic one. Fox and his followers reasoned that their experience of new revelation indicated the inauguration of the eschaton—that Christ was immanent in his return to set up his kingdom on earth.⁸

Fox took his message throughout England, gaining traction between 1653 and 1656.⁹ Coffey and Pestana noted that by 1656, Quakerism represented one of the largest sects of dissenters in England.¹⁰ Weimer, moreover, chronicled that in 1654, seventy Quaker missionaries took their gospel beyond English shores; by 1660, they gained nearly 30,000 converts.¹¹ This capacious growth, however, was juxtaposed with widespread persecution. While the Quakers arose as the fastest growing religious faction in the late '50s, they also suffered the most. Coffey and Weimer both documented the systemic campaign to suppress Quakerism throughout England and her colonies. In England alone, some 11,000 Quakers made their way to prison, with 450 dying, many of whom while in captivity.¹² Quakers provided their opponents with plenty of reasons to

⁸ For the apocalyptic connections with the “new light,” see Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101; Melvin Endy, *William Penn and Early Quakerism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 60; Bruyneel, “Margaret Fell and the Second Coming of Christ,” 106–109. Bruyneel, moreover, placed this apocalyptic anticipation in historical context. The Quakers were not the only religious sect that believed the return of Christ was imminent; see, for example, Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008). Quakers, as Bruyneel noted, differed from their contemporaries in that they connected the imminent return of Christ to their spiritualist message about the inner light. The coming of Christ had commenced, but his coming was not physical. Instead, it manifested through the inner light of Quaker spirituality. See Bruyneel, “Margaret Fell and the Second Coming of Christ,” 107–108.

⁹ Evan Haefeli demonstrated the rise of Quakerism during this period, chronicling Fox’s movement from northern to southern England between 1653 and 1654, followed by the expansion of Quakerism beyond English borders in 1655 then to the English colonies in 1656. Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 288.

¹⁰ Carla Gardina Pestana, “The City upon a Hill Under Siege: The Puritan Perception of the Quaker Threat to Massachusetts Bay, 1656–1661,” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Sep 1983): 330; John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 151.

¹¹ Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 105. Also see Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 196, which surveyed the international expansion of Quakerism. See also, George Fox, *The Short Journals and Itinerary Journals of George Fox*, 241.

¹² Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 105; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England*, 170. See also John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 216.

subdue them, ranging from their refusal to take oaths, their hostility towards the social order and hierarchies, or their failure to pay tithes.¹³ Yet, as historians have well acknowledged, Quakers probably suffered the most because they pursued persecution.¹⁴ Weimer's analysis of Quaker sufferings and martyrology described how, from the onset, George Fox and his followers expected, indeed, welcomed persecution.¹⁵ Their sufferings linked them with the earliest Christians in the New Testament, and the tales of Quaker martyrdom, as Weimer wrote, "formed a crucial part of Fox's historical imagination and his understanding of the nature of true Christianity."¹⁶ Transatlantic England was simply unprepared for a burgeoning denominational sect whose adherents readily anticipated suffering for their faith and made their persecutions a testament to the truth of their devotion and piety.¹⁷

When Quakerism descended on Massachusetts in 1656, the colony endeavored to protect its established order through theological and civil methods. These methods included doctrinal instruction through sermons and pamphlets commissioned by the General Court, and an attempt to create, as Chu deduced, a colony-wide consensus to suppress Quakers through fines, imprisonment, banishment, whippings, and even

¹³ Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 170. See also Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 218, wherein Barbour explained the political and social beliefs of the Quakers and how those beliefs undermined society to an intolerable degree, at least according to English authorities.

¹⁴ Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 328.

¹⁵ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 101. Quakers captured their sufferings in an aggressive publishing campaign. Indeed, as Coffey noted on page 151 of *Persecution and Toleration*, by 1660, Quakers published over 1,000 works on their theology and their sufferings. That the Quakers pursued persecution as a methodological means to spread their message was not lost on the leaders of Rhode Island, who admonished Massachusetts and other New England colonies for their harsh laws against the Quakers. Rhode Island wrote, "We find that they delight to be persecuted by civil powers." See *RRI*, 1:377.

¹⁶ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 102.

¹⁷ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 101–102, 105; Adrian Chastain Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (Jan 2017): 55; Ingle, *First Among Friends*, 196; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 3; Jonathan M. Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen: The Puritan Adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 5.

execution.¹⁸ Yet, Massachusetts's sustained opposition only encouraged Quaker efforts and missionary zeal, which, in turn, elevated the truculence of the anti-Quaker punitive laws. Moves and countermoves marked Massachusetts's campaign against Quakerism from 1656 and into the late 1660s. At the heart of this conflict was the colony's continued allegiance to civility of conformity. Massachusetts's leaders engaged in a contest of civility to preserve, as Weimer stated, its "fragile political experiment"—to protect this city on a hill from the theological and social upheavals associated with Quakerism.¹⁹ As it turned out, the Quakers revealed to Massachusetts that with all the aspirations of civility of conformity, the colony could not stem the tide of religious pluralism. Yet, rather than abandon civility of conformity as the colony's political foundation, their encounter with the Quakers wrought significant shifts into how the colony attempted to synthesize its established order and theological identity with the realities of denominational proliferation.

The Quakers Arrival: 1656

Even before Quakers arrived on their shores, Massachusetts's political and religious leaders were aware of Quakerism and the particular dangers this radical sect posed to their society. In June 1656, the General Court ordered a day of praying and fasting on behalf of England due specifically to the rise of Quakerism.²⁰ Historians George Drake, John Coffey, and Jonathan Chu clarified the context of General Court's, "Day of Humiliation." Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate typically left the suppression of radical religious groups like the Quakers to local authorities, which failed to provide a

¹⁸ For theological instruction, as one example, the General Court turned to John Norton, the pastor of the Boston congregation, who wrote, *The Heart of N-England rent at the Blasphemies of the Present Generation* (Cambridge, MA: 1659), which distilled the contours of Quaker heterodoxy and how the colony was to deal with the spread of Quakerism; Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 27.

¹⁹ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 53.

²⁰ *RGC*, 4.1: 276.

comprehensive and uniform response throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. More than that, Cromwell exhibited toleration towards Quakers, even pardoning the sentence of the notorious Quaker heretic, James Naylor.²¹ Cromwell's government, therefore, seemed unwilling to control the spread of Quakerism, causing, for Massachusetts, a "heightened sensitivity" towards the spread of heterodoxy.²²

One month later, in July 1656, Massachusetts's nightmare became a reality. Mary Fisher and Ann Austin, two Quaker missionaries, arrived at Boston to denounce the false religion of the Bay Colony and draw its inhabitants into the pure faith. While Fisher and Austin's appearance marked the colony's first tangible encounter with Quakerism, Weimer revealed that the General Court already understood the antics and strategies of Quaker missionaries. The authorities moved quickly to burn the women's books, put them in prison, and ensured that neither women had visitors while incarcerated nor allowed access to writing materials.²³ Keeping them silent lessened the chances that they might disseminate their exploits and thereby energize further Quaker missionary efforts.²⁴ Printing their sufferings, as historians Betty Hagglund and Maureen Bell proved, was a vital pillar of Quaker spirituality and an essential means through which they attempted to proclaim their message.²⁵

²¹ For Naylor's crime and the actions against him, see Thomas Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq. Member in the Parliaments of Oliver and Richard Cromwell*, ed. John Towill Rutt. (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), 1:10–11, 27, 32 – 34, 41, 52–53, 66–68.

²² George Drake, "The Ideology of Oliver Cromwell," *Church History* 35, no. 3 (Sep 1966): 261–262; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 153; Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 27. Coffey noted that because England failed to provide a top-down approach to the Quaker issue, it was left up to local communities to deal with this heretical sect. In some cases, local constables, or magistrates, with the aid of the citizenry, imprisoned Quakers and tried to stop them from spreading their message. In other towns, however, Quakers enjoyed more tolerance from their neighbors. These variances, according to Coffey, aided the Quaker mission because they could take advantage of the toleration in certain towns, which served as bases for their efforts to more hostile jurisdictions. See *Persecution and Toleration*, 151–155.

²³ Details of Fisher and Austin's incarceration can be found in Humphry Norton, *New England's Ensigne* (T.L.: London, 1659), 6–7.

²⁴ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 107.

²⁵ For the importance of print to Quaker theology and mission, see Betty Hagglund, "Quakers and the Printing Press," in Angell and Dandelion, *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought*, 32–47;

Despite the General Court's exertions, Fisher and Austin's sufferings found their way into various Quaker martyrdom tracts, including Humphrey Norton's, *New England's Ensigne*, and George Bishop's *New England Judged*.²⁶ Norton, himself a Quaker missionary to New England from 1657 to 1659, described how the General Court dealt with Fisher and Austin, treating them as both heretics and suspected witches. The General Court ordered the women stripped of their clothing in order that officers of the court could search their bodies for marks of the devil. In early modern England, women (and sometimes men) accused and condemned as witches typically had, according to the lore, a physical encounter with the devil or one of his demons. The demonic figure, during this altercation, bit or sucked on the subject's flesh, leaving a mark that indicated the person had been seduced by Satan. Norton, in graphic detail, retold the search of the devil's mark on Fisher and Austin—a search conducted by both men and women.²⁷ Norton included other stories of suffering Quakers, walking through the persecutions these missionaries received at the hands of the civil rulers in New England and especially in Massachusetts. According to Pestana and Weimer, tracts like Norton's were intended to foster courage and conviction for other Quaker missionaries who could read of the faithfulness displayed by their brothers and sisters. The endurance of suffering by their

Maureen Bell, "Women Publishers of Puritan Literature in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: Three Case Studies" (PhD diss., Loughborough University of Technology, 1987), especially chapter two.

²⁶ Humphrey Norton, *New England's Ensigne* (T.L.: London, 1659), 6–7; George Bishop, *New England Judged* (London, 1661), 1:7–8.

²⁷ Norton intended that his work would encourage Quakers to continue suffering, but also to present the violence and persecutions of Quakers at the hands of the Massachusetts authorities and other colonies throughout New England. The inclusion of the court suspecting Fisher and Austin as witches may have scandalized his English audience. Historians Malcolm Gaskill, Nathan Johnstone, Peter Elmer, and James Sharpe chronicled how belief in witchcraft in early modern England began to decline in the middle of the seventeenth century, especially after the Hopkins Witch Trials, which took place in East Anglia from 1645–1647. Those trials, as Gaskill noted, came under severe critique, as it led to over 250 people being accused of witchcraft and over 100 hanged; the methods used by Hopkins mirrored those of what Norton described in his polemic. See Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

missionaries supplied Quakers with stories that they believed would persuade potential converts of the truthfulness of their faith. The narratives, furthermore, provided Quaker polemicists examples from which to indict the political theology of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.²⁸

The arrival of Fisher and Austin served as the first of many examples Quaker authors drew upon to promote the Quaker cause. While the discourses prejudiced the narratives in favor of Quakerism, the historical veracity of the events themselves exhibited an internal integrity, making tracts like Norton's trustworthy sources for what happened to Quakers in Massachusetts. As Weimer confirmed in her study of Quaker missionary pamphlets and polemics, several reasons upheld the accuracy of their documentations. The General Court records, for example, corroborated the details contained in Quaker polemics, especially regarding the various forms of punishment handed down by the magistrates. The court's materials also substantiated the disdain of the magistrates, assistants, and freemen; nor did the General Court's defenders attempt to refute the claims made by Quakers. Weimer noted that while exaggerations of suffering may have existed, the stories were, nevertheless, not manufactured by Quaker apologists.²⁹ In other words, Quakers and the supporters of Bay Colony used the same source materials and historical information in their campaigns against one another; the differences came down to how they spun those chronicles, weaving them into narratives intended to support the aspiration of their respective causes. The results were competing narratives: the Quakers casted themselves as the suffering servants of Christ. Massachusetts, on the other hand, presented their efforts as a righteous, holy, and God-honoring response to an intolerable heretical sect bent on the utter destruction of both the

²⁸ Carla Gardina Pestana, "The Quaker Executions as Myth and History," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (Sep 1993): 445–446; Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 108–110.

²⁹ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 50–51.

civil society and the church of Jesus Christ. This was, as Pestana described, a contest over the meaning and identity of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.³⁰

If Quakers wanted a confrontation with the Massachusetts General Court, then they were no doubt pleased with the subsequent actions taken by the Bay Colony. In September 1656, Massachusetts's Governor, John Endecott, drafted an imprecatory statement to the United Colonies—a coalition of the other English settlements in New England, minus Rhode Island—warning them of the dangers of this heretical group.³¹ Endecott was one of the original settlers of Massachusetts, even arriving before Winthrop in 1630. Historian Francis Bremer demonstrated that Endecott, throughout his life, ardently committed himself to the cooperation between church and state. The magistrate, as God's servant, was to ensure the preservation of orthodoxy and the flourishing of the churches under his jurisdiction; ministers of the gospel, moreover, necessarily provided spiritual and theological counsel to the magistrates and civil leaders.³² Thus, when Quakers threatened the communities of Massachusetts, Endecott acted swiftly to mitigate the spread of this pernicious, disruptive, and turbulent religious sect.³³ He wrote to the United Colonies that the Quakers came to establish the “kingdom of Satan,” and as such, New England needed to stand together in the prosecution of Quakers.³⁴ Endecott framed this contest in terms of spiritual warfare, or, a cosmic battle between the spiritual forces of evil and the godly communities he led. While Quakers drew upon apocalyptic ideas

³⁰ Pestana, “The Quaker Executions as Myth and History,” 442–444.

³¹ The United Colonies, which began in 1643, was organized for the purposes of defending the interests of New England against any military threat, especially from the Native Americans. The Providence Plantations were excluded because of their lack of a centralized government and their commitment to religious freedom. For a history of the United Colonies, see Harry M. Ward, *The United Colonies of New England, 1643–90* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961).

³² Francis J. Bremer, *First Founders: American Puritanism in an Atlantic World* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), 29–31. For a biography of Endecott, see Lawrence Shaw Mayo, *John Endecott: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

³³ Bremer, *First Founders*, 44.

³⁴ *COP*, 284.

and utilized categories of spiritual warfare in their works, Weimer rightly extended this principle to the civil and religious leaders of Massachusetts. She wrote, “The heterodox were weapons in the hands of evil, persecuting powers intent on the destruction of New England’s true churches.”³⁵ The colony had not departed from the earliest vision of its identity cast by Winthrop, Cotton, Dudley, Weld, or Ward throughout the 1630s. Massachusetts, this city upon a hill, “Gods Plantation,” was besieged by the devil who appeared in the form of two Quaker missionaries.

At its October 1656 session, the Massachusetts General Court passed a series of laws to try and prevent the spread of Quakerism, along with any other heresies or blasphemies that defied the colony’s established order.³⁶ The court prescribed imprisonment and forced labor for incarcerated Quakers, who also suffered a prohibition against speaking with anyone while in custody, lest they spread their error. They would be whipped while in prison, and their confinement was as long as “necessitie requireth.”³⁷ Similarly, heavy fines, prison stays, and banishment awaited anyone who defended the Quakers or even granted them aid.³⁸ In fact, at this October session, Nicholas Upshall, a Boston tavern keeper, objected to the Quaker laws. He even tried, as Pestana recounted, to bribe the jailors to set Fisher and Austin free.³⁹ Upon his indictment by the General Court, Upshall paid a significant fine and suffered banishment from the colony. He removed himself to Plymouth and eventually Rhode Island, converting to Quakerism shortly after his banishment.⁴⁰

³⁵ Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 112

³⁶ *RGC*, 4.1:277

³⁷ *RGC*, 4.1:278

³⁸ *RGC*, 4.1:278

³⁹ Pestana, “The City upon a Hill under Siege,” 324.

⁴⁰ *RGC*, 4.1:279–280. From the records of the First Church in Boston, it seemed Upshall had caused problems as early as 1651. He had become a Seeker and was excommunicated from the church. He lived quietly, however, until the arrival of Fisher and Austin. See Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the*

When it came to the Quakers, Upshall was perhaps the first example of what Weimer called, “the lived politics of toleration.”⁴¹ By this, Weimer noted the complex and nuanced reactions of Massachusetts’s citizens towards the Quakers, their antics, and their sufferings. As the General Court attempted to curtail the spread of Quakerism, in some cases, local constables or lay figures like Upshall extended mercy, compassion, or toleration. Jonathan Chu, moreover, demonstrated that specific communities like Salem, Hampton, and Kittery, were less reliable in their cooperation to suppress Quakers and uphold the General Court’s orders.⁴² The reasons for these varied approaches included a range of considerations, involving economic issues, local priorities, and an increased antipathy about the perceived harshness of Massachusetts’s laws, as in the case of Nicholas Upshall.⁴³ Examples of tolerance or pity—these profiles of “the lived politics of toleration”—were not novel to the response against Quakerism. Indeed, when the General Court dealt with the rise of Baptists in the 1640s, John Clarke recounted examples of benevolence in Boston.⁴⁴ Thus, as the colony’s leaders preserved civility of conformity, a nascent and conflicting attitude towards dissenters simultaneously emerged amongst the colony’s inhabitants. These individuals provided medical attention, paid court fines, and supplied spiritual encouragement. The Quaker dilemma magnified these differences, and,

First Church in Boston, 1630–1868 (Boston: Colonial Society, 1961), 54. For Upshall’s conversion to Quakerism, and his importance to the movement in New England, see John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 223–225; Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 182–183, wherein Winship helpfully demonstrated how many Seekers throughout New England were attracted to Quakerism, providing quick converts for this new sect in the American wilderness.

⁴¹ Weimer, “Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay,” 47. Weimer also made mention of this trend in *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 107.

⁴² Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 105–152.

⁴³ Weimer, “Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay,” 47. For the influence of merchants and economic factors that played into the “lived politics of toleration,” see E. Brooks Holifield, “On Toleration in Massachusetts,” *Church History* 38, no. 2 (Jun 1969): 189–191.

⁴⁴ *IN*, 22.

consequently, began to shift the way the colony maintained its religious establishment.⁴⁵

Adding to Upshall's defection came the arrival of more Quaker missionaries, no less than two days after the General Court banished Fisher and Austin.⁴⁶ At least eight more Quakers arrived in Boston, half of whom were women, proclaiming the message of the Society of Friends.⁴⁷ Their missionary method, to the consternation of the Bay Colony's leaders, not only included the venting of heresy, but the disruption of church services and meetings. These religious gatherings, which were three times a week, typically brought together the entire community for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments to members of the churches. This method, as Pestana noted, was the most "potent symbol of the Quaker attack on established religion," wherein Quakers interrupted ministers in the middle of their sermons, ridiculing their theology.⁴⁸ John Turner, moreover, added that Quaker missionaries upended the prevailing social norms and hierarchies of society, which included a radical equality amongst men and women, and a rejection of the aristocracy.⁴⁹ In rarer occasions, some Quaker women walked publicly through town naked, prophetically acting out the spiritual nakedness of the unconverted.⁵⁰ Even Roger Williams found the Quaker

⁴⁵ See David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism & the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5. Hall noted how dissenting groups, especially the Quakers, began to erode the foundations of religious unity.

⁴⁶ Norton, *New-England's Ensigne*, 7. The specific dates on when Fisher and Austin left, and subsequently, when the new missionaries arrived, are not clearly reflected in the primary source documents. Historians, however, have noted that it was probably sometime in October 1656. See Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 324; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 223.

⁴⁷ Norton, *New-England's Ensigne*, 7.

⁴⁸ Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 330. See also, Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 107; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689*, 152.

⁴⁹ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 221; Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 328, where she helpfully distinguished seventeenth-century Quakerism from its modern-day manifestations. She wrote, on page 328, that "if one assumes that the traveling witnesses were pacifistic, respectful, well educated, and contemplative, the reaction of the Massachusetts Bay leaders becomes inexplicable."

⁵⁰ See, for example, the General Court's condemnation of Sarah Roper in *RGC*, 4.2:156. See also Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 107; Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 331.

rejection of social customs and mores difficult to bear and potentially disastrous for a tolerant society like Rhode Island, writing that Quakerism tended to reduce people from “Civility to Barbarism.”⁵¹ Massachusetts, therefore, found itself facing a comprehensive menace to its society and its churches. Whatever the colony’s civil and religious leaders heard before the first missionaries arrived in their harbors, nothing seemed to have prepared them for the shock of Quaker tactics and conviction. The Society of Friends quickly drew Massachusetts, as Winship concluded, into a conflict with its most “aggressive . . . religious threat.”⁵²

The Quaker Invasion: 1657–1658

Rhode Island’s guarantee of religious freedom worked against Massachusetts’s efforts—and the rest of New England, for that matter—to halt the contagion of Quakerism. Upshall had already moved to Rhode Island in early 1657, drawing others to the Quaker religion. By August, missionaries Christopher Holder and John Copeland arrive in Rhode Island as well. Holder was an early convert to Quakerism and a leading figure of evangelistic efforts throughout New England. The two missionaries, using Rhode Island as a base, conducted excursions into Salem, Massachusetts; they successfully established a Quaker contingent, but not without the notice of their discontents, which was their intent.⁵³ At a church meeting, the two men attempted to preach Quaker doctrines until a mob broke out against them, gagging the two of them with gloves to the point where they almost choked to death.⁵⁴ They were taken to Boston and beaten, which involved using a three-chorded whip that tore through their flesh.

⁵¹ *GF*, 5.

⁵² Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 186.

⁵³ Bishop, *New England Judged*, 1:40; see also Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 183.

⁵⁴ Adrian Weimer, who contended that the confrontation with the Quakers provided episodes of the “lived politics of toleration,” also noted the realities of “mob violence” in Massachusetts as some of the laity and local constables took actions into their own hands to stop Quaker preaching.

Despite their sufferings, Holder and Copeland managed to convert some locals within the colony and at Salem—indeed, immediately after their whippings and subsequent incarceration, Samuel Shattock, a native of Salem, was arrested and brought to Boston for his conversion to Quakerism.⁵⁵

The effectiveness of Holder and Copeland stemmed from their ability to use Rhode Island as a haven to launch their missionary enterprise. In the fall of 1657, the United Colonies attempted to pressure the Providence Plantations to pass laws against the Quakers. The colony refused, reminding their New England neighbors of the commitment the colony had for liberty of conscience. Sydney Ahlstrom and Jonathan Chu stressed the importance of Rhode Island's refusal to join the United Colonies in their anti-Quaker laws. The liberties secured in Williams's Providence Plantations forced Massachusetts and her neighbors to find alternative solutions to the Quaker threat.⁵⁶ With the Quaker problems only intensifying, the General Court at their October 1657 meeting instigated new laws designed to barricade Quaker expansion by targeting anyone who transported Quakers into the colony, knowingly or not. If caught, ship captains paid a hefty fine of £100. Other measures dissuaded inhabitants from providing shelter to Quakers, imposing greater fines, prison stays, and even the forfeiture of property on anyone caught aiding the Society of Friends.⁵⁷ While these statutes targeted the importing and housing of Quakers, another set of edicts increased the penalties for apprehended missionaries. If a Quaker male returned to the colony, one of his ears were cut off followed by a term in forced labor. The next offence led to the loss of the second ear and another confinement in labor camps. For Quaker women, rather than losing their ears,

⁵⁵ Bishop, *New England Judged*, 1:40. See also Pestana, "The City upon a Hill under Siege," 331.

⁵⁶ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 176; Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 39.

⁵⁷ *RGC*, 4.1:308.

they suffered a severe whipping and imprisonment. If either a man or a woman violated their banishment a fourth time, their tongues were bored “with a hot iron.”⁵⁸ Yet, as historians have well documented, severer penal consequences only emboldened Quaker activity.⁵⁹

Undeterred by the October 1657 laws, Quakers doubled their efforts, which in turn, led to more frequent encounters with Massachusetts’s authorities. At a trial before the General Court in 1658, Governor John Endecott pressed two missionaries about Quaker Christology. Specifically, Endecott attempted trap them into espousing the doctrine of the celestial flesh of Jesus Christ, which denied that Jesus took on fully human flesh; instead, Jesus received a human body directly from heaven. The missionaries evaded the theological trap, but the General Court sentenced them to have their ears removed.⁶⁰ Endecott, furthermore, added that not only had they broken the colony’s laws, but these Quakers were guilty of deception, poisoning the people of Massachusetts with their reviling against the churches, ministers, and the colony’s civil government.⁶¹ This narrative provided a glimpse into the issues at stake throughout the Quaker invasion. The General Court had more than merely civil concerns about the Quakers. They pressed them on their theology and doctrines.

Throughout 1658, Quakers appeared at church gatherings and held their own worship meetings. Salem, in particular, abounded with Quaker activity to the point that by June 1658, colonial magistrates broke up an assembly of more than thirty Quakers

⁵⁸ *RGC*, 4.1:309. See Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 107.

⁵⁹ Weimer, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 102; Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, 211–212;

⁶⁰ Francis Hogwill, *The Popish Inquisition Newly Erected in New-England* (Thomas Simmons: London, 1659), 19–20.

⁶¹ Hogwill, *The Popish Inquisition Newly Erected in New-England*, 24.

worshiping together in a private residence.⁶² The disruptions and heightened activity triggered further outbreaks of violence as magistrates and ministers tried to quell the Quaker threat. One leading minister, John Norton, became increasingly involved in the attempts to silence the Society of Friends. Norton, as one historian described him, was “one of the old staunch Puritans.”⁶³ A Cambridge trained minister, Norton left England in 1634 due to the “decisions of his enlightened conscience;” England’s religion was, by Norton’s estimation, a cesspool of theology and piety.⁶⁴ In 1638, Norton became the teacher of the church at Ipswich and, after John Cotton’s death in 1652, was appointed the teacher of the church at Boston.⁶⁵ Norton, who enjoyed a successful ministry, now faced the agitations of Quaker missionaries who targeted Boston and his church meetings. Norton, according to an eyewitness account, encouraged a jailor to beat the Quaker missionary William Bend to the point that he passed out. For Norton, beating Bend “black and blew” was a just sentence since he endeavored to “beat their Gospel Ordinances.”⁶⁶ Two days later, two other missionaries infiltrated Boston’s church service, interrupting Norton’s sermon as he disparaged the heresies of Quakerism. The intruders decried Norton’s diatribe, likening him and the entire religion of Massachusetts to an abomination before the Lord. Members of the church stopped the verbal incursion, whereby these two missionaries were imprisoned and beaten for their crimes.⁶⁷

At the General Court’s October 1658 meeting, the Quakers headlined the

⁶² For details of this event, see Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 25–29. See also Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers* (London, 1753), 2:185–186.

⁶³ Alexander W. M’Clure, *The Lives of John Wilson, John Norton, and John Davenport* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1870), 179.

⁶⁴ M’Clure, *The Lives of John Wilson, John Norton, and John Davenport*, 182.

⁶⁵ M’Clure, *The Lives of John Wilson, John Norton, and John Davenport*, 192, 218–219.

⁶⁶ Norton, *New England’s Ensigne*, 78; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 184.

⁶⁷ Norton, *New England’s Ensigne*, 78 – 81; Bishop, *New England Judged*, 57 – 58; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 184.

court's proceedings, with more laws and condemnatory language hurled at these obstinate zealots. The court lamented the effectiveness of Quakers to spread their message. Thus, sensing the need to respond, the magistrates and deputies employed the services of John Norton to write a rejoinder that outlined the heretical contours of Quakerism, which, in turn, would justify the need for the civil clampdown of this radical sect.⁶⁸ Norton's work would be published the following year; nevertheless, he had his marching orders from the court's officials. The Quakers subverted religion, destroyed civil order, and infected God's people with corruptive lies.⁶⁹ The court summoned Norton to respond directly to these blasphemies.

What made this General Court different from previous meetings, however, was the involvement of the laity and freemen of the colony.⁷⁰ A group of merchants and shopkeepers signed a joint declaration, addressed to the Massachusetts General Court. They titled it, a "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers." It began by lauding the pious and faithful leaders of the colony, both in positions of government and ecclesiastical figureheads. Massachusetts's leaders, according to the Petition, had protected the theological purity of the colony in decades past.⁷¹ Yet, the Petition described a spiritual war that engulfed the godly society. Satan, ever duplicitous, contrived new machinations to undo all that the colony attempted to achieve in the New England wilderness.⁷²

As such, this group of laity demanded more from the colony's leaders; this was a desperate hour. Quakerism, as a handmaiden for Satan, portended the decay of

⁶⁸ *RGC*, 348.

⁶⁹ *RGC*, 348.

⁷⁰ See Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 107.

⁷¹ "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers, October, 1658," in *The Quaker Invasion of Massachusetts*, ed. Richard P. Hallowell (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 153

⁷² For the use of satanic imagery and spiritual warfare, see Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 112.

Massachusetts's "cuill & religious Libertyes."⁷³ Specifically, they charged the Quakers with deriding both tables of the Mosaic law, which served as a foundational text for Massachusetts's society.⁷⁴ By extension, Quakers assailed the magistrates' enforcement of God's law. Secondly, the petitioners chided the "pretense of new light," meaning, the new revelations Quakers claimed to have received from the Holy Spirit. This new light, according to the petitioners, sabotaged religion altogether because it removed the Scriptures as the ballast of ontological truth. The signatories believed that the "new light" explained the Quakers' denial of the distinct persons of the Trinity and their repudiation of Christ's humanity.⁷⁵ Third, and finally, given these hazards posed by Quakerism, the petitioners wanted the General Court to add the death sentence to those who violated the terms of their banishment. The laity cited the Münster rebellion from 1534 to 1535 as an example of what would happen if Massachusetts failed to fully overthrow the Quaker threat and deal with these heretics in accordance with God's law.⁷⁶ This was not the last time the memory of Münster was resurrected in the Bay Colony. It evoked the scandalous fall of Münster to Jan Matthys and apocalyptic anabaptists in 1534.⁷⁷ Matthys, a disciple of the radical religious leader Melchior Hoffman, gained control of Münster by sheer numbers, with the city authorities doing little to stop the coup before it was too late. The

⁷³ "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers, October, 1658," 154.

⁷⁴ See George Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960); Edmund S. Morgan, introduction to *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558 – 1794* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003).

⁷⁵ "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers, October, 1658," 154.

⁷⁶ "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers, October, 1658," 155.

⁷⁷ The term "apocalyptic anabaptists" comes from the helpful taxonomy provided by Carlos Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), especially chapter eleven on the Radical Reformation. Eire contended that under the canopy of the term "anabaptist," were a host of different manifestations, including pacifists, moderates, and the apocalyptic activists; this latter group included the Münster rebels. They were apocalyptic in the sense that they believed the end of the world was at hand, and that they had received special revelation from the Lord about where he was going to set up his earthy kingdom. The first location was Strassburg in 1533; when that failed to come to fruition, Münster became the second prophetic target of the Day of the Lord. Eire developed his taxonomy from the helpful history by George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962).

laity in Massachusetts, therefore, cited this 125-year-old event as grounds for the death penalty against the Quakers. The civility of the colony and the preservation of its churches depended upon the civil and religious leaders working together to dispense with this burgeoning heresy. If the ministers and magistrates failed, the petitioners feared that Boston would become another Münster.⁷⁸ As Weimer documented, the General Court agreed, and at its October 1658 meeting, prescribed the death penalty against banished Quakers who returned to the colony.⁷⁹

The laity's petition marked an important moment for the colony's confrontation with Quakerism and provided clarity for the broader commitments to civility of conformity in Massachusetts. The Society of Friends caused such a level of calamity that even the laity wanted the General Court to do more. The petitioners, moreover, represented various classes within the colony, including shoemakers, merchants, felt makers, goldsmiths, and booksellers. Holifield's study indicated that this diversity evinced "no significant correlation" between social or economic status and a person's outlook on issues related to suppressing dissent.⁸⁰ The Quaker invasion vexed ministers, magistrates, and every rung of the social and economic hierarchy in the Bay Colony. Yet, the freemen's involvement in October 1658 revealed how they perceived the specific threat posed by Quakerism. They framed their petition, first, in terms of a spiritual battle with Satan, which uncovered the theological commitments motivating that laity's behavior. Demonizing the Quakers, quite literally, was not something only the

⁷⁸ For the Münster rebellion, see Ralf Klötzer, "The Melchorites and Münster," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 217–256; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), especially pages 261–270; and George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, especially chapter thirteen.

⁷⁹ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 107; *RGC*, 4.1:346. See also Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 185; and Holifield, "On Toleration in Massachusetts," 191–192. Winship and Holifield added that two deputies voted against the death penalty for Quakers who violated the terms of their banishment.

⁸⁰ Holifield, "On Toleration in Massachusetts," 195.

magistrates or ministers did, nor was this a mere rhetorical tactic.⁸¹ A shared belief in a spiritual warfare permeated all levels of society, undergirding this contest with the Society of Friends.⁸² Secondly, the laity linked Massachusetts's struggle with the tumult that engulfed Münster. By invoking Münster, they expounded their own understanding of the promises and necessity of conformity. Without adherence to a socially prescribed orthodoxy—an orthodoxy nourished by ministers and protected by the magistrates—then the city on a hill would certainly crumble. Massachusetts's civility, according to the petitioners, could not sustain this level of plurality.

The General Court's actions from 1657 to 1658, furthermore, disclosed two primary issues about the spread of Quakerism for the members of the court: Quakers eroded the necessary civility required for the colony's flourishing, and they espoused the vilest heresies that inhibited healthy churches. The theological issues, contrary to Turner's argument, were especially problematic. Quakers not only jeopardized Massachusetts's churches and the doctrinal purity of the people, but, if left unchecked, provoked God's wrath upon the colony.⁸³ The court also believed that their faithfulness, or unfaithfulness, bore eternal consequences. The Quakers busily and effectively "infected & seduced" Massachusetts's colonists into a rejection of the true religion and piety.⁸⁴ As Winship described, Massachusetts—from the members of the court to

⁸¹ Historians like Peter Elmer, Jeffrey Russel, and Darren Oldridge concluded that the use of the devil in polemical literature had less to do with theological conviction and more to do with having a convenient tool to disparage theological and ecclesiastical enemies. The devil and the concept of spiritual warfare was propaganda, invented for the sake of political power and advantages. See Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 9; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 31; Darren Oldridge, *The Devil in Early Modern England* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 14; Darren Oldridge, *Religion and Society in Early Stuart England* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 7; Darren Oldridge, "Protestant Conceptions of the Devil in Early Stuart England," *History* 85, no. 278 (April 2000): 232–246.

⁸² Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 112.

⁸³ Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 221. Turner unnecessarily demoted the issues involving theology. He argued on page 221 that "theology was not the main flash point." *RGC*, 4.1:348. See also, Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 185. Winship pinpointed the eschatological fears of Massachusetts's leaders if Quakerism continued to spread.

⁸⁴ *RGC*, 4.1:346.

cobblers in Boston—believed that an actual “revelation-driven Quaker bloodbath” loomed as God’s judgment should the colony fail in its divinely ordained task in New England.⁸⁵

Executing Heretics: 1659–1660

When the General Court amended its banishment law to include “under the pain of death” in October 1658, Massachusetts already held a number of Quakers in prison. In Salem alone, a half dozen Quaker missionaries and converts awaited their sentencing from the court.⁸⁶ Armed with the new October 1658 law, the General Court banished these Quakers from the Bay Colony, now, however, with the added threat that if they returned, they would meet the hangman’s noose.⁸⁷ Historian Arthur Worrall disclosed that between late 1658 and early 1659, the number of incarcerated Quakers continued to grow, indicating that neither the Quakers nor the General Court relented in their efforts.⁸⁸ Indeed, Pestana argued that in early 1659, the Massachusetts General Court initiated an aggressive campaign to stamp out the Society of Friends. Despite their efforts, the General Court met a resilient determination by the Quaker missionaries who remained uncooperative with Massachusetts’s demands to stay out of their jurisdiction.⁸⁹ Quaker stubbornness, furthermore, enjoyed the aid of some Bay Colony residents, who paid fines of imprisoned missionaries and converts, or provided a space for Quakers to

⁸⁵ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 185; *RGC*, 4.1:349.

⁸⁶ *RGC*, 4.1:349.

⁸⁷ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 31.

⁸⁸ Arthur J. Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1980), 12.

⁸⁹ Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 185; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 31; Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 12.

hold their meetings.⁹⁰ Thus, the Massachusetts General Court and the Quakers became more entrenched in their posture towards one another, further provoking the struggle that tried the ecclesial and political structures of the Bay Colony.⁹¹

The conflict crested in the Autumn of 1659. In September, William Robinson and Marmaduke Stevenson made their way into Massachusetts via Rhode Island, spreading their Quaker gospel until apprehended by the Boston magistrates. Robinson, a London merchant turned Quaker evangelist, came to New England in 1657, operating in Rhode Island. In 1659, Robinson met Stevenson, formerly a Yorkshire farmer, who arrived from previous missionary work he conducted in Barbados. He made his way to the Providence Plantations with the intentions of advancing directly into Massachusetts. Dyer, a Quaker convert and native of Newport, heard of the recent beatings and imprisonments of Quakers in Boston, which included Robinson and Stevenson. She, along with eleven-year-old Patience Scott, proceeded to Boston to protest the actions taken by the General Court. As expected, the magistrates confined them to prison. At the General Court's session that September, all jailed Quakers in Boston were banished under pain of death.⁹²

While Dyer and Patience returned to Newport, Robinson and Stevenson disobeyed the General Court's order and went to Salem to conduct meetings and encourage Quaker converts within that community. On October 13th, Robinson and Stevenson returned to Boston with several other Quaker followers who came as a symbolic protest of Massachusetts's laws against the Society of Friends. By the "*Moving*

⁹⁰ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 31; Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 61; Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 44; *RGC*, 4.1:349.

⁹¹ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 32.

⁹² A number of sources detailed the story of Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer. Here, I am grateful for Rufus Matthew Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1911), 79; David L. Johns, "'Hanging as a Flag': Mary Dyer and Quaker Hagiography," *Quaker Religious Thought* 95 (2000): 7–23; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 32–33; Ruth Talbot Plimpton, *Mary Dyer: Biography of a Rebel Quaker* (Boston: Branden Publishing, 1994), 149–173.

and *Power of the Lord*,” they wanted to “look *your* Bloody Laws in the face, and to try *them*.”⁹³ For the General Court, this was an unthinkable act of insolence against their authority and a clear challenge to the colony’s commitment to its laws and civil order. Mary Dyer added to their bewilderment when she also returned to Boston to provide aid to her imprisoned compatriots and deliberately spurn the Bay Colony’s injunction against her.⁹⁴

The General Court, under the authority of its 1658 law, sentenced Robinson, Stevenson, and Dyer to death by hanging. The three condemned missionaries issued statements to the General Court, declaring that they only obeyed the will and revelation of God; they did not fear death and clearly viewed themselves as martyrs for the faith.⁹⁵ To the General Court, however, these three zealots calculatingly usurped the laws of the colony, intent on not only upending its social order, but to continue the spread of its heretical doctrines. The court set October 27th as the date for their executions and readied Boston for the spectacle. Only two out of the three constructed nooses were used because Mary Dyer’s son successfully petitioned the General Court to grant her clemency. The court banished Dyer under pain of death, for a second time, but only after she was able to witness Robinson and Stevenson hang. In preparation for the executions, the militia was called up to provide security and to construct barricades around the prison to prevent anyone from going near the condemned Quakers.⁹⁶ Historians debated whether the court took these measures because they feared an uprising from the people, indicating the law’s

⁹³ Bishop, *New England Judged*, 88–89; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 32–33; Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*; 80.

⁹⁴ Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, 80; Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers*, 2:205; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 33; Plimpton, *Mary Dyer*, 152–153.

⁹⁵ Bishop, *New England Judged*, 95–108; Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, 81–84.

⁹⁶ RGC, 4.1:384–390; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 33–34.

unpopularity.⁹⁷ Pestana, however, inferred that the law enjoyed copious support amongst the colonists, especially since the punishment prescribed was demanded by the freemen, not the magistrates.⁹⁸

Whatever the reason for the military presence, the General Court at least believed that their decision might arouse objections to the colony's justice system. Indeed, the court records stated that some might try to convince Massachusetts to apologize for executing dissenters. The colony, however, was prepared to endure such accusations and labels like "bloody persecutors."⁹⁹ The court considered that this impulse arose out of pity; while a "commendable & Christian virtue," unchecked and liberal pity portended the undoing of any lawful society.¹⁰⁰ The General Court, in a preemptive response, ordered the publication of two documents. The first was John Norton's now completed response to Quakerism, *The Heart of N-England Rent at the Blasphemies of the Present Generation*. The second was a tract drafted by the General Court that justified their specific actions in the case involving Robinson and Stevenson. Each of these documents supplied insight into the developing ideas associated with civility of conformity, and how the colony's religious and civil leaders viewed their present crisis.¹⁰¹

John Norton and the Heart of New England

Norton's, *Heart of N-England Rent*, began with a theological indictment of Quakerism. Norton pinpointed several doctrines where the Quakers espoused heterodoxy,

⁹⁷ See David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 242, 291; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 34–35.

⁹⁸ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 34–35.

⁹⁹ *RGC*, 385.

¹⁰⁰ *RGC*, 385.

¹⁰¹ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 33.

which included the Trinity, Christology, the authority of the Bible, ecclesiology, and the role of the magistrate in matters of religion.¹⁰² The Quakers, according to Norton, denied the distinctions between the persons of the Godhead. With regard to Christ, they rejected Jesus' divinity, instead viewing him as merely a godly man.¹⁰³ The Quakers, moreover, displaced the authority of the Scriptures as supreme, instead accentuating their inner light. The emphasis on personal, experiential revelations, according to Norton, also amounted to an erroneous ecclesiology. Indeed, Pestana connected the Quaker reliance on the inner light to their disdain of organized church services, which also explained the frequent disturbances Quakers caused at church gatherings. The Quakers ridiculed the ordinances, rejecting baptism and the Lord's Supper within the life of a church.¹⁰⁴

The Quaker beliefs regarding the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, and political theology, as Norton argued, amounted to a most horrid, heretical sect, calling Quakers, "the first born of Satan."¹⁰⁵ For the Boston preacher, Quakerism disqualified itself from any form of religious tolerance due not only to the blasphemies it held, but the manner in which Quakers spread their unorthodoxy.¹⁰⁶ Their heresy was "all sin," in that they held to false beliefs and attempted to evangelize others into their "lies against the Lord and his truth."¹⁰⁷ The antidote against this scandalous manifestation of heresy was multifaceted, with different obligations expected within families, churches, and the magistrate.¹⁰⁸

With regard to the magistrate, Norton contended that God designed the office

¹⁰² *NR*, 2.

¹⁰³ *NR*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁴ Pestana, "The City upon a Hill Under Siege," 332; *NR*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁵ *NR*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ *NR*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ *NR*, 47.

of civil rulers to nourish the conditions conducive to right belief and faithfulness to God.¹⁰⁹ Creating those conditions, moreover, in no way violated liberty of conscience. Quaker apologists frequently demanded freedom of conscience, and chastised Massachusetts's policies as violating that solemn liberty between God and man.¹¹⁰ Norton provided the General Court and his readers a response, indicating a continued tradition of thought between Norton and his predecessors regarding the conscience and its operations. He did not deny the Christian's freedom. Liberty of conscience bespoke of man's independence from the dictates of corporeal authorities in the economy of salvation. Norton distinguished this liberty from "liberty of Error."¹¹¹ According to Norton, therefore, when sects like the Quakers pleaded for liberty of conscience, what they really wanted was liberty of error—the liberty to blaspheme and draw other souls away from the truth of God.¹¹² Thus, liberty of conscience was not an unqualified freedom to pursue the dictates of one's religious convictions, but a liberty to love God and enjoy him through the accomplished work of Jesus Christ.

Given the magistrate's duty and Norton's assessment of the human conscience, he articulated a doctrine for the civil authority's role religion, providing more intellectual framework for civility of conformity. For Norton, the magistrate possessed no authority nor power to coerce the human conscience. The means through which to accomplish his duties only pertained to the outward man or woman. In matters of heresy, or error of conscience, Norton created three distinctions, each with their own respective treatment and differing in their need for the magistrate's sword. The first case involved the

¹⁰⁹ NR, 49. See also, Winship's analysis of Norton's text in *Hot Protestants*, 185.

¹¹⁰ See Hogwill, *The Popish Inquisition Newly Erected in New-England*, 33; Bishop, *New England Judged*, 1:4; Margaret Fell, *A Declaration and an Information from us the People of God called Quakers* (London: 1660), 2; Edward Burrough, *A Declaration of the Sad and Great Persecution and Martyrdom of the People of God, called Quakers, in New-England, for the Worshipping of God* (London: 1661), 6.

¹¹¹ NR, 51.

¹¹² Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 44.

articulation of heresy followed by an immediate retraction. In this stream, the normal mechanisms of church polity and ministerial correction brought a person to repentance; the magistrate, furthermore, was unneeded. The second stream, Norton called, “heresy alone,” or “quiet heresy.” By this, Norton meant the utterance of heresy that did not persist nor attempt to draw others into unorthodoxy. In this category, the individual lacked repentance but also did not persist in obstinacy. They could be tolerated as long as their heresy remained veiled. Brutish intransigence marked the third stream of Norton’s framework, what he dubbed, “heresy turbulent.” “This is not only heretical,” Norton declared, “but also pestilential, and here is a reason, wherein it is the duty of the Civil Magistrate, to put forth his Coercive power, as the matter shall require in the defence of Religion, Order, Church & common-wealth.”¹¹³ Quakers, by extension, fell into “heresy turbulent.” The Society of Friends, as Norton believed he proved, proclaimed heretical doctrines at odds with the fundamental theological tenets of Christianity. Quakers also dared to proselytize the godly people of Massachusetts into their vile errors. Taken together, the Quakers necessitated the involvement of the civil magistrate. Norton stated that the magistrates must proceed gradually, utilizing a degree of civil punishments that prioritized lesser punitive actions if they were effective. This seemed a nod by Norton to the General Court’s strategy against Quakerism: the Massachusetts magistrates had acted gradually against Quakers, attempting to suppress the heresy with more moderate corrections before death sentences.¹¹⁴

Norton clarified that the main issue gravitated around the public and obstinate expression of heresy, not the mere presence of doctrinal or denominational plurality. Communities like Massachusetts, Norton suggested, mitigated religious differences through persuasion, not civil weapons, “with Arguments, not with punishments.” These

¹¹³ *NR*, 52.

¹¹⁴ *NR*, 53.

more peaceful methods, however, exerted no influence or power in matters of heresy turbulent; “reason & arguments cannot prevail” against people like the Quakers.¹¹⁵ Regrettably, Norton did not provide a map that charted the boundaries between permissible religious disagreements and heresy turbulent.

Despite this, Norton concluded his tract with an apologetical defense of the magistrate’s involvement in religious affairs by raising a possible objection to his views, namely, that God did not need any temporal authority to defend his church. This was, by Norton’s estimation, a red herring. Of course God did not need the mechanisms of the state to preserve his gospel and protect his church. The question was never about God’s power, but God’s will. God willed the civil governments to create conditions conducive to the flourishing of pure Christianity. He likened his argument to the means of grace and human responsibility used in salvation. God, as Norton reasoned, could save his people from their sins immediately and without the aid of any preacher, missionary, or lay believer. Yet, God chose human agency as the means through which to spread the gospel. In the same way, God designed civil governments as the instruments of safeguarding churches, nourishing piety, promoting morality, and eliminating heresy.¹¹⁶ His remarks elucidated the depth at which civility of conformity was prized by this Boston preacher in 1659.

The members of the General Court were clearly pleased by Norton’s tract; they lauded him with praise in the court’s records and awarded him 500 acres of land as a “small recompense for his paines.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, Norton’s work served at least two purposes for the Bay Colony. First, it provided a brief, theological distillation of Quaker heresies

¹¹⁵ *NR*, 53.

¹¹⁶ *NR*, 54–55.

¹¹⁷ *RGC*, 4.1:397

and attempted to show how their blasphemies endangered the civil and religious order.¹¹⁸ Jonathan Chu argued that Quakers destabilized the institutions and ideals of Massachusetts, especially in the colony's commitment to the distinctions between church and state. Massachusetts's leaders, according to Chu, approached the Quaker question by stressing the civil threat posed by Quakers at the expense of the theological or ecclesiological.¹¹⁹ Yet, Chu's analysis made this quandary more binary than the Bay Colony's magistrates or ministers would have conceded. Norton's tract, as a work commissioned by the General Court, indicated the court's continued understanding that theological error amounted to a civil threat—the two were inseparably linked. As Pestana and Weimer argued, the court leaned on Norton to detail the Quaker's heresies in order to reveal the danger their doctrines posed to both the civil society and the churches; their presence endangered the colonists "growth in holiness."¹²⁰ The General Court was determined to hold together their civil and ecclesiastical identity; they did not sense a need to choose between one or the other, as Chu suggested. The second purpose of Norton's, *Heart of N-England Rent*, was an extension of the first: by highlighting the degeneracy of Quaker theology, Norton concluded that the civil magistrates must necessarily suppress this sect, through whatever means necessary.¹²¹ Civil recourse, in other words, emanated from deeply theological concerns about Quakerism and the consequences that befell any society which failed to suppress the doctrines and missionary efforts of this faction.

¹¹⁸ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 76.

¹²⁰ Quote taken from Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 112; Pestana, "The City upon a Hill Under Siege," 342. See also, Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 12, who similarly linked Quaker heterodoxy with the issues of sedition.

¹²¹ Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 13.

The Calling of the General Court

In addition to publishing Norton's *Heart of N-England Rent*, the General Court also issued its own statement that defended the executions of Robinson and Stevenson. The court wanted these *apologias* in the hands of every possible minister, local authority, and lay leader to create a solidarity for the colony's actions. They also published these works in London in order to combat the anticipated onslaught of Quaker polemics that, as the court accurately perceived, would be published in the wake of these executions.¹²² Chu rightly recognized that if Massachusetts hoped to quell the Quaker threat, it needed a colony-wide consensus against the Society of Friends.¹²³ Quakers, unlike other dissenters the colony faced, relentlessly endured the wrath of the magistrates, deliberately challenged the colony's laws, and strategically spread their message in communities more amenable to Quaker theology. As such, the Quakers eroded the hopes of homogeneity in the Bay Colony. By carrying out the executions and dispatching Norton's book along with the court's own declaration, the General Court was determined to rally the colony around the expulsion of these abhorrent heretics.

Like the "Petition for Severer Laws Against the Quakers," the General Court's "Declaration" connected the Quakers to the Münster rebels. The officials highlighted how the theological errors of the Quakers undermined the essential pillars of godliness and unity in Massachusetts; if left unchecked, the Society of Friends would dispense with their Congregational order, and undo everything the colonists set out to achieve by coming to New England.¹²⁴ The court decried the anti-Trinitarianism of the Quakers and outlined the barbaric consequences of the "new light" divinity, which caused Quaker

¹²² Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 185; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 33; Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 13; For Quaker responses, see Fell, *A Declaration and an Information from us the People of God called Quakers*; Bishop, *New England Judged*; Burrough, *A Declaration of the Sad and Great Persecution and Martyrdom of the People of God, called Quakers, in New-England for the Worshipping of God*.

¹²³ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 27.

¹²⁴ RGC, 4.1:385–386.

missionaries to “belch out railing & cursing speeches.”¹²⁵ The “Declaration” utilized a litany of biblical citations and examples to support the execution of heretics, of which the Quakers were preeminent; the document also made natural law arguments that rooted the court’s policies in God’s design for the *bonum commune*. Property owners, according to the court, acted righteously when they defended their property from a robber or trespasser. At times, during that defense, violence might break out and the property owner was just if he used force, even to the point of taking the intruder’s life. This principle applied to fathers protecting their homes and families from intruders; in the same way, magistrates and governing authorities served as “keepers and guardians of the commonwealth.”¹²⁶ Thus, according to the General Court, Massachusetts was not a morally neutral or a religiously benign jurisdiction. The Bay Colony’s borders contained a specific culture, theologically defined and supported by the mutual relationship between the church and the state. God himself, furthermore, commissioned the civil authorities with the preservation of that social, cultural, and theological order—they had a duty to preserve the colony’s communal civility and its doctrinally defined mission of a religiously pure society. As a man protected his family or property from vagabonds and thieves, so too did civility of conformity require the magistrates to exercise their authority in the spiritual care and nourishment of the colony’s churches. This responsibility included the potential for bloodshed; how else were shepherds to protect their flocks from the wolves if not through violent means?¹²⁷

The General Court’s publication of its “Declaration” and Norton’s *The Heart of N-England* detailed the numerous theological and moral threads that defined Massachusetts’s civility of conformity. They also outlined how civil and religious leaders

¹²⁵ RGC, 4.1:387.

¹²⁶ RGC, 4.1:388.

¹²⁷ RGC, 4.1:410–411.

viewed the Quaker threat and why they were prepared to carry out the executions of Robinson and Stevenson. In fact, the court records and Norton's polemic significantly revealed the continued convictional commitment expressed by colonial leaders to preserve the city on a hill and defend its civility. Weimer, moreover, argued that the majority of Massachusetts's population shared the concerns of Norton and the General Court; indeed, two months after the executions, a colony-wide day of thanksgiving was held to commemorate the measures taken against the Society of Friends.¹²⁸

Despite these efforts taken in late 1659, Quakerism continued to spread. The executions intensified the resolve of Quaker missionaries and, as Weimer noted, altered the image of the "condemned into unmistakable performances of martyrdom."¹²⁹ Pestana, moreover, wrote that the Quaker executions provided their apologists in England ample material to cast the Quaker movement as the true religious faith of suffering saints.¹³⁰ Thus, the executions only exacerbated the contest between Massachusetts and the Society of Friends. Massachusetts's leaders continued to fine, imprison, and whip dozens more Quakers and their sympathizers, and eventually executed two more Quakers. The Quakers, however, responded with heightened missionary activity and a flurry of publications to discredit the colony's image as God's chosen people in New England. Yet, as the controversy moved into 1660, a watershed event occurred that complicated Massachusetts's efforts, namely, the Restoration of King Charles II.

¹²⁸ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 114. Weimer, along with Pestana, noted how there were also examples of dissent in the ranks. See Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 35–38. The concerns from the laity had less to do with intolerance and more to do with the means through which the colony pursued conformity.

¹²⁹ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 115. For the continued spread of Quakerism, see Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 38; Winship, *Hot Protestants*, 186; Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 13

¹³⁰ Pestana, "The Quaker Executions as Myth and History," 468–469.

The Restoration and Civility of Conformity in the Bay Colony

The Restoration of Charles II to the throne in May 1660 wrought considerable challenges for the Bay Colony and the practical methods of enforcing civility of conformity. First, Charles II indicated his desire to expand religious toleration throughout his realms.¹³¹ The restored monarch reminded his subjects that the growth of religious pluralism seemed impossible to reverse. As such, liberty of conscience provided the surest means through which the society's pluralism could safely navigate. Without toleration, the kingdom would revert to the ferment and angst that marked England prior to and during the English Civil Wars.¹³² Second, the king wanted to assert his authority over wayward colonies that seemed to have forgotten their place in the government's hierarchy. Weimer argued that while Charles II was amenable to the sufferings of Quakers in Massachusetts, he primarily grew tired of the General Court's "impudence," which continually usurped his authority by laying claim to lands beyond its charter, or enacting laws that contradicted statutes in England.¹³³

Quaker apologists in England took advantage of these two commitments expressed by Charles II. They published polemics against the Bay Colony showing the insufferable intolerance exhibited by its leaders and the arbitrary authority the General

¹³¹ Jack N. Rakove, *Beyond Belief, Beyond Conscience: The Radical Significance of the Free Exercise of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 28; Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*; 14

¹³² *His Majesties Gracious Letter and Declaration, Sent to the Houses of Peers, by Sir John Greenville, Knight. From Breda* (London: John Macock, 1660), 12. See also Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 48. While Charles II desired religious toleration, the first Parliament elected under him went in a decidedly different direction. What became known as the Cavalier Parliament enacted a series of laws that not only restored the Church of England but ejected nonconformists and hampered the expressions of religious dissent. The Parliament pursued uniformity to the Church of England through the passage of the Act of Corporation in 1661, Act of Uniformity in 1662, and the Conventicles Act in 1664. See Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689*, 168–169. The effects of these laws were primarily felt in England, leaving New England insulated from their effects. See; Paul Seward, *The Cavalier Parliament and the Restoration of the Old Regime, 1661–1667* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); N.H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms, 1660–1685* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹³³ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 57. See also, Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 86.

Court exerted over religious dissenters. As Weimer's study of Quaker missional methods in the 1660s revealed, Quakers adopted more politically astute and strategic methods to achieve their goals in Massachusetts. Leading Quakers like Edward Burrough, Margaret Fell, and Elizabeth Hooton understood the political calculus necessary to upend New England's policies of persecution. For example, Fell, described as the mother of Quakerism, leaned on political categories of natural law, natural rights, and the privileges of citizenship due to the subjects of England in her case for Quaker toleration. She refuted the connection between Quakers and the Münster rebels, arguing that the Friends did not want to force or "offend any ones Conscience" in worship or religious belief. On the contrary, she contended that Quakers merely desired personal liberty, to keep their own consciences clear and pure with regards to their relationship with God. For Fell, a clean conscience was a civil right denied to Quakers regardless of their status as "freeborn English men."¹³⁴ Thus, by the Restoration, Quakers began making less of the apocalyptic consequences of persecution, instead emphasizing the common good or the economic advantages of religious toleration.¹³⁵

Massachusetts, however, ardently defended its religious order in the wake of the Restoration.¹³⁶ By September 1660, the colony's agent in London dispatched a warning to the General Court: Quakers started a campaign to bring Charles II around to their cause, by granting them liberty and freedom in the Bay Colony.¹³⁷ In response, the court drafted two letters, one addressed to the king and the other to its agent providing further instructions. The letter to Charles II reminded him of the colony's civil and

¹³⁴ Fell, *A Declaration and an Information from us the People of God called Quakers*, 4. See Isbel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949).

¹³⁵ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 46, 60.

¹³⁶ Haefeli, *Accidental Pluralism*, 309.

¹³⁷ *COP*, 323–324.

religious liberties accorded to Massachusetts by Charles's father. Their journey across the Atlantic was to secure a place where they could practice the ordinances of the gospel, in peace, as they understood it. The Quakers, however, presented a seemingly insurmountable threat not only to Massachusetts, but to England as well. The General Court outlined the heresies held by the Society of Friends, including their anti-Trinitarianism and abhorrent Christology. Given these realities, according to the letter, the General Court assured Charles II that their intent against the Quakers was not to exercise an arbitrary authority over and against the king, nor to carry out a regime of violent intolerance. The Quakers brought "their blood upon their own head," and Massachusetts pled with the king to leave them free to dispel this threat from their jurisdiction.¹³⁸ The second letter to the colony's agent instructed him to preserve, by whatever means necessary, the colony's authority over religious dissenters. Toleration of Quakerism contradicted their consciences. If granted, it would lead to the destruction of the Bay Colony.¹³⁹

By May 1661, Massachusetts began reforming its anti-Quaker laws. The court decided to localize the threat of Quakerism by empowering the local constables to deal with any suspected Quakers. Typically, constables arrested and detained criminals by a warrant of the General Court or a magistrate; constables, furthermore, did not carry out sentencing until after trial by the General Court. That changed after the May 1661 session. Not only could local authorities confront suspected Quakers and arrest them, but the constables were also instructed to strip Quakers from the waist up, tie them to horse-drawn carts, and whip them throughout the town. This was to continue from town to town until the Quaker was eventually dispelled from Massachusetts's borders.¹⁴⁰ The

¹³⁸ *COP*, 327–328.

¹³⁹ *COP*, 331.

¹⁴⁰ *RGC* 4.2:3.

localization of Massachusetts's penal laws, according to Chu, was a strategic decision. Far from proving the General Court's weariness with the continued Quaker issue, it provided the colony a safer means to carry out punishments given the waters the colony treaded after the Restoration. Chu stated by that by empowering local authorities to carry out punishments, the General Court "reduced the visibility" of its hand in enforcing whippings and banishments.¹⁴¹

Despite these measures taken by the General Court, Quakers continued to press their case before Charles II. Edward Burrough, an early convert to Quakerism and a leading theologian of the movement, wrote two tracts in 1661 that dealt with the persecution of Quakers. Burrough authored these works in an effort to gain an audience with Charles II to plead his case and to stop the sufferings of Quakers in Massachusetts. In his first work, Burrough defended Quaker theology, attempting to correct misconceptions about their views on fundamental doctrines; he devoted significant attention to the doctrine of the inward light. While Burrough conceded that Quakers abided by these inward revelations, he qualified this by stating that the revelations never contradicted the Scriptures. Burrough wanted to assuage the king that the Quaker reliance on the new light was not seditious.¹⁴² In his second work, the Quaker theologian channeled the arguments made by Charles II regarding religious toleration: pluralism was there to stay. The people of England remained divided over religious matters, and no amount of civil statues or regulations could stem the tide of denominational proliferation. He argued, "*ye can never effect your end thereby, as to force all into a conformity and uniformity to your Church and Religion.*"¹⁴³ The Quakers certainly proved this; even under the pain of death, Quakers continued their missionary endeavors, unabated by the

¹⁴¹ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 90.

¹⁴² Burrough, *A Declaration of the Sad and Great Persecution and Martyrdom of the People of God, called Quakers, in New-England, for the Worshipping of God*, 7–8.

¹⁴³ Edward Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1661), 8.

punishments they received. Yet, Burrough offered a more optimistic conclusion about religious pluralism: despite the differences, if England granted freedom of conscience, it would provide peace and stability, ensuring that each of the “free-born” subjects enjoyed their rights and liberties.¹⁴⁴ He shifted the qualifications of good citizenship away from an outward conformity to a socially prescribed orthodoxy and towards more general precepts of peacefulness, lawfulness, and loyalty to the crown.¹⁴⁵

Burrough proceeded to list fifteen consequences that England might suffer if it failed to grant liberty of conscience. These arguments ranged from theological to political, with Burrough attempting to make an appealing case for religious freedom to the king and Parliament. Theologically, he reminded his reader that the conscience belonged to God; something that even the proponents of civility of conformity understood. Burrough, however, asserted that religious establishment necessarily usurped the dominion of God over the human conscience.¹⁴⁶ John Clarke made a similar case the previous decade: despite the consensus amongst conformity’s advocates that the conscience belonged to God, religious establishment belied that conviction.

The *bonum commune* also surfaced in Burrough’s tract. Religious establishment perverted the just ends of governments. According to Burrough, civil governments promoted justice and morality through positive and negative laws; these laws, moreover, only touched the outward man. Thus, civility of conformity breached the ends of good government because policies of religious establishment transgressed the rights of the inward man. Civility of conformity also curtailed potential economic prosperity. Religious establishment divested England from receiving the industry and taxes of peaceable and productive citizens, only because they disagreed over theological

¹⁴⁴ Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience*, 3–4.

¹⁴⁶ Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience*, 5.

issues.¹⁴⁷

Burrough's arguments effected two important historical developments. First, his works corroborated a trend in Quakerism noted by Weimer and Pestana. Quakers began adopting a more moderate and calculated approach to securing religious liberty. They deployed "classic tolerationist arguments" when it came to the relationship between church and state. While Burrough struggled for Quaker liberty, he qualified this request with a concession that Quakers needed to live peaceably and respectfully if they wanted to enjoy freedom of conscience.¹⁴⁸ The second achievement was that his works succeeded in gaining him an audience with the king in September 1661. At this conference, Burrough detailed the sufferings of Quakers in Massachusetts, and the king assured him that he would put a stop to Massachusetts's violence. Charles II ordered the General Court to cease its execution laws and to halt its systemic persecution of the Society of Friends.¹⁴⁹

At the General Court's November 1661 session, the magistrates and assistants reluctantly suspended their corporal punishment laws against Quakers and removed the death penalty as a possible sentence. The court described the relentlessness of the Quakers, despite the colony's laws to try and keep them at bay. The General Court clarified that their thoughts about the Quaker religion in no way dissipated.¹⁵⁰ On the contrary, the court recorded its continued, if not, burgeoning disdain towards the Society

¹⁴⁷ Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 58; Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 42–43. Weimer noted that Burrough's works were certainly a minority position amongst Quakers at this time; yet he nevertheless was an important voice in the development of Quaker public theology. Indeed, in 1662, Elizabeth Hooton, as Weimer concluded, made many of the same arguments as Burrough when she gained her audience with the Charles II.

¹⁴⁹ Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," 57–58. For the narrative of the conference between Charles II and Burrough, see John Greenleaf Whittier, *The King's Missive, and other Poems* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881), 9–17.

¹⁵⁰ Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror*, 117.

of Friends.¹⁵¹

Two months later, the General Court sent a letter to Charles II, informing him that the laws had been suspended. Still, the General Court petitioned the king for a proper recourse to exercise against the Quakers because of their “calamitous, insufferable, if not destructive” disposition throughout the colony.¹⁵² Indeed, in another court letter addressed to the Lord High Chancellor, they declared that the cessation of punishments against the Quakers encouraged the “insolency and seduction of our people.” They pleaded with the king and his ministers to give guidance, and to not surrender Massachusetts to the whims and turbulence of this heretical religion. For the court, their situation had become dyer, and required an immediate reprieve: “Unless his Majesty strengthen our hands in the application of some suitable remedy to suppress these and others ill affected to our tranquility, this hopefull plantation is likely in all probability to be destroyed.”¹⁵³

The doom and gloom prophecy by the Massachusetts General Court did not come to fruition. While the Quakers successfully lobbied Charles II to intervene in Massachusetts, historical circumstances turned the tides of the struggle against the Society of Friends. Indeed, Pestana, Chu, and Worrall argued that throughout the 1660s, Massachusetts experienced the mitigation of the spread of Quakerism, and found alternative measures that preserved the colony’s commitment to its socially prescribed orthodoxy while not provoking the ire of Charles II.¹⁵⁴ Multiple reasons explained this development, including redirection in Quaker missionary activity away from Massachusetts, along with Quakerism shifting from its more militant tactics to, as Pestana

¹⁵¹ *RGC*, 4.2:59.

¹⁵² *COP*, 356–357.

¹⁵³ *COP*, 360.

¹⁵⁴ Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 39; Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 93; Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, 15.

argued, “pacifism and quietism.”¹⁵⁵

In fact, by the late 1660s, Chu demonstrated that Quaker missionaries dwindled, and the localization laws tempered the conflict by making confrontations less notable. It also had the effect of allowing local communities, as Chu argued, to deal with Quakers on a more case-by-case basis. Indeed, Chu described the shifting attitudes in Salem, as an example, when in 1668, a Quaker woman walked naked through the town. This woman was whipped for the same crime in 1662 by order of the General Court. In 1668, however, Salem authorities dismissed her case on grounds of insanity. While Massachusetts was incapable of removing Quakerism altogether, it found a way towards tolerance that balanced their establishment while not exhausting its penal system.¹⁵⁶

Conclusion: Civility of Conformity Changing Over Time

While Massachusetts seemed to have achieved a victory over the Quakers in the 1660s, the contest with the Society of Friends exerted a comprehensive influence on the colony’s commitment to civility of conformity. Indeed, according to Chu, a burgeoning tolerance for Quakers emerged as the seventeenth century ended, at least in local communities like Salem, Hampton, and Kittery.¹⁵⁷ As the eighteenth century dawned, the rise and decline of Quaker persecutions served as an example of a reimagined sense of communal life and the foundations for Massachusetts’s society. Throughout the 1640s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, the General Court and the colony’s religious leaders strove to preserve the colony’s inherently theological identity. The political and ecclesial leaders defended the mechanisms of conformity in order to unify the colony

¹⁵⁵ Pestana, “The Quaker Executions as Myth and History,” 450. See also, Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655–1755* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985); Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 2017).

¹⁵⁶ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 93.

¹⁵⁷ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 105–152.

around its socially prescribed orthodoxy. Yet, those three decades teemed with examples of what Weimer called, “the lived politics of toleration.”¹⁵⁸ The laity of Massachusetts came alongside dissenters—whether Baptist or Quaker—providing aid, medical attention, and spiritual encouragement. There were also growing economic concerns about continued persecution of religious dissenters.¹⁵⁹ The Quakers, furthermore, exposed the weaknesses within civility of conformity. Massachusetts faced a threat to its social order that, for over a decade, levied a sustained and successful campaign against the colony’s religious establishment. Dozens of residents converted, and the Quakers secured a royal rebuke against the General Court for its antics. Religious pluralism was a reality the colony and its leaders had to finally accept. As Chris Beneke suggested, Massachusetts began adopting a tendency of toleration throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶⁰

The rise of tolerance, however, did not equate with a lesser commitment to civility of conformity. Instead, conformity’s application changed over time, adopting measured toleration while still embracing the need for a socially prescribed orthodoxy around which the majority of the citizenry was united. When Massachusetts crafted its 1780 Constitution, it granted religious liberty to its citizens; yet it also noted that “the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government essentially depend upon piety, religion, and morality.” To nourish these qualities, Massachusetts codified the public support of its established church and the maintenance of a specific Protestant religion.¹⁶¹ As Witte and Lattrell noted, the 1780 Constitution

¹⁵⁸ Weimer, “Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay,” 47.

¹⁵⁹ Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen*, 96–97.

¹⁶⁰ Chris Beneke, *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36.

¹⁶¹ “Massachusetts Constitution (1780),” in *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*, ed. Daniel L. Dresbach and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2009), 246.

“narrowly” permitted religious liberty, which remained hindered by its commitment to establishment; they also argued that the intellectual foundations of the 1780 Constitution emanated from a more than century-long commitment to conformity.¹⁶² Massachusetts advanced civility of conformity through religious taxes and institutional measures to keep Massachusetts Congregational while simultaneously securing a limited tolerance of Protestant dissenters.¹⁶³ Civility of conformity, therefore, in no way dissipated; it did, however, change over time.

¹⁶² John Witte Jr., and Justin Lattrell, “The Last American Establishment: Massachusetts, 1780–1833,” in *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776–1833*, eds. Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019), 405, 408.

¹⁶³ Witte and Lattrell, “The Last American Establishment: Massachusetts, 1780–1833,” 405–411.

CHAPTER 7
EVANGELICAL CIVILITY IN THE PROVIDENCE
PLANTATIONS, 1644–1672

From 1642 to 1662, the Massachusetts Bay Colony confronted the Gortonists, suppressed the Baptists, and endured the Quaker invasion of the late ‘50s and early ‘60s. In each instance, colonial leaders from within the government and the churches, defended civility of conformity. The General Court expanded the colony’s civil laws to include harsher penalties against dissent, culminating in the executions of four Quakers between 1659 to 1661. Similarly, ministers like John Cotton, Nathaniel Ward, Thomas Cobbet, and John Norton outlined the theological foundations for established orthodoxy. This commitment gravitated around a conviction about the kind of community the Massachusetts Puritans intended to establish and perpetuate. God’s plantation—this city on a hill—required the politics of conformity in order to achieve the aspirations for a godly commonwealth in the American wilderness.¹

During nearly that same time frame, a group of settlements just south of Massachusetts fashioned a society fundamentally at odds with the political and theological axioms of the Bay Colony. The Providence Plantations preserved liberty of conscience and disestablished the civil state from any ecclesial connection. As such, figures like Roger Williams, Willam Arnold, and William Coddington helped create a colony that encouraged doctrinal and denominational pluralism because, as they believed,

¹ Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 55, 72; Thomas J. Curry, *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7; David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 121; Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 11. See also chapters 2, 5, and 6.

liberated consciences nurtured societal peace, stability, and flourishing. Yet, from their inception, the communities of the Providence Plantations encountered continual outbreaks of disorder, strife, and disputes that, at times, broke out in violent riots.² From 1637 to 1644, the towns of Providence, Portsmouth, and Newport each experienced discord and infighting, especially with the arrival of Samuel Gorton in 1639. Quarrels, for example, over land boundaries and open grazing were the fruit of a more pervasive issue facing the hamlets in the Narragansett Bay. They lacked the social cohesion that religious establishment provided and, summarily, had no pervasive civil religion around which they could unite.³

The issues that faced the Providence Plantations in their earliest years, moreover, continued even after Roger Williams successfully secured a colonial patent for the fledgling communities under his watch. In fact, from 1645 to 1672, the Plantations trudged through intractable altercations, both internally amongst themselves and externally with their colonial neighbors. Indeed, Massachusetts viewed the Plantations' guarantee of religious liberty as a threat to the entire region—the colony attracted blasphemers, serving as a rallying ground for heretical missionaries to launch campaigns throughout New England.⁴ The residents of the Narragansett Bay, furthermore, laid the onus of their uneasy state of affairs upon the political ideal that, in theory, promised them peace, namely, soul liberty.

At various moments in the '40s and '50s, several settlements nearly

² Theodore Dwight Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1972): 44; Bruce Colin Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay: The Colonial Rhode Island Town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 3; Bruce Colin Daniels, "Dissent and Disorder: The Radical Impulse and Early Government in the Founding of Rhode Island," *Journal of Church and State* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 357–378.

³ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 44–45; Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 72, 75–76. See chapter 3.

⁴ John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 212–213.

capitulated, allowing Massachusetts or Plymouth to annex them in exchange for stability. Yet, at every moment of uncertainty, liberty of conscience remained a staple of the Providence Plantations. Just as Massachusetts, even amid the Quaker crisis, retained civility of conformity, the Narragansett settlements also preserved evangelical civility. Moreover, as the Bay Colony adapted its approach to conformity over time due to political circumstances, the Providence Plantations also clarified both the extent to which they were willing to safeguard evangelical civility and, significantly, how they conceived of liberty's limits. The colony's trials and exertions throughout 1645–1672, therefore, had the dual effect of solidifying evangelical civility as the cornerstone of Narragansett Bay society while simultaneously refining the contours and boundaries of conscientious expression.

Crisis of Authority: 1644–1651

John Winthrop recorded the return of Roger Williams to New England in September 1644. He noted Williams's success in England, securing a patent for the settlements in the Narragansett Bay; this was, furthermore, unwelcomed news for Winthrop and the Massachusetts General Court.⁵ The Parliamentary Commission that oversaw England's colonies granted Williams and the Providence Plantations official status and recognition, allowing these communities to continue providing religious liberty. The Parliamentary Commissioners exacerbated matters by placing under the borders of this new colony lands that the Massachusetts General Court contended fell under its jurisdiction. These lands were the Shawomet and Pawtuxit. The Shawomet, in particular, troubled Massachusetts because the notorious heretic Samuel Gorton laid claim to that territory. Thus, Williams's patent created a safe haven for heretics, reduced

⁵ *WJ*, 2:197–198; John Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 349–350; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 59.

Massachusetts's hold on New England acreage, and potentially returned the Shawomet to the Gortonists.⁶ While the General Court granted Williams passage back to Providence, they began devising a plan to halt the project before it obtained a foothold in the region. In May 1645, magistrates from both Plymouth and Massachusetts informed Williams that they disputed the territorial claims to his patent and warned him and the government he tried to create not to exercise authority over contested lands.⁷ Massachusetts, moreover, forbade economic interactions between the Bay Colony and the Narragansett communities, especially banning the sale of gunpowder.⁸ Within only nine months, Williams's colonial aspirations began faltering to external pressure.

Ironically, Massachusetts's acquisitiveness inadvertently encouraged the move towards unity within the Providence Plantations.⁹ While Williams tried to lace Providence, Portsmouth, and Newport together under his charter, Samuel Gorton left for London in 1645, seeking Parliamentary intervention for the Shawomet lands. He was emboldened to pursue Parliamentary relief both because of Williams's success to secure a patent and because of the continued overreach from Massachusetts into the affairs of the Providence Plantations. On September 13, 1646, Gorton's follower Randall Holden returned to Boston with a document signed by the Earl of Warwick and the other members of the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Plantations, which demanded Massachusetts cease its operations in the Providence Plantations and return the Shawomet to the Gortonists.¹⁰ This temporarily hamstrung the Bay Colony from trying to

⁶ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 59–60; Kenneth W. Porter, "Samuell Gorton: New England Firebrand," *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September 1934): 434.

⁷ *WJ*, 2:228–229; *RRI*, 1:133.

⁸ *RGC*, 3:49; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 350.

⁹ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 60.

¹⁰ *WJ*, 2:282–283; Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, 209; Robert Emmet Wall Jr., *Massachusetts Bay: The Crucial Decade, 1640–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 149; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 60.

exercise control over the Narragansett Bay, providing Williams the leeway he needed to organize a government. In honor of their patron, the Gortonists renamed the Shawomet as Warwick, and they joined Williams's efforts to unify the communities of the Narragansett Bay. Finally, between May 19–21, 1647, representatives from Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and now Warwick, convened at Portsmouth to hash out the details of their government. They agreed on a new colonial structure, including officers, elections, standards for membership in the society, laws pertaining to commerce and land development, as well as a recommitment to liberty of conscience as a fundamental precept of their civility.¹¹ After nearly three years, Roger Williams had finally achieved the formation of a society for distressed consciences in the Narragansett Bay.

His victory, however, was short-lived. Even under the new governing document, the settlements in the Narragansett Bay were a constellation of fragmented communities founded by banished religious radicals from Massachusetts and Plymouth. Little to no cohesion existed between the various communities. After only a year, the centralized assembly charged with governing the affairs of the colony essentially divested itself of much of its power, relegating responsibilities back to the localities.¹² As the foundations of their government weakened, Massachusetts attempted to contrive a way to halt this bastion for heretics and civil disorder before its contagion spread throughout New England. They had an opening in 1648 thanks to William Coddington, another discontent against the Providence Plantations. Coddington was the most influential political leader figure amongst Portsmouth and Newport. He formerly served as a magistrate in Massachusetts before departing after his dissatisfaction with how the colony handled the Antinomian Controversy in 1637. Since his departure from Boston, he served

¹¹ *RRI*, 1:147–208; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 60–62; Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 47. For their statement on liberty of conscience, see *RRI*, 1:156–157.

¹² James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 62.

as the political figurehead of the entire Aquidneck Island. Yet, he questioned the stability of the new government secured by Williams and indicated concerns about the religious sensibilities of the Gortonists who now enjoyed a permanent residence in the Providence Plantations. Coddington expressed his contempt about this turn of events, believing that Gorton “will be a thorne . . . in our sides,” and would ignite controversies not only in the Providence Plantations but in all New England.¹³ He began looking for ways to rescue the Aquidneck from the rest of the Providence Plantations.

In May 1648, Coddington was elected president of the colony, but refused to assume office.¹⁴ He then sent a letter to John Winthrop, wherein he discussed the possibility of either Massachusetts or Plymouth annexing the Aquidneck. He wrote of the “disgrace” he and other inhabitants of the island had with the Providence Plantations, especially now that the Gortonists were residents of the colony with Randall Holden serving as one of Warwick’s assemblymen.¹⁵ In September, Coddington pressed his case before the assembly of the United Colonies, declaring himself the spokesperson for the majority party on the Aquidneck Island who were ready to abandon the Providence Plantations. He beseeched the United Colonies to engraft the Aquidneck into the United Colonies as an independent member. The assembly, however, declined, noting that Williams’s 1644 patent, signed by leading political figures in London, placed those lands squarely within the Providence Plantations. Secondly, the representatives of the United Colonies expressed some concern about accepting communities that, in the words of the assembly, exuded “confusion and danger having much disturbance amongst yourselves.” Yet, the assembly conceded that if Coddington could secure proof that the majority of the

¹³ *WP*, 5:224; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 59; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 349; Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 48; Gordon S. Wood, *Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 176–177.

¹⁴ *RRI*, 1:209–210; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 62.

¹⁵ *WP*, 5:224.

Aquidneck wanted to sever ties with the Providence Plantations, they would reconsider his proposal.¹⁶

News of Coddington's machinations spread throughout the Providence Plantations, causing tremendous strife and, at times, physical violence. Williams spent much of the fall of 1648 trying to broker a peaceful solution between the divergent factions within Narragansett Bay.¹⁷ The incessant arguing, according to Williams, would never cease; "Argumts by Armes and Swords," he concluded, sowed nothing but further strife and discord. In what appeared as a slight against Coddington, Williams also wrote, "To trouble our Neighbours of other Colonies seems neither safe nor honorable."¹⁸ Williams proposed that Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick each appoint a three-member delegation to try and mitigate the burgeoning grievances that threatened to undermine everything Williams sought to achieve in his mission to England from 1643 to 1644. Despite his efforts, Williams lamented that "our poore Colonie is in civill dissention."¹⁹ Rather than engage in talks William Coddington left New England in the late fall of 1648, bound for London. He decided to take matters into his own hands by trying to secure an independent charter for the Aquidneck Island.²⁰

Coddington's departure seemed to cool the ascending tension until he returned in August 1651 with a charter that made him governor for life of the Aquidneck Island.²¹

¹⁶ *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, ed. David Pulsifer (Boston: William White, 1859), 1:110; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 354; Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 48.

¹⁷ *CRW*, 1:238–239.

¹⁸ *CRW*, 1:238.

¹⁹ *CRW*, 1:268.

²⁰ *WP*, 5:262–263; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 62; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 354; Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 48.

²¹ *RRI*, 1:233–234; *CRW*, 1:333; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 63; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 354–355.

In response, residents of Providence and Warwick—the two mainland towns—selected Samuel Gorton as their governor. Thus, in the fall of 1651, three men alleged governorship, either over all the Providence Plantations or portions of the colony. Coddington claimed authority over the Aquidneck communities of Portsmouth and Newport, Gorton over Providence and Warwick. Nicholas Easton, on the other hand, was technically the duly elected president of the colony under its laws that the settlements agreed to in 1647. Tensions mounted to such a degree that a riot broke out in Newport leaving one dead and several others wounded.²²

The discordancy in the Providence Plantations burdened its inhabitants, leaving some like William Arnold to question the experiment in religious liberty altogether. Arnold, a resident of Pawtuxit, was one of the original settlers of the Narragansett Bay who joined Williams in 1636. He, like Coddington, held the Gortonists in derision; after all, Arnold led his neighbors to seek aid from Massachusetts against Gorton in 1642, agreeing to come under the Bay Colony's jurisdiction in exchange for support. The breakdown of order in 1651, moreover, left him more beleaguered, deducing in October that the cause of the colony's tumult was liberty of conscience. The promulgation of religious liberty, according to Arnold, invited "all the scume the runne aways of the country, which in tyme for want of better order may bring a heavy burthen upon the land."²³ As he had in 1642, Arnold called on Massachusetts to intervene. Indeed, he concluded in his October 1651 letter to the General Court, "it is time there were some better order taken for these partes."²⁴

²² James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 63; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 354; Samuel Hugh Brockuiner, *Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1940), 217; Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 48.

²³ *RRI*, 1:234.

²⁴ *RRI*, 1:235.

Other factors contributed to the troubles facing the Providence Plantations by 1651. Bozeman rightly noted that the colony's citizenry included the outcasts of New England—boisterous, obstinate, religious radicals populated the towns in the Narragansett Bay. The strong personalities of Williams, Coddington, Arnold, and certainly Gorton naturally created conditions conducive to strife.²⁵ Yet, Bozeman, along with James, pinned much of the strife on the lack of a shared, comprehensive vision around which the people of the Providence Plantations could unify.²⁶ Liberty of conscience promised peace, yet it seemed to foster conditions conducive to peril.²⁷

At the behest of his neighbors, Williams embarked on a second trip to London, along with John Clarke and William Dyer. They were dispatched to reverse Coddington's charter, clarify the boundaries of the Providence Plantations, and reaffirm the original intent of the 1644 patent secured by Williams during his first voyage to London.²⁸ Notwithstanding all that Williams witnessed during the past six years, his time in London from 1652 to 1654 would reveal the resilience of Williams's commitment to evangelical civility first by his continued assertion for the need of soul liberty in the Providence Plantations. Secondly, he engaged in an active publishing campaign that recapitulated the theological and political necessity of evangelical civility as the guiding axiom for any society desiring to flourish.

²⁵ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 49.

²⁶ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 44–45; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 76.

²⁷ Wood, *Power and Liberty*, 177; Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 51, 53; James Calvin Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 33.

²⁸ *RRI*, 223–234; *CRW*, 1:351.

Reclaiming the Narragansett and Reaffirming Evangelical Civility, 1652–1654

Williams and his companions arrived at London sometime in March or early April 1652. They sought, as Williams wrote, “the Renewing of their Liberties,” referring to the people of the Providence Plantations.²⁹ Thanks to Williams’s connections with powerful political figures like Henry Vane and even Oliver Cromwell, he, Clarke, and Dyer made swift progress towards the reversal of Coddington’s charter.³⁰ By May, Williams reported to Providence that he had already submitted an injunction to the Council of State about the issues in the Providence Plantations.³¹ Assisted by Henry Vane, the Council of State drafted a letter in October that overturned the charter granted to Coddington the previous year. Rather than returning home, however, Williams and Clarke decided to stay in London, sending Dyer back to the Narragansett Bay in the fall of 1652 with the Council of State’s letter. Several issues remained unresolved that required Williams’s continued presence in London, including border disputes between the Providence Plantations, Plymouth, and Massachusetts. Yet, the October letter provided immediate resolution over the internal conflicts in the Plantations.³²

Williams used his time in London not only to press the case of the Providence Plantations, but to engage in further theological and political debate about religious establishment and civility. Williams welcomed the opportunity to reengage in “some Contests agst the ministers of Ould and N. England, touching . . . the Soule Freedomes of

²⁹ *CRW*, 1:351.

³⁰ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 358. For Williams’s connections to Cromwell and political elites throughout his life, see Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, especially parts one and two. As Barry demonstrated, Williams, prior to his emigration to New England, socialized in important circles amongst leading Puritan figures in East Anglia and in the English Court, serving as the scribe for Sir Edward Coke, the distinguished chief legal mind in England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As a private chaplain before going to Massachusetts, Williams had interactions with the young and freshmen member of Parliament, Oliver Cromwell. These friendships proved vital to Williams’s political success both in 1644 and in 1652.

³¹ *CRW*, 1:362.

³² *CRW*, 1:366–367; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 358. See also Glenn W. LaFantasie’s editorial notes in *CRW*, 1:362, 370.

the people.”³³ Throughout 1652, Williams busily set to work, publishing three significant works on the topic of conscience, and the relationship between church and state.³⁴ The first was Williams’s response to John Cotton’s *Bloody Tenent Washed*, aptly titled, *The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody: by Mr Cottons endeavour to wash it white in the Blood of the Lambe*. Williams had already worked on this draft prior to any plans for another trip to London. Indeed, in a letter he wrote in August 1651, Williams mentioned that he had completed his “Second Reply or Answer,” to Cotton’s defense of religious establishment.³⁵

Williams recapped much of his earlier arguments in the *Bloody Tenent*, published in 1644. Yet, he provided more nuance and clarity to his understanding of the human conscience—how it operated, its responsibility to God, and its importance in the relationship between the individual and civil obedience.³⁶ He defined the conscience as inward faculty of moral and ethical deliberation that led people to judge what they owed to God.³⁷ God, according to Williams, intended this “Perswasion fixed in the minde” to volitionally reflect upon the proper worship of God and to assent to the conscience’s dictates.³⁸ For Williams, civility of conformity violated this precept, removing God from the judgment seat over the conscience and replacing him with the civil magistrate.³⁹ Enforced religious establishment curtailed the natural law that governed the operative

³³ *CRW*, 1:357.

³⁴ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 359; Davis, introduction to *On Religious Liberty*, 32.

³⁵ *CRW*, 1:339; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 359.

³⁶ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 70.

³⁷ *BTYMB*, 307.

³⁸ *BTYMB*, 22; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 79.

³⁹ *BTYMB*, 28.

functions of the conscience; by breaching the natural law, moreover, civility of conformity necessarily caused the destruction of the “Cities peace.”⁴⁰

Williams, conversely, pleaded for “*freedom to all Consciences*”—a capacious canopy that included Roman Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.⁴¹ Yet, he declared that by conscience, he meant matters “meerly of *worship*.”⁴² In other words, Williams tried to answer the question, “how much pluralism can a society sustain before it crumbles,” by creating a boundary between permissible and impermissible expressions of a dissenting conscience. The answer to the question, by his estimation, was commodious enough to include Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, and Jews within the same territory as long as the term “conscience” referenced how one worshiped.⁴³

Williams concluded that liberty of conscience fell under the spiritual sphere of governance, which civil states had no authority to regulate *unless* a claim to conscientious liberty violated broader precepts of the natural law. In that case, magistrates must intervene and exercise their authority. “The true and *living God*,” Williams wrote, “is the *God of order, spirituall, civil and natural*.” By “natural” Williams meant the natural law, which stayed the same, “ever and perpetual.” The “civil” denoted the particular governments of the world, which differed from region to region, nation to nation depending on the customs and mores of that particular people. The spiritual was the realm of conscience. Thus, an erring conscience in matters of worship did not present a threat to the civil government because the civil government had no authority over matters of worship. However, in this formulation, Williams granted that guaranteeing liberty of

⁴⁰ *BTYMB*, 15, 20; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 79; Robert Louis Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 148–149.

⁴¹ Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God*, 148.

⁴² *BTYMB*, Letter to the reader, no page number.

⁴³ *BTYMB*, 87–88.

conscience required a simultaneous commitment to order, and order defined by God's natural law.⁴⁴

In the *Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, Williams refined the boundaries of the conscience's liberty, which marked an important development in his own thinking regarding evangelical civility. Indeed, these abstract articulations took on added significance in the coming years when he tried to practically apply the limits of liberty in the Providence Plantations. The intersection of liberty and order became an increasingly crucial concept in the Narragansett Bay, especially for a colony that knew nothing but chaos and disorder since its founding.⁴⁵

Despite the tumult of the Providence Plantations, Williams did not equivocate on evangelical civility. In fact, he published three more works in 1652 about liberty of conscience and the need for religious disestablishment, each of them integrally connected to political and theological developments happening in England during the Spring of 1652. In April, Parliament ensued in what Crawford Gribben described as a "theological panic."⁴⁶ An English translation of the Racovian Catechism began circulating earlier that year; as a theological text, the Catechism espoused ant-Trinitarian doctrines associated with the sixteenth century Italian heretic Faustus Socinus and the rationalist tradition he birthed called Socinianism.⁴⁷ Orthodox clergy and theologians, led by John Owen, took advantage of the anti-Trinitarian crisis to launch a campaign for a new established

⁴⁴ *BTYMB*, 21 – 22; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 79–80.

⁴⁵ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 56.

⁴⁶ Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 137–138.

⁴⁷ For the rise of Socinianism as a sect of the radical Reformation, see Carlos M. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1540–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), chapter 11. For the influence of Socinianism in revolutionary England, see Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For the controversy surrounding the publication of the Racovian Catechism and the response of tolerationists like Major Butler and Roger Williams, see C. Polizzotto, "The Campaign against the *Humble Proposals* of 1652," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (October 1987): 569–581.

orthodoxy in England.⁴⁸ John Owen was one of the most preeminent theological figures in the middle of seventeenth century England. He was an Oxford trained theologian and became a leader in the nonconformist movement. He became close with Oliver Cromwell and the leaders of the Interregnum. Owen and his compatriots, furthermore, were Independents, and certainly believed in limited religious toleration. The problem, as Owen saw it, came down to the lack of a national theological benchmark that clearly defined the boundary lines between tolerable and intolerable dogma.⁴⁹ The appearance of an anti-Trinitarian catechism in England afforded Owen the opportunity he needed to advance his agenda against the toleration of heresy in England; or so he thought.⁵⁰

In 1652, he published *The Humble Proposals and Proposals for the Furtherance and Propagation of the Gospel*. These works provided the justification for a loosely defined religious establishment in England and outlined the minimum theological commitments that qualified a person for civil toleration.⁵¹ Williams orchestrated a sustained effort against Owen's campaign, which included the publication of several works lambasting the proposal for a new state church.⁵² The first was *The Fourt Paper Presented by Major Butler*. William Butler served as a major in the New Model Army. Concerned about Parliament's lurch towards religious establishment, Butler authored counterproposals to Owen's scheme. Williams published the proposals with his own commentary, wherein he condemned civility of conformity as antithetical to Christianity. He contended that God, by his wisdom, permitted the existence of heresy, "yea damnable

⁴⁸ Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 138–139.

⁴⁹ Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 138–140.

⁵⁰ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Edinburgh Gate, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 150.

⁵¹ Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 138–140; Davis, editorial note in *On Religious Liberty*, 226; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, 200.

⁵² For Williams's leadership in the affair, see Polizzotto, "The Campaign against the *Humble Proposals* of 1652," 571, and Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, 200; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689*, 150.

Heresies,” in order that his judgment and justice might be manifested at the second coming of Christ.⁵³ Also, as he had done in *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*, separated the spiritual from the civil, suggesting that spiritual and theological deficiencies were not under the magistrate’s purview but the church.⁵⁴ Williams affirmed that God established the proper role and functions of the civil government, which God confined to matters “meerly and essentially *Civil*.”⁵⁵ He pled with Parliament to reject any established religion because in every case where governments attempted civility of conformity, it ended in the corruption of the church and culminated in civil violence.⁵⁶

Williams, however, made a brief comment about the role of magistrates in the preservation of order and in the nourishment of Christian communities within their jurisdiction. He applied Isaiah 49:23—“And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers”—to the responsibilities of rulers in England. Though Williams did not specify the contours of the magistrate’s responsibility, he seemed to indicate that civil rulers had a duty to ensure Christians and their churches could flourish, obligating the magistrate to the outward protection and preservation of Christian communities. Williams also stated that God called his people to live “*peaceably* under them in all *Godliness* and *Honesty*,” citing Jeremiah 29 and 1 Timothy 2 as the biblical injunctions.⁵⁷ Thus, Williams outlined a harmonious system of order between the state and churches, with magistrates outwardly protecting Christian congregations from

⁵³ Roger Williams, *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Major Butler* (London: Giles Calvert, 1652), 2; W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 147; James P. Byrd, Jr., *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution, and the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 151–152.

⁵⁴ Roger Williams, *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Major Butler*, 2–3; Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, 146.

⁵⁵ Williams, *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Major Butler*, 14.

⁵⁶ Williams, *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Major Butler*, 14.

⁵⁷ Williams, *The Fourth Paper, Presented by Major Butler*, 15.

external, physical threats and with Christians living in peace and submission to the civil rulers.

Williams made similar arguments in his second salvo against Owen's plans for a new religious establishment in England, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*. The occasion for this work was also situated within the 1652 toleration controversy with the Independents. Williams drafted the help of other like-minded advocates of religious liberty, including John Milton and Henry Vane to contribute to the literary debate, which Vane did in his *Zeal Examined*.⁵⁸ Vane connected religious establishment with the vile practices of Roman Catholicism—in fact, he framed the Protestant Reformation's key theological assertions as direct refutations of conformity.⁵⁹ Uniformity of religion, furthermore, hindered societal peace and flourishing. The cause of England's troubles over the past decade, according to Vane, had nothing to do with pluralism; instead, the violence and wars engulfing the English people stemmed from the politics of conformity. "That *persecuting Principle*," he wrote, "would endeavour by outward *Force* to impose *one way of Worship* upon all men."⁶⁰ This imposition punctured the solemn relationship between God and man's conscience, engendering hypocrisy in the church and strife in the commonweal.

Zeal Examined was quickly condemned by an anonymous tract titled, *The Examiner Examined*, which questioned Vane's main theological and political assertions that connected liberty of conscience with social peace. Also drawing upon Isaiah 49:23, the *Examiner Examined* contended that magistrates, as nursing fathers to the church, must prevent the spread of heresy. What kind of good father, the anonymous tract queried,

⁵⁸ Polizzotto, "The Campaign against the *Humble Proposals* of 1652," 571.

⁵⁹ Henry Vane, *Zeal Examined: Or, A Discourse for Liberty of Conscience in Matters of Religion* (London: Giles Calvert, 1652), 2.

⁶⁰ Vane, *Zeal Examined*, 4.

would allow his children to feast upon the poison of unorthodoxy?⁶¹ Unfettered liberty, therefore, wrought horrifying salvific consequences that God had endowed the magistrates and civil authorities to abate. Furthermore, religious liberty nourished an unsustainable pluralism that inhibited “the peace and prosperity of a Nation.”⁶²

Williams responded to these claims in his *Examiner Defended*, again, providing insight into the development of Williams’s thought regarding evangelical civility.⁶³ The question of order redounded throughout the 1652 debate—a question that Williams himself had contemplated over the last six years of controversy in the Providence Plantations. Did liberty of conscience possess a proclivity towards disorder and chaos, as the *Examiner Examined* claimed, or was it the means through which to secure peace and stability? Williams contended the latter, explaining that evangelical civility created the conditions for a well-ordered society, notwithstanding religious pluralism.⁶⁴

Indeed, Williams deployed the imagery of ships, which he depicted as commonwealths: there was the ship itself along with private cabins. The cabins represented the individual members of a society while the ship was the community. Individuals aboard the ship, as Williams argued, must preserve the safety of the vessel, standing ready to fulfill whatever duty he or she had on board, linking this obligation to the need of private citizens to pursue the common good of their community. He wrote that a failure to care for the *bonum commune* encouraged societal treachery, nourished the tyranny of individualism that, as he concluded, “tendeth to the destrucion both of *Cabin*

⁶¹ *The Examiner Examined* (London, 1652), 3.

⁶² *The Examiner Examined*, 3.

⁶³ Davis, editorial note in *On Religious Liberty*, 267.

⁶⁴ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 53–54.

and *Ship*, that is, of *private* and *publike safety*.”⁶⁵ Williams clearly had a concern for order and societal stability.

Christ, furthermore, kept a profound interest in the safety, security, and peacefulness of societies: “Christ’s interest is the *Commonweals*.”⁶⁶ Yet, Williams construed the interests of Jesus with soul liberty. Thus, when civil rulers attempted to coerce consciences into a socially prescribed orthodoxy, those magistrates set themselves against the conditions favorable to the commonwealth’s flourishing. “I also maintain,” Williams declared, “that ‘tis not true *Civility*, not true *Christianity*, that draws the Sword for one or other.”⁶⁷ Meddling in the affairs of conscience was akin to shipmasters breaking into the private cabins on their vessel; such measures did nothing to preserve the peace and successfulness of the ship’s voyage. On the contrary, violating the conscience set a society against the will of Christ and endangered every other passenger on board.

Citing Isaiah 49:23 again, Williams acknowledged that kings, queens, and magistrates ought to serve as nursing fathers to the churches and Christians. This service, however, did not carry the same connotations as it had in the days of Israel. The spiritual care of the people of God belonged to the churches, not the civil magistrate. Yet, civil rulers, as Williams argued, ought to fashion peaceful societies advantageous for Christian ministry, which meant maintaining the ship’s integrity without breaking into the private cabins, or consciences of its people.⁶⁸ All societies needed, Williams maintained, “some Order of *Civilitie*,” meaning justice and the restraining of wickedness. Religious pluralism, moreover, in no way threatened this order as long as “men be . . . truly *Civil*,

⁶⁵ Roger Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer* (London: James Cottred, 1652), 2.

⁶⁶ Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 2.

⁶⁷ Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 3.

⁶⁸ Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 3–4.

and walk by the rules of *Humanity* and *Civility*.”⁶⁹ In other words, Williams placed the natural law, or “*Light of Nature*,” as the foundational moral precept that could fasten even a religiously diverse community together.⁷⁰ Even after his experiences in the Providence Plantations—circumstances which had forced him to London in 1652—he still upheld the verity of evangelical civility.⁷¹ Indeed, Williams’s *Examiner Defended* determined that civility of conformity had the tragic and ironic effect of causing the exact opposite of what it hoped to create: rather than securing a peaceful commonweal and pure churches, it only engendered violence, murder, and was, according to Williams, the root of the English Civil War.⁷²

England’s bloody conflict served as potent imagery for Williams and provided for him a wellspring of evidence to verify his claims about civility of conformity. In another 1652 tract written in response to Owen’s campaign for religious establishment, Williams cited the “woefull *experience*” of coerced orthodoxy, which promoted violence and disturbed sincere worship of God.⁷³ Williams, conversely, asserted a vital distinction between “Impiety” and “Incivility.”⁷⁴ Again, Williams set out to clarify how liberty of conscience, contrary to its discontents, could maintain order and peace. In cases of impiety, Williams believed that Jesus never prescribed the sword of the magistrate as the proper means of restraining unorthodoxy. Weapons of steel were insufficient to root out

⁶⁹ Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 76.

⁷⁰ Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 52; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 53–54, 63; William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 77.

⁷¹ Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 57.

⁷² Williams, *The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer*, 4; Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 54.

⁷³ Roger Williams, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs* (London, 1652), 25, 19.

⁷⁴ Williams, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs*, 25.

heresy and impiety from any civil commonweal.⁷⁵ “Incivility,” however, fell under the magistrate’s authority to restrain. While Williams did not explicitly define “incivility,” he did reference Romans 13 indicating that, at minimum, it meant behavior tending to sedition.⁷⁶

Thus, throughout 1652, Roger Williams waged a two-front struggle in the contest of civility. He lobbied for the liberty of the Providence Plantations, seeking Parliamentary relief for the chaos that befell the Narragansett settlements from 1644 to 1651. At the same time, Williams also led the campaign against established orthodoxy in England, publishing four works totaling hundreds of pages devoted to the ideas of soul liberty and disestablishment.⁷⁷ Taken together—his work for the Providence Plantations and his publishing output—1652 marked important historical developments for evangelical civility. Not only did Williams successfully petition Parliament to intervene in Providence, but Williams’s works during this year evinced his increasing concern about the relationship between order and liberty. Bozeman argued that Williams and his allies realized that contending for the merits of liberty demanded more than merely asserting the “priority of inner spiritual experience.” Instead, as Williams’s literary productivity showed, defending evangelical civility necessarily included assertions about the political viability of soul liberty. Specifically, Williams had to prove that the dearth of established orthodoxy did not preclude social stability and flourishing.⁷⁸

Yet, it was the absence of a comprehensive unifying principle that undergirded the host of political issues the Providence Plantations faced—issues which continued to escalate while Williams was in London. In October 1652, Williams received a letter from

⁷⁵ Williams, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs*, 25–26.

⁷⁶ Williams, *The Hireling Ministry None of Christs*, 26.

⁷⁷ Polizzotto, “The Campaign against the *Humble Proposals* of 1652, 581; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 359.

⁷⁸ Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 56.

the General Assembly of the Providence Plantations, encouraging him to continue his work due to the “sad events” disrupting the colony’s peace and stability.⁷⁹ In March 1653, the towns of Warwick and Providence wrote to Williams, describing Providence’s decadence even after William Dyer had returned from London with the Parliamentary reaffirmation of the colony’s 1644 charter. While the Parliamentary letter refuted William Coddington’s charter from 1650, the towns on the Aquidneck Island continued in their intransigence, nor did the mainland towns exhibit enthusiasm about reunifying with Portsmouth and Newport.⁸⁰ This letter to Williams described the settlements “being in disorder,” and mired by bloodshed.⁸¹

There was little Williams could do for the time being. In fact, as much as he desired to return to New England, political circumstances in England in 1653 prolonged his departure. On April 20, 1653, Oliver Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament, which completely shifted the dynamics of the negotiations that Williams had engaged in throughout the previous year. Much of what he achieved was now null and void. Over the course of the next ten months, Williams tried to present the cause of the Providence Plantations to the increasingly busy Cromwell.⁸² By February 1654, news from the Providence Plantations forced Williams to entrust John Clarke with representing the colony.⁸³ The division, rivalry, and discord that engulfed the Narragansett Bay had become, according to Henry Vane, such a noise that all of England rang with stories of their tumult.⁸⁴ Indeed, Vane wrote a letter to the General Assembly of the Providence

⁷⁹ *CRW*, 1:371.

⁸⁰ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 63–63; *CRW*, 1:380–382.

⁸¹ *CRW*, 1:381; Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 49.

⁸² Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 360–361.

⁸³ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 362.

⁸⁴ *CRW*, 2:389.

Plantations in February 1654, rebuking them for the “tumults disorders Injustice” that plunged the Plantation into a seemingly endless chronicle of chaos.⁸⁵ He asked them, “Is not the Feare and Awe of God amongst you to restraine? Is not the love of christ in you to fill you wth yearning bowels one towards another and Constraine you not to live to your selves but unto him that Died for you?”⁸⁶ These seething words reflected a growing concern among figures like Vane, and especially Williams, about the future of conscientious liberty.⁸⁷ In fact, Vane warned the Providence Plantations that their disarray provided ammunition for the “Ennemys” of liberty of conscience, who could point to the burgeoning instability in the Narragansett as proof positive of disestablishment’s harmful consequences.⁸⁸ “Putt a Stop to your growing breaches and Distractions,” Vane commanded, and “silence your ennemys . . . honor the Name of God wch of late hath beene much blasphemed by reason of you.”⁸⁹

Williams added his own dismay to the state of the colony, writing a letter to the towns of the Narragansett Bay about his distress over their controversies. He recounted to them the personal devotion he exerted for the cause of liberty in the Providence Plantations, being called a fool for establishing freedom and liberty of conscience in New England and that he had only “laboured for a licentious and Contentious people.”⁹⁰ As he distilled throughout the toleration debate in 1652, evangelical civility required individual commitment to the common good. Liberty of conscience, and the freedom to live by one’s deepest convictions did not abrogate the needs for love, humility, and compassion. Without these virtues, which Williams pulled

⁸⁵ *CRW*, 2:389.

⁸⁶ *CRW*, 2:389.

⁸⁷ Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 49.

⁸⁸ *CRW*, 2:389.

⁸⁹ *CRW*, 2:389–390; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 363.

⁹⁰ *CRW*, 2:400.

from 1 Peter 4:8–9, the peace promised by liberty would crumble under the unsustainable weight of radical individualism.⁹¹ In different, private letter, Williams described the Providence Plantations as enjoying liberty but desiring licentiousness.⁹²

In August 1654, the Providence Plantations responded to Vane’s rebuke, providing insight into how the various leaders within the colony perceived their struggles and what caused their division. Vain, selfish ambition, according to the letter, lured the settlements into violence and discord. The letter mentioned the antics of William Coddington as a significant part of their turmoil; yet the colony accepted he was but one man. Something more pervasive fueled the colony’s trepidations: “a sweete cup hath rendered many of us wanton and too active.”⁹³ The cup was the cup of soul liberty. Residents of the Providence Plantations had enjoyed the promises of religious liberty, which, as the letter distilled, included freedom from the episcopacy, false religious ceremonies, and the “overzealous fire of the (so called) Godly and Christian Magistrate.”⁹⁴ The colonists, however, recognized that the promises of liberty also came with hazards.⁹⁵ They conceded that liberty of conscience required “more than ordinary watchfulness” to ensure that claims of conscience did not erode the foundations of order and societal stability.⁹⁶ In the following years, if the colony desired to remain committed to the precepts of evangelical civility, then it would have to find a balance between

⁹¹ *CRW*, 2:401–402; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creations of the American Soul*, 363–364.

⁹² *CRW*, 2:429.

⁹³ *CRW*, 2:397.

⁹⁴ *CRW*, 2:398.

⁹⁵ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 76; Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 57–58.

⁹⁶ *CRW*, 2:398

liberty and order—to prove, as Bozeman concluded, that the fruit of disestablishment was not dishevelment but flourishing.⁹⁷

An Ordered Liberty: Evangelical Civility, 1654–1656

When Williams returned to the Providence Plantations in the fall of 1654, he attempted to bring stability and steady leadership to the languishing settlements. His previous two years in England revealed his sustained commitment to evangelical civility; but he, along with much of the colony, sought to couple the idea of liberty with order. This change did not happen overnight. In fact, within a few months of Williams’s return, the colony found itself caught in another contentious dispute over compulsory militia service. Raids by Native Americans were a threat to all New Englanders, but especially for the colonists in the Provide Plantations. They fell to a disadvantage not shared by their colonial neighbors. Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Hampshire created a league known as the United Colonies in 1643, which was primarily formed to provide intercolonial support in case war broke out with Native Americans.⁹⁸ The Providence Plantations, however, were left out of the agreement. As a smaller and much less equipped colony than its neighbors, the General Assembly in the winter of 1654–1655 decided to make militia training compulsory in order to increase the colony’s trained militia.⁹⁹

In what seemed a regular pattern, “tumult and disturbance” erupted in the Plantations. A number of prominent officials, including Williams’s brother, Robert Williams, objected to the compulsory order. Robert submitted an open letter to the town

⁹⁷ Bozeman, “Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island,” 57; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 364.

⁹⁸ See Harry M. Ward, *The United Colonies of New England, 1643–90* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961).

⁹⁹ Horatio Rogers, George Moulton Carpenter, and Edward Field, eds., *The Early Records of the Town of Providence*, (Providence: Snow & Farnham City Printers, 1893), 2:81; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 364; see also LaFantasie’s editorial note in *CRW*, 2:419–423.

of Providence that refuted the civil order as a violation of conscience. Robert charged the proponents of the law with “*Blood-Guiltiness*” for breaching soul freedom and disregarding the “*Rule of the Gospel*.”¹⁰⁰

Roger Williams, however, rejected claims of conscience when it came to the refusal of service in the militia. He entered the debate with his own open letter to the colony. In it, he penned his now famous “ship of the state” metaphor, which drew upon similar imagery that he used in his 1652 work *Examiner Defended*. Rather than coming down on the side of conscientious freedom, Williams argued “That ever I should speak or write a Title that tends to such an infinite Liberty of Conscience, is a Mistake; and which I have ever disclaimed and abhorred.”¹⁰¹ Certainly, Williams reaffirmed that no individual, whether Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or Jew ought to endure persecution of conscience, which included both coercion towards a socially mandated orthodoxy or compulsion away from their religious convictions. Williams, however, wrote that a commonwealth was like a ship, and travelers on that vessel must strive together to ensure safe passage. Religious pluralism could exist on board without threatening the boat’s peace or its ability to traverse tempestuous waters. What the ship could not sustain was sedition, or, behavior that threatened to sink the entire vessel, thereby endangering all the passengers. In this case, the captain of the ship must intervene. The refusal to join in the defense of the colony, Williams believed, fell into this category of seditious, dangerous behavior. Even though conscientious objection to militia service may have extended from sincere beliefs, Williams placed this beyond the pale of toleration because no claim of conscience was permissible that undermined order and the preservation of the commonweal.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *CRW*, 2:423.

¹⁰¹ *CRW*, 2:423.

¹⁰² *CRW*, 2:423–424.

LaFantasie surmised that Williams's letter marked an alteration of his views from those he held previously in the 1630s and '40s.¹⁰³ This was less a betrayal of his former thinking and more a matter of emphasis conditioned by context. Over the past decade, Williams witnessed the travail of a colony that guaranteed liberty of conscience but was tossed by constant fissures. The colony lacked structure, and Williams attempted, in the early 1650s, to introduce a compatibility between liberty and order, making evangelical civility a far more viable and stable political maxim.¹⁰⁴ Liberty of conscience did not, indeed, must not jeopardize the *bonum commune*.¹⁰⁵

Roger Williams's position seemed to prevail, though he wrote the following month about the colony's perpetual struggles for unity, peace, and the cessation of infighting.¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding these "Gusts amongst us," Williams persuaded the various communities to come together and reunite under one colonial government.¹⁰⁷ He also had assistance from a letter by Oliver Cromwell, dated March 1655, wherein Cromwell ordered the colonists to adhere to the original 1644 charter.¹⁰⁸ After a year of negotiations and working with the various personalities, parties, and differences that existed, Williams finally managed to bring stability. On March 11, 1656, representatives of all the communities in the Narragansett Bay gathered in Warwick; this meeting included Williams, Coddington, Benedict Arnold, and even Samuel Gorton. The latter three had been bitter enemies since 1639, but now they came together to try and knit together the fragmented settlements of the Providence Plantations. Coddington, furthermore, provided

¹⁰³ See LaFantasie's editorial note in *CRW*, 2:423.

¹⁰⁴ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 364.

¹⁰⁵ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 64.

¹⁰⁶ *The Early Records of the Town of Providence*, 2:81; *CRW*, 2:427; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creations of the American Soul*, 365.

¹⁰⁷ *CRW*, 2:427.

¹⁰⁸ *CRW*, 2:437; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creations of the American Soul*, 363.

assurance of his allegiance to the government and the colony's authorities.¹⁰⁹ James rightly argued that the success of Williams's efforts between 1654 to 1656 stemmed from the introduction of ordered liberty. The colonists never departed from their original conviction regarding evangelical civility; what had changed, however, was the placement of boundaries around claims of conscience that comported with demands for order.¹¹⁰

Evangelical Civility and the Quakers

At the same time the Providence Plantations began to stabilize, Quakers arrived in New England. In July 1656, the first Quaker missionaries landed in Boston.¹¹¹ By 1657, more missionaries trickled into the region and utilized the Providence Plantations as a base to conduct their operations throughout New England. Indeed, the colony's commitment to religious liberty worked against the efforts of Massachusetts and Plymouth who tried to stop the advance of Quakerism. After the Quaker missionaries Christopher Holder and John Copeland infiltrated Massachusetts via Providence, the commissioners of the United Colonies convened to put pressure on the Providence Plantations. In September 1657, the United Colonies condemned Rhode Island's ineffectiveness at placating the Quaker threat. They blamed the activities of Holder and Copeland on the Providence Plantations and warned that if the outcast colony continued in its toleration of the Quakers, they endangered all New England.¹¹² The Quakers, according to the United Colonies, assailed the churches of Jesus Christ and, wherever they went, tossed civil societies into disarray.¹¹³ Rhode Island had granted these noxious

¹⁰⁹ *RRI*, 1:327–329.

¹¹⁰ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 64.

¹¹¹ Humphry Norton, *New England's Ensigne* (T.L.: London, 1659), 6 – 7; Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107.

¹¹² *RRI*, 1:374–375.

¹¹³ *RRI*, 1:375.

heretics a port of entry to “creep in amongst us, or meanse to infuse and spread their accursed tenants to the great trouble of the collonies.”¹¹⁴

The United Colonies, moreover, offered a deal to the Providence Plantations. If they enacted laws against Quakerism and joined the rest of New England in the suppression of this radical sect, they would admit the Narragansett Bay colony into its membership.¹¹⁵ Yet, this olive branch also came with a direct warning to the Providence Plantations: if they would not yield and join in the cause to end New England Quakerism before it got out of hand, the United Colonies would exact reprisals against Rhode Island. These punishments primarily included economic penalties, sanctions, and the cessation of trade with residents of Rhode Island.¹¹⁶

Undeterred, the Providence Plantations delivered a response to the commissioners of the United Colonies on October 13. Contrary to Sydney Ahlstrom’s suggestion, Rhode Island’s civil leaders certainly agreed that Quakerism wrought significant challenges to civil governments.¹¹⁷ The tolerant colony, however, outlined two reasons why they refused to punish the Quakers.¹¹⁸ First, Rhode Island’s civil leaders understood that Quakers not only willingly suffered persecution, but desired it. The Society of Friends, according to Rhode Island, detested jurisdictions where they encountered arguments and discourse rather than prisons and whippings. “They delight to be persecuted, and when they are soe, they are like to gain more adherents.”¹¹⁹ In other words, Massachusetts’s policies to safeguard civility of conformity encouraged the

¹¹⁴ *RRI*, 1:374–375.

¹¹⁵ *RRI*, 1:397; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*.

¹¹⁶ *RRI*, 1:397.

¹¹⁷ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 178.

¹¹⁸ *RRI*, 1:377.

¹¹⁹ *RRI*, 1:377.

pluralism it desperately sought to avoid. Second, Rhode Island reminded its New England neighbors that in its jurisdiction, the colony protected freedom of conscience—what they called, “the principle ground of our Charter.”¹²⁰ Quakerism certainly corrupted “good manners,” and disturbed the peace of any society where they arrived, but religious freedom remained the “greatest happiness that men can possess in this world.”¹²¹ As long as the Quakers upheld the “humane orders in point of civility,” the Society of Friends would continue to enjoy religious liberty in the Narragansett Bay.¹²²

Evangelical civility, however, did not envision a benign public square where religious disagreements never collided. On the contrary, a chief principle of evangelical civility was to create the conditions in society conducive to evangelism—for men and women to publicly proclaim their deepest convictions and engage in the act of persuasion. Rather than meet heresy with the noose, advocates of evangelical civility pursued dialogue and debate. This was exactly what Roger Williams did with the Quakers near the end of his life in 1672.

Williams, as Barry noted, “despised” Quaker theology, and he tried to organize a public theological disputation with the founder of Quakerism, George Fox, who was in Newport in 1672. Williams expressed a burgeoning desire to engage with the Quakers due to the depth of his own religious convictions. He concluded that an open and public debate was the proper channel that allowed for both sides—Williams and the Quakers—to explain their comprehensive truth claims. Williams met divergence not with indifference but with an invitation to engage in rhetorical discourse. The desire within him that led him to ask the Quakers for an audience typified his conception of civility: the fundamental differences that existed in a pluralistic society must be met with

¹²⁰ *RRI*, 1:378.

¹²¹ *RRI*, 1:378–379.

¹²² *RRI*, 1:398; Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 376–378.

conversation and opportunities for public expression of an individual's deepest convictions. By the time the Quakers received Williams's invitation, Fox had already left; nevertheless, three of Fox's followers agreed to debate Williams.¹²³

The debate, which spanned several days, focused on fourteen theological propositions drafted by Williams.¹²⁴ Their dispute, however, revealed more than the doctrinal differences between Williams and Quakerism. Indeed, it distilled key principles and virtues that Williams upheld as necessary for any public debate. It was, therefore, not enough for Williams to create a public square where a plurality of peoples could air their views openly and without fear of retribution—instead, Williams also pinpointed specific aspects of Quaker spirituality that he believed were corrosive for public discourse. Evangelical civility, as formulated by Williams, required enemies to engage in conversation and dictated the terms of how discourse was conducted. In fact, throughout the debate, Williams indicted the spirit of Quakerism not only with theological error, but a disposition that reduced “*Persons from Civility to Barbarisme.*”¹²⁵

Williams recounted in *George Fox* the “incivility and inhumanity” he received from the Quakers for the way in which they conducted themselves during their theological disputation. He complained about constant interruptions and interjections by Williams's opponents whenever he began to speak. In one place, Williams rebuked his adversaries, stating that “common Reason said that it was my turn to speak . . . that then I should be *disturbed* and stopt was no way befitting the Societies of Civil and Morall men.”¹²⁶ Rules governing public discourse were not secondary to Williams—something essential to humanity was at stake in the willingness or unwillingness to engage in debate

¹²³ *GF*, 2; Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 75.

¹²⁴ Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, 167.

¹²⁵ *GF*, 5; Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams*, 167; Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 75–76.

¹²⁶ *GF*, 99.

with rules and customs animated by “common Reason.” Civility, then, encompassed not only the mutual commitment to protect public manifestations of one’s deepest religious convictions but also the manner of social life together and the manner in which individuals expressed their views.¹²⁷ Indeed, a set of rules and moral precepts ought to govern public discourse, especially over those most fundamental points of disagreement.¹²⁸

Williams specifically targeted Quaker spirituality, not only for its failure to adhere to a biblical spirituality, but also for its destructive impact on the broader civil society. Quakers, like an acid, dissolved the necessary preconditions for debate and discourse. Civility was impossible under Quaker spiritual ethics¹²⁹ Behind this critique was Williams’s consternation towards Quaker pneumatology and the interaction of the Holy Spirit with individuals. Quakers, as Williams argued, believed that the Holy Spirit communicated with them directly, and that any commands from the Spirit must be obeyed. Indeed, Williams recorded the response of the John Stubs, one of his opponents at the disputation, to Williams’s critique of reports that Quakers had appeared in public naked and did so out of obedience to a revelatory command of the Holy Spirit. Stubs rejoined that while he condemned immodesty, “if God stirred them up and commanded them to this service to discover the *Nakedness* of others, they could not but acknowledge *Gods* hand, and submit to it.”¹³⁰ For Williams, the issue was not merely about public nakedness—it was his derision towards Quaker theological ethics that followed no set ontological moral order, but instead based public morality on a subjective experience.

¹²⁷ Keith Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 5.

¹²⁸ Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 76.

¹²⁹ *GF*, 307.

¹³⁰ *GF*, 60–61.

For Williams, public ethics flowed from biblically based, ontological principles rooted in the natural law.¹³¹ “*Civilized Countreyes*,” he argued, abounded with citizens who emulated courtesy, gentleness, patience, and a host of virtues he drew from the Bible.¹³² Being “civilized,” therefore, was not so much a secular imperative but a biblical command. The Bible established proper conduct for Christians engaged in discourse. These precepts and commands, however, marked, as Williams argued, a civilized society. Thus, as a society reflected biblical virtues—virtues that were not subjectively revealed but recorded in the Christian Scriptures—such conduct stabilized communal concord. As Bejan argued, Williams’s civility was not a “superficial” summons “for politeness,” nor did it aim at “the lofty and attractive ideals of sincere respect, recognition, and political friendship.”¹³³ On the contrary, Williams asserted a scriptural, natural law code, given by God, that set the rules for engagement in debate and discussion. Thus, by rooting the manner of public discourse in the natural law and biblical injunctions, far from setting the bar low, Williams raised the stakes on the conduct of participants in public discourse.

Williams’s debate with the Quakers served as a picture of what was required in the mutual commitment of every individual to protect and defend the free expression of ideas and religious beliefs. It was not enough to guarantee a negative liberty. Instead, Williams argued that the task of preserving liberty of conscience was an endeavor shared by every citizen. Thus, while evangelical civility enabled the public manifestation of deep convictions, attempting to draw divergent groups together in conversation and debate, it also framed the manner of debate around virtues, rooted in the natural law, that were

¹³¹ Davis, *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams*, 63.

¹³² *GF*, 308–309.

¹³³ Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 11, 14.

necessary for healthy, civilized discourse. The absence of those virtues made reasonable debate, and therefore, civility, untenable.

Conclusion

From 1645 to 1672, the chronicle of evangelical civility in the Providence Plantations redounded with controversy and discord. The pattern that emerged from the colony's earliest days in the mid-1630s continued into the subsequent decades. The lack of an established religious orthodoxy, though intentionally planned by the colonists, created a societal vacuum. No civil religion filled its place, leaving a constellation of disjointed settlements led by gregarious personalities to carve out an existence in the New England wilderness. It was a violent story of chaos and tumult.

Yet, it also covered the rise of religious liberty in colonial New England. Despite the turmoil, the foundations of evangelical civility were entrenched in the Narragansett Bay.¹³⁴ This period, moreover, clarified important developments in the doctrine of evangelical civility, especially on the concept of order. As the colony limped from controversy to controversy, Williams and his compatriots realized the need to couple claims of conscience with definable limits to protect the various communities from licentious individualism. Roger Williams continued to contend for the ideas of soul freedom and ordered liberty, and his beliefs spread throughout the whole community. Indeed, when Rhode Island's government rejected the demands from the United Colonies to capitulate on granting Quaker's toleration, Roger Williams held not political authority—he had been voted out of office the year prior.¹³⁵ Evangelical civility was, therefore, a political ideal embodied in the broader Providence Plantations.

¹³⁴ Bozeman, "Religious Liberty and the Problem of Order in Early Rhode Island," 64.

¹³⁵ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 377.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Over the course of nearly four decades in colonial New England, a contest of civility emerged. From its inception, the Massachusetts Bay Colony framed its community around a distinctly theological identity and mission, subsequently instituting the idea of civility of conformity. This ideal fastened society around an established religious mission, contending that social cohesion and societal flourishing required the enforcement of a socially mandated orthodoxy. The colony's political leaders codified through statutory law the necessary legal codes to promote the colony's civility. The ministers, moreover, preached conformity from the pulpits and in print, providing the theological, moral, and ethical foundations for religious establishment. The laity also frequently exhibited their own convictions regarding conformity, at times working in concert with civil and religious leaders to expand the colony's laws to quell religious dissent.

Civility of conformity in the Bay Colony, however, endured significant trials, especially with a seemingly unstoppable tide of religious pluralism. Within the first few years of establishing Massachusetts, colonial leaders were confronted by the teachings of Roger Williams, the Antinomians, and Samuel Gorton. Each of these episodes tested the resilience of conformity and the extent to which Massachusetts's leaders were willing to go in order to preserve its theological and political identity. Indeed, the colony was founded as a self-governing society, linked by a covenantal commitment between the residents of the colony and God—this was God's plantation, a city on a hill, a place to enact the purest and fullest extent of religious reform. As such, the early encounters with theological dissent between 1635 to 1645 distilled the formation of civility of conformity

in the Bay Colony.

Massachusetts's actions against Roger Williams in 1635, however, inadvertently created the rise of evangelical civility, thus sowing the seeds of the eventual contest of civility that culminated in the 1640s and '50s. When Williams founded the Providence Plantations after his banishment from Massachusetts, he helped inaugurate the "livelie experiment" in complete religious liberty. Evangelical civility connected prosperity with a public square liberated from the constraints of enforced conformity. God ordained for men and women to pursue the truth of their own volition, which required a community dedicated to protecting the public expressions of an individual's deepest religious convictions. Evangelical civility, moreover, was an attempt to create a society with the necessary protections for evangelism. Rather than banish the unorthodox, as Massachusetts did, Williams believed that theological discourse, and the politics of persuasion were the proper, God-ordained means to draw people into the truth.

Yet, evangelical civility witnessed its own set of challenges and difficulties in the American wilderness. The settlements that became the Providence Plantations all disestablished their civil society from any ecclesial authority, and preserved soul liberty. This created a vacuum that religious establishment filled for other societies like Massachusetts. No civil religion nor any comprehensive ideal framed the constellation of communities in the Narragansett Bay, leading to a series of internal conflicts that crippled the colony. Liberty, as it turned out, was an arduous ideal to promote.

This concept of civility collided with the dominant political axiom in New England, namely, civility of conformity. Vital concepts abounded in this contest of civility, including the theological and natural law foundations of both religious liberty and religious establishment. From 1644 to 1652, figures like Roger Williams, John Cotton, John Clarke, Thomas Cobbet, Samuel Gorton, and Edward Winslow all engaged in pamphlet debates over the proper relationship between church and state. Their debates clarified the development of ideas in early modern England and exerted political and

theological influence in New England.

Indeed, when the Quakers arrived in New England during the late 1650s and early 1660s, Massachusetts and Rhode Island adopted contradictory methods of dealing with this radical religious sect. For Massachusetts, the Quakers presented a monumental challenge to its civility: the missionary zeal of Quakers and their eagerness to suffer meant that Massachusetts's increased efforts to stymie the Society of Friends only multiplied their missionary campaign. Furthermore, the Quaker crisis also revealed patterns of what Adrian Weimer called the "lived politics of toleration"—examples of the laity extending grace, compassion, and tolerance to Quakers in spite of conformity's demands.¹

Yet, Massachusetts's commitment to civility of conformity in no way dissipated, even in the midst of the Quaker invasion. In fact, their contest with the Society of Friends solidified the colony's conviction about religious conformity while simultaneously forcing the colony's leaders to reconsider *how* to apply religious establishment. Massachusetts could not stem the tide of religious pluralism, but it tried to envision a path forward—one that upheld a limited religious tolerance while maintaining state support of religious establishment.

The Providence Plantations, however, suffered their own trials and fissures, abetted by the lack of any cohesive religious identity or establishment. From 1645 to 1657, political infighting, religious disagreements, and land disputes created seemingly insurmountable divisions that fractured the colony—at one point with three claimants to the office of president. The colonists themselves, as well as their supporters and detractors, laid the onus of their strife on the freedoms that liberty of conscience afforded them. Soul liberty created conditions for radical individualism which thwarted the

¹ Adrian Chastain Weimer, "Elizabeth Hooton and the Lived Politics of Toleration in Massachusetts Bay," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 2017): 47.

conditions necessary for social stability. Thus, from 1656 to 1658, Williams and the colony's leaders began emphasizing the importance of order and natural lawfulness as the proper boundaries for licentious claims of individual liberty.

The early modern contest of civility showcased a struggle between two traditions with radically divergent notions of political society. They both sought biblical fidelity, soteriological and eschatological security, as well as the flourishing of the community. These concerns, along with an abiding desire for unity, undergirded both civility of conformity and evangelical civility. The contest between establishment and disestablishment, therefore, contained vital questions and consequences not only on the relationship between church and state, but the very order of political community, human rights, and basic questions over liberty and conscience.

There are, however, issues for further study. First, further exploration into how the laity of these two colonies experienced the conflicts would strengthen the narrative and add more nuance to the thesis. Unpublished diaries and letters from lay people move beyond the ideas of figureheads and open windows into how people truly perceived their communities and the controversies they endured. Liberty and conformity, therefore, were not merely abstract political ideas. They affected individual men and women who lived next door to neighbors whose theological beliefs apparently threatened the entire society. Indeed, in the case of Rhode Island, an important thread needing further exploration is how the lack of an established religion impacted the culture of the Providence Plantations. The initial research evinces that absence of establishment left the communities of Rhode Island without a cohesive civil religion—they did not possess a shared communal identity. Thus, more needs to be done with the early church records of the Providence Plantations to see how these religious communities integrated, or failed to integrate, with settlements devoted to soul liberty.

Additionally, more needs to be done in connecting these two notions of civility with the broader American context. This project largely left unanswered how civility of

conformity and evangelical civility took shape in the early American republic; they were certainly present, and the contest still existed. In fact, this contest remains unsettled. Throughout American history, evangelical civility and civility of conformity have existed in tension as two separate answers to one question: how much pluralism can a society endure before it crumbles? This question was central to the debates in colonial New England and lingers in contemporary political disputes. As John Turner noted, “Americans cherish liberty but disagree vehemently about its meaning.”² In the same way, American history reveals constant contests over the sustainability of pluralism. Colonial New England bequeathed to the American theological and political traditions divergent notions of order, conformity, liberty, and the limits of freedom, reflecting a complex system of ideas that precipitated into later generations. Unresolved then, they remain unresolved today.

² John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 6.

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ABSTRACT

CONTEST OF CIVILITY: CONFORMITY, DISSENT, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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By the early 1660s, two bordering jurisdictions in colonial America enacted fundamentally divergent political communities. Massachusetts perpetuated civility of conformity, a political formulation that fastened society around a mandated theological construct, which was enforced and nourished by the civil state. Civility of conformity posited that societal stability necessitated an established orthodoxy around which citizens committed themselves. Conversely, Rhode Island's "livelie experiment" took some of the first steps in a new political tradition called evangelical civility. Evangelical civility rooted social concord in conscientious freedom—that the surest pathway for political stability required the liberation of the soul from the coercive powers of the state while simultaneously retaining a free public square where all citizens expressed their deepest convictions.

These two incompatible consortiums emerged in colonial America as the representatives of two contrasting traditions that the Protestant Reformation birthed. The magisterial tradition and the dissenting tradition provided the theological and moral support for political life in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Soteriological assertions like justification by faith alone, the proclamation of "Christian liberty," and the proliferation of doctrinal and denominational pluralism forced the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to reexamine the Christendom thesis. The contours of that delicate relationship gripped the minds of magisterial Protestants and dissenting Protestants alike,

which left an indelible mark on Protestant political theology and, perhaps more importantly, provided the societal framework for American colonies like Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Rhode Island.

This contest of civility, moreover, never dissipated. On the contrary, the controversy surfaced repeatedly during the colonial period through the earliest decades of the American republic. The main question pertinent to this contest was the following: how much pluralism could a society sustain before it ruptured? This question lingers and remains unresolved as this perennial contest continues to saturate much of Western civilization and especially the American public square. Present-day disputes over religious liberty, the role of religion in the public square, and the divergences between religious rights and the right to a society free from discrimination all emerged from a centuries-old struggle over the limits of religious freedom and the civility required for human flourishing.

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