WRITING CONSCIENCE AND THE NATION IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

A Dissertation in English

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine uses of conscience meant to reform and re-envision the nation in English polemics, political philosophy, personal correspondence and literature during the English Revolution. Writings from this turbulent period are rife with the language of conscience. While recent scholars have recognized the significance of this prevalent language in early modern England, important gaps remain. After all, little attention has been paid to exactly how and why writers used the language of conscience so profusely in the midst of war and revolution.

This thesis will demonstrate how the civil wars opened up a space in writing for politico-spiritual experimentation in which the language of conscience took on an unprecedented formative role, with conscience itself becoming an instrument for formulating and deploying radically new visions of the English nation. More specifically, I argue that during this period the use of conscience undergoes a dramatic change: it transitions from governing individual faith and behavior to political applications in revolutionary times. This study brings a new dimension to our understanding of the ideological fluidity between the self and the state during the middle of the seventeenth-century. In this way, focusing on conscience reintegrates the religious, political and social aspects of the English Revolution in a way never before considered, while also providing a new lens for evaluating issues of nationhood and national identity.

This project examines the distinctive language of conscience used by five writers or groups of writers: Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, the Quakers, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Milton. In chapter one, on *Eikon Basilike* (1649), I discuss how the text’s authors
used the King’s conscience as a means to maintain his subjects’ conscientious obedience even after the regicide. In chapter two, on Cromwell’s writings and speeches, I consider how Cromwell struggled to implement his program of liberty of conscience in England through his constitutional experiments of the 1650s. In chapter three, on early Quaker writing, I demonstrate how the Quakers attempted to affect national change by appealing directly to Cromwell’s conscience. In chapter four, on Lucy Hutchinson’s *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, I argue that Hutchinson revised her husband’s conscience so that he might become a republican hero, keeping alive the hope for a republican England. In chapter five, I investigate how John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) employs the idea of conscience during the Restoration to cast the restored nation as ungodly, and thus provoke dissent from his fellow nonconformists. Finally, in a brief epilogue, I discuss how Thomas Hobbes divests the individual conscience of its authority in favor of a “national conscience” in *Leviathan* (1651).

This dissertation builds upon studies of early modern conscience, religion and nonconformity, writing of the English Revolution, and conceptions of the nation in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries.
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Introduction

Conscience and the Nation

In 1622, Brilliana Conway, later Lady Brilliana Harley and a parliamentarian gentlewoman, recorded in her commonplace book her musings on conscience and obedience:

God only by his word does bind the conscience, by causing it every action either to excuse or accuse for first God is the Lord of the conscience which created it and governed it. 2 (Jam:4:12) is the only Lawgiver that has power to save to destroy the soul 3 (1 Cor 2:11) Man's conscience is knowe to none besides himself, but to God:

no man's commandement or Law can of it self, and by it[s] owne soveraigne power binde the consciens but do it only by the authoritie and vertu of the written word of God or some part thereof.

ob: subiection is due to the maiestrat for consens sake: Rom 13:5

We must obaie them but not for consciens sake of the said authoritie or Lawes properly, but for consciences of Gods commandmenmts wich apointed both maiestrate and the autoritie thereof. 1

Drawing from both William Perkins’s widely read A Discourse of Conscience (1596) 2 and the scriptures, Conway negotiates the relationship between her public duty to the magistrate and her private conscience towards God. She reveals further her
preoccupation with the topic of conscience in her commonplace book, pondering common metaphors associated with conscience, the nature of an “evill quiet consciens” versus a “good troubled conscience,” and to which part of the human mind conscience belongs.  

Though betraying her puritan leanings, Conway’s meditations on the nature of conscience were neither radical nor unusual in the Church of England at the time. As tensions between King Charles I and Parliament began to mount in the early 1640s, however, the then Lady Brilliana Harley’s idea of conscience shifted from this private realm into the public space of fraught political affairs. Harley, writing to her eldest son Edward on 21 May 1641, commented on Sir Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford’s execution: “I am glad that justice is excicuted on my lord Straford, whoo I thinke dyed like a Seneca, but not like one that had tasted the mistery of godlynness.” “My deare Ned,” she continued,

let theas exampels make you experimentally wise in Gods word, which has set forth the prosperity of the wicked to be but for a time; he flowreschess but for a time in his life, nor in his death has peace; but the godly has that continuall feast, the peace of a good contience, and his end is peace, and his memory shall not rot.  

This letter is but one amidst a flurry of letters in which Harley celebrates such events as Strafford’s beheading, which to her indicate “that the Lord has sheawed Himself so mightly for His peopell, in heareing theare prayers.” Though in her commonplace book she had recorded that “Mans consciens is knowe to none besides himself, but to God,” Harley here presumes to know the state of Strafford’s conscience at his death: he
may have died like a stoic, but he did not die like a Christian martyr, one who had “tasted the mistery of godlyness,” the peace of a good conscience. Indeed, in this letter she uses the language of conscience as a critique against national figures like Strafford, the bishops, and other wicked individuals, and to bolster the standing of the “godly” party: Parliamentarians like her husband and son. An integral part of God’s cause for members of this party, after all, was purging the nation of the powerful and ungodly who did not rule according to their consciences. These wicked persons’ fleeting prosperity was coming to an end now that the “Lords greate worke” was underway – a reformation that would allow the conscientious to flourish in both the religious and political realms.

Harley’s account marks the beginning of a revolutionary understanding of conscience that emerged during the civil wars, commonwealth, and protectorate: conscience as a means of critiquing, discerning, and ultimately re-imagining the nation. This radical language of conscience would emerge more fully after Charles I’s beheading on 30 January 1649, an event that opened up a space for political experimentation never before experienced in England. Commonwealthsmen in Parliament envisioned England as an emerging republic à la ancient Rome; the Levellers called for extensive social reforms; Fifth Monarchists awaited the reign of King Jesus; the New Model Army, a hotbed of religious radicalism, purged Parliament and made possible Oliver Cromwell’s constitutional experiments of the 1650s; the Quakers imagined England the new Israel, and Christ returned in the spirit; and the Diggers fought unsuccessfully for an England free of covetousness and private ownership. In seeking national reformation, many of these groups employed the language of conscience in order to prove their objectives divinely inspired and sanctioned, and altogether necessary.
Writing Conscience and the Nation

This dissertation examines uses of conscience meant to reform and re-envision the nation in English polemics, political philosophy, personal correspondence and literature during the English Revolution and early Restoration. While recent scholars have recognized the significance of conscience in early modern England, important gaps remain. In many literary studies, conscience itself assumes a tangential position in a larger conversation of casuistry and moral decision-making. While several historical and philosophical studies are also preoccupied with casuistry, others focus more closely on conscience in relation to modern subjectivity, religious dissent, and toleration. Scholars of the English Revolution often mention the importance of the language of conscience during this turbulent period, but little has been done to explore this topic at length. Moreover, historians and literary critics working on conscience have given little attention to the connections between conscience and the nation. Similarly, those scholars writing on the emergence of a national consciousness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have not fully recognized the idea of conscience as central to this phenomenon, especially during the English Revolution. Scholarship on the nation, and on republicanism in particular, has failed to connect classical republican thought and widespread religious radicalism during this watershed moment in English history. Jonathan Scott contends that we will not understand the English Revolution “until we reintegrate our examination of its religious, social and political agendas” – a reintegration that this dissertation hopes to further through a focus on conscience.

This dissertation will provide the first systematic examination of the function of the language of conscience during the English Revolution. Specifically, I argue that during this period the use of conscience undergoes a dramatic change: it transitions from
governing individual faith and behavior to political applications in revolutionary times. The civil wars opened up a space in writing for politico-spiritual experimentation in which the language of conscience took on an unprecedented formative role, with conscience itself becoming an instrument for formulating and deploying radically new visions of the English nation. Ranging from letters, to polemical prose, to biography and to literary epic, this project illuminates how an assortment of active writers and political thinkers – Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, the Quakers, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Milton – powerfully exercise the language of conscience to respond to this revolutionary moment.

I define “writing” broadly to include a range of genres, from printed speeches to unprinted manuscripts, so that the prevalence of this phenomenon might be grasped more fully. Indeed, each of these writers and political thinkers hailed from different social classes, received different levels of education, and espoused different forms of Protestantism. As a result, they also had different understandings of exactly what conscience is: while the dictates of conscience were principally extracted from the scriptures for most of the writers represented here (with the exception of the extra-biblical Quaker conscience), their interpretations of those scriptures were usually as diverse as their political affiliations. As a result, “conscience” must necessarily be recognized as a complex and heterogeneous concept throughout this project.

Nevertheless, for each of these writers, conscience remained their highest authority when considering their own beliefs, actions, and ultimately the shape they assumed the nation should take in times of revolution, regicide, and restructuring. Their understanding of the Word of God, or in the case of the Quakers, the Light of God, through the filter of conscience, after all, was the very foundation of their relationship to the divine. In this
way, conscience was the mediator between the individual and God. By hoping to shape the nation according to the dictates of their consciences, then, each of these writers sought to implement a national program dictated by God Himself. As a result, the ideological fluidity between the self and the state reached new heights, often with radical results.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the frequent yoking together of conscience and “nation writing,” or, in the case of the English Revolution, *re*-writing. A host of recent critics have long since challenged the “modernist” view of nations and nationalism, which limited discussion of these ideas to the eighteenth-century. Indeed, Richard Helgerson, Andrew Hadfield, Patrick Cheney, Claire McEachern, and others have shown how the English (and in some cases “British”) nation and a sense of “Englishness” was constructed in writings of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The figures in this project, as I hope to demonstrate, similarly “wrote” the nation or a nation most suitable to the dictates of their consciences. “Nation” in this seventeenth-century context refers at times to a people sharing a common nativity, at others to a people linked by a common government, or even in some cases to England as God’s chosen nation. The turmoil of the civil wars created an urgency for most of these writers to discern God’s plan for England’s future, especially after the regicide. For this reason, conscience played an unprecedented role in conceptions of the “nation” as never before imagined: England as a republic, England as the new Israel, or even England as the site of Christ’s imminent Second Coming.

Finally, as this dissertation will show, the radical notion of conscience was still in circulation even after the Restoration. The English Revolution, after all, did not end with
the return of King Charles II. Instead, revolutionary ideas, language, hopes, and writing
thrived well after the collapse of the commonwealth.

Revolutions of Conscience

Saint Paul introduced the idea of conscience into the Christian tradition.Derived from
the popular Greek word syneidesis, the word “conscience” meant a feeling of shame or
fear in response to one’s own past wrongdoings. By incorporating this terminology into
the Christian belief, Paul transformed this instinctual phenomenon into a response instead
to God’s wrath, with its chief function being to “evaluate actions [. . .] not to identify and
define ‘the good’ or ‘God’s will’ either concretely or abstractly.” When Jerome
translated the Greek New Testament into Latin, however, he took a concept that was for
the “N[ew] T[estament] writers a precise, indeed somewhat narrow, idea,” according to
C.A. Pierce, and transformed it into “a conception so broad, vague and formless as to
confuse rather than clarify all ethical discussions from that moment forward.”
The Latin term conscientia, from the verb conscire, literally means to know with. Though the
meaning of conscientia encompasses the essence of the Greek syneidesis, it has a much
broader and more complex range of use. Conscientia can be a joint knowledge, common
knowledge, consciousness; it can mean either a good conscience or a feeling of guilt or
remorse. This sense of a “shared knowledge” imbued conscience with a public function
– in addition to its private function – wholly absent from its Greek origins.

This troubled etymological history contributed to the elusiveness of the idea of
“conscience” in both medieval philosophy – where Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others
attempted to pin down its meaning – and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
when calls for “liberty of conscience” echoed throughout England and on the continent.
Precariously bridging the divide between the public and private spheres, the medieval conscience was “never the sole property of its subject, but [was] intersubjectively held.”

This sense of conscience, after all, was directed by God’s laws as defined by the Catholic Church and its fathers. Even Augustine, whose pained experience with his conscience in the *Confessions* seems most personal, asserted, “For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of Catholic Church.”

The Reformation, however, wrested from the Catholic Church sole guardianship over the individual conscience, offering reformed believers scripture as their consciences’ principal guide. Martin Luther’s renowned declaration at the Diet of Worms substantiated this shift:

> [my] conscience is captive to the words of God; I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is never safe nor virtuous to go against conscience.

> I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.

> [capta conscientia in verbis dei, revocare neque possum nec volo quiquam, cum contra conscientiam agere neque tutum neque integrum sit.

> Ich kan nicht anderst, hie stehe ich, Got helff mir, Amen.]

In this moment, as Paul Strohm argues, Luther “was announcing, and in a sense formalizing, a new understanding of conscience,” one that “may indeed be considered a ‘Reformation’ conscience.” The idea of a “Reformation conscience” diverged from its medieval predecessor in its connection to the Word and function as barometer of the individual’s faith in Christ and his promise of salvation by grace alone. The role of conscience thus transitioned away from the scholastic tradition where its primary function was the application of moral precepts to particular situations and towards interrogating “questions of religious belief itself.” And, the furious translation of the
Bible into the vernacular during the Reformation allowed this revolutionary idea of conscience to thrive as the Word became more available for private study and consideration. Such accessibility forged a new relationship between the individual and his conscience, opening the door to a range of conflicting Protestantisms – an unintended, though inevitable, after-effect of Luther’s Reformation.  

Henry VIII, by employing a new understanding of conscience to resolve his “Great Matter,” inaugurated a new relationship between conscience and the nation in England. Prior to the English Reformation, references to a personal conscience – my conscience, your conscience – were rare in writing. Henry’s insistence upon his conscience throughout the divorce proceedings, however, put such language into wider circulation. In 1528, Archbishop Thomas Wolsey sent word to Rome of his own certainty that the King’s desire for an annulment was “ground upon justice” and that despite Henry’s affection for Catherine, “as this matrimony is contrary to God’s law, the King’s conscience is grievously offended.” Similarly, Henry himself assured his ambassadors in Rome that the divorce must be granted for the “exoneration of our conscience.” Speaking before the Legatine Court on 18 June 1529, Henry expressed viscerally the pangs of his troubled conscience: “It was a certain scrupulosity that pricked my conscience”; “These words [the French Ambassador’s questioning of Mary’s legitimacy] were so conceived within my scrupulous conscience that it bred a doubtful prick within my breast, which doubt pricked, vexed, and troubled so my mind”; “I thought it good […] in the relief of the weighty burden of scrupulous conscience, to attempt the law therein, and whether I might take another wife.” The King drew on both Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 to challenge the papal dispensation of 1505, setting the
judgment of his scripturally informed conscience over the judgment of the Catholic Church. “Though the law of every man’s conscience be but a private court,” Henry claimed, “yet it is the highest and supreme court for judgement or justice.” The judgment of Henry’s “private court” of conscience would send ripples across Europe, and earned him a prominent place in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* amidst copious stories of Protestant sufferers for conscience’s cause.

However revolutionary Henry’s reliance on his “private conscience” seemed, he did not extend such liberties to his subjects: a hard-learned lesson for Thomas More, who refused to take the Oath of Supremacy for his conscience’s sake. Mimicking the King’s own call to his personal conscience, More wrote to his daughter that he never intended to “pin my soul at another man’s back,” and therefore “dare not do it [take the Oath], mine own conscience standing against it.” Like any good Christian, More knew that oaths were sworn to man and God. For this reason, he testified before the King’s Commissioners in 1534 that “in my conscience” this matter of the Oath “was one of the cases in which I was bounden that I should not obey my prince.” Most interesting about More’s case is the fact that the Commissioners implored More to “leave off the doubt of your unsure conscience” so that he might take the surer way of obedience to Henry. Like Luther at the Diet of Worms, so More was encouraged to abandon the dictates of his conscience for the sake of a higher authority. For Luther, that authority was the Church, an international spiritual body, wielding a power separate from that of the monarch. For More, however, that higher authority was the King of England: a conflation of spiritual and national-secular authority that he tried to resist by refusing to take the Oath.
This disregard for the subject’s conscience in the face of the King’s was not exclusive to More’s case. At a tribunal held at London Blackfriars in June 1529 to consider the validity of the King’s marriage, Henry put it to his prelates’ “conscience and judgment” to rule in the matter. However, when John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, objected to the divorce on the ground of his conscience, Henry discounted Fisher’s protest: “Well, well,’ quod the King, ‘it shall make no matter. We will not stand with you in argument herein, for you are but one man.”

Not only did Henry seem to privilege his own conscience over those of his subjects, but also he began to believe their consciences “within royal jurisdiction.” Indeed, after his marriage to Jane Seymour, Henry instituted a new Oath of Allegiance that gave him the power to determine the succession. This Oath declared it treason to protest “upon any interrogatories that shall be objected to them for or concerning this Acte as any thing therein contayned, that they be not bound to declare their thought and consciens.” In the case of this act, Henry forced (or hoped to force) subjects to reveal their consciences and its dictates, and believed that such power was his due. Though oaths of allegiance were enforced by both Henry IV and Henry VI, as Edward Vallance points out, “[w]ith the Tudors’ assumption of ecclesiastical supremacy loyalty came increasingly to be defined in political and religious terms. Subjects were for the first time asked to swear to a set of beliefs.”

While Henry attempted to supersede, control and even know his subjects’ consciences, Elizabeth hoped to use the authority of conscience to secure her supremacy, requiring frequent “displays of conscientious assent” regarding the legitimacy of the crown. Drawing on the power of Romans 13:5 – “ye must be subject [to the magistrate], not because of wrath onely, but also for conscience sake” – the Elizabethan
regime recognized conscience as foundational to civil order. Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of York, in defense of preaching ministers held that “obedience proceedeth of conscience, conscience is grounded vppon the worde of God, the worde of God worketh his effect by preaching.” This formulation brought together the civic and divine duties of the conscience—loyalty to God and loyalty to the Queen—under one act of obedience. Though Grindal’s advocacy of both preaching and prophesying would lose him his favor with the Queen, the idea of conscientious obedience was not exclusive to Grindal nor was it lost on the Tudor state. The Lords’ and Commons’ petition to the Queen of 2 March 1576 assured Elizabeth that “preaching of the Word” was the “only ordinary mean of salvation of souls and th’only good means to teach your majesty’s subjects to know their true obedience to your majesty,” the “bond of conscience being of all other most straitest.”

Anxiety regarding the bond of conscience was not surprising considering the influence of John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs throughout Elizabeth’s reign. Going through five editions and one abridgment from 1563 to 1596-7 alone, Foxe’s magnum opus was a documentary history celebrating dissent for conscience’s sake—dissent that was characterized as distinctly English. Many of the martyrs, like the minister Thomas Wyttel, went to the scaffold with their “conscience and minde” “quiet in Christ” and “verye well willyng and content to geue ouer this body to the deathe for the testimonye of his truth.” Though Foxe expressed much deference to Elizabeth’s civil authority in his preface, the text itself left open the possibility (or threat) of future dissent if the monarch failed to carry out the reforms expected by evangelical Protestants. Indeed, it is no surprise that the eighth edition of the Book of Martyrs was published in 1641 against the
backdrop of the Bishop’s Wars (1639-40) (the Scot’s rebellion against Charles’s attempt to reform the Scottish Kirk), and the impeachment trials of Archbishop William Laud and the Earl of Strafford, who lost their heads in 1645 and 1641.51

In response to the looming fear of conscience, Elizabeth increasingly hoped to appear a guardian over her subjects’ consciences, with her own becoming a national conscience of sorts. She allegedly did not desire to make windows into her subjects’ souls, yet she nevertheless recognized the important connection between conscience and obedience. For this reason, she held that the Laws of England, and especially those laws regarding the Church of England, were in absolute agreement with God’s own laws. In a speech to the heads of Oxford University on 28 September 1592, the Queen desired that the University’s care “be especially to worship God” but “not in the manner of the opinion of all nor according to the over-curious and too-searching wits, but as the divine law commands and our law teaches.” “For indeed,” she continues, “you do not have a prince who teaches you anything that ought to be contrary to a true Christian conscience.” The operative phrase here is “true Christian conscience”: any individual with a true conscience would find that what “our law teaches” is not contrary to the scriptures and only individuals with a false, un-Christian conscience would believe otherwise. She would, after all, “be dead before I command you do to do anything that is forbidden by the Holy Scriptures.” Assuring her audience that she would not “abandon the care of your souls,” Elizabeth implores them “not to go before the laws but to follow them”: “Shall I neglect the care of souls, for the neglect of which my own soul will be judged?” In this way, each subject must share guardianship over his soul between his
conscience and his Queen, ultimately recognizing the continuity between what “divine law commands” and “ours compels,” and the Queen’s salvation and their own. 52

Elizabeth makes this call for absolute and conscientious obedience, not surprisingly, in the name of warding off disunity in the nation from within and from without. And, like her father and her successors, the Queen feared the Reformation conscience as a potential source of such commotions. For this reason, she increasingly stressed the importance of obedience to superiors in both temporal and ecclesiastical matters during the last decade of her reign, and in the face of a thriving Protestant resistance theory, Jesuit incendiaries, and non-conformist factions in the English church. 53

James VI and I continued to cultivate the connection between conscience and obedience, faith and allegiance. More importantly, as Kevin Sharpe argues, James “believed in a ‘common quality conscience’ in which all (himself included) shared, rather than ‘distinct individual consciences.’” 54 To stave off the dangerous potential of the Reformation conscience, then, James touted the ideal that since there was “one God, one Scripture,” there was also “one conscience for the commonwealth.” 55 This notion of a homogenous conscience bolstered the link that James built between civil obedience and conscience. Like Elizabeth, James knew that the “bond of conscience” was “the only sure bond for tying of men’s affections to them whom to they owe a natural duty.” 56 As a result, even in the case of his Catholic subjects, where there could not be continuity between faith allegiance, James still sought to create this “bond of conscience” with the Oath of Allegiance (1606). In response, Pope Paul V issued two statements informing English Catholics that they “cannot with safe Conscience take the Oath.” 57 The Oath itself was book-ended with professions of conscience to the King’s temporal authority:
“I A.B. doe trewly and sincerely acknowledge, professe, testifie and declare in my conscience before God and the world, That our Soueraigne Lord King IAMES, is lawfull King of this Realme,” and again at the end of the oath, “I doe beleue, and in conscience am resolued, that neither the Pope nor any person whatsoeuer, hath power to absolue me of this Oath, or any part thereof.”

Prompted by the Pope’s statement to differentiate political and divine obedience, James responded with *Triplici Nodo, triplex cuneus. Or An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance* in 1607. He assured his Catholic subjects that by issuing the Oath, he “intended no persecution against them for conscience cause”; rather, he “onely desired to be secured of them for ciuill obedience, which for conscience cause they were bound to performe.” Any Catholics objecting to “so iust a charge,” then, gave him “so great and iust a ground for punishment of them, without touching any matter of conscience.”

By separating out their temporal obedience to the King from their purely spiritual obedience to the Pope, James could persecute Catholics for not swearing on their consciences to his supremacy in temporal matters *without* “touching any matter of conscience.” This separation seems tenuous at best, while also revealing the weight that James put on conscience as a dangerous entity that needed to be controlled.

James’s attempt to stabilize the idea and function of conscience is also evident in his authorization of the King James Bible (1611). Since the scriptures were the very text that individuals’ consciences relied upon for guidance and an understanding of God’s law, the Word as it was available also had to be stabilized. James found the Geneva Bible “the worst of all” bible translations. He objected primarily to this version’s notes, which he found to be “very partiall, vntrue, seditious, and sauouring too much of daangerous, and trayterous conceites.” Thus, the authorized version was not to have any
“Marginal Notes at all” “but only for the Explanation of the Hebrew or Greek Words.” More importantly, by eliminating these notes, the King James Bible of 1611 only contained 54 references to conscience in comparison to the 182 references in the Geneva Bible of 1587. Even the Bishop’s Bible of 1568 contained 72 uses of the word. These notes were missed after 1611: “[t]he people complained that they could not see into the sense of the Scriptures” in the King James Version “so well as formerly they did by the Geneva Bible.” Not surprisingly, Archbishop Laud also tried to suppress the Geneva Bible: citing James’s objections to the notes during his trial, Laud claimed “now of late these notes were more commonly used to ill purposes than formerly.” By thus sponsoring the production of an “authorized version” of the Bible that would have to be “ratified by his Royall authoritie,” James hoped to eradicate the dangers of the Geneva Bible with its conscience-laden notes to the zealous reader.

From the Reformation to the civil wars, then, the idea of conscience had a troubled relationship to the nation: Henry VIII, Elizabeth, James, and finally Charles tried to find innovative ways – accusations of treason, oaths, Bible translations, church reforms, etc. – to harness the power of this still-evolving concept. Charles, much like his predecessors, cultivated the idea that subjects should be obedient to the monarch for their consciences’ sake, with his own conscience occupying the role of the “conscience of the nation” (as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 1). Once Charles lost his head on 30 January 1649, however, for the first time since the Reformation, there was no official monarch to whom subjects should pledge their conscientious obedience. Though royalists and the Scots vowed their support to the man they believed the rightful King – Charles, Prince of Wales – there were some, like the writers represented in this thesis, who filled this void
with their own consciences. Oliver Cromwell, John Milton, and many others viewed this unprecedented moment as divinely ordained, and searched their consciences for the next step that God wanted them to take in reforming the English nation. In this way, the writings examined in the following chapters are blueprints for the future of England—a godly nation re-imagined through conscience, and thus dictated by God, His scriptures, and, in some cases, His light within.

**Conscience and the English Revolution**

This dissertation is structured largely chronologically to emphasize the range of understandings of conscience during this revolutionary period in English history. Moreover, the five chapters overlap to create a larger narrative regarding individuals’ struggles to discern their own, and God’s, role in rebuilding a unified English nation.

Chapter 1, “Charles I, *Eikon Basilike*, and the Pulpit-Work of the King’s Conscience,” explores Charles I’s efforts to maintain his subjects’ conscientious obedience, even after his death, through *Eikon Basilike* (1649). Like his predecessors, Charles considered his control over the English pulpits key to maintaining his power. Once the royalist sway over those pulpits declined during the civil wars, the King and his supporters had to find a substitute that would similarly establish that essential bond between monarch and subject. The authors of *Eikon Basilike*, then, presented Charles’s conscience in a way that would not only secure subjects’ conscientious obedience to the posthumous King, but also ensure the survival of the royalist state even in the absence of its head.

Chapter 2, “Oliver Cromwell, Liberty of Conscience, and the ‘door to usher-in the things that God has promised,’” looks at a second head of state, though one whose idea of conscience differed dramatically from Charles I’s. Oliver Cromwell remained a strong
advocate of “liberty of conscience” for the duration of his public career, as is apparent in his various speeches to Parliament and his private correspondence. He believed that it was only through such liberty that a godly commonwealth, stronger and more cohesive than ever, would finally emerge. But, ironically, it was Cromwell’s forceful determination to secure this liberty that continually destabilized his efforts to establish a successful civilian government.

Chapter 3, “Early Quaker Writing, Oliver Cromwell, and the Nationalization of Conscience,” examines how the Quakers used their radical notion of the “light within conscience” in an attempt to shape the nation through appeals to Oliver Cromwell’s conscience. During the early years of their movement, Friends believed that Christ’s second coming had already occurred; yet, while groups like the Fifth Monarchists were awaiting Christ in the flesh, the Quakers argued that he had returned in spirit – a spirit or “light” accessible only through the conscience. Now that Christ had come, they contended, the nation should be ruled according to this light within everyone’s consciences, including Cromwell’s. Indeed, their numerous pamphlets and letters to Cromwell reveal not only the radical nature of the Quaker idea of conscience, but also their hope that Cromwell would use the light that all consciences shared to reshape England.

Chapter 4, “Lucy Hutchinson’s Revisions of Conscience from the ‘Defense of John Hutchinson’ to the Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson,” shows how Lucy Hutchinson uses the dictates of her husband’s conscience in the Memoirs to inspire a republican future for the English nation even after the Restoration. To do this, however, Lucy Hutchinson first has to revise, and in some cases suppress, the historical record,
particularly in the cases of her husband’s petition to the speaker of the House of Commons in 1660, as well as his speech before Parliament that same year – both of which revealed his efforts (actual or claimed) to aid Charles II in his return to the throne. The constructed picture that emerges as a result is that of a republican martyr who died in prison for God’s cause, and for his conscience’s sake. Lucy Hutchinson’s belief that this revolutionary moment had not yet passed reveals how, even during the Restoration, nonconformists looked back to the civil wars and commonwealth period to inspire hope for the future of the nation.

Finally, Chapter 5, “Conscience and the “Paradise Within” in *Paradise Lost,*” investigates how John Milton employs the idea of conscience during the Restoration to cast the restored nation as ungodly, and thus to provoke dissent from his fellow nonconformists. *Paradise Lost* powerfully depicts the experience of conscience – both the peace of a good conscience and the hellish horrors of a bad conscience. Using this visceral experience, the poem reveals to the readers that it is only through conscience – and maintaining the peace of their consciences – that they might finally subdue and regulate their enemies in both church and state. Milton’s is not only a message of survival but also of victory.

This project, then, will explore not only how the language of conscience is used in the English Revolution, but also how it makes a significant contribution to the radical ferment of thought and writing in the mid-seventeenth-century. More importantly, it will demonstrate that the idea and language of conscience is part of what makes those years revolutionary.
2 Perkin, A Discovrse of Conscience (London, 1596), “Magistracie indeed is an ordinance of God to which we owe subjection, but how farre subiection is due there is the question. For body & goods & outward conversation I grant all: but a subiection of conscience to mans lawes, I deny. And betweene these two there is a great difference to be subiect to authority in conscience, & to be subject to it for conscience” (47).

3 Commonplace book, fo. 84r.


5 Ibid, p. 132.


9 Two important recent studies of conscience include Andrew R. Murphy’s Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England


11 See for example Richard Helgerson’s Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and David Norbrook’s Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics 1627-1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Helgerson, focusing on “discursive communities,” contends that two forms of nationhood emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries in England: the first was based in the idea of nationhood as a state construct, and the other a populist approach to nationhood, based in opposition to the state or nobility. Norbrook
argues for the development of a “republican imagination,” derived from the study of classical texts, in England beginning in the 1620s through the 1660s.

12 Jonathan Scott, Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), isolates this same phenomenon: “the major historians of classical republicanism have tended to treat it as a secular, or secularising, ideological force [and] the most important historian of [...] social radicalism, the late Christopher Hill, had ideological preoccupations which led him to be less interested in classical republicans than in plebian sectaries” (xi). Walter S.H. Lim, John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006) is an exception to this trend.

13 Scott, p. xi.


19 V.P. Furnish, as quoted in Leon Morris’ *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 126-27.


Baylor points out that as a result of Luther’s stand, “the authority of the church to act as an instructor and guide of conscience received a shock from which it never recovered” (270).

D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. 7 (Weimar, 1897), p. 838.

Strohm, “Conscience.”

Baylor, p. 271.

Strohm, “Conscience.”

Strohm, “Conscience.” See also, the OED, “conscience”: “In ME. conscience took the place of the earlier term INWIT in all its senses [. . . ] The word is etymologically, as its form shows, a noun of condition or function, like science, prescience, intelligence, prudence, etc., and as such originally had no plural: a man or a people had more or less conscience. But in sense 4 it came gradually to be thought of as an individual entity, a member or organ of the mental system, of which each man possessed one, and thus it took a and pl. So my conscience, your conscience, was understood to mean no longer our respective shares or amounts of the common quality conscience, but to be two distinct individual consciences, mine and yours.”


Byrne p. 106.

The Oath of Supremacy under Henry VIII declared the monarch the head of the Church of England.

See *The Last Letters of Thomas More*, ed. Alvaro de Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 79. de Silva points out that “The word *conscience* is conspicuous throughout the last letters, appearing a total of one hundred times, and more than forty times in a single letter,” the letter quoted above. “Indeed,” he continues, “More’s prison epistolary can be read as a lasting monument in praise of conscience” (8).

In Robert Sanderson’s *De juramento: seven lectures concerning the obligation of promisory oaths* (London, 1655), Sanderson notes that “because an Oath tends to the honour of God as being an acknowledgement of his truth, wisdome, justice, and divine power. For although a falsf oath, or an oath lightly, rashly, or otherwise unduly taken, discover a certain irreverence to, or rather contempt of God in the party swearing, and savour too much of Atheisme: the act nevertheless of swearing in its own nature implies a reverence of the divine Name. For since every oath is made for confirmation of that which is avouched by the party swearing; and all confirmation ought to be made by
something that is most certain, and of greater authority, (Heb. 6. Menverily swear by the
greater:) He who swears, ipso facto acknowledgeth God to be his superior, a witnesse of
the highest authority; of infallible truth, the searcher of hearts, and the most just, and
powerfull punisher of all perjury and falshood. An oath therefore is a religious act” (pp.
7-8).

39 The Last Letters p. 60.
40 English Historical Documents, 5:712.
41 Edward Vallance, Revolutionary England and the National Covenant: State Oaths,
20.
42 Qtd. in Vallance, p. 20.
43 Ibid.
44 See Robert Zaller’s The Discourse of Legitimacy in Early Modern England (Stanford:
45 The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin
46 Zaller p. 74.
47 Zaller p. 74.
48 This petition is printed in its entirety, along with Elizabeth’s response, in Elizabeth I:
Collected Works, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago:

51 King, pp. 150-51.

52 *Collected Works* p. 328. For a detailed discussion of this speech, along with a comparison to her earlier and more humanist speeches before both Cambridge and Oxford, see Linda Shenk’s “Turning Learned Authority into Royal Supremacy: Elizabeth I’s Learned Persona and Her University Orations” in *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 78-96.

53 John Guy, “The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth?,” *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-19, isolates the period from 1585 to 1603 as the “second reign of Elizabeth,” characterized by a dramatic “swing to the right.” Reacting to both the sustained Jesuit threat and the non-conformist factions in the English church, religious leaders such as John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft increasingly stressed divine right.


55 Sharpe, p. 78.


58 Political Writings, pp. 88-9.

59 Political Writings p. 86.


61 Pollard, p. 54.

62 Hill, The English Bible, pp. 64-5.


64 Pollard, p. 46.
Chapter 1
Charles I, *Eikon Basilike*, and the Pulpit-Work of the King’s Conscience

On 29 May 1676, James Duport, dean of Peterborough and college head, delivered a sermon on the anniversary of Charles II’s birthday and return to England, asking his congregants, “Is it not strange, that when the Apostle bids us *be subject to the Higher Powers*, and obey lawful Autority *for conscience sake*, any should pretend *conscience* for their disobedience?”¹ Focusing on 1 Peter 2:17, “Fear God. Honour the King,” Duport called obedience to the King not merely civil law, but also an “act of Religion” rendering it impossible for any man to “truly *fear God*, and not *honour the King*.”² And, he continued, if any thinks his conscience not in accordance with this due obedience, then his conscience is a “dangerous thing” that must be rectified by “distrust[ing] his own judgment” and accepting the “judgments of so many wise, grave learn’d, and godly men, his Superiors in Church and State.”³ Thus, Duport concluded, “‘tis in vain for any to plead or pretend tenderness of conscience for their contempt and disobedience.”⁴ Though steeped in the Restoration politics of its day, Duport’s sermon was typical in its treatment of conscientious obedience towards the King, an idea promoted from the pulpit since the Reformation. Yet, his words also remind us that the civic role of obedience was anxiously attached to conscience during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, a role ideally secured via the pulpits.

When the royalist sway over the pulpits began to wane during the civil wars, however, the King and his supporters had to turn to another medium in order to sustain this sense of conscientious obedience: print. Such “paper bullets,” Jason McElligot points out, exhibited a “vibrant, pugnacious royalism, committed to the need to win
Despite the steady stream of royalist newsbooks and other illicit royalist publications during this period, no efforts in print rivaled the success of the *Eikon Basilike* (1649). *Eikon Basilike*, in its attempt to sustain obedience to the crown, gave the English nation an unprecedented view into its King’s conscience. Written in the fashion of Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, the King’s book established the “fixity of the King’s conscience” with Charles presented as a figure of “innocence afflicted” and “heroic suffering.” This effective rhetorical strategy was the culmination of both Charles’s and his supporters’ labors to vindicate the King’s actions during the civil wars in terms of his scrupulous conscience. Indeed, the King’s dedication to his conscience in *Eikon Basilike*, rather than teaching his readers the “arts of holy living and holy dying,” instead taught them the art of civil obedience, for conscience’s sake.

Charles’s appeal to conscience has long been acknowledged as a cornerstone of the King’s book, though the topic has not been explored at length. Viewing *Eikon Basilike* as a casuistical text or as the genuine discharge of the “royal conscience,” scholars such as Kevin Sharpe and Andrew Lacey have given due attention to the notion of a “private conscience” and its complex relationship to “public duties.” More specifically, they agree that Charles “had great difficulty in separating out the actions of the prince from those of the private individual.” In this way, through “maintaining an unspotted conscience Charles was fulfilling his duty not only as a Christian but also as a virtuous king.” But, in order to understand how and why conscience is used so extensively in *Eikon Basilike* – the word appears over 110 times in the text – we must examine the public role and function of that language beyond Charles’s duties as a monarch. Indeed, “when applied politically,” as in the *Eikon Basilike*, “conscience could
be a radical concept because of its unimpeachable source of authority” – God’s law.\textsuperscript{11} Most remarkable here, however, is that this “unimpeachable source of authority” was most often employed against Charles by Presbyterians, Independents and religious radicals seeking freedom of conscience. For Charles’s detractors, Calvinist Resistance Theory had left a space (however small) for civil disobedience to the King, a political activism warranted by the dictates of their consciences and attacked by royalists like Duport.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Eikon Basilike}, then, recovers this language of freedom of conscience for the King’s cause against a rebellious and disobedient Parliament, drawing on the religious and civic duties of conscience.

Rather than read \textit{Eikon Basilike} as either casuistical or merely introspective, I will here argue that the prevalent language of conscience in the King’s book functioned for the reader as the pulpit would have for the listener: as a call to conscientious obedience. Though Charles was undoubtedly a genuine “man of conscience,” he, like his predecessors, believed that his subjects’ consciences were the ultimate locus of civil obedience, the “bond of conscience being of all other most straitest.”\textsuperscript{13} In the absence of the royalist pulpits, then, \textit{Eikon Basilike} uses the King’s conscience to remind the nation that it owed obedience to the King and that civil disobedience was a transgression against God Himself.

\textbf{Conscience, Obedience, and the Pulpit}

Charles was especially attuned to the relationship between the pulpit, the subject’s conscience, and his own power. The Reformation had wrested from the Catholic Church guardianship over the individual conscience, offering reformed believers scripture as their consciences’ principal guide. Yet mediating between the scriptures and the
conscience was the Church of England, and more particularly, its clergy. Preaching thus became more than ever a political act, with sermons negotiating the terms between monarchical power, obedience and God. Indeed, the only way to make the connection between obedience to God and obedience to the King an enduring one was to validate it according to conscience. In this way, obedience to the monarch was not a choice but rather an irrefutable act of conscience, as Duport suggested. The private role of conscience in understanding and interpreting the Word of God was thus transformed into a public and political act.

According to this model, the pulpits could work upon a subject’s private conscience in order to forge its public role of obedience. Conscience as a result was thought to be at once permeable and unimpeachable: though it could be permeated by a preacher’s voice, once an individual accepted the preacher’s dictates as true according to the Word of God, that belief became unimpeachable. A sermon delivered to Charles in April 1627 by John Donne, then Dean of St. Paul’s, demonstrated this permeability – a permeability that occurred, not surprisingly, through listening. Appropriately, Donne focused on Mark 4:24, “Take heed what ye hear.” Donne tells his listeners that “Christ speaks to us in our Ear,” through which the “Holy Ghost insinuates himselfe into our soules, and works upon us so, by his private motions.” And Christ’s “Ministers are an Earth-quake” when they pass on His message; their preaching “batters the soul” and “scatters a cloudy conscience,” and “by that breach, the Spirit enters.” This exposition confirms the influential nature of the pulpits: it is through preaching that the Holy Spirit enters the soul, and the clouds that confuse conscience are dispelled. The flipside of this process, however, also suggests the vulnerability of the ear as an inroad to both the soul
and conscience. Later in the sermon the verse “Take heed what you hear” takes on a foreboding sense: Donne warns his listeners to “Come not so neare evill speaking” because a “man may have a good breath in himself, and yet be deadly infected.” The ear, then, could bring one closer to salvation or damnation, depending on what it hears.

If conscience could in fact be permeated in this way, then controlling the information disseminating from the pulpits was especially crucial. Accordingly, Charles’s accession marked a striking shift in the content of court sermons and, more importantly, the Paul’s Cross Sermons. Paul’s Cross was the “most public pulpit in the land,” and as a result the Church and Crown carefully regulated the sermons preached there. In 1628, Charles forbade preachers to discuss the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, a declaration catalyzing a dramatic change in the content of the Paul’s Cross sermons (or at least those being printed) beginning that same year. Replacing the orthodox Calvinist sermons relatively common during Elizabeth and James’s reigns were those betraying Arminian sympathies. These sermons promulgated not only the doctrine of universal grace, but also unconditional obedience to the sovereign and conformity to the Church of England. Millar MacLure characterizes the Paul’s Cross sermons of this era as but “an echo, sometimes fuzzy, always monotonous, of the administration.”

Because of this belief in the connection between monarchical power and the pulpit, Charles feared that if his influence over the pulpit waned, so would his national support. As early as 1642, Charles was anxious about an idea “vented in some Pulpits (by those desperate turbulent Preachers, who are the great Promoters of the Distempers of this time) That humane Laws do not bind the Conscience.” Similarly, in “His Majesties
Declaration to all His Loving Subjects” issued later that year, Charles lamented that “licence even to Treason is admitted (that is, not punished) in Pulpits,” with “Persons ignorant in Learning and Vnderstanding, turbulent and seditious in disposition, scandalous in life, and unconformable in Opinion to the Laws of the Land [...] imposed upon Parishes to infect and poyson the mindes of Our People.” Later in the “Declaration,” he asked “by what measure and rule the Reformation they so much talk of, is to be made” when

the blessed means of advancing Religion, the preaching of the Word of God, is turned into a Licence of libelling, and reviling both Church and State, and venting such seditious positions, as by the Laws of the Land are no lesse then Treason, and scarce a man in reputation and credit with these Grand Reformers, who is not notoriously guilty of this; whilst those learned, reverend, painfull, and pious Preachers, who have been and are the most eminent and able assertours of the Protestant Religion, are (to the unspeakable joy of the Adversaries to Our Religion) disregarded and oppressed.

Charles’s concerns regarding what he saw as a hijacking of the national pulpit were not completely unfounded. William Haller confirms that “by the time fighting began,” Parliament made “certain that the Word should be preached and that the Puritan brotherhood should be free to preach it as they saw fit.” Similarly, Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, claimed that the “strange wild-fire among the people” in 1642 “was not so much and so furiously kindled by the breath of the Parliament as of the clergy, who both administered fuel and blowed the coals in the Houses too.” These preachers, Clarendon continues, having “driven all learned and orthodox men from the pulpits [...]

under the notion of reformation and extirpating of Popery, infused seditious inclinations into the hearts of men against the present government of the Church, with many libellous invectives against the State too” and “the person of the King.”

In reality, between 1640-1660, about 3,000 of England’s 8,600 parish clergy lost their positions, were pressured to resign, were imprisoned, and fined. In 1642, Parliament created a Committee for Plundered Ministers, which would replace royalist clergy with Parliamentarian supporters. In 1643, local officials were also given the permission to expel royalist clergy. Despite these efforts, however, many of the pre-war clergy maintained their positions in the church, and Independent and Presbyterian clergy most likely remained in the minority throughout the republic. Charles’s perception of the Parliament’s ability to reconfigure the Church of England was exaggerated, yet his anxieties regarding this matter of the pulpits fed into his correspondence during the civil war, and most pervasively into *Eikon Basilike*.

**The King’s Irresistible Conscience**

In a copy of the twenty-fifth edition of *Eikon Basilike*, an eighteenth-century collector and reader has left telling notes in the front and back covers of the book. Those written in the front cover indicate that the book’s owner was an antiquarian: he has recorded both what seems to be a shelf-mark, as well as the pedigree of his edition. The notes in the back cover, written in the same hand, show that his interests went beyond those of a collector. There, the owner began indexing moments in *Eikon Basilike*, particularly those related to the King’s policies in the English and Scottish Churches: “y e bill of putt[in]g y e B[isho]ps out of y e house of Peers.55,” “y e abolishing of Episcopacy in Scotland.153.256,” “Whence y e dislike to y e Lord’s Prayer?.131.” Because the
handwriting is small and starts in the right-hand corner, we can assume that the owner intended to record more entries. Tucked to the right of the first two entries, he squeezed in a third: “v. Clar[endon] State Pap[er]s ii.296.” This reference leads to a letter written by Charles to Henrietta Maria in November 1646 wherein Charles tells his wife (not for the first time) that he cannot consent to the Scot’s request to establish a Presbyterian Church government in England for his conscience’s sake. This impulse to key *Eikon Basilike* to Charles’s letters during this pivotal year of failed negotiations was undoubtedly connected to the reader’s interest in Charles’s church policies. Whatever the owner’s motivation, setting the *Eikon Basilike* alongside the King’s letters helps to clarify the complexity of *Eikon Basilike*’s discussions of episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and conscience, as this eighteenth-century reader-antiquarian seemed to understand.27

Charles’s correspondence of 1646 reveals how he used the language of conscience for both political leverage and to secure his subjects’ obedience. Parliament’s New Model Army defeated the royalist forces in 1645-46, concluding the First Civil War. Charles’s next step after this devastating loss was questionable. David Scott identifies two warring factions amongst Charles’s advisors: the “foreign-alliance faction” were grandees in favor of Charles’s appeal to foreign powers, primarily Scotland, for assistance, while the “pro-accommodation camp” encouraged Charles to negotiate a settlement with his opponents.28 Seeming to side with the pro-accommodation faction, Charles initially wanted to make for London, as he wrote to Lord Digby in March 1646, where he hoped that he could “draw either the Presbyterians or Independents to side with me, for extirpating one or the other” resulting in him being “really King again.”29 A set of letters sent to Sir Henry Vane the Younger at the same time similarly betrays Charles’s
hopes of reentering England. Charles soon abandoned this maneuver, however, and was persuaded by the foreign-alliance faction to flee from Oxford in April 1646 to surrender to the Scottish army at Newark in May 1646.

While imprisoned by the Scots at Newcastle in July of that year, Charles received Parliament’s peace terms. The nineteen clauses of these “Newcastle Propositions” demanded, among other things, that episcopacy be abolished and a Presbyterian system of church government be established in England and Ireland; that Charles sign the Solemn League and Covenant, thereby endorsing the reformation of the churches of England and Ireland, and imposing the Covenant on all of his subjects; and that he acknowledge that Parliament took up arms in its just defense against him and his supporters. A large section of the Propositions names royalists who would not be pardoned for their actions against Parliament. Not surprisingly, Charles found these terms unacceptable and a threat to his monarchical power.

It is during this period of negotiations that Charles received the letter from Henrietta Maria that interested the eighteenth-century reader of Eikon Basilike. This exchange between the King and Queen was part of a larger correspondence that Charles had with his most trusted advisors of the foreign-alliance faction, John Ashburnham, John Culpepper, and Sir Henry Jermyn. Like the Queen, Ashburnham, Culpepper, and Jermyn implored the King to take the Covenant and approve the Presbyterian Church settlement so that he might form an alliance with the Scots against the English Parliament. Such an alliance, they believed, would instigate a second civil war through which Charles could hope to regain his power with the help of both the Scottish and French forces. The one casualty in this plan would be episcopacy; but, for Jermyn, Culpepper, Ashburnham, and
the Queen, episcopacy could be sacrificed in order to ensure the survival of monarchy itself.

Responding to his advisors on 22 July 1646, Charles takes issue with this plan, contending that “It is not the change of Church government which is chiefly aimed at [by the Scots] (though that were too much); but it is by that pretext to take away the dependency of the Church from the Crown, which, let me tell you, I hold to be of equal consequence to that of the Militia.” “For people,” he insists, “are governed by the pulpit more than the sword in times of peace” (The Letters, 200-1). In a letter dated 19 August 1646, Charles makes a similar argument, reminding his advisors to “[b]elieve it, religion is the only firm foundation of all power; that cast loose, or depraved, no government can be stable.” “For where was there ever obedience,” he asks, “where religion did not teach it?” (The Letters, 203-4). While his advisors deem episcopacy the one roadblock between the King and victory against the English Parliament, Charles instead regarded royal influence over the pulpit as the only guarantee of maintaining monarchical power.

Fearing this loss of power over the pulpits, Charles tells Ashburnham, Culpepper, and Jermyn that with such an alliance, “all our orthodox devines will be expelled or silenced, and theirs introduced” along with their “doctrine, which is antimonarchicall.” 32 Again in a letter dated 7 September 1646, Charles claimed that if Scottish Presbyterianism prevails in England “then the Clergie will depend upon none” and “the King will have more cause to sew to them then they to the King”; and if English Presbyterianism, then “the two houses (without the King) will have the dependancy upon them [the clergy]” (State Papers 2:260). As a result, it would be “in the power of the pulpits (without
transgressing the law) to dethrone me at their pleasure, at least to keep me in subjection” (The Letters 207).

Charles did not rely upon this argument alone, however; instead, he characterized his unwillingness to treat with the Scots as a matter of conscience. In response to his advisors’ repeated requests for him to accept the Scot’s terms, Charles revealed the desperate and victimized condition that his conscience has been brought to as a result of their persistence. “[A]lbeit my condition be sufficiently sad,” Charles tells them, yet it is made so strangely worse by your misunderstanding the point of Church government, whereby I am made the scourge of my kingdom and family, that rather than I will undergo that burden, I will (laying all other considerations aside) hazard to go to France, to clear my reputation to the Queen, and all the world, that I stick not upon scruples, but undoubted realities, both in relation to conscience and policy (The Letters 207).

Throughout this correspondence, Charles increasingly refers to his conscience as the cause of his seeming willfulness. He uses this language, moreover, with the hopes of persuading his advisors, asserting that their disagreement with him was a result of their own misunderstanding. In a letter dated 31 August, Charles similarly describes his condition as made more desperate by pity for his over-precise conscience:

For when those few from whom I can only expect encouragement in my constancy, shall condemn me of willfulness, and by it make me the distroyer of my Crowne and Family, how can you think it possible for me to joy in any thing after this? It is such a greefe, that must sinke any honest hart, and I am sure
would soone doe myne, if I did not hope, (and that shortly) to make you see and confess your error.

“Nor will it satisifie me,” he continues, “that you pitty my misled or too strict conscience.” Rather than unfounded pity, Charles instead “must make you acknowledge that the giving such way to Presbiteriall government as will content the Scots, is the absolut distruction of Monarchy” (State Papers 2:255-56, my emphasis). This desire to influence their judgment, and make them confess their supposed error, becomes more persistent as the correspondence progresses. For the King, outward obedience to his dictates was not enough. When he feared that his letters might have “silenced you by way of obedience,” Charles confirms that he will not be satisfied “unless your reasons be likewise convinced” and he is able to “make your judgement concur with mine” (The Letters 204). Citing his own conscience, the King hoped to satisfy his advisors’ judgment, and convince them of their error. He seems not to have considered that their consciences might differ from his own.

Charles concludes his letter of 7 September 1646 confident in the fact that his advisors would be satisfied with both his conscience and his policy, with them “heerafter assist[ing] (but no more trobl[ing])” him “in matters of Religion” (State Papers 2:260-61). By asking for more than their silent obedience, however, Charles unknowingly invited opposition from his advisors. Jermyn and Culpepper respond by presuming the “liberty to reply fully and plainely to what you are pleased to urge against our opinion.” In their letter dated 12/28 September 1646, not only did they challenge Charles’s use of conscience in his previous letters, but also they undercut the political expediency of Charles’s preserving episcopacy for fear of losing his power as a King. Because Charles
mixed the discourse of conscience with a discourse of “civill enforcements,” Jermyn and Culpepper conclude that the King does not “center only upon this foundation [conscience]” and thereby leaves his position regarding episcopacy open to debate. Treading tenuous ground, they deduce that if “by conscience is intended to assert that Episcopacy is *jure divino* exclusive, whereby no Protestant (or rather Christian) Church can be acknowledged for such without a Bishop, we must therein crave leave wholly to differ” (*State Papers* 2:262-63). Jermyn and Culpepper’s strategy here is to divorce Charles’s policy from his conscience in order to reveal the weaknesses in both. First, they suggest that his language of conscience has been used incorrectly: episcopacy is not backed by divine law, and therefore he is not obliged in conscience to defend episcopacy at the risk of losing his kingdom.

Second, Jermyn and Culpepper attack his connection between royal power and the pulpits. They acknowledge the King’s argument as “solid and strong,” but only “so far as it reacheth.” If Charles does not treat with the Scots, they threaten, “Presbitery, or somthing worse, will be forced upon you, whether you will or no.” “Com,” they continue, “the question in short is, whether you will chuse to be a King of Presbitery, or no King; and yet Presbitery or perfect Independancy to be.” They assure him that “a disease,” like the Presbyterianism demanded by the Scots, “is to be preferred before dissolution” of the monarchy altogether (*State Papers* 2:261). In this brazen letter, the King’s supporters turn his connection between the pulpit and monarchical power on its head, thus questioning Charles’s own judgment and conscience. To refuse the Scots’ terms in order to preserve episcopacy at this moment would, according to Jermyn and
Culpepper, have the opposite effect: rather than strengthening the King’s power, it would instead be his downfall.

Though Jermyn and Culpepper initially abstain from using the word “conscience” in these letters, Charles nonetheless insists on reading their disobedience as a matter of conscience. Responding once again, Charles no longer poses as the martyr-King victimized for his conscience’s sake. He claims that the “chyding part” of this letter refers only to Culpepper and Jermyn since Ashburnham did not endorse the letter of 12/28 September. And, Charles claims, he expects that Culpepper and Jermyn will not “beare less the frendship to him, because his conscience discents not from myne.” Charles here attributes conscience to Ashburnham because he agrees with Charles’s own conscience; yet he also implies that Culpepper and Jermyn are not acting out of conscience since they dissent “from myne.” In the face of such dissension, Charles asks, must I be caled single, because some ar frigted out of, others dares not avow, there opinions? And who causes me to be condemned, but those who either takes courage and morall honesty for conscience, or those who were never rightly grounded in Religion according to the Church of England.

Condemning Culpepper and Ashburnham further, the King groups them with those who are either too frightened to declare their opinions, those who fail to realize what conscience is, or, worst of all, those who were never true members of the Church of England. He concludes this fit by telling Culpepper and Jermyn to “instruct yourselves better, recant, and undeceave those whom ye have misinformed.” Though Charles closes by claiming “nether anger nor greefe shall make me forgett my frendship to you,” his anger towards their “discent” still rings loudly, as does his command that they “instruct”
themselves better— instruct themselves better according to the dictates of his conscience, that is (*State Papers* 2:270).

Sharpe argues convincingly that Charles “thought his first responsibility was to do according to God’s dictates, as his reason and conscience discerned them, rather than act ‘politically,’” yet this correspondence tells a more complex story. Undoubtedly there is some genuine sentiment when Charles writes to his advisors regarding the preservation of episcopacy and his conscience. As Sharpe and others have aptly pointed out, Charles was a man of conscience. His attention to his conscience, however, did not compromise his ability to be a good politician. Indeed, at the same time that he was appearing inflexible in this correspondence, Charles was making plans to compromise with the Scots: he was willing to allow Presbyterianism in England for a period of three years, an agreement that the Scots finally consent to in December 1646. In a letter to the Bishop of London on 30 September 1646, Charles asked Juxon if, in “compliance to the iniquity of the times” he may agree to terms with “a safe conscience” that “at another time were unlawful” (*The Letters* 208). Charles, however, did not wait for his reply, and instead sent his old companion Will Murry to London to offer the proposition to the Scots’ commissioners. That Charles would agree to such an accommodation without receiving the Bishop’s reply demonstrated that, with an advantage over Parliament in his sights, Charles found a way to reconcile his conscience with political expediency. Charles’s tie between conscience and policy, then, did not inhibit his ability to act “politically.” Instead, it seemed that, in some circumstances, not only could conscience be used to validate the King’s politics, but also that his politics could be used to validate his conscience.
In the face of these negotiations with the Scot’s commissioners, Charles’s rigidity for his conscience’s sake in his correspondence with Jermyn and Culpepper seems entirely misleading. While Charles decided that he could allow Presbyterianism in England for a set period of time and not violate his conscience, he chooses to withhold this information from his advisors temporarily. Once this initial offer to the Scots fails, Charles is again pressed by his advisors to yield to the Scots on their terms. This time, he exasperatedly writes, “God God, what things are these to try my patience!” In his past letters, Charles argues, he not only gave “reasons (which to me are unanswerable) why I cannot yeald unto it,” but also made it “my verry earnest desyre ye would hartely joyne with me in my way” – a desire that remains unfulfilled (State Papers 2:314).

Culpepper and Jermyn were similarly attuned to the rhetorical power of the word “conscience,” and the King’s use of it. Having repeatedly accused him of being willful (as opposed to conscientious), they “have done with the argument” since “it is your pleasure” – not his conscience. More importantly, Culpepper and Jermyn insist that they cannot change their advice or judgment upon the matter for their conscience’s sake: “if we should give you any other advice we should dispairely (against our consciences) [. . .] betray you, your posterity, and all your party to utter ruin” (State Papers, 2:269).

Though Charles had earlier accused his advisors of not acting in conscience, here Culpepper and Jermyn assert the dictates of their consciences against the King’s. They couch their disagreement in terms of their obedience to him (they speak their conscience, after all, to spare him, his posterity and party); yet, they simultaneously emphasize the independence of their consciences from his own – a possibility that the King had repeatedly resisted by accusing them of error and misunderstanding. What is worse, this
show of obedience seeks to prove above all else that it is the King’s conscience, not their own, which is wrong.

As this correspondence demonstrates, Charles does not allow for anyone’s conscience – even that of his closest advisors – in cases where they disagree with him. He attributes Jermyn and Culpepper’s dissent from his conscience to their judgment, or their opinions, rather than their consciences, while he grants that Ashburnham acts according to his conscience solely because of his agreement with the King’s own. In this way, he envisions a conscience for his subjects that will lead to the highest form of obedience: conscientious obedience. *Eikon Basilike* presents a similar view of conscience. Unlike Charles’s correspondence, however, *Eikon Basilike* leaves little room for opposition like Culpepper and Jermyn’s. Once the mode of writing shifts from that of a private correspondence with political advisors to that of a private correspondence with God Himself, the King’s conscience becomes truly unassailable. And, it is this representation of the King’s unimpeachable conscience that allows *Eikon Basilike* to permeate the consciences of its readers. Like the pulpit, the King’s book would secure obedience in England’s subjects – obedience for conscience’s sake.

**Securing the Bond of Conscience: Eikon Basilike**

*Eikon Basilike*’s extensive use of conscience was anticipated not only by Charles’s correspondence with his advisors, but also by royalist newsbooks. In such publications, the King’s conscience was similarly presented as the basis of his unwillingness to compromise with Parliament. *Mercurius Elenticus*, October 1648, claims “here you have a King proffering all things imagineable to satisfie them in matters of Religion; or conducing to their own security: Refusing nothing but what he cannot yield to, without
violence to his Conscience.” Also in 1648, Elenticus and Pragmaticus drew increasingly dire pictures of Charles’s prison conditions. A January issue of Mercurius Pragmaticus portrayed Charles as the “most unfortunate (though the most rationall, Pious, Gracious and Conscientious) of all men living; being shut up as a close prisoner; deprived of Wife, Children, Friends, Servants, and all but a good conscience.”

These newsbook exposés of Charles as a man and King suffering for his conscience’s sake, however, did not rival the rhetorical power of Eikon Basilike, nor could they produce its effect. The King’s book was made available on the very day of Charles’s execution, 30 January 1649, and it quickly became “the most popular and influential tract of the English Revolution.” In 1649 alone, the book went through thirty-five editions, and over the next decade it was translated into Latin, French, German, Dutch and Danish. Unlike the periodicals, Eikon Basilike was not written as a public vindication of the King’s actions. Rather, the King’s book is presented as a private meditation, the King searching his conscience before God, as its full title – Eikon Basilike, The Povrtraictvre of His Sacred Maiestie in His Solitvdes and Svfferings – indicates. Despite the seemingly private and meditative nature of Eikon Basilike, the anonymous author of Eikon Alethine, The Povrtraitvre of Truths most sacred Majesty truly suffering, though not solely (26 August 1649) and John Milton in Eikonoklastes (6 October 1649) nevertheless tried to refute the irrefutable book.

Richard Helgerson called the Eikon Basilike “unbookish – indeed anti-bookish,” a book that “turned print against itself” in its iconic affront to the print-based Protestantism. Yet, it seems that the King’s book actually embraced print culture as essential to its success: the book played upon certain print norms, dictating how it should
be read and regarded by its audience. For instance, *Eikon Basilike* was printed as an octavo for the first three editions, and subsequently as a duodecimo. While the duodecimo format was undoubtedly more economical for both printer and buyer, it was also the format increasingly used for devotional literature and bibles. That *Eikon Basilike* was made to look and function like a devotional book was bolstered by the fact that later printed versions separated out the prayers that were appended to early editions of *Eikon Basilike* as a stand-alone book and printed them as *His Majesties Prayers Which He used in time of Sufferings* (1649). Also, in the twenty-fifth edition, the lines throughout the text were marked in five-line intervals so that they might be keyed to the apophthegmata printed at the back of the book. Compiled by Edward Hooker, this *Apophthegmata* separated out from the main text Charles’s theological, political, and moral adages, and provided the page and line number for each. Such a supplement not only made Charles at once a politician, moral philosopher, and theologian, but also mirrored the contemporary impulse to condense scripture into a set of helpful aphorisms, like those in *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* (1643). And, just like *His Majesties Prayers*, the *Apophthegmata* was subsequently printed as a separate book. This continuous modification of the text speaks not only to its enduring popularity, but also to its intended devotional qualities and how its reader might use the text.

Also important is how *Eikon Basilike* could be treated as a result of its being printed in this small format. Its size was more conducive to keeping it by one’s side, or carrying it in one’s pocket at all times for consultation or private reading. Many surviving duodecimo copies of the book are well worn, suggesting such treatment by the owners. And, this format could not help but draw attention to the fact that owning this
book was dangerous in post-regicide England: Richard Royston, the first publisher of *Eikon Basilike*, had to move his press outside of London after having had his printed copies twice destroyed by Parliamentary censors. As Henri-Jean Martin points out, clandestine publishing often used octavo and duodecimo formats because small books “could be transported more discreetly and hidden more easily, and perhaps their reduced size was a more enticing wrapping for the attractions of forbidden fruit.”

Figure 1: Frontispiece from *Eikon Basilike* at the University of Glasgow
Also attractive was *Eikon Basilike*’s striking frontispiece (Figure 1). Certainly the book’s devotional function was tied intricately to its iconic function, duly produced by William Marshall’s fold-out engraving. The picture displays a weary Charles kneeling, one hand on his chest, the other holding a crown of thorns above which is the tag, “Asperam et Levem,” or “Bitter and Light,” and within which is the key to salvation, “Gratia.” Below him on the ground is his earthly crown, over which is inscribed the words “Splendidam et Gravem,” “Splendid and Heavy” and within which is the motto “Vanitas” or “Vanity,” and above is the heavenly crown labeled both “Beatam” and “Æternam,” “Blessed and Eternal.” To Charles’s back is a landscape representing thesteadfastness of his conscience through extreme duress. Interestingly, Charles’s enemies are consumed by this metaphorical landscape, represented as winds, waves and weights. This strategy allowed the focus to be on the King and God, once again appearing to drain the book of any polemical agenda. Also, the structure of the engraving, with the left-hand page representing the landscape and the right the King himself, encourages the reader’s eye to make the progressive movement from the metaphorical representation of the King’s internal struggles to the King himself. Charles’s concentration, however, is not on that suffering but rather on the crown of glory awaiting him in heaven as a reward for his commitment to conscience and ultimately to God.

In many editions, the frontispiece is the first thing to greet the reader, immediately opposite the title page. Its presence there is especially striking in the duodecimo editions where, once unfolded, the engraving is four times the size of the book itself. Significantly, this engraving is the only prefatory material other than the title page, table of contents and list of errata, before Chapter I, “Upon His Majesty’s calling this last
Parliament.” As Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler points out, “there was at the outset a decision not to allow any material beyond the basic design of the book and the chapter heading to intervene between king and readers.” This supposed unmediated stream between the King’s private meditations and his subjects emphasizes the idea of the book as a “portrait” of Charles, as the title appropriately suggests. In reality, after all, the book is just that, a representation of the King, though not composed by the King alone, and, more importantly, composed with a purpose other than its form might suggest.

Indeed, while the size and content of Eikon Basilike makes the text seem sacred and private, with the reader positioned as a voyeur to Charles’s relationship with God, it was meant to perform a public function. Francis F. Madan recounts that as early as 1642, the King “declared his intention of writing his own defence.” According to Sir John Brattle, “In the year 47 King Charles, having drawn up the most considerable part of this book, and having writ it in some loose papers, at different times, desired Bishop Juxon to get some friend of his (whom he could comment as a trusty person) to look it over, and to put it into an exact method.” These “loose papers” made it into the hands of John Gauden, Bishop of Exeter and later of Worcester (1605-1622), who shaped the material and most likely added the chapter headings (they are all notably in the third person). Though we cannot be sure how much of Eikon Basilike can be attributed to Charles and how much to Gauden, we do know that the King approved the enterprise and “sometimes corrected and heightened” Gauden’s work. Royston also testifies that “his late Ma[jesty] of blessed memory King Charles the first did sent to him about Mich[ael]mas before his Martirdome to provide a Presse for hee had a Book of his owne for him to Print.” Thus, despite the private appearance of the Eikon Basilike, Charles
and his supporters clearly intended the book to be a “spectacular propaganda coup” – spectacular enough to outdo all of their previous efforts.  

_Eikon Basilike_, however, was more than mere propaganda. It was so popular precisely because it was not designed to look like propaganda; instead it was designed to look like and, as I would argue, serve the function of a devotional book. But, if _Eikon Basilike_ was supposed to function like a form of prayer or worship, _what_ exactly did it teach readers? Lacey, focusing on the extensive use of the word “conscience” in _Eikon Basilike_, suggests that the King’s book provided readers with “a pattern and example for their own discernment of right action and the achieving of a quiet conscience,” thereby deeming _Eikon Basilike_ and the King “casuistical texts” or “teachers of holy living and holy dying.” Such an argument, however, depends upon the idea that the reader could see himself in Charles, with the King acting as an everyman. Skerpan-Wheeler argues that the “emphasis on conscience,” along with “the insistence on the depth of sorrow at his suffering,” finally “present a vision of Charles the man, rather than Charles the king.” I would suggest, however, the exact opposite: _Eikon Basilike_ never lets its readers forget that they are reading about the King. Though the author flirts with Charles’s humanity repeatedly, the structure, form, and function of the text all work to turn those moments into reminders of the King’s privileges and the obedience due to him as King. The frontispiece itself acts as proof of this reminder: though at the height of his humility, the Charles pictured in the engraving is significantly still dressed like a king. He did not trade in his royal robes for those of a penitent, martyr, or an everyman. This image is so striking because he is clearly a martyr-king: he has traded in his earthly crown for a crown of thorns with the promise of the crown of glory. Charles was a king in life,
a king in his suffering, and he will be a king in death: his readers could hardly replicate this trajectory.

Rather than function as common ground, Charles’s conscience is used in *Eikon Basilike* as a reminder of the King’s power and the subject’s obedience. The King’s book not only “literally took the place of the king” but also took the place of the bishops, and by extension the pulpits, who helped to shape and edit the text. In this way, the act of reading becomes a devotional act of obedience. By reading and re-reading *Eikon Basilike*, the reader consents to the King’s conscience, and ultimately to his actions during the war. In his letters to Culpepper, Jermyn, and Ashburnham, Charles believed that the source of obedience in the subject was the pulpit itself: without this venue, his power was null and void. To replace the pulpits, Charles and his book’s compilers turn to the space where divine and civil power meet: the conscience, and more specifically, the king’s conscience. Certainly most infuriating for his detractors was the fact that Charles mobilized the very source of power used by Presbyterians, Independents, and other non-conformists when their influence over the pulpits had been nearly non-existent.

With the King on their side, however, the compilers of *Eikon Basilike* had a strong advantage over their opponents. In metaphorical terms, the King’s conscience, like the King’s body, played a national role. Through reading *Eikon Basilike* as a devotional text, and praying its prayers, the text’s audience effectively affirmed its obedience to the King. Meeting in the space of Charles’s conscience in *Eikon Basilike* was Charles’s relationship to God, his subjects’ relationship to Charles, and finally his subjects’ relationship to God mediated through the King and his conscience. This
ultimate affirmation of obedience performed the work of the pulpits while simultaneously keeping the King’s cause alive through worship even after his execution.

To transform the King’s conscience into such an effective rhetorical tool, *Eikon Basilike*’s authors first fashion Charles as a martyr suffering for conscience’s sake. In an England now controlled by Parliament, Charles’s triumphant enemies are presented as denying him *his* freedom of conscience. In Chapter 2, “Upon the Earl of Strafford’s death,” Charles identifies his sole blunder during the wars as his signature on Strafford’s death warrant. Thomas Wentworth, president of the Council of the North, Privy Councillor, and Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was tried by Parliament as one of Charles’s “evil counselors” and found guilty of treason. Charles hesitantly signed his death warrant, and Strafford was beheaded on 12 May 1641. In *Eikon Basilike*, this incident is introduced early on as a confession to God (and, of course, the reading public) for choosing “rather what was safe, than what seemed just.”

Having learned his lesson after once going against what “My Conscience suggested to Me,” Charles uses this incident as a precedent for following his conscience in all subsequent matters of state. The King affirms that after this one error he now prefers “the inward peace of My Conscience, before any outward tranquility,” including his own “liberty” and “life”, it being “dearer to me than a thousand Kingdoms” (81, 167 and 194).

Having declared the necessity of conscience’s supremacy in Charles’s decision making, the King’s book next characterizes Charles’s enemies as attacking his freedom to use that conscience. Chapter 2 already laid out the dangers of separating policy from conscience, a mistake that Charles vows not to replicate. Yet, Charles’s enemies in Parliament, according to *Eikon Basilike*, tried to make him do just that. Charles assures
God, however, that “They have no great cause to triumph [...] since my Soul is still my own: nor shall they ever gain my Consent against my Conscience” (166). The King’s language repeatedly casts the civil wars as a battle between Parliament and his afflicted (though steadfast) conscience: a battle, in other words, between good and evil with the stakes being his eternal soul. In this way, though Charles has lost the physical battle, he emerges as victorious before God within *Eikon Basilike* and before the book’s readers.

Looking to God to buttress his own accusations against Parliament, in the prayer appended to Chapter 11, “Upon the 19 Propositions first sent to the KING; and more afterwards,” Charles implores God to “confirm My will and resolution to adhere to [Truth, Reason, and Justice], that no terrors, injuries, or oppressions of my Enemies may ever enforce me against those rules, which thou by them hast implanted in My Conscience” (100). This prayer not only assumes that God is on the King’s side, but also that the King is working in harmony with God’s will because he chooses his conscience even at the expense of England’s tranquility. Those reading or praying such a prayer, then, must accept the deaths and chaos of the 1640s as both necessary and sanctioned by God. In other words, this prayer enacts obedience to the King’s decision not to negotiate with Parliament because the King’s will here dovetails with God’s.

Also striking in this prayer is that Charles characterizes the attack upon his freedom of conscience as an attack on his fundamental rights as a man and Christian. He tells God that He did not make him king so that he might be “less than a Man,” denied the power to say “Yea, or Nay,” as he saw fit, a freedom “not denied to the meanest creature” (100). Indeed, Charles repeatedly calls the divestment of his negative voice in Parliament an attack on his liberty of conscience and thus “against the very natural and
essential liberty of our souls” (144, my emphasis). The “blind obedience” that Parliament required of him was “never expected from any Free-man” (94); and, what’s worse, Parliament attempted to deny him a right that “all the Commons of England enjoy” and “demand for their own Consciences” (70 and 180). These isolated moments speak to the aura of the entire *Eikon Basilike*: embedded in the text is the idea that Charles died to preserve not only the tranquility, but the liberty of his conscience, like many of the martyrs in Foxe’s foundational Protestant martyrology. This theme makes Charles at once a martyr, but more importantly a virulently Protestant martyr, important because of the accusations of “popery” often used by Parliament against Charles’s church policies.

This sustained argument for the “natural and essential” liberty of conscience belonging to everyone makes Charles seem like an advocate for the fundamental liberty of conscience of all Christendom. Yet, when contextualized within *Eikon Basilike*, it is clear that Charles emerges rather as a martyr for *his* liberty of conscience, a liberty different in quality and degree from that enjoyed by his subjects. Indeed, had the text advocated an equal liberty of conscience for everyone, Charles would have not only sounded dangerously like his enemies, but also *Eikon Basilike* would have fallen short of its message of obedience. The only way to advocate both liberty and obedience was to allow readers to participate in Charles’s liberty of conscience, a participation that is featured as their only inroad to enjoying the liberty of conscience promised them in the gospels. Charles’s conscience is thus fashioned as exceptional in its closeness to and understanding of divine law. Charles claims that his conscience, whose freedom belongs to him “as a King [...], as a Man, and a Christian,” owns the “dictates of none, but God, to
be above me, as obliging Me to consent.” “Better to die,” he continues, “enjoying this Empire of My Soul, which subjects me only to God [...] than live with the Title of a King, if it should carry such vassalage with it” (70). This same freedom is qualified, however, when Charles turns to his subjects and their duties to him as their King. Just as natural as his right to liberty of conscience are the “bonds of nature and Conscience” that his subjects “have to Mee” (113).

It is these “bonds of nature and Conscience” that determine the difference between a king’s conscience and a subject’s. This distinction becomes especially apparent in Chapter 14, “Upon the Covenant.” The Solemn League and Covenant, signed on 25 September 1643, made official the alliance between the English Parliament and the Scottish. Its terms were both military and religious: in exchange for Scottish military aid, Parliament agreed to move towards the Scottish goal of uniting the churches of England and Scotland under a Presbyterian church government. For Charles, such “after Contracts” as the Solemn League and Covenant, administered without “My consent, and without any like power or precedent from God’s or man’s laws,” cannot “absolve or slacken those moral and eternal bonds of duty which lie upon all My Subjects’ consciences to both God and Me” (115). Without regal, and thus divine approval (as the adage “God and Me” suggests), the “cords and withes” of the “later Vows” to Parliament cannot “hold men’s Consciences” as their previous vows to the King do. After all, they lack the “commands of God’s word, or the Laws of the Land” (116). Several times in this chapter and elsewhere in the text, Charles uses the maxim “God and Me,” or “God and My self.” Such repetition continuously links Charles’s will, law, and word with that of God Himself. He thus defines the “bounds of a good Conscience” as “fixed and
certain” in both God’s laws and the “Laws of the State and Kingdom” (117, my emphasis). In the closing prayer to this chapter, Charles once again emphasizes this inextricable link between God’s law and his, asking God to remind his subjects of those “just, moral, and indispensable bonds, which thy Word, and the Laws of this Kingdom have laid upon their Consciences” (120). Whether composed by Charles, Gauden, or another editorial hand, this prayer has the effect, once again, of enacting obedience in the subject for conscience’s sake.

In the next chapter, “Upon the many Jealousies raised, and Scandals cast upon the KING, to stir upon the People against Him,” Charles humbly states that he did not seek this bond of conscience between subject and monarch, but rather that God himself put it in place. “In point of true conscientious tendernous,” attended, Charles maintains, “by humility and meekness” rather than “proud and arrogant activity,” he “oft declared, how little I desire My Laws and Scepter should intrench on God’s Sovereignty, which is the only King of men’s Consciences.” Instead, it was God himself who “hath laid such restraints upon men,” commanding that they be “subject for Conscience sake” (128). As this formulation suggests, though God may be the only king of men’s consciences, those who are subjects are conscientiously subject to “God and Me” rather than just God – a privilege reserved only for the King himself. Such a claim clearly draws its conclusion from Romans 13:5 where Paul states that subjects must be obedient to the magistrate for conscience’s sake – a passage obsessively interpreted and re-interpreted by both Parliamentarians and Royalists during this period. This moment in the text is pivotal, marking a clear rhetorical shift: the liberty of conscience employed by Charles throughout Eikon Basilike is here qualified for the reader in terms of obedience.
Though in Chapter 24, “Upon their denying His Majesty the Attendance of His Chaplains,” Charles admits that in the deepest recesses of the soul, “every private believer is a King and Priest,” he at the same time reflects that if the “outward polity of the Church” were left up to such governance, “confusion in Religion” would ensue with every man “turning Priest and Preacher” (173). As the King of England, Charles rightly deems himself the “Defender of the Church, both in its true Faith, and its just fruitions” (119). Disagreement amongst Charles’s enemies did not stem necessarily from his office as such, but rather from what level of involvement in the church such an office permitted. In an Independent treatise The Ancient Bounds (1645), the writer affirms that the King, as defender of the church, rules “for the Church, not in the Church and over it” (264). Charles, however, believed that this office necessitated his defense of the church from “Sacrilege and Apostasy” (119). Accordingly, he deems episcopacy the “Ancient” and “most Universal way of Church-government,” whereas Presbyterianism would leave the Church of England vulnerable to any such “Sects, Schisms, or Heresies” that would be able to get “but numbers, strength and opportunity” (111). Significantly, Charles does not here speak of the connection between episcopacy and civil obedience. Rather, he positions his defense of episcopacy as part of his duty to God, and his subjects’ acceptance of this form of church government as part of their duty to him and God.

Indeed, those who do not accept episcopacy are not only schismatics, but more importantly they have ignored their consciences and its duties. His enemies, Charles tells God, merely use the name of religion to mask their political agendas – an accusation that Milton will recycle in Eikonoklastes against the King himself. More than that, while Charles adheres to his conscience even in the face of adversity, Parliament’s supporters
“stop [conscience’s] mouth with the name and noise of religion” when it accuses them “for Sedition and Faction” (186). He cannot believe, after all, that their “own consciences are so stupid, as not to inflict upon them some secret impressions of that shame and dishonour” that follows upon losing the “respect and Honour, which they owe to their KING” (161). Though valiant in the field, Charles argues, his enemies are “more afraid to encounter those many pregnant Reasons, both from Law, Allegiance, and all true Christian grounds” that “accuse them in their own thoughts” (151). Charles is confident of his enemies’ guilt “before God and man” and “in their own consciences too” (197-98), and implies that to war against the King is to wage war against God himself.

Despite their success in the battle, Parliament has gone against its natural and divinely ordained duty to the monarch, as their lost battle with conscience indicates. Indeed, he maintains that his enemies should remember “at best they sit in Parliament, as my Subjects, not my Superiors”: they can only provide counsel, “recommend[ing] their advice” not “command[ing] my Duty” (96, my emphasis). In the prayer capping off Chapter 26, Charles recounts Parliament’s violation of these boundaries directly to God: they have fought “against thee and the clear convictions of their own consciences.”

Charles emphasizes the futility of his enemies’ success in the field in this closing prayer, telling God that they thus “fight more against themselves, than ever they did against Me” (183).

_Eikon Basilike_ thus affirms civil obedience – in state and church affairs – as an act of faith and conscience. At the same time that it promotes this idea, it invites the reader to perform obedience through the prayers and devotional nature of the text. The reading experience – the reader is, after all, reading Charles’s words to God, not to him or
her – prevents the text from looking like an argument for civil obedience. Rather, by allowing the reader to experience Charles’s “private” conversation between himself and God, it functions instead as a reminder of those duties owed to the King, and set in place by God himself. Ironically, it is only through putting on display the King’s liberty of conscience that the subjects’ similar liberty could be qualified. *Eikon Basilike*, however, offers this formulation as both natural and ordained by God. The text itself, while participatory, is irrefutable and sacred. Believing that the pulpit was the wellspring of obedience, Charles and his followers here replicate that effect by similarly presenting obedience to the King as a necessary act of conscience – necessary for preserving the King’s own exceptional liberty of conscience. The freedom of the subjects’ conscience can only reach its full fruition through the King’s ability to exercise his own liberty of conscience – a liberty that, when exercised, binds theirs. As a devotional text, then, *Eikon Basilike* encourages its readers to define their own liberty of conscience in terms of these limitations set by God Himself, and enacted by the King. To exercise liberty of conscience here, then, is coterminous with the exercise of civil obedience.

Beginning with the twenty-third edition, supplementary materials were added to the end of the official text of the *Eikon Basilike*, including additional prayers used by the King, his reasons against the jurisdiction of the High Court, a letter from Prince Charles dated 23 January 1649, the King’s last words to Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Gloucester, and an epitaph attributed to James Howell.⁶⁰ These supplemental materials transformed the book into a documentary history of the King’s final days, furthering both the reader’s sense of pathos towards Charles and his sense of reverence. The last text available to the reader in most subsequent editions was the epitaph beginning “So falls
that stately Cedar,” often attributed to both James Howell and John Hewett.

Characterizing Charles as both an “earthly God” and “Celestial Man,” the poem situates the King somewhere between an everyman and God himself. Moreover, the King’s “heavenly Virtues” are a “theam to high for humane Verse.” “He that would know Thee right,” the epitaph advises, “let him look / Upon Thy rare-incomparable Book.” Not only that, but they should “read it o’er and o’er” (my emphasis).

This process of continuous reading and rereading would result both in the reader “find[ing] thee King, and Priest, and Prophet too” and in his “fruitless wishes to call Thee back again.” Like the voice of *Eikon Basilike*, the reader here is positioned on the outside of this text in that the poet speaks not to him, but rather to Charles. The effect of course is that the voice of the poet establishes the book’s absolute accomplishment: the poet after all is telling Charles how the reader and rereader will undoubtedly react to the King’s book. Having read the book, then, the reader *will* feel compelled to “call Thee back again,” and once he rereads the book, he will again call the King back again, and so on in a continuous exchange between reader, text and martyr-King. In this way, the epitaph indirectly instructed the reader: in the midst of a kingless nation, it should create (and renew) a fruitless desire for the King, and in doing so incite conscientious obedience to his legacy – again and again and again with each reading. Not surprisingly, in some editions, this epitaph book ended *Eikon Basilike*, appearing both on the verso of the title page as well at the back of the text. In the absence of a pulpit dedicated to the King’s cause, then, the reader’s rereading, as encouraged by this epitaph, could fill that void.

Published with Duport’s sermon celebrating Charles II’s return and birthday was his sermon delivered on the anniversary of Charles I’s execution. Referring explicitly to
Eikon Basilike, Duport implores his congregation, as “Pilat did of him whose example this our Royal Martyr follow’d,” to look to the King’s book in order to “Behold your King, and again, Behold the man: Look upon him as a King, and look upon him as a Man, he was a Mirror of both, the best of Kings, and the best of Men.” Like Eikon Basilike, Duport reminds his audience that Charles was a king, and thus not just a man, but the best of men. Charles’s obedience to his conscience and God throughout Eikon Basilike, then, was more than a lesson in casuistry for his readers, just as the King himself was more than an everyman. In the face of his detractors’ calls for the abolition of episcopacy, reformation in the Church of England, and the liberty of their consciences, Charles through Eikon Basilike revealed the complicity between the King of England and God. Indeed, the King’s “private” conversations with God reveal (or were meant to reveal) that God was on Charles’s side during the civil wars, and visa versa. He never abandoned his conscience again after Strafford’s execution, and by setting this example for his readers, he was effectively encouraging obedience to his cause – which was also God’s cause – for their conscience’s sake. Indeed, Eikon Basilike, as Duport tells his congregation, proved that, whatever Charles’s enemies “pretended, to palliate so foul a cause” “their Conscience told ’um, they cu’d find not fault in him.” Charles’s death, in both Eikon Basilike and subsequent sermons like Duport’s, is presented as the ultimate act of obedience towards both God and conscience. And, to replicate such an act, his readers, as the lesson of the pulpits and Eikon Basilike taught, must be obedient to God and King, for conscience’s sake.
NOTES


2 Ibid, pp. 39, 41.

3 Ibid, pp. 42, 44.


7 Andrew Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), deems *Eikon Basilike*’s famous frontispiece in particular a drawing upon “a body of emblems and typologies which, as we have seen, were already established by the time of the king’s death” (78).


Politics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), points out that “the view of political reality as the embodiment of divine will must be active also in any group of men actually in revolt, manifest in revolutionary organizations as much as in the institutions of government. And did not the Calvinist saints know themselves to be instruments of that will? God had put his mark upon them and that mark was conscience, a piece of divine willfulness implanted in man. Conscience would be the saint’s warrant to free himself from political passivity and success would be the divine sign justifying whatever he did” (58-9).


14 Susan Wabuda, Preaching During the English Reformation (Cambridge University Press, 2002), points out that “Cromwell emphasized preaching as a political act,” and “[a]t the beginning of June 1535, Cromwell ordered the bishops to preach the sincere word of God and the king’s title of supreme head of the Church of England on every Sunday and feast day throughout the year” (94).


16 Nicholas Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), notes that the preachers chosen to speak at Paul’s Cross were selected by the Bishop of London himself (248).

17 Tyacke identifies less than a third of the printed Paul’s Cross sermons from Elizabeth’s, James’s and Charles’s reign pre-1627 as mentioning the “predestinarian
question.” He also points out that not until 1632 “did an Arminian sermon preached at Paul’s Cross appear in print” (249).


21 An exact collection of all remonstrances, declarations, votes, orders, ....betweene the Kings most excellent Majesty, and his high court of Parliament (London, 1642), p. 550.

22 Ibid, p. 556.


26 He wrote, “This is call’d the best Edition of yª Book in “Wagstaffe’s Vindication,” p. 139 being yª 5th Impression with the Prayers.”

27 This copy of *Eikon Basilike* is in the Pennsylvania State University’s Special Collections holdings, shelf mark DA400.C488 1649b. As PSU’s catalogue entry states, this copy was part of an eighteenth-century library in Williamescote House near Banbury, England. The library was put together by John Loveday (1711-1789), who was both a
philologist and antiquarian. The library was moved to Williamscole House in 1799 by John Loveday the second (1742-1789).


29 The Letters, Speeches and Proclamations of King Charles I, ed. Sir Charles Petrie (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1935), p. 176. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically according to page number.

30 These two letters to Sir Henry Vane the Younger were sent by the command of Charles. In them, the author tells Vane to “prevail that the King may come to London upon the terms he hath offered; where, if Presbytery shall be so strongly insisted upon, as that there can be no peace without it, you shall certainly have all the power my Master can make, to join with you rooting out of this Kingdom that tyrannical government; with this condition, that my Master may not have his conscience disturbed (your’s being free) when that work is finished.” See State papers collected by Edward, earl of Clarendon, commencing from the year 1621, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1767-1786), 2:226-27.

31 Scott, pp. 125-27

32 State Papers, 2:247. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically according to volume and page number.

33 Though Charles continues to address Jermyn, Culpepper and Ashburnham in this series of letters, Ashburnham does not seem to be writing in league with Jermyn and Culpepper at this point.
34 Sharpe, p. 649.


36 Cust similarly points out that Charles “was more flexible then he claimed. There are several occasions during this period when he deliberately set aside his conscientious scruples in pursuit of immediate advantage” (356).

37 Cust, p. 426.

38 p. 385.

39 Sig. 4v.


43 Most of the subsequent editions were printed as duodecimos, except for the fifteenth, twenty-first, twenty-second, twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth, and twenty-seventh editions. See Francis F. Madan, A New Bibliography of the Eikon Basilike of King Charles I.
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), for a catalogue of all printed all thirty-five English editions printed in 1649.

44 Ian Green, Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), points out that the early seventeenth-century marks the “appearance of the duodecimo bible, a size which proved increasingly popular in the 1640s and 1650s and after the Restorations when, though precision is not possible, it appears that twice as many duodecimos were published as of any other format” (57).

45 This particular title was featured on the eighty-fourth edition (Madan 89).

46 Green discusses the increase in simpler commentaries, paraphrases, expository notes, etc. in bibles during the middle of the seventeenth-century in addition to abridgement (101-44).

47 Both the Folger Shakespeare Library’s duodecimo copy (shelf mark E287.8) and PSU’s duodecimo (shelf mark DA400.C488 1648) are falling apart at the binding, and their leather covers (if original) also betray similar signs of regular use.

48 Madan quotes Mrs. Gauden’s narrative of Royston’s experience: “‘when it [the Eikon] was about half printed they that were in power found the press where it was printing, and likewise a letter of my husband, with a sheet which he sent up to the press, whereupon they destroyed all that they found then printed: but they could not find out from whence the letter came in regard it had no name to it: now notwithstanding all this yet my husband did attempt the printing of it again, but could by no means get the book finished till some few days after his Majesty was destroyed’” (164-65).


51 Madan, p. 128


53 Madan, p. 153.

54 Wilcher, p. 222.

55 “Charles I,” p. 5.


58 This idea, of course, was a renaissance commonplace. Both Lacey in *The Cult of King Charles* and Sharpe also point out Charles’s use of this construction.

59 *Eikon Basilike*, ed. Daems and Nelson, p. 54. All subsequent citations from *Eikon Basilike* are from this edition unless otherwise noted, and will be cited parenthetically.

60 Madan, pp. 33-4.

61 Madan, p. 28.

62 *Three Sermons*, p. 11.

63 *Three Sermons*, p. 9.
Chapter 2

Oliver Cromwell, Liberty of Conscience, and the “door to usher-in the things that God has promised”

In George Smith Green’s *Oliver Cromwell: An Historical Play* (1799), the character Cromwell brags that “to rule despotic over [Charles’s] dominions” was

The sole and perfect End of my Ambition:

The Crown of all my Study, and my Toil,

Dissimulation, Perfidy, and Bloodshed:

The Prize, for which I’ve sacrific’d myself,

My Country, Conscience, Quiet, and my Soul.¹

When his wife implores him to repent, Cromwell feels a “fluttering” in his breast and exclaims, “Surely it’s not the Plague the World calls Conscience! / Of which I’ve often read, and heard Men prate, / But never knew that I had one before.” Mrs. Cromwell is hopeful – “Oh how it raises my desponding Soul, / To find you have a Conscience, and Contrition!” – until Cromwell avers,

But what can Conscience now effect for me,

Who must, and will, this Moment be a King?

Conscience! what is it, but a Term, a Bubble,

A State Device of Knaves, t’imprison Fools,

And propagate the deep-laid Plots of Priestcraft?

Denouncing conscience as an “empty, idle Notion,” Cromwell rejects it altogether, on his way to kingship: “I’ll none of it; but straight with eager Joy / Embrace the inviting End of my Desires.”²
Green’s dramatic Cromwell – the embodiment of overweening ambition – may seem an outdated – if comic – distortion of the historical figure of Oliver Cromwell. Yet, in its focus on Cromwell’s conscience, the play gets at a central aspect of Cromwell’s rhetoric that has not received adequate attention. Christopher Hill’s conservative reactionary still contends with a more religious and radical figure in contemporary scholarship on Cromwell. Indeed, if there is any consistency amidst such criticism it is for an inconsistent Cromwell, a Cromwell marked, in Blair Worden’s words, by “ideological schizophrenia,” or, in the view of Patrick Little and David Smith, a Cromwell of “paradoxes.” It is difficult, after all, to reconcile the Cromwell who successfully led the New Model Army against Charles I’s forces with the Cromwell who dissolved the Rump Parliament on 20 April 1653; or the Cromwell who valued religious conviction over class hierarchy during the civil war years with the Cromwell who was installed as Lord Protector on 16 December 1653; or the Cromwell who supported regicide with the Cromwell who was offered the crown on 23 February 1657.

Yet, when viewed in light of his ultimate political-religious goal – to establish liberty of conscience in a godly nation – Cromwell’s behavior in the political sphere seems less erratic. In this chapter, I will examine the central and ongoing language of conscience in Cromwell’s letters and correspondence from the civil wars, as well as his in speeches before the Nominated Assembly and the First and Second Protectorate Parliaments. Cromwell’s early letters evince his sympathies for nonconformists and those suffering for conscience’s sake, while his later speeches show his sustained commitment to this cause, at times with unparalleled forcefulness. Attention to Cromwell’s language of conscience reveals that what is often viewed as his spiritual
radicalism – his pursuit of liberty of conscience – is also accountable for his supposed political conservatism. Indeed, while Cromwell’s actions seem to oscillate between radical and conservative for the duration of his public career, his language remained consistent in its focus on liberty of conscience. Cromwell’s dedication to this radical liberty of conscience fueled many of his actions during the civil wars, Commonwealth, and Protectorate, and played a much larger role in his rejection of the crown than has been recognized.

Liberty of Conscience and the “Real Unity”: The Civil War Years

During the First (1642-46) and Second Civil Wars (1647-49), Cromwell used the language of liberty of conscience to overturn deeply entrenched class values in the Parliamentary forces. This period, not surprisingly, is often seen as his most radical because he challenged his military and Parliamentary colleagues by defending nonconformity, all the while building a reputation for himself as the guardian of liberty of conscience. Moreover, his politics on and off of the battlefield seemed to concur with his radical language of liberty.

Early on, Cromwell insisted that the Parliamentary forces should be filled with “faithful and conscientious men.”6 “[I]t much concerns your good,” he informed Sir William Springe, Knight and Baronet, and Maurice Barrowe, Esquire, in September 1643, “to have conscientious men” fighting for Parliament (Lomas-Carlyle 1:154). Cromwell wanted soldiers who were passionate about the cause; and since he saw Parliament’s cause as God’s cause, he also wanted men – regardless of social standing – who “made some conscience of what they did,” as he would later tell the Second Protectorate Parliament (Lomas-Carlyle 3:66). For this reason, Cromwell insisted that
those volunteering for service in Parliament’s army not be scrutinized because of the form that their Protestant godliness took: as long as they were godly men who heeded conscience, and their beliefs were within the parameters of Protestantism, he believed they should be allowed to serve their country. So convinced was he that any man loyal to his conscience in tandem with the scriptures was a man of God that differences in opinion to Cromwell were mere technicalities.

Not surprisingly, Cromwell’s more conservative colleagues found his tendency to recruit men because of their piety rather than their social standing objectionable. One of his opponents complained that in the “raising of his regiment,” Cromwell makes choyce of his officers, not such as weare souldiers or men of estate, but such as were common men, pore and of meane parentage, onely he would give them the title of godly pretious men [. . . ] I have heard him oftentimes say that it must be not souldiers nor the Scots that must doe this worke, but it must be the godly to this purposs [. . . ] If you looke upon his owne regiment of horse see what a swarme ther is of thos that call themselves the godly; some of them profess they have sene visions and had revellations.

In 1644, Cromwell twice had to persuade Lieutenant-Colonel William Dodson, a Presbyterian who objected to serving with sectaries, not to resign. Also in 1644, Major-General Lawrence Crawford arrested William Packer, a lieutenant in Cromwell’s “Ironsides,” for disobedience. Because Cromwell believed that Crawford had actually arrested Packer because he was a Baptist, he wrote Crawford an indignant letter reprimanding him for dismissing “one so faithful to the Cause” and “so able to serve you as [Packer] is.” “Ay, but the man is an Anabaptist,” Cromwell continued, “Admit he be,
shall that render him incapable to serve the Public”? Unlike Crawford, Cromwell contended, “the State, in choosing men to serve them, takes no notice of their opinions, if they be willing faithfully to serve them, that satisfies.” Cromwell went on to admonish Crawford for his unwillingness to bear with men of different minds: “Take heed of being sharp, or too easily sharpened by others, against those whom you can object little but that they square not with you in every opinion concerning matters of religion” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:170-71).

While on the surface Cromwell’s quarrel with Crawford was simply a practical one – Cromwell, after all, needed men to fill his ranks – this fact cannot override Cromwell’s explicit criticism of Crawford’s conduct towards religious radicals. Indeed, the heart of the matter for Cromwell was not Packer or military necessity at all, but rather Crawford’s continued hostility towards those “men of different minds from yourself.” Crawford confirmed this contention when he later used this letter from Cromwell to demonstrate that Cromwell was an “insubordinate person, and what was equally terrible a favourer of Anabaptists” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:172). The tension between Cromwell and Crawford regarding the composition of the army did not end here: in that same year, each sought the other’s dismissal from Parliament’s forces, causing the Commons to create a committee to consider how to unite Presbyterians and Independants. John Morrill points out that the Commons’ “stated willingness to ‘endeavour of finding out some way how far tender consciences … may be borne with’ was a considerable concession to Cromwell’s position” in the debate.

Cromwell’s early fight for liberty of conscience was not confined to the army, however; he also put pressure on Parliament to recognize his approach as the reason for
God’s favor and the army’s success. After his decisive victory at Naseby in June 1645, Cromwell wrote to William Lenthall, Speaker of the House, that “Honest men served you faithfully” in the army’s latest conquest, “I beseech you in the name of God, not to discourage them.” Instead, he continued, “I wish this action may beget thankfulness and humility in all that are concerned in it. He that ventures his life for the liberty of his country, I wish he trust God for the liberty of his conscience, and you for the liberty he fights for” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:205). Cromwell here presented his soldiers as entitled to liberty of conscience, and Parliament as obligated to protect that liberty. This argument for liberty of conscience was, to say the least, unwelcome in Parliament. When the Commons sent this particular letter to press, they excised this final paragraph calling for liberty of conscience. Not as careful as the Commons, the House of Lords had the letter published in its entirety at the same time. Despite this, the fact that the Commons found the need to censor Cromwell’s sentiments foreshadowed his future conflicts with this body.

Cromwell, unrelenting in the pressure he placed upon Parliament, wrote to Lenthall once again after the surrender of Bristol in September 1645. Returning to the topic of liberty of conscience, Cromwell this time addressed the Presbyterian fear of the disorder that would arise if a variety of religious opinions were permitted. He pointed to the liberty of conscience amongst his own ranks as a successful model for Lenthall: “Presbyterians, Independents, all had here the same spirit of faith and prayer; the same pretence and answer; they agree here, know no names of difference: pity it is it should be otherwise anywhere” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:218). Undoubtedly referencing the divide in Parliament itself between Presbyterians and Independents, Cromwell proposed a sense of
unity beyond the doctrinal conformity desired by Presbyterians: a unity not in form but rather in the “same spirit of faith and prayer.” Cromwell continued in this vein, arguing “All that believe, have the real unity, which is most glorious, because inward and spiritual, in the Body, and to the Head. As for being united in forms, commonly called Uniformity, every Christian will for peace-sake study and do, as far as conscience will permit; and from brethren, in things of the mind we look for no compulsion, but that of light and reason” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:218). For this argument, Cromwell appropriated the language of Ephesians 4:3-4 to distinguish between “the real unity” and the uniformity so desired by Presbyterians. This real unity was enjoyed by all believers. Moreover, Cromwell demonstrated for Lenthall and the House of Commons that liberty of conscience and unity – albeit spiritual unity – were not mutually exclusive. They might seem so only to those who desired unity in outward forms. Instead, Cromwell sought to dispel the fear of difference by showing that unity could be experienced more fully because of the difference produced by liberty of conscience, not despite it. As Cromwell put it in a 1648 letter to the Lord Wharton, “difference is only in the subject, not the object; to a worldly man they are outward, to a saint Christian” (Lomas-Carlyle, 1:353).

Whether or not Lenthall and the House of Commons agreed with his argument for “the real unity,” Cromwell nonetheless pushed liberty of conscience as a goal. This time, however, he set this burden on Parliament not as a political body protecting its soldiers (as in his previous letter to Lenthall), but rather on Parliament as a national Protestant body, and thus the army’s own brethren. Conscience, as Cromwell argued, would rightly judge how far any individual could conform to Parliament’s desired uniformity. And, since his soldiers considered MPs their Protestant brethren, they “look for no
compulsion” to tyrannize over nonconforming consciences, but rather only “light and reason” towards those who might be erring.

Cromwell’s defense of liberty of conscience during the civil war period extended beyond the military sphere. In July 1646, Cromwell solicited Thomas Knyvett, Esquire, regarding one of his tenants, Robert Browne, who sought the “disquiet,” in this case, eviction, of his neighbors simply because he was “not well pleased with the way of those men.” Cromwell’s letter to Knyvett stressed his concern over those who suffered for conscience:

Truly nothing moves me to desire this, more than the pity I bear them in respect of their honesties, and the trouble I hear they are like to suffer for their consciences. And however the world interprets it, I am not ashamed to solicit for such as are anywhere under a pressure of this kind; doing herein as I would be done by. Sir, this is a quarrelsome age; and the anger seems to me to be the worse, where the ground is things of difference in opinion” (Lomas-Carlyle 1:237).

As in his letters to Crawford and Lenthall, Cromwell lamented once again the strife caused by what he considered mere “difference in opinion.” More importantly, however, Cromwell also announced his intentions to protect all those suffering for conscience’s sake regardless of what effect his actions might have had on his reputation. Cromwell thus emerged during this period as a supporter of liberty of conscience and the difference that it produced. And, while these early years in Cromwell’s military career are often regarded as his most radical, his defense of liberty of conscience would remain his driving force.
The Parliament of Saints and the “good of the whole flock”

When Cromwell moved from his success on the field to the unprecedented act of expelling the Rump Parliament on 20 April 1653, he continued to justify his actions according to his ongoing fight for liberty of conscience. The Commonwealthsmen regarded this forced dismissal of Parliament a betrayal and violation of the nascent republic. Yet, though capable of grasping power for himself at this moment, Cromwell instead aided the creation of another body that he hoped would recognize, as the Rump had not, the importance of liberty of conscience for the survival of the Commonwealth. The Nominated Assembly, whose members were meant to represent “the various forms of godliness in this nation,” replaced the Rump in July 1653; and, on 4 July, it was Cromwell who delivered an optimistic keynote address to this “Parliament of Saints.”

Cromwell began his speech by insisting that he and his fellow officers preferred “healing and looking forward” to “raking into sores” and looking backward on things past. Nevertheless, he found it necessary, “for our own vindication” to provide his present audience with the reasons behind the Army’s unexpected action against the Rump (Lomas-Carlyle, 2:277). Cromwell thought this digression necessary because their motivations “hath been in our own hearts and consciences, justifying us, and hath never been yet thoroughly imparted to any.” Indeed, he insisted, their “judgments and consciences” were satisfied not upon “vain imaginations, nor things fictitious” but rather upon those “that fell within the compass of our own certain knowledge” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:281-82). This surety of conscience, he continued, was created by the Rump’s disregard for the cause of the Civil Wars, the people, and God’s providence. “Finding the people dissatisfied in every corner of the nation,” Cromwell told the delegates, “and all men laying at our doors the non-performance of these things, which had been promised, and
were of duty to be performed, – truly we did then think ourselves concerned” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:278-79). Cromwell claimed that the Rump had no intention of fulfilling the promises of liberty of conscience expounded during the wars; rather, having forgotten “all tenderness” towards the nation, their sole aim was to perpetuate themselves (Lomas-Carlyle 2:283; 279-80, 285, 286, 287).16 Because the Rump’s “spirit was not according to God,” and because the weight of the Cause “must needs be very dear unto us who had so often adventured our lives for it,” Cromwell insisted that it was their duty to take action against it (Lomas-Carlyle 2:280-81). Ultimately, he felt that this body not only failed to support the cause, but also that it was no longer representative of the nation as a whole.

Having asserted that the unprecedented act of expelling Parliament was both in keeping with conscience and done to protect liberty of conscience, Cromwell encouraged the Assembly – a body, he supposed, more representative of the nation than the Rump – in the “great business” they had taken up (Lomas-Carlyle 2:289). He implored them to “Love the sheep, love the lambs; love all, tender all, cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good.” Recalling the Rump’s fear of the difference created by liberty of conscience, Cromwell drew on Isaiah 41:19-20 to envision an emblem of unity in difference: “He said, He would plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle and the oil-tree; and He would set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine-tree, and the box-tree together.” Cromwell read God’s end in placing these various species of trees together as being that, despite their differences, they might “see, and know, and understand together, that He hath done and wrought all this for the good of the whole flock” rather than any one species (Lomas-Carlyle 2:293-94). According to this model,
God Himself created difference – difference akin to the religious differences amidst the Assembly’s own ranks. And, as Cromwell contended, it was their Christian duty to create out of that difference a mutual care and understanding of all Christians.

Cromwell’s emblem of toleration, however, continued to grow in scope as the speech progressed. “And if the poorest Christian,” Cromwell continued, “the most mistaken Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you, – I say, if any shall desire but to lead a life in godliness and honesty, let him be protected” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:294). This implicit call for liberty of conscience was perhaps Cromwell’s most radical to date: he not only encouraged the new Assembly, as he had encouraged the House of Commons under Lenthall, to “be pitiful and tender towards all, though of different judgments,” but also and more importantly, he asked them to tolerate even “the most mistaken Christian” so long as he or she abided by the civil laws of the land (Lomas-Carlyle 2:293). In other words, he reminded the Nominated Assembly, it was not its job to dictate compulsory doctrine, even in cases where a Christian might be wrong; rather its primary concern was to extend liberty of conscience to all Christians – irrespective of sect or denomination – who sought its protection.

This call for “pit[y] and tender[ness] towards all, though of different judgments” would, by Cromwell’s next speech to the First Protectorate Parliament, become more explicitly his call for liberty of conscience (Lomas-Carlyle 2:293). Yet here, confident in this Assembly and the future that was before it, he was more subtle in his wording, using instead the language of the scriptures to foster a congenial atmosphere amongst the delegates towards each other and the nation they represented. Optimistic regarding the potential of this body, Cromwell finally asked, “And why should we be afraid to say or
think that this [Assembly] may be the door to usher in the things that God has promised; which have been prophesied of; which He has set the hearts of His people to wait for and expect?” “Indeed I do think,” he continued, “somewhat is at the door: we are at the threshold” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:298).

Less than two months after this hopeful speech, however, Cromwell lamented to Lieutenant-General Fleetwood that “Being of different judgments, and of each sort most seeking to propagate their own,” the delegates did not possess “that spirit of kindness” that he felt towards them. Having ushered in the Barebones Parliament under a banner of mutual understanding and toleration, Cromwell despaired at their inability to justify their “form[s] of judgment” in religion “by love and meekness” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:307). In the event, this Parliament of Saints would last less than six months.

“[I]s not liberty of conscience in religion a fundamental?”: The First Protectorate Parliament

The failure of the Nominated Assembly to embrace the difference produced by liberty of conscience even within its own ranks only strengthened Cromwell’s resolve to establish a strict policy of liberty of conscience throughout the nation. In a move that some still regard as sheer ambition, or, at the very least, social conservatism, Cromwell and the Council of Officers established the Protectorate on 16 December 1653. Ironically, this decision was made in response to the Nominated Assembly’s unwillingness to adhere to Cromwell’s program of spiritual radicalism. If the creation of the Protectorate was in fact a socially conservative maneuver, Cromwell chose this path purposefully, with the hopes of pursuing his radical agenda of liberty of conscience. Indeed, during the nine months before the First Protectorate Parliament would meet, the Protector and his Council
catalyzed what they hoped would be the beginning of a full-scale reformation in England.¹⁷

When the first Protectorate Parliament met on 4 September 1654, Cromwell once again delivered an opening address before the newly elected MPs. As with his speech before the Nominated Assembly, Cromwell presented this talk as a discharge of his conscience – “I shall speak to you [. . .] what is truth, and what is upon my heart” – in order to guarantee his audience that his words were sincere (Lomas-Carlyle 2:339).

Hoping that his and the Council’s work toward reformation would continue under this first parliament,¹⁸ Cromwell boasted of their accomplishments, and mostly their dispelling of the “heap of confusions [which] were upon these poor nations!” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:352). He catalogued these confusions, warning Parliament most of all of the “pretensions of liberty of conscience” recently used to justify civil disturbances throughout the nation (Lomas-Carlyle 2:345, 349). “[L]iberty of conscience, and liberty of the subjects,” he argued, “two as glorious things to be contended for, as any God hath given us; yet both these also abused for the patronising of villainies” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:345). Cromwell thus distinguished between those who suffered for conscience’s sake and those who were merely “pretending [. . .] spirituality” and using the language of conscience for their own ends (Lomas-Carlyle 2:347). The former should be protected; the latter punished at the hands of the magistrate.

Moreover, Cromwell took the fact that this Parliament would protect those legitimate claims to liberty of conscience for granted. He lamented that

I wish it may not too, too justly be said, that there was severity and sharpness; in our old system! yea, too much of an imposing spirit in matters of conscience; a
spirit Unchristian enough in any times, most unfit for these; denying liberty of conscience to those who have earned it with their blood; who have gained civil liberty, and religious also, for those who would thus impose upon them! (Lomas-Carlyle 2:346).

For Cromwell, such “severity and sharpness” was a thing of the past: he and the Council had initiated an era in which conscience would not be imposed upon, and he expected that this first parliament, unlike those of the “our old system,” would be eager to continue this revolutionary and Christian work. Energized and ready to hand over the legislative reins, Cromwell ended his keynote speech in seeming haste so that Parliament might “lose no time in carrying on your work” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:359).

Cromwell’s hopes for this Parliament’s potential were dashed almost immediately. From 5 to 11 September, parliamentary proceedings were dominated by those MPs like Sir Arthur Heselrige and Thomas Scot who were dissatisfied with the Instrument of Government, and particularly the principle of government by a single person. ¹⁹ Responding to these attacks on the Instrument of Government itself in his speech on 12 September, Cromwell aggressively defended his position before Parliament as unsought and providential: “I called not myself to this place. I say again, I called not myself to this place!” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:367). Instead, he claimed, he became Protector “by a good right from God and men,” a fact to which he had “many witnesses” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:380, 367). “And,” he continued, “I shall now make you my last witnesses” to this truth by telling them what he must “for approving myself to God and my conscience in my actions throughout this undertaking” and “approving myself to every one of your consciences in the sight of God” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:379-80).
This rhetorical bond of conscience at once secured Cromwell’s position as Protector (or so he hoped) while simultaneously guaranteeing his audience that his actions were conscionable. In response to Parliament’s challenge of the Instrument of Government, Cromwell detailed which provisions of that constitution were fundamental and which circumstantial: the former could be changed, while the latter were untouchable. Not surprisingly, Cromwell listed amongst his several fundamentals liberty of conscience (Lomas-Carlyle 2:283). As if he had already established this particular fundamental with Parliament in the past, Cromwell heatedly asked, “Again, is not liberty of conscience in religion a fundamental?” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:282). Indeed, it was not merely a fundamental but also a “natural right” and ought to be reciprocated: “he that would have, ought to give it” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:382). Yet, he argued, “one of the vanities of our contests,” was the fact that “Every sect saith, ‘Oh, give me liberty!’ But give him it, and to his power he will not yield it to anybody else.” In disbelief, he finally asked, “Where is our ingenuousness?”

This impassioned digression against what Cromwell perceived as inexcusable hypocrisy did not end here, however. Considering the limits to which he could push his defense of this natural right, Cromwell finally decided that

I may say it to you, I can say it: All the money of this nation would not have tempted men to fight upon such an account as they have here been engaged in, if they had not had hopes of liberty of conscience better than they had from Episcopacy, or than would have been afforded them from a Scottish Presbytery, -- or an English either.
Prior to this moment, Cromwell had always argued that Parliament owed its soldiers liberty of conscience for their service; but here he impressed upon Parliament that had it not been for their hope of gaining this fundamental and natural liberty, his soldiers would not have fought at all. Their fight, in other words, was a fight for religious freedom, for themselves as well as the “generations to come.” He threatened that if there was to be an absolute religious doctrine, without an allowance for exceptions to the rule, “we shall have our people driven into wilderness, as they were, when those poor and afflicted people, that forsook their estates and inheritances here” for “the enjoyment of their liberty” in the “waste howling wilderness in New England!” “[F]or liberty’s sake [they] stript themselves of all their comfort” rather than be “ensnared and in bondage” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:383). His troops, however, were motivated by the hopes of enjoying those liberties in their England, and their success during the wars seemed to signify God’s similar support of their program.

Most interesting about this lengthy digression is the fact that liberty of conscience was not one of the topics discussed at length by this first parliament during 5-11 September. 20 Perhaps Cromwell’s disillusionment with this parliament’s ability to possess “a sweet, gracious and holy understanding of one another,” as he had hoped for in his opening speech only a week prior, made him fear for this fundamental in addition to his position as Lord Protector (Lomas-Carlyle 2:359). Or, perhaps he wanted to anticipate what he feared would be members’ next target. Interestingly, the indenture that he forced delegates to sign after this speech if they wished to remain MPs did not include a stipulation for liberty of conscience. 21 Cromwell might have hoped that by instead guaranteeing his position as Protector in the indenture, he could single-handedly
protect liberty of conscience if it came under fire. Or, he might have realized that had a stipulation been included in the indenture regarding liberty of conscience, he would have lost more than the 50-80 MPs who ultimately decided not to sign the agreement. Either way, his insistence on liberty of conscience being a fundamental in this speech was his most direct and emphatic declaration of this “natural right” as such. Earlier, it seems, he had mistakenly thought such emphasis on liberty of conscience superfluous or somehow unnecessary, as if it was a right taken for granted in the Commonwealth. But, as his trust of this body declined, so did his belief that this fundamental would be recognized by the present parliament.

As if in response to his assertions regarding this fundamental, for the next five months, religious liberty and the extent to which it should be granted became a hotly contested topic in Parliament. In November, tensions were so high that Cromwell refused to advise the committee appointed by the Commons regarding articles of indemnity and toleration.22 Parliament’s debates concerning religious liberty continued on into December with some MPs pushing for an “enumeration of heresies,” an enumeration, which others feared, might “expose the godly party, and people hereafter, to some danger of suffering under those laws,” while others tried to take away Cromwell’s veto power in matters of religion (neither of which passed).23

The seeming unproductivity of this Parliament, along with its members’ insistence upon altering the Instrument of Government, resulted in its dissolution on 22 January 1655.24 Speaking as if betrayed, Cromwell lamented in his final speech before it that “you might have had opportunity to have settled peace and quietness amongst all professing godliness; and might have been instrumental [ . . . ] to have kept the godly of
all judgments from running upon one another” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:416-17). It was because of its failure to “heal[] the breaches” that, Cromwell argued, there was “yet upon the spirits of men a strange itch”: “Nothing will satisfy them unless they can put their finger upon their brethren’s consciences, to pinch them there.” “What greater hypocrisy,” he asked, “than for those who were oppressed by the Bishops to become the greatest oppressors themselves, so soon as their yoke was removed?” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:417).

Perhaps their greatest failure, however, was their failure to realize that though “Religion was not the thing at first contested for” during the Civil Wars, “God brought it to that issue at last; and gave it to us by way of redundancy; and at last it proved that which was most dear to us” all along (Lomas-Carlyle 2:417). Indeed, Cromwell asserted, liberty of conscience was no longer merely a fundamental, natural right, or even the driving force behind his soldiers’ passion; rather, Providence had revealed that liberty of conscience was *the* cause of the Civil Wars themselves. In this way, they had failed to uphold this “Cause of God” by failing to protect liberty of conscience (Lomas-Carlyle 2:418). For Cromwell, this discovery of the cause was certainly revelatory. Taking a moment even in this censuring speech to glory in this revelation, Cromwell asked

> Is not this [the liberty that God has granted His people] as fair a lecture and as clear speaking as anything our dark reason, left to the letter of the Scriptures, can collect from them? By this voice has God spoken very loud on the behalf of His people, by judging their enemies in the late war, and restoring them a liberty to worship, with the freedom of their consciences, and freedom in their estates and persons when they do so. And thus we have found the Cause of God by the
works of God, which are the testimony of God, upon which rock whosoever splits shall suffer shipwreck.

“It is my glory,” he continued, “that I know a Cause which yet we have not lost” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:412). Despite his revelation, he did not consider the present Parliament a vehicle for this yet unlost cause. For their failure to uphold liberty of conscience, Cromwell took it upon himself to once more be God’s instrument, or, in this case, the rock upon which the First Protectorate Parliament would split.

**Fulfilling the “debt due to God and Christ”: The Major-Generals and the Second Protectorate Parliament**

While Cromwell’s behavior towards both the Rump and the First Protectorate Parliament seemed increasingly authoritarian, his radical determination to establish liberty of conscience was never more passionate. He had retrospectively identified liberty of conscience as the goal of the civil wars themselves, and would stop at nothing in adhering to God’s cause. In his mind, it was the Rump, the Nominated Assembly, and finally the First Protectorate Parliament – not him – that had betrayed the revolution in their unwillingness to establish liberty of conscience throughout the Commonwealth. As a result, the Second Protectorate Parliament would not sit until 17 September 1656 when the government was in desperate need of funding for the Anglo-Spanish war. In the interim, Cromwell and his Council established the direct military rule of the major-generals to drive the reformation of manners and provide stringent security for the commonwealth. The “sole end” of this mode of godly rule, Cromwell argued, was “the security of the peace of the nations, the suppressing of vice and encouragement of virtue, the very end of magistracy.”

Cromwell would again laud the major-generals as having
been “more effectual towards the discountenancing of Vice and settling Religion, than anything done these fifty years.” “I will abide by it,” he defensively claimed, “notwithstanding the envy and slander of foolish men!” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:543).26

On 15 February 1655, while under the direct rule of this godly government, the Protector and his Council published *A Proclamation prohibiting The Disturbing of Ministers and other Christians in their Assemblies and Meetings*, substantiating his commitment to what he now saw as the cause. Wilbur Cortez Abbott reads this proclamation negatively, claiming that this “adroitly phrased” document “could not conceal the fact that it was directed against those sects which had been causing disturbances among the congregations of the dominant party, and it further emphasized the position of the Protector, suppressing the extreme elements [ . . . ] not so much to steer a middle course as to fortify the position of his own group against all others.”27 Recently, Ronald Hutton similarly characterized the decree as “a proclamation to restrict religious liberty.”28 Yet the wording of the proclamation remains consistent with the arguments for liberty of conscience that Cromwell had been promoting all along.29 The edict began by assuring readers that one “Token of [God’s] Favor and Good Will to Us” is the fact that there is a free and uninterrupted Passage of the Gospel running through the midst of Us, and Liberty for all to hold forth and profess with sobriety, their Light and Knowledge therein, according as the Lord in his rich Grace and Wisdom hath dispensed to every man, and with the same Freedom to practice and exercise the Faith of the Gospel, and to lead quiet and peaceable Lives in all Godliness and Honesty, without any Interruption from the Powers God hath set over this
Commonwealth.

Such a mercy, as Cromwell deemed it, was gained at the “Price of much Blood” and “till of late years denied to this Nation.” Cromwell stated that it was his duty to protect this freedom for those who practice the “sober and quiet exercise and profession of Religion,” even if they are of “differing Judgements.”

Repeating in large part the content of his speeches before the First Protectorate Parliament, the proclamation goes onto declare that the Protector lamented that instead of reciprocating a “Spirit of tenderness and forbearance” towards each other, many who claimed to fear God continued to possess a “spirit of bitterness towards their Brethren.” The edict labels such disturbers of the peace “Quakers, Ranters, and others,” and outlawed neither their belief system or form of worship, but rather their interruption of “Publique and Private Meetings” of “others in their Worship.” Thus, though the proclamation may seem to have a hidden agenda, one embedded in the rhetoric of religious liberty, it really served one purpose: to protect liberty of conscience. Cromwell and his Council did not deny this liberty to those calling themselves either Ranters or Quakers; rather, they outlawed only their behavior that was considered a disturbance of the civil peace. Indeed, the very next day, Cromwell had the Fifth Monarchist leaders Thomas Harrison, John Carew, Nathaniel Rich and Hugh Courtney arrested for refusing to live peaceably. This is not to say that Cromwell embraced all sects; instead, he was willing to allow or tolerate those who abided by the laws.

In his opening speech to the Second Protectorate Parliament September of the following year, Cromwell shared a similar sentiment. Speaking to the delegates of the dangers England faced as a result of Charles Stuart’s alliance with Spain, as well as
internal threats from the Levellers who were in league with Royalists and Spain,
Cromwell claimed that the only way to “avert the present danger” was through a “true
Reformation” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:533). Indeed, Cromwell maintained before them “in my
very conscience” that “if it be honest and thorough and just,” “your reformation will be
your best security!” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:533, 535). In order to guide them in such a
Reformation, Cromwell divulged his current policy of liberty of conscience:

   Our practice since the last Parliament hath been, To let all this Nation see that
whatever pretensions to Religion would continue quiet, peaceable, they should
enjoy conscience and liberty to themselves; -- and not make Religion a pretence
for arms and blood, truly we have suffered them, and that cheerfully, so to enjoy
their own liberties.

“And truly,” he added, “I am against all liberty of conscience repugnant to *this*” (Lomas-
Carlyle 2:535). His main concern, then, was not to dictate doctrine to individuals or to
set in place a national and compulsory form of Protestantism, but rather to punish only
those who disturbed civil peace as a result of their religious pretences. Cromwell urged
Parliament to encourage and countenance Independent, Baptist and Presbyterian alike,
“so long as they do plainly continue to be thankful to God, and to make use of the liberty
given them to enjoy their own consciences!” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:536). For Cromwell, as
he told this new Parliament, the only form that “gives the being to true religion” is “Faith
in Christ.” “Whoever hath this Faith,” he continued, “let his Form be what it will.” Such
tolerance, Cromwell argued, was a “debt due to God and Christ” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:536).
Cromwell presented Parliament’s success as dependant upon this balancing act between
sects, ensuring that no “one Religion” imposes “upon another” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:537).
Finally, as he had revealed in his dissolution speech to the First Protectorate Parliament, Cromwell reminded its successors that “undoubtedly this” enjoyment of liberty of conscience “is the peculiar Interest all this while contested for” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:536). And, mindful of the First Protectorate Parliament’s failure, he implored them, “I beseech you, I beseech you, do not dispute of unnecessary and unprofitable things that may divert you from carrying on of so glorious a work as this is” (Lomas-Carlyle 2:548-49).

“Nothing must make a man’s conscience a servant”: Cromwell and the Offer of the Crown

Despite Cromwell’s hope that this Parliament’s focus would be on liberty of conscience, he found his own conscience imposed upon by Parliament in 1657. First on 23 February and more formally on 31 March, the House presented to Cromwell The Humble Petition and Advice, a new constitution for the Commonwealth. Primarily the work of Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill and other conservative Cromwellians, the constitution sought to crown Cromwell king. Those in defense of this motion argued that the office of king, unlike that of Protector, was an ancient one, well defined according to English law. A King’s powers were known and limited accordingly, whereas the Instrument of Government made the Protector’s power seem arbitrary and subject to abuse.

Scholars for years have speculated as to why Cromwell ultimately decided to turn down the offer: over a century ago, C.H. Firth argued that “If left to himself the Protector would probably have waived his scruples and accepted”; in Firth’s view, it was the many pamphlets and letters that Cromwell received, and his own knowledge of the army’s opposition to the offer, that finally decided his answer. More recently, historians have
recognized the possibility of religious motives behind Cromwell’s decision; yet, most list other reasons as the prime catalyst driving Cromwell’s refusal of the crown. Barry Coward, after stating that a “major personal reason for this decision was his providential world-view,” goes on to adduce the political reasons that Cromwell refused the crown, such as pressure from the army and other “radical Cromwellians.” Similarly, Little and Smith mention the “importance of providence,” yet posit that it was equally possible that “Cromwell realised that he was perhaps more powerful as Lord Protector than he would have been as king.” For Little and Smith, the most “crucial considerations” in Cromwell’s mind were “a desire not to antagonise the army” and “a fear that to accept the Crown might indicate sinful ambition and greed.”

While, undoubtedly, the advice of “good and godly friends” held sway with Cromwell, as well as his standing with the army, I would argue a careful reading of the series of speeches delivered throughout this crisis shows conscience as the prime motivation for Cromwell’s refusal of Parliament’s offer of the crown. In his first official response to this “Frame of Government,” Cromwell told the House that

should I give any resolution in this matter suddenly, without seeking to have an answer put into my heart, and so into my mouth, by Him that hath been my God and my Guide hitherto, -- it would give you very little cause of comfort in such a choice as you have made in such a business as this is, because it would savour more to be of the flesh, to proceed from lust, to arise from arguments of self (Lomas-Carlyle 3:27).

He closed by asking Parliament for “some short time” to “ask counsel of God and of my own heart” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:28). In other words, he requests time to search his
conscience for the right answer regarding their proposition. This short time spans only four days before Cromwell again speaks to Parliament on April 3, apologizing for not “mak[ing] this desire of mine known to the Parliament sooner” because of “some infirmity of body” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:29). Finally delivering his answer, Cromwell assured Parliament that “I have not been able to find it my duty to God and you to undertake this charge under that Title” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:32). Indeed, he continued, “Nothing must make a man’s conscience a servant,” and “really and sincerely it is my conscience that guides me to this answer” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:33). Despite modern conceptions of this “crisis,” as early as April 3 – four days after the Commons’ official proposal – Cromwell had given Parliament a definitive answer: a “no” for conscience’s sake.

The crisis of conscience that follows, drawing the question of kingship on for another month, then, was not a result of Cromwell’s own indecision or desire for the crown, but rather of Parliament’s particular stipulation regarding Cromwell’s acceptance of the Humble Petition: the Protector either had to accept every motion in the Humble Petition, or he had to throw the entire document away. Earlier in the speech, he had praised Parliament for the Humble Petition, telling them that they “have done that which never was done before!” Indeed, he exclaimed, “They have been zealous of the two greatest Concernments that God hath in the world”: religious and civil liberty (Lomas-Carlyle 3:30-1). Cromwell, to his dismay, ended this declination speech on Parliament’s terms: “if the Parliament be so resolved, ‘for the whole Paper or none of it,’ it will not be fit for me to use any inducement to you to alter their resolution” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:33).
He would not question or press Parliament on its terms; rather, he assumed the matter closed after his refusal of the crown.

Despite Cromwell’s decisive answer to Parliament – citing his own conscience, no less – Parliament still considered the matter unresolved. On 4 April, they voted on whether or not the House still adhered to the Humble Petition and Advice, with an outcome of 65 nays and 78 yeas. On 6 April, Parliament resolved to acquaint Cromwell with the results of their vote, along with a set of agreed upon reasons that would account for those results. The reasons they presented were as follows:

That the Parliament having lately presented their humble Petition and Advice to your Highness, whereto they have not as yet received satisfaction; and the matters contained in that Petition and Advice, being agreed upon by the great council and representative of the three nations; and which, in their judgments, are most conducive to the good of the people thereof, both in their spiritual and civil concerns, they have therefore thought fit to adhere to this advice; and to put your Highness in mind of the great obligation which rests upon you, in respect of this advice; and again to desire you to give your assent thereunto.  

Rather than accept Cromwell’s plea to conscience on 3 April, then, Parliament pressed him once again, reminding him of his “great obligation” as Protector. And, though he began his response to this second petition by saying that “No man can put a greater value than I hope I do, and shall do, upon the desires and advices of Parliament,” he insisted that “in such cases as these are, the world hath judged that a man’s conscience ought to know no scruples; yet surely mine doth, and I dare not dissemble” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:34, 37). He praised them once again for providing for liberty, “Civil and Spiritual!” for
everyone, and asked that he be given the same liberty to “vent my own doubts, and mine own fears, and mine own scruples” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:37). Finally, he assured them, if he should “undertake anything not in Faith, I shall serve you in my own Unbelief; -- and I shall then be the most unprofitablest Servant that ever People or Nation had!” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:37).

When again approached with Parliament’s proposal on April 11, he reminded them that “I did not indeed in vain allege conscience in the first answer I gave you” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:51). Thus, though he said that he would “gladly receive” reasons from Parliament regarding the offer of the crown, he insisted that the matter still “stick[s] upon my conscience” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:51). And, while he asked for more time at the end of this meeting with Lord Whitelocke to “consider” “these things that have been spoken,” Cromwell replied on 13 April by arguing that Whitelocke’s reasons for wanting him to accept the crown were “strong and rational” but not “necessarily conclusive” (3:52, 55). He told them his “present answer,” still, “sways with my conscience.” Cromwell mentioned the “honest men and faithful men” who “do not swallow this Title,” but goes on to “say something for myself” in this matter (Lomas-Carlyle 3:67, 69). Reminding his audience that he has the Word of God “for the rule of my conscience,” he confidently asserted that “the Providence of God hath laid aside this Title of King providentially de facto” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:69-70). “I will not seek to set up that, that Providence hath destroyed,” he continued, “And this is somewhat to me, and to my judgment and my conscience. That it is true, it is that that hath an awe upon my chest” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:71). Cromwell concludes with the hope that God will “direct you [Parliament] to do what is according to His will” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:73).
In his final speech upon this “great matter,” Cromwell once again insisted that he was still unconvinced “of the necessity of that thing that hath been so often insisted on by you, -- to wit, the Title of King.” He also insisted that while “no private judgment is to lie in the balance with the judgment of Parliament,” in matters “that respect particular persons, -- every man is to give an account to God of his actions, he must in some measure be able to prove his own work, and to have an approbation in his own conscience of that he is to do or to forbear.” Cromwell thus implored Parliament not to “deny me this” similar freedom of conscience, a liberty “being not only a Liberty but a Duty” since “without sinning” he cannot “forbear” “to examine my own heart and thoughts and judgment” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:127). Assuring Parliament that “at the best” he could accept this title “doubtfully,” Cromwell argued that “whatsoever is not of faith, is sin to him that doth it” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:128).

This account tells a very different story than that of a Cromwell hesitant to accept the crown because of peer pressure. Indeed, if we can trust Cromwell’s language of conscience throughout this predicament, it seems that his only crisis of conscience was that created and exacerbated by a Parliament unwilling to grant Cromwell the one thing that he had advocated for his countrymen all along. Parliament finally appeased him when, in June 1657, the Humble Petition and Advice was adopted with Cromwell maintaining his position as Protector.

Yet Cromwell’s conflict with this body did not end with the offer of the crown. Already suspicious of their dedication to liberty of conscience after James Nayler’s cruel penalty for blasphemy, Cromwell had to remind them of this cause time and time again
before their eventual dissolution. In his speech before this Parliament on January 25, 1658, Cromwell asked,

What is that which possesseth every sect? What is it? That every sect may be uppermost! [...] [it is] as if we should see one making wounds in a man’s side, and would desire nothing more than to be groping and grovelling with his fingers in those wounds! This is what such men would be at; this is the spirit of those that would trample wounds, and rending and tearing, and making them wider than they are (Lomas-Carlyle 3:174-75).

Having divulged how fragile and precious the peace that England now enjoyed truly was, Cromwell ended on a determined note, insisting that

I shall, -- I must! -- see it done [that] liberty of conscience may be secured for honest people, that they may serve God without fear; that every just Interest may be preserved; that a Godly Ministry may be upheld, and not affronted by seducing and seduced spirits; that all men may be preserved in their just rights, whether civil or spiritual.

It was, he argued, “Upon this account” that “I took my oath” (Lomas-Carlyle 3:184). A mere ten days later, Cromwell would dissolve this Parliament for, as the previous failed Parliaments, wrangling over matters that he considered inconsequential in comparison to the big questions of religious and civil liberty, and especially liberty of conscience. This was the final Parliament that Cromwell would contend with: on 3 September of that same year, Cromwell died leaving his son Richard to take his place as Lord Protector.

Ironically, by rejecting the crown for his conscience’s sake, Cromwell ultimately made the Protectoral government weaker, precipitating the return of Charles II in 1660.
Richard, after all, would not hold the sway that his father held, and without the crown he could not sustain his power as Protector. Rather than retreating from the revolution, then, it was instead Cromwell’s refusal to retreat from the revolution that ultimately struck the death knell of the Commonwealth and the godly nation he hoped it would become.

Conclusion

Green’s Cromwell possesses a conscience “sear’d and harden’d above all impression.” Rather than genuine sentiment, then, Cromwell’s language of conscience in the context of this play was used to “conquer Consciences, as well as Men.” Religious expression was thus reduced to a power play, a scheme bringing Cromwell closer to his ultimate goal: the crown. Green is perhaps picking up on a seventeenth-century suspicion of Cromwell’s pious language. Ironically, modern-day historians sometimes seem to share that same suspicion.

In reality, Cromwell’s dedication to liberty of conscience was both revolutionary and limiting. It allowed him to radically change the demographics of the Parliamentary forces, while also inhibiting his ability to create a strong civilian government over the Commonwealth. Cromwell’s dedication to liberty of conscience enabled some of the most revolutionary actions of the English revolution: a transformation of the Army, dissolution of Parliament, broader (if not unlimited) toleration of Protestant faiths and practice. But, his insistence on establishing this liberty also caused, in large part, his failure to work productively with any Parliament between 1649 and 1658 to forge the godly nation that he had so passionately fought to establish.
NOTES

1 *Oliver Cromwell: An Historical Play* (London, 1799), p. 76.

2 pp. 100-101.


5 Anthony Fletcher, “Oliver Cromwell and the Godly Nation,” in *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, ed. John Morrill (London: Longman, 1990), pp. 209-33, argues for Cromwell’s “practical Christianity and yearning to work with the godly for a spiritual regeneration of the whole English nation,” though his focus is not primarily on Cromwell’s unrelenting program of liberty of conscience (209).

to this text will be cited parenthetically as “Lomas-Carlyle,” indicating volume and page number.


10 Ironically, Packer, representing Woodstock in the second Protectoral parliament, joined the opposition in parliament and the army, for which Cromwell later stripped him of his command.

11 The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, 4 vols, ed. Wilbur Cortez Abbot (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), claims that, in this case, Cromwell’s defense of Packer “had little to do with those abstract principles of toleration and democracy.” Instead, Cromwell’s reasoning was “preeminently practical” because “[t]here was a war to be won . . . and any instrument which would assist in the accomplishment of this great task was to be seized upon an used. That this involved toleration and democracy – if it did – was incidental to the immediate design” (1:278).

More recently, Andrew R. Murphy, Conscience and Community: Revising Toleration and
Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), seconded Abbot’s argument, asserting that “this much-quoted letter does not constitute an argument for toleration, but rather a statement of military necessity” (118n).


13 This publication history was noted by Carlyle (1:205).

14 Calvin reads this passage as not denoting the “spiritual unity which is produced in us by the Spirit of God” but rather thinks “it more natural to understand the words as denoting harmony of views.” See Mark Water, ed., Parallel Classic Commentary on the New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004), p. 878.


16 Worden, The Rump Parliament, especially pp. 345-63, argues against this claim, supposing that, “Cromwell, hitherto the advocate of open elections, had become resolutely opposed to them” (355). Austin Woolrych, Commonwealth to Protectorate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), also attempts to get to the bottom of the Rump’s dissolution claiming that “It is much easier to tell the story of Cromwell’s breaking of the Rump than to explain it. It used to be simple when the House was assumed to have been rushing through a bill to keep its present members in their seats indefinitely, but the now
irrefragably evidence that it was on the point of legislating for its own dissolution makes
it necessary to look afresh for reasons why he felt such a desperate urgency to sop the bill
from passing” (68).

17 Peter Gaunt, “‘To Create a Little World out of Chaos’: The Protectoral Ordinances of
1653-1654 Reconsidered,” in *The Cromwellian Protectorate*, ed. Patrick Little
(Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 105-26, points out that during this period,
Cromwell and the council “completed a substantial body of legislation, most of it
respectable and worthy, some of it important and innovatory, responding to the needs and
demands of the state and the three nations as well as to the requests and aspirations of
localities and individuals. They may not have created a ‘new world’ out of ‘chaos’, but
the ordinances of protector and council of 1653-4 did go a long way towards bringing
form out of confusion and, in the words of article thirty of the constitution, they did in
various ways and to differing degrees promote ‘the peace and welfare of these nations’”
(126). See also Barry Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, 2002), where he claims that “in contrast to the Rump Parliament, the
Protector and Council had made an efficient and energetic start towards reformation”
(41).

18 Coward, p. 41.

19 Guibon Goddard, the MP for King’s Lynne, recorded these fiery debates in his journal.
From: 'Guibon Goddard's Journal: September 1654', Diary of Thomas Burton esq,
volume 1: July 1653 - April 1657 (1828), pp. XVII-XLIV. URL: http://www.british-
The indenture, instead, simply state: *I do hereby freely promise, and engage myself, to be true and faithful to the Lord Protector and the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland; and shall not (according to the tenor of the Indenture whereby I am returned to serve in this present Parliament) propose, or give my consent, to alter the Government as it is settled in a Single Person and a Parliament* (Lomas-Carlyle 2:391).

The Diary of Thomas Burton, 1:79. Coward also discusses this passage from Goddard’s journal, pp. 45-6.

The Diary of Thomas Burton, 1:114, 116.


For a detailed account of the rule of the major-generals, see Christopher Durston, Cromwell’s Major-Generals: Godly Government during the English Revolution (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, 3:627.


Coward also helpfully points out that “the Protectorate had never stood for unlimited religious liberty. Its religious objectives were not to promote the kind of religious
freedom that would encourage the growth of sects, which, as recent events have shown, were as intolerant of the views of others as had been the Laudian bishops in the 1630s. The central religious objective of the Protectorate was, on the contrary, to promote religious unity not diversity” (59).

30 This proclamation was reprinted in Abbott, 3:626-27.


32 One exception here is Martyn Bennett, Oliver Cromwell (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), who holds that “Cromwell rejected the crown because it was a tainted title for God ‘hath not only dealt so with the persons and the family, but he hath blasted the title’ [. . . ] It is a mark of Cromwell’s political consistency, rather than an indecisive reaction to conflicting pressures that ensured that Oliver remained a protector to the people not a king over them, the greatest pause in history was simply not a pause at all: it was a period of negotiation aimed at getting what Oliver wanted from the Humble Petition and Advice without having to adopt the royal title” (252).

33 The Cromwellian Protectorate, pp. 89-90.

34 Parliaments and Politics, p. 137. Gaunt, Oliver Cromwell (London: The British Library, 2004), also names providence as influential in Cromwell decision, but ultimately argues that “Opposition from the army, God’s chosen instrument, and from good and godly individuals, swayed Cromwell” (119).

35 This phrase comes from Gaunt, Oliver Cromwell, p. 119.

36 The Diary of Thomas Burton, 1:421-23.

pp. 111, 60.
Chapter 3
Early Quaker Writing, Oliver Cromwell, and the Nationalization of Conscience

“I stood still & gave him not a word,” recounts Anthony Pearson to George Fox regarding his first meeting with Oliver Cromwell in 1654, “but waited a pretty while my eyes being fixed on him w[ch] putt him into a maze.” After Pearson had thus transfixed Cromwell, “the Lord opened my mouth & I declared unto him yt I was moued of y[e] Lord to come to him.” Pearson was but one of a number of Friends who visited Cromwell during his term as Protector to inform him that “y[e] Lord [was] comeing to establish his own law” in England, “& to sett upp righteousnesse.” Indeed, during this meeting Pearson outlined for Cromwell “what great things y[e] Lord had done in y[e] north w[ch] was goeing ouer England & should passe ouer the whole Earth.” As this exchange would suggest, Pearson had hoped to assume a sense of both spiritual and political power over the Protector: he spoke to Cromwell not as a supplicant, but rather as God’s direct messenger to inform him of a power greater than his own effecting constitutional changes across England. What is more, having put Cromwell “into a maze,” or state of amazement, Pearson assured Fox that “[I] spoke plainly to y[1] [of God] in his conscience & was made manifest to it.” Pearson, in this way, was a very different sort of messenger: he hoped to appeal directly to Cromwell’s conscience. Though Pearson later confesses to Fox that “my words to him were other then I looked for,” and that “it was shewed to me since y[1] there is nothing left in him of God,” Pearson’s attempt was neither the Quakers’ first nor last effort to shape the nation at large through its Protector.

Scholars have long shown an interest in the early (and most radical) years of the Quaker movement, and, more recently, literary historians in particular have taken an
interest in early Quaker writings. Despite this rich body of scholarship, however, the prevalent language of conscience in early Quaker writing has not been explored at length. Often taken for granted, such language was central to the Quakers’ radical discourse of the “light within” and their revolutionary belief in that light as an alternative site of authority to both church and state. Moreover, as the vignette above would suggest, this language also became increasingly politicized during the course of the Protectorate.

Cromwell, who was a self-avowed advocate of liberty of conscience as we have seen, was also subject to political pressure from various religious sectors. George Fox’s several visits to Cromwell during the Protectorate have been well-noted; yet Cromwell’s equally important – and persistent – contact with other prominent Quaker leaders has received little attention. Additionally, discussions of Cromwell’s interactions with Quakers have been more concerned with the degree of liberty of conscience granted individuals or with the dramatic case of James Nayler than with the nature and significance of Quaker writing, argumentation, and rhetoric.

By bringing to light new letters to Cromwell from the Friends Library in London, and considering more closely those “private” letters that were printed for public viewing, this chapter will demonstrate how, through the language of conscience, Quakers made (or hoped to make) a more precise intervention in the political sphere of the 1650s than scholars have previously recognized. Indeed, though the idea that “politically the Quakers were unimportant” was debunked over half a century ago, little has been done since to flesh out the complexities of the Quakers’ relationship to Oliver Cromwell, and through him, to the nation. Yet, in fact Quakers aggressively used the language of conscience to advise, challenge, and reprimand Cromwell in person, in print, and in
private correspondence. They revolutionized the already radical language of conscience giving it new meaning and purpose. More specifically, through this language, they politicized the idea of conscience itself, transforming it into a tool through which they expected – and demanded – that Cromwell would shape England into the Kingdom of God.

Conscience and the national community in early Quaker writings

In *To all the Professors of the World* (1655), Margaret Fell proclaimed to her readers, “To the Light in all your Consciences do I speak, that to it ye may turn, to see what ye know of the living God.” “There [in your conscience] he is,” she continued, “unknown to you yet [. . . ] though he be not far from every one of you.”

During the early years of the Quaker movement, Friends’ peculiar notion of “conscience” was central both to their theology of the “light within” and, as Fell’s pamphlet suggests, to their project of national expansion. Addresses such as this one – written directly to the “light” in the reader’s conscience – were a Quaker commonplace by 1655. As James Nayler had explained several years prior, only when an individual’s conscience was called upon directly “shall we, and what we declare, be approved.”

Fell, Nayler, and others, after all, understood conscience to be the vehicle of the “light of Christ,” also referred to as the “light within” or “that of God within.” Though not itself divine, conscience was where this divine light was “loved, and the voice [of God] heard.” By speaking, or in the case of Fell, writing, directly to the consciences of their audiences, Friends sought to compel individuals to submit themselves entirely to this “light of Christ” and the form of worship to which such submission would lead.
Consequently, these unprecedented appeals transformed the language of conscience into a key component of Quaker evangelism. Friends often confirmed the importance of such language when recollecting the moment of their own convincement or spiritual conversion. Richard Hubberthorne, a former soldier in Cromwell’s army and later an active Quaker minister and polemicist, wrote to Fox in 1654, several weeks after hearing him preach for the first time:

Dear Brother:

This eye being opened, which was blind, now comes to witness thee, and reads thee within me. “I was in prison and thou hast visited me.” The conscience opened, thy words found there are my life, and I live in thee in measure.

That same year, in a published version of his convincement, Hubberthorne similarly recorded, “when his [the Son of God’s] Power was made manifest and his Word spoke within me, which Word was in my heart, and was as a fire or a hammer; and this Word being made manifest within me, and my Conscience being awakened by the Light of God, which did convince of sin.” Both of Hubberthorne’s accounts showed that Fox’s words had the effect that Fell, Nayler and other Quakers had hoped for: they awakened his conscience to the truth of the Friends’ doctrines, and especially to that of the light of God within. Moreover, Hubberthorne conflated Fox’s words with the Word of God spoken “within me,” confirming for his readers that Fox’s words were in fact the truth. In this way, Hubberthorne’s experience followed the trajectory described above by Nayler: once his conscience had been “opened,” the words that Fox declared, and Fox himself, were approved.
Despite accounts such as Hubberthorne’s, this submission to the “light of Christ” encouraged by Quakers was not meant to be a unique experience of the divine. Rather, it was universal and universalizing. Quakers held that “the end of that blood” which Christ shed at his sacrifice was “to wash and cleanse all from sin, and to purge every Conscience from dead works.” This process of atonement, however, occurred spiritually rather than historically: since Christ is “an everlasting Priest,” according to Nayler, Fox, and other prominent Quakers, he “for ever stands offered up to the Father, with his bloud in the everlasting Covenant an atonement making, and besprinkling the hearts and consciences of every one of his.”

Though relying heavily on the Letter to the Hebrews 9:13-14, Friends privileged the moment that one turned to the light in his or her conscience over the historical moment of Christ’s death as the actual instant of one’s atonement. Indeed, writing to Jeffrey Elletson in 1654, Fell guaranteed him that “[T]hou that denyes the light Shall never know what a Cleane conScience is.” It was only through “his pure light,” after all, as Nayler argued that same year, that Christ could “revea[l] the man of sin” to believers, and “by his power cas[t] [the man of sin] out.”

This process of purgation transformed the “bodies of the Saints” into “a fit Temple for the pure God to dwell in,” reconciling “God and man.” The result of this reconciliation was a more profound union not only with God, but also with each other. Edward Burrough, in A Discovery of Divine Mysteries (1661), explained the possibilities of such a union:

The only chief and perfect Rule of the right Exercise of Conscience, both to God and all men, is, The SPIRIT of CHRIST [. . .] and all, whose Consciences are guided and exercised by it, are in Unity and Peace in their Worship, Doctrine, and
Religion; for the Spirit of CHRIST is but one in itself, and guideth the Conscience into the exercise of one Truth and Faith; and in this same Spirit is the true Union and Communion of Saints in Religion and Worship.  

Since only one spirit of Christ existed, Burrough suggested, anyone whose conscience was guided by that spirit would come to espouse the same “Worship, Doctrine, and Religion” as the Quakers. This understanding of the one light of Christ inhabiting all consciences simultaneously divested the idea of conscience of any sense of privacy or individualism, characteristics that might otherwise seem inherent to any Protestant sense of conscience. In this way, the Quaker idea of conscience became an essential proponent of the Christian community. The individual conscience, when guided by this “Spirit of CHRIST,” ideally became part of a larger network of the divine, operating along a unified continuum of belief connecting it inevitably to the consciences of other individuals who had similarly submitted to this “light within.” Drawing on this sense of interconnectedness, Fell wrote in 1657 to her fellow Friends William Caton and John Stubbs as they prepared to sail for Holland on a mission, “ye are present with mee, you in mee, and I in you” (Letters, 224).

This sense of interconnectedness was used not only during worship, or to hearten fellow Friends, but also as a surveillance mechanism allowing Quakers to determine whether another individual had been faithful to the light in his conscience. Writing to Friends in 1653 who “have not been faithful” to the light, William Dewsbury warned them that “the all seeing eye, that light in your consciences” was “the eye with which I see you.” “[F]or I am with you,” he continued, “though absent in body, and see you with the invisible and eternal eye which nothing can be hid from.” Fell presumed a similarly
privileged view into Elletson’s conscience when writing to him in 1654: arguing that his worship of the gospels lacked the “Substance & the life that Spoke it,” Fell substantiated her claim by assuring Elletson that “that in thy Conscience which is of God, will answear me, that this is truth” (Letters, 58). Thus, if he wanted to test the veracity of her words, he need look no further than his own conscience.

This presumption to know already what was in the recesses of another’s conscience met with much opposition from those outside of the movement. In The Worlds Wonder, Or the Quakers Blazing Starr (1654), Edmund Skipp marveled at how Quakers:

charge and accuse me for acting against my own conscience, meaning my living, dwelling and preaching constantly unto a particular people in a publick meeting place, this they say is against my own light and convictions of heart, as though they knew my conscience better than my self.24

“[H]ereby,” he concluded, “do I see again they are acted through delusion and mistake [. . . ] Now let any sober man observe by what power these creatures are acted while they charge me with doing this against my conscience.”25 Humphrey Smith, seemingly unmoved by Skipp’s charges, responded in Something in reply to Edmund Skipps Book (1655) by emphasizing once again that Skipp was violating the dictates of his own conscience:

return, return, unto the light of Christ in thy own conscience, which will let thee see the deceit of thy own sinful heart, out of the abundant deceit thereof, thy pen hath run so largely in confusion: now I charge thee in the presence of the living
God, (in as much love to thy soul as ever) that thou return to the light of Christ in thy own conscience and mind, that which checks thee in secret.

I tell thee man in love, there is something yet in thee, which will witness me to be true.  

Several years later, Fox revisits Skipp’s argument to challenge him once again on this point of conscience: “the apostles knew the state and condition of Jews, and Gentiles, and people, better than they did themselves, and so do the Quakers that are in their spirit; and this is not delusion.”

By utilizing this language and theology of conscience, Quakers hoped to reach as many people across England – and eventually the world – as quickly as possible. In the passage that opened this section, Fell asked her readers not only to turn to the light in their consciences, but also that they “call [the living God] while he is near, and seek him while he may be found.” The urgency in her writing indicated that this “living God” would not be there forever if they failed to turn to Him. Early Quakerism was steeped in apocalyptic expectation. The political, social and religious upheavals of the 1640s and 1650s led Quakers to believe that England’s “day of visitation” had arrived. In order to raise awareness, Quakers systematically took advantage of the lack of censorship after the civil wars more than any other sect during this period. Over one hundred Quaker writers authored or co-authored about three hundred tracts between 1652 and 1656 alone, a publication frenzy that continued into the second half of the 1650s and into the Restoration. In 1660, John Gaskin, a bitter opponent of the Quakers, accused them of “writing and printing so many Books, to spread abrode their Errors”: “some of them have affirmed in my hearing, That there is a thousand of their erronious Books printed every
week, and most of them given away on purpose to delude ignorant people.” Similarly, in 1656 William Thomas noted the dangers of Quaker publications. Calling their books “Corrupt and corrupting,” he believed them specially designed to disseminate their damaging messages as quickly as possible: such books, he claimed, were “purposely made little, that they may be made nimble, and passe with more speed, and at an easy rate, to infect the Nation.” “May we not fear,” he finally asked, “a flying roule will go forth over the face of this God-neglecting Nation, because the wings of such Books are not clipt”?

Though exaggerated, Gaskin’s and Thomas’s fears were not entirely unfounded. Quakers were both aware of the power of the written word and the effect it could have upon the reader. Accounts in contemporary journals and elsewhere confirm that encounters with Quaker literature often prompted conversion. Yet writing pamphlets would not alone effect the national change that the Quakers sought. Addressing England directly in 1655, William Dewsbury called on the nation to turn to God “who waits on thee” so that He might “make thee the glory of all the Nations of the world.” Quakers believed that England occupied a preeminent position on the world stage since it was the first nation to experience God’s visitation on earth. In order that England might satisfy this God-given role, Dewsbury assigned specific responsibilities to each sector of the nation. While the job of “every particular Inhabiter of England” was to “examine your hearts, and mind the light in your Consciences” so that they might seek salvation, the “Rulers of England” were to “obey the light in your Consciences to rule in the power of the spirit.” These unnamed rulers, in other words, needed to heed conscience both for the sake of salvation and to rule the nation properly. In this way, the fate of their souls
became inextricable from the fate of the nation. Recalling the fortunes of rulers past, Dewsbury warned that God would “overturn, overturn, overturn until I have given it [the nation] unto him whose right it is, and he will give it to me,” as he had with “the Bishops, and the King, the Lords, and the late Parliament, who all professed the name of the Christ, but they would not obey his Counsel, the light in their Consciences.”

Dewsbury imagined Providence at work not only in the toppling of the monarchy, but also of the Rump Parliament, recently dissolved by Cromwell. Moreover, he held that God would continue to overturn the government until He had finally granted power to those who would rule the nation according to conscience, and thus according to the spirit of God.

While Dewsbury’s message was already radical in its presumption to advise the “Rulers of England” regarding their manner of governance, he envisioned for them just what such a rule would look like. If the light in their consciences “alone guide you in all your Counsel,” Dewsbury argued, they would remove “the Judges that judg for rewards, and the Lawyers that plead for mony, and the Priests that teach for hire.” And, in place of these corrupt judges, lawyers, and priests, they would set “men fearing God, and hating Covetousness” so that “the people may be taught freely, without mony or price, by the free Spirit of Christ.”

This simple religio-social program would create an atmosphere, Dewsbury believed, most amenable to the propagation of Quaker beliefs. What is more, if only the “Rulers of England” would listen to the light within their consciences, then all those living under their jurisdiction would be compelled to do the same. Indeed, writing to the Protector and Parliament as late as 1658, Fox supposed that if they would “stand in his [God’s] counsel,” they could “come to reach that of God in
every one, under all your Dominions.” The spiritual fate of the nation, in other words, lay in their consciences.

In this way, early Quakers like Dewsbury, Fox, and others strove to create a nationwide – and eventually, worldwide – communion of saints by first striving to reach England’s rulers. Their goals were far-reaching, but, they believed, attainable.

“[T]hou wilt come to witnesse A tender conscience”: The conscience of the Protector

The most daring political pressure levied on Cromwell during his term as Lord Protector was more direct and personal than Dewbury’s address to these unnamed “Rulers of England.” Indeed, while groups like the Fifth Monarchists felt betrayed when Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector, the Quakers regarded Cromwell’s new position as an opportunity. His overwhelming success during the civil wars and thereafter convinced Friends that Cromwell was (or had been) an instrument of God. Between his installation in December 1653 and up until days before his death in 1658, Cromwell was bombarded with letters, pamphlets, and visits from Quakers intent on reaching his conscience, and through his conscience, effecting national change. Friends saw in Cromwell the potential for nationwide politico-spiritual reform, and were assiduous in their efforts to reach him, efforts that have been little explored in scholarship.

In 1653, Margaret Fell was “moved of the Lord to write” her first of five letters to Oliver Cromwell, “A warning to thee from the Lord God of heaven & Earth that thou harken to the light of god in thy Conscience [. . . ] that by it thou may be guided[,] lead & taught.” Written very soon after Cromwell’s installation as Lord Protector, this letter was not only bold in its timing, but also in its supposedly divine message. Like the Quakers who hearkened to the light in their consciences above all else – the Bible
included—so Fell commanded Cromwell to do the same. This light, according to Fell, should guide him, lead him and teach him not only in his private affairs, but also in his public affairs. In order to substantiate her divine warning, Fell stressed that England has entered a new era in its relationship with God: “now is the might day of the Lord come & comeing” “now is the time come & comeing” “now is he fulfilling his promise” “now is the sprit of the Living god made manifest” “now is the Lord seperateing betwixt the pretious & the vile.”

Rather than view Cromwell’s installation as a usurpation of King’s Jesus’s throne as the Fifth Monarchists and others had, Fell here—from a position of authority no less—invited Cromwell to partake in this great moment of God’s imminence: “Therefore to the Light of Christ in thy conscience I Speak, which is pure and tender, which if thou harken to it & come downe and be low, it will lead thee into the obedience of the Lord” (Letters 36-7).

Yet, Fell redefined obedience to God as complete and utter subjection to the Quaker idea of “the Light of Christ in thy conscience.” If only he would listen to his conscience, after all, Cromwell would “witness a tender conscience”—a conscience more spiritually mature and closer to God—through which he would better know “what it is to offend that in the Conscience which is of god [. . . ] & is not to be offended in Jew nor in Gentile, nor to be Limitted by the will of man, nor any Carnall Law which stands in the will of man.” Though still seeming private in nature, Fell’s language of conscience now straddled Cromwell’s personal experience of the divine as well as his very public role as Lord Protector. Managing these two spaces simultaneously, Fell suggested that if Cromwell would be led by his conscience, he would ultimately become more sympathetic towards the Quakers by understanding “what it is to offend” or disobey the light within
one’s conscience. More importantly, he would also realize that men’s laws should not impinge on this divine space, competing for obedience that rightfully belonged to God. It was only through the conscience, after all, she argued, that God is “served & obeyed,” and through such obedience that he is finally “knowne” (Letters, 37-8). Transitioning further into this public realm of discourse, Fell warned Cromwell to “beware how thou gives way to the men of the world [. . .] to make Lawes over the consciences of the servants of the most high God.” If he was not wary, she threatened, he would “partake of the woe & plagues” suffered by the enemies of God (Letters 38).

Despite the overt public concerns in the latter half of this letter, Fell closed by reminding Cromwell that she had not written for herself but rather for Cromwell’s own benefit: playing on the idea of Cromwell-as-Protector, she assured him “Not for any favour or protection from thee as thou art A governour outwardly do I write this” but rather “for the good of thy soull which is dear unto mee, have I written these lines unto thee” (Letters, 38). She had written to Cromwell for his own protection. And, what is more, Fell would become his protector: the protector of his soul, “which is dear unto mee.” Optimistic regarding the persuasiveness of her message, Fell once again stated that her purpose for writing was “the directing of thy mind to the [. . .] Light” in his conscience, and ended with a prayer of sorts: “the Lord God of power enlighten thy understandings that thou may be guided by that of god in thee which cannot erre” (Letters, 38-9). As Cromwell began his new role as Lord Protector, then, Fell emphasized the importance of his submission to the light in his conscience, confident that Cromwell could become a part of the “true Union and Communion of Saints in Religion and Worship.”
“[T]hou canst not deny us”: Dueling liberties of conscience

Fell wrote Cromwell again less than a year later; yet this time her message was indignant. In her previous letter, Fell had hoped that Cromwell would use his conscience as his guide in matters of state. The events that transpired during the first year of his appointment, however, suggested to Fell that Cromwell had not heeded her warning. While the Quakers sought a swift disestablishment of the national church and the abolition of tithes, Cromwell’s church settlement of 1654 guaranteed the continuance of tithes, and established a system of “Triers” and “Ejectors” as a centralized check on insufficient national clergy. And, though this church settlement also secured liberty of conscience for Christians (excluding Catholics and radical sectarians), as Barry Reay points out, “[c]learly Oliver Cromwell’s policy of toleration was only what the local communities would make of it.” Moreover, Cromwell’s idea of “liberty of conscience” differed from the liberties that Friends demanded of the Protector, particularly the liberty to disrupt church services, to preach openly in the marketplaces, and in all public spaces.

As a result, Quakers were often persecuted under the Blasphemy Act of 1650, some by the Vagrancy Act of 1597, some by an act “against Offenders of Preachers and other Ministers in the Churche” passed during Mary I’s reign, and others by Cromwell’s own proclamation of 1654 aimed at Quakers who were considered disturbers of the peace, *A Proclamation prohibiting The Disturbing of Ministers and other Christians in their Assemblies and Meetings*. In response to these measures, many Friends were careful to record what they saw as injustices against their evangelism in manuscripts like “Great Book of Sufferings” (1650-1793), or tracts like the anonymous *The Cry of the Oppressed from under their Oppressions* (1656), a literal name-by-name catalogue of
hundreds of Quakers persecuted for refusing to pay tithes and take oaths. Yet Quakers not only wanted to present these injustices to the “Publick view,” as The Cry of the Oppressed announced on its cover page, but also they sought to confront the Protector himself. Elizabeth Hooten, presumably the first person to be convinced by Fox in 1647, wrote to Cromwell in 1653, attacking him for not fulfilling promises she believed he had made: “did you not promise this nation should bee made free from oppression, & that tythes should be taken away”? Others, like Thomas Aldam who was imprisoned in York Castle for two and a half years for his opposition to a Warmsworth priest, wrote to Cromwell from prison on multiple occasions to question the justice of their imprisonment.

Despite this mistreatment, many Friends still believed that they could awaken Cromwell to “that of God,” or the light, that they were sure dwelled within him. Indeed, while still imprisoned in 1654, Aldam wrote to Fox, “I am often in spirit waiting at London at the doors of Oliver Cromwell’s house without, as if clothed in sackcloth, standing in sackcloth in body, and weeping over a seed [of God] which is in bonds in that creature [. . .] Oliver Cromwell, with which I suffer.” Unlike Pearson who, that same year, feared that “there is nothing left in him of God,” Aldam believed that Cromwell still had this “seed” or “light” within him, however bound. Fell’s second letter, also sent in 1654, similarly revealed both her disappointment in Cromwell and her belief that he could still be reached. Fashioning his position as Lord Protector into a test of faith, Fell urged Cromwell to believe that “now hath the Lord putt an opportunity into thy hand, and he is trying of thee whether thou wilt stand for him or against him.” Having set this choice before him, Fell warned, “mind what it is thou dost protect.”
Fell pushed beyond the unsolicited counsel in her previous letter, however, not only compelling the Protector to listen to the light in his conscience but also confronting him with what it would entail:

if thou wilt harken to that, thou shalt see all the Lawes of this nation to be corrupt, And all the priests of this nation to be changeable, and leading to Teachers without, and denyes the one priest, which is unchangeable, eternall, and forever, which if thou wilt harken to that in thy Conscience[,] it will let thee see, that they are all in one Generation, without god in the world, And their foundation to be sandy, and not built upon the rokke Chr[ist] which is the light within every mans conscience (Letters, 115).

Once again warning Cromwell to “mind what thou protects,” Fell insisted that if he would protect corrupt laws and changeable priests, he protected a nation that was contrary to the dictates of his own conscience. Fell, then, ultimately required of Cromwell that he reconcile the nation to the dictates of his conscience – the dictates of his conscience, however, as she understood them. Moreover, only if he would follow this path would Cromwell come to establish true liberty of conscience throughout England. Questioning his own policy of “libertie of conscience,” she urged him to consider “what Libertie that in the conscience hath, which is limited by A Carnall Law” (Letters 116-17). Indeed, in order for people across England to surrender absolutely to the light within, their consciences must first be freed of all outward encumbrances.

Fell insisted once again that she wrote not for “protection from thee,” but rather “for the good of thy soull that thou be not overturned with them that went before thee” (Letters 117). She had written, in other words, so that he might both be saved in the
private and public realm: if he failed to rule according to his conscience, after all, he would simultaneously compromise his seat as Lord Protector and the fate of his eternal soul. Though recalling briefly the pseudo-prayer that concluded her first letter, Fell finally ended with a threat: “if thou doe Act contrary to that in thy Conscience [. . .] & soe deny Christ, the light of christ in all consciences will cry against thee for vengance from god” (Letters 118). This terrifying construction suggested that Cromwell’s obedience to his conscience was not an isolated act. His decisions were subject to the approval or disapproval of all consciences that dwelled in the light. Reaching a new pitch in her radical use of the language of conscience, she wanted Cromwell to realize that he was under spiritual surveillance.

Cromwell, however, was soon to prove a disappointment to the Quakers. Fell sent Francis Howgill and John Camm to deliver her letter personally to Cromwell in 1654. On 27 March, they wrote her an account of their meeting, lamenting that Cromwell “gathered the substance of all the words we spake unto him [. . .] and went about to question whether they were the word of the Lord or not, by his carnal reason.” As a result, they feared that Cromwell was “in great danger to be lost.” Howgill and Camm’s greatest frustration with the Protector during this meeting was his degree of toleration towards sectarians: they informed Fell that “he pleads for every man’s liberty and none to disturb another.” Worse yet, they continued, “he holds that all the worships of this nation is the worship of God.”55 Cromwell’s brand of “liberty of conscience” was too far-reaching for Camm and Howgill, and differed dramatically from what Fell had described to Cromwell: a liberty that would bring conformity to Quaker beliefs. The path towards a Christian union for the Protector, however, was more gradual and thus he
allowed for a degree of error (though not heresy\textsuperscript{56}) with the hopes of eventually reaching the truth. Yet, for Quakers like Fell, Camm, Howgill and others, “liberty of conscience” did not grant individuals an allowance for error in their search for truth, but rather it granted them the liberty to discover the truth already within them. For this reason, Cromwell’s belief that different “worships” were all the “worship of God” violated any sense of “liberty of conscience” that the Quakers had hoped for from him. And, as long as he allowed for such liberty of worship, Camm and Howgill feared, “sin must be uphelden by law.”\textsuperscript{57} Their aversion to Cromwell’s program revealed not only how different the Quakers’ understanding of conscience was from Cromwell’s own, but also how integral their understanding of conscience was to their hope for spiritual unification at a national level.

Continuing this quest to use conscience to reframe the nation in the mid-1650s, both Camm and Howgill wrote letters of their own to Cromwell. Camm, as Fell before him, insisted that he and Howgill came “in love to thy Soul” to exhort him “to minde the light in thy conscience [ . . . ] to guide thee in the great affairs of the Nations.” If only Cromwell would take heed, Camm continued, he would become “an Instrument in the Lords hand,” as he was during the wars, “to take off oppression from off the necks of the people.” Camm required that Cromwell abolish all “Law[s] upon Religion,” and boldly asserted that “as thou art guided by this pure light in thy conscience” “\textit{thou canst not deny us}.”\textsuperscript{58} Camm delivered his message as if it was undeniable, and Cromwell’s obedience irresistible. “[N]ow the power is in thy hand,” Camm claimed, at once granting Cromwell a sense of agency and responsibility.\textsuperscript{59} Similarly demanding that Cromwell take “away all those laws which are made concerning Religion,” Howgill assumed the voice of God:
“What,” he asked, “have I thrown down all the oppressors, and broken their Laws, and art thou now going to establish them again?” Perhaps what is most radical about Camm and Howgill’s letters to Cromwell is that these “private” letters were published for all to read. While Fell had threatened Cromwell with condemnation if he failed to follow his conscience, Camm and Howgill sought to make certain such condemnation. These letters, after all, presented Cromwell as either the nation’s savior or its oppressor, with the choice being his.

Other Quakers went further in their admonition of Cromwell and nationalization of conscience. Dewsbury wrote to Cromwell during his imprisonment at York in 1654 to deliver “ye word of ye Lord, wch word came to me about ye time of ye first hour in ye morning on ye twelft day of ye fourth month, saying, Arise, & write, to Oliver Cromwell, what I make knowne unto ye by my Spirit concerning him.” Dewsbury, as Howgill, boldly assumed the voice of God in this letter: “I chused ye out of ye nations of the earth,” Dewsbury recalled, “to stand against ye heathenish council of oppressing Tyrants” who “cast my law behind their backes in not regarding the light in their consciences.”

Cromwell had been God’s instrument against those “oppressing Tyrants” who made “heathenish lawes & would have bound them upon thy conscience & have caused ye bow downe to their Image contrary to the ye law ye light in thy conscience.” These tyrants, then, nearly stripped Cromwell of his liberty of conscience by neglecting to exercise their own. For this reason, Dewsbury continued in the voice of God, Cromwell “cryed to mee for deliverance from ye power of those oppressing Tyrants,” and “I heard ye & appeared thy Lord Protector who preserved ye out of their power [. . .] y’ thou mayest have fre[e] lyberty to worshipp me in spirit & in truth according to my law in thy conscience.”

In
response to Cromwell’s own cry for deliverance, then, God filled the role that Cromwell
now occupied: Lord Protector. But, before God played Cromwell’s “Lord Protector,”
Cromwell had “promised to me before my children many times, & in tenderness of heart
wth teares yf if I would hear yf & answer thy desires, in delivering these oppressing
Tyrants in thy hands [. . .] yf no outward law should command the consciences of my
people.”63 Looking back, Dewsbury insinuated that Cromwell’s sole reason for entering
the civil wars – and, consequently, the sole reason for his success in those wars – was his
fight for liberty of conscience: his own, and that of “my people,” the Quakers.
Moreover, he was not simply chosen by God “out of yf nations of the earth,” but rather
Cromwell wanted to be chosen as the liberator of conscience.

This rewriting of history created an unwitting bond between Cromwell and the
Quakers: now that his conscience was freed, he had to listen to it. Yet from the Quaker
viewpoint, despite God’s favor towards Cromwell, he had “dep[ar]ted from my counsell,
yf light in thy conscience,” and worse yet, “contrary to all thy faire words & promises”
persecuted God’s own people.64 Cromwell had now become exactly what he earlier
opposed: a tyrant over conscience. Since Cromwell failed to fulfill his role as Lord
Protector, Dewsbury threatened his destruction at the hands of God: “If thou Oliver
Cromwell will not performe thy promises to me I will arise in power like a Gyant
refreshed wth wine & manifest myselfe Lord Protector of my people.”65 If Cromwell
would not fulfill his duties as Lord Protector, then, God Himself would.

Despite the ominous quality of Dewsbury’s letter, he too still believed Cromwell
capable of shaping a nation suitable for God’s children. His voice reaching a feverish
pitch as God’s message came to a close, Dewsbury desperately asked, “Oliver Cromwell,
Dewsbury thus appealed to conscience to urge a program of social, political, and religious reform. This program, moreover, would heal the rift between Cromwell and God, and between Cromwell and the Quakers, and, as a result, between Cromwell and his own conscience.

Dewsbury, not surprisingly, considered this letter both imperative and timely. Writing to Aldam some time later, he inquired “I would have thee to let me know as way is made what is done in the delivering of the word of the Lord I sent to O. Cromwell.” “[I]t lies on me untill it be delivered to his hands,” insisted Dewsbury, “& that he it read to know the mind of God concerning him, that he may be left without excuse, if he do not return to the Lord in the day of his righteous judgments w^ch will come upon him, & all that walk contrary to the righteous law of God in the conscience.”67
“[T]he presence of the Lord is departed from thee”: Failures of state, failures of conscience

Despite these persistent messages from Friends, their nationwide persecution did not abate in 1655. They read this continued mistreatment as an outward manifestation of Cromwell’s failure to listen to his conscience: these public failures of state indicated his private failures of conscience. Writing early that year, John Stubb, a prolific Quaker minister who had been attacked at Coldbeck by enemies of the movement, implored Cromwell to “protect my harmless person from ye violence & cruelty of wicked & unreasonable men.” “[Y]e Lord,” he declared “requires it of thee.” While Camm had written to Cromwell a year earlier to remind him of his opportunity – “now the power is in thy hand” to free the oppressed – here Stubbs accused him of eschewing that opportunity: “thou hast power in thy hands to free [the innocent and oppressed] & thou sits silent.” “[I]s y£ y£ end of ^thy^ protection?,” he asked mockingly. Emphasizing viscerally the violence used against Quakers in “markets, steeplehouses, faires, courts, sessions, assizes” and wherever else they attempted to spread the word of God, Stubbes questioned the justness of such brutality, pushing Cromwell to “Let that [of God] in thy conscience” judge whether it is right that one individual “be sent to prison, because he is a Quaker, & those y^ beat him set free.” Finally citing Cromwell’s own declaration of “liberty to tender consciences,” Stubbs asked “who are Christians” worthy of such Christian liberty: “those that are like Christ [. . .] are they Christian, or Christ like magistrates, ministers, & people that persecute & imprison”? Stubbs, answering his own question, asserted that “Christ is holy, Christians are holy,” but the “magistrates, ministers, & people that persecute are not holy, therefore not Christians.” If only Cromwell would, Stubbs claimed, “let that [of God] in thy conscience speake, & be
singlehearted, & judge for the Lord righteously,” he would see that “tender consciences are embondaged, & the wicked set free.”

Pushing his interrogation of Cromwell’s policy of liberty of conscience beyond even that of Dewsbury, Stubbs suggested that “impurity abounds in this nation” because of Cromwell’s failure to implement properly his own legislation.

For Friends, Cromwell’s failure to heed the light of God in his conscience was manifested not only through such widespread impurities, but also through other failures of state. Also writing in 1655, Fell cited one of the many plots against Cromwell’s life that year (though it is not clear which she is referring to), claiming that God “did Frustrate thine enemies” so that he might have “space to repent” for neglecting his conscience. She confronted Cromwell, as Stubbs, with his own inaction: “Consider honestly with the Just in thee, what thou hast done for god, sinse hee put thee in power and Authority, what unJust Lawes hast thou changed, by which the Innocent is opressed[,] what unJust men hath thou turned out, onely for there cruelty exercisised upon the Innocent.” Honing her attack, Fell focused particularly on the continuance of tithes, “a cruell bondage to the Tender Conscience.” If there was to be true liberty in England, Fell insisted, “such lawes should bee Established, as were According to liberty of Conscience.” Yet Fell faulted Cromwell for both his inaction and his actions: he had, according to her, turned out those “who would have done Justice,” and taken into the government those “which are enemies to god and his truth,” men whom she called “Actuall enemies against the state.” Worst of all, however, Fell could not fathom how Cromwell, a man who “hath formerly ventured thy life and blood for liberty of Conscience” now allowed those enemies of the state to “bee lords over tender
Consciences and to exersise there cruelty upon them under thy name” (*Letters*, 141-43). God had spared him from this plot against his life only so that he might have a space to repent – a space, as Fell’s urgent tone suggested, that was limited.

Friends also regarded England’s failed military campaign in Hispaniola, the “Great Western Design,” in April 1655 as a sign of God’s displeasure towards Cromwell. And they were not alone in this assumption: when Cromwell received the news of this defeat in July 1655, he apparently “shut himself up in his room” for an entire day “brooding over the disaster.” To find the source of God’s anger with the nation, the government held a day of solemn fasting and humiliation in November 1655 and, fearing their prayers unanswered, again in March 1656. Writing to Cromwell a year after this blow, George Bishop asked him, “Art thou still asleep?” “Perceivest thou not,” after such a clear signal of God’s displeasure, “that the presence of the Lord is departed from thee”? Recalling Cromwell’s military success during the civil wars, Bishop asked if his “Sword (till of late) ever return[ed] empty from the blood of the slain, and the spoil of the Mighty? [. . .] Was ever any thing too hard for thee?” God had abandoned not only Cromwell because of his disobedience, but also the nation. The Englishmen abroad, once regarded as the “ mightiest Powers of the world at Sea” were now “dead at the heart, lumps of flesh, and averse to War.” Taunted by their captors in Hispaniola, these men were asked “Of what Nation are ye? Ye are not English men.”

Like Fell, Dewsbury, and Stubb before him, Bishop centered on Cromwell’s failure to establish liberty of conscience on the Quakers’ terms as the cause for God’s departure from Cromwell and from England. Looking back to the civil wars, Bishop fashioned Cromwell then as a hero, who “didst bear, as on a common shoulder, the
sufferings of the oppressed for conscience sake.” God had made Cromwell his instrument in those battles, and, to God’s children, Cromwell seemed an appropriate scourge upon the unjust:

as thou returnedst laden with Victories in England, Ireland, and Scotland, was not this the burthen of thy Letters and Declarations to the Parliament and Nation LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE? Were not thy Speeches in Parliament and Council and wherever thou camest, in the behalf of tender Consciences? Came not it from thee in thy Letters, Declarations, and Speeches, with such weight and heaviness, as manifested thee a man pained at the very heart, and in a continued travel of soul for it, and bitterness of spirit, and as one whose very life was oppresséd?

Not content to simply note Cromwell’s fight for conscience, Bishop cites directly from Cromwell’s own speech before the First Protectorate Parliament, asking “hast thou not said, That Liberty of Conscience is a natural Right? That it is one of the four Fundamentals of the Government thou hadst set up”? Bishop thus confronted Cromwell with the same line of interrogation that he had turned on Parliament several years prior in order to point out the discrepancies between the Protector’s words and his actions. Indeed, he catalogued for Cromwell the “cruel mockings and stonings, and whippings, and beatings” endured by Quakers “without regard to ages or sexes.” He catalogued, too, how God had sent his messengers to Cromwell, “some in Writing, others by Verbal Declaration” to warn him of God’s displeasure; warnings, Bishop insisted, that Cromwell had willfully ignored. Comparing the persecution of nonconformists under Charles I to their present pains under the Protector, Bishop accused Cromwell of worse atrocities. Charles I, after all, “had never opportunity to understand” nonconformity as
Cromwell had had; nor was “he ever one in principle, spirit, and action, especially in such a one, and in such action as thou and we have been” during the war, action that Bishop describes as the “greatest engagements.” He finds it unfathomable that, after such a bond, they could now suffer at “thine hands, whom we have loved above any man.”

Having thus bombarded Cromwell with rhetorical questions, citations from his past speeches, and bitter memories, Bishop finally makes his request of Cromwell:

Now to that of God in thy Conscience, the measure of him which thou hast, in his fear and dread consider, and let it search and try thee [. . .] Doth God blesse thee? Let his Witness in thee be heard to speak and answer. Art thou (whose heart all the Sufferers aforesaid do not now melt) in the same spirit as thou wast in 1645 wherein thou wast ready to have hazarded thy life and thine interests on such a case for to have remedied, such was then thy tenderness, and sense, and bowels?

Bishop thus urged Cromwell use the light in his conscience to discern how far he had fallen away from his original cause, and, consequently, how far he had fallen away from God’s blessing. At the height of the civil wars, according to Bishop, Cromwell had been the hero of liberty of conscience, and a martyr if necessary. Despite his profound sense of disappointment in the Protector, however, Bishop was still confident that Cromwell could once again be the man he had been in 1645: his letter, Bishop assured Cromwell, was a message from God meant to reveal “where thou hast been, and where thou art; and what thou hast done, and what thou art doing, and the way to return, which is yet open.” God’s arms, Bishop insisted, “are yet open to thee,” if only he would seek the guidance of his conscience.
Ironically, it was this glimmer of hope that Bishop would ultimately use against Cromwell when he published this letter four years later in *The Warnings of the Lord to the Men of this Generation* (1660). The first of a series of letters sent to Richard Cromwell, the restored Rump, the Council of State, and others, this pamphlet was meant to encourage “Them that Remain” to repent their misdeeds towards God before it was too late, and they come to share the fate of Cromwell and others who had been overturned.

"Oh! Oliver": Re-locating the “Holy Nation,” for conscience’s sake

In the last years of the Protectorate, Quakers continued to appeal to Cromwell for national change, yet there was a clear shift in their mode of discourse: appeals directly to Cromwell’s conscience ceased almost entirely. Cromwell had responded to the failure of the First Protectorate Parliament and the various uprisings of 1654-55 with the Rule of the Major Generals: a fifteen-month period of direct military rule beginning in October 1655. Under this rule, violence against Quakers in various regions of England continued, and, in some cases, worsened. Northamptonshire Quakers complained that Major-General William Boteler not only imprisoned them without trial, but also that he ordered their meetings violently broken up by the local militia. *Mercurius Politicus* corroborated such accounts, reporting that the local militia fiercely dispersed a meeting of 800 Quakers on direct orders from Boteler. In her fifth and final letter to Cromwell, Fell warned him to “consider seriously of these Things” for the “good of thy soule, & thy eternall peace.” “[God] will not bee Mocked,” she threatened, this time keeping her message curt (*Letters*, 223). Abstaining from directly addressing Cromwell’s conscience, Fell’s tone in this letter is more remote. Indeed, though she demanded the same reforms from the Protector,
perhaps she, as Pearson three years prior, feared that there was “nothing left in him of God.”

Fell was not the only Friend, however, to alter her manner of appeal to the Protector in this way. Burrough and Fox wrote a series of letters to Cromwell in 1657 and 1658, later to be published as *Counsel and Advice, Rejected By Disobedient Men* (1659) so that the people all over England (and those in charge of the tenuous political situation at that time) might know that “the downfalls of these men [Oliver and Richard] were not before sufficient warning.” As Bishop, Burrough warned Cromwell that his “day of visitation” would not last forever, and that a time would come when “God will cease to strive with thee, & will not call unto thee” in the form of such letters and appeals from His saints. “O, be awakened, be awakened” he pleaded with Cromwell so that he might once again “be an instrument to remove every burthen, and may at last fulfill the will of God.”

Also as in past letters, Burrough reminded Cromwell of his promises to God, the expectations of the children of God, the intricate tie between his own salvation and the state of England, and accused the Protector himself of being an obstruction to liberty of conscience. Fox in 1657 lamented what might have been:

*Oh*! Oliver, Hadst thou been faithful, and thundred down the deceit, the *Hollander* had been thy subject, and tributers; and *Germany* had given up to have done thy will; and the *Spaniard* had quivered like a dry leaf, wanting the vertue of God; the King of *France* should have bowed under thee his neck; the *Pope* should have withered as in winter; the *Turk* in all his fatness should have smoaked; thou should not a stood trifling about small things, but minded the work of the Lord, as he began with thee at first.
Despite these failures, Fox also insisted that Cromwell’s “day of visitation” had not passed just yet.

As with Fell’s final letter, however, neither Fox nor Burrough use the language of conscience as extensively here as they had in previous correspondences with Cromwell. Enumerating the various failures of state under the Protector, Burrough asked him to “let the light of Christ in thy own conscience answer” whether or not the sufferings of innocent Quakers was “contrary to thy own promises sometimes vowed by thee.” A key word in this passage is own: Burrough, rather than write directly to Cromwell’s conscience as if it were a space so easily breached, instead seems to put some distance between himself and Cromwell’s “own” conscience. Though Burrough still believed Cromwell’s conscience imbued with “the light,” this type of appeal was no longer predominant. Similarly in a letter written in March 1658, Burrough compelled Cromwell to put “all thy objections and doubtings” regarding the Quakers, “into plain positions [. . .] what thou doubtest of, or stumblest at, either in respect of our doctrines or practice.” “[A]nd,” he continued, “if God permit, a sufficient answer thou maist receive, to remove all conscienceous scruples.” In earlier correspondences, Friends had directed Cromwell to the light in his conscience, confident that once he did so, he would be led to a Quaker point of view. Yet, here, this process of convincement is more ambiguous: Burrough never specifies, after all, how Cromwell would receive a “sufficient answer,” if at all.

These letters, though still hopeful that Cromwell would finally heed his day of visitation, lacked the confidence of earlier correspondences in both their limited use of the language of conscience and in their more cautious tone. In this way, while Burrough, Fell, and Fox yet believed that Cromwell could be God’s tool for transforming the nation
into the Kingdom of God, they no longer believed that his conscience was necessarily the tool through which he would accomplish that end. This shift may have been aggravated by Cromwell’s failure to regard their previous warnings, or perhaps Friends felt more distant from Cromwell after he was officially offered the crown in 1657. Whatever the reason, Quakers continued to revise their understanding of the relationship between the nation and “conscience” as England entered another period of upheaval after Cromwell’s death. Writing to the “Rulers” and “such as are in Authority” in 1659, Burrough lamented that though many had called for a religious settlement over the last decade, what they really desired was “to have Parliaments to make Lawes, to establish one sect, and throw down and limit all others.” Indeed, such cries, according to Burrough, sprang from “selfe love to their own sect, and from malice and envy against others that were not of their way.” Yet, Burrough asked, “can the Laws of Kings or Parliaments settle such Religion, or make people truly religious, or establish a Nation or people, in this Religion?” “I say no,” he insisted, “nor any thing, save only the teaching and leading of the holy spirit of God.”89 Burrough strove throughout this pamphlet to convince the powers that were – whether Richard Cromwell, Parliament, or the Army is unclear – that there should be no laws set over religion. Cataloguing England’s religious unsettlement since Henry VIII’s reign, Burrough argued that the “exercise of conscience” laid outside of such rulers’ jurisdiction. Instead, he suggested, “let all sects have their course, and every religion its liberty in a nation or country (so that they doe no violence to one anothers persons and estates) and if thy do, then they fall under the Magistrates power.” The role of the “powers of the earth” while this process was transpiring would be to “be all quiet, and looke on in patience, and let their authority be herein exercised, not to limit
one, or tollerate one more then an other, onely let them keep mens persons and estates in peace."^90

Ironically, this plan resembles Cromwell’s own hoped-for policy of “liberty of conscience,” a policy that Camm and Howgill had reported to Fell with dismay in 1654. Yet, unlike Cromwell, Burrough believed that this process of sects dueling with “doctrine and forceable arguments” would ultimately lead to the establishment of Quakerism as the “true religion.”^91 And, more importantly, unlike Friends’ previous arguments to Cromwell, the magistrate played no role in this process of national conversion. This idea of a productive policy of “liberty of conscience” carried over into the Restoration. Rosemary Moore suggests that, from 1660 on, the Quaker understanding of “conscience” had changed in that they were willing to “accept the existence of a form of ‘invincible ignorance’ that must be respected,” a deduction based primarily on the many Quaker pamphlets calling for nationwide liberty of conscience in the early years of the Restoration. ^92 Yet, it seems more likely that these calls for “liberty of conscience” were, like Burrough’s, qualified by the hope that such liberty would eventually lead to Quakerism. Indeed, writing in 1660, Fox seemed hardly willing to accept the ignorance, however invincible, of non-Quakers: “True religion,” he wrote, “is y’ true rule, and right way of serving God [. . . ] Come Papists, Protestants, Presbiters, and Baptists, with all the several religions in the world stand forth, and bring your religion to this [Quakerism] & compare them see if they will hold weight and proportion herewith.”^93 Similarly, in 1661, Burrough defined “liberty of conscience” as leading not to a variety of faiths, but rather one faith: his own^94; and as late as 1666, Fell defended Friends practice of “commending our selves to every Man’s Conscience,” challenging the English ministry
to recognize that Quakers were “made manifest unto God,” and, more importantly, “I trust [that we] are also made manifest in your Consciences.”

Rather than ascribe this shift to the Quakers’ understanding of conscience, I would suggest that it was their changing of conception of the nation that effected most significantly how they used the language of conscience, particularly in their writings to state leaders. Indeed, in her nearly twenty letters to King Charles II, Fell never once spoke directly to the light in his conscience, and, in fact, only mentions the King’s conscience itself on one occasion. Rather than convince Charles II to use his conscience to shape a godly nation, Fell instead implored him to extend his promise of liberty of conscience that he made in the Declaration of Breda (1660) to Quakers. Similarly demanding liberty of conscience from the newly seated King, Burrough threatened,

if you do make and execute Laws against us, in opposition to the Law of our God, that you may take an occasion against us to destroy us because thereof, then

Innocent blood and cruel suffering will be upon you, and the weight of it will sink you into confusion, when your measure is full; and if you should destroy these vessels, yet our Principles you can never extinguish, but they will live for ever, and enter into other bodies to live, and speak, and act through other vessels, for our Principles are standing and unchangeable through Ages, and Generations, and may be clouded but can never be extinguished, for every man hath a Light in his Conscience which Christ hath inlightened them withal.

When Quakers had written (or spoken) directly to the light in Cromwell’s conscience, they implied that there was an intricate link between themselves and the Protector. Yet
here, referring to God as “our God,” Burrough sets a fundamental rift between the King and the Quakers. Moreover, he mentions the “light within conscience” as a potential form of defiance if the King would “make and execute Laws against us.”

What is most significant about this shift in Quaker addresses to heads of state is the fact that Quakers no longer looked for the Kingdom of God to be established on earth through the conscience of England’s ruler. The language of conscience, in other words, ceased to be a tool for creating out of the worldly nation the nation of God. Instead, Friends like Fell began to use the language of conscience to forge an alternative nation: “the Holy Nation” to which they would be led through the “pure Eternal Light” of God in their consciences. Indeed, Fell encouraged readers in 1668, “unto this pure Eternal leader and Guider, the Light which shines in your Consciences, all be subject” so that they might come to know “the Royal Law,” and the “Royal Priesthood” outside of Charles II’s jurisdiction. It was only through obedience to their consciences, Fell assured her readers, that they might become “a Peculiar People” unto God. Moreover, an integral part of this journey towards the “Holy Nation” was not only suffering, but also the “Fight of Faith,” and the eventual “Victory which is over the World.”

In this way, Fell no longer depended on a head of state to transform the nation of England into this “Holy Nation” through his conscience, but rather that Friends, through their own consciences, would come to the “Holy Nation” set over and against – and in opposition to – England.
NOTES

1 OED, maze, n¹, 3a.

2 Thomas Aldam, letter to Oliver Cromwell (1654), Swarthmore MSS, 3:34.


4 Prose Studies 17.3 (1994), Special Issue on The Emergence of Quaker Writing: Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-century England, ed. Thomas N. Corns and David Loewenstein, which was reissued as its own book a year later, The Emergence of Quaker Writings: Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-Century England, ed. Thomas N. Corns

5 Despite the title of Moore’s study, neither the idea nor the language of conscience as it was used by Quakers during this period is central to her analysis.

6 Two exceptions here would be Cole, “The Quakers and the English Revolution,” and Reay’s monograph with the same title. Both Reay and Cole mention other figures in addition to Fox, like Burrough and even George Bishop, in their discussions of Cromwell, yet they do not focus closely on the correspondences themselves.


10 *A Discovery of the Man of Sin* (London, 1654), A2.

11 Quakers were often at pains to make this distinction between their ideas of the “light within” and the “conscience.” See Fox, *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (London, 1659; reprinted Philadelphia: Marcus T. Gould, and New York: Isaac T. Hopper, 1831), pp. 48, 49, 52, 69, 185, 282, 305, 341, 342, 518, etc. Moore points out that “Quakers were not consistent in the ways they used the word ‘light.’ They very rarely equated ‘the light’ with the Holy Spirit, and were often unclear about its relation to Christ. Their commonest phrases were ‘the light of Christ’ or simply ‘the light,’ and they
often used the word in a way difficult to distinguish from ‘conscience.’ Opponents agreed that everybody had a conscience, but not that it was divine. Most writers who argued with Quakers, like Thomas Weld, wrote of two lights, a ‘natural’ light of conscience, which was part of the human make-up, and a ‘divine’ light that was the Holy Spirit” (102-3). Even modern day Quakers strive to make this distinction between the conscience and the Light: in *Friends for 350 Years* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2002), Howard H. Brinton points out that “The Light Within is not to be identified with conscience. Conscience is not the Light in its fullness but ‘the measure of Light given us.’ The Light illumines conscience and seeks to transform an impure conscience into its own pure likeness. Conscience is partly a product of the Light which shines into it and partly a product of social environment. Therefore conscience is fallible” (43).


13 “Convincement” referred to one who had become convinced of Quaker truth. It was generally thought to be the first step towards full conversion.

14 *Early Quaker Writings*, p. 156

15 *Early Quaker Writings*, p. 159

16 See also Richard Howgill and Isaac Penington’s convincement experiences, *Early Quaker Writings*, pp. 173; 232-33.


18 “For if the blood of bulls and of goats [. . .] sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ [. . .] purge your
conscience from dead works to serve the living God?.” *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

19 *Undaunted Zeal: The Letters of Margaret Fell*, ed. Elsa F. Glines (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003), p. 61. All subsequent letters by Margaret Fell are from this edition and will be parenthetically cited unless otherwise noted.


21 *A Discovery of Divine Mysteries; Wherein is Unfouled SECRET THINGS of the KINGDOM of GOD* (London, 1661), pp. 26, 27. The next chapter, entitled “Concerning the Diversity of Judgments in RELIGION,” similarly asserts that “The Cause of your Divisions, and of the Diversities of Judgements and Opinions that are amongst you concerning the things and matters of God’s Kingdom, is, Because you want the Spirit of God to guide you, and it is not the Rule of your Knowledge and Judgment; and you [are] wanting the Spirit of God, in which is Unity among Saints” (29).

22 John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Services, 1984), points out that “it would be a mistake to regard [the Light] as a part of human nature, a personal possession, a fragment of divinity, our bit of God. The light is in all, but it is the same light that is in all, not sparks from the eternal flame. There are not many lights, but only one [. . . ] Because it is common to all of us, the light calls us into unity with one another, into the community, into what we have seen George Fox call ‘the Church in God, the general assembly written in heaven’” (50). For more on this sense of communal identity, or “shared selfhood” as Booy terms it, see Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 150 and Booy, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 9.
This letter was printed in *Several Letters Written to the Saints of the Most High* (London, 1654).


26 *Something in reply to Edmund Skipps Book, which he calles the Worlds Wonder* (London, 1655), p. 17.


29 The “day of visitation” was a critical time during which all people across England would hear the voice of God in their consciences and were supposed to act upon it accordingly. See, for example, Edward Burrough’s *A Warning from the Lord to the Inhabitants of Underbarrow* (London, 1654) and William Dewsbury’s *A True Prophecy of the Mighty Day of the Lord* (London, 1655). See also Barry Reay, “Quakerism and Society,” in *Radical Religion*, pp. 141-164, especially pp. 146-47, and Underwood, “Early Quaker Eschatology” in Peter Toon, ed., *Puritans, the Millennium and the future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600-1660* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Company, 1970, 2003), pp. 91-103, for more on the inward experience of Christ. Moreover, Quakers did not believe this day of visitation exclusive to England: they also viewed Ireland and Scotland within this fold. See, for example, Burrough’s *The Visitation of the Rebellious Nation of Ireland* (London, 1656). Reay points out that the Quakers were “most
successful in the garrison towns of Ireland and Scotland,” and the “peak of Quaker activity in Ireland was in 1655 and 1656” (“Quakerism and Society,” 153-54).


33 Rayling Rebuged: Or, a Defence of the Ministers of this Nation (London, 1656), Epistle.

34 Davies, pp. 109-10


36 A True Prophecy, pp. 11, 3.

37 A True Prophecy, p. 3.

38 A True Prophecy, pp. 3, 5.


41 Spence MS 3/90 only indicates the year that this letter was written, “1653.” Cromwell was installed as Lord Protector on 16 December, so it is possible that she wrote this letter after he was sworn in, especially since in this letter she writes “Not for any favour or
protection from thee as thou art A governour.” In later letters she similarly plays on this idea of Cromwell as “protector,” but not her protector.

42 For more on this idea of the living God, see J.C. Davis, “Living with the living God: radical religion in the English Revolution,” in Religion in Revolutionary England, pp. 19-41.

43 Davis quotes Samuel Hartlib who believed that “‘god withdrew and hid himself, and the body of the Nation grew apostaticall’” after Cromwell “usurped the throne of King Jesus” (30). See also Hill’s God’s Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

44 Brinton points out that “Spiritual growth was often described by Friends as a process of becoming more ‘tender.’ The word ‘sensitive’ did not then bear its modern connotation. One object of the meeting for worship was to make the conscience more tender, or sensitive” (43-4).

45 The date of Fell’s second letter is also an estimate. The date in the Spence MS 3/93-4 appears as 1657; yet, as Glines points out, this date cannot be correct according to the topical events that Fell refers to in the letter which occurred on 2 February 1654.


48 Collins, p. 18.

49 “Quakerism and Society,” p. 157.

*The Cry of the Oppressed from under their Oppressions* (London, 1656); “The Great Book of Sufferings” is held in the Library of the Religious Society of Friends.

Elizabeth Hooten, letter to Oliver Cromwell, 1653, Port MS 3/3, Friends’ Library.

Aldam, letters to Cromwell, 1654, Port MS 36/117; Port MS 1/5a; Port MS 1/9.


*Early Quaker Writings*, pp. 384-5.

Worden, p. 211.

*Early Quaker Writings*, p. 384.

Camm and Howgill, *This was the Word of the Lord which John Camm and Francis Howgill Was moved to declare and write to Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1654), A2-A3, my emphasis.

*This was the Word*, A2.

*This was the Word*, Ibid, A4-A4v

Dewsbury, letter to Oliver Cromwell, Caton MS, 1:1-7, formerly the Barclay Box/3/1-3, p.1.

Dewsbury to Cromwell, pp. 4-5.

Dewsbury to Cromwell, p. 2.

Dewsbury to Cromwell, pp. 3-5

Dewsbury to Cromwell, pp. 4-5
Dewsbury to Cromwell, p. 6

Dewsbury, letter to Thomas Aldam, Port MS 15/26. This letter (a handwritten transcription of the original) is dated “The 14 day of the 2 Mo 1547,” which clearly cannot be correct.


Stubb to Oliver Cromwell, 1655, Port MS 33/142-45, p. 142.

Stubb to Cromwell, p. 143

Stubb to Cromwell, p. 144.

Stubb to Cromwell, p. 145.

Stubb to Cromwell, p. 144.


This letter was later printed in The Warnings of the Lord to the Men of this Generation (1660), pp. 1-17, 1-2.

Bishop, pp. 5-6.

Bishop, pp. 8-10.

Bishop, p. 12.

Bishop, pp. 15-17.

82 Durston, p. 139.


84 Burrough and Fox, Counsel and Advice, pp. 3, 9.

85 Burrough and Fox, Counsel and Advice, p. 15.

86 Burrough and Fox, Counsel and Advice, p. 26.

87 Burrough and Fox, Counsel and Advice, p. 7. Burrough uses similar phrasing on p. 20.

88 Burrough and Fox, Counsel and Advice, pp. 29-30.

89 To the Rulers And to such as are in Authority (London, 1659), pp. 2-3.

90 Burrough, To the Rulers, pp. 9-10.

91 Burrough, To the Rulers, p. 9.

92 Moore, pp. 219-20.


94 A Discovery of Divine Mysteries, pp. 26-7.

95 A Touch-Stone: Or, A Tryal by the Scriptures, of the Priests, Bishops, and Ministers (London, 1666), reprinted in A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages, p. 419.

96 See Letters, p. 356.

97 A Visitation and Presentation of Love unto the King (London, 1660), p. 20.

Chapter 4

Lucy Hutchinson’s revisions of conscience from the “Defense of John Hutchinson” to the Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson

Perhaps the most dramatic episode in the whole of Lucy Hutchinson’s Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson is her singular moment of wifely disobedience. In May 1660, she sensed that her husband was “ambitious of being a publick sacrifice” for the republican cause. As a result, “herein only in her whole life” Lucy Hutchinson “resolv’d to disobey him” by forging a written retraction in her husband’s name to the Speaker of the House of Commons.¹ James Sutherland argues that “Nothing else that she says or does in her long narrative is likely to please [her audience] more” than this striking moment.² Most scholars, including recent editors of the Memoirs, have accepted her account of the forged letter as truth; yet its veracity has rightly been called into question on several occasions.³ Soon after the discovery of John Hutchinson’s petition, C.H. Firth pointed out that, “Mrs. Hutchinson conceals much of the truth, and misrepresents many of the facts” in the Memoirs, especially in regard to this particular episode.⁴ Citing a second petition sent to the House of Lords six weeks after Hutchinson’s original letter, as well as the fact that John Hutchinson endorsed the first letter – “A copy of my letter to ye house of Commons” – Firth argued convincingly that “[John] Hutchinson’s share in this matter was not confined to the passive and silent acceptance of his wife’s expedient.”⁵ It seems more likely, as Firth and more recently Derek Hirst conclude, that Lucy Hutchinson may have been John Hutchinson’s amanuensis rather than the sole author of this recantation.⁶

Such speculation provokes the question, why would Lucy Hutchinson claim
authorship of the petition? Also, considering her claim, why does she fail to disclose the terms of this recantation in the *Memoirs*, a text that is otherwise meticulous in its attention to detail? This petition, it seems, is an absent presence in the text: Lucy Hutchinson, after all, calls attention to it by trying to make it disappear. And scholars who want to focus on the Hutchinsons as republican similarly make this explicit submission to monarchy disappear. Indeed, despite critics’ fascination with this alleged moment of wifely disobedience, almost no attention has been given to the petition itself. In this chapter, I would like to shed light on this little-explored document as a lens through which we should read the *Memoirs*. More specifically, I will focus on the use of the word “conscience” in the recantation and on how Lucy Hutchinson uses similar language in the *Memoirs* in an attempt to recover her husband’s reputation as a staunch republican. By focusing on the language of conscience in both texts, much is revealed regarding the legacy of John Hutchinson that his wife hoped to fashion through this revision of history.

While scholars have noted that the *Memoirs* is a redemptive text, they have failed to recognize that it is also a very anxious text. The language of conscience throughout is insistent and reiterated precisely because Lucy Hutchinson has something to hide. The *Memoirs* confronts readers with a seemingly flawless – if constructed – picture of John Hutchinson. He was at once an Englishman, a republican, and a man of conscience, with each of these attributes being inseparable from the next. “He never did anything,” she insisted, “without measuring it by the rule of conscience” (6). Yet, as N.H. Keeble points out, the “collapse of the Good Old Cause posed for [Lucy Hutchinson], as for all the defeated Puritans and their nonconformist successors, a daunting case of conscience. The
‘revolution’ of 1660 [...] tempted her, and them, to betray their Puritan allegiance, to doubt God’s providential dealings with his elect nation, and to despair.” Whether the sentiment of John Hutchinson’s petition was genuine or not, it suggests that he may have momentarily failed this test of conscience. Indeed, he twice insisted that it was for his conscience’s sake that he had returned his loyalties to Charles II, and repented his role in the regicide. This language of conscience at once made this petition more credible (he was pardoned soon after its delivery) and sullied his reputation as a republican, regicide, and advocate of the cause. Considering these two incriminating appeals to conscience, it seems no accident that the Memoirs is rife with references to John Hutchinson’s republican conscience.

Yet Lucy Hutchinson’s project in the Memoirs was not simply a recovery effort: she sought not only to restore her husband’s reputation, but also to further the republican cause through this portrait of his revised conscience. Because John Hutchinson’s character used the “rule of conscience” to determine his actions – especially his decision to sign Charles I’s death warrant – Lucy Hutchinson tried to convince readers that his (and her own) cause to establish an English republic was advocated by God Himself. Indeed, by revising her husband’s conscience, she created a martyr for the republican cause who would hearten others not to abandon hope for the future. In this way, the Memoirs is both retrospective and forward looking in its desire to inspire a new republican future for the English nation out of the a failed republican past – a failure, ironically, shared by John Hutchinson, the anxious text’s hero and unremitting “man of conscience.”
“[M]y former misled judgment and conscience”: John Hutchinson’s petition to the Commons and the politics of seduction

While it is surprising that in a narrative as attentive to detail as the Memoirs Lucy Hutchinson failed to disclose the terms of her husband’s pivotal letter to the Commons, this fact becomes much less baffling upon a single reading of the document. The petition itself was not discovered until the nineteenth-century by Mrs. M. A. Everett Green in the Public Record Office, and published in The Athenaeum, 3 March 1860. Despite its obvious importance to the narrative of the Memoirs, some editors have not even included the text of the petition in their editions; others have included it, but with little commentary. On the whole, more attention has been paid to the fact that Lucy Hutchinson claimed the letter as her own than to the actual letter itself. Ironically, it seems that her deliberate inattention has successfully prompted scholars’ own neglect of its terms. Yet, the petition and its damaging language, I would argue, had a profound effect on the way in which Lucy Hutchinson fashioned her husband’s defense in the Memoirs.

The letter begins with an expression of “that deepe and sorrowfull sence which so heavily presses my soule, for the unfortunate guilt that lies upon it.” Such profound “penitent sorrow,” as John Hutchinson terms it, transforms this letter into an act of contrition, meant not only to acquit the Colonel, but also to alleviate his guilty conscience. In his own defense, John Hutchinson assures the Commons that he leagued with Parliament during the wars not for “my owne mallice, avarice, or ambition,” but rather because “an ill-guided judgement led me.” Though the Colonel begins with a confession of wrongdoing, he also constructs his disobedience as largely passive: it was Parliament, after all, with their “seeming sanctity” and “subtile arts” who “seduc’d not
only me, but thousands more” to fight against the King. Once he realized his error, John Hutchinson insists, he immediately “stopt and left acting with them”; and, once he defected, “no person with a more perfect abhorrency detested both the heinous fact and authors of it [the execution of Charles I].” Distancing himself even further from Parliament, he claims to have abandoned the cause even before Cromwell’s dissolution of the Rump Parliament in 1653 – the point after which most republicans ceased their support of Cromwell – desiring more than anything “to returne to that loyall subjection to the right Prince, from which I had bene so horridly misled” (290). Moreover, the Colonel argues, even after Cromwell’s death in 1658, a time when many republicans hoped for the revival of the cause, “the same desires [to be loyal to the king] continued in me” (291).

Yet John Hutchinson’s seduction, this letter suggests, reached beyond his “ill-guided judgement” and into the inner sanctum of his conscience. Thus, he assures the Commons that it was “God’s greate mercy, a thorough conviction of my former misled judgment and conscience and not a regard of my particular safety that drove me to [repent].” More troubling than even a misled judgment for devout Puritans such as the Hutchinsons was a misled conscience: the faculty that was supposed to be led by God through the scriptures rather than by the “arts of those men.” Now that he realized his error, however, it was his conscience and not his instinctual drive for self-preservation that returned his allegiance to the crown. Earlier in the petition, he had similarly appealed to his conscientious obedience, asserting that he was not “driven to this [repentance] through feare, but the conviction of my conscience that I ought so to act.” “Conviction” in this sense has two meanings: first, convincement, or convincing
someone of the truth, and second, finding one guilty of a past misdeed, or finding one in error. By employing this language, then, the Colonel hopes to convince the Commons that he had already been accused in his conscience for his rebellion and that his present obedience to the King was thus sealed by his conscience – a seal that John Hutchinson’s colleagues would know he did not take lightly (290-1).

To substantiate this claim to conscience, the Colonel appeals to his past actions as evidence of his convincement. Such evidence, he was confident, would prove that his “repentance [. . . ] [had] bene long since, and not of late expresst; that it was reall, rather declard by deeds then words.” More specifically, he argues that he “hindred the oath of renuntiation,” an oath introduced on 2 January 1660 by the restored Rump meant to renounce the “title of his Majesty and the whole line of King James”11; “endeavoured the release of Sir G. Booth,” the head of a royalist uprising in 1659; and sought the “restoring of the secluded members” of Parliament, members who had been forcibly removed by the New Model Army during Pride’s Purge in December 1648 for their attempt to negotiate a settlement with Charles I (291).

Only by neglecting to disclose the details of this petition, then, could Lucy Hutchinson hope to recover fully her husband’s conscience for the republican cause. Even though she claimed authorship of the letter, she still found its terms too damaging to share with readers. Yet this was not the only episode in the Memoirs where Lucy Hutchinson omitted information with the hopes of casting her husband as a steadfast republican. On 11 May 1660, before John Hutchinson’s petition was sent to the Commons, the Commission Parliament demanded that he account for his actions during the civil wars and regicide. Lucy Hutchinson describes this speech in the Memoirs:
“[Colonel Hutchinson] told them that for his acts in those dayes, if he had err’d, it was
the inexperience of his age and the defect of his judgement, and not the mallice of his
heart, which had ever prompted him to pursue the generall advantage of his country more
than his owne.” Moreover, he claims, “the vaine expence of his age and the greate debts
his publick employments had runne him into” during the course of the wars, “yielded him
just cause to repent that ever he forsooke his owne blessed quiett to embarque in such a
troubled sea, where he had made shipwrack of all thing but a good conscience” (228).

This report of his speech renders the Colonel’s “repentance” inconclusive. He only
admits to the possibility of erring – if he had erred – and he only repents compromising
his quiet life for public engagements. More importantly, drawing on 1 Timothy 1:19,
John Hutchinson maintains that he made a shipwreck of all things except a good
conscience. In other words, all of his actions were performed in good faith, including his
signature on Charles I’s death warrant. Aware of this ambiguity, Lucy Hutchinson
reports that one gentleman in the House exclaimed, “when a man’s words might admitt of
two interpretations, it befitted gentlemen allwayes to receive that which might be most
favourable” (228).

Yet, this uncertainty, like her story about the petition, was a result of Lucy
Hutchinson’s partial omission of her husband’s confession. In William Bankes’s diary,
held at the Lancashire Record Office, there is an account of John Hutchinson’s speech
before Parliament that day. The diarist records,

John Hutchinson saith w’t was donne by him was out of noe ill intent that hee hath
seene y’e ill effects of it, & hath since endeavoured to bring y’e king back he hath
not advantaged himselfe by these turns & throwes himselfe upon ye mercy of ye Parliament.\textsuperscript{12} 

John Hutchinson’s claim that he “endeavored to bring ye king back” is telling: it not only dispels the ambiguity in Lucy Hutchinson’s representation of the speech, but also suggests that if John Hutchinson claimed to have preserved his good conscience up to the present moment, then his conscience must have approved of his endeavors to bring the king back. By eliminating this line, then, Lucy Hutchinson once again preserved her husband from this damning association with the Restoration.

The Colonel’s former republican allies, Edmund Ludlow and Algernon Sidney, corroborated these outward manifestations of John Hutchinson’s “recovered” conscience, though they doubted how conscientious his repentance truly was. In a letter dated 30 August 1660, Sidney wrote “If I could write and talk like Col. Hutchinson [. . . ] I believe I might be quiet. Contempt might procure my safety, but I had rather be a vagabond all my life than buy my being in my own country at so dear a rate.”\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, John Hutchinson’s fellow regicide, Edmund Ludlow recorded in his memoirs that “Colonell Hutchinson [. . . ] had gotten the King’s pardon before his coming over, and had joyned with Monke in his treachery, pressing the Howse to execute their sentence against the emynent patriot Sir Henry Vane, and improving all opportunityes against the honest party, of which he formerly professed to be a zealous wel-wisher.”\textsuperscript{14} Though Ludlow was incorrect in claiming that John Hutchinson had been pardoned before Charles II’s restoration, his accusation regarding the Colonel’s actions against Vane and the “honest party” as a whole have more truth to them.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, both Ludlow’s and Sidney’s comments confirm at least the appearance of a “change of conscience” in John
Hutchinson at the dawn of the Restoration, a change that the Colonel himself sought to prove.

John Hutchinson’s speech of 11 May alone was not sufficient for Parliament to grant him pardon. As a result, the Colonel’s petition was read aloud before the House of Commons on 9 June 1660, and it was recorded in the Commons Journals as the “humble Petition of John Hutchinson.” It was resolved that day that though he would lose his position as an MP and be barred from holding public office in the future, “John Hutchinson Esquire, in respect of his signal Repentance, shall not be within that Clause of Exception in the Act of general Pardon and Oblivion, as to any Fine, or Forfeiture of any Part of his Estate not purchased of, or belonging to, the Publick.”

The Colonel’s petition, or “signal Repentance,” spared him his life and property. What is more, on 23 June 1660, John Hutchinson’s name was struck from the record of those present at the King’s trial, effectively effacing the history that his wife would later seek to restore in the Memoirs.

“[T]o the satisfaction of his owne conscience”: Revising history from the “Defense of John Hutchinson” to the Memoirs

After the Colonel’s legacy had been sullied by what Firth deems an “abject and dishonoring petition,” Lucy Hutchinson wrote the Memoirs to undo the damage done, proving that her husband had remained faithful to the cause until his death, and, most importantly, for his conscience’s sake. As a result, she deliberately created an insurmountable tension between the Memoirs and the historical record where her husband’s loyalties were concerned. Yet, this was not the first defense that she had written on his behalf. Twenty years prior to writing the Memoirs, Lucy Hutchinson had
written a document in defense of her husband’s actions as Governor of Nottingham Castle during the civil wars. David Norbrook has appropriately titled this yet unpublished manuscript the “Defense of John Hutchinson” because of the text’s clear rhetorical purpose. The extensive use of the pronoun “our” in reference to the Colonel’s forces in the “Defense” as well as its meticulous detail suggest that a lot of Lucy Hutchinson’s narrative was derived from her husband’s own notes. When writing the Memoirs, she transported much of the material from the “Defense” to her new project, which takes up about one third of the Memoirs. This recycling of text, however, was not without revision, reframing, and in some cases, rewriting. For this reason, the differences between the “Defense” and the Memoirs are noteworthy, and reveal much about her shift in focus from the “Defense” to the Memoirs, and especially in terms of her husband’s conscience. Indeed, while the language of conscience is prevalent throughout the Memoirs, the word is used only a few times in the “Defense.” When revising this material for the later text, where clearly her husband’s conscience was at issue, Lucy Hutchinson often enhanced the barebones narrative approach in the “Defense” so that she might have room to comment on her husband’s conscience during various trying episodes of his time as Governor.

Lucy Hutchinson made one such revision in an incident regarding the Cannoneers, the gunners of the castle and religious separatists. According to her account in both the Memoirs and the “Defense,” pressure from military officials in Nottingham and local ministers had forced John Hutchinson, then Governor of Nottingham Castle, to imprison the Cannoneers in order to avoid a mutiny. Aside from being nonconformists, as Lucy Hutchinson writes in the Memoirs, they were “honest, obedient and peaceful.”
The Cannoneers were to be held until Huntingdon Plumtre, a member of the committee, received orders from then General Thomas Fairfax as to how to proceed. As a result, John Hutchinson wrote to the General to inform him of the situation. In the “Defense,” Lucy Hutchinson briefly relayed the result of this correspondence:

The Lieft. Coll[onel] went immediately to my Lord General who upon ye Go[vernor’s] [Hutchinson’s] letters sent Plumtre a letter to discharge him ye Garrison & likewise sent to ye Gov[ernor] to release the Canoneers. She augmented this moment in the Memoirs in order to reveal the nature of her husband’s conscience, and his regard for the consciences of others:

The Generall, upon the Governor’s letters, sent down a letter to Plumtre to discharge him the Garrison, and another to the Governor to release the Cannoneers; which he accordingly did to the satisfaction of his owne conscience, which was not satisfied in keeping men prisoners for their consciences so long as they liv’d honestly and inoffensively. (131)

What is most remarkable about this revision, however, is that it would not have been possible had Lucy Hutchinson not omitted an earlier episode from the “Defense” regarding the Cannoneers. According to this account, John Hutchinson had granted permission to a Mr. Collins and Anthony Smith to worship privately in their chambers on Sundays on the condition that “none else should be with them” save their chamber fellows. When he discovered several weeks later that there were “some more y’n he gave allowance for” worshipping in their chamber, John Hutchinson “surprised them at unawares,” and imprisoned Smith and Collins. He later released them not for any scruple of conscience, but rather because he needed their aid against the royalists. Lucy
Hutchinson left out this incident and revised the later incident cited above so that it might seem that her husband was entirely opposed to religious persecution when, in reality, he had taken action against the Cannoneers in the past.

Subsequent revisions continued to develop this portrayal of her husband’s conscience. Sir John Meldrum and the local committee appointed John Hutchinson Governor of Nottingham Castle on 29 June 1643, and soon thereafter Parliament and Lord Fairfax appointed him Governor of both the Castle and town. Since his power remained largely undefined, especially his power over the local forces, he often came into conflict with the committee, who accused him of conspiring with royalists. In the “Defense,” Lucy Hutchinson wrote about the moment her husband became Governor of the town in addition to the castle, casting the local committee in a negative light:

while it [the Garrison at Nottingham] was in soe low & dangerous a condition they all [the Committee] courted the Governor both to accept & keep it [the appointment as Governor of the town] themselues not daring to undergoe the hassard but when there was likelihood of any profitt by it they then were as ready to catch at it & envie the fruities of other mans labours as unable to deserue anithing themselues.

But in writing against this committee in the Memoirs, or as she preferred to called them in this later text, the “conspirators,” Lucy Hutchinson put the consciences of her husband’s detractors to work on his behalf:

When the Governor undertook this employment, the Parliament’s interest in those parts was so low, and the hazard so desperate, that these pittifull wretches, as well as all the other faithfull-hearted to the publique cause, courted him to accept and
keepe the place [as Governor], and though their fowle spiritts hated the day light of his more vertuous conversation, yet were they willing enough to let him beare the brunt of all the hazard and toyle of their defence, willinger to be secur’d by his indefatigable industry and courage than to render him the just acknowledgment of his good deserts; which ingratitute did not at all abate his zeale for the publick service, for as he sought not prayse, so he was well enough satisfied in doing well. Yet even through their envious eies they tooke in a generall good esteeme of him, and sin’d against their owne consciences in persecuting him, whereof he had after acknowledgments and testimonies from many of them. (136-37)

Lucy Hutchinson revised this passage not only to cast a favorable light on her husband’s role as Governor, but also to show her audience that those committee members who persecuted her husband sinned against themselves. Indeed, his enemies’ consciences functioned in a way that supported John Hutchinson in opposition to their own actions, a conclusion that she claims to have drawn from their own testimonies.

One final example of Lucy Hutchinson’s revisions to the “Defense” illustrates once again how her husband acted according to his conscience, while his enemies ignored their own in order to oppose him. This episode, regarding a seemingly unjust excise tax issued in Nottingham, appears in the “Defense” as such:

M’ Salusbury & one Siluester for their owne profitt had gotten a commission to sett on foote y^e excise in this garrison ^and countie^ & ioyned with them our Sherwin these two were such pragmaticall knaves that they grew odious to all men & y^e towne generally refused to pay & that w^ch^ made them & the thing more odious was that when y^e Yorkshire horse came into y^e country & lay upon free
quarter they made the poore country pay excise for that very meate & drinke w^{ch}
y^{e} souldiers plundred from them & they neuer tasted of w^{ch} oppression was soe
greate y^{i} when they came to desire souldiers of y^{e} Governor to helpe gather it the
soulders were rather readie to mutinie for it & when it was ordered y^{i} y^{e} mony
should be payd to y^{e} souldiers they refused to take any of it yet these men came
still urging y^{e} Governor to compell it whereupon y^{e} Governor told them he would
first call a hall & see if he could perswade them [the soldiers to collect the tax].

In the *Memoirs*, however, conscience appears twice in order to revise the purpose of this

passage:

Salsbury and one Silvester had, for their owne profitt, gotten a Commission to sett
on foote the excise in the County, and joyn’d with them one Sherwin. These two
were such pragmaticall Knaves that they justly became odious to all men, and
allthough necessity might excuse the tax in other places, yett here is was such a
burthen that no men of any honesty or conscience could have acted in it; for when
plund’ring troopes kill’d all the poore countriemen’s sheepe and swine and other
provisions, whereby many honest famelies were ruin’d and beggar’d, these
unmercifull people would force excise out of them for those very goods which the
other had rob’d them of, insomuch that the religious souldiers sayd they would
sterve before they would be employ’d in forcing it, or take any of it for their pay.
The Governor, being enclin’d in conscience to assist the poore county, was very
active in endeavours to relieve them from this oppression, which they highly
urg’d in their Articles against him, and these Excise men came very pressingly to
urge the Governor to enforce the payment of it in the Towne. The Governor told
them before he would use compulsion he would trie faire means, and call a Hall
to see whether they [the soldiers] would be perswaded [to collect the tax]; which
accordingly he did. (153)

Lucy Hutchinson revised this passage not only to make the soldiers who objected to the
tax “religious souldiers,” but also to reveal how her husband’s conscience was in
harmony with all “men of any honesty and conscience” in his unwillingness to enforce
the tax on the “poor county.”

Sydney Race argues that when revising the “Defense” for her Memoirs,
Hutchinson omitted passages that “might have been considered by the Colonel’s enemies
to reflect on his character and conduct,” citing an episode where John Hutchinson was
complicit in the torture of a boy spy and one of the soldiers of the garrison. In addition
to excising such unfavorable material, Race claims, she also “heightened by little touches
here and there” “the actual part which he plays in the history” so that “he becomes the
central figure of the story.” Norbrook similarly points out that “[t]his version [the
“Defense”] includes some vivid touches which seem to have been omitted from her later
version in the name of literary decorum.” In addition to revising the “Defense” so that
her husband’s role might be central and literary decorum established, I would argue that
Hutchinson recast the material in the “Defense” in order to shape her husband’s character
into a bona fide man of conscience.

There were traces in the “Defense” of the John Hutchinson that readers would
later meet in the Memoirs: after providing her audience with her husband’s reasons for
hesitating when offered the position of Governor of Nottingham, Lucy Hutchinson notes
“But for all this & many things elce since ye State & my Lord Fairfax had bene pleased to
conferre y' burthensome honor on him he resolved ^not^ to refuse it, but in this as in all this other actions to maintaine an upright and cleare conscience before god and to despise all y' ye malice of fortune or wicked men could endeavour against him." Yet, the scarcity of such grand declarations in the “Defense” confirms that revisions like those cited above were deliberate and are significant. Since both the “Defense” and the Memoirs justify John Hutchinson, Lucy Hutchinson clearly shifted her presentation in the twenty-year lapse between the two texts in order to accommodate an event that occurred after she had already completed the “Defense.” And, that event, I would argue, was John Hutchinson’s retraction of June 1660 – a retraction grounded upon the supposed misguidance of his own conscience.

“[M]easuring it by the rule of conscience”: John Hutchinson, man of conscience

The Memoirs is a text rife with references to John Hutchinson’s conscience, the result of his wife’s attempt not only to recover the Colonel’s conscience from the offending language in his petition, but also to forge an inextricable bond between her husband’s dedication to a “free Republick” and his sense of himself as a good Christian (214). Lucy Hutchinson opened the Memoirs with a vivid description of her husband entitled “To My Children.” Here, she deemed her work a “naked undrest narrative, speaking the simple truth of him,” though at the same time she hoped to be “pardon’d for drawing an imperfect image of him” since the extent of his glory could not possibly be captured by her words (1-2). When describing his Christian virtues, she asserted that his “life and joy was most in resignation and submission to God.” More specifically, Hutchinson continued:
He never did anithing without measuring it by the rule of conscience, and for the
gaine of the whole world would not have committed one sinne or omitted one
duty against his conscience, that being perswaded neither his estate, honor, wife,
children, nor his owne life weigh’d anithing with him in the ballance against
Christe and his interest, and having often cheerefully sett them att the hazard, he
att last joyfully parted with them all att God’s call and for God’s cause. (6)

This portrait of the Colonel differs dramatically from the man represented in the petition
of 1660. Here he was almost mathematically precise in his attention to conscience, a man
whose conscience could not be easily misled since it was linked to Christ’s own interests.
Indeed, as his wife suggested, he not only measured all of his potential actions by the
“rule of conscience,” but he was ruled by conscience, setting it before all earthly
possessions, relationships, and honors.

Ironically, the Colonel’s petition to the House of Commons had made a similar
argument for him as a “man of conscience”: there it was his misled conscience, after all,
that he had followed into sin, and his rightly led conscience that made him repent and
return his allegiance to the King. In order to offset such irony, Lucy Hutchinson was at
pains to prove the opposite: that it was the John Hutchinson’s rightly led conscience,
rather, that led him to Parliament’s cause. It was during the Irish Rebellion of 1641, she
recalls, that the Colonel first “applied himself to understand the things then in dispute”:  
[he] read all the publick papers that came forth between the King and Parliament,
besides many other private treatises, both concerning the present and foregoing
times; whereby he became abundantly inform’d in his understanding, and
convinc’d in conscience of the righteousness of Parliament’s cause. (53)
Rather than being seduced to Parliament’s side, his decision was careful and the result of much private study and devout reflection. This John Hutchinson was not a passive victim seduced by Parliament; instead, he was an active and informed advocate. And, as Nottingham became a key factor in Parliament’s war against the Royalist forces, John Hutchinson became even more “perswaded in his conscience of the cause, and of God’s calling him to undertake the defence of it,” even though “in all humane probabillity he was more like to loose than save” the town (76). Lucy Hutchinson presented her husband’s conscience, then, as a mediating agent between his understanding of God’s providence and his actions in the world. It was “Conscience to God,” after all, that “engag’d him in that party he tooke” (91).

This portrait of the Colonel as the quintessential man of conscience, careful in his decision-making and calculated in his actions, spills over into what was considered his most reprehensible crime by the King’s party: John Hutchinson’s decision to sign Charles I’s death warrant. Lucy Hutchinson’s primary concern, after all, was not merely to present her husband as a good Christian, but also as a good republican – for his conscience’s sake. Indeed, she deems the civil wars “that greate cause of God’s and England’s rights,” suggesting that “encroaching princes” violated God and Englishmen and women alike (24). On 16 March 1646, John Hutchinson became an MP for Nottingham, a position formerly held by his father. On 18 September 1648, negotiations with the King, also known as the Treaty of Newport, opened. Throughout this process of negotiation, Parliament received petitions from Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Newcastle and elsewhere demanding that the King be held to account for the loss of English lives during the civil unrest. Despite such demands and despite Charles’s unsatisfactory
answers to the terms of the Treaty, Parliament voted 129-83 to continue negotiations with
the King after sitting all night on 4-5 December 1648. As a result of this vote, the
Colonel was “convinc’d in his conscience that both the cause, and all those who had with
an upright honest heart asserted and maintain’d it, were betray’d and sold for nothing.”
The King’s power being “inconsistent with the liberty of the people,” John Hutchinson
felt that this vote was “contrary to their former engagements to God” regarding the future
of the English nation. Thus unable to be “satisfied in conscience” with Parliament’s
decision, the Colonel and several other MPs “enter’d into the House Book a protestation
against that night’s votes and proceedings” (187). 31

Despite John Hutchinson’s public protest to this vote, his wife claimed that he
also detested Colonel Thomas Pride’s decision on 6 December to purge Parliament of the
King’s supporters. He remained an MP, nevertheless, and was soon appointed by the
court to help try the King later that month. The Colonel acted as part of this commission,
according to his wife, against his own will, but held himself “oblige’d by the Covenant of
God and the publick trust of his country reposed in him” to partake in this unprecedented
trial. Speaking directly to this sense of a simultaneous obligation to the nation and to
God, she claimed that when the court saw in Charles a “disposition so bent to the ruine of
all that had oppos’d him, and of all the righteous and just things they had contended for”
the judges and “divers others” present thought it “upon the[ir] consciences [...] that if
they did not execute justice upon him, God would require at their hands all the blood and
desolation which should ensue by their suffering him to escape” (189-90). In other
words, if they did not prosecute the King for his past crimes, his future crimes would lie
on their consciences. Despite their fear of the consequences, then, they believed that they
“ought to cast themselves upon God while they acted with a good conscience for him and their country” (190).

While her husband was certainly included amongst those who felt it upon their consciences to indict Charles, Lucy Hutchinson wanted to stress, once again, that his decision was an individual and painstaking one. Indeed, objecting to the Colonel being considered part of a faction earlier in the text, she had insisted that “they very little knew him that could say he was of any faction, for he had a strength of judgement able to consider things himselfe, and propound them to this conscience, which was so upright that the veneration of no man’s person allive [...] could make him doe the least thing without a full perswasion of conscience that it was his duty so to act” (166-67). And so it was with his decision to support the regicide. He was “very much confirm’d in his judgement concerning the cause,” but since he was being called to such “an extraordinary action,” the Colonel addressed himselfe to God by prayer, desiring the Lord that, if through humane frailty he were led into any error or false opinion in these great transactions, that he would open his eyes, and not suffer him to proceed, but that he would confirm his spiritt in the truth, and lead him by a right enlight’ned conscience.

The Colonel in this way desired to be freed from exactly what he would later claim in his petition to have been subject to: seduction, or being “led” into error. In response to his prayer, however, he felt “no check, but a confirmation in his conscience that it was his duty to act as he did” in signing the King’s death warrant. Moreover, this decision, as his earlier decision to league with Parliament, only came after “serious debate, both privately in his addresses to God, and in conferences with conscientious, upright, unbiassed
persons.” Having thus distinguished his decision-making from that of the “Gentlemen that were appoynited his [Charles’s] judges, and divers others” in the court room, Lucy Hutchinson brought him back into the fold by asserting, as she had with the those trying the King, that her husband, too, “cast himselfe upon God’s protection, acting according to the dictates of a conscience which he had sought the Lord to guide” (189, 190).

What is perhaps most remarkable about this passage is Lucy Hutchinson’s direct affront to her husband’s petition: there, he grouped himself with “thousands more” who had similarly been seduced by Parliament’s seeming godliness. In the Memoirs, she sought to prove just the opposite: the Colonel’s decision to sign Charles I’s death warrant was not the result of trickery, but rather of much prayer, debate, and a rightly guided conscience. He had sought God Himself, after all, to guide his conscience before he acted. Also important here was her attempt to reveal most explicitly the nature of her husband’s conscience: not only were its dictates the result of much private study and prayer, but also these dictates were in agreement with the conscientious decisions of the larger godly community. Indeed, though Lucy Hutchinson throughout fashions her husband as exceptional in his virtue and attention to his conscience, she was hesitant to present his conscience itself as exceptional. Rather, it was more important for the larger function of this text and its connection to the future of the English nation that John Hutchinson and the dictates of his conscience were representative rather than extraordinary.
“[I]nstruct[ing] the erring children of this generation”: John Hutchinson’s republican conscience and the future of the English nation

In the Memoirs, Lucy Hutchinson seeks to recover her husband’s memory not only by omitting offending material from both his speech and petition, but also by presenting his death as the death of a republican martyr – a martyr, that is, who died as all martyrs do: with a peaceful conscience. As a result of his efforts in Parliament to seek pardon, the Colonel escaped the fate of many of his fellow regicides, execution and imprisonment. Most of the signatories of Charles I’s death warrant were either hanged, drawn and quartered or died in prison, and the bodies of Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton, and John Bradshaw (who presided over the King’s trial) were exhumed and executed posthumously in a gory display of Restoration justice. With John Hutchinson being one of two signatories pardoned (Richard Ingoldsby was the other), his wife blasts his detractors who “because he was not hang’d at first [in 1660], imagin’d and spoke among themselves all the scandalls that could be devis’d of him, as one that had deserted the cause, and lay private here in the country to trapan all the party and to gather and transmitt all intelligence to the Court” (244). The Colonel himself, as he saw his former colleagues go to the scaffold, “suffer’d with them in his mind,” and believed himself “judg’d in their judgement, and executed in their execution” (234). Thus, whatever part John Hutchinson played in attaining his pardon, it seems, he soon came to regret. There is no account recording when he had this change of heart, but perhaps it was a result of his own guilty conscience. When he was imprisoned first in the Tower and then in Sandown Castle on suspicion of involvement in a plot against the restored government in
1663, the Colonel tells his wife that “this captivity was the happiest release in the world” (255).

Yet, rather than focus on his “signal repentance,” Lucy Hutchinson as both character and narrator emphasizes that it was “God’s eminent appearance” which had “singled him out for preservation” (234). Indeed, this idea of his “eminent deliverance” was key to her representation of her husband’s post-Restoration life and of his death in Sandown Castle as a pivotal part of God’s plan for the future of the cause. Scholars have recently acknowledged that Lucy Hutchinson’s Memoirs were “confined to manuscript because she could not, rather than would not, reach a wider public.”

She opens the Memoirs, after all, by setting out the hoped-for end of her husband’s death, and, by extension, of her text: first, “to discover the deformities of this wicked age,” and second, “to instruct the erring children of this generation” (1). Thus, though the text would only circulate in manuscript during her lifetime, Lucy Hutchinson does not sell it short of these grand aspirations. She told her audience that she “celebrate[d] the glories of a saint” in writing the Memoirs, confident that her husband “and all his excellencies came from God, and flow’d back into theire owne spring.” “There [in the fountaine of God] lett us seeke them,” she encourages her readers, “thither lett us hasten after him” (2).

This call for her readers to “hasten after him,” however, was not simply metaphorical. Speaking to her husband’s “delight in the study of devinity” soon after their marriage in 1638, Lucy Hutchinson digresses to compare “how God tooke this time to instruct him” to the “preparation of Moses in the wilderness with his father in law.” Moses’s training at that time, she argued, was similar to her husband’s in that “he was thus prepar’d to be a leader of God’s people out of bondage” (35). During his own period
of contemplation, the Colonel too had “beheld the burning bush still unconsum’d” and “had the call to goe back [to public life] to deliver his country, groaning under spirituall and civill bondage.” She admits that this parallel breaks down since Moses was God’s “sole Viceroy” while her husband “was joyn’d with many partners equally sharing the worke” of deliverance during the civil wars. Yet, she continues, “whosoe considers the following history,” the following pages of the Memoirs, “shall find that Mr. Hutchinson againe might often take up the paralell of the greate Hebrew Prince” (36). Writing in the future conditional tense, Lucy Hutchison guarantees her audience that if they considered this comparison while reading, the Colonel would again and again become a Moses-like leader of the Israelites out of slavery.

Beyond the future of the text, however, she also looks to the future of the nation. Lucy Hutchinson encourages her readers to view his time of imprisonment in Sandown Castle, where the Colonel would die on 11 September 1664, as the “bleake mountaines of affliction” where “the Lord instructed him in his law, and shew’d him a patterne of his glorious tabernacle,” just as God had with Moses on Mount Sinai. Pushing this parallel to its logical end, she tells her audience that before he died, her husband saw the “promis’d land,” and “tooke possession of future glory, and resign’d himself in the assured hope of returning with the Lord and his greate Armie of Saints” (36). Like Moses, then, the Colonel was only allowed a glimpse of the promised land just before his death; but he found solace in “future glory,” the glory of her readers to establish this promised land in England with the memory of John Hutchinson, man of conscience, as their leader out of bondage.
This digression comes early in the *Memoirs*, yet Lucy Hutchinson returns to the idea of her husband as a Moses-like leader once again when recounting the Colonel’s imprisonment in Sandown Castle. While there, he diligently studies the scriptures, and experiences “dayly greater enlightenings” (234). As a result of his studies, the Colonel assures his wife’s character that the cause would be revived because “the interest of God was so much involv’d in it that he [God] was entitled to it.” And, he believed, the best thing he could do to further the cause in England was to die a martyr’s death: “my blood will be so innocent I shall advance the cause more by my death, hasting the vengeance of God upon my unjust enemies, than I could doe by all the actions of my life” (264). Lucy Hutchinson substantiates his hope for martyrdom in her description of his death. Despite the fact that his “pulse grew very low, and his head allready was earth in the upper part,” the Colonel asks the doctor “ ‘why [do] you thinke me dying; I feele nothing in my selfe; my head is well, my heart is well, and I have no payne nor sicknesse anywhere.’ ” Not only did he seem free from the agonies of his condition, but also his facial expression after death, according to his wife’s description, resembled the expression in life that he had when he was most happy. Moreover, his doctors were so moved when he passed, that they wept, and one claimed that he “never in his whole life saw any one receive death with more Christian courage, and constancy of mind, and stedfastnesse of faith, than the Collonell had exprest from the first to the last” (272). Lucy Hutchinson readily attributed his demeanor both before and after death to the “peace and joy which crownes the Lord’s constant martirs” (273). Commenting several times on the Colonel’s tranquil death, she stressed time and again that he fulfilled the martyr trope in his assurance of salvation at his death.
Yet, as she also made clear, his self-assuredness also laid in his confidence that the cause would revive. Fashioning the Colonel not only a martyr but also a prophet, Lucy Hutchinson reported how her husband “foresaw that the courses that the King and his party tooke to establish themselves would be their ruine” and “he was very confident God would bring them downe” (265, 269). Continuing in this prophetic vein, however, he also feared that the pride of his own party would lead to certain ruin once again. A subtext running throughout the *Memoirs* was one of profound human failure: responding to the fear that the Restoration might indicate God’s abandonment of his elect nation, Lucy Hutchinson repeatedly identified man’s shortcomings as the culprit for the failure of the cause. It was not God, after all, who had betrayed the “most glorious cause that was ever contended for,” but rather His people (167). Indeed, despite their failures, John Hutchinson insisted that “if God had a people in the land, as he was confident he had, it was among them [the republican party] and not among the Cavaliers,” and so he would adhere to them for “the cause they own’d” rather than their merits. Foreseeing that his party’s pride would once again bring the cause to ruin, the Colonel advised his son not to league with the “hot spirited people” who would first drag the nation into confusion after the King’s demise, but to wait for the more “sober party” that would afterward strive for settlement (265).

As this prophecy suggests, the Colonel still believed his party – or at least part of it – capable of victory. And, more than anything else, Lucy Hutchinson tried to capture in the final moments of her husband’s life and in his death just that: victory. Through this story of her husband’s life, and relaying of the dictates of his conscience, she was at pains to prove that the cause was still God’s cause. In the text, it was God who continually
convinced the Colonel’s conscience of the integrity of actions against the King. During his darkest moment of despair, he watched those who most had supported the cause defect from it, calling it “rebellion and murther” in the face of the Restoration. John Hutchinson once again sought reassurance from God for his actions, and found that the “more he examin’d the cause from the first, the more he became confirm’d in it” (234). His subsequent study of the scriptures continued to confirm the cause in his conscience, preparing him for his martyrdom.

As with his guidance during Charles I’s trial, however, these revelations through the scriptures were not for the Colonel’s conscience alone: rather than construct her husband’s conscience as extraordinary, Lucy Hutchinson presents it as a model for those reading the Memoirs. Keeble notes that the Restoration caused many republicans to despair of God’s support for the cause. Lucy Hutchinson combated such despair with the assurance of her husband’s conscience through which she hoped they would attain a similar faith in the cause. Indeed, she outlined his Bible reading rituals within in the Memoirs, noting that his most prized text was Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, a letter more rife with the language of conscience than any other gospel (270). Moreover, though never before published by one of the text’s editors, she also included an appendix to the original manuscript of the Memoirs cataloguing extensively the scriptural passages that he had marked in his Bible while imprisoned in Sandown Castle. This appendix functions as a florilegium of sorts, an anthology of the Bible’s greatest hits organized according to descriptive subtitles for ease of reading: “Concerning his enemies”; “Concerning a mighty Adversary,” which, not surprisingly, lists many snippets from scriptures written against princes; “For the 30th of January,” the anniversary of the
regicide; “Grounds of encouragement wch he had selected with some choyce promises”; “Spirituall Triumphs and exercises of faith very suitable to his professions to those that were with him to the last,” with a particular emphasis on Corinthians 15:23, “All shall be made alive in Christ,” which was underlined; “Some more threats to wicked princes and people”; “Rules Gathered for sundry things out of the scripture Concerning Magistracy and Magistrates for the choyce of them”; “Magistrates Duties”; “Concerning Subiects,” etc.

Norbrook points out that these passages “not only provide an intellectual portrait of her husband, leaving the manuscript a memorial to him in a further sense, but also bring out messages for the future: in defiantly linking her husband’s political positions with the prophets of the Old Testament, Lucy Hutchinson provides inspiration and guidelines for her children and other sympathetic readers of the manuscript.”

In addition to providing an intellectual portrait, these bits of scripture piece together the inner workings of John Hutchinson’s conscience just before he died – a conscience certain of the integrity of the cause. In this way, the “messages for the future” relayed through this portrait are meant to work upon the conscience of the reader so that he or she might also be confirmed in the cause, and find similar solace in God’s plan for his chosen nation. Since he could not claim a military victory over his opponents, after all, it was this victory – the victory of an assured conscience, confident in the future of the nation – that the Colonel wielded “in life and death,” making him finally “victorious over the Lord’s and his enemies,” the penultimate line of the Memoirs. It was also this sort of victory that she hoped to pass onto readers. Prior to his imprisonment in Sandown
Castle, John Hutchinson had a dream which, though he was not “superstitious of
dreames” “stuck a little in his mind”:

he dreamt one night that he saw certeine men in a boate upon the Thames,
labouring against the wind and tide to bring their boate, which stuck in the sands,
to shore; att which he being in the boate was angrie with them, and told them they
oyl’d in vaine and would never effect their purpose. ‘But,’ sayd he, ‘lett it alone
and lett me try.’ Whereupon he lay’d him downe in the boate, and applying his
breast to the head of it, gently shoov’d it allong till he came to land on
Southworke side, and there, going out of the boate, walk’d in the most pleasant
lovely fields, so greene and flourishing and so embellisht with the cheerefull
sunne that shone upon them as he never saw aniething so delightfull; and that
there he mett his father, who gave him certeine leaves of lawrell which had many
words written in them which he could not read.

Lucy Hutchinson offered one reading of this dream, with the boat representing the
commonwealth, “which severall unquiet people sought to enfranchise by vaine
endeavours against wind and tide,” and the Colonel’s “lying downe and shooving it with
his breast might signifie the advancement of the Cause by the patient suffering of the
Martyrs, among which his own was to be eminent.” Moreover, the laurel leaves given to
him by his father (then dead) with “unintelligible characters fortold him those triumphs
which he could not read in his mortall state” (242).

According to her interpretation of the dream, then, it was patient suffering that
would bring the fulfillment of the cause within reach. The Colonel was only able to earn
his laurel leaves – a symbol of his victory – by painfully pushing his chest against the
bow of the boat rather than laboring against the elements. *This* was the legacy that Lucy Hutchinson hoped the Colonel’s story would finally produce – the legacy that his wife fashioned in order to erase his own moments of weakness and to exorcise the conscience he appealed to in his damning petition. Through the *Memoirs*, she sought the survival of the cause in the minds, and the assurance of the cause in the consciences, of her readers.

As her legacy to her husband, however, Lucy Hutchinson crafted him into a posthumous Moses-like leader of these “patient martyrs,” whose suffering for his conscience’s sake would be most eminent and who would eventually be honored with the crown of triumph for leading the commonwealth into victory. In this way, the *Memoirs* were meant as a working text: John Hutchinson emerges as a flawless man of conscience so that the readers’ memory of him might similarly work upon their own consciences. Indeed, until England would once again find the strength to rid itself of kingship, it was in the minds, memories, hearts, and, most importantly, the consciences of believers that the cause would thrive, and the future of the nation persevere.

**Conclusion**

In the opening lines of the *Memoirs*, Lucy Hutchinson tells her readers that, according to her husband’s last wishes, she must discover some way to “moderate my woe.” And, she finds nothing more consolatory than the “preservation of his memory” that would follow in the ensuing pages (1). Preserving his memory was a way for Lucy Hutchinson to keep the Colonel alive far past his death; but preservation in this sense also meant to protect or save from an undesirable eventuality.\(^{38}\) When considering both John Hutchinson’s petition and his speech before Parliament, it seems that, at times, his wife was at pains to protect him from himself. It also seems that the conscience she fashioned for her
husband in the *Memoirs* may have been closer to her own conscience rather than his. In shaping her husband into the ultimate republican hero Lucy Hutchinson had, perhaps unknowingly, actually become that hero herself. It was *her* firm belief in the integrity of the republican cause for conscience’s sake, after all, that drove Lucy Hutchinson to excise her husband’s conscientious concessions of 1660. And, it was her certainty that the republican cause was God’s cause that gave her the confidence to rewrite her husband’s conscience in the *Memoirs*.

She exuded this same confidence regarding others’ consciences in the *Memoirs* as well. Referring to those men during Charles I’s trial who refused to partake in the proceedings, she claimed to have “certaine knowledge that many – yea, most of them – retreated not for conscience,” as they claimed, “but for feare and worldly prudence.” She also attacked those who after the Restoration sought pardon on the grounds that they were seduced by Parliament into supporting the regicide rather than convinced in their consciences, claiming once again that it is “certaine that all men herein were left to their free liberty of acting, neither perswaded nor compelled” “by Cromwell, and like” (190). Lucy Hutchinson did not confine this jarring relationship between a good conscience and monarchy, after all, to the *Memoirs*. In her biblical epic *Order and Disorder*, she commented on Isaac’s unjust exile at the hands of King Abimelech in canto 17:

> Could mortals but with true discerning eyes
> Behold the state of kings, they would despise
> What now, regarding with unsteady view,
> The general wishes of mankind pursue:
> Not seeing that all who to the high throne climb
Must wade through blood and strife, check at no crime,
Tread on contemnèd piety and faith,
Quit every virtue in that horrid path,
Encounter sorrow, danger and affright,
With a guilt-stainèd conscience hourly fight.  

If mortals could see, she argued, “the state of kings” with “true discerning eyes,” they would know for certain that monarchy was antithetical to God’s laws. Indeed, according to her formulation, not only must would-be kings forgo any sense of virtue or faith before ascending the throne, but also, once there, they “[w]ith a guilt-stainèd conscience hourly fight” in order to maintain their position of power. As in the Memoirs, at several key junctures in Order and Disorder, a poem that Norbrook classifies as “Eve’s version of Genesis,” Lucy Hutchinson continued to mine the scriptures for this jarring connection between an upright conscience and kingship.

Also in the opening pages to the Memoirs, Lucy Hutchinson, referring to herself in the third person as she did throughout the text, claimed that “If he [the Colonel] esteem’d her at a higher rate than she in her selfe could have deserv’d, he was the author of that vertue he doted on, while she only reflected his owne glories upon him” (10). Yet, when considering the man of conscience that Lucy Hutchinson fashioned for the Memoirs, it seems more likely that she was the author of her husband’s virtue – a virtue she hoped others would dote on. And, more than just authoring his virtue, she also authored that most private and sacred part of his being – his conscience. Yet, by struggling to deny, overwrite, and rewrite the Colonel’s conscience, she actually calls attention to the very text – the petition – that she is trying to occlude.
NOTES

1 Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, ed. James Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 229. All subsequent references to the Memoirs will be to this edition unless otherwise noted, and cited parenthetically by page number.

2 Sutherland, Introduction, p. xviii.


4 Memoirs, ed. Firth, p. xix. This letter was found in the Public Record Office by Mrs. M.A. Everett Green, and first printed in The Athenaeum, 3 March 1860.

5 Ibid, p. xxi.

6 Hirst, p. 265.


9 Both Firth and Sutherland have included the letter, while N.H. Keeble’s recent edition (London: J.M. Dent, 1995) does not include it.

10 “conviction,” OED, 1, 3, 6.


15 Hirst, pp. 267-68
The surviving parts of the manuscript, fragmented in the nineteenth-century, are now British Library Additional MSS 25,901, 39,779, and 46,172N. The most in-depth discussion of this manuscript to date is Sydney Race’s “The British Museum MS of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson and its Relation to the Published Memoirs,” Transactions of the Thoroton Society 18 (1914): 35-66. For a more detailed account of John Hutchinson’s role as Governor of both the castle and town, see P.R. Seddon, “Colonel Hutchinson and the disputes between Nottinghamshire parliaments, 1643-45,” Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire 98 (1994): 71-81.

““But a Copie”: Textual Authority and Gender in Editions of The Life of John Hutchinson,” in Ashgate Critical Essays, pp. 273-96, 275. Following Norbrook’s lead, as well as the forthcoming Oxford edition, I will refer to this manuscript throughout as the “Defense of John Hutchinson,” though Hutchinson herself did not assign a title to the document.

Norbrook, “‘But a Copie,’” also makes this point (275).

BL Additional MS 25901, p. 68.

Ibid, p. 60v.

Race also notes Lucy Hutchinson’s deliberate choice not to include this episode in the Memoirs (50-2).

BL Additional MS 25901, p. 73.

Ibid, p. 86.

Ibid, pp. 70-70v


Norbrook, “‘But a Copie,’” p. 276.

BL Additional MS 25901, p. 34.

Commenting on this episode, Firth quotes Ludlow who wrote that “some of us expressing our dissatisfaction, desired that our protestation might be entered’ but that being denied as against the orders of the House, I contented myself to declare publicly that being convinced that they had deserted the common cause and interest of the nation, I could no longer join with them.” He also notes that “if Colonel Hutchinson actually entered a protest, it must have been erased,” a sentiment that Lucy Hutchinson herself includes in the Memoirs (2:147n).

Keeble, p. 236. Norbrook, “‘But a Copie,’” similarly points out that “If the text remained largely within her family, it was because it would have been politically dangerous to circulate it further” (275).

See pp. 7, 13.

Memoirs pp. 36, 72, 146, 167, etc.

This MS is held in the Nottinghamshire Archives, ref. DD/HU/4, and this index can be found at the end of the MS.
36 Norbrook, “‘But a Copie,’” p. 277.

37 Unfortunately, the last line of the Memoirs has been scratched out, and is mostly illegible. We cannot know if this was Hutchinson’s editorial choice, or that of one of her descendants.

38 OED, “preserve,” 1.a.

39 The first five books of Order and Disorder were published in 1679; but since much of the text was too radical for publication, it was published for the first time in full in 2001, and edited by Norbrook.


Chapter 5

Conscience and the “Paradise Within” in Paradise Lost

On August 17, 1662, Presbyterian minister Edmund Calamy preached at St Mary Aldermanbury that the straits martyrs were driven to “for God and a good Conscience” were “so sweetned to them by the consolations and supportations of Gods spirit” that “a Prison was a Paradise to them.”¹ This farewell sermon was one of the last Calamy would preach from his London pulpit before the St Bartholomew’s Day ejections a week later. Focusing on 2 Samuel 24:14, Calamy used this opportunity to distinguish for his congregation between straits suffered for “guilt of sin,” like David’s, and those suffered for “God and a Good Conscience”: the former “awaken[ed] Conscience” and “fill[ed] it full of perplexities,” while the latter were “no troubles at all.”² Calamy’s desire to keep his audience from violating their consciences to preserve their livelihoods attests to his lifelong commitment to godly reform.³ This particular sermon was memorialized in the first best seller of the Restoration, a book aptly named Farewell Sermons (1663) and condemned by Robert L’Estrange as “one of the most Audacious, and Dangerous Libels, that hath been made publique under any Government” in “Defiance of the Law.”⁴ In this dangerous book, Calamy’s voice was added to the chorus of nine other ejected preachers, who had similarly heartened their flocks to follow their consciences despite religious persecution.

Milton’s Paradise Lost, as a literary epic, might seem far from these Restoration debates on toleration and liberty of conscience. Indeed, most of the poem’s references to conscience appear very private in nature, befitting what was once taken as Milton’s archetypal turn away from politics. Yet, it is precisely in its depiction of the private
experience of conscience – its internal horrors and peace – that *Paradise Lost* converges most dramatically with Milton’s politics. Recent scholars have argued that Milton did not in fact withdraw “from politics into faith” in his great theodicy.\(^5\) Despite this “notably polemical edge” identified in *Paradise Lost*, however, conscience remains a largely unexplored topic in the scholarship.\(^6\) And, those scholars who have examined Milton’s use of conscience in *Paradise Lost* have not linked it to Restoration politics, instead focusing primarily on conscience as a theological concept.\(^7\) Yet, as Gary De Krey recently pointed out, any attempt to link the “‘revolutionary’ ideas of the 1640s and the ‘radical’ language of the late Stuart era needs to begin with discourse about conscience” – a discourse that had a “much broader circulation and a much broader following after 1660 than any form of republicanism.”\(^8\) If we are to understand Milton’s politics and purpose in *Paradise Lost*, then, we should begin by exploring how and why he used the resonant language of conscience in his great epic.

The discourse of conscience that had proliferated in revolutionary England continued to flourish amidst urban dissenting communities of the Restoration. This language, once a point of contention between Presbyterians and other non-conformists, now acted as a glue, binding “dissenters of all persuasions” into a “community for conscience,”\(^9\) however diverse politically and theologically they may have been. In response to the rigidly conformist policies of the 1660s, members of the dissenting community flooded the presses with defenses of the liberty of conscience, arguing for the toleration of tender consciences, and refuting the arguments of their equally prolific opponents. As a result, the language of conscience became closely associated with dissent and nonconformist efforts to achieve toleration. Though she confirms that
Milton’s “preoccupations were absolutely in tune with his contemporary Dissenting writers,” Sharon Achinstein argues that in *Paradise Lost*, and particularly during the Abdiel episode in book 6, Milton “seems to have avoided” the language of conscience, “as if staying far clear of contemporary debates over toleration in which the term conscience was the sounding call.”\textsuperscript{10} Though I agree with Achinstein that “*Paradise Lost* is not an argument for toleration,”\textsuperscript{11} Milton does use the word conscience at key junctures in the text; and in those moments, I will argue, *Paradise Lost* directly engages with the religious politics of the early Restoration.

*Paradise Lost* appropriates the arguments of tolerationists and dissenting preacher-polemics alike – some of Milton’s own arguments from the civil wars and republic – to shape a dissenting identity based on unconditional obedience to God-given conscience. To convince his fit audience to follow their consciences even in the face of persecution, Milton dramatizes both the horrors of a guilty conscience – horrors worse than persecution and worse than the physical torments of hell itself – and the “paradise within” of a free conscience. And, as Milton demonstrates, it is only by protecting this liberty of conscience that one can remain God’s obedient subject. In this way, *Paradise Lost*, like *Farewel Sermons* and other “dangerous” books published in defense of conscience and nonconformity, thrusts the private experience of conscience into the political sphere. This subtext of political dissent and religious obedience reveals not only that Milton’s preoccupations were in tune with other dissenters, but also that he dedicated his great epic to his and their cause.
“[O]nly in the conscience of every Christian to himself”: Liberty of conscience in Milton’s late prose

Liberty of conscience was central to Milton’s prose and poetry of the civil wars and commonwealth; yet his appeal for conscience became most urgent with the threat of Charles II’s return in 1659. In *A Treatise of Civil Power* (1659), Milton advocated a policy of separation between the civil and ecclesiastical spheres more emphatically than in his earlier prose works, as well as a policy of “complete religious liberty.” Indeed, in this tract, Milton argues that “no man or body of men in these times can be infallible judges” in “matters of religion to any other mens consciences but thir own.” Instead, God has commanded each individual “to search, to try, to judge of these things our selves,” with the scriptures being “the final judge or rule in matters of religion, and that only in the conscience of every Christian to himself.” The free conscience of each individual in conjunction with the scriptures here emerges as second only to God where any and all matters of religion are concerned. And, for Milton, that liberty was the essence of conscience itself: a conscience “enthrald to man instead of God,” he argues, “almost becoms no conscience” (*CPW* 7:254). His argument, moreover, was “to all knowing Christians undeniable” since it was “drawn from the scripture only” (*CPW* 7:241).

Milton’s unremitting defense of liberty of conscience is also central to two other late prose tracts, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* (1659) and *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660). Though not as explicit a concern as it is in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, liberty of conscience in these tracts functions as the foundation upon which Milton’s argument rests: in *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means*, Milton fears that corrupt teachers,
“the very bane of truth,” force men to “maintaine a disapprov’d ministerie against thir conscience” through “violence and extortion” (CPW 7:277, 309). And, in The Readie & Easie Way, written on the eve of the King’s return, Milton argues that a “free Commonwealth” is the form of government most “inclinable not to favor only but to protect” “liberty of conscience,” a liberty which “above all other things ought to be to all men dearest and most precious” (CPW 7:456).

In these late prose works, Milton takes on the voice of the beleaguered national prophet, willing to speak the truth even if he is not heard. He admonishes his nation for its failures, and threatens his readers that the return of monarchy will inevitably bring with it those “old encroachments” “upon our consciences, which must necessarily proceed from king and bishop united inseparably in one interest” (CPW 7:423). Whatever the outcome of the turbulent years of the 1659-60, Milton confirms, “I in the mean while have borne my witness not out of season to the church and my countrey,” with these publications memorializing what he knew to be the truth and the only way to guarantee liberty of conscience (CPW 7:321).

**Persecution and peace in the 1660s**

Ironically, the Restoration was ushered in with a promise of liberty of conscience. The Declaration of Breda (1660), a conciliatory document for the English Parliament that grew out of the King’s negotiations with General George Monck, promised “a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matter of religion, which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom.” Many religious radicals initially embraced this promise of liberty to “tender consciences.” Margaret Fell, in A Declaration and an Information from us the People of
God Called Quakers (1660), directly addressed the King and Parliament to claim such “liberty of conscience” for the much-feared Quakers: “we desire and also expect to have the liberty of our Consciences and just Rights, and outward Liberties as other people of the Nation, which we have promise of from the word of a King.”  Theophilus Brabourne, a religious controversialist and dedicated sabbatarian, went so far as to write a defense of the King’s promise entitled God save the King, And Prosper Him and His Parliament: Or, A justification by the Word of God, of the Kings gracious proffer for Liberty of Conscience, Made to His Parliament and Subjects, before he came into England (1660), proving the unjustness of the civil magistrate’s interference in matters of religion.

Such a promise, however, remained unfulfilled. During the first year of the Restoration, the King attempted to compromise with Presbyterians on church affairs as promised; yet his efforts were persistently thwarted by Anglican royalists who gained power in both church and parliament. Parliament supported this renewal of intolerance, passing the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which ensured that Presbyterians would be expelled from the national church, resulting in the removal of nearly one thousand parish ministers in England. Samuel Pepys wrote of the popular attendance at the final sermons before these St Bartholomew’s Day ejections (of which Calamy was a part): “This being the last Sunday that the Presbyterians are to preach [. . .] I had a mind to hear Dr. Bates’s farewell sermon; and walked to St. Dunstan’s, where, it not being seven o’clock yet, the doors were not open [. . .] At eight o’clock I went, and crowded in at a back door among others, the church being half full almost before any doors were open publicly, which is the first time that I have done so these many years.” Pepys goes on to
note that “I hear most of the Presbyterians took their leaves to-day, and that the City is much dissatisfied with it.”

A year after Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity, Pepys recounts a conversation he had with Mr. Blackburn, who thought it a “great matter of prudence for the King and Council to suffer liberty of conscience,” and told Pepys that “many pious ministers of the word of God, some thousands of them, do now beg their bread” as opposed to the “present clergy” who “highly . . . carry themselves everywhere, so as that they are hated and laughed at by everybody; among other things, for their excommunications, which they send upon the least occasions almost that can be.”

Blackburn, as Pepys relates, “did give me many stories of the affronts which the clergy receive in all places of England from the gentry and ordinary persons of the parish.”

After the expulsion of these “many pious ministers of the word of God,” the Restoration Church, and its clergy in particular, sought active persecution of dissent in order to force dissenters back into the church. Clerics such as Reverend Nathaniel Aske, after all, believed that if dissenters were required to attend church and hear its sermons, “‘constant hearers doe many tymes become conscientious hearers.’” Such abuses drew protests. In his Some Queries proposed to the Bishops and Ministers of England ... that there may be an understanding why Persecution is so violently prosecuted (1663), William Smith asked reproachfully “is it a light thing to drive Innocent People from their Peaceable Meetings with Armed men, and to thrust them into Holes and Prisons, for not other cause but the exercise of their Consciences towards God”?

Threats of excommunication and persecution and even the Act of Uniformity itself, however, could not quell nonconformity or the popularity of many of the ejected
preachers. Instead, conscience became a rallying cry against persecution. Edward Billing, for example, called the Act of Uniformity "your Act against Conscience" and railed against "Persecuting Episcopalians," claiming that "I am ready to seal with my Blood, though my Sepulcher, for declaring this Truth, should be on the Bridge and four Gates of your City." In 1663, Pepys recounts a similarly violent reaction against such measures in the name of conscience: "Coming home to-night, I met with Will. Swan, who do talk as high for the Fanatics as ever he did in his life; and do pity my Lord Sandwich and me, that we should be given up to that wickedness of the world, and that a fall is coming upon us all; for he finds that he and his company are the true spirit of the nation, and the greater part of the nation too, who will have liberty of conscience in spite of this 'Act of Uniformity,' or they will die; and if they may not preach abroad, they will preach in their own houses." Like Billing, Swan and "his company" are also willing to die for the cause of conscience rather than conform to the Church of England.

While all dissenters knew that their reward for this suffering awaited them after death, many also believed that the consolation of a good conscience rewarded them even in this world. And, it is this consolation that numerous nonconformist pamphlets offered to the persecuted (or those afraid of persecution) in order to give them courage in their dissent. In Unto all that wait in Sion, for the Consolation of Christ Jesus, is the Word of Peace and Comfort declared (1665), William Green told his audience to "look up unto the Lord . . . and the Lord will dayly appear amongst you in his life and heavenly power, to the comforting your Souls, and astonishment of the Heathen that neither know you nor the Lord, nor what is your life, nor by what you are supported." "Therefore," he continues, "be of good courage." George Whitehead, a Quaker leader, similarly told his
readers in *An Epistle of Consolation* (1664) that those persecuted for conscience’s sake “do know a sweet repose in their deepest sufferings and tryals...and herein joy, and peace, and everlasting glory and triumph is seen and felt by all the faithful and sincere in heart over all their oppressors.” Even Zachary Cawdrey, a conformist clergyman who late in his career was “much maligned and reproached by some people for his moderation toward dissenters,” advised his readers that “peace of Conscience is certainly the best feast that any can invite himself to next to the supper of the Lamb the glory of Heaven.”

For many, as for Calamy, and, I would argue, for Milton in *Paradise Lost*, this “sweet repose” was the peace – or paradise within – of a good conscience.

“[I]f they will hear”: The horrors and peace of conscience in *Paradise Lost*

In helpful and groundbreaking studies, Neil Keeble and Sharon Achinstein have pointed out the centrality of “literary creativity, composition, and reading” to the survival and cultivation of nonconformity, since “public, communicative roles – speaking, assembling, officiating, ministering, teaching – had been denied [dissenters].” Building upon their work, I will argue that it was Milton’s use of conscience in *Paradise Lost* more than anything else that demonstrated his active participation through writing in this vibrant and prolific culture of nonconformity. In his late prose, Milton had written to the administration regarding the injustice of denying freedom of conscience – the fundamental Christian liberty achieved by Christ – to any individual who adhered to the scriptures; but in *Paradise Lost*, Milton turns to his fellow Christians to stress the agency that they possess in maintaining the liberty of their consciences even in the face of persecution. Moreover, his great epic goes beyond choice to reveal the consequences of those choices. In *Paradise Lost*, then, Milton shapes a dissenting identity based on the
experience of conscience within, and the political and spiritual consequences of that experience.

To do this, Milton boldly dramatizes the interior states of the horrors and peace of conscience that he had addressed prescriptively in his prose works. Significantly, Milton’s first two drafts for a biblical tragedy on the fall had listed the character of Conscience among the speaking parts rather than among the “mutes” like “Labour” and “Sicknesse.” His third draft envisioned Conscience “cit[ing]” the newly fallen Adam and Eve “to Gods Examination” (CPW 8:554-55). Though not a drama in the sense that Milton had earlier imagined, Paradise Lost is in many ways very dramatic, especially when considering the experiential role that conscience plays throughout the poem and the similar role Milton expected conscience to play in his contemporary readers’ lives.

It is God the Father who first sets in motion this role of conscience in Paradise Lost when he speaks of implanting His “umpire conscience” in fallen man. Leading up to this moment, God had stressed the importance of free will in his creation: mankind not only “ordained thir [o]wn fall” but also after their restoration via divine grace, they must once again stand of their own accord.26 To help mankind freely choose the right path, God promises to place within them as a guide

My Umpire Conscience, whom if they will hear,

Light after light well us’d they shall attain,

And to the end persisting, safe arrive. (3.194-97)

After man’s free will has been restored by God’s grace conscience will guide his free choices towards the good.27 What is more, God calls conscience “My umpire,” asserting


not only his ownership over conscience, but also the degree to which conscience should be obeyed. Derived from the Middle French noun *nonper*, an “umpire conscience” would be “one who surpasses all others.” Milton’s God here asserts conscience as the supreme voice guiding mankind, implicitly dismantling the arguments of those conformist Restoration divines who dismiss conscience as “every private man’s persuasian,” or “weak, silly, and ignorant things.”

The operative word in this passage, however, is not “umpire” or even “conscience” but rather “if”. If he will hear conscience, he will “safe arrive,” but if he will not, he “shall never taste” God’s “day of grace,” and he will “stumble on, and deeper fall” (3.198-201). According to this construction, it is not the pre-determined reprobate who shall suffer damnation, but rather the willful neglectors of conscience. And, “none but such,” God confirms, “from mercy I exclude” (3.202). Interestingly, it is here with his discussion of conscience that God stops in his prophetic telling of the future to ask for the “charity so dear” that the Son will offer (3.216). It is also here that the world of the text comes into contact with the world of the reader: indeed, by speaking directly to the importance of fealty to conscience, Milton’s God was also speaking to the reader’s present struggle between competing loyalties to his conscience and the restored nation and church. Stressing that hearing conscience is a free choice, Milton’s God puts the responsibility of obedience upon each individual regardless of state compulsion or persecution: just as Adam and Eve, those who “deeper fall” “enthrall themselves” (3.125). Though the power to save remains God’s alone, then, the power to choose the good is man’s – a power exercised exclusively through conscience. Conscience in this
way becomes the sole means through which man may express his “true allegiance”
towards God after the fall and “safe arrive” (3.104).

Significantly, most of *Paradise Lost* focuses not on this “true allegiance” to
conscience, but rather on willful disobedience – namely Satan as the archetypal disobeyer
and Adam as following his example. And the price of this disobedience proves
agonizing: recalling Calamy’s idea of a good conscience creating the internalized space
of paradise even within a physical prison, here the horrors of a guilty conscience create
within the culprit nothing short of hell. Beyond Calamy, however, Milton, having
implicated the reader in book 3, now exposes the reader to a visceral experience of this
hell through his poetry. The poem opens with Satan’s inner horror at the thought of “lost
happiness and lasting pain” (1.55). He hides his mental anguish from his fallen crew
through his heroic rhetoric and seemingly “unconquerable Will,” yet the narrator assures
the reader that though “vaunting aloud” Satan is “rackt with deep despair” (1.106, 126).
Satan’s mental torment, however, comes to the fore only once he has left the physical
place of hell behind and is in sight of Paradise. Here, Satan finally understands the
profundity of his punishment when, having escaped the Stygian pool, he realizes that he
nevertheless carried hell with him – the hell of a guilty conscience.

Satan’s daughter-lover, Sin, earlier emblematizes this mental anguish when she
describes her hellish offspring as:

> yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry

> Surround me, as thou saw’st, hourly conceiv’d

> And hourly born, with sorrow infinite

> To me, for when they list, into the womb
That bred them they return, and howl and gnaw
My Bowels, thir repast; then bursting forth
Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,
That rest or intermission none I find. (2.795-802)

In one 1667 copy of Paradise Lost, a contemporary hand has aptly written beside this grotesque description, “Horrors of Conscience.” These “horrors,” or as Sin calls them “conscious terrors,” “vex” her “round” in the form of her cannibalistic progeny. Encircling her with their “ceaseless cry,” they continuously gnaw at her bowls, causing her “sorrow infinite.” In Satan, this visceral process of infinite torment is internalized to become the horrors of conscience identified above by an early reader. Accordingly, the narrator’s description of Satan in book 4 performs the same function as Sin’s monstrous offspring: Satan’s “dire attempt”

Now rolling, boils in his tumultuous breast,
And like a devilish Engine back recoils
Upon himself. (4.15-18)

When read aloud, the words themselves surround the reader, mimicking the cyclical and self-damaging movement of both Satan’s “horror and doubt” and Sin’s litter (4.18). Milton creates this effect again when this same horror and doubt from the bottom stir

The Hell within him, for within him Hell
He brings, and round about him. (4.18-21)

Folding back on itself, this language paves the way for the catalyst of Satan’s horror:

now conscience wakes despair
That slumber’d, wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse. (4.23-26)

Satan’s conscience thus recreates the space of hell within him by confronting him
with a stunning sense of self-awareness. His first line in the poem expressed his horror at
Beelzebub’s change from “what he was”: Satan asked “If thou beest hee” in disbelief,
“But O how fall’n! how chang’d” (1.84). Now, his conscience forces him to look to
himself, and vexes him with the conscious terrors of his own change, his culpability, and
self-inflicted fall from grace. Just as Sin’s progeny go forth from her womb only to
return to their maker to fill her with terror and agony, Satan’s attempts to curse God’s
love “dealt equally to all” only redound back upon his own head: after he curses God
accordingly, his conscience interjects, literally turning his words back upon himself,
cursing Satan “since against his thy will / Chose freely what it now so justly rues,” to
which Satan replies, “Me miserable!” (4.68-73). 31 This knowledge of his own evil is
Satan’s hell, the “hot Hell” of a guilty conscience “that always in him burns,” making
paradise itself his prison (9.467).

Adam is similarly tormented by the horrors of a guilty conscience for his willful
disobedience. The Serpent’s words seem to Eve to be “impregn’d / With Reason” and
“Truth,” yet, when Adam is tempted by Eve, he

scrupl’d not to eat
Against his better knowledge not deceiv’d,
But fondly overcome with Female charm. (9.737-38, 997-99)
Unlike Eve, Adam scruples or hesitates before he eats, weighing his decision against his “better knowledge” of God’s law. Just as the rebel angels who refuse “Right reason” or conscience “for thir Law,” so Adam consciously transgresses against what he knows to be right and good (6.42). And, like Satan, Adam suffers the price of disobedience.

After the Son’s mild judgment of Adam and Eve, Adam witnesses around him the “growing miseries” of his fallen Paradise:

Beast now with Beast gan war, and Fowl with Fowl,
And Fish with Fish; to graze the Herb all leaving,
Devour’d each other. (10.710-15)

These miseries “were from without,” but Adam “worse felt within” (10.714-17). Once again recalling Sin’s progeny, Adam calls his horrors of conscience a “deathless pain,” “deathless Death” and an “endless misery” worse than the quick death he had imagined (10.775, 798, 810). Moreover, his fear of this pain’s perpetuity “Both in me, and without me” “Comes thund’ring back with dreadful revolution / On my defenseless head” like Sin’s tormenters who are “hourly born” (10.812-14). He longs to become “earth /
Insensible” only so that God’s “voice no more / Would thunder in my ears” and
no fear of worse
To me and to my offspring would torment me
With cruel expectation. (10.776, 778-82)

Adam’s incessant questions throughout this soliloquy, like the narrator’s description of Satan’s psychological state, create for the reader the experience of a conscience heavy with sin: his reason now fallen, Adam’s plagued conscience forces him to question
God’s sense of justice, mercy, and his own just punishment. Unrepentant and consumed with despair, Adam finally identifies the culprit, crying out

O conscience, into what Abyss of fears

And horrors hast thou driv’n me; out of which

I find no way, from deep to deeper plung’d! (10.842-44)

Just as with Satan, then, Adam’s guilty conscience creates within him the unbearable experience of hell – the ultimate punishment of disobedience. His “evil conscience,” or consciousness of his own evil as Milton defines it in *De Doctrina Christiana*, torments him further, “represent[ing] / All things with double terror” like the “conscious terrors” produced by Sin’s hellish offspring (10.849-50).33

As suggested by Adam’s psychological anguish, after transgressing God’s sole command, Adam experiences the fall – or his paradise lost – most dramatically in his conscience. Having abandoned his consciousness of good and right reason when he “Against his better knowledge” ate the forbidden fruit, Adam now suffers the “degradation of the mind” attendant on the fall, including “mind and conscience.” Indeed, as Milton also points out in *De Doctrina*, the spiritual death following the fall consisted first in the “loss or at least the extensive darkening of that right reason, whose function it was to discern the chief good, and which was, as it were, the life of the understanding.” Man thus loses his righteousness and “liberty to do good,” which is replaced by his “slavish subjection to sin and the devil,” a conscience weighted down with the guilt of sin, and the necessity for the law of the Old Testament (CPW 6:394-95).

Up to this point, *Paradise Lost* has focused only on the horrors of a guilty, fallen conscience through both Satan and Adam: having established the importance of
obedience to conscience in book 3, Milton follows up with the dire consequences of disobedience, consequences that include the creation of a physical hell, and the birth of the more agonizing hell within of a guilty conscience. While both of these characters are consumed by despair, Adam, unlike Satan, “shall find grace” – a grace that Milton identifies as the freedom from the horrors of sin, or, the freedom of conscience (3.131). In this way, Adam functions as a model of primal disobedience and as the subject of redemption, both experienced through the veil of conscience. Indeed, the horrors of Adam’s evil conscience are finally overcome by Christ’s proleptic sacrifice set out in book 3, a prefiguration of the psychological effects of Christ’s sacrifice for mankind. Like the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, Milton saw Christ’s expiation as having the effect of “sprinkl[ing]” the heart “from an evil conscience.” Here, as for Milton, an “evil conscience” is a conscience aware of and tortured by sin – a consciousness alleviated only through Christ’s sacrifice. “How much more,” the Hebrews writer asks, “shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” It is “for this cause” – the purging of conscience – Hebrews continues, that Christ “is the mediator of the new testament.” Drawing directly from Hebrews, Milton in book 12 claims that mankind will realize that in order to find “peace / Of Conscience” “Some blood more precious” than that of “bulls and goats” “must be paid for Man” (296-7, 292-93). Christ’s sacrifice itself, then, was made in order to inaugurate a new relationship between God and man – a relationship experienced through the regenerated conscience rather than the law.
Prefiguring this ultimate sacrifice, the Son intercedes on Adam and Eve’s behalf by presenting their penitent prayers before God. In his speech, similar in its repetition of the pronoun “me” to his monologue in book 3, the Son implores the Father to bend thine ear

To supplication, hear his sighs though mute;

Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
Interpret for him, mee his Advocate
And propitiation, all his works on mee
Good or not good ingraft, my Merit those
Shall perfet, and for these my Death shall pay.
Accept me, and in mee from these receive
The smell of peace toward Mankind, let him live
Before thee reconcil’d. (11.30-9)

Though this intercession looks forward to the time when the Son, as Christ, shall expiate Adam and Eve’s sin, his plea to God has immediate effects for the ill-fated pair. God, at the Son’s request, accepts their prayers, and grants them “Strength added from above” and “new hope” “Out of despair” (11.138-39). More than that, Adam, believing he was “heard with favor” tells Eve that “peace return’d / Home to my Breast” – a reference back not only to the Son’s request for peace from the Father, but also to the “abyss of fears / And horrors” produced earlier by his evil conscience, and forward to the “paradise within” that Michael will promise. Adam twice more refers to this change within him as Michael tells him the future in book 12: Adam claims that this “heart” is “much eas’d, / Erewhile perplext with thoughts,” and tells Michael that he leaves paradise in “peace of
thought” (274-75, 558). Only a shadow of the sacrifice the Son will ultimately make for mankind, their restored joy is linked yet with fear, and Adam’s peace rests not on the fulfillment of the promise of redemption, but rather in anticipation of that restoration. Nevertheless, Adam’s transition from the horrors produced by his evil conscience to this state of inner tranquility dramatizes for the reader the “peace of conscience” made available to him through Christ’s sacrifice – available, that is, if the reader chooses to hear his conscience.

While these experiences both with the horrors of a guilty conscience and the peace of a restored conscience seem private in nature, it is their very intimacy that thrusts *Paradise Lost* into the political mêlée of the 1660s. In *Farewel Sermons*, Thomas Jacombe told his congregation that “it is not this thing or that thing, that put us upon this dissent, but it is conscience towards God, and fear of offending him.” And, such offense, he continues, “should certainly violate the peace of my own conscience [. . . ] which I must not do.”36 For Jacombe, his political dissent is justified by his private experience of conscience, and his subsequent understanding of God’s will. In his case, to conform by using the Book of Common Prayer would have been a worse form of dissent: dissent or disobedience towards his conscience, and, as a result, towards God. Jacombe reveals to his congregation that the private anguish of a guilty conscience is far worse than any worldly loss, even that of his ministry. Having similarly established the need for absolute obedience to God’s umpire based on the experience of conscience, Milton’s epic more severely than Jacombe or Calamy polarizes man’s power and God’s in Michael’s prophecy, setting them in competition for man’s obedience. Milton thus
contextualizes these experiences of conscience within the reader’s present in order to encourage him – if he is a fit reader – to dissent from any attempts to bind his conscience.

Milton’s presents the fallen world as depraved, unpromising and godless. Indeed, Michael’s narrative is throughout a story of the few righteous – Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Moses – against the multitude of the unrighteous. And, once Christ’s sacrifice restores the “peace / Of Conscience” to those suffering under the law, conscience emerges as the locus of an epic battle between the “enemies of truth” and the “few / His faithful” (12.480-82). The wolves that “shall succeed” the apostles “for teachers” – the loathed hirelings of Milton’s Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church (1659) – will threaten this peace granted by Christ himself by joining with “Secular power, though feigning still to act / By spiritual” and

from that pretense,

Spiritual Laws by carnal power shall force

On every conscience. (12.508-22)

What’s worse, these laws

none shall find

Left them inroll’d, or what the Spirit within

Shall on the heart engrave. (12.522-24)

Through such laws, these wolves effectively undo Christ’s sacrifice by divesting the conscience of its freedom; and, “Without this freedom,” as Milton argues in De Doctrina, “we are still enslaved: not, as once, by the law of God but, what is vilest of all, by human law” or, better yet, “inhuman tyranny” (CPW 6:123).
Michael pauses his own narrative in order to allow Milton’s voice to emerge more explicitly: he asks,

What will they then

But force the Spirit of Grace itself, and bind

His consort Liberty; what, but unbuild

His living Temples, built by Faith to stand,

Thir own Faith not another’s: for on Earth

Who against Faith and Conscience can be heard

Infallible? (12.524-30)

In book 3, God had promised paradise to those who choose to hear His umpire conscience, and here Michael confirms once again the superiority of conscience’s voice over all others: as Milton had confirmed numerous times in *A Treatise of Civil Power* (1659), *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means*, and elsewhere, here again he confirms that none can be heard infallible against conscience and faith. Leaving this query unanswered (though the answer is an obvious one, for Milton at least) forces the reader to provide that answer, with Milton’s tone anticipating (or hoping to) what that answer will be. Michael continues, “many will presume” to be heard infallible against conscience; and the “far greater part” will willingly consent to this violation of their own freedom of conscience (12.530, 533). Forfeiting their Christian liberty because they “deem in outward Rites and specious forms / Religion satisfi’d” against the dictates of their consciences, this “far greater part” will conform to the wolves’ unjust and unholy laws. And, for allowing these wolves to be heard infallible against conscience, the multitude will undoubtedly suffer the hell of a conscience heavy with sin, and ultimately
dissolve with Satan and his “perverted World” (12.534-35, 547). In his farewell sermon, Calamy similarly feared that there are “thousands in England” that “to gain an Estate, will sell God and a good Conscience and to avoid the loss of estate and imprisonment, will do anything: they will be sure to be of that Religion which is uppermost, be what it will” (*Farewel Sermons*, 8). Yet, he ensures his congregation, those who sin thus to “avoid straits,” suffer the “soul-plagues” of sin, which awaken conscience – a much more profound punishment than any worldly loss.

On the other hand, those who disobey these wolves in order to obey their consciences and God, as Michael tells Adam, face “heavy persecution” (12.531). These obedient few, however, do not suffer under this worldly abuse. Mr. Watson, whose sermon was also printed in *Farewel Sermons* alongside Calamy’s and Jacombe’s, claimed that “we see a godly man in misery; but we see not his comforts; we see his prison grates, but we hear not that sweet musick that he enjoys in his conscience” and “inward peace”; Jacombe similarly tells his audience that “when the burden is heavy upon the back, then the peace of Conscience is great within”; and Mr. Jenkins, also memorialized in *Farewel Sermons* closes his sermon by reminding his congregation that “either thy conscience doth comfort thee, or it shall” (55, 79, 273). Milton similarly suggests that the righteous will find solace in their peaceful consciences:

What man can do against them, not afraid,

Though to the death, against such cruelties

With inward consolations recompens’t. (12.493-95)

Even in the face of the heaviest of persecutions – death – Milton’s martyrs are rewarded with the “inward consolations” of a free and peaceful conscience. Calamy, delivering the
funeral sermon for Simeon Ashe, claimed that his close friend died with a “great deal of calmnesse and serenity upon his Conscience,” telling Calamy just before his death that “It is one thing to speak of Christ, and of Heaven, and another to feel the consolations of Christ and Heaven as I do” (Farewel Sermons, 409-10). Though Ashe did not die a persecuted martyr, Calamy offers Ashe as an example to his congregation, trying to convince them of the power of such consolations.

Milton, however, goes beyond the passive dissent encouraged by these nonconformist preachers in his characterization of this solace. His martyrs are so “oft supported” by their consolations “so as shall amaze / Their proudest persecutors” (12.496-97). According to this description, these consolations enjoyed by those obedient to God’s will become the dissenters’ greatest weapon through which they might “amaze” the enemies of truth. As opposed to the gnawing, guilty conscience that consumes the sinner from within, this free conscience, preserving the inner man, allows him to engage in spiritual warfare against even his “proudest persecutors,” including Satan. Indeed, armed with “spiritual armor,” God’s obedient can “resist” or oppose “Satan’s assaults,” and “quench his fiery darts” (12.491-92). Dissent against both man and Satan according to this model is defensive in that it protects the liberty of conscience and offensive because, through that liberty, it actively opposes the enemies of truth. I would not argue that in Paradise Lost Milton encouraged his contemporary audience to die for the cause of conscience (though, it seems, he would not have opposed this extremity if necessary); instead, Milton appears more interested in the defeat of his and God’s opponents through “heroic martyrdom” or active dissent.
In *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton wrote in similarly violent terms regarding the standoff between the conscientious and his persecutor. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:27, “*God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,*” Milton argued: “[S]urely [God] hath not chosen the force of this world to subdue conscience and conscientious men, who in this world are counted weakest; but rather conscience, as being weakest, to subdue and regulate force, his adversarie, not his aide or instrument in governing the church” (*CPW 7:257*). A popular verse for women like Fell in *Women’s Speaking Justified* (1666-67) and Anna Trapnel in her apocalyptic prophecies when defending women’s more extensive role in religious affairs, Milton here reappropriates this passage to account conscience and conscientious men the “weak things of the world.” Not only does he polarize force and conscience here, but also he argues that God has appointed conscience the regulator and oppressor of force. Anticipating book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, this passage similarly imbues individuals with the power to “amaze / Their proudest persecutors” through their use of conscience. Next referencing Paul’s second Letter to the Corinthians, Milton argues that the apostle, when claiming that “*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,*” was speaking of “that spiritual power by which Christ governs his church, how allsufficient it is, how powerful to reach the conscience and the inner man with whom it chiefly deals and whom no power els can deal with” and in comparison how “uneffectual and weak is outward force with all her boistrous tooles” (*CPW 7:257*). And, such force is “oft times fatal to them who use it” (*CPW 7:261-62*). In this spiritual battle, it is the conscientious who prevail, not only amazing their enemies with their consolations, but also subduing and regulating
the agents of that persecution and witnessing their ultimate destruction at the hands of God.

Adam’s lesson by the end of book 12 of *Paradise Lost* confirms this construction. He begins with the spiritual lesson, telling Michael that he now knows that to “obey [God] is best,” only to move onto the worldly lesson: he learned that “by things deem’d weak” he might “Subver[t] the wordly strong,” evoking once again 1 Corinthians 1:27. He also learned that “suffering for Truth’s sake” – undoubtedly through persecution – “Is fortitude to the highest victory” (561, 567-70). As in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, in *Paradise Lost* the lesson learned is that victory is achieved through obedience to conscience, and through conscience, to God – obedience sustained even through suffering, persecution, and, if necessary, death. And, such victory is not a retreat inward, but rather the highest form of dissent. Thomas N. Corns argues that, by the end of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are “impotent against the forces which, as Michael reveals, will all but overwhelm them.” “The strategies available to them,” he continues, “are strategies for surviving, not for winning.” Yet as these final moments in *Paradise Lost* suggest, as well as their corroboration with Milton’s prose, the future that Michael prophesizes, albeit difficult, is a story of the victory of the “fit though few” who choose to hear conscience over not only the “far greater part” of mankind who will fall, but also over their “proudest persecutors.” And this victory, more than for Adam and Eve, is for the fit reader who can, if he chooses, experience the paradise within of a peaceful conscience through political dissent against Milton’s age-old enemies, the forcers of conscience.
Conclusion

In “Milton on Liberty, Servility, and the Paradise Within,” Barbara Lewalski comments that “Michael’s promise to Adam of a ‘Paradise within thee, happier far’ . . . is anything but a quietist message.” Instead, she insists, “Milton has shown his readers the true nature of liberty and servility, inviting them to attain (with Adam) the inner paradise of reason and virtue which alone can – but naturally will – lead to a free society.” While I agree that Michael’s final promise to Adam and Eve is “anything but a quietist message,” I would add that Paradise Lost speaks not only to the future, but also to Milton’s England of the 1660s. Participating in the larger nonconformist conversation arguing for toleration, liberty of conscience and dissent, Milton’s great epic is about existence in his present world. Indeed, he encourages his audience to be the righteous few in a fallen world by defending the liberty of their consciences, enjoying the paradise it creates within, and dissenting from the conformist policies of a “restored” England. Whether tolerated or not, Milton shows his audience that their consciences are free, and that to forfeit that freedom through conformity is to repeat the archetypal fall itself – a failure to stand that inevitably leads to the unbearable horrors of conscience emblematized by Sin and experienced by Satan and Adam. In A Treatise of Civil Power, Milton argued that God “hath not only given us this gift [of liberty] as a special privilege and excellence of the free gospel above the servile law, but strictly hath commanded us to keep it and enjoy it” (CPW 7:263). As this would suggest, the paradise within is not a means to an end, rather it is the end of conscientious obedience. Moreover, enjoying that paradise of a peaceful conscience and cultivating it is part and parcel of the obedience owed to God. In a world fraught with persecution and compulsion, then, Milton, like Calamy, hoped that
his fit audience would make “conscience what we hear and how we hear.”\textsuperscript{39} And, as the Father ensures in book 3, “if [they] will hear,” and only if they will hear, will they “safe arrive.”
NOTES

1 *An Exact Collection of Farewel Sermons, Preached by the late London-Ministers* (London, 1663), p. 5. All references to *Farewel Sermons* are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

2 *Farewel Sermons*, pp. 7-8


Tyranny of Heaven,” in Machiavelli and Republicanism, ed. G. Bock and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 244, where he argues that Milton does make this retreat from politics in Paradise Lost. Though Worden’s argument is mostly contested, Annabel Patterson recently revisited its possibilities in “Why is there no Rights Talk in Milton’s Poetry?,” in Milton, Rights and Liberties, ed. Christophe Tournu and Neil Forsyth (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2005).


Sharon Achinstein makes a related argument in “Toleration in Milton’s Epics: A Chimera?,” in Milton and Toleration, ed. Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), where she claims that “while Milton’s major epics are

12 Arthur Barker in *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma: 1641-1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942) points out that in his late prose, “Milton went beyond Independency and appeared to adopt the position set forth by those who demanded complete religious liberty” by the way he defined “matters of conscience” (226).

13 *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 7:242-43. All subsequent references to Milton’s prose tracts will be cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page in this edition, along with the abbreviation *CPW.*


17 Ibid., p. 120.


19 Qtd. in Spaeth, *The Church*, p. 159


21 Pepys, p. 134.

22 Green, *Unto all that wait in Sion, for the Consolation of Christ Jesus, is the Word of Peace and Comfort declared* (London, 1665), p. 6.


Paradise Lost 3.128. All citations of Paradise Lost are from John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), and all subsequent citations will be noted parenthetically.

27 Benjamin Myers, “Prevenient Grace and Conversion in Paradise Lost,” Milton Quarterly 40.1 (2006): 20-36, stresses the importance of prevenient grace in Arminian thought whereby “the fallen will [is able] to cooperated with grace, and so to be converted.” In this way, prevenient grace is “only a necessary condition for conversion,” though it does not guarantee salvation without the willful cooperation of the individual (23).


30 This copy of Paradise Lost is in the British Library’s holdings, shelfmark C.69.ff.5.

31 Benet, “Adam’s Evil Conscience,” comparing Satan’s soliloquy in Book 4 to Adam’s in Book 10, points out that “The text identifies the oppositional voice that interrogates Satan and Adam, and it does not belong to them” (4).

32 Richard Arnold, Logic of the Fall: Right Reason and [Im]pure Reason in Milton’s “Paradise Lost” (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), defines “right reason” as a “form of reasoning that simultaneously unites the intellectual or ratiocinative faculty and the moral or spiritual sense; it is animated and sustained by (and operates according to) one’s higher
conscience, moral sense, or, in theological terms – and certainly in the case of *Paradise Lost* – the holy spirit or religious conscience” (ix). Milton also draws together conscience and right reason early on in *De Doctrina Christiana* when he argues that “No one would try to be virtuous, no one would refrain from sin because he felt ashamed of it or feared the law, if the voice of Conscience or right reason did not speak from time to time in the heart of every man” (*CPW* 6:132).

33 *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 6:653. All subsequent references to Milton’s prose tracts are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number, along with the abbreviation *CPW*.


36 *Farewel Sermons*, p. 94.


38 Tornu and Forsyth, p. 48.

Epilogue

As we have seen, many individuals and groups during the English Revolution believed conscience a suitable tool for transforming the nation. From the defeated and imprisoned Charles I to his unlikely successor, Oliver Cromwell, from the republican Lucy Hutchinson to radical groups like the Quakers, and finally to Milton, the beleaguered poet of the Restoration, each of these writers radicalized and deployed the language of conscience to effect national reform. Though their understandings of conscience were often distinct, each of their stories overlap to create a complex, yet cohesive, narrative of the revolutionary nature of this period. They all imagined an England made better politically, socially, and theologically: an England dictated by God Himself.

Yet not all would-be reformers embraced this radical conception of conscience. Thomas Hobbes wrote and published *Leviathan* (1651) at the height of this revolutionary moment in England. In chapter 29, “Of those things that weaken, or tend to the dissolution of a commonwealth,” he listed the idea that “whatsoever a man does against his conscience, is sin”:

> For a man’s conscience, and his judgment is the same thing; and as the judgment, so also the conscience may be erroneous. Therefore, though he that is subject to no civil law, sinneth in all he does against his conscience, because he has no other rule to follow but his own reason; yet it is not so with him that lives in a commonwealth; because the law is the public conscience, by which he hath already undertaken to be guided. Otherwise in such diversity, as there is of private consciences, which are but private opinions, the commonwealth must
needs be distracted, and no man dare to obey the sovereign power, further than it shall seem good in his own eyes.¹

Rather than try to harness the power of the individual conscience, Hobbes instead divests it of its authority. Conscience for Hobbes is no more than “private opinions,” and is thus as fallible as man’s judgment. For this reason, those living in a commonwealth have forfeited the absolute authority of their individual consciences for that of the “public conscience,” the law. Hobbes, after all, was only interested in advocating a commonwealth based on rationality, not a commonwealth based on conscience. By stripping the individual conscience of the power that the writers in this thesis granted it, Hobbes also stripped it of the power to shape the nation.

Hobbes’s primary fear in this passage, however, is that the commonwealth would be weakened, and susceptible to destruction and disunity if every person listened only to his or her own conscience. Security itself – mankind’s very reason for establishing civil society – was at stake. Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, those individuals and groups who sought to shape the nation according to conscience were striving for the very opposite of Hobbes’s fear: unity rather than disarray, order rather than chaos, a united nation rather than a dismantled, powerless commonwealth. Though their ideas were often radical and sometimes divisive, each of these writers’ endpoint was an England united by more than its laws: in some cases they anticipated an England united in its quest for truth, and in others, an England united by the light of God within the consciences of each Englishman and woman. Whatever their hopes for the future, they each put conscience to work for the survival of the nation, not against it.
Ironically, these writers’ goal of a united English nation was impossible in part *because* they used the language of conscience to present their ideas for national reform. This language lent their writings a self-assuredness that ultimately had the potential to alienate those whose consciences told them otherwise. Indeed, they each looked to God’s Word as a guide for their consciences; yet they all came away with conflicting programs for the English nation, whether monarchical, republican, or theocratic. In this way, the potential – and potential dangers – of the Reformation conscience reached its height during this period of religious, social, and political experimentation. Despite their failures to shape the nation according to their particular understandings of conscience, however, once this potential had been recognized, belief, worship, and church-going would never again be the same in England. Charles II promised to establish liberty of conscience upon his return to England in the Declaration of Breda (1660), a document recognizing liberty of conscience as a means to establishing civil peace in England. Restoration thinkers like John Locke, evaluating the failed and unjust efforts of past monarchs to control conscience, began to reconsider the relationship between conscience and the nation, and between church and state. James II issued the Declaration of Indulgence on 4 April 1687, hoping to free all subjects from religious persecution, and he released over 1,300 prisoners of conscience during his short reign. Parliament passed the Toleration Act in 1689, which extended toleration to nonconformists who took the Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance.

Though their programs for an English nation transformed through conscience were never realized, writers like Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, the Quakers, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Milton brought the conversation of conscience to the forefront,
changing forever the relationship between conscience and the nation. Full toleration was long in coming despite the many efforts of the Restoration, yet the aftershocks of the English Revolution never subsided. For this reason, as this dissertation has tried to demonstrate, the idea of conscience was not only revolutionized in the writings of this period, but also revolutionizing.
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Book Reviews


HONORS AND AWARDS

2010 Outstanding Teaching Award for Graduate Students in the College of Liberal Arts, The Pennsylvania State University. Sole recipient of annual college-wide award.
RGSO Dissertation Support Grant to fund archival research in London and Nottingham, 2010. Awarded on a competitive basis by the College of the Liberal Arts.
Rock Ethics Fellow, 2009-2010. One of four fellows awarded on a competitive basis by the College of the Liberal Arts.
Folger Institute Grant, 2008-2009. Awarded in support of my participation in the “Researching the Archives” seminar led by Jean Howard and Linda Levy Peck.

CONFERENCES


