

Irenicism in Seventeenth-Century English Thought: With Special Reference to English Natural Philosophy

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I. Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is a historiographical minefield. Attempts to correlate the development of science in early modern Western Europe with the Protestant reformation have a long and controversial history. There have been many interpretations inspired by Max Weber's thesis according to which capitalism and science were nurtured by Calvinist theology. In the celebrated thesis of Robert Merton, what he called 'Puritan values' were a stimulus to the expansion of science in seventeenth-century England where a godly involvement in altruistic enterprise could lead to a higher value placed on applied sciences.¹ Protestant Millenarianism, according to Charles Webster, provided a distinctive stimulus because the cultivation of applied sciences could be seen as a religious duty in preparation for Christ's second coming.² As Francis Bacon saw it, the effects of the fall could be reversed through experimental philosophy. Other historians such as Shapiro and Jacob have put forward the case for the latitudinarians bridging the gap between religion and science.³

Despite much excellent scholarly work on historical categories such as 'puritanism' and 'latitudinarianism', historians examining the relationship between natural philosophy and religion in seventeenth-century England have not yet fully explored the importance of a deep-seated and pervasive irenic attitude in English reformed religion. H. F. Kearney caught the gist of this irenic tradition when he suggested that the elusive connection between science and other intellectual and social attitudes was not through radical Puritanism but through radical reformist thinking within the established church. As he has pointed out: all the factions of the English Reformed Church shared a common 'vision of what the Church of Christ ought to be if it were stripped of externals and inessentials'.⁴ Yet, without a more thorough and deeper understanding we are left with an incomplete picture of seventeenth-century English natural philosophy. This study will attempt to remedy this gap by examining this irenic tradition in the Church of England in order to more fully elucidate the complex relationship between religion and natural philosophy in seventeenth-century England.

This study will focus particularly on a distinctive 'Hookerian Anglicanism' in the Church of England; *a via media* that embraced an element of doubt and so laid the epistemological basis of a scientific ethos that valued a certain empirical cast of thought. I want to suggest that this irenic outlook in English reformed religion was a causative factor in development of the Scientific Revolution. I take inspiration here from two short but highly

¹ See Robert K. Merton, "Puritanism, Pietism and Science", *The Sociological Review*, xxxviii (1938). See also Dorothy Stimson, "Puritanism and the New Philosophy in Seventeenth Century England", *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, iii (1935); R.F. Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A study in the Background of the Battle of the Books* (St. Loius 1961); and, "Puritanism, Science and Christ Church", *Isis*, xxxi (1939); Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1965); L. Solt, "Puritanism, Capitalism, Democracy and the New Science – Problems of Definition", *Past & Present*, no. 31 (July 1965).

² Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform, 1626 – 1660* (Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1976).

³ See Barbara Shapiro, "Latitudinarianism and Science in Seventeenth Century England", *Past and Present*, 1968 No. 40, pp. 16-41; and John Wilkins, *1614-1672* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1969), chaps. iv and viii; and *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Princeton University Press, 1983); Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Cornell University Press, 1976), esp. ch. 1.

⁴ Hugh Kearney, 'Puritanism and Science: Problems of Definition' *Past and Present*, (1965), Vol. 31, (1): 104-110, p.105.

suggestive and persuasive papers by John Henry.⁵ Henry proposes that we need to understand the achievements of Newton and company in terms of their attachment to a natural philosophy version of an irenic tradition within the Church of England. He understands the puzzle of the ascendancy of English science as the model of all intellectual enquiry in terms of legitimation, and he seeks that legitimation of modernity where Max Weber did: in religion. The aim of irenicism in theology was not merely to arrive at an interim position until something better came along, it was the only sure way to approach the truth. Thus, an analogous irenicism in natural philosophy was regarded in the same light. The combination of religious cultures rather than the dominance of one particular group produced the rhetoric of consensus within the Royal Society. English religion thus shaped the culture of English science.

Accordingly, what follows is not presented as a single key to understanding the nature of the Scientific Revolution in England. It will merely be suggested that the irenic tradition in English theology might be worth considering as a so far unconsidered factor among the many that contributed to England's rise as a major scientific nation by the end of the seventeenth-century. A necessary, but not a holistic precondition, if you will. The majority of this thesis, then, is focused on constructing a case for this prevalent irenic tradition, with each chapter building upon the last. An extended epilogue is included which begins the task of showing how this irenic tradition could have conditioned English natural philosophy. The remainder of this introductory chapter has two main objectives: firstly, a critique of the historiography on the relationship between English Protestantism and English natural philosophy; second, a brief outline of the methodological principles that will underpin the subsequent chapters.

Review of Historiography

Previous historiography points to two major factors which are characteristic of the formation of science in England. First, an undeniable link between the development of science in England and contemporary religious developments. Second, English philosophy since Locke is usually classified as 'empiricist', and it is routinely acknowledged that Locke modelled his own philosophy on the science of Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and other contemporary English natural philosophers. English natural philosophy was fundamentally empirical in a way that set it apart from other European countries.

The problem with attempting to link science to specific religious strands such as Puritanism, latitudinarianism or even Anglicanism raises many historical problems, not least that of head-counting. An argument that stipulates a common epistemology between science and a specific religious sect can never be conclusive because no degree of inherent compatibility will ever prove any causal connection. John Spurr, for example, has recently shown how it is not entirely clear that there really was such a sect as the Latitude-men.⁶

Douglas Kemsley has argued that Anglican methods of biblical interpretation differed significantly from those of other Protestants and of Catholics 'in a closely similar way' to that which the scientific method of the Royal Society differed from Cartesian or scholastic methods. However, Kemsley seems to believe that the theological method can be identified exclusively

⁵ 'The Scientific Revolution in England' in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.) *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and 'National Styles in Science: A Possible Factor in the Scientific Revolution?' in D. N. Livingstone & C. W. J. Withers (eds.), *Geography and Revolution* (Chicago University Press, 2005).

⁶ John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Mar., 1988), pp. 61-82.

with Anglicans; this thesis will suggest that the English theological method was common to different factions and shades of opinion within the English Reformed Church as a whole.⁷

Furthermore, one only has to take a look at the membership of the early Royal Society in order to realise that a case for the internal consistency of Anglicanism or Latitudinarianism quickly becomes problematic. The Royal Society, whose Fellows were not all natural philosophers but who were, at least, openly conveying their interest in science-included not only latitudinarian moderates but hard-line Anglican clerics and bishops. Latitudinarians such as Glanville, Tilloston and Sprat can be countered by fervently Anglican clerics such as Bishops Dolben, Henchman, Stearne, Sheldon, Peason and Parker supported by lesser clerics and laymen such as James Arderne, Robert Nelson, Benjamin Woodroffe, Sir John Clutterbuck, Benjamin Lacey and others.⁸ The mere presence of so many non-latitudinarian clerics in the Royal Society strongly suggests the need to search for a more general affiliation between science and religion. If membership of the Royal Society can be equated with an interest in science, then such an interest was compatible with a whole range of religious, political and social attitudes.

More nuanced accounts of the similarities between the methods of English theology and English natural philosophy can be found in Henry van Leeuwen's *The Problem of Certainty in English thought* and in Barbara Shapiro's *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England*, although both concentrate unduly upon Anglican thought. Shapiro's account, for example, takes natural philosophy as its starting point and misses, therefore, the fact that the probabilism which she discerns in many aspect of early modern intellectual life stems from the anti-dogmatism and sceptical epistemology developed by English Reformers seeking a middle way between the essentially unreformed Church of Henry VIII and the Calvinism of more radical theologians. Nevertheless, her scholarship has provided us with the fullest account so far of the links between contemporary religious and scientific methodology in England.

James and Margaret Jacob have argued that the new philosophy was established upon 'a metaphysics of God and matter', drawn from latitudinarianism, which was 'produced for ideological reasons' by Anglicans to help restore a stable monarchy. There is, however, no concrete evidence for their thesis which shows the problem of using an almost exclusive externalist approach to the history of science. The implications of their thesis would be that Boyle deliberately forged a particular account of the physical world in order to promote a specific politico-religious ideology. Such an artificially constructed account of the physical world could succeed only with thinkers who shared Boyle's ideology, and so the Jacobs have had to insist upon the ideological unanimity of the Royal Society.⁹ This last point, as Michael Hunter has shown, cannot be supported by the evidence. Nevertheless, the Jacobs view of the ideological uses of the new philosophy is not unfounded, therefore, but their presentation of the mechanical philosophy as a self-consciously produced political tool is rather wide of the mark.

Hunter's own view of the early Royal Society is so finely textured that he would deny any unified methodological approach of the kind that I will propose in this study. Hunter,

⁷ Douglas Kemsley, "Religious Influences in the Rise of Modern Science: A Review and Criticism, Particularly of the 'Protestant-Puritan Ethic' Theory", *Annals of Science*, 24: 3, 199-226.

⁸ Biography information from *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹ See, for example, James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob, "The Anglican Origins of Modern Science: The Metaphysical Foundations of the Whig Constitution", *Isis*, Vol. 71, No. 2, (Jun., 1980), pp. 251 – 267).

however, has been criticised for offering no explanation of the Society's adoption of a natural philosophical equivalent of doctrinal minimalism.¹⁰

A more recent and general theory has been proposed by Peter Harrison. He explores the way in which understandings of the Fall and its effect on human nature and reason functioned in the seventeenth-century as a primary motive for conceiving the search for knowledge and the intellectual tools needed to get there. The rise of experimental science, in this reading, is not the result of a new awareness and conviction of the powers of human reason, but, on the contrary, a product of a profound awareness of the intellectual incapacities of human beings.¹¹ The arguments made in this thesis complement Harrison's. The sceptical epistemology, for example, developed by the Great Tew Circle and adopted by the Royal Society is itself a product of the awareness of the limits of the human condition, specifically that of reason. This distrust of the faculty of reason and adoption of what English intellectuals termed 'right reason' (common-sense) stressed the fallacies of the human mind. Furthermore, Steven Shapin has argued that later Stuart natural philosophy forged a self-conscious middle way between scepticism and credulity, ostensibly restoring moderation by basing 'epistemological decorum' upon gentlemanly norms of conduct.¹²

Methodology

A thesis like this one, on a topic so capacious, cannot possibly be comprehensive; instead it treads a particular path through the groves of its subject, mapping specific territory along the way but inevitably leaving a great deal unexplored. As a result, each chapter focuses on a case study of English irenicism, some defined thematically and other structured around particular events or debates, using a variety of historical methodologies from political history to cultural history to intellectual history, with the hope that together they will add up to more than the sum of their parts. While my choice of topics is idiosyncratic, however, it is far from arbitrary: the structure of this thesis is intended to argue for a particular trajectory of the English irenic theological method in English history.

My method is essentially one of exposition of primary texts concerning the irenic approach in matters of religion with which some English religious divines of the period were concerned. Irencism, as far as this thesis is concerned, is taken as a method of enquiry rather than a dogmatic position. The historical actors in this thesis can, to a degree, be labelled as irenicists. In my opinion they are reflective of a distinct irenic and practical approach to the problem of religious strife which plagued England during this period. They all shared a specific approach to religion which was motivated primarily by an important question: how to live together in society which was comprised of divergent religious sects? Their solution was irenic. A focus on fundamentals, what every Englishman believed to be true, would, they believed, establish a unified English Church and a harmonious English society.

The history of ecumenicism and irenicism is, of course, a problematic subject to deal with. Historians have, in the past, been criticised for assuming a kind of irenic 'essentialism' in which the association of Christian unity with peace, toleration and irenicism is presupposed.

¹⁰ See, for example, M. Hunter, "Latitudinarianism and the 'Ideology' of the Early Royal Society: Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667) Reconsidered" in *Establishing the New Science: The Experience of the Early Royal Society* (Boydell Press, 1995).

¹¹ P. Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1994).

This ‘essentialist’ approach has also allowed historians to construct a sort of apostolic succession of moderate, fair-minded people who urged projects for Christian unity, from Erasmus through Cassander and Acontuis to Grotius (to give an example).

Such an approach leads to numerous problems. Firstly, it tends to imply that these irenicists were all after the same thing and for the same reasons – as if all attempts to unite different Christian groups was a step towards a truly unified Christendom, and was underpinned by modern principles of religious toleration and comprehension. Secondly, the idea of an essentialist irenical succession also carries with it the presupposition that a ‘true’ interest in Christian unity was limited in this period to a small clutch of rationally minded ‘Erasmian’ figures. In fact, most thinkers of this period accepted that religious unity was a good idea, in the same way that they believed that sin was a bad idea.

While some may read this thesis, regrettably, as an exercise in attempting to construct an English apostolic line of succession from Richard Hooker to Edward Stillingfleet, I do hope that the majority of readers will not be drawn to such superficial conclusions. It will be shown that Hooker and Stillingfleet, for example, were bona fide irenicists committed to Protestant unity, but they were reacting to different contexts which meant that they strove for, and desired irenicism on different terms. Hooker’s irenic project was devoted to creating a doctrinal defence of Elizabeth I’s moderate policies and of Anglican theology, liturgy, and governance. His irenic defence was designed to promote Elizabeth’s policy of inclusion and secure the Elizabethan church against the attacks of the Elizabethan Presbyterians at the end of the sixteenth-century. Stillingfleet’s irenicism, on the other hand, was borne out of something quite different. The experience of the English civil wars during his adolescence would later dominate his thinking, demonstrating, for him, the dangers of religious differences and extremism, and thus the strong need for Christian moderation and unity. His irenic project was thus constructed and shaped in a Restoration era that was haunted by a bloody civil war; an era where peace and social order seemed to hang by a thread. In short, the irenic projects of both men reflect the flexibility and variety of irenical notions and the part that they had to play in different contexts, settings, and generations.

I am also wary of any facilely constructed alliance between the ‘rationalism’ of the Enlightenment and that of the divines whose writings make up the bulk of my primary texts. Furthermore, I have accepted the longstanding categorization of the Church of England as a *via media* between the theological right and left. In matters of scriptural interpretation, the right is the authority of Roman infallibility; the left is the Spirit-centred interpretation of disestablished and non-established churches and sects. Against both the over-zealous Catholics and Calvinists, Anglicans formulated a rational interpretation of Scripture, which they hoped reasonable believers could accept and employ in the public forum. Within this middle-of-the-road existence, various political and theological responses were possible, but differences tended to be muted, when against Catholicism and the Calvinists, divines argued their theories of scriptural truth and the interpretation that might build up that truth.

The growing role of reason as a critical factor in Protestant thought in the late seventeenth-century, especially in England, but not only in England, is well known, of course.¹³

¹³ Among the extensive literature on this subject, see especially, G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950); H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Adams and Charles Black, 1965); Philip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of a Tale of A Tub* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961); Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in Seventeenth*

My point, however, is that this new role of reason is much more crucial than has hitherto been recognised for two main reasons: first, this new role of reason emerged specifically, and was deeply rooted in the irenic tradition of the Church of England; Second, that this emergent tradition was crucial to the irenic methodology of the early Royal Society. Moreover, the development of the concept of ‘moral certainty’ by religious divines such as William Chillingworth, Jeremy Taylor and Edward Stillingfleet was also inextricably linked to the increased use of reason in matters of religion. Whilst this has been discussed at length by Carroll, Popkin and Van Leeuwen, it has not been clearly connected to the Royal Society’s professed irenic methodology.¹⁴

The focus of this thesis is on events in England but the story is necessarily European in scope. However, a few things remain that must be stated explicitly. First is the extent to which this dissertation posits English exceptionalism. A number of scholars have explored the issue of moderation in other early modern European contexts.¹⁵ Most recently, Mark Greengrass has argued that moderation acquired distinctive significance in the middle years of the French Wars of Religion as elites came to the conclusion that the passion of the kingdom had run amok and wholesale public reformation was necessary.¹⁶ These historians, while acknowledging that discourses of moderation were never entirely transparent or apolitical, have nonetheless on the whole found peace and irenicism in their subject. Therefore, this study does not claim that the *via media* was unique to England; undoubtedly versions of it can be found elsewhere in different contexts, whether in the *politiques* of the Valois court or the anti-Anabaptist diatribes of Luther and Calvin. Rather it suggests that the unique circumstances of the English Reformation led to the development of a prevalent, characteristically English theological tradition. A theological tradition that did not depend upon a particular set of theological doctrines but rather on a method, irenicism, which offered a safe way to salvation. This study will thus explore whether such ‘irenic theology’ was capable of embracing many shades of opinion in English Protestantism, and whether it can supplant Puritanism, Latitudinarianism, etc, as the key explanatory factor concerning religious sanction of the new experimental philosophy.

It is also possible, however, that the irenic character of the English Church is not an Anglo-centric development. This would also be interesting, suggesting that perhaps England’s local version of irenic moderation was merely one thread in a broader strand of Renaissance culture that has hitherto gone unnoticed. I am not prepared to make this argument or to argue with any historian of the wider European context; at the end of the day this is not a comparative study and I must remain bound by the insular nature of my evidence. But I am aware that the possibility exists, and I hope that others will choose to explore it.

and *Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1995); Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defence of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ See Robert T. Carroll, *The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet 1635-1699* (Martinus Nijhoff-The Hague, 1975); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 13; Henry van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630-1690* (The Hague, 1963).

¹⁵ See, for example, Luc Racault and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *Moderate Voices in the European Reformation*, (Aldershot, 2005); Zdenek David, *Finding the Middle Way: The Utraquists’ Liberal Challenge to Rome and Luther*, (Washington, D.C., 2003); Howard Louthan and Randall Zachman (eds.), *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform* (Notre Dame, 2004). For an older example, see Donald Nugent, *Ecumenism in the Age of Reformation: The Colloquy of Poissy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

¹⁶ Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passion: Peace and Religion in the French Kingdom, 1576 – 1585* (Oxford, 2007).

II. Richard Hooker as Irenicist

‘For my part, Sir, I think all Christians, whether Papists or Protestants, agree in the essential articles: and that their differences are trivial; and rather political than religious.’¹⁷

The observation of Samuel Johnson may seem as unrealistic as superficial in retrospect of the melancholy history of controversy and strife between Christians of the several Churches. But his words, however, have the merit of expressing a salient characteristic of the many discussions of ecclesiastical union during the early modern period: namely, the recognition and acceptance of a distinction between the essentials and non-essential articles in Christian faith and confessional standards, and the important part played by political or social factors in ecclesiastical divisions. For during the period, despite the heavy shadow of religious wars and civil conflicts of essentially religious basis, were fruitful discussions and projects of ecclesiastical union; and the principle of differentiation between fundamentals and non-essentials was ubiquitously stated and iterated, alike within the British Isles and on the European continent. This chapter specifically looks at Richard Hooker, his *Lawes*, his religio-political context, and his lasting importance not only for the Church of England, but also for the course of English natural philosophy. A proper evaluation of Hooker’s significance, however, can only be made if one recalls some basic data of the history of the English Reformation.

The English Reformation owed much to the literary fruits of Continental Protestantism and its founders were indebted alike to individuals such as Erasmus and Luther, though it was not identified with any branch of the latter. It remained, however, favourable to Erasmus and retained a tincture of Erasmian liberalism, but assumed a distinctively national character. England’s history as a Protestant country is crucial if we are to understand later developments in English natural philosophy. England was unique in being the only Protestant country whose religious reformation was not based upon doctrinal grounds.

When Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church of England in 1534, to legitimate his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn, he severed the English church from Rome while still upholding the fundamental doctrines of Catholicism. This conservative ecclesiastical policy accorded with the temper of the people. The episcopal line of continuity was maintained, and episcopacy as an institution, while not yet supported by high church interpretations, was not seriously imperilled in the 16th century. The abolition of monasticism was the only radical change in the internal ecclesiastical polity. The reforms of worship were abrupt only in the use of the vernacular. Even where the changes in the meaning and structure of the liturgy were considerable, the new forms were looked upon as essentially continuous with the old. Thus the reformed Church of England held a strategic position in irenic matters. It carried forward more that was medieval than Continental Churches, while it acknowledged a fraternity with both Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism. In these respects, Thomas Cranmer (Archbishop of Canterbury 1533, martyred 1556) is the most characteristic representative of 16th century English irenicism.

Cranmer’s reading of Erasmus had turned him early on to the study of the Bible and the literature of theology, and at Cambridge he came in touch with men strongly influenced by

¹⁷ J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL. D.*, Vol. 1 (London, 1824), p. 356.

Luther.¹⁸ It was in Edward VI's reign (1547-53) that Cranmer had his opportunity. His irenic attitude is close to that of Martin Bucer of whom he invited to England in October of 1548 in order to assist in his not too easy task for the Reformation in England.¹⁹ Cranmer shared not only Bucer's desire for ecumenism, but also his beliefs about the best way to avoid dissension and promote unity. He sincerely sought a unification of Reformation forces.

For him the Church was one, Christendom was *republica Christiana*, and England and the Church of England were not to be severed from this unity. Melanchthon had remarked in a letter to Cranmer, in 1535, that if there were bishops like him elsewhere, concord and reform would be attained without difficulty. Cranmer turned to Melanchthon for co-operation and invited him to England. Melanchthon, however, never took Cranmer up on his offer despite much persistence from the Englishman.²⁰ The death of Edward VI on 6 July 1553 signalled the end of Cranmer's hope for a consensus with foreign Protestants. Nevertheless, his espousal of a cause far wider than national reform—the integration of the severed Reformation Churches of Europe—is evidence of a sincere irenicism and of a certain noble grandeur of design challenging to later generations.

A new sudden turn within church policy followed when Edward's successor, Mary, came to the throne. A staunch Catholic, Mary immediately abolished the previous anti-papal legislation. 'Bloody Mary' even made Cranmer a martyr; he was burnt at the stake in 1556. Cranmer's death, however, only worked to cement the roots of English Protestantism. Many converted to Protestantism and searched for help in Geneva, and Calvinism afforded shelter for refugees.²¹

When the short time of reaction ended in 1558, Elizabeth succeeded her sister to the throne. The refugees then returned to England. They brought home to their country the fighting spirit of continental Calvinism. Elizabeth personally seems to have been religiously indifferent, having witnessed the tumultuous rule of her older half-sister and the product of over-zealous Catholicism. Whatever her private views may have been, necessity dictated her steps. In the eyes of the pope she was a bastard; consequently she was eager to remove any papal influence. She certainly disliked Calvinism, since the victory of Calvin's adherents would mean her personal power would decrease. Thus, she moved to a constitutional position similar to that of Henry VIII. By the Act of Supremacy in 1559 she was proclaimed the 'supreme Governor' of the Church of England, a wording that perhaps sounded softer than 'the supreme Head', the title of Henry VIII. The Act of Uniformity re-established the Common Prayer Book. It was modified, however, in the tenets dealing with the Lord's Supper in order to move away from a solely commemorative view of the Eucharist. In this way the Prayer Book was designed to embrace as many adherents as possible. This compromise endeavour triumphs anew in the revised 39 Articles which were decided upon in 1563. Moderation and comprehension are characteristic traits in these articles in which Lutheran and Zwingli tenets are harmonised with a basic view on the sacraments which comes quite close to Roman Catholic ideas.

¹⁸ For a good overview see D. M. Loades, *Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation* (Plantagenet Press; 2nd ed., 2001).

¹⁹ For a detailed study of Bucer's influence see C. Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1946).

²⁰ See John Schofield, *Philip Melancthon and the English Reformation* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

²¹ J. Brown, *The English Puritans* (Cambridge, 1910), tells us that among more than a thousand refugees, who went to the Reformed churches on the Continent, there were five bishops, five deans, four archdeacons, and fifty-seven doctors of divinity and preachers who had held church offices during the reign of Edward VI.

These developments make up the remarkable main features in the history of the English Reformation. It was Richard Hooker who was to give the theological defence of this final 'Elizabethan Settlement'. It is understandable, therefore, that the outcome of this work was not only praised but was also treated with suspicion by theological critics. The contemporary Roman Catholic C.F. Dirksen remarked that just as political expedience guided Elizabeth, Hooker 'was motivated by expedience to consolidate the power of the sovereign.'²²

Hooker and the Anglican *Via Media*

According to a tradition going back to Isaac Walton, Richard Hooker was the archetypal 'Anglican' divine, whose celebrated defence of the established church against the Puritans, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity (Lawes)*, finally made explicit the principles of the Elizabethan church settlement as a *via media* between Rome and Geneva. The 'Anglicanism' he defended was implicit in that settlement, 'protestant but not Calvinist, episcopalian yet reformed, sacrament and ceremony centred although in no sense popish'.²³ 'Puritanism', by contrast, was the radical Protestant opposition to that mainstream.²⁴

The reaction against Walton has today gone so far that scholars refuse to accept even the categories he took for granted. It has become all but an orthodoxy that 'Anglicanism' did not exist under Elizabeth. 'Puritans', by contrast, have been moved so far to the centre of the stage that it is they, we are told, who represented the 'mainstream': English Protestant divinity is said to have been so much dominated by a word-centred, austere simple ideal of piety that the small minority of those Protestants who wanted to retain some degree of ceremony can in turn be consigned to the sidelines, and the name 'Puritan' safely dispensed with, the more so as there were no significant differences in theology that divided them.²⁵ Others would not go so far, but nevertheless are convinced that the influence of Calvin was unquestioned, that his theology was a common bond in spite of all the other disagreements between Cartwright and Whitgift, and that even the continued existence of episcopacy was precarious.²⁶ It is possible to see the Whitgift-Cartwright controversy as the epitome of the Anglican-Puritan struggle within the Church of England. The principal issue between the two men was the governmental forms of the Establishment. Was it to be episcopal or reformed in the direction of the Presbyterian model? Behind this struggle, of course, lay the crucial question of the authority of the Church, and, ultimately, the delicate problem of the Queen's prerogative.²⁷ Where, then, did Hooker stand? This question is not entirely relevant for the purpose of this chapter. That being said, however, it is necessary to take a brief look at the different interpretations of Hooker's position.

First, there is the general problem of the anachronistic label Anglican which is so commonly applied to Hooker. It has been pointed out that the term itself was the product of

²² Cited in R. Rouse and S. C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948* (London, S. P. C. K., 1967), p. 187.

²³ P. Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 4-5.

²⁴ Walton's *Life* (1665) is printed in J. Keble (ed.), *The Works of...Mr Richard Hooker*, (Oxford, 1888), vol. I. 3-117.

²⁵ C.H. and K. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640*, (Princeton, 1961).

²⁶ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?*, pp. 10-11.

²⁷ For a good analysis of this subject matter see J. F. H. New, "The Whitgift-Cartwright Controversy", in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, LIX (1968), pp. 203-11.

post-Restoration polemical historiography.²⁸ The first use of the term has been attributed to Dr. John Fell, Dean of Christ Church, in his *Life of Dr. Henry Hammond*.²⁹ The label Anglican is not only anachronistic, it is also theologically very imprecise. It has been applied indiscriminately to Calvinist Bishops of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church and to Arminians as well. Similarly, as already mentioned, the term Puritan has been loosely applied to conformists, Disciplinarians, and Separatists, within or without the Church of England, who held to strictly reformed theological principles.³⁰ By this reckoning, Hooker might equally well be regarded as a Puritan.

There is, nevertheless, the generally received opinion that Puritans were representative of the Protestant mainstream while Anglicans, such as Hooker, deviated from the doctrinal norms of reformed orthodoxy in the direction of a ‘peculiarly English’ pragmatic compromise, usually termed the *via media*.³¹ Furthermore, W. J. T. Kirby has convincingly argued that the portrayal of Hooker as an Anglican according to this traditional interpretation actually pales Hooker’s significance with respect to his irenic apologetic.³²

On the other hand, there has been a mounting trend of opinion critical of the traditional dichotomy of Anglican and Puritan. Patrick Collinson, for example, expressed a dislike of the term Anglican in his landmark study *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*.³³ Collinson labelled the term anachronistic and suggested that ‘Protestant’ would have to stand in place of ‘Anglican’. The implicit lack of clarity in this alternative, however, gets quite out of hand in the virtual abolition of any distinction whatsoever between ‘conformist’ and ‘Disciplinarian’ in the thesis of C.H. George and K. George.³⁴ A more recent and much more convincing treatment of the question is by Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695*.³⁵ Finally, there is the important contribution of Nicholas Tyacke.³⁶ For Tyacke, ‘Calvinist predestinarian teaching was...a crucial common assumption, shared by a majority of the hierarchy and virtually all its non-conformist opponents, during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods’.³⁷ Thus the weight of contemporary scholarly opinion has begun to shift perceptibly away from ‘the damaging mistake of writing the history of that Church in the anachronistically dichotomous terms of an Anglicanism not yet conceived and an alien Puritanism not yet clearly disowned.’³⁸

With the validity of ‘Anglicanism’ called into question, it is inevitable that the traditional interpretation of Hooker’s theology, which for so long has been viewed through the

²⁸ Paul Christianson, “Reformers and the Church of England”, *J.E.H.*, 31 (1980), p. 469.

²⁹ Christianson cites P. Heylyn, *Ecclesia Restaurata: on the History of the Reformation* (London, 1661), p. 92 for a comparable usage.

³⁰ For a full bibliography and sound discussion of the involved controversy over the validity of the terms ‘Anglican’ and ‘Puritan’, see Christianson’s article cited above.

³¹ For this traditional dichotomy, see D. Little, *Religion, Order and Law: A Study of Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York, 1969); J.F.H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of their Opposition, 1558-1640* (London, 1964); and H.C. Porter, “Hooker, the Tudor Constitution, and the *Via Media*”, in *Studies in Richard Hooker*, edited by W. Speed Hill, (Cleveland, 1972) pp. 77-116.

³² See W. J. T. Kirby, *Richard Hooker’s Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990), ch. II.

³³ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), p. 108.

³⁴ C. H. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640* (Princeton, 1961).

³⁵ (Chapel Hill, 1982).

³⁶ “Puritanism, Arminianism, and Counter-Revolution”, in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, edited by Conrad Russell, (London, 1973), pp. 119-43. See also Tyacke’s *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminians c. 1590-1640* (Oxford, 1987).

³⁷ Tyacke, (1973), p. 128.

³⁸ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1984), p. ix.

lens of that same anachronistic category, should itself be called into question. The classic nineteenth-century definition of the Anglican *via media* in theology, formulated by John Henry Newman and assumed by many Hooker scholars, has been vigorously challenged by a group of scholars who constitute what may now well-be regarded as a ‘new school’ of Hooker interpretation.³⁹ These scholars argue that the ‘via media’ understanding of Hooker’s thought, along with his anachronistic association with what only much later became known as ‘Anglicanism’ were largely creations of ‘Catholicising’ leaders of the nineteenth-century High Church Oxford Movement – including Hooker’s editor, John Keble, and most notably J.H. Newman in his pre-conversion Anglo-Catholic guise. These scholars then set forth their counter-thesis that Hooker was, in fact, a faithful English exponent of the basic ‘orthodox’ doctrines of all the Magisterial Reformers, namely, Luther and especially Calvin.

On the other hand, Lee W. Gibbs, in a number of articles, has marshalled evidence for his thesis that a *via media* form of Christian faith and practice did in fact emerge within the structures of the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Settlement of religion, and that Hooker, more self-consciously and effectively than any of his predecessors or contemporaries, gave classic expression to this particular mode of thought.⁴⁰ According to Gibbs it is Hooker who was the first to give this complex and highly dialectical *via media* way of doing theology its most coherent and systematic expression. He gave the most complete formulation to this new theological position in his monumental treatise *Lawes*.

I am not going to argue that either of these positions is unreservedly true. In fact, as will become apparent in the course of our analysis of Hooker, it is quite possible that the truth lies somewhere between them. Indeed, however, the *via media* hypothesis continues to hold widespread authority as a hermeneutical paradigm in Hooker studies. Even revisionist historians such as Kirby and Atkinson have had difficulty in escaping the attraction of the *via media* interpretation of Hooker and his work. Kirby, for instance, while wanting to redefine the boundaries of the *via media*, is still able to write:

Our brief consideration of the ecclesiology of the *Lawes* suggests that it may be more plausible to include Hooker among the ranks of the magisterial reformers, and thus alongside Calvin, Luther, and, of course, Hooker’s own patron, John Whitgift. All of these theologians of the magisterial Reformation seek to tread a middle way between the Scylla of Rome and the Charybdis of a radical biblicizing Protestantism.⁴¹

And Atkinson writes in a similar vein in the conclusion of his chapter on Hooker and the authority of reason:

³⁹ The leader of this new school is W.J. T. Kirby, whose revisionist interpretation is clearly set forth in *Richard Hooker’s Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990); “Richard Hooker as an Apologist of the Magisterial Reformation in England,” in *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community* (ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade; Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997); and “Richard Hooker’s Theory of Natural Law in the Context of Reformation Theology,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 30, (1999). See also Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Reformed Theologian of the Church of England* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Partenoster, 1997); and “Hooker’s Theological Method and Modern Anglicanism,” *Churchman*, 114, (2000).

⁴⁰ Lee W. Gibbs, “Richard Hooker’s Via Media Doctrine of Justification,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Apr., 1981), pp. 211-220; “Richard Hooker’s Via Media Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 227-235; “Richard Hooker: Prophet of Anglicanism or English Magisterial Reformer?,” *Anglican Theological Review* 84 (2002), pp. 943-60.

⁴¹ W. J. T. Kirby, “Hooker as an Apologist of the Magisterial Reformation in England,” in *Richard Hooker* (1997), pp. 232.

Hooker was able to steer a middle course between the two extremes; of allowing reason scope to control revelation on the one hand whilst on the other hand allowing revelation to control all of reason's activity even in those areas that apply to man 'civilly associated'.⁴²

Hooker lived and died long before the Church of England divided itself into 'parties' – Low or Evangelical, High or Anglo-Catholic, and Broad or Latitudinarian.⁴³ Yet had he lived to experience such divisions, I cannot help envisioning him as gravitating toward the Broad Church centre. As a result, the interpretation offered here of Hooker's theological orientation and, most importantly, his concept of reason is based upon a careful reading of the main apologetic and purpose of his treatise *Lawes*. Briefly stated, Hooker frames his discourse as an irenic appeal to the hearts and minds of the 'moderate puritan' critics of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559.⁴⁴ Hooker addresses his discourse directly to disciplinarian but non-separating puritans who seek reformation of the ecclesiastical law of England (Laws, I. 1.3; 1: 57.33-58.19). He endeavours to persuade his audience by an appeal to standards of doctrinal orthodoxy, acknowledged by them as authoritative, that a complete reformation has in fact already been achieved. By a concerted appeal to 'reason' he hopes to secure conscientious acceptance of the Settlement by such disciplinarian critics as Walter Travers or Thomas Cartwright. In the course of the Admonition Controversy of the 1570s Travers and Cartwright articulated their support for a scripturally prescribed form of ecclesiastical polity or *disciplina*, and are the representative authorities for the *disciplina* cited by Hooker in the *Lawes*. The comparative stability enjoyed by the Jacobean Church and Cartwright's own eventual conformity to the established church in the late 1590s provide some evidence of success of this irenic purpose.

Hooker and the Authority of Reason

Hooker's importance in the context of this study is based on his provision of a philosophical foundation for the sixteenth-century Church of England, a foundation dealing with profound issues in a large and irenic spirit. The significance of his monumental treatise *Lawes*, for our purposes, consists in its defence of the powers of reason. Although Hooker may very well not have intended it – the net result of his argument was to make reason, in a way, the ultimate arbiter in questions of faith.

When we come to examine Hooker's defence of reason we are approaching that aspect of his theology that has commonly been seen as the element within his thought that is not only the most distinctive but that which has also had a profound influence upon Anglican theology.⁴⁵ It is widely recognised that it was Hooker who first advanced within the post-Reformation Church the use of reason as an essential ingredient in order to act as a counterpoise to Calvinism's appeal to Scripture and Rome's appeal to tradition.⁴⁶ In an attempt to avoid the extremes of Puritan scriptural exclusiveness on the one hand and Catholic dependence on the authority of church councils on the other, Hooker chose to emphasise the roles of human reason

⁴² Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Reformed Theologian of the Church of England* (Regent College Publishing, 2005), p. 330.

⁴³ For a brief informed discussion of the three major parties that emerged within Anglicanism, see W.J. Wolf, J.E. Booty, and O.C. Thomas (eds.), *The Spirit of Anglicanism: Hooker, Maurice, Temple* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1979), p. v.

⁴⁴ This interpretation will be largely based on the work of W. J. T. Kirby. Esp. his monograph study *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (1990).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Neill, S., *Anglicanism* (London and Oxford, Mowbray, 1977).

⁴⁶ Neill, *Anglicanism*, p. 123.

and natural theology in justifying religious beliefs and practices. De-emphasising the Calvinist notion that salvation demands some special dispensation of grace, Hooker focused on elements of religion that were, in principle, accessible to all.

At the centre of the Puritan-conformist controversy lay the complex theological issue of the exact relationship that exists between mankind's natural and innate knowledge of God and the divine will as expressed in creation, and the supernatural knowledge of God that mankind can only discover through the means of special revelation. What Hooker needed to do, then, was to define and delimit the different types of law and their spheres of operation in order to avoid the confusion which springs from attempting to measure all mankind's knowledge by the one or by the other. Hooker tackles this precise issue head-on in Book One of the *Lawes*.

He opens his discussion by reminding readers that those who were wishing to uphold the then current position and discipline of the Church of England 'are accused as men that will not have Christ to rule over them' and so have 'wilfully cast his statutes behind their backs, hating to be reformed, and made subject unto the sceptor of his discipline'.⁴⁷ Since the Church's 'rites, customs, and orders of Ecclesiasticall government' were under severe attack it was essential for Hooker to 'offer the laws by which we live unto the general trial and judgement of the whole world'.⁴⁸ By adopting this course Hooker was attempting to place the whole controversy in the context of God's working throughout the whole of creation. By doing so Hooker was able to demonstrate that scriptural laws functioned in a wider context and that it was essential, if they were to be properly understood, to understand their relationship to the other laws of God.

Hooker argues that the whole universe is governed by a hierarchy of laws. Each of these laws is of a different nature and they relate to the differing aspects of creation so that each type of creature was governed by a set of laws proportionable and appropriate to the demands and the limits of its own nature. This was true and applied even to God who operated according to the law eternal although Hooker was quick to point out that this did not in any way hinder the freedom of God since the imposition of this law upon himself was entirely his own free and voluntary act. In this sense God was like and yet unlike the rest of his creation. He was like the rest of creation in that he worked as the rest of creation did according to law and yet he was unlike the rest of creation because the law by which God worked was not imposed upon him by a superior authority but was merely 'that order by which God before all ages hath set down within himselfe, for himselfe, to do all things by'.⁴⁹

It was, of course, important for Hooker to make this point if the rest of his argument was going to stick. Hooker needed to reiterate again and again that God's eternal law over his creation was mediated through a series of laws and that these laws were grounded in God's own nature and character. It was part of God's nature to work in an orderly and reasonable way, and consequently it should not come as any surprise to discover that God's creation also worked in an orderly and reasonable way, especially if it is remembered that nature is God's own instrument. Hooker puts it rhetorically: 'Who [is] the guide of nature but only the God of nature?'; and, as nature's guide, the law 'aeternall receyveth according unto different kinds of things which are subject unto it different and sundry kinds of names'.⁵⁰ Consequently that part

⁴⁷ Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Vol. I, of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker* (Belknap Press, 1977), 1.1.3, 1, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hooker, *Lawes*, 1.2.6, 1, p. 63.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

of God's law which orders nature Hooker calls 'natures law', and that part which order and controls angels he calls:

...coelestiall and heavenly: the law of reason that which bindeth creatures reasonable in this world, and with which by reason they may perceive themselves to be bound; that which bindeth them, and is not known but by special revelation from God, Divine law; humane law that which out of the either of reason or of God, men probablie gathering to be expedient, they make it a law.⁵¹

Hooker has now identified the varying hierarchies of law; Nature's law is the law which each created thing keeps 'unwittingly', almost automatically, as seen in the 'heavens and elements of the world, which can do no otherwise than they doe'. Similarly, celestial law binds and controls the angels of heaven, who, because they live in such close proximity to God, 'they adore him; and being rapt with the love of his beauty they cleave inseparably for ever unto him'.⁵² Nature's law and celestial law govern the created and heavenly worlds. In both these cases there, on the whole, unqualified obedience – nature kept her course 'unwittingly' whilst the angels, although 'voluntary agents' with an 'intellectual nature' similar to man's, live in such close proximity to God that rebellion is deemed to be highly unlikely. But with mankind the situation is entirely different and more complex.

This complexity can be noted, first of all, by the different laws that apply to mankind and Hooker points to at least three varying types of law, namely the law of reason, divine law and human law. But why should this be the case? It is the case, Hooker maintains, because all these differing laws point to the various ends to which each creature is being led. Humans are complex animals – as creatures living in this world they are subject, as other creatures are, to the law of nature. But this alone cannot exhaust the final end for which they were created. Humans are also, Hooker reminds us, voluntary and intellectual creatures and as such there is a certain freedom given to them which is denied to other natural agents who can only 'worke by simple necessity'. Moreover, mankind is also created 'according to the likeness of his maker, and therefore stands in a unique relation to God. Endued with the gift of reason, God expects mankind to employ this gift in order to frame laws that reason tells them need to be obeyed. Hooker insists however that these laws of reason can be discovered without the 'helpe of revelation supernaturall and divine'.⁵³ The law of reason is not extended 'as to conteine in it all maner laws whereunto reasonable creatures are bound'.⁵⁴ A further law exists, a law supernatural and divine, which pertains to mankind's spiritual nature created as they are in the image of God. As God's image-bearer mankind desires spiritual perfection, but this perfection cannot be achieved without supernatural revelation for it 'exceedeth the reach of sense' and is 'somewhat above [the] capacitie of reason'.⁵⁵ This is where Scripture comes into play, pointing out the road that mankind must take if they are to be saved everlastingly. All the other laws cannot reveal this spiritual end to human life.

Hooker has now demonstrated the various laws by which mankind operates and has also shown that these laws have their origin in God. Because this is the case it cannot be right for Puritans to insist that people can only obey God when they are specifically acting in response to biblical law. Divine law has a divine end and purpose. It was given for a particular

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 1.4.1, 1, p. 70.

⁵³ Ibid., 1.8.9, 1, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.8.10, 1, p. 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.11.4, 1, p. 115.

reason. People are not just spiritual beings. They are also physical, reasonable and voluntary agents and these different aspects of their nature necessitate differing types of law. But, having made this point, Hooker nevertheless conceded that even without supernatural and divine law mankind can still discover, through the use of their reason, something of life's spiritual end.

Given Hooker's polemical purpose to show that it was possible to obey the varying laws of the created order without automatically thereby displeasing God, it could only strengthen his case if he could point to worthy pagans who, without the benefit of divine law, were nevertheless able to discover things about God. Hooker is able to prove this by employing the concept of potentiality, linking it to his hierarchy of laws and duly applying it to the created order. Naturally God is not part of this process as he 'cannot be that which now is not'.⁵⁶ But whilst God cannot be unrealised potential, creation certainly is; hence the need for the hierarchical structure of universal law to lead creation onward to its appointed ends. 'All things', argues Hooker, 'are somewhat in possibility, which as yet they are not in act. And for this cause there is in all things an appetite or desire, whereby they incline to something which they may be'.⁵⁷ The whole of creation is straining and travailing for an ever closer union with God. This travail finds its most acute expression in the life of mankind, heathen or Christian. 'This is not only knowne to us', continues Hooker, 'who [Christ] himselfe hath so instructed, but even they do acknowledge, who amongst men are not judged the nearest unto him.'⁵⁸ Hooker then alludes to Plato and Mercurius Trismegistus who had both defined the aim of human life to be participation in the life of God.

In making this point Hooke is attempting to prove that the natural law of reason is able to discern a great deal; and this without the need of special revelation but purely from the light of natural discourse. Not only can the law of reason attain to the knowledge of the divine existence, it can also from this point deduce other laws.

Accordingly there is a natural way to discover the mind and will of God without the aid of supernatural revelation, and it cannot possibly, therefore, be maintained that by obeying these natural dictates of reason mankind does injury to the power and wisdom of the special revelation that God does see fit to provide through the Scriptures. For Scripture is not the only law provided by God for mankind's use.

Hooker elevates reason, almost exalting it into an independent source of revelation. But what exactly does this use of reason amount to? On the one hand it amounts to a great deal. It informs mankind that there is a God who is to be worshipped and adored. It also informs them of their duty to their fellow human beings. This is no small achievement for it lies at the heart, as Hooker pointed out, of the Law and the Prophets. But beyond this point it could not go. Hooker warned his readers that the law of reason did not 'contein all maner lawes whereunto reasonable creatures are bound'.⁵⁹ It did not have the ability or the power to inform mankind about the way to eternal life. On the contrary, the path to which reason did point could only serve to make salvation forever unattainable for the 'natural means...unto blessedness' logically pointed to 'works'.⁶⁰ But works were, in this sphere, corrupted by sin and could not aid mankind in their securing of the gift of eternal life. 'But examine the works we do', Hooker pleads, 'and since the firste foundation of the world what one can say, My ways are pure?'⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1.5.1, 1, p. 72.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.5.3, 1, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1.8.10, 1, p. 91.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.11.5, 1, p. 115.

⁶¹ Ibid.

And so the conclusion to which Hooker comes to is that either there is no way unto salvation or, if there is, then it must be ‘a way supernaturall’, a way that could never have entered into a person’s heart and that was utterly beyond their reason to conceive or imagine. And this ‘supernatural way’ is the way given to mankind by the gracious act of God in revealing his son Jesus Christ in the Holy Scriptures.

Conclusion

By attacking the extreme Biblicism of Calvin’s followers Hooker attempted to show that there was a close relationship between grace and nature, reason and revelation. Nevertheless, although this relationship is close, grace and nature, reason and revelation are not identical. They each have their spheres of operation and influence and an overemphasis on the one must not distort the other. Hooker’s argument can be summarised in two statements, namely that ‘when supernatural duties are necessarily exacted, natural are not rejected as needless’⁶² and that the benefite of natures light be thought excluded as unnecesarie, because the necessities of a diviner light is magnified’.⁶³ His position was based squarely on the doctrine of the two realms. He sought to do justice to mankind’s need of grace whilst at the same time acknowledging the truth that, made in the image of God, human reason had great scope and ability. In doing so Hooker sought a middle course between the two extremes; on the one hand giving reason a degree of control over revelation whilst also allowing revelation to control reason’s activity. This was Hooker’s *via media*; one that embraced an element of doubt. This element of doubt, as the following chapters will attempt to show, was arguably the dominant epistemological basis of a religious and scientific ethos which privileged an empirical approach and which, in contrast to continental philosophy, accepted that religious and scientific knowledge was provisional and probabilistic.

In regards to the long-term impact on English religion and natural philosophy, Hooker initiated two important issues. Firstly, is the issue of what counts as an acceptable argument both in religious discussions and in natural philosophy. Hooker introduced a doctrine that made Anglican natural theology particularly appealing to those who were voluntarists regarding God’s will. This doctrine was also known as ‘probabilism.’ According to most Christian Aristotelian philosophers including Thomas Aquinas, one had to demand absolute certainty of any religious or natural philosophical statement that commands assent. Such certainty could only be achieved in two ways: either through immediate intuition or through logical deduction from intuitively given first principles. In the *Lawes*, Hooker followed other reformation thinkers in shifting the focus of Christian doctrine from strictly theological issues – that is, issues concerned with the nature of God – to issues of Christian ethics, morality, and duties. Christian doctrine thus became a subject for probable arguments rather than conclusive demonstrations.

The best that could be hoped for was what later Anglican theologians, such as William Chillingworth, perhaps the greatest developer of Hooker’s probabilistic ideas, called ‘moral certainty,’ or enough confidence to preclude reasonable doubt. Most seventeenth-century followers of Hooker came to the conclusion that very little knowledge that purported to be about things that really exist – whether those things were natural objects of sensory experience, or non-sensed spiritual entities such as angels or even God – could be more than probable. A

⁶² Ibid., 1.12.1, 1, p. 119.

⁶³ Ibid., 1.14.4, 1, p. 129.

major consequence of this probabilistic approach emphasised by Chillingworth and others was that the acceptance of propositions in religion and in natural philosophy had to depend on the same kind of evaluation of evidence and argumentation. This approach, as well shall see, formed the basis of the ‘matter of fact’ methodology that was later adopted by the early Royal Society.

The second of Hooker’s arguments that had a major impact on religion and natural philosophy was related with God’s ongoing role in the natural world. Hooker went far beyond Aquinas’ concern regarding God as the first cause of the world to emphasise God’s role as creator, organiser, lawgiver, and efficient cause of all. ‘It cannot be,’ he wrote, ‘But nature has some director of infinite knowledge to guide her in all her ways...Those things which nature is said to do, are by divine art performed using as an instrument; nor is there any such art or knowledge divine in nature herself working, but in the guide of natures work’⁶⁴ All natural objects do ‘proceedeth originally from some such agent, as knoweth, appointeth, holdeth up, and even actually formeth the same’.⁶⁵ Hooker made two important and related points in these sentences. First, he denied the Hermetic/Paracelsian/neo-Platonist argument that the universe contained within itself an *anima mundi*, or world soul, capable of directing nature internally and without God. Second, he argued that God was more than simply the creator of the universe. In fact, he had an ongoing role, he was ‘both the Creator and the *Worker* of all in all’.⁶⁶ Later natural philosophers such as Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton, for example, held that the investigation of God’s providence was central to their natural philosophy.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Lawes*, 1.3.2, 1 p. 67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:158.

⁶⁷ On Newton conception of God’s providence shaping his natural philosophy, for example, I highly recommend Stephen Snobelen’s masterful chapter, “To Discourse of God: Isaac Newton’s Heterodox Theology and his Natural Philosophy”. In Paul Wood, ed. *Science and Dissent in England, 1688-1945*. (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004) pp. 39-65.

III. The Great Tew Circle and the ethos of Irenicism.

“In the writing of Great Tew we are dealing with an ethos, and not with a social unit”⁶⁸

After Hooker, the most important stage in the development of the English irenic theological method in the seventeenth-century was the founding of the ‘Great Tew circle’ in the 1630s. The contributions of the members are crucial, not only to the formal expression of the value of reason in demonstrating the truth of Christianity, but also in the elaboration of an irenic ethos that was thoroughly grounded in a desire for religious unity. The most substantial recent scholarly interest in the group that gathered around Lucius Cary, second viscount Falkland, at Great Tew has centred on matters of religion, politics, and the history of toleration and freedom of thought. In this chapter I will argue that Falkland’s circle were decisive in the construction of a rational and firm basis for religious belief within the Church of England. By this I mean that they were not merely an ephemeral house-party but a remarkably coherent group of men with clear and consistent ideas. Their ideas not only reflect the enduring significance of Hooker’s *Lawes*, but also the emergence of a particular philosophy which was marked by an acceptance of sceptical reason in matters of religion.⁶⁹ This sceptical reason, they believed, was the chief tool to build the true Church of England.

Falkland and his Circle

Great Tew is a small village that lies about sixteen miles northwest of Oxford. Little remains now to recall the importance that this place enjoyed as an intellectual centre. The Great Tew Circle lay outside academia and the established church, away from the running battles between Archbishop Laud and his Calvinist enemies. Indeed, it was at Great Tew that the most sympathetic supporters of the original English *via media* could be found - who had returned with renewed vigour to the method of mediation. At Great Tew visitors could study in their host’s impressive library, walk in the grounds, and dine with the family when they pleased. Standing at a civilised remove from the universities and from the court, Great Tew provided an ideal setting for theological, ethical and political discussion. The conversation which took place began to move the religious agenda away from the physical and polemical warfare raging between Catholics and Protestants, as Falkland’s learned guests began to think about how religious sincerity and civil harmony could be maintained.

Falkland’s circle, as one might expect, were not simply building upon Hooker’s *Lawes*. They were primarily directed toward the study of England’s religious infrastructure as a result of their own disillusionment. Reacting against the increasing clamour of Calvinistic Puritans and the supposed excessive Romanism of the Laudian Party, the circle returned to Hooker’s method of mediation. In contrast the first two decades of the seventeenth-century had witnessed

⁶⁸ Cited in M. L. Donnelly, “‘The Great Difference of Time’: The Great Tew Circle and the Emergence of the Neoclassical Mode’ in C. J. Summers and T. L. Peabworth (eds.), *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England* (The University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 187. For original source see, J. C. Hayward, ‘New Directions in Studies of the Falkland Circle’ *The Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 1987.

⁶⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 229.

a period of relative societal and religious stability. This was, in part, due to the irenic endeavours and policies of James I. James had encouraged such intellectuals as Jacques-Auguste de Thou, Jean Hotman, Isaac Casaubon, Hugo Grotius, and Georg Calixtus, all of whom sought to reconcile religious differences among Christians. He had also striven for closer relations among the major Christian churches – English, Calvinist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox – out of the conviction that they shared a common heritage and as a way of easing tensions in an era of recurring religious wars. Even at the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, he worked tirelessly to try to reconcile the warring parties, despite opposition to efforts at home and abroad.⁷⁰

The thought of the Great Tew Circle was marked by a commitment to reasoned argument. Falkland and his friends were searching for a solution to the bitter religious and theological warfare which surrounded them, and they found one in the ideal of concord and irenicism shared by Erasmus, Hooker, and Grotius. This irenic, rationalist position was underpinned by a sceptical approach to Christianity. Falkland's friends put the individual at the centre of their version of Christianity, and they sought to disentangle the religious demands which God placed on individuals from the earthly requirements of civil life.

Relationships in early seventeenth-century England are tangled and close, and I think Great Tew and its circle provides an area for a helpful and steady focus on one of the main currents of intellectual life in this period. From a theological perspective, the most important members of the circle were Lucius Gray, the second Viscount Falkland, William Chillingworth, and Henry Hammond, and John Hales. These thinkers knew one another intimately, and collaborated on much of their work. Falkland's most important theological work, his *Discourse of Infallibility*, was the product of discussions with Chillingworth; and Chillingworth's major work, *The Religion of Protestants*, was written during his stay at Great Tew. Hammond not only edited Falkland's writings but also gave a long defence of his *Discourse*.⁷¹ Although Hales probably never visited Great Tew, he knew Falkland and Chillingworth well and was an important influence on both.⁷² He wrote his famous tract, 'On Schism and Schismatics', for 'the use of a private friend,' who was most probably Chillingworth.

While it is difficult to find common ideals among all the members of the Great Tew Circle, it is easy to do so in the case of Falkland, Chillingworth, Hammond, and Hales. The hallmarks of their theology are rationalism, irenicism, and, to use a somewhat anachronistic term coined only in the 1660s, 'latitudinarianism'. In ecclesiastical affairs, Falkland, Chillingworth, and Hammond were the heirs of Hooker. They too tried to steer a middle way between *jure divino* episcopacy and Presbyterianism, regarding Church government and discipline as 'indifferent matters' that are best determined according to the civil sovereign and constitution of the land.

The theological views of Falkland, Chillingworth, Hammond, and Hales deserve close analysis because of their significance and influence. In the context of this study they are important for at least three reasons. First, they gave reason a high authority in religion. In this regard they resemble Hooker. But they went further by proposing that we should examine all

⁷⁰ The irenic endeavours of James I are set forth convincingly in W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷¹ See Henry Hammond, *A View of the Exceptions which have been made by a Romanist to the Lord Viscount Falkland's Discourse of the Infallibility of the Church of Rome*, in *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Henry Hammond* (London, 1684), II, pp. 567-628.

⁷² On Hales' relationship with Falkland and Chillingworth, see K. Weber, *Lucius Cary* (Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 161-66, and 209-10.

beliefs according to reason into a religious duty, indeed into the characteristic obligation of the Protestant. Second, the Great Tew men laid down the foundation for the broad-middle way that became predominant in the Church of England in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁷³ There is indeed little in the broad Church Principles of Edward Stillingfleet, John Tillotson, Gilbert Burnet, and Simon Patrick that we do not find in Falkland, Chillingworth, and Hammond. If it can be permitted that Hooker was the father of latitudinarianism, these Great Tew men were its most important transmitters, providing the connecting link between Hooker and his late-seventeenth century heirs.⁷⁴ Third, although they advocated a degree of sceptical reasoning, the Great Tew men were also concerned to defend religious belief against excessive doubt. In their attempts to do, they developed a pragmatism that later became essential for the defence of the growing natural sciences in seventeenth-century England. Natural philosophers like Robert Boyle, and John Wilkins applied the same concept to defend their experimental philosophy.⁷⁵

Although Falkland, Chillingworth, Hammond, and Hales regarded themselves as Protestants knights in the struggle against the dogmatism of the Catholic Church, their religious views differed from Protestant orthodoxy. Implicitly or explicitly, they would sometimes depart in fundamental respects from the theology of Luther and Calvin. First, they held that faith could be acquired through natural reason alone without the assistance of divine grace – otherwise known as the concept of ‘right reason’.

While they admitted that grace was necessary for a certainty that goes beyond the evidence, they also insisted that God does not require mankind to believe any proposition more than the evidence warrants. Since, furthermore, they held that there is sufficient evidence for all our essential beliefs, they were also committed to the view that grace is not necessary for one to have faith.⁷⁶

Second, Falkland, Chillingworth, Hammond, and Hales were unfavourably disposed to the doctrine of predestination because of its apparent fatalistic implications which undermined the motivation for moral conduct. Their sympathies lay more towards a Pelagian view that all human beings had the power to earn their salvation through good works.⁷⁷ Third, they disapproved of the intolerance, zeal, and dogmatism of orthodox Protestantism as much as that of orthodox Catholicism. Thus Hammond criticised Calvin for burning Servetus; Chillingworth reprimanded Luther for his persecution of Anabaptists; and Falkland simply forswore the whole ‘bloody tenet of persecution’.⁷⁸ In general, the Great Tew men maintained that the very

⁷³ On the influence of the Great Tew circle upon Latitudinarianism, see, for example, James Elson, *John Hales of Eton* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1948), pp. 155-59; and Pierre Des Maizeaux, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Life and Writings of the Ever-Memorable Mr. John Hales* (London, 1719), pp. 20-5.

⁷⁴ Examples of studies that support this idea include M. I. J. Griffin, JR., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (E.J. Brill, 1992); and Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defence of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ On this development, see H. G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630-1690* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 13-32; and Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 3-10, 82-3, 74-118.

⁷⁶ In an unpublished manuscript Chillingworth was quite explicit on this point: ‘to have faith raised, confirmed, and settled in me, by a supernatural agent, is no work at all of mind, and therefore I can deserve no thanks for it.’ As cited in Robert Orr, *Reason and Authority: The Thought of William Chillingworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 79.

⁷⁷ See for example, Hammond’s *Of the Reasonableness of the Christian Religion*, chap. V in Hammond, *Works*, I, 149; William Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants, A Safe Way to Salvation*, in *The Works of William Chillingworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1838), I, vii, 4; II, 437.

⁷⁸ Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants*, I, v, 96, II, 247; and Hammond, *View, Works*, II, 596.

spirit of Protestantism consisted in freedom of conscience, which could not be impelled. To do so only led to disagreements and, inevitably, to conflict and strife.

Fourth, and most important of all, the Great Tew men sought to purge the Protestant faith of all dogma by insisting upon the distinction between what was fundamental and what was not. Falkland, for example, was himself said to have ‘such a latitude of opinion, he believed nothing in the Church could not be dispensed’.⁷⁹ The aim of this ‘latitude opinion’ was to determine the method for establishing the minimum requirements of faith. Such a method, with its deliberate policy of doctrinal minimalism, forms the lynchpin of the general irenic character of the Great Tew circle. They firmly believed that it was the only way to avoid dissension, to promote unity within the Church, and, most importantly, to reach the truth in matters of faith. Such was the general outlook which the men of Great Tew held in common.

The Philosophy of the Great Tew

Desidrius Erasmus, Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius...these very names define a clear irenic tradition. Let us seek to extract that tradition. Then we can see how far it was adopted by Falkland and his circle.

Politically, it was a conservative tradition. Though they were often denounced as heretics, none of its advocates can be classed as radicals. All of them wished to preserve the form of society which they had inherited. Erasmus disclaimed any desire to alter the structure of Church or state, though he did seek reform in both. Hooker, as we have seen, was the eloquent defender of the Elizabethan settlement. Grotius accepted the established Calvinism of the Netherlands, just as Erasmus had accepted its established Catholicism. One of his most treasured quotations was the phrase in which Thucydides expressed the same conviction: ‘whatever form of government we have received, that we should keep.’⁸⁰

They were therefore opposed to radical change because it involved violence and war, which they detested. Erasmus, for example, denied the whole concept of the just war. ‘War is not absolutely forbidden’, he wrote, ‘but it is better to be killed than to kill’.⁸¹ To avoid such violence, all these men preached the importance of irenicism, especially in matters ‘indifferent’. Erasmus was the first writer to make the distinction between *fundamenta*, or essential doctrines, and *adiaphora*, on which men could agree to differ; and to increase the list of *adiaphora* in the cause of irenicism was the constant aim of his successors.⁸²

With irenicism comes a degree of scepticism. The scepticism of Erasmus was notorious and exasperated his adversaries on all sides. Erasmus would have been content to leave many problems in suspense and he urged his contemporaries to do the same in order to turn aside from controversy about indifferent or unknowable things and concentrate upon essentials: upon ‘the philosophy of Christ’ which was so clear and simple and could so easily be extracted ‘from

⁷⁹ The comment upon Falkland was given by his friend, Edward Hyde, later Earl of Clarendon, as cited in John Henry, ‘The Scientific Revolution in England’ in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 7, p. 192.

⁸⁰ Cited in Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans*, p. 193.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (London, Collins, 1970), p. 225. There are two other commanding studies that should be consulted concerning the legacy of Erasmus: B. Mansfield, *Phoenix of his Age: Interpretations of Erasmus, c. 1550-1750* (University of Toronto Press, 1979). G. D. Dodds, *Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmian Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

the purest sources of the evangelists and apostles and their most approved interpreters'.⁸³ His successors continued this tradition. Hugo Grotius, along with the other Dutch Arminians, was regularly accused of scepticism. The Great Tew members agreed with their forebears. Scepticism was compatible with Christianity – and even necessary to it. 'It shall well befit our Christian modesty', wrote Hales, 'to participate somewhat of the sceptick'.⁸⁴

On the basis of such a philosophy, there was, most importantly, the ideal of the reunion of Christendom, split apart by the Reformation and Counter Reformation. Such a reunion had been the aim of Erasmus, and although by the end of his life, it seemed further away than ever, it was not forgotten. In England the idealised and rhetorical *via media* set out by Hooker offered a concrete model, rejecting alike the superstitious innovations of Rome and the pedantries of Protestantism, and firmly based, as we have seen, on the twin pillars of correctly understood Scripture and human reason. The English model seemed the most promising, and the European heirs of Erasmus looked to it as the epicentre of the third Church which would ultimately lead the way to a united Christendom.

Throughout his life Grotius sought-perhaps above everything else-the reunion of Christendom; and he sought it in the same form as Hooker. His ideal Church was to be based on Scripture and Reason: Scripture interpreted by Reason, cleaned by exact scholarship and protected by irenicism and scepticism. In the epilogue of his apologetic work, *De Veritate Religionis Christianae* (1640), he expresses his irenic intentions unambiguously. This conclusion is an admonition to all Christians. Entirely in line with his Christian humanist ideals Grotius urges his fellow Christians to lead a pious and virtuous life. He adds an urgent call to mutual unity and peace. He quotes several passages from the Bible to show that all partisanship and schism among Christians are entirely unlawful. Unfortunately they exist. For his remedy Grotius looks to the relativity of human knowledge, reminding his readers that it is good to observe a certain degree of moderation in the quest for knowledge. Differences of opinion are only very relative and must not be the occasion for mutual hate and enmity. Rather, one should devote one's talent to improving one's own life. In short, Grotius believed that a certain degree of scepticism could act as a salutary remedy against an unhealthy craving for doctrinal certainty, and the disunity that stems from it. Its end, he hoped, would be the restoration of an irenic, national, universal Church.⁸⁵

If we now turn from the tradition which the Great Tew acknowledged to the philosophy which they expressed, we find similar distinctive characteristics. They all strongly believed in peace. Nothing troubled Hales more than 'the brawls which were grown from religion'.⁸⁶ Hammond, according to his biographer, both preached and practiced 'that great fundamental doctrine of peace and love'.⁸⁷ All advocated a kind of intellectual irenicism and hoped, by enlarging the category of 'things indifferent', to restore the unity of the Church. All believed in the positive function of scepticism – though some of them were prepared to carry scepticism further than others.

⁸³ Cited in Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans*, p. 194.

⁸⁴ Reply to White in *Discourse* (1660), p. 265.

⁸⁵ For this short account of Grotius I have relied heavily on the commanding study by J.P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of His Work De Veritate Religionis Christianae (1640)* (Brill:Leiden:Boston, 2004), ch. 4. See also G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, "Hugo Grotius as an irenicist," in *The World of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium organised by the Grotius Committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Rotterdam 6-9, April 1983, (Amsterdam/Maarssen, 1984).

⁸⁶ As cited in Trevor Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans*, p. 199.

⁸⁷ John Fell, *The Life of...Dr Hammond* (1661), p. 16.

William Chillingworth

In his book *The Platonic Renaissance in England* Ernst Cassirer pointed out that Chillingworth in the seventeenth-century, like Hooker in the sixteenth-century, had argued for the comprehensive and irenic character of the Church of England; both were preoccupied with peaceableness, both shared the conviction that disparate doctrinal interpretations should coexist decently.⁸⁸

Chillingworth was indebted to the Great Tew circle and in 1637 he published a book which was to have a profound effect upon the course of religion in England for the remainder of the century. *The Religion of Protestants, A Safe Way to Salvation* was Chillingworth's masterpiece and acted as a sort of microcosm for what the Great Tew circle was all about. The book itself is long and difficult to extract, but one well-known passage from chapter 6 expresses the force and the substance of his argument:

I do not understand the Doctrine of *Luther*, or *Calvin*, or *Melancthon*; nor the Confession of *Augusta* [Augustine], or *Geneva*, nor the Catechism of *Heidelberg*, nor the Article of the Church of *England*, nor the *Harmony* of Protestant Confessions; but what wherein they all agree, and which they all subscribe with a greater Harmony, as a perfect Rule of their Faith and Actions, that is, the BIBLE. The BIBLE, I say, the BIBLE only, is the Religion of Protestants! Whatsoever else they believe besides it, and the plain, irrefragable, indutitable Consequences of it, well may they hold it as a Matter of Opinion: But as a matter of Faith and Religion, neither can they with coherence to their own Grounds believe it themselves, nor require the Belief of it of others, without most high and most schismatical presumption. I for my Part, after a long and...impartial search of the true way to Eternal happiness, do profess plainly that I cannot find any Rest for the sole of my Foot, but upon this Rock only.

Chillingworth writes with strong intensity on the supposed clarity and simplicity of Christianity. It had been over forty years since Hooker wrote his *Lawes*, but there remains the insistence on natural reason and its capacity to survey the scriptures with urgency, along with an underlying belief in the supreme and sensible ability of the English church to reveal the necessities-essential and simple-of faith.

Chillingworth was not concerned with the ceremonial formalities of religious worship; rather he was particularly interested in the question of the criterion of certainty of religious beliefs. He was a diligent student of the works of Sextus Empiricus, and undoubtedly his understanding of scepticism gave impetus to his desire to establish a certain criterion for matters of faith.⁸⁹ In *The Religion of Protestants* Chillingworth wanted to show that doctrinal conflicts need not be moral issues and to relocate true Christianity in individual ethics and conduct. Through his researches into the Catholic tradition, Chillingworth had come to accept that the opinions of Christians had varied in the past, and that they might never cohere in the future. In his opinion, heaven was wide enough to contain men of conflicting views. Chillingworth, therefore, set out to demonstrate that the Scriptures were credible and that all must judge for themselves both the accuracy of the Scriptures as historical texts and the morality of the doctrine which they contained.

The truth of the Scriptures could only be ascertained though the use of natural reason, a reason cultivated by charity, openness, a lack of sectarianism, and a deep scepticism –

⁸⁸ I owe this reference to Robert R. Orr's own observations in his *Reason and Authority: The Thought of William Chillingworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. IX.

⁸⁹ Robert Todd Carroll, *The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet 1635-1699* (Martinus Nijhoff-The Hague, 1975), p. 5.

scepticism, one should add, greatly stimulated by the Huguenot pastor of Charenton, Jean Daillé (1594-1670), the author of *Traicté de l'employ des saints père* (1632), a book well known at Great Tew that revealed the numerous incompatibilities in patristic writings and rejected the authority of the Fathers as irrelevant for his time. Daillé's book encouraged Chillingworth's own uncertainty and return to the generous amplitude of Hooker. Chillingworth thus plead for unity based implicitly on his understanding of Hooker's explication of the eternal law, and the primacy of scripture read through right reason.⁹⁰

Chillingworth neatly summarised this line of argument: 'It being indeed a plain impossibility for any man to submit to his reason but to reason; for he that doth it to authority must of necessity think himself to have greater reason to believe that authority.'⁹¹ Thus Chillingworth and the Great Tew circle argued that we have a moral and religious duty to examine all beliefs according to reason. The chief rule of reason was that we should only accept a belief if there is sufficient evidence for that said belief. We are not bound to believe anything if it is not clear and evident to our understanding, or at least if there are no probable reasons for it. In his *Religion of Protestants* Chillingworth wrote: 'I shall believe nothing which reason will not convince that I ought to believe it.'⁹² He further explained that 'God does not require us as our duty to give a greater assent to the conclusion than the premises deserve.'⁹³ Similarly, in his *Discourse*, Falkland maintained that someone is in 'the State of a Naturall Foole' if he accepts any doctrine as divine when his 'understanding is not convinced of the same.'⁹⁴ Chillingworth's religious philosophy thus placed a great deal of faith in common-sense (right reason), a faith that was ultimately based upon a profound belief in the providence of God. The reliability of common-sense in practical affairs, especially religious affairs, was assured only if it could be assumed that God did not give us faculties which were essentially unreliable.

Chillingworth's adoption of right reason reveals two important points. First, it was a middle ground, holding that there is a measure of certainty which is possible. Though such certainty is not infallible, it is the best that can be had under the circumstances and therefore must suffice. The application of right reason, for Chillingworth, was the only way to reach the truth. The certainty of right reason thus forms the basis for the problem of religious disputes and for Chillingworth's irenicism. Second, given the fact that the human mind is unable to achieve absolute certainty, it is therefore only natural that men should disagree with one another concerning religious matters.⁹⁵ Thus it was reasonable that men be forbearing of each other's religious differences. In short, Christian unity did not imply the need for religious uniformity.

There is no Danger to any State from any Man's opinion, unless it be such an Opinion by which Disobedience to Authority, or Impiety, is taught or licensed... And how can it be in any way advantageous to Civil Government, that men without warrant from God should usurp a tyranny over other men's consciences, and prescribe unto them, without reason, and sometimes against reason, what they shall believe...⁹⁶

⁹⁰ I owe this point to Paul G. Standwood's essay 'Community and Social Order in the Great Tew Circle', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 180.

⁹¹ Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants*, I, ii, 14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, I, vi, 62.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, I, ii, 154.

⁹⁴ As cited in Beiser, *Sovereignty of Reason*, p. 125.

⁹⁵ Robert R. Orr, p. 152.

⁹⁶ As cited in Robert Todd Carroll, p. 10. See Chillingworth, *Works*, pp. 292-93.

As the extract suggests, Chillingworth's irenicism was also rooted in a readiness to accept differences in matters of faith, not just the search for a common doctrinal basis. In fact, the only sure basis of comprehensive lay in this approach. It was the only way to achieve a well ordered society, free from disruption and violence.

Henry Hammond

Hammond was an enormous active writer and polemicist on behalf of the English church. He is perhaps best known in his own time for *A Practical Catechism* (1644), a work that particularly appealed to the king, whom he attended as chaplain until the king's confinement at Carisbrooke in December 1647. But many of Hammond's publications were written to meet particular exigencies, none more compelling than the execution of the king and the apparent collapse of the church and of the royalist cause in 1649. Thus, Hammond published *Of the Reasonableness of Christian Religion* (1650), a tract that displays cogently the basis of Christianity as he understood it – and recalls the intellectual tradition of Hooker's *Laws* as transmitted through the Great Tew circle. Underlying his argument is the discussion in chapter 2 'concerning the use of reason in deciding controversies in religion.' Hammond states, for example, that 'the measure of man's natural power of knowing or judging of things is his participating of those things, in some degree, with God, in whom they are as in the fountain: so that man may find, and behold them in himself as truly, though not as eminently, or in the same degree, as they are in God.'⁹⁷

Hammond followed this work with numerous treatises for promoting the sequestered church, and he worked tirelessly toward its restoration. Of particular interest is his treatise *Of Schism: A Defence of the Church of England against the Exceptions of the Romanists* (1645) that urges the visibility and continuation of the old and nonschismatic church whose temper is 'docile,' felicitous, and dedicated to preserving 'the unity of the apostolical faith and primitive practices as entire as we would have done Christ's body or garment.' Hammond's *Of Schism* would join Falkland's posthumously published *Discourse of Infallibility* in which it is claimed that no grounds exist on which the Roman church can claim infallibility.⁹⁸ Hammond provided a wise and peaceable voice in difficult times, 'for he provided quiet but determined leadership' building up a theological house where the church of the Restoration could live.⁹⁹ Accommodated within this structure was Richard Hooker; the Great Tew circle provided the principal means for conveying Hooker's ideas across the seventeenth-century.

John Hales

John Hales' *On Schism and Schismatics* (1636; first published in 1642), along with Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* and Hammond's various treatises, would set the tone for the 'latitudinarian' movement in England in the latter half of the seventeenth-century. Despite this, however, Hales remains an elusive figure in the history of the English Church.¹⁰⁰ Hales' *Schism and Schismatics* was adduced to demonstrate that 'all difference between church

⁹⁷ See Henry Hammond, *The Miscellaneous Theological Works*, ed. Nicholas Pocock, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, 3rd ed., 5 vols. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1849), 2:29.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 281-2.

⁹⁹ Summers and Peabworth (eds.), *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*, p. 183

¹⁰⁰ The most complete account of his 'life and times' remains John Tulloch's classic *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, first published in two volumes in 1872.

officers [arises] from consent of parties, not from any divine law.¹⁰¹ Like Chillingworth, Hales shared a discontent of dogmatic doctrinal systems maintaining that every man, guided by reason, ought to be his own judge in matters of religion. In the nineteenth-century the philosopher John Toland wrote how Hales' ideas are scattered here and there throughout his writings. The same issue still applies today. However, we shall accordingly draw our quotations from them in order to attempt to present his ideas under a consistent sequence of thought.

The principle element that underlies his entire thought can be summarised as the following: that theological or dogmatic differences are not really religious differences, and should not break the unity of common faith and worship. All theological opinion implies human addition to the religious element – certain 'conceits of men', which in their very nature provoke and admit of diversity of criticism; but this adversity should not be grounds for religious separation and strife. For Hales, there is no reason why men of differing opinions in such matters should not worship together. The 'liberty of judging,' which Hales took to himself, he not only extended to all, but he felt that such right was an inherent Christian right. It was not the difference of opinion which the Church had to fear, but the hardness and perversity of will which transformed such difference into a cause of unchristian estrangement. This is the lynchpin of his irenic theology and the key-note of a great deal of his writing – 'It is not the variety of opinions,' he says in one of his sermons, 'but our own perverse wills, who think it meet that all should be conceited as ourselves are, which hath so inconvenienced the Church. Were we not so ready to anathematise each other, where we concur not in opinion, we might in hearts be united, though in our tongues we were divided, and that with singular profit to all sides. It is the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and not identity of conceit, which the Holy Ghost requires at the hands of Christians.'¹⁰²

There is a highly important passage from the tract *On Schism* which strongly reflects his irenic project:

It hath been the common disease of Christians from the beginning not to contend themselves with that measure of faith which God and the Scripture have expressly afforded us; but out of a vain desire to know more than is revealed, they have attempted to discuss things of which we can have no light, neither from reason nor revelation...conclusions of that nature...have broken out into divisions and factions, opposing man to man, synod to synod, till the peace of the Church vanished, without all possibility of recall. Hence arose those antient and many separations amongst Christians...I do not yet see... that men of different opinions in Christian religion may not hold communion *in sacris*, and both go to one Church.¹⁰³

The value of Hales' writings consists not in any elaborate treatment of theological questions *per se*, but rather in the development of an irenic method in matters of religion. It should therefore not be surprising to learn that Edward Stillingfleet, in his *Irenicum* (1662), quotes Hales profusely. Stillingfleet's *Irenicum* was written for the sole purpose of achieving uniformity in the Church of England in the early years of the Restoration.

¹⁰¹ As cited in M, I. J. Griffin, JR., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 146.

¹⁰² Quotations as cited in Tulloch, (G.A.J. Rogers, ed.) *Rational Theology*, Vol. 1, (Thoemmes Press, 1993), pp. 224-25.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-28.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to discern a clear, yet subtle, ethos within the Great Tew circle. I have shown, I hope, that it was not a mere casual house-gathering but a remarkably coherent group of men with clear and consistent ideas. They developed a philosophy that was part rational, part sceptic underpinned by the desire, with the use of constructive reason, to find a firm basis for belief. I have also shown that they were clearly irenicists to the core; for if such a basis could be found, they believed that religious disputes would become irrelevant and religious unity restored. In all this they were the heirs to a distinct tradition: the tradition of Erasmus and Hooker. Their immediate master was Grotius.

The circle at Great Tew, confronted with the religious conflicts in England which finally led to the Civil War, were passionate in their pleas that men observe the difference between fundamentals and matters indifferent – Christian unity was always their ultimate goal. For their troubles, Falkland and Chillingworth died in the Civil War. Hales died during the Interregnum and Hammond passed away just before the Restoration of Charles II. But the irenic ethos of the Great Tew circle survived in their writings, all of which were written in hope that God would ‘inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity and concord, and grant that all they that confess his holy name, may agree in the truth of his holy word, and live in unity and godly love.’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *Of Fundamentals, The Works of the Reverend and Learned Henry Hammond, D.D.* (4 vols., London, 1684), I, p. 499.

IV. Irenicism and the English Revolution

“Wherein they differ from us, I take it to be a from a conscientious principle; & hope & daily pray, that there may be a right understanding and better agreement between all honest and conscientious people that feare the Lord, that we all as one man with one shoulder, labour to exalt the Kingdome of Jesus Christ, and to advance holiness & righteousness in our several Actions.”¹⁰⁵

“[...] we desire you to countenance and encourage frequent Christian meetings, both publicly and privately, to confer with each other about Gospel duties...avoiding vain and unnecessary questions and disputations, which administer strife.”¹⁰⁶

In English history, the twenty years from 1640 to 1660 are, at first sight, years of desperate, even meaningless change. It is difficult to keep pace with those crowded events or to see any continuity in them. Even Oliver Cromwell, the man who managed, with great agility, but spluttering all the time, to ride the waves, constantly lamented his inability to control them. When all was over, men looked back on the whole experience with disgust. It was a period of ‘blood and confusion’ from which no one had gained anything except the salutary but costly lesson of disillusion.¹⁰⁷

It is the function of the historian, happily separated from such events, to make sense of the historical narrative: to reconstruct it, and so extract its significance. But do we in fact do any better than contemporaries? Are we not ourselves, unless we are the driest of antiquaries, parties in the struggle: royalists and parliamentarians, Presbyterians and Independents, Levellers and Anabaptists, successively hoisting and submerging each other in the turbid stream.

This chapter will present two case studies which, I believe, demonstrate the irenic outlook of English religion (and culture in general) during the period 1640-60. Its course inevitably moves through rugged terrain – and, as a result, the path has been kept deliberately narrow. Thus the purpose of this chapter is not to describe the phenomenon of English irenicism in its entirety during this period. Rather its concern is limited: to examine a relatively small number of individuals who expressed a passionate commitment to a new kind of irenic method in the face of great conflict and civil unrest. In order to provide some helpful context, I will begin with a brief outline of the experience of English religion during the period. I will then offer two concise case studies. First, I will look at Henry Hammond’s enduring commitment to the Church of England and his quest to find it a stable foundation. My second case study is a comparative one. I explore specifically how the writings of Laudian divine Jeremy Taylor, who influenced the development of the Latitudinarian position, were remarkably close to that of the more-radically inclined Leveller movement.

105 J. Cook, *Monarchy No Creature of God’s Making* (Waterford, 1652), sig. f7.

106 R. Dunlop, *Ireland under the Commonwealth* (Manchester University Press, 1913), Vol. 2, pp. 61. Quote taken from *The Parliamentary Commissioners’ care to promote religion*, written in 1651.

¹⁰⁷ The phrase in quotation marks is from J.C.D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 130.

The Church of England in Limbo

The years 1640-60 witnessed the most complete and drastic revolution which the English Church has ever undergone. The turmoil and unrest of the 1640s abolished episcopacy, the church courts, cathedral chapters, and the prayer book. In 1649, the country also became kingless. The defining elements of the Church of England were gone. On the clean-swept ground an entirely novel Church system was erected. In place of Episcopal Church Government, a Presbyterian organisation was introduced coupled with a Presbyterian system of ordination. For the Spiritual courts were substituted Presbyterian Assemblies (Parochial, Classical and Provincial), acting with a very real censorial jurisdiction, but in final subordination to a parliamentary committee sitting at Westminster. Instead of the Thirty-nine Articles the Confession of Faith was introduced, and the Directory in place of the Book of Common Prayer. New Catechisms and a new metrical version were prepared, a parochial survey of the whole country was carried out, and extensive reorganisations of parishes effected. In Cromwell's Commonwealth, congregations might determine their forms of Christian teaching and worship, provided that 'this liberty be not extended to popery or prelacy', to neither Roman Catholicism nor Anglicanism.¹⁰⁸ He sought to unite the godly within a broad ecclesiastical framework, a framework established and policed by the magistrate. Unity would, it was hoped, be maintained by shared commitment to the central principles of Reformed theology.

Continental observers might have concluded that the Church of England did not exist any longer. Prayer Book religion, however, lived on both openly at the exiled court of Charles II and more furtively in England as approximately a quarter of beneficed English clerics refused to conform. Some wrote in its defence, and many served as tutors or chaplains in royalist households. They and conforming sympathisers employed Prayer Book forms wherever they might elude government zeal.¹⁰⁹

Henry Hammond's Irenic Project

During the Interregnum Henry Hammond, Michael McGiffert has observed, 'did as much as any man and a good deal more than most to reinforce and renew the ideational underpinning of his Church. It is difficult to disagree with McGiffert's judgement. Even the independent John Owen likened him to a clerical Atlas bearing on his shoulders 'the whole weight of the episcopal cause'.¹¹⁰

From the middle of the 1640s, Hammond devoted his time to producing tracts and pamphlets in support of the Church of England and its episcopal structure. We have already seen that Grotius was one of his favourite contemporary theologians and Hammond, like his friends at Great Tew, drew on Grotian ideas as he developed his own thoughts. As he did so, Hammond developed English theology in a particular direction and helped to shape what would become known as Restoration Anglicanism.

We have already briefly touched upon Hammond's *Practicall Catechisme* which focused Christianity on personal practice. Hammond's view of Christianity as a matter of

¹⁰⁸ As cited in S. Sykes, J. Booty, and J. Knight (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism* (SPCK/Fortress Press, Revised edition 1998), p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Both quotes cited in M. McGiffert, 'Henry Hammond and Covenant Theology,' *Church History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), pp. 255-285, p. 255.

personal piety and morality contrasted sharply with the prevailing puritan stress on God's grace and on orthodox theology; the attack on puritan theology implicit in *A Practical Catechism* provided struggling Interregnum Anglicans with convincing reasons for remaining aloof from puritan Christianity.

By 1650 it had reached its seventh printing. The *Catechisme* was no conventional work of Reformed, or even Protestant, piety, although it began in irenic vein. Hammond explained that it was designed for students who knew the basic principles of Christianity but wanted direction for the practice of their religion. The focus was, therefore, on those doctrines and scriptural texts which would encourage people to live in peace as good Christians. But Hammond felt that Christian living required the rejection of several Reformed ideas – notably predestination – and an understanding of salvation very different from Calvin's. Christ had died for all men without exception, Hammond thought, and God would only exclude from the kingdom of heaven those who rejected his gracious offer of eternal life. Human beings must, he felt, be persuaded that their salvation lay in their own hands and was conditional upon their obedience to the precepts of Christ. Only then would England see the practice of true Christianity.

The point that I want to make abundantly clear here is Hammond's irenic project. It can be discerned from nearly all of his sermons, and his major works. The seeds of which were planted during his time at Great Tew and blossomed in reaction to the strife of the 1640s and 1650s. In his sermon titled 'The Christians Obligation to Peace and Charity,' for example, Hammond rejects any association of Christianity with conflict. Hammond here is clearly referring to armed warfare rather than verbal disputes; as chaplain to Charles I, he preached this sermon during the Advent season of 1647, while the king was under guard at Carisbrook Castle. The previous years had witnessed various factions vying for control of the king's person and the country's leadership. The army had seized Charles from Parliament's control in June; the Independents of Parliament fled London riots in late July, only to be restored by the army in early August; and a November mutiny in the army (following the inconclusive Putney debates) was resolved only a few weeks before Hammond's sermon. Addressing the king of a country ravaged by civil wars, whose very enemies were quarrelling violently, Hammond was nonetheless adamant that Christianity precluded the possibility of conflict and hatred. Like Ralph Cudworth, in his 'Sermon Preached Before the House of Commons' in March of the same year, Hammond makes charity the criterion of true religion.

Hammond dismisses Old Testament zeal in favour of New Testament patience and quiescence. Preaching from Isaiah 2:4, 'They shall bear their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks,' he affirms that it is the duty of Christians to refrain from warfare. Admitting that Christianity sometimes seems to be a breeder of disputes rather than a religion of peace, he explains in what sense Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled: 'This prophetick form,' he writes, 'is but a phrase to express the duty and obligation of Christians; *they shall beat their swords into plough-shares*, i.e. *'tis is most certainly their duty to doe so.*'¹¹¹ The 'doctrine,' 'spirit,' and 'example' of Christianity are the means by which the sword of strife and violence is transformed into the ploughshare of peaceful Christian labour. The doctrine of Christ, Hammond reminds his readers and audience, is a doctrine of peace; Christ forbids '*swords and spears*,' revenge and violence, through his teaching of deference and humility. 'Let but the

¹¹¹ Henry Hammond, *The Christian's obligation to peace & charity delivered in a advent sermon at Carisbrooke Castle, Ann, 1647: and now published with IX sermons more* (London: printed for R. Royston, 1649), p. 6.

beautitudes in the 5 of *Mat.* plant these blessed seeds in us,' Hammond states, 'and our swords will presently be out of fashion.'¹¹²

The term 'spirit,' Hammond explains, must be 'taken almost in the Naturalist's acceptance of the word...for a kind of vitall or animall spirit.' This force, 'flowing from Christ...and passing freely though all the members,' unites all Christians into a body. For Hammond, this is no metaphor but rather a 'vitall *fellow-membership*.' The religious body united by this spirit can be harmed not only by warfare but also by '*division or separation*.' Therefore, neither disagreement nor injury nor difference of opinion nor outright offence is 'ground sufficient' for any response other than love. The members of the Christian Church remain in love because of, and by means of 'the uniting spirit that passes through them, and gives them *joys and sorrowes* in sympathy with one another.'¹¹³ True faith, for Hammond, is incompatible with armed rebellion against the king; Christians who commit such an atrocity cease to be true Christians. Faith should work as a deterrent to conflict and never a cause of it.

Of course, the effect of Hammond's publications on public opinion is hard to estimate, but a passage from Gilbert Burnet's *History of his own Time* (1724), is worth pondering:

At the Restoration, *Juxon*...was promoted to *Canterbury* more out of decency than he was then capable to fill that post;...*Sheldon* was a very dextrous man in business...He seemed not to have a deep sense of religion, if any at all: And spoke of it most commonly as an engine of government, and a matter of policy...*Morley*...was a pious and charitable man, of very exemplary life, but extream passionate, and very obstinate. He was first made Bishop of *Worcester*. Doctor *Hammond*, for whom that See was designed, died a little before the Restoration which was an unspeakable loss to the Church; For he was a man of great learning, and of most eminent merit, he having been the person that during the bad times had maintained the cause of the Church in a very singular manner, so he was a very moderate man in his temper, tho' with a high principle; and probably he would have fallen into healing counsels. He was also much set on reforming abuses, and for raising in the Clergy a due sense of the obligations they lay under.¹¹⁴

Hammond's death was a very grievous loss to the English Church and Burnet realised this. Hammond's importance lies in his publications, at a time when so few voices were raised to defend the Church of England.¹¹⁵ They were some of the chief proofs of the Church's continued existence. Hammond's work during this period provided a direct link of continuity between Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* and the Latitudinarianism of the Restoration. In 1662, two years after Hammond's death, Stillingfleet published what might be called the manifesto of seventeenth-century religious irenicism and moderation, his *Origines Sacrae*, in order, he said, to present Christianity in a form suitable 'to the proper temper of this age.'¹¹⁶ That form, as we have seen, was essentially the system outlined by Hooker and developed by the Great Tew Circle.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹⁴ As cited in John Henry Parker, *The Transformation of Anglicanism with special reference to Henry Hammond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 197

¹¹⁵ For an elaboration of this idea see M. McGiffert, "Henry Hammond and Covenant Theology", (Jun., 2005), pp. 255-285. N. Lettinga, "Covenant Theology Turned Upside Down: Henry Hammond and Caroline Anglican Moralism: 1643-1660", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 653-669.

¹¹⁶ E. Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, II (London, 1662), preface.

¹¹⁷ Preface to the Reader.

Jeremy Taylor's *Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying* (1647)

In this section I want to give a brief example which I believe demonstrates the pervasiveness of the irenic attitude in English society by the mid-seventeenth-century. I explore specifically how the writings of Jeremy Taylor became an important resource for Levellers and Quakers.¹¹⁸

The text in question, *A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying* (1647) is as much an intellectual response to the turmoil of civil wars as Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), and Taylor is as concerned as Hobbes to ensure that conflict over religious difference never recurs in England. He tells us that he conceived the book in the midst of 'this great Storm which hath dashed the Vessel of Church to pieces', and that he wrote 'with as much greediness as if I had thought it possible with any Arguments to have persuaded the rough and hard handed Souldiers to have disbanded presently.'¹¹⁹ Taylor set out to abolish religious conflict by defining Christian belief in terms of ethics rather than theology and by establishing the validity of religious toleration on the basis of the uncertainty of religious knowledge. His arguments clearly anticipate the principal ideas that came to be associated with the Latitudinarians, on whom Taylor was an acknowledged and respected influence.¹²⁰ Taylor insisted that the moral fundamentals of Christian conduct, as laid down in the Apostles' creed, are clear and in accord with natural reason, and any person who follows them lives the Christian life. However, reason also tells us that there is no possibility of certainty in matters of religion beyond these fundamentals and no external authority is sufficient to settle these issues of speculative theology. Taylor specifically considers and rejects the claims to absolute authority of Scripture. In the absence of certainty, all religious beliefs and practices that are not opposed to the essential articles of Christian morality or pose no threat to the security of the state should be tolerated:

we have no other help in the midst of these distractions, and dis-unions, but all of us to be united in that common terme, which as it does constitute the Church in its being such, so it is the medium of the Communion of the Saints, and that is the creed of the Apostles, and in all other things an honest endeavour to find out what truths we can, and a charitable and mutuall permission to others that disagree from us and our opinions . . . How many volumes have been writ about Angels, about immaculate conception, about originall sin, when all that is solid reason or clear Revelation, in all these three Articles, may be reasonably enough comprised in forty lines! And in these trifles and impertinencies, men are curiously busie while they negate those glorious precepts of Christianity and holy life, which are the glories of our Religion, and would enable us to live a happy eternity.¹²¹

Taylor's irenicism is clear from his reconciliation programme. He is emphatic not only in replacing theology with ethics as the basis of Christian doctrine but also external authority with personal reason as the rule of faith. By taking this position Taylor goes much further than either Hooker or Chillingworth would have allowed by making reason the arbiter of truth in religion. Heresy, for example, in the eyes of Taylor thus becomes a matter of uncertain opinion rather than certain error:

¹¹⁸ I am indebted to Malcolm McDowell for this comparison. Although McDowell uses this comparison to show the radical appropriation of Anglican texts by Levellers, I believe it also demonstrates the extent to which an irenic character was embedded within English thinking.

¹¹⁹ Jeremy Taylor, *A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying* (London: Printed and Published by Joseph Rickerby, Sherbourn Lane, 1836), pp. 2-3.

¹²⁰ See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780. Volume 1. Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 25-6, 35-6.

¹²¹ Taylor, pp. 33, 44.

I am certain that a Drunkard is as contrary to God, and lives as contrary to the lawes of Christianity, as a Heretick; and I am also sure that I know what drunkennesse is, but I am not sure that such an opinion is Heresy, neither would other men be so sure as they think if they did consider it aright, and observe the infinite deceptions, and causes of deceptions in wise men, and in most things, and in all doubtfull Questions, and that they did not mistake confidence for certainty.¹²²

Therefore, while human beings must be directed by their own reason and judgement in the absence of external sources of certain knowledge, subjective reason is of course fallible – ‘even when a man thinks he hath most reason to bee confident, hee may easily bee deceived’ – so no individual has the authority to impose their beliefs, or rather opinions, on another individual.¹²³ Here we see Taylor reacting to Presbyterian demands for an enforced national church discipline and hoping to convince the Presbyterians, the dominant party in 1647, to allow the Anglican church services to continue alongside their own: he says as much in his preface to the second edition of 1657.

The position on religion to which the arguments of *The Liberty of Propheying* brought Taylor closest in 1647 was in fact that of the Levellers. In *The Compassionate Samaritane* (1644) the future Leveller leader William Walwyn had addressed the Presbyterians and the Independents in order to argue against the imposition of religious uniformity and for universal liberty of conscience on the grounds of the ‘uncertainty of knowledge in this life. No man, or sort of men, can presume of an unerring spirit...since there remains the possibility of error, notwithstanding never so great presumptions to the contrary, one sort of men are not to compel another, since this hazard is run thereby, that he who is in error may be the constringer of him who is in truth’.¹²⁴ Belief for Walwyn, as for Taylor, is a personal matter for each individual to derive from the process of rational examination. While Taylor had been a fellow of All Souls and Walwyn was a London merchant, their similarity of argument and expression is striking and should give us pause for thought.

Taylor, for example, urges men not to force others to believe through law and physical persecution – which is an impossibility in any case – but to debate the truth of their opinions through ‘Argument, and Allegations of Scripture, and modesty of deportment, and meeknesse, and charity to the persons of men’, so putting an end to ‘pertinacious disputing about things unnecessary, undeterminable, and unprofitable’.¹²⁵ Walwyn states that it is ‘excellency in any man or woman, not to be pertinacious, or obstinate, in any opinion, but to have an open eare for reason and argument, against whatsoever he holds’.¹²⁶

Walwyn had always insisted that a policy of religious toleration must be universal or it was nothing, and in his early writings he had daringly assumed the persona of those considered to personify blasphemy and irreligion in seventeenth-century England – the Catholic in *A New Petition of the Papist* (1641) and the Familist in *The Power of Love* (1643) – in an attempt to engage with the stereotypical depictions of their depravity used to bolster arguments against toleration.¹²⁷ In *The Compassionate Samaritane* he was particularly concerned to argue the

¹²² Ibid., pp. 38-9.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹²⁴ *The Writings of William Walwyn*, ed. Jack R. McMichael and Barbara Taft (Athens, Ga., 1989), p. 104. Cited hereafter as WWW.

¹²⁵ Taylor, 37, 44.

¹²⁶ *Tolleration Justified, and Persecution Condemned* (London, 1645) in WWW, p. 159.

¹²⁷ For *A New Petition of the Papist* (1641), see WWW, p. 55 - 61. For *The Power of Love* (1643), see WWW, p. 78 - 96.

case of the Anabaptists against the many claims from the pulpit and in the press in the mid-1640s accusing them of irreligious beliefs and practices.¹²⁸

Taylor's main aim in demonstrating the insufficient testimony of Scripture was probably to challenge the Presbyterian certitude: the tradition of rejecting Puritan Biblical fundamentalism in favour of arguments from natural reason and probability which would complement those from Scriptures stretched back to Richard Hooker. Hooker, as we have already seen, argued that since revelation had ceased the authority of Puritan argument from Scripture must rest upon the 'ordinary' illumination of reason; not upon 'the fervent earnestness of their persuasion, but the soundness of those reason whereupon the same is built, which must declare their opinion in these things to have been wrought by the holy Ghost, and not by the fraud of that evil spirit which is even in his illusion strong'.¹²⁹ In other words, the Bible retains its infallibility as the Word of God but, in the absence of revelation, all human readers are fallible. Walwyn was accused of atheism because he had declared that the Bible was 'so plainly and directly contradictory to it self, that makes me believe it is not the Word of God'. However he never questions the infallibility of the Bible in any of his writings; rather, interestingly enough, he agrees with Hooker and insists that all human hermeneutics are fallible, 'liable to errors, and mistakings, and are not the very Word of God, but our apprehensions drawn from the Word.' With the cessation of revelation, 'there are no true Apostles, Evangelists, Prophets, Pastors, or Teachers, endowed with power from on high, as all true ones are; by which, they are enabled to divide the word of God aright'. In fact it is not surprising that we can see such strong similarities between Walwyn and Hooker as Walwyn lists 'Mr Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*' amongst his favourite books and as early as 1641 had cited Hooker in arguments for the toleration of Catholicism.¹³⁰ It would appear, therefore, that the Levellers may have derived their sceptical arguments for liberty of conscience from the tradition of Anglican rationalism. Walwyn, therefore follows Hooker in challenging Puritan Biblicism by identifying a space between 'divine meaning and human reading - a space mediated by reason which embraced an element of doubt - a space always productive of probabilities and conjectural inferences rather than certain knowledge.'¹³¹

In *The Liberty of Prophesying*, however, Taylor explicitly questions the very status of the Biblical texts as divine meaning, as the infallible Word of God. While he does maintain that the fundamentals of Christian doctrine as laid down in the Apostles' creed are plainly evident, he argues on historical and textual as well as hermeneutical grounds that the Bible can provide no decisive answers concerning speculative theology.¹³² Taylor's position was very likely a reaction to the rise of enthusiasm in the 1640s.¹³³ Of course Taylor, like the Latitudinarians who followed him, ultimately envisaged religious difference as encompassed within a broad national church administered by a tithe-funded clerical caste and headed by an episcopal government.

¹²⁸ For a further discussion, see McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 24-25, 78-9.

¹²⁹ Hooker, *Lawes*, pp. 16-18.

¹³⁰ *Walwyns Just Defence*, in *WWW*, 327; *A New Petition of the Papists* (London, 1641), in *WWW*, 59

¹³¹ Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), p. 35.

¹³² H. R. McAdoo emphasises that Taylor does not reject the authority of Scripture in fundamentals; *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1965), p. 70

¹³³ For a commanding study of the reaction to enthusiasm see Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*, (Brill, 1995).

Conclusion

The case studies discussed in this chapter have attempted to demonstrate that the development of the English irenic method cannot be isolated from the context of the English civil wars or the Commonwealth that followed. The quest for unity that the irenicists of this period aspired to was as much borne out of a reaction to current events as it was from personal aspirations. There can be little doubt that the theologians who developed the irenic method of theology really did see it as the best means of restoring original Christian teachings of the 'Primitive Church', and therefore of establishing the safe way to salvation, and the only way to bring about peace and unity in the Reformed Church, and in society as a whole.

The similarities between Jeremy Taylor, an Anglican Divine, and Walter Walwyn, part of the radically-inclined Leveller movement, demonstrates the prevalence of the English irenic tradition. More broadly, and more importantly, it shows the fundamental role that the civil war had on the way that English intellectuals thought about the nature of English religion and how it ought to be structured.

The events of the 1640s and 1650s had, at least, taught the need for prudence and reconciliation. After the Restoration in 1660, the Church of England inherited many of the problems that had been faced by its antecedents at institutional, social, and intellectual level, but was also rocked by several new and profound challenges. The 1640s and 1650s helped shape a stronger English Church. The foundations of Restoration religion were primarily laid during this period. Those years of religious experimentation traumatised the Church of England but, in the face of the abolition of bishops, compulsory Church attendance, and the prayer book, saw it respond with remarkable tenacity in a context where it was not, paradoxically, the national church. The English Revolution meant that the Restoration witnessed support for a new kind of religion: a rational religion which was underpinned by the fascination with 'reason'. Theologians after 1660 regularly discussed 'reason' because, following Chillingworth and others, they considered a 'rational account' the obvious, commonsensical, and only way to deal with religious controversies. This approach was constructed upon the irenic tradition in English theology and reflects the developing intellectual currents as well as the religio-cultural changes that took place in Restoration England. These transformations shall be the subject of the next chapter.

V. Irenicism in Restoration England

‘[He] gave us not only a free Audience, but as an Answer as we could expect: professing his gladness to hear our Inclinations to Agreement, and his Resolution to do his part to bring us together, and it must not be by bringing one Party over to the other, but by abating somewhat on both sides, and meeting in the Midway’¹³⁴

‘we do declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for difference of opinion in matter of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom’¹³⁵

No decade in English history opens so decisively as the 1660s. None so dramatically or emphatically announces itself with such splendid public affirmations of security and stability, of right order restored on the ruins of the past; none so loudly heralds a new age. The very date itself, *1660*, has a euphonious harmony which, if it no longer has quite the numerological significance or millennial suggestiveness it had for some seventeenth-century witnesses, yet rings in English memory as resonantly as 1066. ‘Great joy all yesterday at London; and at night more bonfires then ever and ringing of bells and drinking the King’s health upon their knees in the street’ wrote Pepys in his diary on 2 May 1660, the day after the Convention’s vote that according to ‘fundamental laws’ the government of England was by King, Lord and Commons.¹³⁶

In the experience of those who lived through those events, however, 1660 carried with it no assurance of finality. Though the return of Charles II had long been both plotted and resisted, its achievement in 1660 was virtually unforeseen. Contemporaries found only providential explanation sufficient to accommodate an occurrence so swiftly and unexpectedly accomplished, apparently without human contrivance – even, indeed, contrary to human contrivance, ‘without’, as Evelyn put it in his diary, ‘one drop of blood, & by that very Army which rebell’d against [the King]: but it was the Lords doing’. The Restoration was consequently as startling to its beneficiaries as to its victims; disorientation and apprehension were common to both.¹³⁷

In this predicament, neither tradition nor history offered any guidance. Moreover, by 1665 there was good reason to suppose that there might indeed be divine dismay at the way things were going. London’s experience of plague and fire further unsteadied nerves, for these were providences more readily interpreted as divine punishments than as blessings in accord with the great mercy (as the Royalists had it) of the Restoration. N.H. Keeble has recently suggested that ‘Restoration’ is, in fact, best understood as a process rather than an event *per se*, and as a process which never achieved the closure that its public propaganda attempted to vehemently claim.¹³⁸ Something certainly happened in 1660, and of momentous importance, dominating the consciousness of everyone who lived through the ensuing decade and beyond.

¹³⁴ Richard Baxter refers to a meeting with Charles II.

¹³⁵ The Declaration of Breda. For a good overview on the concept of ‘Liberty to Tender Consciences’ see, P. H. Hardacre, “Sir Edward Hyde and the Idea of Liberty to Tender Consciences, 1641-1656,” *Church and State* (1971) vol. 13, (1): pp. 23-42.

¹³⁶ Pepys, i. 122 (2 May 1660).

¹³⁷ Evelyn, iii, 296 (29 May 1660).

¹³⁸ N.H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), p. 3.

In this chapter I will examine a variety of interconnected threads: My main focus shall be on the irenic project of Edward Stillingfleet who, perhaps more passionately than any of his contemporaries, supported a religious worldview where peace and unity precluded dissenting religious factions. I will also examine the religious visions of Roger L'Estrange and the liberal dissenter Richard Baxter, who, like Stillingfleet, were committed to a comprehensive Church based on a few fundamentals. Furthermore, rather than simply place Stillingfleet within the boundaries of seventeenth-century Latitudinarianism, my aim is to contextualise his views with others outside of the movement. By doing so I hope to show how the majority of religious factions in Restoration England (with the exception of extreme radical sects) were united by the common irenic tradition in English theology - as Hugh Kearney has pointed out, all the factions of the English Reformed Church shared a common "vision of what the Church of Christ ought to be if it were stripped of externals and inessentials".¹³⁹

The Irenic Project of Edward Stillingfleet

Edward Stillingfleet was a prolific author and speaker who addressed both a scholarly and popular audience. Following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, Stillingfleet served as royal chaplain, became dean of St. Paul's and eventually was appointed Bishop of Worcester. He was later even considered a leading candidate for the archbishopric of Canterbury. Stillingfleet's popularity as a preacher in the first decade of the Restoration was unmatched. Samuel Pepys, the great diarist of the period, went out of his way to hear Stillingfleet preach and reported that his sermons were 'a most plain, honest, and good grave sermon in the most unconcerned and easy, yet, substantial manner that I ever heard in my life'.¹⁴⁰ He was also a founding member of the latitudinarian movement that sought less doctrinal specificity within a unified national church.¹⁴¹

Following in the tradition of Erasmus, Hooker, Great Tew and others, he advocated a broad use of *adiaphora* in order to smooth over divisions within the church. He was one of the most erudite divines of the seventeenth-century, a leading member of the brilliant group of theologians, including besides himself, William Chillingworth, Bishop John Wilkins (one of the founding members of the Royal Society), and Archbishop John Tillotson.¹⁴² Stillingfleet was extremely sensitive to the fundamental issues that were being raised in the religious, scientific and philosophical debate of the time, and tried, like his fellow Anglican divines, to develop a commonsense semirational, semiempirical defence of religion in an age becoming more and more infested with scepticism and disbelief.¹⁴³ Stillingfleet was genuinely focused on those elements in the new intellectual currents that could be reconciled with religion through his commonsense reasonable philosophy, while, at the same time, rebutting all of the excesses that were leading people astray. He was not against the new experimental philosophy. Rather, he was convinced that the new approach to nature, as understood and practiced by the Royal Society, especially Boyle, provided a secure basis for religion. He was, however, opposed to

¹³⁹ Hugh Kearney, 'Puritanism and Science: Problems of Definition' *Past and Present*, (1965), Vol. 31, (1): 104-110, p.105.

¹⁴⁰ Pepys, (23 April 1665).

¹⁴¹ M. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism* (1992), p.23.

¹⁴² On Chillingworth, Wilkins and Tillotson, see Henry van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630-1690* (The Hague, 1963).

¹⁴³ On Stillingfleet's common sense approach to religion see Robert T. Carroll, *The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, 1635-1699* (The Hague, 1975).

the antiteleological and materialistic tendencies in modern philosophy that denied a basis for religion that he found in Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza. In order to construct Stillingfleet's irenic project, I shall trace his intellectual career throughout the Restoration period.

When Richard Baxter came to write his 'engagingly biased' biography at the close of the century, he distinguished three broad categories of conformists to the Restoration Church Settlement of 1662. There were those who had been forced to conform out of need; next there were the Latitudinarians, who were 'mostly Cambridge-men' and of 'Universal Principles and free'; and then there were those of the 'high and swaying Party' who were 'desirous to extirpate or destroy the Nonconformists'.¹⁴⁴ It was the moderation of the Latitudinarians which Baxter stressed. Irenicism, not interest in new experimental philosophy, formed the bedrock of the Latitude men. According to J. Marshall, this has made 'the concentration of recent scholarly attention on the Latitudinarians in their role as midwives at the birth of modern science, to the almost total exclusion of other aspects of their influence, all the more unfortunate.'¹⁴⁵ Although they were a small body within the Church of England, they nevertheless exerted a strong influence in spheres outside the intellectually heterodox Royal Society.

Stillingfleet began his ecclesiastical career in Sutton in 1657. His first work appeared in 1659, *The Irenicum, a Weapon-Salve for the Churches Wounds*, in which he proposed a compromise between the positions of the Church of England and the Presbyterians regarding church government, while also attacking nonconformity. The title page signalled the tenor of the work, bearing the biblical motto 'Let your Moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand'. He proclaimed the necessity of mutual forbearance in different things, querying 'why should men be so strictly typed up to such things, which they may do or let alone, and yet be very good Christians still?'. A measure of uniformity in the practice of religion or opinion, while extremely desirable, was hardly attainable because of 'the different persuasions of mens minds'.¹⁴⁶ In later works Stillingfleet thought that he had moved somewhat beyond his early position, as he came to argue more strongly for uniformity. But he retracted nothing of importance, and if he had moved away from the position of *Irenicum*, he had moved away from the spirit, not the principles of his youthful claims.¹⁴⁷

His most celebrated work *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Grounds of Natural and Revealed Religion* appeared in 1662. Interestingly, it was reissued eight times by 1709. In his magnum opus, Stillingfleet developed his common sense defence of Christianity. He tried to show that a reasonable man should find that the Biblical account is plausible, and that those elements of pagan ancient history that do not fit with Judeo-Christianity are implausible. In his argument for the authenticity of the Mosaic account, Stillingfleet set down some of the bases for his common sense point of view (using the same contentions as Chillingworth). The person who demands mathematical certainty that Moses wrote the books attributed to him is unreasonable in that he wants more evidence than the matter to be proved is capable of. There is no demonstration of such a matter of fact. To demand one is unwarranted and unnecessarily destructive of what certainty we can attain.

¹⁴⁴ R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), pp. 386-7.

¹⁴⁵ See John Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men 1660-1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson and 'Hobbism'", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 36, Issue 03, July 1985, pp. 407-427; p. 407.

¹⁴⁶ All reference to the 1662 edition of E. Stillingfleet, *The Irenicum*, London 1662, title page, 'Preface to the Reader'.

¹⁴⁷ This interpretation has been suggested by R. Carroll, (1975), p. 19.

In short then, either we must destroy all Historical Faith out of the World, and believe nothing (tho' never so much attested) but what we see our selves, or else we must acknowledge, that Moral certainty is a sufficient foundation for an undoubted assent, not such a one *cui non potest subesse falsum*, but such a one *cui non subset dubium*, ie., an *Assent undoubted*, tho' not infallible. By which we see what little reason the *Atheist* on one side can have to question the truth of the Scriptures, as to the History of it; and what little ground the *Papists* on the other side have to make a pretence of the necessity of the Infallibility, as the proposal of such things where Moral Certainty is sufficient, that is, to the matter of fact.¹⁴⁸

Stillingfleet granted that the main foundation of religion could be discovered through the use of natural reason unaided by revelation. One could be morally certain that God exists. If we accept moral certainty as sufficient, then Stillingfleet contended, one should believe that Moses wrote the books and that they are accurate. Nevertheless, revelation was necessary to keep even the simplest doctrines of natural religion from becoming corrupted. 'The principles of Natural Religion were strangely corrupted, although they were plain, easy, few, [and] of the highest Importance'.¹⁴⁹ Thus the problem was not simply to provide satisfactory evidence from reason alone, but to provide satisfactory evidence that revelation was true. Reason could only prove the possibility – it could not demonstrate the principles of natural religion, it could, however, show the reasonableness of such principles and prove them to be morally certain. This was the essence of Stillingfleet's irenicism – that the use of reason could arrive at moral certainty and this is the best that can be hoped for since it would be unreasonable to demand the evidence or certainty of sense or mathematics in religious matters. Stillingfleet's irenic approach to religion was not merely an interim position until something better came along, it was the only sure way to approach the truth. As we shall see later, an analogous irenicism in natural philosophy was regarded in the same light.

In defending the truth of the principles of religion Stillingfleet attempted to follow a *via media* which would avoid the suspension of Reason of those who were prepared to abdicate the realm of Philosophy to an infallible authority, while staying clear of those whom he considered perverted Reason by arguing for materialistic, mechanistic, and deterministic 'conjectures'. In advocating a common sense approach as an answer to scepticism and religious deviation, Stillingfleet was by-and-large applying the theory of certainty from Chillingworth. The *via media* which Stillingfleet pursued involved a distinct method. The aim was to make Christianity reasonable to the man of common sense. He could not prove with absolute certainty that his case was true, but he insisted that his method could establish beyond a reasonable doubt the truth of the whole set of Scriptural books.

Stillingfleet hoped that his common sense approach to religion would help curb the deepening confessional divide in a rapidly evolving English political and religious society. His unease over the idea of toleration also reflects his desire for unity within a single Church. He was convinced that the more numerous the sects became, the more difficult it would be for the Church of England to exercise any authority over the nation as a whole. If toleration were granted to Dissenters, and the interests of the sects made by their office holders, the Church of England would cease to be a *national* Church. Nevertheless, Stillingfleet did not support tyranny over men's consciences – he simply demanded that men agree to abide by the same rules.

He wanted to avoid both the radical individualism of the freethinkers, as well as the tyranny over conscience which he identified with Catholicism. He viewed the Church of

¹⁴⁸ Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, II, preface.

¹⁴⁹ Stillingfleet, *Discourse Concerning the Grounds of Certainty of Faith* in *Works*, VI, p. 382.

England as a middle ground, avoiding the excesses of rationalists, enthusiasts, and Catholics alike. His defence of the need for a National Church was not coupled, however, with the advocacy of persecuting people with some of the ferocity that some of his fellow Protestants continued to exhibit toward one another. He wished to prevent, for example, the continuing persecution of Quakers and Anabaptists. Yet, he could not support universal toleration.

*An universal Toleration is that Trojan Horse, which brings in our enemies without being seen, and which after a long Siege they hope to bring in at last under a pretence of setting out Gates wide enough open, to let in all our friends.*¹⁵⁰

Universal toleration would only lead to universal contentions. Religion would thus sink into great contempt. It is interesting to note that Stillingfleet was by no means alone in this way of thinking. Roger L'Estrange, for example, was also a staunchly belligerent opponent of emerging arguments for religious toleration. He was the official censor of the Restoration printing industry and became perhaps one of the foremost apologists for Charles II and the emerging Tories.¹⁵¹ He viewed himself as defending the moderate middle from the forces of violence and extremists on both ends of the religious and political spectrum. Like Stillingfleet, he sought a comprehensive Church that was devoted to peace and unity. Religious toleration alarmed L'Estrange not because of false theology per se, but because of social disorder. He was convinced that toleration was a recipe for destruction. If there was religious toleration, L'Estrange asked:

What Security have We, that it shall not yet embroil us in *Mutiny*, and *Sedition*? Will not the *Tolerated Party* become a Sanctuary for all the *Turbulent Spirits* in the Nation? Shall they not have their *Meetings*, and *Consultations*, without Control?¹⁵²

The freedom to be as religiously bigoted as one chose, according to L'Estrange, was a one-way path to renewing the religious wars. As Gregory Dodds has shrewdly pointed out, historians have commonly assumed that seventeenth-century supporters of intolerance were theological dogmatists who demanded orthodoxy. But L'Estrange and Stillingfleet are examples that this was not always the case. What was always lurking in their minds was how divisions caused by the Reformation has ultimately led to religious strife and civil wars. The English Civil war was certainly never far from their thoughts and L'Estrange took the time to remind his readers that

It was the *Pulpit* that started the Quarrel; The *Pulpit* that Enflam'd it; The *Pulpit* that Christen'd *God's Cause*; The *Pulpit* that conjur'd the People into a *Covenant* to defend it; The *Pulpit* that blasted the King, that pursu'd him, that prest the putting of Him to death; and the *Pulpit* that applauded it when it was done. And how was all this affected? (I beseech ye) but by Imposing upon the weak and inconsiderate Multitude, *Errors* for *Truths*; by perverting of *Scriptures*; and by These Arts, moulding the *Passions* and the *Consciencences* of the People to the Interest of a Tumultuary Design. These are the Fruits of *Toleration* that you demand.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ As cited in Carroll, p. 26. See also Stillingfleet, *Works* I, p. 299.

¹⁵¹ See De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution in Britain* (New York: 2007), pp. 173-5.

¹⁵² As cited in G. Dodds, "Betwixt Heaven and Hell": Religious Toleration and the reception of Erasmus in Restoration England" in K.A.E. Enenkel (ed.), *The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period*, (Brill, 2013), p. 113.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The pulpit was dangerous; religion was dangerous. For both L'Estrange and Stillingfleet, doctrinal differences had to be kept out of the public sphere so that they would not threaten what was significantly more important: peace, unity, and charity. Schism was the greatest heresy and hindrance. It was the destruction of Christianity and Christian peace and unity were far more important than doctrinal scruples. Men like L'Estrange, Stillingfleet, and even Charles II, therefore recognised the need for less religious dogmatism in public policy

L'Estrange and Stillingfleet were prepared to accept the ambiguity of doctrinal truth. In agreement with the Anglican Latitudinarians, they were keen to stress the certainty of moral truth. It was precisely this ambiguity that necessitated a national church where an increasingly diverse nation could come together in the interest of peace and charity.

Richard Baxter's Pursuit of Unity

Stillingfleet's latitudinarianism was not the only strong source of irenicism in Restoration England. The influential Puritan Richard Baxter also self-consciously pursued the ideal of unity of the church throughout his ecclesiological career, from his ordination in 1638 until his death in 1691. Baxter was arguably one of the best known and certainly the most prolific writer among the Puritans in seventeenth-century England. Even the great latitudinarian divine John Wilkins thought highly of Baxter, believing that if he had lived in the days of the primitive Church, he would have been one of the Fathers of the Church.¹⁵⁴

Baxter was convinced that only by adherence to Scripture sufficiency could true doctrinal unity and primitive purity be preserved. Emphasis on catechizing – only the absolute essentials – and a corresponding focus on 'laborious holynesse,' were two closely related themes in his radical sola scriptura and, in his view, the best way to rediscover the primitive simplicity and purity of the Christian faith.¹⁵⁵ According to Baxter, 'the great cause of our uncharitable censures and divisions, hath been our departing from the Antient simplicity of faith...there was no hope of the antient Christian Unity and Charity, while proud men thrust their own Opinions into the Churches Creed, or un-Church all that hold not such Opinions.'¹⁵⁶

Baxter insisted that the basis of unity was not doctrinal unanimity but agreement on fundamentals. In *The Cure of Church Divisions* (1670), he provided a list of writers whose works had shaped his irenic thinking. It is interesting to note that one of them was John Davenant. Davenant was President of Queen's College, Cambridge between 1614-1622, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Cambridge when the Synod of Dort was first convened in 1618, and eventually Bishop of Salisbury. He contributed to *An Exhortation to Brotherly Communion betwixt the Protestant Churches* (1641), which was urged on by John Dury in order to facilitate his irenic schemes with the Lutherans. For Davenant, that 'which was not Fundamentall in the times of the Apostles and Primitive Church, cannot with all our Affirmings, wranglings, and Cursings, become Fundamentall,' a view shared by all shades of Protestant opinion in England.¹⁵⁷ Baxter agreed with his irenicist mentor:

¹⁵⁴ Orme, *Life and Times of Richard Baxter*, vol. 2, p. 447.

¹⁵⁵ This phrase originates from a letter by Peter Ince in his praise of Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), as Ince perceived that Baxter was 'rowsinge up men to an active and busy religiousnesse (which is religiousnesse indeed)'.
¹⁵⁶ R. Baxter, *The Judgement and Advice...of the Associated Ministers of Worcestershire...in Reply to John Durey's Proposals for Church Unity* (1658), p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ J. Davenant, *An Exhortation in Brotherly Communion* (1641), p. 13.

Are not the old Apostolical rules and terms sufficient to the safety and peace of Christians? Were those worthy persons, B. *Usher*, B. *Hall*, B. *Davenant*, B. *Morton*, with the *Bergii*, the *Crocii*, and all the great pacificators deceived, who wrote and preached and cried out to the world that ‘so much as all Christians are agreed in, is sufficient matter for their concord; if they would lay it upon no more’.¹⁵⁸

For Baxter the sufficient doctrinal truth was already revealed in the Apostolic era and encapsulated in Scripture. To multiply confessions and increase the number of litmus tests for orthodoxy was counterproductive.

Baxter’s similarity with Hugo Grotius is also noteworthy. Paul Chang-Ha Lim, for example, has shown how Baxter supported Grotius’ understanding of atonement.¹⁵⁹ Grotius was acutely aware of the problem of a divided Christendom, and propounded that concord would only be possible if the number of fundamental articles were reduced to a bare minimum. In this regard, Grotius and Baxter’s views bear striking resemblance. It is important, however, not to accept such similarities at face-value. There was a crucial component of Protestantism missing in Grotius’ irenic design: the Calvinists. Baxter felt that Grotius’ irenic plans took a more Rome-ward turn. Nevertheless, Baxter’s irenic intentions were clear: he wanted to compose a liturgy that would appeal to moderates of all persuasions, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian or Independent. These intentions, I believe, can be evidenced in the full title under which his reformed liturgy was published in 1661: *A Petition for Peace: with the Reformation of the Liturgy*.

Conclusion

There was a clear element of irenicism in English cultural and religious thought during the Restoration. The similarity between a latitudinarian like Stillingfleet, the puritanical Baxter, and a high Anglican such as Roger L’Estrange is evident. Their thought was underlined by a shared predilection for peace and unity within a national church coupled with a zero tolerance for religious separatists who stood outside of that church and condemned it. All three men could not accept the democratic dogmatization of religious belief where every community and every sect could be as exclusive and intolerant as they saw fit. The demands of peace and unity superseded the scruples and zeal that led to religious separation.

The late seventeenth-century, however, was marked by the increasing fragmentation of Protestant communities and cries for the acceptance of a plurality of churches and congregations. In essence a new post-Reformation model was beginning to emerge where Christians could be as zealous and dogmatic as they chose while simultaneously living in peace with their neighbours – at least in theory.¹⁶⁰ The result, of course, was the rapid disintegration of the Christian Commonwealth and the push for this disintegration came from zealous dissenting groups who believed that dogmas were extremely critical, that liberal use of *adiaphora* was an abomination, and that true Christians had to practice and believe correctly. This was the same dogmatic zeal that Stillingfleet and others had feared and worked so hard to prevent.

¹⁵⁸ Baxter, *The Cure of Church-Divisions* (1670), p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ See P. Chang-Ha Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter’s Puritan Ecclesiology in its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Leiden, Brill, 2004), esp. 183-6.

¹⁶⁰ A. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England 1500-1700* (Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 315-318.

The toleration established by the Act of Toleration in 1689 countered the English irenic method in several ways: first, it firmly established intolerance for Catholics in England, and simultaneously, it accepted the failure of a comprehensive Protestant church. Protestant disunity was accepted, at least tacitly, and the limited seeds of pluralism were sown. The revolution of 1688 ushered in an era that abandoned the dream of Christian unity.

VI. Conclusion

In the course of this study we have moved through rugged terrain – it would perhaps be more accurate to describe it as a minefield – but the path we have followed has been kept deliberately narrow. Given our theme, we have inevitably had to refer to some of the major problems that have troubled scholars of seventeenth-century England for a hundred years, but we have not had the temerity to pretend to solve these questions.

It has not been the purpose of this study to describe the English irenic method in its entirety. The concern here has been much more limited: to examine a relatively small number of prominent individuals who flourished between the late sixteenth-century to the close of the seventeenth-century and how they shared a common irenic approach in matters of religion.

This is not to say necessarily that the irenic method in English religion was universally adhered to by every living soul during this period. Such broad assertions are unhelpful in our quest to understand the infinite complexities of early modern English society. It does, however, seem to be the case that there were doubtless innumerable individuals – many but not all of them clergyman – who were characterised by a conspicuous preoccupation with irenic ideals, a reliance upon reason as the essential arbiter in matters of faith, and a firm and unyielding belief in the policy of doctrinal minimalism. Then and only then could there emerge a unified national Church. It might even be argued that there was a common core of doctrine or a set of values to which all ‘Irenicists’ subscribed, and to which no one subscribed who was not an ‘Irenicist’. The case for this, however, has yet to be made.

In reaching this conclusion, we finally return to the problem with which we began: the relationship between English religion and natural philosophy. Religion, of course, in seventeenth-century England was an issue of enormous and pervasive content. Its social implications were openly avowed and avidly followed out. If the ideals and ideas of the irenicists were not purely literary reveries, utterly divorced from everyday life (and on the present evidence we may strongly presume that they were more than that), then it is possible that many people had an interest in them. Many people would be inclined to adapt themselves to these ideas and ideals, and many people would look to them for a solution to questions as large as their own salvation. With this in mind, it seems highly likely that this unique blend of religion in seventeenth-century England could well have shaped the culture of English natural philosophy. Constructing this inextricable link between the peculiar nature of English natural philosophy in the seventeenth-century – partly mechanical, partly chemical, occasionally vitalistic, and always experimental – and the religious orientation of the country after the Reformation shall be the subject of my epilogue.

VII. An Epilogue: Or, How an Irenic Theological Method could affect contemporary Natural Philosophy?

“[...]These being the dangers in the process of humane Reason, the remedies of them all can only proceed from the real, *the mechanical, the experimental Philosophy*, which has this advantage over the Philosophy of discourse and disputation, that whereas that chiefly aims at the subtilty of its Deductions and Conclusions, without much regard to the first ground-work, which ought to be well laid on the Sense and Memory; so this intends the right ordering of them all, and the making them serviceable to each other.”¹⁶¹

“[...]though the Experiments he mentions be delivered in such a manner, as is usual in mentioning matters of fact; yet I remember not, that he expressly says, that he actually tried them, and he might possibly have set them down as things which *must* happen, upon a just confidence that was not mistaken in his Ratiocinations.”¹⁶²

So what does all this have to with natural philosophy? How could a theology of peace and compromise, as opposed to dogmatism, particularly where chains of disputatious reasoning have to be recurred to, and embracing instead a position of doctrinal minimalism affect natural philosophy?

In the following epilogue, I want to try to show how this irenic tradition in English religion conditioned the way that English natural philosophers conducted and presented their work. What follows, however, should not be seen as a systematic attempt to explain how England rose to prominence as a scientific nation solely in terms of irenicism. The aim – as already stated in the introduction – is simply to suggest a different way of looking at the way English religion stimulated English science; by thinking in terms of an irenic theological method rather than specific religious doctrines and, I hope, to stimulate others to explore it further. I do not claim, therefore, to have discovered the answer to the problem as to why Newton rather than Huygens or Leibniz, who were brilliant mathematicians in their own right, published the *Principia* (1687), for example; or why the Scientific Revolution occurred only in post-Renaissance Western Europe. I merely wish to suggest that the irenic tradition in English religion may repay further historical research in relation to its impact on early modern English natural philosophy.

In order to understand the close links between developments in theology and natural philosophy we first have to bear in mind that natural philosophy, since the thirteenth century was regarded as the dutiful handmaiden to the Queen of the sciences, theology.¹⁶³ While there

¹⁶¹ Robert Hooke, *Mircographia* (London, 1665), Preface, (unpaginated).

¹⁶² R. Boyle, *Hydrostatical Paradoxes* (1666), pp. 4-5. In this work, Boyle took Pascal to task for the form of presentation used in the latter's publication of 1663. Boyle's criticism was not that Pascal had been dishonest in his reports but that he had relied upon reasoning that was not restrained by experience.

¹⁶³ On natural philosophy as a handmaiden to theology see, D. Lindberg, 'Science as Handmaiden: Roger Bacon and the Patristic Tradition', *Isis* 78 (1987): 518-36; and R. K. French and A. Cunningham, *Before Science: The Invention of the Friars' Natural Philosophy* (Aldershot, 1996).

was only ‘one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church’ it seemed perfectly natural, since Truth is indivisible, that the truths of natural philosophy should be compatible or congenial with the truths of religion. The Reformation changed all of this. As a result, natural philosophy came to be used by different factions to support their particular interpretation of the truth. Natural philosophy came to be seen as a special site for the development of complex chains of reasonings, sometimes even using mathematics, to dupe the unwary into accepting a false religion.

The strong connection between Catholic theology and Aristotelian natural philosophy, brought to everyone’s attention by the Galileo affair, led many Englishmen to distrust scholasticism. Thomas Hobbes wrote how ‘the study of Philosophy it hath no otherwise place, then as a handmaid to the Romane Religion: And...that study is not properly Philosophy, but Aristotelity’, while Joseph Glanvill argued that Aristotle had become an ‘Oracle’ because the schoolmen had mingled his philosophy with divinity. Similarly, Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667) emphasised the confusing use of wordy argumentation by Catholic scholastics so that in philosophy, as in religion, men ‘were forc’d in all things to depend on the Lips of the Roman Clergy.’¹⁶⁴

The so-called ‘new philosophy’ was also met with apprehension and distrust. Many English thinkers believed that it served to undermine the true religion of Englishmen. Thomas Barlow, later to be the Bishop of Lincoln, for example, remarked how the ‘great Writers and Promoters of’ the new philosophy were ‘of the Roman Religion: (such as Des Cartes, Gassendus, Du Hamel, Maurus, Mersennus, De Mellos, &c.)’.¹⁶⁵ Barlow explained how he had asked friends in Catholic Europe about whether the Jesuits trained their students in the new philosophy or whether they kept them to Aristotle’s ways of thinking. In all cases he received a similar answer:

That none were more strict than they, in keeping all their young men, to the old principles and forms of Disputation. For they well know, that all their schoolmen, Casuits and Controversy-Writers have so mix’d Aristotle’s Philosophy with their Divinity; that he who has not a comprehension of Aristotle’s Principles, and the use of them, in all Scholastick Disputes, and Controversies of Religion, will never be able rationally to defend or confute any controverted position, in the Roman or Reformed Religion.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, Meric Casaubon was convinced that Descartes’ encouragement to systematic doubting was one of those ‘rare inventions to raise the expectations of the credulous, and in the end to send them away pure Quacks or arrand Quakers’. This technique was the same as that of ‘Jesuited Puritans’, that is, those Jesuits who pretended to be Protestant sectarians in order to undermine the Reformed Churches.¹⁶⁷

The point here is that distrust of natural philosophy, whether new or traditional, was running at an all-time high. What was required was a different approach: a middle way, one that avoided dogmatism and chains of disputatious reasonings. It had to be based upon a mitigated sceptical epistemology, affirming to only those propositions which could be accepted

¹⁶⁴ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1655), Pt. IV, ch. 46, p. 370. J. Priestly, ‘Letter...concerning Aristotle’, in *Scire / I tuum nihil est: Or, the Author’s Defence of the Vanity of Dogmatizing* (London, 1665), p. 79. T. Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (1667), p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Barlow to ‘Sir J. B.’, written in 1675 and published in P. Pett (ed.), *The Genuine Remains of that Learned Prelate Dr Thomas Barlow* (London, 1693), pp. 157-9.

¹⁶⁶ As cited in J. Henry, ‘The Scientific Revolution in England’ in R. Porter and M. Teich (eds.), *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 195.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

as immediately and undeniably true. It had to, therefore, disregard speculative theorizing as much as possible and be doctrinally minimalist. In other words, if the handmaiden of theology was to regain its virtue as a safe means of determining the truth about the Book of Nature, it was going to have to pursue the same methods which were viewed to be the safest means of recovering the true Church.

There can be little doubt, as evidenced by the preceding chapters, that the theologians who developed the irenic method of theology genuinely saw it as the best means of restoring the original Christian teachings of the 'Primitive Church', and therefore establishing the safe way to salvation, as well as the only way to bring peace and unity in the Reformed Church.

Moreover, the leading natural philosophers of the early Royal Society whatever the precise details of their personal theologies, were convinced of the validity of this very English approach to resolving the difficulties of the Reformed Church of England. In fact, it would not be too presumptuous to assume that they believed this to be the only approach they could take. This considered then, makes it understandable they would adopt and adapt the prevailing theological epistemology and methodology to their natural philosophy. Thus, as previously stated, the aim of irenicism in theology was not merely to arrive at an interim position until something better came along, it was the only sure way to approach the truth. An analogous irenicism in natural philosophy was regarded in the same light.

This is where 'right reason' proved to be an extremely useful tool. The underlying method was to solicit a common-sense view of rationality which was obvious to everyone. 'I affirm nothing', Jeremy Taylor wrote, 'but upon...right reason discernible by every disinterested person.' The conclusions of 'right reason' were ineluctable. As Robert Hooke wrote, 'arguing, concluding, defining and judging, and all other degrees of Reason are lyable to the same imperfection, being, at best, either vain, or uncertain.'¹⁶⁸

The position of doctrinal minimalism, adopted by the English irenicists, can be seen throughout the work of English natural philosophers. Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, for example, is a good place to start. A number of historians, notably Margery Purver and J. R. Jacob have acclaimed the book as the Society's 'official manifesto, representing, if not the Society's 'official ideology', then at least its 'public stance'.¹⁶⁹ Whilst Michael Hunter has shown the difficulty in trying to discern an undue degree of consensus in the Society (Sir William Petty and Sir Robert Moray, for example), there is a degree of truth in the position which Jacob has suggested.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, I would argue that Sprat's *History* reflects the English approach that the natural philosophers had adopted. The object was to find a generalized creed which would enjoy at least the tacit support of people from a wide range of positions, which would disarm criticism and might also enlist support. The core mission of Sprat's *History* was thus an irenic one.

Sprat was a great turner of phrases and he used rhetorical conventions to convey the Society's irenic method – 'behold the agreement that is between the present *Design* of the

¹⁶⁸ J. Taylor, *Works* (ed. R. Heber, London 1828), xi, p. 356, cited from McAdoo, *Spirit of Anglicanism*, p. 53. R. Hooke, *Micrographia* (London 1665), sig. av.

¹⁶⁹ For example, see M. Purver, *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation* (Routledge, 1967); J.R. Jacob, 'Restoration Ideologies and the Royal Society', *History of Science*, vol. 18, pp. 25-38, 1980.

¹⁷⁰ See M. Hunter, 'Latitudinarianism and the 'Ideology' of the Early Royal Society: Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society (1667) Reconsidered*, in Hunter (ed.), *Establishing the New Science: The Experience of the Early Royal Society* (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 1989). In this chapter Hunter points to the differing theological stances between Petty and Moray in order to highlight the dangers of trying to discern an undue degree of consensus in the Society. Such an example, in my opinion, shows that we must look at a theological method (irenicism) rather than those specific theological doctrines which members of the Society adhered to.

Royal Society, and that of our *Church*, in its beginning'. Sprat's depiction of parallel images closely associated the new philosophy with his narrative of an Anglican past. The Royal Society and the Church, in Sprat's view, 'lay claim to the word Reformation', since they had followed 'a like cours' and had both stressed 'passing by the *corrupt Copies*, and referring themselves to the *perfect originals* for their instruction'.¹⁷¹

Sprat's religious orientation drew heavily on the ideas of Hooker, further developed by divines such as Hales, Whichcote, Hammond and Chillingworth, the last two of whom Sprat himself praised.¹⁷² In the early Restoration Hooker was constructed as the first real apostle of a *via media* 'Anglican' Church.¹⁷³ Hooker's works were certainly known and highly respected within Sprat's circle. Sprat may well have used Izaak Walton's *Life of Mr. Richard Hooker* (1665). Walton emphasised Hooker's criticism of strict predestinarianism, his acceptance of the ceremonies and his insistence that faith be accompanied by works. In Hooker's England, too 'pertinacious zeal' had upset reason and peace and had led to the 'spiritual wickedness' of opposition to the government. It is highly likely that Sprat's probabilistic discourse was influenced by Hooker's distinction between certainty of evidence and certainty of adherence; that it was available elsewhere would at least have made his representation of the Royal Society seem less novel.¹⁷⁴

Sprat's persistent comments that the Church of England 'can never be praejuduc'd by the light of *Reason*', that religion was 'the perfection and the crown of the Law of *Nature*', as well as his identification of rational religion as the 'universal Disposition of this Age', can be situated as part of a long-term anti-Calvinist thrust against the primacy of the inner light.¹⁷⁵ So when Sprat insisted that religion should not stand in need of any devices of *reason*, he meant divisive ratiocination, that it 'ought not be the subject of *Disputations*'. A 'bare promulgations, a common apprehension, and sense enough to understand the Grammatical meaning of ordinary words' would do the trick.¹⁷⁶ In an era with less-than-sturdy foundations, reason, as we have seen, was proffered as a pacifier: the 'most efficacious *Remedy*' against religious maladies 'is not so much the sublime part of *Divinity*, as its intelligible, and natural, and practicable *Doctrines*', attainable, as Hooker had argued, through reason.¹⁷⁷

For Sprat, the alleged timorousness of the Fellows in drawing conclusions when acting as a Society was further proof of their irenic methodology. The construction of an inherent restraint in the experimental method allowed him to argue that it 'contains the best remedies for the distempers which some other sorts of Learning are thought to bring with them'.¹⁷⁸ The concern was not with any particular theory or hypothesis about how the world worked, but merely with the so-called matters of fact. Experiments, therefore, were only intended to establish what could clearly and undeniably be seen, not to confirm a particular interpretation

¹⁷¹ Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (1667), esp. p. 370-4, quotation at 371.

¹⁷² Sprat, *A Sermon Preach'd to the Natives of Dorset*, 1692, (London, 1693), p. 19.

¹⁷³ See M Brydon, *The Evolving Reputation of Richard Hooke: An Examination of Responses, 1600-1714* (Oxford, 2006), esp. chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁷⁴ I. Walton, *The Life of Mr. Richard Hooker*, in *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr Richard Hooker, Mr George Herbert*, 4th edn, (London, 1670), pp. 183-248.

¹⁷⁵ Sprat, *History*, pp. 368-374. The doctrine of the 'Inner Light' was the basis of a mysticism commonly associated with the Quakers during the seventeenth-century. It was linked with religious radicalism and was heavily criticised on the basis that it taught men to privilege their subjective impulses over the use of their rational faculties.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

of what must therefore be the underlying reality. By insisting that their experiments simply revealed matters of fact, with no tendentious presuppositions, orthodox English suspicions could be allayed, and the experimental philosophy came to be accepted as an unbiased objective way of establishing truth. This emphasis on ‘matters of fact’, as Paul Wood has shown, was an important element in the irenic ambitions of natural philosophers who shaped the Royal Society, and, as Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have shown, it became a powerful resource for establishing the objectivity and disinterestedness of the new science.¹⁷⁹

That this nationally idiosyncratic version of the experimental method was purposely modelled on the efforts of English theologians to establish the authority and unity of the national church is hard to deny. The Royal Society, it seems, embraced the English irenic stratagem of doctrinal minimalism. Sprat explained how the Royal Society was very ‘backward from settling of Principles, or fixing upon Doctrines’, so much so, in fact, that ‘we should grant that they wholly omitted doctrines’.¹⁸⁰ Those who continued to pursue doctrinal differences were thus not only engaging in divisive activity but also aspiring to a goal that, on historical testimony, was not central to the Reformation.

Perhaps the strongest adherer to this approach was the Honourable Robert Boyle. Boyle’s mechanical philosophy was characterised not only by the doctrines it included, but also by the doctrines that it excluded. A crucial feature of the mechanical philosophy as Boyle articulated it was the fact that certain doctrines and debates were considered off limits. When Boyle introduced the general principles of the mechanical philosophy, he purposely put aside differences among different groups, claiming to write ‘for the Corpuscularians in general, than any party of them.’¹⁸¹ More specifically, he put aside differences about the atoms and the void. For Boyle’s new mechanical philosophy it did not matter whether there really was a vacuum, a genuinely empty space, or whether the interior of his vacuum pump was filled with some kind of ether.¹⁸² He set aside such issues and concentrated on the issues that *he* thought were of the most importance that there is one matter in the physical world that it is divided into parts through motion, and that all the phenomena of the natural world could be explained in terms of size, shape and motion. In the preface to his *Some Specimens* Boyle’s irenicism is unmistakable:

I esteem’d that notwithstanding these things wherein the Atomists and the Catesians differd, they might be thought to agree in the main, and their Hypotheses might by a Person of a reconciling Disposition be look’d on as, upon the matter, one Philosophy, which because it explicates things by Corpuscles, or minute Bodies, may (not very unfitly) be call’d Corpuscular; though I sometimes stile it the Phoenician Philosophy, because some antient Writers inform us, not only before Epicurus and Democritus, be ev’n before Leucippus taught in Greece, a Phoenician Naturalist was wont to give an account of the Phaenomena of Nature by Motion and other Affections of the minute Particles of Matter, which because they are obvious and very powerfull in Mechanical Engines, I sometimes also term it the Mechanical Hypothesis or Philosophy.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ See P. Wood, ‘Methodology and apologetics: Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*’, *BJHS* (1980), pp. 1-26. S. Shapin and S. Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁸⁰ Sprat, *History*, p. 107.

¹⁸¹ Boyle, *Works*, vol. V, p. 292.

¹⁸² Boyle, *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Spring of the Air and its Effects*, *Works*, vol. I, pp. 197f.

¹⁸³ Boyle, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 87.

Boyle is definitely someone ‘of a reconciling Disposition’: he desired to convince adherents of the competing positions to put aside their disagreements, and recognise one another as heeding to a single philosophy. In the experimental part of the essay, and in his other chemical writings, Boyle focuses precisely on the elements of the mechanical philosophy that he thinks should be uncontroversial, making plausible through experiment that everything can be explained in terms of size, shape and motion, and setting aside questions relating to infinite divisibility or the real existence of empty space.¹⁸⁴

Boyle’s project is partly to undermine and overcome the disagreements between various camps, especially between those who advocated atoms and the void, and those who preferred infinite divisibility and the plenum, by focusing on fundamentals. And his main point is to direct actual empirical research on those parts of natural philosophy that fall into this common area. Furthermore, Boyle goes farther still and suggests that the issues of disagreements go beyond the possibility of settling through empirical means, and are therefore not appropriate subjects for discussion and debate. In the preface to *Some Specimens* he states that the difference between ‘the Cartesians and the Atomists’ over ‘the Notion of Body in general, and consequently about the Possibility of a true Vacuum, as also about the Origine of Motion, the indefinite Divisibleness of Matter...seem to be rather Metaphysical than Physiological Notions...’¹⁸⁵ Moreover, in his *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Spring of the Air and its Effects* (1660), Boyle presents the results of the experiments with his air-pump and is very explicit about excluding debates about the nature of the vacuum from the realm of what is empirically meaningful and useful, and thus from serious debate.

In this work Boyle refuses to come down on one side as to whether the chamber of his air-pump ‘be truly empty, that is, devoid of all Corporeal Substance.’ After carefully analysing arguments on both sides, Boyle concludes that in the end, the controversy is not over anything that can be determined experimentally, but over the notion of a body. He concludes:

This reason, I say, being thus desum’d seems to make the Controversie about a *Vacuum*, rather a Metaphysical, then a Physiological Question; which therefore we shall here no longer debate, finding it very difficult either to satisfie Naturalists with this Cartersian Notion of a Body. Or to manifest wherein it is erroneous, and substitute a better in its stead.¹⁸⁶

This approach, whereby Boyle eliminates certain questions from the domain of natural philosophical inquiry in order to promote agreement among different factions can be viewed as the irenic program of the mechanical philosophy.

It must be pointed out that Boyle’s version of the mechanical philosophy was not the only conception in play in the seventeenth century. One has to consider other different conceptions of the mechanical philosophy in the period. Descartes, Gassendi, and Hobbes, for example, were all in sharp contention with one another. All of them set themselves against Aristotelian orthodoxy about the natural world. All three were attempting to present a vision of what a new natural philosophy ought to look like, something to replace the accepted world of prime matter and substantial form. But each also opposed the ‘new philosophies’ proposed by their competitors. Though they agreed that Aristotelian natural philosophy was sterile, and that everything in nature should be explained in terms of size, shape, and motion, they all

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, W.R. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 79-81.

¹⁸⁵ Boyle, *Works*, vol. II, p. 87.

¹⁸⁶ Boyle, *Works*, vol. I, p. 197f. On Boyle and the question of the divisibility of matter, see P. Anstey, *The Philosophy of Robert Boyle*, pp. 43f.

pointedly disagreed about a variety of other issues. And they were also unwilling to set aside these disagreements. The three represented what they would consider importantly different visions for the future of natural philosophy. In this way, there is nothing irenic about their programs: Descartes, Gassendi, and Hobbes direct their insults as much against one another as they do against their common enemy, the philosophy of the scholastics. In this way, their intellectual programs depart in an important way from Boyle's mechanical philosophy. Though they may agree with the explanatory project that Boyle proposes, they are quite at odds with his irenic project.

The conflict between Descartes, Gassendi, and Hobbes is only the tip of the iceberg. There are plenty others who vigorously opposed the Aristotelianism of the schools. And it is this intellectual context which can help us understand where Boyle's irenic approach is coming from. Boyle's mechanical philosophy, I think, can be viewed as a reaction to this context. The program that he sets out in his *Origin of Forms and Qualities* and in other related texts can be read as a call for a new program intended to diffuse the chaos of anti-Aristotelian views fighting it out with one another. In identifying certain doctrines as the central issues, and in setting aside all others which thinkers had differed, Boyle created something new in early 1660. Boyle's position was irenic: he strove to convince adherence of opposing positions that their agreements were more important than their disagreement. It was a central part of Boyle's project to undermine disagreement by focusing on fundamentals, indeed, to eliminate those points of disagreement from even being a proper part of scientific activity.

It is no accident that Boyle attempted to create an irenic program in natural philosophy, particularly at exactly this point in time. The earlier chapters of this thesis have shown the existence of an irenic tradition in English reformed religion. This then begs the question: how different is Boyle's irenic program to that of Henry Hammond, Jeremy Taylor, Edward Stillingfleet, or even Richard Baxter? Boyle was certainly something of an irenicist himself, someone 'of a reconciling Disposition.' In a letter to John Dury, 3 May 1647 Boyle wrote: 'It is strange, that men should rather be quarrelling for a few trifling opinions, wherein they dissent, than to embrace one another for those many fundamental truths, wherein they agree.' While this comment is related specifically to religious disunity, it would not be fortuitous to view his natural philosophy in that same spirit: attempting to persuade his contemporaries that they should 'embrace one another for those many fundamental truths, wherein they agree,' rather than arguing uselessly about metaphysical issues such as atoms or the void.¹⁸⁷

Boyle's approach shows us how English experimental enterprises could be accommodated to efforts to establish the safe way to generate new knowledge which were inspired by parallel efforts in religion to establish the safe way to salvation and societal unity. This irenic inquisitive nature can also help explain why English natural philosophers were willing to entertain, to a much greater extent than Continental philosophers, causes that were not strictly mechanical in their operations, including attractions and repulsions, and chemical and even vitalistic notions.

In the 1670s William Petty, for example, constructed his own system of the mechanical philosophy. In his system he assumed that bodies were made up of invisibly small particles that could combine and recombine with different arrangements to give rise to different sensory phenomena. What made his system different from Descartes' and indeed, from all earlier atomist or corpuscularist systems, was the fact that the invisible particles were all assumed to be tiny spherical magnets. So instead of seeking to give a mechanistic account of how magnets

¹⁸⁷ Boyle, *Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 57.

work, Petty took the observational and experimental data about magnets and their behaviour for granted (they were matters of fact) and used them to build a system of natural philosophy. In the end, Petty's scheme failed to convince, but not because it relied upon the taken-for-granted occult nature of magnets. It was, simply, too speculative and too far removed from what might be construed as undeniable matters of fact. Yet Petty's scheme nicely how English thinkers were perfectly happy to accept, on phenomenalist grounds, the existence of unexplained active principles in matter.¹⁸⁸

It is well known that Robert Hooke conceived of a way to explain planetary movements fully consistent with Kepler's laws of planetary motion by assuming an attractive force operating between the sun and planets that varied inversely as the square of the distance between them. No continental thinker would have considered such an occult account of cosmology. The Cartesian approach, for example, demanded an explanation in terms of a balance of forces in toward the sun and out from the sun, keeping the planets in their orbits. But these balanced forces were forces of impact – there was an outward pressure and an inward, caused by the crowding and jostling of moving particles in the plenist Cartesian universe. Hooke simply assumed that there was an attractive force operating across a notionally empty space whose effect was modified by the tangential inertial motion of the planet, so giving rise to an elliptical orbit. In a brief exchange of letters with Isaac Newton in 1679, Hooke told Newton and eventually convinced him (not without difficulty) of the fruitfulness of this approach (and Newton subsequently wrote the *Principia*). As Richard Westfall pointed out in his biography of Newton, after this correspondence with Hooke, Newton began to use occult actions-at-a-distance in all his speculations.¹⁸⁹

Perhaps the most famous example of a fellow of the Royal Society arguing in these terms is, of course, Isaac Newton. Newton was criticised by Huygens and Leibniz, both of whom subscribed to Cartesianism, for introducing an unexplained occult force back into natural philosophy. Newton's account of gravitational attraction, for all its mathematical success, was nonetheless incomplete, according to Leibniz, because Newton had not explained the cause of gravity. Newton's answer is famous: *hypotheses non fingo* – “I do not feign hypotheses”. Working in the Royal Society tradition – effectively the English irenic tradition – in natural philosophy, Newton was able to insist that he only dealt in facts: “To us it is enough that gravity does exist”.¹⁹⁰ That matter attracts other matter comes under the category of a minimalist interpretation that could not be interpreted in any other way. To offer an account involving continual pressure applied by streams of invisible particles (as in the Cartesian explanation) would no longer be an approved, English, way of proceeding. This example reflects the triumph of doctrinal minimalism within the Church of England, where the quest for an uncontested road to salvation inspired and corresponded to the attempts of the natural philosophers to find a secure route for the generation of natural knowledge.

This way of presenting scientific work can also be found in Newton's early contributions to the *Philosophical Transactions* – he presents the theory that white light is

¹⁸⁸ See William Petty, *The Discourse Made before the Royal Society... Concerning the Use of Duplicate Proportion... Together with a new Hypothesis of Springy or Elastique Motion* (London, 1674). For a concise introduction to Petty's Natural Philosophy see Robert Kargon, “William Petty's Mechanical Philosophy”, *Isis*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Spring, 1965), pp. 63-66.

¹⁸⁹ Richard S. Westfall, *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 388.

¹⁹⁰ This quotation is taken from Florian Cajori's edition of Andrew Motte's 1729 translation of the *Principia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), p. 549, as cited by I. Bernard Cohen in “Hypotheses in Newton's Philosophy”.

compounded out of several rays of light, each of which is itself incapable of further analysis, as is shown by his experiments with prisms. This account, Newton states, is certain, and can be proved by anyone willing to make the requisite experiments. However, it is an account only of the rays of light as they appear to the observer, coloured, and not as they really are in themselves: ‘But, to determine more absolutely, what Light is, after what manner refracted, and by what modes or actions is produceth in our minds the Phantasms of Colours, is not so easie. And I shall not mingle conjectures with certainties.’¹⁹¹ The conclusions Newton thinks worthy of presentation to the public are only those which are experimentally discoverable and verifiable. To present an account of the nature of light and causal nexus by which refraction and perception of colours occur, would be to present a speculative hypothesis, a conjecture which has no role in the formal presentation of theory.

It would seem, therefore, that there is great deal of truth underlying Sprat’s rhetorical claim that the Church and the natural philosophy of England ‘arose on the Same Method’. As we have now seen, albeit through limited examples, they were both anti-dogmatic, rejected disputation and arguments based on complex chains of reasoning, adopted a mitigated sceptical epistemology, and professed themselves to be doctrinally minimalist. Since the examples given throughout this thesis have been limited, then our conclusions must also follow suit. What I hope to have shown here is that English science was not stimulated exclusively by Puritanism or Latitudinarianism, but rather by a more general outlook in English reformed religion. Sprat echoed this:

Though I cannot carry the Institution of the Royal Society many years back, yet the seeds of it were sown in King Edward the Sixth’s, and Queen Elizabeth’s Reign: And ever since that time Experimental Learning has still retained some vital heat, though it wanted the opportunities of ripening itself, which it now enjoys. The Church of England therefore may justly be styl’d the Mother of this sort of Knowledge.¹⁹²

By the end of the seventeenth century it was clear that the leaders of the Church of England had failed to bring about the restoration of the Primitive Church, before it had been corrupted by Catholics and over-zealous Reformers. English natural philosophers, on the other hand, not directly affected by the contingencies of states which brought about the Clarendon Code, the Glorious Revolution and other political developments were able to flourish. The efforts of the former handmaiden to present herself as indifferent to the finer, or more controversial, points of both religion and natural philosophy, to reject dogmatic or uncertain doctrines, and to insist upon only those obvious and plain truths to which all men could assent to, although modelled on the parallel efforts of English religious divines, led not just to a new image of science, but also to a new way of doing science. No longer the handmaiden to religion, natural philosophy could now be viewed as unbiased, ideologically neutral, and therefore a safe and trustworthy means of establishing truth about the natural world.

This link between science and religion, unlike that of Merton’s, cannot be undermined by exercises in head counting, for example. When this irenic tradition in English theology is considered in context of the early Royal Society, it is easy to see how a latitudinarian like John Wilkins, a staunch Royalist like Walter Charleton, the rather more ‘Purtianical’ Robert Boyle and John Wallis, and the more radical reformers Samuel Hartlib and John Dury, to give a few examples, could all be in agreement. Furthermore, this thesis does not depend on

¹⁹¹ *Philosophical Transactions*, No. 80, 19 February 1671/72, p. 3085 (Cohen and Schofield, p. 57).

¹⁹² Sprat, *History*, p. 372.

prosopographical statistics but on a putative explanation of how theology conditioned natural philosophy.

In a short epilogue such as this we must confine ourselves to an impressionistic and, unfortunately, limited view of the links between natural philosophy and religion in seventeenth-century England, and not all historians will agree with such a view. It is hoped, anyway, that the brief comparisons given here can help refine and deepen our understanding of the development of English natural philosophy. Of course, I am well aware that the case I am suggesting needs further substantiation and argument. But it seems quite plausible that this broad irenic attitude toward religion will turn out to be a major factor in the development of English experimental philosophy in the latter half of the seventeenth-century.

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