

Routledge Studies in Religion

TOLERATION, FREEDOM OF RELIGION, AND CHURCH—STATE RELATIONS IN THE THOUGHT OF THE FIRST BAPTISTS

THE GARDEN WALLED OFF FROM THE WILDERNESS

Rafał Prostak



Toleration, Freedom of Religion, and Church–State Relations in the Thought of the First Baptists

This book focuses on the development of Baptist views on religious liberty. It explores the arguments for freedom of conscience and full religious toleration that were formulated in the 17th century by the first Baptists, a particularly persecuted religious current of the English Reformation. The author quotes and comments on fragments of theological treatises and pamphlets by the first London Baptists (Thomas Helwys, John Murton, Leonard Busher, Samuel Richardson, and Christopher Blackwood), as well as those seeking religious freedom in New England (Roger Williams and John Clarke). Whilst the book deals with the history of Baptist doctrine in the field of religious policy, it also offers a commentary on contemporary phenomena in which many groups of this ecclesiastical tradition in the United States play an active and important role (i.e. the so-called New Religious Right). The study is presented at a moment when issues related to the limits of religious freedom, religious tolerance, and relations between church and state are still present in public debate despite ongoing secularisation in the Western world. It will be of particular interest to scholars of Baptist and religious history, as well as religion and politics.

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For our lord the King is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a king but in earthly causes. And if the king's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all human laws made by the king, our lord the king can require no more. For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.

Thomas Helwys, 1612

First, the faithful labours of many witnesses of Jesus Christ, extant to the world, abundantly proving, that the church of the Jews under the Old Testament in the type, and the church of the Christians under the New Testament in the antitype, were both separate from the world; and that when they have opened a gap in the hedge, or wall of separation, between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, and made his garden a wilderness, as at this day. And that therefore if he will ever please to restore his garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto himself from the world, and that all that shall be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the world, and added unto his church or garden.

Roger Williams, 1644



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1 Introduction

Faith is an individual experience, the answer to the most important and difficult existential questions: What is the cause of our life? What gives value to our being? What is the purpose of our being? Religion, in turn, is a social phenomenon, a structure of beliefs and practices relating to divinity. Churches and religious associations constitute systems of social influence to which the people who make them give structure and functions. Since established religion is a collective, purposeful (functional) product, it will inevitably exist alongside another, overarching social structure: The state. Even if the practitioners of a particular religion aspire to universalism – in principle, it is for everyone and of general scope of application – from the perspective of the state, it remains a phenomenon operating within the state. In the state's jurisdiction, one finds religious agents and other entities that do not identify with a specific or even any religion, which will result in a particularistic character of religiosity (in principle, it is not for everyone, and its scope of influence is limited). This likewise applies to all types of religious associations. Even if a specific religious association aspires to objective universalism (it is a force organising all manifestations of human activity and standardising all social behaviour), the state – at least in the realities of Western liberal democracies (where, by their nature, political societies are pluralistic) – will enviously defend its right to establish rules of social conduct (to the extent limited by law), regulating the behaviour of members of a given religious association, as well as those who do not identify with it. Taking the above into account, we conclude that interactions, often leading to tensions, between the demoliberal state and religion as a social phenomenon are inevitable.

The set of actions taken by the state towards organised forms of religiosity (religious associations) and towards people participating in them is called “policy on religion”. It includes legislation regulating the legal status and activity of these associations, as well as all state actions that are a manifestation of its attitude towards organised religion (religious associations). In the circumstances of demoliberal constitutionalism, policy on religion is implemented on the basis of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) and the principle of equality of all persons under the law, regardless of worldview.

2 Tolerant, Freedom of Religion, and Church–State Relations

Discussion around (1) the desired shape of the relationship between the state and religious organisations; (2) the social role of religion; (3) the place of religious argumentation in the law-making process, especially enacting the law that restricts fundamental rights (coercive law); and (4) directions in interpreting international (treaty) and national (constitutional and statutory) guarantees of religious freedom are an important component of public debate in the democratic political order. It can be assumed that the history of religion in Western civilisation is primarily the history of the relationship between the state (the political organisation of society) and the church (the religious organisation of society). Competition and cooperation, balance and domination (subordination), and union and separation are the terms used to describe the relationship between these two entities that we occasionally name *civitas terrena* and *civitas Dei*, terms coined by Augustine of Hippo (354–430).

The history of this relationship may be approached from two angles: (1) the history of the state's relations with the church; and, respectively, (2) the history of the church's relations with the state. Apparently, these two perspectives look, but are not, the same. When the “temporal state” is placed at the centre of our approach, a story emerges about a political order focused on its existence (self-preservation) and stable development (securing the existential interest of the state, its compelling interest, its *ratio status*), dealing with a structure that declares its timeless and indomitable nature (Matt 16, 18), which does not have to worry about its “tomorrow” since nothing can overcome it. When the church is at the centre, on the other hand, as the “pilgrim City of God” (spiritual community), an entity emerges that will last regardless of the fate of the state, by its nature transient (time-limited), both in terms of its exemplification (a particular state) and generally as a framework of social cooperation (i.e. political community, politically organised society). The Reformation was a turning point for the history of the church (as well as for Christian doctrine), particularly in the relationship between the *Ecclesia* and political power. The teachings of the Reformers gave rise to various streams in Protestantism, and within this diversity, there would be room for Baptists, an offspring of the English Reformation that emerged at the beginning of the 17th century. Inevitably, the newly established Christian communities, in seemingly irrevocably divided Western Christendom, had to determine their attitude towards the state (its legal system and political institution), which defined the environment in which they were to operate.

Commonly, Baptists are distinguished by an unequivocal call for a complete separation of the affairs of the state and the church and to recognise that in spiritual matters an individual should be free from the pressure of others, especially from those exercising political power. This commitment is not a fruit of the development of Baptist doctrine, but a response to historical experience: Other models of church–state relations consistently failed to deliver the hoped-for results. Instead, this principle flows from something far more fundamental – a core and enduring element of Baptist identity, grounded in their vision of the church and in their understanding of the relationship

between God and the individual. In other words, the postulate of complete depoliticisation of the church and desacralisation of the state has accompanied Baptists since the birth of this denominational tradition of Christianity in the 17th century, and the rejection of the concept of a national (established) church is not one of many principles, but a central element of the Baptist identity, one inscribed in its DNA.¹

Although Baptist tradition was born in Europe, among separatist Puritans, it flourished in the United States of America. The history of Baptists on American soil is a story of an originally widely rejected, marginalised, and persecuted religious group. In 1640, only about 0.1% of the English population of colonial America identified themselves with this group. For the next hundred years, it barely grew. In 1760, only half a per cent of the inhabitants of the colonies that would soon establish the United States were Baptists.² However, by the beginning of the 20th century, Baptists had become the largest denominational family of the Protestant part of the American population,³ with over 30 million believers.⁴ In 2014, more than 15% of Americans identified as Baptists.⁵

Obviously, the Baptist tradition is unique for reasons beyond its strict opposition to a national church. It also calls for a decentralised ecclesial order and more relaxed theological discipline than that found both in Catholicism and other streams of American Protestantism (Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, Methodism, Episcopalianism, and Lutheranism). Baptist Churches have a unique heterogeneity thanks to their structural democratism, including autonomous congregations. The principal equality of their members results from the strict understanding of the universal priesthood of believers (ministry under Christ) and recognition of the freedom of their consciences.⁶ Because Baptists cannot be constrained to one theological tradition, they are not willing to admit to a shared confession of faith (Latin: *credo*).

Walter B. Shurden, professor at Mercer University, a renowned Baptist academic centre, once noted: “Baptists do not agree on where they came from, who they are, or how they got that way. In other words, Baptists do not agree on their historical origin, their theological identity, or their subsequent denominational history”.⁷ The most significant moment in the history of American Baptists was their disagreement on the biblical justification of slavery, which, in 1845, led to the establishment of the Southern Baptist Convention (hereafter: SBC). Today, American Baptists divide along the lines of Particular Baptists, strong supporters of Calvinistic double predestination, and General Baptists, who reject this doctrine and advocate for the universal availability of salvation (unlimited atonement), in accordance with the teachings of Arminius [Jakob Hermanszoon (1560–1609), a theologian from Leiden, whose teachings were condemned by the Synod of Dort].⁸ There are also adherents of premillennial dispensationalism, as well as amillennarians who question its biblical foundations. Baptists divide into “cessationists” maintaining that the supernatural, spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit [apostolate, prophecy, speaking and interpreting tongues (glossolalia), and

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performing miracles of healing and resurrection] were given to the church during its initial development and expired with the death of the Apostles; and “continuationists” arguing that these gifts are still given to the church in its mission (which brings these Baptists – the so-called “Bapticostal movement” – closer to the Christians of the charismatic Pentecostal tradition). “Landmarkists”⁹ that reject the possibility of collaboration with other Christian denominations in building the Kingdom of God, and ecumenists who are open to dialogue and interdenominational cooperation. Surprisingly, today’s Baptists do not maintain unity even on such a fundamental issue of their original identity as the availability of the baptism ritual: Some recognise only the baptism of those who consciously profess faith in Christ (believer baptism; credobaptism), while others allow the baptism of small children, even under five years of age, which brings them dangerously close to the practice of infant baptism (paedobaptism).¹⁰

The heterogeneity of Baptists allows them to function successfully in the realities of American religious culture. H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962), in *The Kingdom of God*, characterised American religiosity as follows:

Here it has no central organization here; it has not even such an institutional core as an established church provides, accompanied though it be by sectarian organizations. Here there is no common system of doctrine, nor any distinctly American confession of faith which, like the Augsburg Confession in Germany or the *Thirty-nine Articles* and the *Westminster Confession* in Great Britain, emerged out of a great critical and formative period in the past to remain a depository of religious insights painfully won by the fathers and a program of spiritual discipline for their children. Here no national liturgy, no *Book of Common Prayer*, leads generation after generation to pattern its religious thought upon a classic model or to channel its pious emotions in purified forms of their expression.¹¹

Reading this opinion of an outstanding Christian theologian and ethicist of the 20th century, one may wonder whether it is not a statement reflecting the nature, not so much of the reality of religious life in the United States, but of Baptists as such. Referring to Niebuhr’s statement to Baptists encourages us to look at this stream of Christianity as a perpetual call for constant reform of the church, which “offensively” seeks “the Kingdom of God and its justice”, and not “defensively” preserves or freezes the dynamic nature of faith in static institutions, doctrines, rules, and rituals. The Baptist movement appears to us as a search for dynamic religiosity, according to Henri Bergson (1859–1941), whose authority Niebuhr noted – and not a static formula of the cultural presence of the sacred, in which the church becomes a social institution that satisfies specific needs, providing specific goods.¹² If, according to Niebuhr, “Christianity is a ‘permanent revolution,’ a *metanoia* which does not come to an end in this world, this life, or this time”,¹³ then this

description undoubtedly fits perfectly into the Baptist vision of Christianity. Taking this perspective, heterogeneity and variability seem to be the only constant factors.

Baptists today are also not unanimous in matters of religious policy. Their history is a testimony to the tireless struggle to distinguish and separate the earthly order (mechanisms of political power) from the church (the mystical Body of Christ), in the name of the freedom of conscience of the follower of Christ and the institutional and functional autonomy of the “Bride of Christ”. Importantly, Baptists saw separatism as a guarantee of freedom of conscience also for people who rejected the Gospel, without any reservations in this regard. Meanwhile, the SBC, the largest Baptist organisation and currently the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, has since the 1980s consistently questioned “strict separatism”¹⁴ between state and church as the desired formula of American religious policy, advocating the “benevolent neutrality” known as accommodationism¹⁵ of the state towards religion. Moreover, the involvement of many influential SBC leaders in the emergence and development of the New Religious Right (hereinafter: NRR),¹⁶ unveiled and uncritical support for Republican Party politicians, and the promotion of the thesis that Americans are, in fact, a “Christian nation” and should remain so is perceived by participants in other Baptist denominations as an attack on the Baptist tradition.

In summary, openness to the theological and ritual heterogeneity of American Baptists is an inherent feature, accepted and affirmed in this family of Christian communities. Today, the divisions about issues related to religious policy are much more controversial. Tensions between Baptist churches supporting the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty¹⁷ and those of the SBC clearly show it. This is not a rivalry limited to the nature of the relationship between the state and the church. It is about the legacy of the Baptist tradition and the assessment of its contribution to the constitutional protection of religious freedom in the United States. All significant Baptist associations emphasise their commitment to religious freedom, assigning less weight to the separation of church and state. For those behind the BJC, however, separatism remains an indispensable tool. For its part, the SBC questions its usefulness in the circumstances of contemporary American political culture. For the leaders of the SBC, separatism is no longer a protection against the takeover of political power by a specific religious association, which could consequently obtain the status of state church, potentially seeking to eliminate or weaken the others, but is handing over the governing body to the hands of groups hostile to religion and, above all, Christianity. Separatism turned out to be a separation of Christian values-oriented agents from the political process of enacting universally applicable laws from religion, while non-religious and anti-religious persons retain unlimited access to it.¹⁸

The institution of a state church was the norm in colonial America. The entry into force of the federal Constitution of 1787 is a breakthrough moment in the history of religious policy on American soil. The newly established

federation would not serve to promote the Christian faith or cooperate with the church in building the Kingdom of God, but would restrict itself to achieving clearly secular goals: Forming a more perfect Union, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for common defence, promoting general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty.¹⁹ In 1791, the US Constitution was supplemented by the Bill of Rights, in which the First Amendment contained the following provision: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. Thus, in the name of religious freedom of US citizens, the possibility of the existence of a state (national) church was excluded in the Constitution of the American Republic.

However, this provision referred to federal power, while the states retained autonomy. When the Bill of Rights was adopted, a state church operated in the New England states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and the newly established Vermont. The state church, understood here as a Christian denomination with a privileged legal status (through public financial support from funds from the obligatory “church tax”), survived in Massachusetts until 1833. If the state church is understood as a specific ideological (denominational; religious) tradition recognised by law as having a special status, its abolition can be traced to 1876, when New Hampshire abandoned the constitutional norm requiring that every member of the state legislature be a Protestant, although the text of the New Hampshire Constitution in this respect was to be revised not earlier but in 1968.²⁰

The abolishment of the institution of the state church (disestablishment of religion) in the American legal system has its acknowledged heroes, Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and James Madison (1751–1836), who initiated the fight against institutionalised religion in their homeland, Virginia, and continued it at the Union level. Jefferson penned the concept of the “wall of separation”, separating the state from the church, which today is identified not only with the message of the First Amendment, in the section regarding religion, but even incorporated into its text.²¹ Madison is remembered as the editor of the amendment itself, the original form of which was even more separatist in its message: “The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or any pretext infringed”. Madison also proposed that the provisions of the First Amendment likewise apply to the states, but his suggestion was rejected by Congress, thus ensuring the states’ autonomy in this respect.²² This anticipated the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the effects of the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 US 296 (1940).²³

Frank Lambert in *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* points to two cultural phenomena that had a decisive impact on the shape of the political solutions of American federalism regarding state–church relations at the beginning of the Republic.²⁴ The first was “radical Whig thought”, which Lambert identifies with the political writings of John Milton

(1608–1674), James Harrington (1611–1677), Algernon Sidney (1623–1683), John Locke (1632–1704), and especially with essays by John Trenchard (1662–1723) and Thomas Gordon (c. 1691–1750), who together, under the pseudonym “Cato”, published *Cato’s Letters*.²⁵ This “radical Whig thought”, filtered through the Enlightenment’s rationalism, guided the philosophical thought of many of the Founding Fathers, including Jefferson and Madison.

The second key phenomenon was the “Great Awakening”,²⁶ in which Baptists played a significant role. Their concept of the church won them throngs of supporters who were discouraged from traditional forms of religiosity and noticed the shortcomings of institutionalised religion (state church). The effect of the “Great Awakening” was a clear challenge to the denominational monopoly of official churches. As Lambert notes:

(...) a religious revolution swept through the colonies in a spiritual revival known as the Great Awakening, and thousands of evangelical Dissenters embraced the radical notion that individual experience, not church dogma or government statute, was authoritative in religious matters. Salvation, they argued, occurred through the outpouring of God’s grace in what they called a spiritual “New Birth”. Thus empowered, converted men and women, called New Lights, challenged both church and state authority in matters of faith... They insisted that religion was strictly voluntary, and that no government could compel an individual to subscribe to any belief or practice. The result was a new place for religion, a religious marketplace in which individual men and women chose among voluntary, competing sects.²⁷

Although the position on religiosity presented above is close to that of the Baptists, the group of “evangelical dissidents” also includes Quakers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Anglicans (including later Methodists). What makes Baptists unique is their constant growth in number, giving their influence increasing power. Ultimately, Baptists became an inseparable element not only of the American religious landscape but also an important cultural phenomenon, especially in the Southern and Southwest states, where they strongly influenced the thinking.²⁸

The alliance of American Whigs and religious dissidents was tactical in nature. They were brought together with the shared goals of: (i) disestablishing the state church (depoliticising the church); and (ii) introducing guarantees of freedom of conscience for all. They differed in their motivations to fight for a secular state. While the first group sought to “privatise religion” in the spirit of Enlightenment rationalism and individualism, the second pursued the right of the individual to publicly express their views, even if the convictions of the social environment conflicted with them. Religious dissidents by no means questioned the social (or even civic) role of religion as such.

The subject of this book is the Baptist movement as a dissenting current in the Church of England in the 17th century. While it offers some remarks on the establishment of the first General and Particular Baptist congregations, its main focus is on the arguments of the first Baptists promoting the separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, and religious toleration. This group included: Thomas Helwys, John Murton, Leonard Busher, Christopher Blackwood, Samuel Richardson, Roger Williams, and John Clarke. The views of these thinkers have been reconstructed thanks to an analysis of the treatises and pamphlets they wrote on depoliticising the church and secularising public authorities. In the Baptist argumentation for a secular state, there is an obvious connection between the promotion of a specific vision of the church and affirmation of freedom of conscience and religious toleration, addressed to the secular authority, which is denied the right to interfere in matters of faith. This claim, bluntly and unambiguously articulated by the first generations of Baptists, continues to be put forward by Baptists today, regardless of the place – political and ecclesial – from which they speak to us.

The book is divided into two parts: (I) *The freedom of believers as a precondition of the purity of the church. Freedom of conscience in the thought of the first Baptists*; and (II) *“Briers and Thorns” in the “Garden” of the Church of Massachusetts. Church–state relations in the thought of the first Baptists in America*

Part 1 opens with remarks on the origins of religious liberty and toleration as concepts and political values. It then turns to the circumstances of the emergence of Baptist communities among Brownist Separatists in Amsterdam and London (and the role John Smyth played in this process). That is followed by a discussion of the first Baptists’ attempts to mark their participation in the Puritan discussion on the nature of the church, its political role, and obligations resting with the public authority in whose jurisdiction the Christian associations remain. This part includes commentary on the writings of Helwys, Murton, Busher, Blackwood, and Richardson.

Part 2 looks carefully at two figures, Roger Williams and John Clarke, and their reflections on the relationship between political society and the church. These two thinkers were chosen for their desperate struggles against the established religion in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Thanks to Williams and Clarke, the Baptist vision of relations between church and state crossed the Atlantic, becoming an enduring part of the American religious landscape. The separation of the “English Baptists” from the “American” ones in this book is more technical than identity-related. Williams and Clarke did not perceive themselves as “Americans” in any way. They were Englishmen who happened to live in New England. Their voices in the theological and political discussion about the relationship between church and state were embedded in the intra-English debate about the future of the Church of England. Their pamphlets were published and commented on in London. Although

they criticised the ecclesial and political establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, their voices were also a commentary on the incidents and processes taking place in old England. However, due to their participation in building the heritage of American political thought, Williams and Clarke are recalled by contemporary researchers of American religious policy as participants in the intergenerational discussion around American identity, American “civil religion”, and the interpretation of the First Amendment to the American Constitution.

A careful reading of the tracts and pamphlets of the first Baptists allows us to spot similarities in identifying the weaknesses of the ecclesial-political order of 17th-century England and New England. They treat the institution of the state church as an unauthorised blend of the reality proper to the Old Covenant with that which came with the New Covenant. The religious aspect of the political order of ancient Israel, as they argue, was negated when the prerogatives in spiritual matters were entrusted to the only king, Jesus Christ, in relation to whom, without the mediation of other people, the faithful to the Gospel remain. Meanwhile, since the times of Constantine I the Great (reign 306–337), secular authorities have claimed the right to shape conscience, to establish (or participate in the establishment of) orthodoxy, and to persecute those who deviate from it. This claim, as deprived of evangelical authorisation, was vehemently opposed by individuals whose ideas are the subject of reflection in this study.

The contrast between the realities of the Old and New Testaments is a key theme of the political theology of the early Baptists. It is accompanied by another argument, also based on evangelical teaching, and specifically on the *Parable of the Weeds (Tares)*, which we find in the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 13:24–30; 36b–43).²⁹ This parable was placed at the forefront of Baptist advocacy for freedom of conscience and religious toleration. If the “Lord of the harvest” reserves the right to distinguish the “wheat” (the faithful to the Gospel) from the “weed” (the unbelievers), He irrevocably defines the impotence of public authority in this respect. The powers of the secular authorities, it seems, do not include the right to repress those whom they are ready to classify as “weeds”.

Both strands of the Baptist argument for, first, depriving public authorities of competence in spiritual matters and, second, for freedom of conscience and religious toleration are strongly embedded in Baptist Christology and ecclesiology. Without appreciating this, the Baptist position remains incomprehensible. Religious compulsion is an unauthorised appropriation of the authority belonging to God, the delegation of which to another entity (including state authority) is not confirmed by the Bible. Religious persecution is an unacceptable interference in the way Christ builds relationships with His followers, who gather in His church. And finally, the presumption of any prerogatives of secular power in the church is, in fact, a challenging of the Gospel truth that the sovereign (king) in the Kingdom of God is Christ alone.

The texts of 17th-century Baptists analysed in this book question the reasonableness of repressing “dissenters”. Reason is supposed to prompt us to believe that violence against those who follow unorthodox teachings, in the opinion of the majority, destroys social peace more effectively than unperturbed disputes in a society “spiritually” divided. Nevertheless, it is not natural reason, but the Gospel, that is the basic and key justification not only for the separation of church and state, but also for freedom of conscience and religious toleration.

Edward Bean Underhill’s³⁰ anthology *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution, 1614–166* (Haddon, London, 1846) has been an invaluable work for this book. It is not only a unique compilation of source texts, but also an in-depth commentary on them. While many years have passed since its publication, a book of comparable quality has yet to emerge. Readers looking for contemporary studies can look to biographies of the first Baptists or other works dealing with the history of the Baptists as such. Works that stand out include Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603–1649* (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006), and Henry Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Broadman Press, Nashville, 1987). Of course, it is also worth reaching for the very rich literature devoted to Puritan thought, including Baptist reflections on the nature of the church. Matthew C. Bingham’s *Orthodox Radicals – Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2019) is a great example here.

When it comes to the contemporary reception of early Baptist thought, the works of Lee Canipe, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, deserve special attention. Canipe is associated with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship,³¹ and the author of *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free* [Mercer University Press, Macon, 2011 (Chapter 1)] and *Loyal Dissenters. Reading Scripture and Talking Freedom with 17th-Century English Baptists* (Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., Macon, 2016). Other outstanding works include Thomas White, *The Defense of Religious Liberty by the Anabaptists and the English Baptists*, which appears in a work edited by academics associated with the SBC, T. White, J. G. Duesing, and MB Yarnell, *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty*, B&H Academic, Nashville, 2007 (Chapter 3).³² Among the first Baptist thinkers, the most known and widely commented on are Roger Williams’ works on religious freedom and toleration. There is a long list of valuable publications on Williams’ legacy, presenting him not only as a theologian but also a political thinker.

* * *

Among the symbols we encounter when reading the Old and New Testaments, the “garden”, the “wilderness” (desert or wasteland), and the “wall” occupy a unique place. The “garden” is Eden, described in the *Book of Genesis* (Gen

2:8), a space where man remains in friendship with God, talking to Him face-to-face. A “well-watered garden” is the “righteous”, who calls on “the name of the Lord”, admonishes those who err, and is merciful (Isa 58:11). The symbol of the “garden” represents the bride of the *Song of Songs* (Song 4:12). And finally, the “garden” is the “vineyard of the Lord”, a symbol of Israel (Is 5:1–7), but also of the church of Christ (Matt 21:33–43). In turn, the “wilderness” (desert or wasteland) is a place untouched by God’s blessing, to which He did not send fruitful rain and did not send a man to cultivate it (Gen 2:5). It is a symbol of God’s wrath that falls on the chosen people for their infidelity (Ezek 6:14) and their fall (Jer 9:10). The “desert” is a land inhabited by the demon, a solitary place to which he abducts a wandering man to destruction (Luke 8:29); where he tempts Jesus (Mt 4:1–11); it is the place of seclusion of the righteous, separated from sinners (Heb 11:38) and the place of their torment (Heb 11:37). The desert is also a place of trial and purification, through which one enters the Promised Land of “milk and honey” (Deut 8:2; Heb 3); it is the place where the chosen people make a covenant with God; it is the place where John, the man of God, grows in the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:80), receives the word from God (Luke 3:2) and where the righteous go with mission to call sinners to repent (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:1–2). And finally, the “desert” is a “quiet place” where the Son of God, in isolation, seeks to meet the Father in prayer; where He finds refuge from the crowd (Mk 1:45); and where He sends the Apostles, tired from ministry, for their “rest”, so that they can be filled with the Holy Spirit in solitude (Mk 6:30–31).

The figure of the “wall” represents the separation of Jerusalem from the wickedness of the towns of Judah (Jer 1:15) and the priests performing the sacred rites of the people (Ezek 42). The chosen nation should separate itself from the Gentiles with a “wall” (Exod 34:10–16; Lev 20:24), although this “wall” was finally overthrown by Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, making God’s promises and the covenant with Him available to those excluded from citizenship in Israel” (Eph 2:11–16). In turn, in the *Second Epistle to Corinthians* (2 Cor 6:14–18), we read that Christians (the people of God; “God’s sons and daughters”) need to be separated from the world and its values. Thus, the “wall” standing between the “sons of Israel” and the Gentiles was brought down by the atoning death of God’s Son, but only so that it could be re-erected by the church of Christ in opposition to the rest of the “world” (or more precisely: to the values of “world”). It is impossible to be both a “friend of the world” and a “friend of God” (Jas 4:4), because irrevocably the “world” will hate the “man of God” (John 15:18–19). Moreover, through the cross, as Apostle Paul wrote, “the world” became “crucified” for him, and he for “the world” (Gal 6:14). In the prophecy of St. John, a great and high “wall”, with twelve gates and with twelve foundations, surrounded the Holy City, “New Jerusalem”, to which only those blameless and truthful, written in the Lamb’s book of life, will have access (Rev 21:12, 14, 27).

12 *Toleration, Freedom of Religion, and Church–State Relations*

A special place in the Bible, combining the motifs of “garden”, “desert” (“wasteland”, “wilderness”) and “wall”, is the Song of the Vineyard, which we find in the *Book of Isaiah*, in the fifth chapter, in verses one to seven, reading:

I will sing for the one I love
a song about his vineyard:
My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside.
He dug it up and cleared it of stones
and planted it with the choicest vines.
He built a watchtower in it
and cut out a winepress as well.
Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,
but it yielded only bad fruit.
“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
What more could have been done for my vineyard
than I have done for it?
When I looked for good grapes,
why did it yield only bad?
Now I will tell you
what I am going to do to my vineyard:
I will take away its hedge,
and it will be destroyed;
I will break down its wall,
and it will be trampled.
I will make it a wasteland,
neither pruned nor cultivated,
and briers and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.”
The vineyard of the Lord Almighty
is the nation of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are the vines he delighted in.
And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

The “vineyard of the Lord” (the House of Israel) falls into iniquity, which brings upon itself misfortune and a deserved punishment: Its enclosure is to be destroyed, and the garden, no longer bearing sweet fruit, deprived of the careful care of the Gardener, will be swallowed by the desert. Jesus used this image to announce the establishment of a new covenant (Matt 21:33–43) with those who will accept Him, and by remaining in Him, as He promised

them, they “will bear much fruit” (John 15:1–8). Thus, the “garden”, separated from the “desert” by a “wall”, is a symbol of both the chosen people, in covenant of Israelite ancestry with the Creator, and the church of Christ, in which disciples of the Son have a new covenant with the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The motifs of the “garden” separated by a “wall” from the “desert” are not only the key to understanding the nature of Israel and the church of Christ. They are equally helpful in reconstructing the intergenerational discussion among the participants of our civilisation on: (1) the place of the Christian church in social and political life; (2) the structural and functional dimension of this church (ecclesiology, social teaching of the church); (3) the origins and conditions of exercising political power (political theology); and (4) the proper arrangement of relations between the state and the church (religious policy).

While these are complex issues, the fundamental problem here is that, contrary to the realities of ancient Israel, the “wall” does not have a “physical” dimension, just as the “garden” and “wilderness” are not physically describable spaces here. The “wall” no longer separates the priests from the people, as was the case with the Temple in Jerusalem; the walls of Jerusalem, the Holy City, do not separate it from the other corrupted cities of Judah; the “border wall” standing between the “chosen nation” and other peoples does not define Christian identity. In the story about the church and the state, the “wall” is a concept, an alleged, invisible border with an undetermined location and structure, and the question of its permeability remains unresolved.

The threads of this story can be found in the opening of *Didache* (*The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*), which describes two ways – one of life and one of death – separated one from another. They are found in the narrative of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) about “two cities” (*Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena*). And they are found in medieval investiture disputes in Western Christianity, starting with the defence of the autonomy of the church by Pope Gelasius I (pontificate 492–496) and his concept of the “two swords”, developed by Pope Gregory VII (pontificate 1073–1085), and ending with the hierocratic principle of Giles of Rome (1243–1316), subjecting royal power (Latin: *regalis potestas*) to the supremacy of the “holy authority of priests” (Latin: *auctoritas sacra pontificum*), and especially to the authority of the Pope, who enjoys full power in the church (Latin: *plenitudo potestatis*), not limited here only to the spiritual sphere. Obedience to the Pope's *auctoritas*, as Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) claimed [and which was repeated in the papal bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII (pontificate 1294–1303)], is a condition for belonging to the church and thereby achieving salvation (Latin: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*).

The Franciscan monk, William of Ockham (c. 1280–1347), opposed hierocracy (or papalism) and advocated for the separation and relative autonomy of the secular and spiritual authorities, due to the limitation of both in

their jurisdiction (distinguishing *principatus dominativus* of secular government from *principatus ministerativus* of the church). This position was in obvious contradiction to the idea of papal *plenitudo potestatis*. The issue of the political effects of the church's activity was present in the considerations of Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275–1343) on the essence of sovereignty. Finally, the juxtaposition of the order of the *regnum* with *sacerdotium* is the central theme of the “two kingdoms” tale of Martin Luther (1483–1546), later taken up by John Calvin (1509–1564). Chapters V and VI of *Syllabus Errorum* of Pius IX (pontificate 1846–1878) outline the political rights of the church and the nature of its relationship with secular power. On the nature of political power and its duties, we read in *Diuturnum illud* and *Immortale Dei*, encyclicals of Leo XIII (pontificate 1878–1903), and our picture is supplemented by considerations on the obligations of secular power in the context of religious freedom in the declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Dignitatis humanae* (1965).

There has been a constant effort in Western civilisation to capture the nature of the church, which, although “in this world”, is not, as Christians believe, “of this world”. Although the “garden” stands in the middle of a “desert”, the latter is not what lets the former bloom, to bear nutritious fruit. For millennia, thinkers have sought to define the essence of the relationship between the church and the state and to look at both creations from the perspective of the promise of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God, understood both as man's spiritual relationship with his Creator as well as in the eschatological dimension. Yet even those who recall the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 22:19–21)³³ and establish a strict separation between the sacred and the profane, or between *regnum* from *sacerdotium*, may still be wrong. Factually, the tax-coin bears the image of “Caesar” and his inscription determines the provenance and fate of the coin, but whoever holds it in hand is the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) and this, in turn, determines one's origin and destiny – the “tax coin” rightly belongs to the state, but the man as a whole, in every aspect of his/her existence, including being a citizen, is the property of a jealous God (Exod 20:5; Exod 34:14), enjoying “fullness of power in the universe” (Latin: *summum dominium in universum*). Moreover, one may also hear that political power itself, as a form of interpersonal relations, has a transcendent origin, so its purpose is not limited only to “earthly matters” (Rom 13:1–7).

The centuries-old story about the “wall” separating the “garden” from the “desert” is invoked in the words that open this book. They come from the pen of Roger Williams, father of the first Baptist congregation on American soil. The motif of the “wall” is at the centre of disputes over the desired shape of the relationship between the state and the church in the United States, in which subsequent generations of Baptists take an important part. And this goes a long way towards explaining the subtitle of this book: *The Garden Walled Off from the Wilderness*.

Notes

- 1 See: B. J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways. A History*, Judson Press, Valley Forge 2003, p. 9.
- 2 R. G. Gardner, *Baptists of Early America: A Statistical History, 1639–1790*, Georgia Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta 1983, p. 15.
- 3 Due to the extraordinary religious heterogeneity of American society, many attempts are made to systematise the multicolored palette of Protestant identifications. One such attempt was made in the popular 2015 Pew Research Center report, *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, PRC, Washington 2015 (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>). The report distinguishes between “denominations”, “traditions”, and “families”. A denomination is a group of congregations that are united not only by a common doctrine and practices, but also operate in appropriate, separate administrative structures. We will use the concept of denomination when describing the Southern Baptist Convention. Tradition gathers various denominations, characterised by a similarity of beliefs and practices, and historical affinity, which, however, do not create common administrative structures, retaining their distinctiveness. The report distinguished three traditions of American Protestantism: “evangelical Protestantism”, “mainline Protestantism”, and “historically black Protestantism”. Baptists can be found in each of the distinguished traditions. In turn, a family is defined as a set of denominations with common roots, which in the historical process have undergone some differentiation in terms of beliefs, sometimes also practices, functioning today in different traditions. Those American denominations and unaffiliated congregations that identify with Baptist origin will constitute one family. See: *America's Changing...*, pp. 20–24. The continuous differentiation of Baptist churches allows us to consider it as a kind of movement within Christianity, or as a peculiar philosophy of church organisation.
- 4 F. S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1990, p. 34.
- 5 Pew Research Center Report, *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, May 12 (2015), (<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>), p. 101. An attempt to organise the historiography tracking the development of Baptists, their impact on American religious life, and progressive differentiation (fragmentation) can be found in Keith Harper, *From the Margin to the Middle to Somewhere in Between. An Overview of American Baptist Historiography*, in: K. Harper (ed.), *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future*, The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 2008, pp. 71–94.
- 6 As Charles McDaniel notes: “Searching for an official Baptist position on any issue is like diverting a river with a stick” [C. McDaniel, *The Decline of the Separation Principle in the Baptist Tradition of Religious Liberty*, “Journal of Church and State”, vol. 50, no. 3 (2008), p. 422]. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility of determining some characteristic of Baptists. A successful attempt was made by Bill J. Leonard (Leonard, *Baptist Ways...*, pp. 2–10).
- 7 W. B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity and the Baptist “Manifesto”*, “Perspectives in Religious Studies”, vol. 25, no. 1 (1998), p. 321.
- 8 Synod of Dort – a synod of the Dutch Reformed Churches in 1618–1619 in Dortrecht (also known as Dort), whose task was to assess the compliance with the Calvinist orthodoxy of Hermenszoon's teaching on salvation (issues of predestination, the role of man's free will in the act of salvation and the certainty and irreversibility of being saved). In addition to Dutch theologians and representatives of Dutch Provinces, delegates from the British Isles, German principalities, and Swiss cantons also took part in the discussions. The result of the synod was the condemnation of Arminius' statements regarding the universality of Christ's redemptive

sacrifice, the participation of man's will in accepting saving grace, and the possibility of losing salvation as a result of denying faith in the Gospel. The Synod of Dort was a breakthrough in the process of establishing the doctrine of the Reformed Churches. The Canons of Dort are the five principles of Calvinism – (1) man's nature is completely corrupted by sin; (2) some people are unconditionally chosen to salvation and, in effect, others to damnation ("double predestination"); (3) the redemptive work of Christ atoned for the sins only of those previously chosen by God; (4) saving grace cannot be rejected by the chosen; therefore, (5) those chosen by God will persevere in Grace. These principles are encapsulated in the acronym 'TULIP' [T (total depravity), U (unconditional election), L (limited atonement), I (irresistible grace), and P (perseverance of the saints)].

The Canons of Dort became a way to distinguish the Reformed Churches from their denominational surroundings. The synodal resolutions, subsequently adopted by the Dutch States General, gained the sanction of the secular authorities, which was a precursor to the persecution of the followers of Arminianism in the Netherlands.

- 9 Landmarkism – a current of American Baptists, asserting that only Baptist congregations are the historical, true church of Christ, the origins of which date back to the Apostolic times. Landmarkists refer to the heritage of "rejected" communities of the Christian world, which paid the highest price for their independence and nonconformity, and which, as Landmarkists argue, practiced the baptism of believers, including rigorous Montanists, Novatians, and Donatists; the 12th-century Waldensians and Albigenses; and the 16th-century Anabaptists. Landmarkists derive their name from a text taken from the *Book of Proverbs* ["Do not remove the ancient landmarks that your fathers set up" (Prov 22:28, KJV)]. Landmarkism was supposed to be a response to the popularisation of the practice of baptising young children in Baptist communities in the mid-19th century and to Campbellism, a movement pursuing the reconstruction (restoration) of Christian unity following the example of the early church ("Campbell-Scott Restoration Movement"), rapidly gaining popularity in evangelical Protestantism, which, although born in a Baptist environment, eventually left it, giving rise to subsequent denominations of American Protestantism, called the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ, from which the Churches of Christ would later emerge.

For Landmarkists, the true church of Christ (i.e. Baptists faithful to the Gospel) needs no reform, purification, or orthodox turn, because it is the only one that constantly remains in unity with Jesus. All the efforts at renewal undertaken by the reformers of Western Christianity, Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and in the 19th century by Alexander and Thomas Campbell, Walter Scott and Barton W. Stone, were in fact undertaken in an impious "world," and not in the authentic church, which is not only distinguishable from this world, but must also remain separate from it. Landmarkism was the first act of fundamentalist separatism to affect Baptists in the 20th century. Bill Leonard presents the Landmarkists as successionist Baptists. It also indicates two other ways of identifying the roots of Baptists – or some they come from Anabaptists, for others they are the fruit of the Puritan revolution (Leonard, *Baptist Ways...*, pp. 10–13; 183–185.)

- 10 B. Allen, *Seminary President Says Southern Baptists Drifting Toward Infant Baptism*, "Baptist News Global", May 6 (2015), <https://baptistnews.com/article/seminary-president-says-southern-baptists-drifting-toward-infant-baptism/#.WucX4ohubIU>; J. K. Allen, *Baptism: Infant vs. Child Baptism among Baptists*, "Patheos", May 8 (2015), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2015/05/08/baptism-infant-vs-child-baptism-among-baptists/>.
- 11 H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1988, pp. 2–3.

- 12 Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, pp. 165–166.
- 13 H. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1941, p. x.
- 14 Strict separatism is understood here as a line of jurisprudence of the federal judiciary, which, when interpreting the “establishment” clause, finds its essence in the prohibition of any institutional and functional interdependence of the church and the state, which is accompanied by the demand for full secularisation of the legal system (independence of the legislative process, as well as the assessment of the legality and conditions of validity of established law on values, beliefs, attitudes, and standards of behaviour of religious origin). The effect of erecting the “wall of separation” is to exclude religious associations from the possibility of using financial support from the budget of the federation and state authorities, while exempting them from tax obligations. Representatives of public authorities do not participate in the ordination of clergy, while the latter have no influence on the competence test and official nominations, and do not designate public officials. In other words, the decision-making process of public authorities is free from religious inspiration, both in the doctrinal (impact of religious doctrines) and institutional (political influence of churches and other religious associations) dimensions. Carl H. Esbeck defines “strict separatism” as the separation of church and state in which religion is regarded as a private thing (individual matter), with no influence on public affairs or what we associate with the governance of the state (matters of state). “Strict separatism” does not qualitatively distinguish religious organisations among diverse types of non-governmental organisations, so religious freedom is essentially reduced to the guarantee of the rights of individuals making up religious organisations. Additionally, in this model of relations between the state and the church, the freedom of religious expression enjoys the same guarantees as the freedom to express non-religious views; in other words, theistic beliefs do not have any special status. However, it is not unreasonable to claim that advocates of “strict separatism” attribute less value to religious expression than non-religious expression, because they do not find a place for the former in the public debate on the shape of generally applicable law or, more importantly, in the process of enactment. Moreover, religious content does not enjoy freedom of expression in public education in this model. In short, strict separatism requires a secular state (see: C. H. Esbeck, *Five Views of Church–State Relations in Contemporary American Thought*, “Brigham Young University Law Review”, vol. 1986, no. 2 (1986), pp. 378–395).
- 15 The term “benevolent neutrality” relates here to cooperation of the state with religious associations for the common good while maintaining impartiality in relations with these associations (no preference for a selected religious association or group of such associations; not promoting a specific religious doctrine). The functional and institutional distinction between the state and organised religion does not result in a lack of contact between both spheres. According to accommodationists, the “establishment” clause does not prevent non-discriminatory cooperation between public authorities and religious associations. Moreover, this type of cooperation is an expression of recognition of the freedom of US citizens with their various ideological preferences.

A characteristic feature of accommodationists is emphasising the participation of the Judeo-Christian heritage in the development of American civilisation, including its legal culture. This Judeo-Christian heritage takes its observable form in American “public religion” (referred to in the literature as civil or public religion).

Esbeck presents “benevolent neutrality” as “non-preferential cooperation” and its advocates as “non-preferentialists”. “Non-preferentialists” support non-discriminatory support for religions (both religious doctrines and religious associations); they are

characterised by a belief in the evident superiority of the theistic worldview over atheism and agnosticism because religion, as such, uniquely promotes honesty, diligence, frugality, charity, and sobriety. Hence, “non-preferentialists” regard religious communities as an essential link in a properly functioning society, structurally situated between the family and the state; a sphere of internalisation and development of the civic virtues of solidarity and co-responsibility for the fate of the political community and its prosperity.

“Non-preferentialists” do not prejudice the superiority of a specific religious identification (about its “truth”), but confirm the social, moral, and, consequently, political usefulness of religion as such, regardless of origin, ecclesial order, or the doctrine of a specific religious tradition. As a result, they allow a special state aid for religious organisations, which will not be equally open to entities not affiliated with religious associations. This is aid “without preference”, although in fact it prefers religion at the cost of other, non-religious sources of moral standards. An example of a “non-preferential”: political demand is the expectation of special support for non-profit religious education, regardless of denominational affiliation. This type of support, according to “non-prerferentialists”, does not contradict the “establishment” clause.

- 16 New Religious Right – social organisations involved in defending Christian values against the progressive “liberalisation” of American public debate and legislation in the 1960s and 1970s. The social base of NRR is not only members of Baptist congregations associated with the SBC, but also members of other evangelical denominations (Pentecostal and Charismatic movements) and conservative Catholics. NRR is also looking for support among conservative Jews and Mormons. NRR is engaged in: (1) voter registration; (2) providing them with information about the policies NRR promotes; (3) obtaining financial support for politicians NRR supports; (4) discouraging people from voting for politicians rejected by these organisations; (5) lobbying for the adoption of legislative solutions desired for the NRP; (6) court battles in defense of religious freedom (see: K. D. Wald, A. Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford 2007, pp. 207–209).

The most famous SBC pastors involved in the creation and operation of organisations associated with the NRR include: Robert G. Grant (1936–), creator of “Christian Vote”; Jerry Falwell (1933–2007), co-creator and leader of “Moral Majority”; and Marion Gordon “Pat” Robertson (1930–2023), founder and leader of the “Christian Coalition”. Robert J. Billings (1927–1995), founder and leader of the National Christian Action Coalition, one of the first NRR organisations, and co-founder of Moral Majority, was also a Southern Baptist. About the participation of SBC members in the creation of the NRR organisation, read: O. P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*, New York University Press, New York, 1997.

- 17 Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) – an organisation of Baptist associations established in Washington in 1936, promoting religious freedom and the separation of church and state. BJC brings together lawyers, academics, clergy, and social activists from Baptist backgrounds; engages as *amicus curiae* in litigations involving violations of the First Amendment to the Constitution; and lobbies for the passage of legislation protecting religious freedoms, especially in the Congress of the United States of America. Historically, the BJC was associated with the SBC, which established it as the SBC’s external communications agency under the name of the Southern Baptist Committee on Public Relations and under the leadership of Rufus Washington Weaver (1870–1947). Establishing cooperation with the Northern Baptist Convention (NBC) and the National Baptist Convention of America in 1942 led to the transformation of this agency into the Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations. In 1946, with the assumption of

- leadership by Joseph M. Dawson (1879–1973), former pastor of First Baptist Church of Waco, there was another name change to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA). Under new leadership, the BJCPA became an influential actor in American religious policy. Since 1946, the BJC has published its own monthly magazine, “Report from the Capitol”, a magazine tracking legislation and case law relating to religious freedom. The SBC’s conservative turn resulted in a reduction and then virtual discontinuation of Southern Baptist cooperation with the BJCPA in the 1990s, although some state’s SBC conventions maintained financial support. In September 2004, the BJCPA board decided to change its name to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC). On the history and participation of the BJC in the promotion of religious freedom and the separation of church and state in the USA, read: P. Parry, *On Guard for Religious Liberty: Six Decades of the Baptist Joint Committee*, Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Macon 1997; B. J. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, pp. 167–169.
- 18 McDaniel, *The Decline of the Separation Principle...*, pp. 413–414; see also T. J. Zieliński, *Roger Williams: twórca nowoczesnych relacji państwo-kościół*, Semper, Warszawa 1997, pp. 266–267.
 - 19 These goals were indicated in the preamble to the *Constitution of the United States of America*, which was presented to the Congress of the Confederation on September 28, 1787, and entered into force on March 4, 1789.
 - 20 Cf. C. H. Esbeck, *Dissent and Disestablishment: The Church-State Settlement in the Early American Republic*, “Brigham Young University Law Review” (2004), pp. 1457–1540.
 - 21 As Daniel L. Dreisbach notes: “The celebrated ‘wall’ metaphor, in the course of time, took root in American political and legal soil and has profoundly influenced, if not defined, public debate on the constitutionally prescribed relationship between church and state in the United States.” (D. L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*, University Press, New York 2002, p. 95).
 - 22 A presentation of all proposals and subsequent versions of the amendment regarding religious freedom considered by the First Congress can be found in: J. Witte, *Religious Rights in the Founding Era*, “Public Law and Legal Theory Research Series, Research Papers”, no. 22 (2003), pp. 26–29.
 - 23 As one reads in the opinion of the Supreme Court in *Cantwell*:

We hold that the statute, as construed and applied to the appellants, deprives them of their liberty without due process of law in contravention of the Fourteenth Amendment. The fundamental concept of liberty embodied in that Amendment embraces the liberties guaranteed by the First Amendment. The First Amendment declares that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The Fourteenth Amendment has rendered the legislatures of the states as incompetent as Congress to enact such laws (...) No one would contest the proposition that a state may not, by statute, wholly deny the right to preach or to disseminate religious views.
 - 24 F. Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2003, Chapter 7, pp. 180–203. Compare with: G. M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, Harcourt Press Jovanovitch, Publishers, San Diego 1990, pp. 29–46.
 - 25 These essays, 144 in number, were published in the years 1720–1723 in the *London Journal* and the *British Journal*. They were later reprinted, collected, as *Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, which, according to Peter Karsten, was the basis for reading the Founding Fathers of the

United States (see: P. Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes in England and America: Political Symbolism and Changing Values over Three Centuries*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1978, pp. 34–35).

- 26 The Great Awakening – a period of evangelical religious revival in colonial America, which peaked in the 1730s and 1740s. The “Great Awakening” was the result of the teachings of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), a Congregationalist theologian who was an inspiration for itinerant preachers, including George Whitefield (1714–1770), who called for conversion as they traversed the East Coast. The “Great Awakening” set the stage for the emergence in colonial America of a new evangelical revival movement, which today constitutes a significant family of Christian denominations in the United States, namely Methodism, whose spiritual father was John Wesley (1703–1791), an Anglican minister. The attractiveness of the doctrine of Methodism – emphasising the need for personal religious experience, declaring the universal availability of salvation, promoting toleration, and practical ethics – allowed that new denomination to quickly gather large crowds of believers, religiously awakened by the “Great Awakening”. Due to the fact that the social history of the United States records successive periods of intense religious revival, the “Great Awakening” of the first half of the 18th century is also described as “The First Great Awakening”.
- 27 Lambert, *The Founding Fathers...*, p. 8).
- 28 B. J. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*, Baylor University Press, Waco 2010, 16–18.
- 29 “Jesus told them another parable:

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ (...) His disciples came to him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.’ He answered, ‘The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear’.

(Matt 13:24–30; 36b–43)

All passages of the *Holy Bible* quoted in this study come from the *New International Version* (NIV), except biblical fragments in quoted works by other authors. The *King James Version* (KJV) is used where required.

- 30 Edward Bean Underhill (1813–1901) – an outstanding historian of the early Baptists from Oxford and an important figure of British Baptists in the 19th century; founder of the Hanserd Knollys Society publishing house, which issued the works of the first Baptists from 1845; owner and publisher of “Baptist Record”, in which he printed texts on the history of Baptists in 1848–1849; from 1849 engaged in missionary work in the Baptist Missionary Society.

- 31 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) – an association of Baptist congregations that seceded in 1991 in response to the conservative turn of the Southern Baptist Convention. CBF brings together approximately 1,800 congregations with a total of approximately 700,000 members; it is a member of the World Baptist Alliance and supports the BJC. Mercer University’s James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology is affiliated with CBF.
- 32 The conspicuous lack of scientific literature on the thought of early Baptists on the relationship between the state and the church, freedom of conscience, and religious toleration may result from the fact that the Baptist tradition is much more often the subject of interest to historians of religion than to historians of political thought.
- 33 “‘Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’” (Matt 22:19–21).



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Part 1

The freedom of believers as a precondition of the purity of the church

Freedom of conscience in the thought
of the first Baptists



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2 Part 1

Introductory remarks

2.1 *Religio* and *superstitio*

Christianity emerged in the Roman Empire, in a world intertwining political power with *sacra*. It was a reality in which, due to the close connection, there was no tension between public order (state institutions) and religion. The cult had a state character, and participation in it determined membership in a political community, with all legal consequences. The sociopolitical order sought not only divine protection but also a transcendent sanction for its existence. And finally, maintaining religious uniformity was considered a condition for the durability and prosperity of this community, its public interest. Institutionalised worship, essentially state religion, was the indisputable norm, both in the Roman Empire and in occupied Judea.

The very word “religion” comes from the Latin *religio*, *religare* (to tie, to bind). The original meaning of *religio* is closely related to public worship in ancient Rome. It was believed that any other manifestation of spirituality would be *superstitio* (superstition), a false cult that lacks seriousness, belonging to the tutelary deities of Rome. As Seneca maintained, *religio* alone was the realisation of true piety, the authentic worship of the gods, while *superstitio* was their deception.¹ Where *religio* ties (binds), *superstitio* divides. Hence, for the Romans, there was only one religion (the noun *religio* initially had only a singular form), surrounded by numerous *superstitiones* (superstitions). Improperly performed public worship – excessive exaltation that goes beyond the commonly used practices of *religio*, for example, is also a form of *superstitio*.² The identification with *religio* was at the heart of Roman identity. Engagement in *religio* was perceived as a measure of loyalty to the Roman order and a fundamental duty of every Roman citizen, because public displays of piety (*pietas*) and military virtue in defence of the city decided the prosperity – both present and future – of Rome. Properly performed worship benefits the household as well as the city over which the tutelary deity watches, but most importantly, it serves the whole of Rome.

Rome’s religious policy was relatively tolerant. It tolerated “external cults” (non-Roman *externo ritu*), the local rites of the peoples inhabiting the vast Empire – as long as they had a fixed character (through blood ties and heritage),

and did not pose a threat to the Roman order, including its *religio*. Rome did not tolerate human sacrifice, ritual orgies (bacchanalia), astrology (fortune telling), or the practice of magic, prophecies predicting the end of the world or the fall of the Roman Empire (e.g. the prophecies of the Gallic Druids; the prophecies of the fall of the Great Harlot in John's *Apocalypse*). At the beginning of the second century, intentional religiously motivated mutilation was also prohibited, which was not indifferent to Judaism (its practice of circumcision).³

Christianity, by necessity, was depicted as a *superstitio*. The spread of a new, “subversive” teaching, originating from Judea, far from the centre of Roman civilisation, forced the authorities to react. In the interests of public order and in the name of social unity, this reaction included violence. The teachings of Christians were seen as akin to astrology, and their practices to magic, both of which made them criminals.⁴ Christianity, now an extremely dangerous *superstitio* and a serious threat to the Roman order, became a felony. It did not meet the conditions allowing for the application of customary toleration – it was not an *externo rite*, as it was not limited to one of the peoples inhabiting the Roman Empire. At the same time, it was a new cult (unrecognised and unaccepted) for the world from which it originated (i.e. for Judaism). Challenging Roman religion, often referring to it with contempt, and promoting pacifism, Christianity undermined the public worship and universal military service that had become the foundations of the Roman order. Adopting Christianity inevitably weakened the loyalty of the Roman citizen to the prevailing political order, isolating him from the institutions that constituted the core of that order. Meanwhile, a defining feature of the New Testament worldview was the clear demarcation between the church and the outside world – that is, between the “house of God” and the politically organised society (cf. John 15:18–19; John 18:36; Eph 2:19–20; 1 Pet 1:17; 1 Pet 2:11). This separation often led to a sort of alienation that was difficult for the surrounding world to comprehend. Christian identity did not involve ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or territorial identification but was based on acceptance of the truths of faith, and, through baptism, inclusion in the community of saints, the church. Meanwhile, according to the world where the first generation of Christians lived, piety and worship were to serve sociopolitical integration aims, not separation or identity splitting. This would require a final determination of the gradation of importance of the two orders of self-identification. In the Christian ideal, irrevocable priority was ascribed to the spiritual over the corporeal (political, social, cultural; cf. Phil 3:20).

Therefore, the emergence of Christian communities during the apostolic era posed a challenge to the established principles underlying the sociopolitical order. It presaged the breakdown of the state cult, along with its moral principles and social obligations, both crucial for the efficient functioning of the state. Because religious pluralism can cause conflict between rival cults, giving rise to social chaos and even the disintegration of the political community, the dynamic development of Christianity led to the followers of Jesus being persecuted, especially under the rule of Decius (reign 249–251),

Valerian I (reign 253–260), and Diocletian (reign 284–305). In his letter (ca. 110) to the emperor Trajan (53–117 AD; reign 98–117), the governor of Pontus and Bithynia, Pliny the Younger (ca. 61–ca. 113) requested a standard of conduct towards Christians be established, not only in response to their rituals and way of life, but also to a legally required response to the declaration *Christianus sum* itself (the verbal confirmation of one’s being a “disciple of Christ”).⁵ Although Pliny could not point to a specific crime (*flagitia*) in the behaviour of Christians, he sought to present their worldview as depraved, “debased” superstition (*superstitionem pravam, immodicam*). In response to the governor’s request, Trajan confirmed in an imperial rescript that those admitting to being Christian should be punished. Therefore, it was not only action or omission (refusing to participate in offering sacrifices to the Roman gods) that determined the guilt of Christians, but also the very “expression of identity” (giving oral testimony). Their name was the crime, and it made them public enemies (*publici hostes*).

2.2 Religious liberty as Tertullian’s legacy

Initially, Christians did not object to the use of the term *religio* to describe Roman public worship. In the *Acts* and the apostolic epistles, two terms are used repeatedly to describe Christian identity: The “Way” [Greek *ὁδοῦ* (*hodou*)], or “Teaching” [Greek *διδασκῆ* (*didachē*)].⁶ Additionally, the authors of the *New Testament* used the term “piety” [Greek *εὐσέβεια* (*eusebeia*)]: A living spiritual relationship with a transcendent power. Importantly, *εὐσέβεια* was distinguished by them from *θρησκεία* (*thrēskeia*) – that is, from the term semantically closest to the contemporary understanding of the word “religion”, and in ancient times referred to external practices of religious life (rituals). In the *New Testament*, the word *θρησκεία* was used only five times: Once in reference to Judaism (cf. Acts 26:5), three times to the ideal of Christian life (cf. James 1:26–27), and once to Christians who err in their faith (cf. Col 2:18). In his translation of the *New Testament* into Latin, St. Jerome used the word *religio* exclusively in reference to *θρησκεία*. However, this part of the *Vulgate* was completed in 383, around the time that Christianity gained the status of *religio*, or Roman public worship. The original text features two uses of terms derived from *δεδαιμονία* (*deisdaimonía*, cf. Acts 17:22; Acts 25:19), which St. Jerome translated as *superstitio*. In his translation of the *Letter to the Colossians* (Col 2:23), Jerome also uses the word *superstitione* as an equivalent of the ancient Greek *ἐθελοθησκία* (*ethelothrēskía*), or a cult invented by men.

Disassociating the “Way” (“Teaching”)⁷ from *superstitio* required the introduction of new terminology. It came from Tertullian (c.155–c.220), who coined the term “religious liberty” (orig. *libertas religionis*). To give it meaning, Tertullian set out to establish a new understanding of *religio*. After all, formally, nothing at that time could challenge the freedom of Roman public worship. The only threat could come from peculiar *superstitiones*,

which were gaining disturbing interest among Roman citizens, especially from Christians, a *novum superstitio*, originating from the infamous Judea. In his dictionary, Tertullian drew no sharp distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*. This dichotomy was replaced by another: *religio licita* – legal religion, which was tolerated, and *religio illicita* – illegal religion, which was not.

At the beginning of Chapter XXI of Tertullian's *Apology*, Judaism is presented as *religio licita*, a cult formally recognised by Rome. Christianity, while distinct from Judaism, grew out of it and, in his opinion, it deserved a similar privilege. This is a turning point in the defence of Christianity in *Apology*. *Religio*, a word that can be pluralised, ceases to be a term reserved for the Roman public cult, which he calls *religio Romanorum* (or *religio Romana*). So, in systematising the spiritual life of the Roman Empire, Tertullian ultimately distinguishes three categories: *religio Romanorum*, *religio licita*, and *religio illicita*. This was a real breakthrough in thinking about religious policy, a departure from Seneca's thesis, which reflected the foundation of religious thinking in Rome during the persecution of Christians. According to Tertullian, wherever a deity is worshipped, there is religion, even if it is false gods that are worshipped. *Superstitio*, therefore, would also be a religion, and if the sovereign allows its practice, it will gain the status of *religio licita*. In Chapter XXIV of *Apology*, we read:

Let one man worship God, another Jove; let this man raise suppliant hands to heaven, that man to the altar of Fides; let one (if you so suppose) count the clouds as he prays, another the panels of the ceiling; let one dedicate his own soul to his god, another a goat's. Look to it, whether this also may form part of the accusation of irreligion—to do away with freedom of religion (orig. *libertatem religionis*), to forbid a man choice of deity, so that I may not worship whom I would, but am forced to worship whom I would not. No one, not even a man, will wish to receive reluctant worship.

Why, the Egyptians are allowed full freedom in their empty superstition, to make gods of birds and beasts, and to condemn to death any who may kill a god of that sort. Every individual province, every city, has its own god (...) But we alone are forbidden a religion of our own (orig. *religionis proprietate*). We injure the Romans, we are reckoned not to be Romans, because we do not worship the god of the Romans.⁸

Tertullian did not attempt to hide Christians' hostility towards the deities of the "Roman religion". Indeed, expecting members of Christian communities to participate in the Roman public cult would be an attack on the essence of Christian identification. While *religio Romanorum* would be a futile and absurd superstition for followers of Christ, they had to accept that it was the public cult of Rome, dear to the imperial authority. Moreover, they also could not challenge the authority's dominion/sovereign authority in matters unrelated to religion (cf. Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–14).

Under Roman law, Christians were denied the right to legal protection. The rationale was that allowing them such recourse would be as unreasonable as granting a person accused of homicide the right to kill others.⁹ Exoneration for murder required proving that the defendant had been falsely accused. The same rules applied to Christian identity: Merely bearing witness that one was not a follower of Christ freed one from criminal liability. Tertullian sought to change the status quo. He wrote the *Apology* in the form of a Ciceronian advocacy speech, seeking to prove that professing Christianity was not a criminal act and did not pose a threat to the *Roman pax deorum*. The author took up the accusations against Christians and their “Teaching”, carefully refuting them one by one. In so doing, his goals were threefold: To (1) acquaint the Roman magistrate with the tenets of Christianity, in order to (2) make it familiar with the sources of self-identification of the disciples of Christ, and to (3) demonstrate that Christianity did not threaten the public order. Tertullian also put forward a thesis that was to prove fundamental for advocates of religious freedom in subsequent epochs: That the conformism of worldviews enforced by law has nothing to do with actual religiosity (it ridicules the deity to whom the sacrifice is made without sincere intentions) and is therefore clearly unjust and denies human freedom.

It might easily seem unjust that free men should be compelled to sacrifice against their will, for in other acts of divine service a willing mind is enjoined. It would certainly seem silly for a man to be forced by another to honour the gods whom he ought to wish to please on his own account (...)¹⁰

In turn, in a letter addressed to Scapula (*Ad Scapulam* 2.1), proconsul of Africa between 211 and 213, Tertullian wrote:

We are worshippers of one God, of whose existence and character Nature teaches all men; at whose lightnings and thunders you tremble, whose benefits minister to your happiness. You think that others, too, are gods, whom we know to be devils. However, it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature (orig. original humani iuris et naturalis potestatis est), that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man’s religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion – to which free-will and not force should lead us – the sacrificial victims even being required of a willing mind (orig. *Sed nec religionis est cogere religionem, quae sponte suscipi debeat, non vi; cum et hostiae ab animo libenti expostulentur*). You will render no real service to your gods by compelling us to sacrifice. For they can have no desire of offerings from the unwilling, unless they are animated by a spirit of contention, which is a thing altogether undivine.¹¹

In the above excerpts, three notions of historical importance come to the fore. First, belief in a transcendent power is natural; second, worshipping is, by its very nature, a human right (*humani iuris*); and third, forced public worship has nothing to do with actual religiosity (*sed nec religionis est cogere religionem*) and is therefore irrational. The second and third points warrant further comment.

In his argument, Tertullian did not appeal to Christian revelation, or to the idea that eternal divine law determines the “natural order of things” (laws of nature). Despite the Stoic intellectual formation he received in his youth, he did not refer here to a transcendent power or divine providence (*providentia deorum*), and thus the source of eternal and unchanging law governing nature. At the same time, *ius naturale* was not for him a stylistic ornament reserved for rhetorical purposes. As it was for numerous Roman jurists, this term, considering its ambiguity, did not represent a special value either in legal practice or in theoretical reflection on law.¹² Tertullian made “natural reason” (*naturalis ratio*) the basis of reasoning when confronted with legal coercion in matters of faith. After all, for his contemporaries, *ius* was not a source of subjective citizen rights that could supersede political will, but the reasonable natural order of things, whose obviousness would not be rejected by rational beings.¹³

Aware that his readers would not be interested in philosophical or theological speculations, Tertullian followed a path of pragmatism, which was typical for Roman jurists. Religious persecution would not benefit either the deities of the Roman pantheon or Rome itself. This situation raises questions about the usefulness of fighting the “Way”:

But now suppose what protects us to be false, and really presumption; still it is necessary: silly – but useful since those who believe in it are driven to be better men, by fear of eternal punishment, by hope of eternal refreshment. So it is in no one’s interest that tenets should be called false or judged silly, which it is in the interests of all to be presumed true. What is beneficial cannot be condemned on any grounds. It is with you that the presumption lies, in condemning what is useful. In the same way, neither can these tenets be silly. At all events, even if they are false and silly, they are harmful to no one. For they are just like many other tenets on which you lay no penalties, vain tenets, sheer fable, but exempt from accusation and punishment, because harmless.¹⁴

The repression of Christians is an unreasonable act; therefore, the law sanctioning persecution, “a human work” (*ab homine concepta est*), was, like many other laws, not only erroneous and absurd, but also unjust.¹⁵ *Libertas religionis* is an emanation of *ius naturalis*, not because it is a gift of Heaven, but because it is a self-evident prompting of reason. A law not examined by the judgement of reason is tyrannical, while demanding submission to it is, by definition, unfair. For the justice of the law is, crucially, not decided by its

own conviction, but by those who are subject to it.¹⁶ Recognising that the measure of the justice of the law is the conviction of its subjects as to its justice, to whom what was established by the will of the human legislator appears as reasonable thanks to the use of common knowledge (natural reason), Tertullian entered the field that would be occupied, many centuries later, by the Enlightenment contractarians and promoters of natural rights. This language, unavoidably, had seemed to his contemporaries a difficult “foreign tongue”.

2.3 The politics of toleration – the ancient perspective

Just as we use the Machiavellian term *stato* – introduced in *The Prince* and *The Discourses* to describe an abstract political entity, distinct from specific regimes like the Greek *polis*, the Roman *civitas* or *res publica*, or the medieval *dominium* – we also tend to use the contemporary language of human rights to reconstruct the legal situation of individuals in historical contexts that lacked the very concept of fundamental rights as we understand them today: Rights belonging to every human being without exception, by virtue of his or her humanity. In doing so, however, we risk falling into anachronism – by projecting contemporary ideas onto past societies that understood such concepts differently, or not at all.

Such a pitfall has occurred, for example, in studies on the history of religious freedom, which presumed that this liberty might be found on the Cyrus Cylinder (539 BC), where the Persian ruler Cyrus II the Great (reigned 559–530 BC) announced, after the capture of Babylon, that he had agreed to exercise the rites of local populations in non-Persian temples and other places of worship.¹⁷ In the case of Western Civilisation, this freedom, as commonly asserted, was initiated by proclamation of Constantine I the Great (reign 306–337) and Licinius Augustus (reign 308–324), named the *Edict of Milan* (313), where, as Lactantius (c.250–c.325) reported, it was stated: “we have decided [...] to grant to Christians and all others freedom to profess whatever religion they wish” {orig. “*in tractatu haberemus [...] ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem quam quisque voluisset (...)*”}.¹⁸

However, these imperial decrees are not an affirmation of the rights of human beings, but an emanation of the ruler to expand toleration to embrace subjects who do not participate in the official cult. The difference is significant: Religious freedom is a manifestation of freedom as such, while toleration is an act of will of the “tolerant”, who distinguishes what can be patiently and leniently endured from what cannot be permitted to exist. Religious freedom is rooted in the inalienable character of the individual who possesses it, inscribed in the unchangeable characteristic of the subject enjoying it, while toleration is a licensed, conditional, negotiable, and revocable privilege granted by a sovereign. Therefore, toleration cannot be understood as an obvious and necessary political affirmation of religious freedom. The former

is the refraining of those in power from persecution or a renunciation of establishing formal prohibitions or imposing obligations, while the latter does not recognise the legitimacy of the sovereign to use power against undesirable identities. At the same time, toleration on the part of state authorities does not entail unconditional political inclusion of the tolerated. The tolerated, refusing to participate in official religious practices, do not provide evidence of civic identification with the sociopolitical order nor show genuine concern for its successful development. Their actual participation in the political community may therefore be questioned. Remaining outside or on the fringes of society may make it impossible to reap the same benefits one receives by remaining inside of it.

While the discussion on religious freedom as a legal category focuses on the individual (the entitled entity), this is not necessarily the case with tolerance in matters of religion. A brief look at two terms that are often used interchangeably – tolerance and toleration – will be helpful here. The first refers to the disposition of an agent that is, ready to tolerate “otherness” with regard to, for example, a worldview, denominational affiliation, or religion. It is the willingness to tolerate somebody or something (opinions, behaviour, life choices, identity) one dislikes or rejects personally. Toleration, on the other hand, is not a personal attitude, but a deliberate public policy permitting a behaviour or actions to be taken (to be legally accepted or recognised). Here, our attention is focused on the political decision-maker – ready to tolerate given views, attitudes, practices, or religious associations – creating appropriate legal guarantees or issuing an act of toleration that protects what is “tolerated”. In the case of religious freedom, one focuses attention on the subject of this freedom; in the case of toleration, the state policy is called upon to officially tolerate unpopular beliefs or practices.¹⁹

The *Edict of Milan* is a toleration act that ends the period of persecution and opens a new chapter in the functioning of the church.²⁰ Although formally, the emperors decided to

grant both to Christians and to all men freedom to follow whatever religion each wished, in order that whatever divinity there is in the seat of heaven may be appeased and made propitious towards us and towards all who have been set under our power.

Decreeing that everyone is free to “give his mind to the observances of the Christians or to that religion which he felt was most fitting to himself”, in fact, the edict was a confirmation of the social position of Christianity, replacing the traditional official religion in both parts of the Roman Empire. Over time, Christianity, a cult strictly distinguished from public order and perceived as fundamentally hostile to it, became an immanent part of it. This process went surprisingly smoothly: As early as 325, Emperor Constantine was actively participating in a council he convened in Nicaea, where the *Nicene Creed* was adopted, which established the orthodoxy of Christian

doctrine. In 380, Emperor Theodosius I the Great (reign 379–395), in an anti-Arian edict *De fide catholica (the Edict of Orthodoxy or the Edict of Thessalonica)*,²¹ expressed his will for all his subjects to accept “Nicene symbol”,²² what finished religious toleration in the Roman Empire, announcing the persecution of pagans and heretics (followers of Christ who did not accept the *Nicene Creed*). This is how Theodosius became a defender of the orthodoxy (the Trinitarian doctrine). His imperial command contains the following:

It is Our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans, as the religion which he introduced makes clear even unto this day. It is evident that this is the religion that is followed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity; that is, according to the apostolic discipline and the evangelic doctrine, we shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity.

We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with the divine judgment.²³

De fide catholica inscribed the Christian faith into law. The Gospel became the *religio* of the Empire while other convictions gained the status of *superstitio*.²⁴ We look at this act of political will from various perspectives, but perhaps most revealingly in juxtaposition with the three-element perspective of a Christian’s presence in the world: (1) a seeker (participant) of the Kingdom of God, (2) a faithful member of the church, and (3) a resident of the state (subject, citizen).

Since the times of the Apostles, Christians have anticipated the imminent return of Christ (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17; Luke 4:43), the Kingdom of God, and have desired to share in it. They should seek this kingdom in earnest (Matt 6:33; Matt 13:44–46), and those who find it will indeed belong to Him (John 3:3). The Kingdom has three forms: (1) the sovereign power of God the Father (“the order of God’s justice”); (2) the spiritual relationship with the son of God (“order of grace”); and (3) Christ’s millennial reign on Earth (the “order of glory”) as described in the Book of Revelation.

The first figure is the reality of God’s laws in the world of human affairs, social moral patterns, and statutory law in accordance with God’s will, with His eternal and perfect plan, as revealed in the Bible, which compelled the Old Testament prophets to call for faithfulness. The second figure is spiritual – the

inscription by the power of the Holy Spirit of the principles of God’s justice into the heart of the follower of God’s Son (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26; Heb 8:8–11; 2 Cor 3:3–6). The third is the return of God’s Son, who will reign in His glory on Earth.²⁵

The Kingdom of God as the “order of grace” gathers those who enter into a mystical relationship—a spiritual union between the Redeemer and the redeemed—in which the redeemed submit their entire selves to the rule of the Redeemer, allowing God’s Spirit to guide their lives (Luke 17, 20–21; Rom 14:17). So understood, the Kingdom of God is the spiritual experience of people of faith who, in the New Covenant, confess in their hearts the Saviour as their Lord (King); the Kingdom is built with subsequent conversions of sinners who rebel against “living according to the flesh”. The Kingdom of God as the “order of glory” is a reality yet to come; it is a prophetic announcement of *Parousia* (the second coming of the Messiah) and His thousand-year-long “physical” reign on Earth, together with those who remained faithful to Him (Rev 20:4), when “under Christ unity to all things in heaven and on earth will be brought” (Eph 1, 10) and God will become “all in all” [Greek πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν (*panta en pasin*), 1 Cor 15:28].

The church is not synonymous with the Kingdom of God. But it is a place of gathering [Greek ἐκκλησία (*ekklesiá*); Latin *ecclesia*] of the people of God in the name of Christ (Matt 18:20). The church is the leaven of the Kingdom of God and the announcement of its coming (Eph. 3:9–11); a sign of its approaching, realising the aspiration for its coming. The church does not encompass the whole of creation, in which He becomes “all in all”. It can, however, accommodate those not actually in unity with God, though this contention has divided Christians. Therefore, the church cannot be equated with the Kingdom of God.

Meanwhile, Theodosius’ decision to require his subjects (except for Jews) to join the church community was an authoritative attempt to bring eschatological reality closer: Obligatory baptism of those under his power was to radically accelerate the achievement of a state in which God was “all in all”. Submitting his subjects to the rule of Christ in His Kingdom was a political act which, in the initiator’s intention, would bear spiritual consequences. Nonetheless, it was based on an imperial order and not the result of divine intervention. While evangelical justification for such a measure is elusive, encouragement for it can be found in the *Parable of the Feast* in the Gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 14:23).²⁶ The political ruler will here be a “servant” ordered to bring those who resist to enter “His house” (the church), even with the use of force (Latin *compelle intrare*).

De fide catholica not only fundamentally changed the religious policy of the Roman Empire, but also how the church was understood – its conditions of membership and its destiny – and even the perception of the three-fold nature of the Kingdom of God and the role of secular authority, the state, in its growth, or advent.²⁷ Here, the emperor, the ruler of the earthly empire, whose primary task should be to announce the coming of the Kingdom of

God, becomes the most effective tool in building the church. A human cannot boast such “evangelising effectiveness”. With one decision of the Roman Emperor, Christ’s reign on Earth became radically closer. It should come as no surprise, then, that the successors of Theodosius received divine glory (deification via imperial power), titling them with the dignity of “king high priest” [Greek ἀρχιερεὺς βασιλεὺς (*archiereus basileus*)]. The emperor, while not administering the sacraments, remains a defender of the true faith (orthodoxy), following the example of Melchizedek of the Old Testament.²⁸ As “equal to the apostles” [Greek ἰσαπόστολος (*isapostolos*)] and “Bishop of those outside” [of the church, Greek ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτός (*episkopos ton ektos*)],²⁹ he takes care of those who will one day enter the church as a result of measures taken by the secular power. Imperial power imitates [Greek μίμησις (*mimesis*)] the reign of Christ, and the Roman Empire, *per analogiam*, is to be an earthly reflection of His Kingdom.

The *Act of Theodosius* culminated a process that took place in the Christian world and was of fundamental importance for its ecclesiology. A small, radical sect operating on the fringe of Judaism (persecuted by the Jews and initially ignored by the Romans), fragmented into local communities of Christ’s followers in the Roman Empire. It was heterogeneous in both its teaching and rituals, and gained in the Constantinian era the right to exist among other religious identities. Thanks to Theodosius’ decision, it then became a state church, the only true (apostolic) and indivisible one. As the *Nicene Creed* states: There is one and only one “universal and apostolic church” (Greek καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία; Latin *catholica et apostolica Ecclesia*), and all who question that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is of the same substance as the Father are excluded. Apostolic teaching looks for formulas (dogmatic determinations) that allow the essence of Christian doctrine to be preserved free of the errors that wash faith away from its substance.

Half a century after the *Act of Theodosius*, the Council of Constantinople characterised the church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” (Greek μία, ἁγία, καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία; Latin *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica Ecclesia*). No fellowship could remain outside its boundaries and call itself the true church and be tolerated in the Roman Empire. Formally, each local congregation would be a church as long as it remained in communion (institutionally, ritually, and above all doctrinally) with the state church of the Empire. Consequently, maintaining unity was a condition for the authenticity, ergo holiness (apostolic character), of local Christian congregations.³⁰ This unity was maintained until the Council of Chalcedon (451), when theological disputes over the nature of Christ permanently divided the Christian world (Latin *Christianitas*), despite the sincere efforts of Emperor Marcian to preserve it.³¹

In the western part of the Empire, the institutional church continued to resist attempts to subordinate it to imperial authority. Figures such as Bishop Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–c. 397) or Pope Gelasius I – who articulated the “two swords” doctrine to distinguish secular from ecclesiastical power – defended

its autonomy. Yet, despite these efforts, the church became permanently entangled in political competition, functioning as part of the political system, irrevocably incorporated into the apparatus of governance in the Christian world (*Christianitas*).

Close cooperation between the church and state survived both the fall of the Western Empire and the subsequent division of the church in 1054. Crucially, the teachings of the reformers [especially Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)] did not free the church from political dependence – even if the Protestant understanding of the universality of the church put forth in the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Confession of Faith* differs from that of the Roman Catholic tradition.³²

The Peace of Augsburg (1555), ending the religious war in the German Reich, established the rule “whose realm, his religion” (Latin *cuius regio, eius religio*), thus leading to the “marriage between throne and altar”, effectively and irreversibly confessionalising the states of the Reich, while sacralising public authority.³³ This principle lifted hopes for the peaceful coexistence of the religiously divided German principalities, at the price of their subjects no longer adhering to a religious doctrine that was close to them, but different from the beliefs of the rulers.³⁴ The church constantly faced pressure from the political authorities, which sought transcendent legitimacy while at the same time viewing religious pluralism as a threat to political stability and social unity within their jurisdictions. Religious conformism – unity enforced by political power – remained the norm in the permanently fragmented Christian world. The “Free church of free people”, enduring pressure from both those in power and Christians who were ready to use the instruments of political power to defend the orthodoxy they had established, would remain an unfulfilled ideal, one spoken of since the time of the apostles.

The instrumental treatment of the church took on a special dimension under Henry VIII Tudor (reign 1509–1547). The monarch’s decision to exclude the Catholic Church in England from the authority of the Bishop of Rome, after nearly nine centuries of unity, had no theological basis. It was not a delayed effect of John Wyclif’s (c.1328–c.1384) teachings and the Lollard tradition and a response to the “heretical” translation of the Bible into English by William Tyndale (c.1494–c.1536). It was not dictated by the monarch’s doctrinal doubts regarding the evangelical foundations of the ecclesial order of the Roman Church. This act grew out of concern for the future of the Tudors on the English throne. Indeed, the reform of the Church in England was a top-down political decision – it was not inspired by English theologians questioning papal primacy, nor was it a response to the expectations of the people of England. The institutional union of *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in the English monarchy in 1534 was a local return to the reality of the late Roman Empire. Henry VIII sought such extensive power in the church that his intentions exceeded the ambitions of even the Roman *archiereus basileus*. Since the Roman emperors were forced to struggle with opponents of Caesaropapism (a secular ruler like an emperor or king also

holding supreme authority over the church) on the one hand, and religious non-conformists on the other, there had to be opposition to the power of Henry and his successors over the Church in England, as well as the conscience of their subjects. The desire to crush resistance plunged England into fratricidal war less than a century after the death of Henry VIII.

2.4 Doctrinal defence of monarchical power in the Church of England

Rampant dissatisfaction with the progress of “de-Catholicisation” of the Church of England during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) became the basis for Puritanism, a religious and social movement. Some Puritans expected a profound reform of the state church, following the example of Scottish Presbyterianism.³⁵ Others believed that the Church was structurally and functionally incapable of cleansing itself of the vestiges of the “papistic” tradition or effectively separating the “saints” [regenerated people who faithfully followed the path of the Gospel, being “the light of the world” (Matt 5:14)] from unrepentant sinners who were worthy only of condemnation, but were allowed to participate, without major obstacles, in the sacramental life of the Church of England.³⁶ These were Puritan Separatists, who opted to secede from the permanently contaminated state church in England and create independent “congregations”, composed of people joined in “covenant of the faithful” at the presence of God (Matt 18:20), in response to God’s “covenant of grace” with the people that God was pleased to choose.³⁷

Robert Browne established such a congregation in Norwich in 1579. With his publication of two pamphlets in 1582 in the Dutch city of Middelburg – *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie*; and *A Booke Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of All True Christianity* – Browne is considered to have forged the first path of Separatism. The first pamphlet treated the reform of the Church as work free from the influence of political power. The second described the need to adopt an ecclesial system based on the autonomy of local congregations (the gathered church).

The Church is understood here as a particular “assembly of saints” – “saints” being those who experienced regeneration and voluntarily (without official recognition) make up a congregation of Christ’s followers (Matt 18:20) – not as a territorially organised parish system; one or another Christian denomination; or universally understood [Greek καθολικός (katholikos)] Church of Christ.³⁸ Such was Browne’s influence that the Separatists were widely called Brownists. Although Browne himself returned to the Church of England after a few years, even getting ordained ministry in *Anglicana Ecclesia* in 1591, he set in motion a process that led to perennial divisions in the Puritan movement.

Separatism was an open challenge to monarchical authority in the church, heralding the disintegration of parish life in the Kingdom of England. Removing the monarch’s subjects – members of the Church of England from the moment of obligatory baptism in infancy – from the administrative

structures of the parish, operating within the jurisdiction of a given bishop, exercising his ecclesial office at the will of the monarch, all these were perceived as antisocial and antistate actions; not only an obvious act of disobedience, but also an insult to the king's majesty, and even a rebellion amounting to high treason.³⁹ Rebellion requires an appropriate political response. However, the Brownists' reference to the will of the Creator, in response to whose summons a covenant is concluded, which is the basis for establishing a community (church), also required a different type of reasoning: Coherent doctrinal argumentation based on theological explanations. This task was undertaken by the Anglican clergyman and outstanding theologian of the Elizabethan era, Richard Hooker (1554–1600), the author of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiasticall Politie*.⁴⁰

In his reflections on state–church relations, Hooker is strongly rooted in the ecclesial tradition of the Christian Roman Empire. The difference is that his world was composed of independent monarchies and was not in the hands of the sovereign of a vast Christian Empire, as it had been in Theodosius I's lifetime. In Hooker's England, it was the Tudors' dominion. Despite the marked difference, the constitutional principle remains almost unchanged (except for the issue of possible investiture disputes). Just as the Roman Emperor held the title *archiereus basileus*, the English Monarch was known as *fidei Defensor* – a title granted to Henry VIII by Pope Leo X in 1521 in recognition of his efforts to combat Martin Luther's teachings in England. When, under the decree *De fide catholica*, the Roman Empire's domain overlapped both jurisdictionally and in substances with that of the church (since every imperial subject was ultimately expected to become a Christian with a community united by the *Nicene Creed*), so the national community of the Christian world of Hooker's times, being a political community (the English commonwealth), is also a confessional one (a state church), professing the *Thirty-nine Articles of Faith*. As Hooker maintains:

We hold, that seeing there is not any man of the Church of England but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth; nor any man a member of the commonwealth, which is not also of the Church of England; therefore as in a figure triangular the base doth differ from the sides thereof, and yet one and the selfsame line is both a base and also a side; a side simply, a base if it chance to be the bottom and underlie the rest: so, albeit properties and actions of one kind do cause the name of a commonwealth, qualities and functions of another sort the name of a church to be given unto a multitude, yet one and the selfsame multitude may in such sort be both, and is so with us, that no person appertaining to the one can be denied to be also of the other. Contrariwise, unless they against us should hold, that the church and the commonwealth are two, both distinct and separate societies, of which two, the one comprehendeth always persons not belonging to the other (...)⁴¹

In the above fragment, the analogy of the triangle conveys the mystery of the union of church and state, despite the obvious differences between them. Nominally, the church and the state are two distinct entities (two different sides of the triangle), but they are not physically separated from one another, because the “conceptual removal” of one of them deprives the other of the ability to perform its specific tasks. If the church and the political community stand for the sides of a triangle, the triangle itself is a society that remains united. In the case of England, it is the people of England once perceived as a political community (commonwealth) and sometimes as the church. When at the base of the triangle (*ergo* the people of England) is the Church of England, the people of England will appear to us as the visible Christian church in England; when we put it on the monarchy side, the people of England will present themselves to us as the subjects of Queen Elizabeth I. However, it will invariably be the same triangle (*ergo*, the people of England). There is one indivisible people of England – that is, the Christian society of Christian England, in which ecclesial and political identification cannot be treated separately (cutting one off from the other).

While there are obvious differences between *ecclesia* and commonwealth, they arise solely from their functions. Adopting the logic of a patrimonial understanding of society, as Hooker does, one confirms that the person at the head of the people, as its guardian, is the person of the monarch, who determines the preservation of the *summus ecclesia*: The state and the church, inextricably intertwined. The role of the earthly ruler is to take care of the good of the people, entrusted to his solicitude by Providence. Implementing this obligation effectively requires taking measures to maintain the unity of the people. Even potential sources of division should, therefore, be eliminated. Confessional pluralism also presents a clear challenge to maintaining people’s integrity. Additionally, the monarch, following the example of the kings of ancient Israel, must ensure “purity of worship” so that his subjects do not fall into idolatry or heresy. This is essentially enough to justify royal authority, both in the state and in the Church of England.

The passage below offers the metaphor of “wall(s) of separation”, which we encounter in the reading of state–church relations in Roger Williams’ memorable letter to John Cotton, half a century after the publication of *Of the Lawes...* In his understanding of separatism, promoted by opponents of the state church, Hooker emphasises that:

(...) bishops may not meddle with the affairs of the commonwealth, because they are governors of another corporation, which is the church; nor kings with making laws for the church, because they have government not of this corporation, but of another divided from it, the commonwealth; and the walls of separation between these two must for ever be upheld. They hold the necessity of personal separation, which clean excludeth the power of one man’s dealing in both; we of natural, which doth not hinder, but that one and the same person may in both bear a principal sway.⁴²

Meanwhile, in Hooker's position, as we learnt earlier, the church and state are two different manifestations of the same body (two forms of its association). The unifying force is the monarch, who oversees the execution of law, both "civil laws" and "ecclesiastical commands", and who must be obeyed and honoured. As the Apostle Peter commanded: "Fear God, honor the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17).

When engaging in polemics with Puritan opposition, Hooker did not avoid confronting his views with the Bible. He accepted the rules of debate set by his adversaries, who sought authoritative solutions to all doctrinal disputes in the *Holy Scriptures*, and did not accept the reasoning of other sources, such as "natural order", which Hooker did not shy away from supporting.⁴³ As he went on to note, even an astute reader would not find in the *Holy Scriptures*' statements that question the institution of the state Church of England. Indeed, the Bible offers no standard for the ecclesial organisation of the people of God, unless we turn to the Old Testament model, with which Erastianism⁴⁴ (Anglicanism) is not divergent. *The New Testament* does not decide whether the visible church is to be based on the episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational formula.⁴⁵ It does not define what liturgy or church customs should look like.⁴⁶ The Puritans' challenge to the monarch's authority in the Church of England was more a political act than a religious one, and they fairly incurred the sovereign's wrath.

In response to Puritan Thomas Cartwright's accusation – that the Church of England tolerated iniquity in its ranks – instead of freeing itself from Catholic remnants and removing open sinners from sacramental life, Hooker turns to John Calvin, whose theology was the doctrinal foundation of Puritanism, and his reflections on the nature of the church. Calvinist ecclesiology assumes the dualism of the church, its visible and invisible forms. In Hooker's considerations, the former corresponds to *corpus politicum*, and takes into account the realities of the English state church, while he calls the latter *corpus mysticum*, which are the terms used in *Of the Lawes...* Like Calvin, Hooker notes that the visible church, and therefore the *corpus politicum*, is not a place of meeting for the righteous, but for sinners, including those committing idolatry or heresy ("*notorious improbitie*"), for which they could be excommunicated.⁴⁷ Righteousness is not the central criterion of belonging to the visible church, but public acknowledgement of the symbol – "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5) – which God's children in the visible church profess. The man's heart (his thoughts) remains hidden from others, and only God knows it; people are only able to recognise "external signs of faith", and baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity is one such sign.⁴⁸

Here, the emphasis is on the "external" sacramental life, not the Puritans' more common notion of the "internal" faith of the "saints", the fruits of which are observable to the surroundings.⁴⁹ Hooker did not deny that inner faith is the measure of belonging to the invisible church/*corpus mysticum*, understood as the "assembly of the faithful" (Latin *congregatio fidelium*) in the mystical Body of Christ. But public proof of possessing such faith did not condition participation in the visible church. The invisible church, the

spiritual connection of believers with Christ, is outside the world – its members are known only by God,⁵⁰ which makes it impervious to blemish. The visible church, the one of this world, is constantly tested by human nature corrupted by sin, gathering sinners at different stages on their path to holiness. In his argument on the nature of the church, Hooker relies on Chalcedonian Christology: Just as Christ has two natures, so too does the church of which He is the head: A spiritual or mystical one, and a physical or social/political one (Hooker preferred political).

Hooker's perception of the visible church was strongly inclusive and ecumenical, especially in relation to the Catholic Church. Despite that Church's "obvious errors", he had a friendly attitude towards it, but he was also clearly at odds with the rigourism of the Puritans, who were ready to impose on the visible church the requirements appropriate for *congregatio fidelium*. In Hooker's opinion, this rigorism was clear evidence of a misunderstanding of the nature of the visible church. The notion that it could be purified, thereby making it similar to the invisible church, was a utopian ideal that has haunted Christianity since ancient times. Accompanying, clearly distinguishing the invisible church from the visible one, while recognising the unity (inseparability) of the Church in its dual nature, allowed Hooker to confirm the special position of the English monarch in the latter.

For Hooker, adopting Puritan rigourism would be, for the Church of England, to enter the path of endless schismatic exclusivism, inevitably leading to the breakdown of its unity and a descent into sectarianism.⁵¹ In his argument, he uses the Gospel's *Parable of the Weeds* (Matt 13: 24–30).⁵²

In *Institutio religionis christianae*, John Calvin names the members of the invisible church "saints",⁵³ who, thanks to God's having elected them, remain in the grace of God's children, being authentic members of the Body of Christ through sanctification in the Holy Spirit. The invisible church, standing before the Almighty, gathers the "saints" who inhabit the Earth and those he has been chosen from the beginning of time – in other words, those faithful to God both in the New and the Old Covenant.

Calvin, meanwhile, describes the members of the visible church as a great mixture of hypocrites who are Christ's only in name and appearance; who, scattered around the world, call themselves the church, confessing "one God, one Jesus Christ"; who through baptism are initiated into the faith, through participation in the Lord's Supper profess unity with the true doctrine, observe the *Holy Scriptures*, and recognise the clergy whom Christ has appointed to preach His Word. At the same time, they are "ambitious, greedy, envious persons, evil speakers, and some of a quite unclean life. Such are tolerated for a time either because they cannot be convicted by a competent tribunal or because a vigorous discipline does not always nourish as it ought".⁵⁴ Therefore, the Church of England, as the visible church, was and would remain a bunch of hypocrites. If so, then to demand its final cleansing of open sinners would indeed be a misunderstanding of the nature and destiny of the visible church, and a utopian call of radicals who misread God's Word.

Hooker's and Calvin's understanding of the church's dualism is consistent with each other.⁵⁵ Here, though, the question arises as to whether the ecclesiology of Puritanism, which Hooker so thoroughly criticised, was consistent with the teachings of Calvin, whose doctrine the Puritans referenced constantly. Any potential dissonance is dispelled by Calvin's words at the end of his statement about the visible church: "(...) who are tolerated for a time either because they cannot be convicted by a competent tribunal or because a vigorous discipline does not always nourish as it ought". And this is what the Puritan hope of "sanctifying" the visible church is based on, so that it can ultimately gather only the genuinely faithful children of God, the 'saints'.

In the desired circumstances, when the iniquity of open sinners is proved to them, and discipline is enforced with full severity, the visible church will change its face, becoming like the invisible church. The Church of England deliberately abandoned this effort in order to encompass all the monarch's subjects, both those who were faithful to Christ and those who were not. For Puritans, the visible church is a gathering of 'saints' who sometimes make mistakes, even though they sincerely want to stay on the path of the righteous, by being subjected to strict church discipline. Such a church, built by people with God's help, is the true church of Christ, who is its head. It is no longer a church that merely condemns sin, but a church that desires to be free of it and strives in earnest to realise this desire. According to the Puritan opposition, the Church of England, saturated with iniquity – like the Roman Church – does not belong to Christ. The goal of the King of England and his bishops is not to advance the Kingdom of God on Earth, but to maintain supremacy over the Church, even at the cost of petrifying the wickedness of this world.

As a final note, the conditional nature of the sentence quoted above, taken from the *Institutio*..., does not mean that Calvin hoped for a complete purification of the visible church, as long as the discipline was effectively enforced. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the Consistory of Geneva did a great deal to accomplish this goal. Furthermore, Calvin unequivocally condemned those who, in their pride, thought that their communities were, or could be, a "radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27). Calvin observed that such tendencies had characterised the Cathars and Donatists; he listed Anabaptists among his contemporaries.⁵⁶ He reminded readers that Christ himself compared the church (the "Kingdom of Heaven" in the Gospel) to a net thrown into the sea, catching all kinds of fish, which would be sorted only on the shore, where some would be rejected (Matt 13:47–48). The *Parable of the Weeds* should be read in a similar light. Calvin's concluding remark leaves no doubt: "If the Lord declares that the church is to labor under this evil – to be weighed down with the mixture of the wicked – until the Day of Judgment, they are vainly seeking a church besmirched with no blemish".⁵⁷

Hooker, leveraging Calvin's authority, sought to position the Puritan reformers in opposition to Geneva's ecclesiological findings. We must remember, however, that Puritanism was by no means a homogeneous movement,

as the call to “purify” the Church of England in practice assumed varying degrees of radicalism. It is impossible to place Robert Browne or Henry Barrow (c.1550–c.1593) among the ranks of the “Presbyterian party”. Moreover, even the supporters of Thomas Cartwright, whom Hooker recognises in *Of the Lawes...* as his main adversary, did not maintain one opinion in this respect. What Calvin, Hooker, and the Presbyterian Puritanism did share was the belief that – regardless of the expected state of purity of the church that could be achieved by human means – secular power was obliged to use the “sword” against apparent heretics and idolaters.⁵⁸

Notes

- 1 In *De Clementia*, Seneca maintains: *Ergo quemadmodum religio deos colit, superstitio violat* (So in the way that religion functions to worship the gods but superstition to damage them) [Seneca, *De Clementia* (trans. ed. comm. S. Braund), Book 2: 5(1), Oxford University Press, New York 2009, pp. 144, 145.
- 2 A mocking phrase referring to irreligion is *superstitio falca ac malefica*. See: L. F. Janssen, ‘*Superstitio*’ and the Persecution of Christianity, “*Vigiliae Christianae*”, vol. 33, no. 2 (1979), p. 155.
- 3 Cf. C. Ando, *The Ontology of Religious Institutions*, in: *Religion of the Alien and the Limits of Toleration. Ancient Perspectives* (ed. P. Borgeaud), “*History of Religions*”, vol. 50, no. 1 (2010), p. 56.
- 4 Astrology and magic were associated with the Persian religion, and anything Persian was fundamentally suspect. Since the early republican times, these practices were banned by law as particularly dangerous superstitions. See: M. Beard, J. North, S. Price, *Religions of Rome, vol. 1: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 227, 236.
- 5 Pliny’s question to Trajan: “(...) whether the name [of being a Christian], even, though otherwise innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes that gather around it?” (W. S. Davis, *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from The Sources*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 2013, p. 220.
- 6 One of the oldest Christian sources, dated to the first half of the 2nd century, is titled *Διδαχὴ κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* (*The Lord’s Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*), popularly called *Didache* from the first word of the title.
- 7 The first trace of the use of the term “Christianity” [Greek *Χριστιανισμός* (*Christianismos*)] in the depiction of the “Way” is found in the tenth chapter of the *Letter of Ignatius of Antioch to the church in Magnesia* (end of the first century), where the author used this term to designate the way of life taught by the followers of Christ, which they distinguished from Judaism. We do not know how popular this term was among Christians themselves at that time. The case is different with the name “Christians” (Greek *Χριστιανός*, *Christianos*), which, in reference to the followers of Christ, occurs three times in the biblical text (cf. Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16). The Latin version (*Christiani*) was in common use in the first centuries of Christianity.
- 8 Tertullian, *Apology. De spectaculis. With an English translation by T.R. Glover. Minucius Felix; with an English translation by Gerald H. Rendall based on the unfinished version by W.C.A. Kerr*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1977, Chapter XXIV, 5–9, pp. 133, 135.
- 9 Cf. A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again*, “*The Journal of Theological Studies*”, vol. 3, no. 2 (1952), p. 205.
- 10 Tertullian, *Apology...*, XXVIII.1, p. 147.

44 Toleration, Freedom of Religion, and Church–State Relations

- 11 Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* in: A Roberts, J. Donaldson (eds.), *Ante Nicene Fathers, The Writings of the Fathers down to AD. 325*, vol. 3, The Christian Literature Publishing Group, Buffalo, 1885, p. 105.
- 12 A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law. An Introduction to Legal Philosophy*, Hutchinson University Library, London 1961, pp. 23–27.
- 13 J. M. Kelly, *A Short History of Western Legal Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 60–61.
- 14 Tertullian, *Apology...*, XLIX, 2–3, pp. 219–221.
- 15 Tertullian, *Apology...*, IV, 5–8, pp. 25, 27.
- 16

If I find that to be good which your law has forbidden, does not that presumption imply that the law cannot forbid me to do it, since it would only rightly forbid it if it were bad? If our law has made a mistake, well, I think, it was the creation of man; it did not come down from heaven (...) A law does not owe to itself alone a sure sense of its own justice; it owes it to those from whom it expects obedience. Contrariwise, a law is suspect which is unwilling to be examined—yes, and bad, if without such examination it tyrannises.

(Tertullian, *Apology...*, IV, 5, 13 pp. 25, 27, 29)

17

I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon ... to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy.

(R. A. Taylor, E. R. Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)*, vol. 21, B & H Publishing Group, Nashville 2004, pp. 31–32)

- 18 Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, (ed. and transl. J. L. Creed), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984, 48, 2, p. 70.
- 19 George W. Truett argues that the Baptists' ideal is not religious toleration but religious liberty, because it is all about the prerogatives of believers, who answer before the Creator, not the political power in spiritual matters:

Our contention is not for mere toleration, but for absolute liberty. There is a wide difference between toleration and liberty. Toleration implies that somebody falsely claims the right to tolerate. Toleration is a concession, while liberty is a right. Toleration is a matter of expediency, while liberty is a matter of principle. Toleration is a gift from human beings, while liberty is a gift from God.

(G. W. T, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, in: W. B. Shurden (ed.), *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Religious Liberty*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., Macon 1997, p. 63)

- 20 Two years earlier, the *Edict of Toleration* was issued by Emperor Galerius, signed by him and other Imperatores augusti: Licinius, Maximinus Daza, and Constantine the Great. The edict recognised Christianity as a “permitted cult”. Although Galerius's attitude towards Christians was fundamentally negative, he recognised the popularity of their cult and decided to tolerate their existence. The edict announces:

Among all the other arrangements which we always making for the advantage and benefit of the state, we had earlier sought to set everything in accordance

with the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans and to ensure that the Christians too, who had abandoned the way of life of their ancestors, should return to a sound frame of mind; for in some way such self-will had come upon these same Christians, such folly had taken hold on them, that they no longer followed those usages of the ancients which their own ancestors perhaps had first instituted, but, simply following their own judgements and pleasure, they were making up for themselves the laws which they were to observe and were gathering various groups of people together in different places. When finally, our order was published that they should betake themselves to the practices of the ancients, many were subjected to danger, many too were struck down. Very many, however, persisted in their determination and we saw that these same people were neither offering worship and due religious observances to the gods nor practising the worship of the god of the Christians. Bearing in mind therefore our own most gentle clemency and our perpetual habit of showing indulgent pardon to all men, we have taken the view that in the case of these people too we should extend our speediest indulgence, so that once more they may be Christians and put together their meeting-places, provided they do nothing to disturb good order (...).

(in: Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*..., , p. 70)

Nevertheless, it is assumed that the *Edict of Milan* ends the period of persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, because after the death of Galerius in 11, Maximinus returned to the policy of persecution in the eastern part of the Empire.

- 21 Formally, this edict was signed with Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II.
- 22 In 381, the Council of Constantinople adopted the supplemented symbol of faith of the universal church, that is, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, although this name would not be accepted until the 17th century.
- 23 C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, Book XVI, title 1, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1952, p. 440.
- 24 M. R. Salzman, "Superstitio" in the "Codex Theodosianus" and the Persecution of Pagans, "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 41, no. 2, (1987).
- 25 The threefold approach to the Kingdom of God in the experience of American society is the axis of H. R. Niebuhr's argument in *The Kingdom of God in America*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1988. The terms "order of grace" and "order of glory" were taken from that book.
- 26 "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full".
- 27 Augustine of Hippo attempted to establish the proper doctrinal relations between the political and ecclesial spheres and the eschatological reality in *The City of God*, a work written between 413 and 427, which has been constantly referenced by subsequent generations of Christians interested in recognising these distinctions.
- 28 D. J. Geanakoplos, *Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism*, "Church History", vol. 34, no. 4 (1965), pp. 381–403.
- 29 This title was given to Constantine I by Eusebius of Caesarea, who, writing about the emperor, contrasted him with the Divine Logos:

He who is the pre-existent Word, the Preserver of all things, imparts to his disciples the seeds of true wisdom and salvation, and at once enlightens and gives them understanding in the knowledge of his Father's kingdom. Our emperor, his friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God, aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God; proclaiming clearly in the ears of all, and declaring with powerful voice the laws of truth and godliness to all who dwell on the earth. Once more, the universal Saviour opens the heavenly gates of his Father's kingdom to those whose course is thitherward from this world. Our

emperor, emulous of his Divine example, having purged his earthly dominion from every stain of impious error, invites each holy and pious worshiper within his imperial mansions, earnestly desiring to save with all its crew that mighty vessel of which he is the appointed pilot. And he alone of all who have wielded the imperial power of Rome, being honored by the Supreme Sovereign with a reign of three decennial periods, now celebrates this festival, not, as his ancestors might have done, in honor of infernal demons, or the apparitions of seducing spirits, or of the fraud and deceitful arts of impious men; but as an act of thanksgiving to him by whom he has thus been honored, and in acknowledgement of the blessings he has received at his hands. He does not, in imitation of ancient usage, defile his imperial mansions with blood and gore, nor propitiate the infernal deities with fire and smoke, and sacrificial offerings; but dedicates to the universal Sovereign a pleasant and acceptable sacrifice, even his own imperial soul, and a mind truly fitted for the service of God.

[Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Oration of Eusebius Pamphilus in Praise of The Emperor Constantine* (transl. by E. C. Richardson), found in: Ph. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1*, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo 1890, p. 583]

- 30 A. A. Chibi, *The Wheat and the Tares: Doctrines of the Church in the Reformation*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene 2015, p. 2.
- 31 During the sixth session of the Council of Chalcedon, Marcian openly explained his intentions to the gathered:

At the beginning of our reign, when we had been chosen for it by divine judgement, before all other cares, however pressing, we thought nothing so worthy of deliberation and exertion as that everyone should be of a common mind as regards the orthodox faith, which is holy and true, and that no doubts about it should find a home in the souls of men. Because some people, on the one hand through love of money and on the other through evil factionalism, held divergent views and expounded to the masses teaching contrary to the faith of the holy fathers, the intermediate time has been found brimming with harmful error. Wishing to cure this, we have convoked your holy council, out of confidence that the great achievement of the labours of the journey will be the confirmation of true religion, so that the darkness which weighs on the minds of those in error may be dispersed and the human race may worship in accordance with the Godhead's revelation of itself to mankind by its own will and the exposition in the teaching of the holy fathers of the most pure and authentic faith which illuminates the souls of all, and so that in future every wilfulness may be suppressed in those who dare, on the subject of the generation of our Master and Saviour Jesus Christ, to believe or argue in a way contrary to what was proclaimed by the holy apostles and has now been handed down in harmony by our 318 holy fathers at Nicaea, in the way signified also by the letter sent to Flavian of devout memory, bishop of imperial New Rome, by the most God-beloved Leo archbishop of imperial Rome, who governs the apostolic see. Therefore, through the removal of all vicious factionalism, the suppression of all patronage, and denial of any place for insatiability, may the truth become manifest in your teaching. For it was to confirm what is being transacted and not to make a display of power that we decided to attend the council, making Constantine of divine memory our example, in order that, once the truth is discovered, the masses should not, seduced by the evil teaching of some, any longer be divided.

(R, Price and M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2005, pp. 215–216)

However, the imperial expectation was not fulfilled. The schism of the pre-Chalcedonian, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Syrian, and, consequently, Armenian Churches became a fact.

- 32 A detailed presentation of the positions of the Reformation fathers on this issue can be found in: Chibi, *The Wheat and the Tares...*, pp. 24–276.
- 33 See more: H. Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1992.
- 34 Here, homogeneity was considered a condition of unity, for which justification was sought in the words of Jesus, who said: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (Matt 12:25).
- 35 In the spirit typical of the teachings of the church reformer in Scotland, John Knox (c. 1513–1572), who, inspired by the teachings of John Calvin, demanded the abandonment of the episcopal system of the church in favour of the synodal authority of elders, that is, presbyters (Greek: *πρεσβύτεροι*), representing individual congregations in the general assembly of the Church of Scotland. Knox’s Presbyterianism became an inspiration for Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), an advocate of the reform of the Church of England, like Knox, based on the doctrine taken from John Calvin’s *Institutio religionis christianae*. Cartwright and other supporters of the Presbyterian reform of the Church of England did not question the need for political care of the church, but rejected political authority over it, as the head of the church is Christ alone. Following Calvin, Cartwright will claim that the state and the church are in fact two different organisms, with different characters: Tasks, powers, and destiny. The church should enjoy autonomy in the state and at the same time be a moral guide for it. The state that owns the “sword of justice” uses it to defend both tables of Moses, both against common criminals, heretics, and sowers of false religious doctrines. The goal of the advocates of the Presbyterian reform of the Church of England was to purify it in the spirit of Calvinist orthodoxy, not to establish freedom of conscience in the state. See: J. Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, Volume II, (transl. by T.S. Westow), Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, London 1960, pp. 388–391.
- 36 John Calvin reminded us that Christ connected in himself the Old Testament figures of Prophet, Priest, and King. The same is true of His church. The prophetic duty of the church is to preach the Word of God, the priestly duty is to administer the sacraments, and the royal duty is to discipline its members when they stumble (Matt 18:15–18). Meanwhile, the Church of England fulfilled, according to the Puritans, only the first two roles – that is, preaching the Word of God and sacramental service – but was not willing to discipline open sinners. Calvin’s teaching about the church proved a useful tool in the doctrinal fight against defenders of the status quo. See: J. R. Coggins, *The Theological Position of John Smyth*, “The Baptist Quarterly”, vol. 30, no. 6 (1984), p. 248.
- 37 B. R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition: from the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers*, Oxford University Press, London 1971, pp. 53–63. The idea of the covenant occupies a central place in Puritan theology, which has many forms. The three basic types of covenant are: “covenant of redemption”, understood as an agreement between Christ and the Father, in which Jesus consents to a redemptive death for believers; “covenant of works”, understood as an agreement between the Creator and the creature in which God makes promises of eternal life to the offspring of Adam and Eve, who will remain completely faithful to God’s law, arranging their lives according to its provisions (a feature of this covenant is its conditionality); and “covenant of grace”, understood as an unconditional agreement between God and His chosen ones, who, aware of their inability to

- persevere in the covenant of works, believing in the redemptive death of Christ, gain access to the Father. The essence of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace was established in the *Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646* (Chapter 7).
- 38 On the Separatists' definition of the church and the method of its organisation, read: E. S. Morgan, *Roger Williams, the Church and State*, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., New York 1967, pp. 18–24.
 - 39 If the *Act of Supremacy of 1534* made the monarch, without any reservations, “the only supreme head on Earth of the Church of England”, then constructing an alternative ecclesial reality, not subject to this headship, meant that either the *Anglicana Ecclesia* is not a church, or the monarch's authority over the Church in England is *de facto* apparent.
 - 40 The first attempts to theologically justify the *Act of Supremacy of 1534* were made shortly after its announcement. These were: *De vera differentia regiae potestatis et ecclesiasticae*, by E. Foxe (1534); R. Sampson's *Oratio* (1534); *De vera obedientia*, S. Gardiner (1535).
 - 41 J. Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*, vol. 3, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1888, p. 330.
 - 42 Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*, vol. 3, p. 330.
 - 43 See: B. Szlachta, *Monarchia prawa? Angielska myśl polityczna doby Tudorów*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2008, pp. 598–606.
 - 44 Erastianism – a doctrine providing for the supremacy of political power over the church community. The name of the doctrine comes from the name of the Zwinglian theologian and physician of Heidelberg, Thomas Erastus (1524–1583). Erastus denied the church authorities the right to impose excommunication on church members, arguing that the only entity authorised to assess social behaviour is the magistracy. Erastus also maintained that public authorities should not allow religious pluralism in their jurisdiction. Although he did not promote the absolute supremacy of political power over the ecclesial order, his name was used to describe it. The differences between Erastus's position and the doctrine of Erastianism were highlighted by John Neville Figgis (see: J. N. Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1914, pp. 293–342). Nowadays, Erastianism is identified with Henry's reform of the church in England, with the idea of the supremacy of monarchical power in the ecclesial sphere. Cf.: Szlachta, *Monarchia prawa?*.... pp. 202–203.
 - 45 It is significant that Hooker does not refer here to the issue of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the Church, because neither he nor the Puritan opposition recognised the biblical foundations of the teaching of the Catholic Church in this respect.
 - 46 See the full argument in: J. Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*, vol. 1, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1888, pp. 338–415.
 - 47 See the full argument in: Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*...., p. 342.
 - 48 See the full argument in: J. Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*...., pp. 339, 342.
 - 49 Referring to the dualistic description of the church, typical of the Zwinglian-Calvinist (Reformed, in today's parlance) tradition, allowed Hooker to conduct a theological dialogue with the Puritan opposition. In turn, emphasising the importance of the sacramental service of the visible church allowed him to maintain doctrinal contact with Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. It is worth recalling the 19th Article of Faith of the Church of England:

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the

same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also, the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.

For comparison, in point VII of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530, we find a very similar statement:

Also they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught, and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: '*One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all,*' etc. Eph. 4, 5–6.

Importantly, in both definitions of the church, its truthfulness is not dependent on maintaining "Apostolic succession", but on the preaching of true teaching (the church gathers around the Word of God) and sacramental service. The church is "Apostolic" because it transmits the Apostolic teaching which Christ's disciples received directly from Him.

- 50 Louis Berkhof, presenting the specificity of the invisible church, states that

(...) is said to be invisible, because she is essentially spiritual and in her spiritual essence cannot be discerned by the physical eye; and because it is impossible to determine infallibly who do and who do not belong to her. The union of believers with Christ is a mystical union; the Spirit that unites them constitutes an invisible tie; and the blessings of salvation, such as regeneration, genuine conversion, true faith, and spiritual communion with Christ, are all invisible to the natural eye; — and yet these things constitute the real forma (ideal character) of the church.

(L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Devoted Publishing, Woodstock 2017, p. 292)

- 51 A. S. McGrade (ed.), *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community*, Arizona State University, Tempe 1997, p. 255.

- 52 Keble, *The Works...* vol. 1., p. 343.

- 53 Although it would probably be more precise to point to the teachings of Augustine, whose comments on the nature of the church inspired Luther, Calvin, and Hooker. These reflections of the bishop of Hippo are the key to understanding Luther's *Geistliches Reich* and *Weltliches Reich*, Calvin's *forum conscientiae* and *forum externum*, as well as Hooker's *corpus mysticum* and *corpus politicum* (see: W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy*, "Studies in the History of Christian Thought", vol. 43, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1990, pp. 66–74).

- 54 J. Calvin (ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles), *Institutes of the Christian Religion, volume two*, book 4, chapter 1, point 7, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2006, pp. 1021–1022.

- 55 On Hooker's Calvinist inspirations, read D. Needlands, *The Use and Abuse of John Calvin in Richard Hooker's Defense of the English Church*, "Perichoresis", vol. 10 no. 1 (2012).

- 56 A similar interpretation of Mt 13:24–30 can be found in Martin Luther's sermon for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany:

(...) this Gospel condemns the Donatists, Novatians, Anabaptists, and other heretics, who zealously endeavored to establish a church free from all blemishes and composed of perfect saints. If therefore any Christian happened, through weakness, to commit some wrong, they excommunicated him on the spot and considered him no longer a brother. This procedure was in direct conflict with the

demands of Christ, who desires that the sinner should be brought to repentance, and that to this end the ministers of the church should seek, with all care and diligence, to assist the people to mend their ways and to repent of their sins.

[M. Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's House-postil, vol 1 (second edition)*, J. A. Schulze, Columbus 1884, pp. 270–271]

57 Calvin, *Institutes...*, book 4, chapter 1, point 13, p. 1028.

58 Martin Luther should be added to the list of those who perceive the role of the magistracy in this way. In his writings, a careful reader will find a call to reach for the “sword of secular power”, although the Wittenberg reformer repeatedly defended freedom of conscience. In *The Luther's House-Postil*, in the sermon for the second Sunday after Epiphany, we read:

(...) the civil government, as soon as it discovers abominable heresies by which the glory of Christ is diminished and the salvation of souls prevented, is in duty bound, yea that it has the office, to wield the sword and to exercise its full authority against those errors which bring divisions among the people and other great calamities, as we have experienced more than once. And if the teachers of false doctrines will not be convinced of their error, nor desist from their preaching, let the government use its power and compel them to refrain from their mischievous work, so that the true doctrine, and the proper worship of God, may be retained pure and unadulterated, that peace and harmony may prevail.

(Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's...*, p. 279)

In defence of pure doctrine, unadulterated service to God, peace, and unity, the sword of secular power will rightly be raised against the unorthodox and dissenters.

3 General Baptists

Freedom of conscience in the writings of Thomas Helwys, John Murton, and Leonard Busher

In order to suppress the emergence of dangerous ideas, in 1592, a law was enacted in England, popularly known as the *Act Against Puritans* (other names: *The Religion Act of 1592*, or the *Conventicle Act*). It required every person over 16 years of age to confirm membership in a local Anglican parish and regularly participate in services organised there, under the penalty of one month imprisonment. Recidivists were given a choice: Death or exile. Clergy who questioned the teachings and practices of the Church of England were particularly harshly disciplined.

A group of approximately forty London Separatists decided to go into exile, forming a Separatist church (also called The Ancient Church) at Southwark, and whose pastor, Francis Johnson (1563–1618), was imprisoned for spreading Brownist ideas. Amsterdam became their refuge. In 1597, the freed Francis Johnson joined the Amsterdam community. In 1608, another group of Separatists reached Amsterdam, including John Smyth, whose act of se-baptism in 1609 is considered the beginning of English Baptists' history.

3.1 John Smyth, Se-Baptist from Amsterdam

John Smyth (c. 1570–c. 1612) was a graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge University, a hotbed of Puritan ideas at that time. Francis Johnson had been one of his tutors. In 1594, Smyth was ordained by William Wickham, Bishop of Lincoln, but only three years later, he was known for openly criticising the Anglican liturgy (use of surplice), not finding any evangelical basis for it, and in 1598 vacated his position. Initially, his views remained in the mainstream of the Puritan Reformation, declaring loyalty to the state church. The situation changed in response to the issuance of decrees by James I in 1604, obliging all clergy in the kingdom to recognise the truth of the doctrine described in the *Thirty-nine Articles of Faith* and to base the liturgical order and other rites on *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹ Rejecting the possibility of submitting to the king's will and at the same time abandoning false hopes for the possibility of a thorough reform of the Church of England, Smyth joined the

ranks of dissidents, gathering around himself a group of Separatists from Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, in 1606. Smyth's congregation was joined by another Separatist fellowship, Scrooby in Nottinghamshire, led by John Robinson (1573–1625). Thomas Helwys, Smyth's close companion in his search for the true church, was among its members.

The Smyth–Robinson community reached Amsterdam in early 1608, joining the Ancient Church, Johnson's congregation. These communities remained united for a year, but their paths then diverged, mainly due to issues related to the structure of The Ancient Church and the way its finances were managed.² Johnson retained for himself the exclusive right to preach the Word and lead the congregation.³ The reasons for the separation were explained by Smyth in the treatise *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation* (1608), accusing Johnson of "Presbyterian tendencies", for which he found no basis in the Holy Scriptures.⁴ In the dispute over how a well-ordered church should be structured, Smyth was supported by Thomas Helwys and John Murton.⁵ The split did not run exclusively along the lines of the original alliance, and also led to a division within the Smyth–Robinson group. About a hundred people, led by Robinson, left Amsterdam and moved to Leiden. Robinson's congregation ultimately opted to leave the Netherlands and seek asylum in America. Part of it, under the leadership of William Brewster (1560–1644) and William Bradford (1590–1657), set off in 1619 from English Plymouth on a journey to the New World, aboard the *Mayflower*. History would remember them as the "Pilgrim Fathers" who, in November 1620, disembarked in what would be called Provinceland, founding a break-away colony there, the Plymouth Colony.

In 1609, Smyth decided to take a radical step, an act of se-baptism (self-baptism), which prompted him to question the evangelical character of not only the English state church, but also the Brownist congregations. This was a consequence of his reflections on the essence of the visible church and the conditions of membership in it. For Smyth, the Church of England was a political creation of the English monarchy and, as such, it could not claim any right to participate in the church of Christ. Consequently, as he argued, being baptised in this "false church" was not a testimony of adherence to Christ in His church.⁶ At the same time, he linked the theme of the true church with the issue of baptising infants who were unable to attest to faith in God's Revelation. He described his position in the treatise *The Character of the Beast or the False Constitution of the Church* (1609). The text reflects the path of his personal journey in search of the authentic church, which was, he reasoned, neither the Church of England nor Separatist groups, including his own congregation. It was not the apostolic succession, which the English state church sought to maintain, that determined the validity of its claim to be a church. The church also did not survive thanks to "covenant succession" – doctrinally based on Acts 2:39; 1 Cor 7:14 – incorporated into the Puritan "covenant of grace", the central element of the theology of both the Presbyterians and the Separatists. The Church of England, Presbyterian, and

Separatist congregations, with all their obvious differences, all also baptised infants, making them more similar to the “church according to the flesh” than to the “church of the Spirit”. Infant baptism means inclusion in the fellowship, akin to the circumcision of Jewish boys: An Old Testament act proving his election (belonging to the chosen nation), his participation in God’s covenant with the House of Israel, and marking him with “God’s seal”. However, God’s covenant with the House of Israel was unique. The church of Christ, His Mystical Body, is “the children of promise”, not “the children by physical descent” (Rom 9:8). This promise must be believed for one to be numbered among the sons and daughters of God. The practice of infant baptism does not fulfil the function – spiritually marking a Christian who is aware of his faith with “God’s seal”, to which it aspires.⁷ Therefore, the true church of Christ consists only of people who first believed and then asked to be baptised (Mark 16:16); who, having been “born of the Spirit”, turned away from their sinful life to lead a “new life” in Christ (John 3:1–21). The Brownists’ full separation from the Church of England required them, according to Smyth, to abandon infant baptism, which he encouraged Puritan non-conformists to do in *The Character of the Beast...*⁸

Consciously confessing faith in Christ in the Spirit and repenting of his sins, Smyth sought to receive “true” baptism by water in order to enter the church of “the children of promise”. However, there was an obstacle. He could not find the appropriate person to give it to him. After discussing the issue with Thomas Helwys and other members of the congregation, he decided, in his radicalism, to baptise himself along with those who had left The Ancient Church with him. The re-baptism of the group of English Separatists gathered around John Smyth is considered the beginning of the Baptists’ history, a new current of the English Reformation. Smyth’s decision was inconceivable to his contemporaries. The desperate act of se-baptism reduces the church, the community of the faithful, to a single person.⁹ This raises doubts as to whether the church can still be spoken of in the sense envisaged in the Gospel (Matt 18:20).¹⁰

For Smyth, the “heirs of promise” are those who, believing in the Good News, have been baptised. Thus, the act of faith and the ensuing baptism became the central point of his understanding of the church and its ecclesiology.¹¹ How the church was organised was also of crucial importance. According to Smyth, its organisation does not differentiate the position of its members: The regenerated cannot be subjected to the authority of pastors, teachers, or elders, as was the case in Johnson’s Ancient Church. In the democratically organised church of the regenerated, the functions of a pastor or deacon are assumed by people following the congregation’s decision. They remain servants of their brothers and sisters, answering to them for the service with which they have been entrusted, and they are responsible to the Creator for their ministry to the same extent as other members of the congregation for the use of the talents entrusted to them. No distinctions between “clergy” and “laity” are recognised.

Smyth's ecclesiology was a radical, yet consistent, form of Puritan teaching on the visible church. If the church is to include only "saints", or regenerated persons, on what basis should the offspring of "saints" be included in it, particularly if, due to their obvious spiritual immaturity, they show no evidence of remaining in God's grace? If there was a place in the visible church for the unregenerate offspring of "saints", was there not also a place in it for all the hypocrites who only call themselves Christians? If so, what are the fundamental differences between Separatist congregations and Anglican parishes? Not discerning any significant difference, Smyth leaves the Brownists with the following choice: Either return to the bosom of the state church, because the Separatists' schism proved groundless and scandalous (disintegration of the church), or limit membership in the visible church to the truly regenerated who receive a "believers' baptism" (credobaptism). According to Smyth, if the visible church of baptised followers of Christ is to continue its mission thanks to apostolic succession in the Western church and the Eastern church, through the sacramental ministry, blessing, and laying of hands by persons who were unconsciously baptised (when infants) on the heads of their successors (who had also been baptised involuntarily), schismatic search for the true church by Separatists turns to dust, is regrettable, and should be condemned, particularly if the infant baptism is thought to be a visible sign of participation in the covenant. In other words, the Separatists' conditions for membership in the true visible church are only apparently correct.¹²

After the act of se-baptism, Smyth became close to the Anabaptist fellowship of Dutch Mennonites (Waterlanders), who confirmed his belief in the effectiveness of baptism only for people consciously professing faith in Christ. Under their influence, he also abandoned the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination and adopted Arminian soteriology. However, most importantly, he recognised the true church in this community and was baptised in it.¹³ This confirms that his se-baptism did not free him from doubts about being properly baptised into the church of Christ, nor about membership in it: Baptism takes place in the church, from the hands of its members. Asking for baptism from Mennonites – and consequently seeking admission to their community, signing the *Waterlander Confession of Faith* in March 1610, together with about 30 of his adherents¹⁴ – he challenged not only the effectiveness of his se-baptism but also questioned whether his own congregation was actually the true church of Christ.

This step led to another division, as those who remained were convinced of the effectiveness of the baptism administered by the se-baptised Smyth and rejected his suggestion that they stay outside the church.¹⁵ With no more than ten members, the group was led by Thomas Helwys, Smyth's closest friend,¹⁶ and also had support from John Murton. Though being a minority group, Smyth's supporters were three times as numerous; they excommunicated Smyth and his followers for applying for membership in the Waterlanders. In 1612, Helwys, together with those who stood by him, left Amsterdam and

returned to their homeland – being convinced that escaping from persecution was a mistake (a lack of faith in Divine Providence)¹⁷ – settling in Spitalfields, then a northern suburb of London. In the same year, Smyth died of tuberculosis, and those who had persevered with him finally found their place in the Mennonite community, which formally accepted them only on January 21, 1615.¹⁸ This is how the extremely turbulent history of the first English Baptist congregation in Amsterdam ended. Smyth's legacy is not only the creation of the first Baptist church, but also an attempt to carve out the doctrinal foundations of the newly established religious movement, which we find in his *Short Confession of Faith in the XX Articles* (1609).¹⁹

3.2 Thomas Helwys, the first leader of the London General Baptists

Assuming Thomas Helwys and those who decided to return with him to England continued the work Smyth had done before attempting to join the Waterlanders, then we have the moment of the birth of Baptists movement in the Isles. Helwys would be the second pioneer of this current of the English Reformation.²⁰

Thomas Helwys (c. 1575–c. 1616) was from Nottinghamshire. He was born into a wealthy landowner family, the heir to the estate of Broxtowe Hall in Nottingham. Although he did not have a theological education, he became proficient in the field. He also had solid legal training, supported by study and practice at Gray's Inn in London. He became a Puritan prior to 1600. His home, Broxtowe Hall, was a meeting place for Puritan dissidents, including John Smyth, with whom Helwys committed to his fate.²¹ When visiting Helwys' house in 1606, Smyth contracted tuberculosis. Nursed by his host, he recovered, and this experience led them to become close friends. According to Earnest Payne, it was at this time that Smyth and Helwys agreed that reforming the Church of England would be impossible. Their moderate Puritan position soon became a Separatist one²² – and forced them to seek asylum in Amsterdam.

After returning from Amsterdam to his homeland, Helwys busied himself not only with developing the first Baptist community on the British Islands but also with popularising the belief that every person should enjoy freedom of conscience, and secular power was limited only to “corporal” matters. He settled in Spitalfields because his property at Broxtowe had been confiscated, presumably because he had left England illegally. In 1612, Helwys published the treatise *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*,²³ where he presented the basis of his Baptist worldview, including questioning the king's right to define the truths of the Christian faith, as his authority did not cover the relationship between God and man. In an inscription written on the frontispiece of a copy of *A Short Declaration...*, which Helwys dispatched to King James I, the following is written:

Hear, O King, and despise not the counsel of the poor, and let their complaints come before thee. The King is a mortal man and not God, therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them. If the king has authority to make spiritual lords and laws, then he is an immortal God and not a mortal man. O King, be not seduced by deceivers to sin against God whom you ought to obey, nor against your poor subjects who ought and will obey you in all things with body, life, and goods, or else let their lives be taken from the earth. God save the king.²⁴

Helwys also pointed out the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, of the Church of England, of advocates of the reform of the English state church, and of paedobaptist²⁵ Separatists, whom he accused of distorting evangelical teaching.²⁶ Nevertheless, the essential message of this treaty concerned the impotence of political authority in matters of conscience and was a strong appeal for religious toleration for all the King of England's subjects, regardless of their beliefs. In probably the most frequently quoted fragment of *A Short Declaration...*, an extension of the dedication to King James I, Helwys wrote:

For our lord the King is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a king but in earthly causes. And if the king's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all human laws made by the king, our lord the king can require no more. For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.²⁷

Even the monarch, concerned for the fate of his subjects, could not force them to believe in Christ, nor turn to the "sword: to gather them in His church: "let them be heretics, Turks or Jews, or whatsoever". After all, during His earthly mission, He did not resort to violence to win over His adherents. Helwys reminded the king of a fragment of the Gospel according to St. Luke:

And let the king call to mind that which no doubt the king has often read in the Gospel According to Luke (9:52, 56), that when the Samaritans would not receive Christ, and that his disciples said, 'Will you that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.' Jesus rebuked them and said, 'Tou know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' Whereby the king does see that Christ will have no man's life touched for his cause. If the Samaritans will not receive him, He passed them by. If the Gerasenes pray him to depart, he leaves them. If any refuse to receive his disciples, he only bids them 'shake off the dust of their feet for a witness against them'.²⁸

If the King of all creation did not raise His hand against unbelievers, how could the earthly king justify his rule over the spiritual lives of his subjects? It is difficult to imagine a more direct challenge to the monarch's authority over the conscience of his subjects, even if the monarch intends to call himself a "defender of the Christian faith" (Latin: *fidei defensor*). Here is the ruler of a perishable kingdom who wants to arrogate to himself prerogatives that He, whose "kingdom is not of this world", refused to exercise; he was prepared to persecute dissenters and condemn heterodox teachings, even though Christ had not done so. Based on the Gospel, Helwys implicitly accuses James I of sacrilege: Claiming to himself *potestas absoluta* in God's dominion, the sphere of Christ's exclusive rule. The *Code of Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical of 1603*, in the second point of the part entitled *On the Church of England*, contains the following provision:

Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, That the King's Majesty hath not the same authority in Causes Ecclesiastical, that the godly Kings had amongst the Jews and Christian Emperors of the primitive church; or impeach in any part his regal supremacy in the said causes restored to the Crown, and by the laws of this realm therein established; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but only by the Archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of those his wicked errors.²⁹

When James I justified his authority in the Church of England by the scope of the authority of the kings of ancient Israel – which, let us recall, also included matters of worship (enforcement of the principles of the First Table of Moses) – Helwys reminded him that the reality of the people of God was radically changed with the coming of Christ.

Here is showed unto our lord the king that which we know he is not ignorant of, that Christ only sits upon David's throne to order it. And we the king's servants show it that the king might not be deceived by deceivers who would persuade the king that he has the same power over the church of Christ that kings of Israel had over the church of the Old Testament, to this end, that they might use the earthly power of the king to rule over and build up (as they pretend) the spiritual tabernacle, temple, and church of Christ, which if the king shall suffer them to do, he shall sin against God in entering upon the kingdom of Christ, who only is the king of Israel (John 12:15), 'whose power and sword are spiritual, whose tabernacle, temple, and house is holy, made without hands,' (2 Corinthians 3:17, 1 Peter 2:5, Hebrews 9:11) and therefore has given spiritual 'gifts unto men, for the gathering together of the saints for the work of the ministry, and for the building up of the body which is his church,' and does not will nor require to have people commanded and compelled by an earthly sword or power as in the days of Hezekiel and Josiah, kings of Israel.³⁰

The king errs, and the sin of sacrilege burdens his conscience. It does not matter if his own arrogance or following the whispers of deceivers leads him into iniquity. Helwys, like Nathan, facing David, stands before his king with a brotherly admonition to stop building the Temple, because this work was not entrusted to him.

We should heed this line of reasoning. In addition to the urgent call for reform of the church to separate it from the Antichrist's scheming, Helwys contrasts the reality of the chosen nation of Israel with times after the incarnation. His use of typology, a figurative reading of biblical message, tends to accent the dispensational opposition of both terms, the discontinuity of the covenant of Mosaic law and that founded on Christ's grace. This perspective led Helwys to question the simplifying analogy between circumcision and baptism. The former is the marking of an infant Jewish boy with the sign of entrance into the covenant of Mosaic law, while the latter is an outward sign of an inward change – the rebirth in Christ of a regenerated believer. While for paedobaptists there is a close parallel between circumcision and baptism, Helwys reserves the act of baptism for those who willingly confirm their sincere devotion to God.

At the same time, in order to protect himself against accusations of being an enemy of public order as such, he emphasises the transcendent origin of monarchical power and the belief in Christians' responsibility for the public good, especially when they rule over others. In *An Advertisement and Admonition unto the Congregation, which Men Call the New Fryelers, in the Lowe Countries* (1611), a treatise dedicated to Hans de Ries, leader of the Waterlanders, Helwys clearly lays out his position. As he emphasises, referring to the 13th chapter of *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*:

It is made plain that the power and authority of the magistrates is the holy ordinance of God. They are further called, the ministers of God, and their administration is set down to take vengeance of those that do evil, and to praise those that do well. And the instrument that is used to punish evel doers is the sword. And in this they are ministers of God for good and for the good and benefit of God's children. Therefore they are commanded to pray for them. Thus their power (being of God) is holy and good (as it is showed here by the Apostle), appointed of God for good, who does, no can appoint nothing but that which is holy and good, and pleasing to him. God is holiness and goodness, and he cannot appoint anything that is contrary to himself.³¹

Helwys's appeal for unconditional and full religious toleration and his belief in the impotence of authority in spiritual matters would become the hallmark of Baptist identity, distinguishing it from other currents in the English Reformation. The idea that toleration would embrace Mohammedans, people of the Mosaic covenant, and even "Papists" was, in the early 17th century, a truly revolutionary idea.³² As Joseph Lecler notes, the treatise of

Helwys is the first Protestant apology for religious freedom, with epochal significance in the history of England.³³ The editor of the contemporary edition of *A Short Declaration...*, Richard Groves, pointed to Helwys as the person who presented the fundamental identifiers of the Baptists: The baptism of believers, the congregational organisation of the church, the individual right to read and search for understanding of the Bible, and, crucially for us here, the postulate of separation of church and state.³⁴ This last, fundamentally political postulate concerns the state's political order and religious policy, and it has been at the heart of the Baptist religious doctrine from the outset.³⁵

There is one important caveat here: Simply applying conceptual categories operating in the contemporary discourse on religious freedom, or religious policy in a demoliberal state, to Helwys's considerations on the nature of the state and the church would be a mistake. For him, "freedom of the soul" was not an individual right to make free (autonomous) decisions in spiritual matters. Freedom of conscience is about the submission of a believer to God's will. The logical consequence is thus the refusal to succumb to any earthly authority, including the civil magistrate, in determining the method of interpreting the Word of God and the commands flowing from it ("For men's religion to God is between God and themselves"). Freedom of conscience is therefore not a human right – at least not in the sense that we currently give to this fundamental concept in defining liberal constitutionalism. Rather, it is a claim made by God, who builds relationships with a believer without the intermediation of public authority. One could say that an individual enjoying a free conscience is not an autonomous being. Such an individual's freedom will instead be a function of the freedom of God, to whom they will be accountable for their choices. That individual's conscience is to be free from the pressure of other people. No matter how ridiculous or incomprehensible it may sound to our ears today, the guarantees of freedom of conscience in *A Short Declaration...* refer more to the condition of God, to His prerogatives, than to the legal situation of humans demanding that their autonomy be recognised.³⁶ Helwys did not compare conscience with an autonomous choice, but with an obligation (trust in God, submission to His will, His judgement).³⁷ As he reasons:

And we bow ourselves to the earth before our lord the king in greatest humbleness, beseeching the king to judge righteous judgment herein, whether there be so unjust a thing and of so great cruel tyranny under the sun as to force men's consciences in their religion to God, seeing that if they err, they must pay the price of their transgression with the loss of their souls. Oh, let the king judge, is it not most equal that men should choose their religion themselves, seeing they only must stand themselves before the judgement seat of God to answer for themselves, when it shall be no excuse for them to say we were commanded or compelled to be of this religion by the king or by them that had

authority form him? And let our lord the king that is a man of knowledge yet further consider that if the king should by his power bring his people to the truth, and they walk in the truth and dei in the profession of it in obedience to the king's power, either for fear or love, shall they be saved? The king know they shall not. But they that obey the truth in love, whom the love of God constrains, their obedience only shall be acceptable to God (1 Cor 13).³⁸

However, if conscience is viewed from the perspective of individual freedom, it would be freedom from sin, in which the Church of England persists, freedom from the pressure of the king and his bishop. However, let us repeat that we should always look at this freedom in the appropriate light: A believer who desires to live according to God's Revelation, which gives meaning and fullness to life [Aristotle's *τέλος* (telos)]. Freedom is therefore not a gift of nature for humans enjoying natural autonomy and independently deciding what is good and what is bad – as the philosophers of the Enlightenment put it – but a gift from God and a task for His humble servant. Struggling with a world that constantly corrupts him/her, the servant is obliged to testify with his/her very life about God's love for creation.³⁹ The free conscience is not autonomous, if we use the classical understanding of the concept of autonomy (Greek *αὐτονομία*): The capacity to be one's own person [Greek: *αὐτο* (auto)], to live one's life according to standards of behaviour [Greek *νόμος* (nomos)] independently established, without imposition of any external authority, or forces. As Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) may have framed it: Helwys put the “positive” aspect of freedom before its “negative” counterpart.

Freedom from the dictates of the authorities in matters of religion (association with negative freedom) is not an end in itself, but a means of realising the desire to live according to the voice of conscience, to the glory of God, and for the benefit of other people (association with positive freedom).⁴⁰ Identifying freedom with an unrestricted choice that remains closed to the perspective of God's perfect plan, realised in the work of Christ, and with freedom from the pressure of conscience, which constantly calls the sinner to live in accordance with the evangelical model, is “the most damnable heresy”, as the author of *A Short Declaration...* put it. This is not so much a rejection of God's perspective as a denial of Christ and the grace to which those who believe in Him have access. After all, freedom for a Christian is not an excuse for evil, but submission to the will of God (1 Pet 2:15–16); it is not indulging the flesh (one's desires) but serving one another (Gal 5:13). In response to the accusations levelled against adherents of Arminius' doctrine – among whom Helwys was counted in – he noted:

And whereas it is suspected that they which hold universal redemption do, or must hold free will, wee desire to testifie unto all, for the clearing of our selves from the suspicion of that most damnable heresy that God in his mercy has so far given us grace to see that whoever holds

universal redemption by Christ cannot hold free will, if they have any understanding. Free will utterly abolishes Christ and destroy faith and set up worke. Free will is to have absolute power in a man's self to work righteousness and obey God in perfect obedience. And such men do not need Christ...⁴¹

As Helwys argues, anyone who believes in man's free will promotes a theology of freedom from sin that is not compatible with the Holy Scriptures. The theology of freedom from the consequences of sin will be in harmony with the Gospel, but this freedom requires accepting Christ and thus also submitting to His will (His royal power).

The principle of authentic freedom of conscience (in accordance with the Gospel) is the impotence of secular authority over the spiritual and the simultaneous omnipotence of Revelation to which the believer submits his life. Even a close alliance of "sword and altar" cannot generate any *lex specialis* here. Moreover, such an alliance is the most serious threat to this "sacred" rule, and therefore it should be strongly opposed. In spiritual matters, the Christian is called to follow the voice of God, not of men; to obey the calls of the eternal Holy Spirit and not of other mortals, even if they present themselves as particularly proficient in the principles of faith, or flaunt their position by demanding the obedience of others in matters of religious doctrine and practice (Acts 5:27–32).⁴²

The response to the publication of *A Short Declaration...* was typical for Helwys' times. The author was imprisoned in Newgate Prison, where he died in 1616 at around the age of 40.⁴³ Helwys' London community survived the imprisonment and death of its leader, then went on to become the "mother church" for congregations in Lincoln, Coventry, Salisbury, and Tiverton, numbering around 150 members in total.⁴⁴ John Murton, who had also been imprisoned in Newgate for two years, assumed the head of the London congregation.⁴⁵

3.3 John Murton, the defender of Christ's kingship over human conscience

John Murton (1585–1626), in 1615, penned *Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned*, an important pamphlet on religious freedom.⁴⁶ It was written as a conversation between an Antichristian and a Christian, the former representing the English state church, most likely its bishop, and the latter a Baptist perspective. Over time, an "Indifferent man" joins the discussion between the Anti-Christian and the Christian, whom the Christian has set out to convince that "none ought, nor can be compelled to worship God to acceptance, by any worldly means whatsoever"⁴⁷ – as was proclaimed in the Gospel according to St. John (John 4:24).

In *Persecution of Religion...* we find a fragment in which Murton, like Helwys, undermines a key argument put forward by advocates of Erastianism,

who are looking for an analogy between the monarchical rights of the kings of Israel and the power of, “the sovereign by the grace of God”, James I, who, supposedly was obliged to care for the “purity of worship” of the people entrusted to him (the people of modern Israel). The Christian addresses the Anti-Christian as follows:

Yes, Christ alone is king of Israel, that sits upon David’s throne, and therefore mark the true proportion: in the time of the old testament, the kings of Israel had power from God to compel all to the ordinances of God, or to cut them off by their sword from the earthly land of Canaan, and the promises thereof; so in the new testament, the king of Israel, Christ Jesus, hath power from the Father to compel all to the ordinances of God, or to cut them off by the sword from the heavenly land of Canaan, and the promises thereof. The kings of Israel only had this power under the law, and the king of Israel only hath this power under the gospel. And therefore, whosoever will challenge this power under the gospel, he must be the king of Israel in the time of the gospel, which is particular only to Jesus Christ, unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given. And let it be here well observed, that by this opinion of yours, you make the kingdom and ordinances of Israel under the law, and the kingdom and ordinances of Israel under the gospel, all one, directly contrary to the whole scripture; for the kingdom and ordinances of Israel under the law were of this world, but the and ordinances of Israel under the gospel are not of this world, as Christ the king thereof himself testifieth, John 18. And therefore, you, setting up a worldly king over this heavenly kingdom and ordinances, you and all of your profession, declare yourselves to be of that worldly kingdom, and so to look for that heavenly and spiritual king, yet to come in the flesh, being of the number of those that deny him to be come in the flesh, and so are deceivers and antichrists, whatsoever you say to the contrary.⁴⁸

Murton’s reasoning is clear: If an earthly king rules in His Kingdom, who will physically occupy the throne at the end times, if it is already occupied? The reign of Christ in His Kingdom (Murton means the visible church) is, for now, spiritual in nature. Since the King of England sat (physically, “in the flesh”) on the “throne of spiritual relationships and obligations” (orders given by God, the fulfilment of which is an obligation of the Christian who trusts Him), then Christ either does not have to come again to rule over His people in the Kingdom of God on Earth, or he will come, but not “in the flesh”. Either way, the Anti-Christian position turns out to be heresy.

Persecution of Religion... can be read as a restatement of the theses put forward by Helwys in *A Short Declaration....* The freedom that Murton talks about, analogously to Helwys’ lecture on the subject, is not the freedom to seek what is good for man, or beneficial in his capricious judgement, but

to follow the voice of conscience, liberated from the pressure of others, shaped solely by the Spirit of God. At the same time, despite his sincere aversion to their doctrine and the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, Murton also defends Catholics, whose situation in England was particularly difficult after the discovery of the “gunpowder plot”,⁴⁹ and whose conscience, as he argued, forced them to resort to violence.⁵⁰

In *An Humble Supplication to the King's Majesty* (1620), a supplement to *Persecution of Religion...*, Murton once again assumes the role of spokesman for Christ's exclusive authority over His people, in the Kingdom of Israel according to the Good News.⁵¹ In this text, we will also find an argument for religious toleration, similar in its tone to the one used by Helwys, who referred James I to read the Gospel according to St. Luke. Murton used various Gospel fragments and apostolic lessons from *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1 Cor 6:8–11) and *The First Epistle of Saint Peter* (1 Pet 2:10):

But he charged straitly, that his disciples should be so far from persecuting those that would not be of their religion, that when they were persecuted, they should pray; when they were cursed, they should bless. The reason is, because they that are now tares may hereafter become wheat; they who are now blind, may hereafter see; they that now resist him, may hereafter receive him; they that are now in the devil's snare, in adverseness to the truth, may hereafter come to repentance; they that are now blasphemers, persecutors, and oppressors, as Paul was, may in time become faithful as he; they that are now idolaters, as the Corinthians once were, may hereafter become true worshippers as they; they that are now no people of God, nor under mercy, as the saints sometimes were, may hereafter become the people of God, and obtain mercy, as they. Some come not till the eleventh hour: if those that come not till the last hour should be destroyed because they came not at the first, then should they never come, but be prevented. And why do men call themselves Christians, and do not the things Christ would?⁵²

Referring to the “sword and fire” in the work of conversion blocks the action of the Spirit in the conscience of the converted: The only sure path to a sincere renewal of the life of a follower of Christ, to authentic sorrow for sins and a true conversion of the sinner. In turn, the destruction of unbelievers already “at the first hour of the day” is, for Murton, a hindrance to the action of grace in those who would potentially open themselves to its power when the “last” hour strikes (Matt 20:1–16).

These words echo the key theme of the contemporary discussion around the scope of religious freedom, which also includes “freedom from religion”, that is, from religious pressure, but Murton's argument clearly differs from those engaged today. In Murton's approach, the foundations of freedom from religion are unequivocally religious, founded on the authority of Christ's words and attitude. If a person (ergo, “unhired worker”) is deprived of the

opportunity to say “NO” to the “vineyard owner” at nine in the morning, or later in the day, what is the value of his “YES”? Murton finds the justification for freedom from pressure in matters of religion in the nature of the Christian religion (or, more precisely, in the Gospel). Since Constantinian times, Christians have been accustomed to a confessional Christian state, one where the coercion of secular authority in matters of religious doctrine has not only been accepted but is desirable.⁵³

3.4 Leonard Busher – religious coercion in the dispute between the Word of God and common sense

Leonard Busher’s pamphlet, *Religion’s Peace; a Plea for Liberty of Conscience, long since presented to King James and the High Court of Parliament then sitting, by L. B., Citizen of London, and printed in the year 1614*,⁵⁴ opens an anthology of texts on freedom of conscience by Edward Bean Underhill. It was most likely brought by members of Smyth’s church, who returned with Helwys and Murton from Amsterdam to establish the first Baptist congregation in London.⁵⁵ The publication of his work took place a year before the release of Murton’s *Persecution of Religion...* and two years after *Helwys’ A Short Declaration...* However, the primary purpose of Helwys’s treatise was to present and defend the doctrine of General Baptists, and his plea for complete religious toleration was only a component of it. Busher’s pamphlet can be considered the first work by a Baptist to deal entirely with religious freedom.⁵⁶ As with the texts by Helwys and Murton, *Religion’s Peace...* was addressed to James I, to whom Busher appeals for toleration for religious dissidents. The second addressee is members of Parliament. Busher pleads:

Therefore may it please your majesty and parliament to understand that, by fire and sword, to constrain princes and peoples to receive that one true religion of the gospel, is wholly against the mind and merciful law of Christ, dangerous both to king and state, a means to decrease the kingdom of Christ, and a means to increase the kingdom of antichrist (...) [P]ersecution is a work well pleasing to all false prophets and bishops, but it is contrary to the mind of Christ, *who came not to judge and destroy men’s lives, but to save them*. And though some men and women believe not at the first hour, yet may they at the eleventh hour, if they be not persecuted to death before.

And no king nor bishop can, or is able to command faith; *That is the gift of God, who worketh in us both the will and the deed of his own good pleasure* (...) And as kings and bishops cannot command the wind, so they cannot command faith; *and as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so is every man that is born of the Spirit*. You may force men to church against their consciences, 1 but they will believe as they did afore, when they come there; for God giveth a blessing only to his own ordinance, and abhorreth antichrist’s.⁵⁷

The passage above put forward an argument that we encountered while reading Murton's *An Humble Supplication*...: Forcing subjects to public authority to accept faith in Christ, and punishing those who resist with death before the "eleventh hour of the day", is like pulling out "wheat that has been mistakenly recognised as tares" (Matt 13:29–30). This argument cannot be ignored if the message of the Gospel is really to guide those in power: the magistrate is neither the "owner of the vineyard" nor the "Lord of the harvest", at least not as given by Christ.

In other places, in a similar tone, he notes that actions undertaken by members of the church, which lead to persecution in the name of faith, whether of "princes or their people", are an obvious violation of God's plan for creation. As he argues:

[If] the believing should persecute the unbelieving to death, who should remain alive? Then none but the believing should live in the world, and the unbelieving should die in their unbelief, and so perish for ever. The Lord will not that the believing should live to the destruction of the unbelieving, but unto their conversion, edification, and salvation. And by persecuting of prince and people to death, because they will not hear and believe, is no gaining of souls unto God, but unto the devil. And whereas ignorant and wicked bishops may think to win souls, by killing prince and people for religion, they are deceived greatly; for thereby they lose many souls—viz., their own and the unbelieving.⁵⁸

Repression in the name of God does not bear good fruit but ends with the perdition of persecuted and persecutor alike – after all, the latter violates the commandment "Thou shalt not kill". If no one is saved as a result, what is the benefit of using them for the Kingdom of God?⁵⁹ The only "sword" of the church is the Word and the Spirit, and only by wielding these can the church truly fulfil its mission.

The persecution of dissenters does not benefit the magistracy, which usually justifies persecution by either referring to God's command or the need to maintain social unity and public peace. In his argument for religious toleration, Busher draws on an instructive example from outside the Christian world, making freedom of conscience a principle of *ius gentium*. In *Religion's Peace*..., he writes:

I read that a bishop of Rome would have constrained a Turkish emperor to the Christian faith, unto whom the emperor answered, 'I believe that Christ was an excellent prophet, but he did never, so far as I understand, command that men should, with the power of weapons, be constrained to believe his law; and verily I also do force no man to believe Mahomet's law.' Also I read that Jews, Christians, and Turks, are tolerated in Constantinople, and yet are peaceable, though so contrary the one to the other.

If this be so, how much more ought Christians not to force one another to religion? And how much more ought Christians to tolerate Christians, when as the Turks do tolerate them? Shall we be less merciful than the Turks? Or shall we learn the Turks to persecute Christians? It is not only unmerciful, but unnatural and abominable; yea, monstrous for one Christian to vex and destroy another for difference and questions of religion.⁶⁰

Busher seems to be asking: If the millet system is possible in the Ottoman Empire, that is, the freedom of Christian and Jewish communities to function in an Islamic environment, what prevents “unorthodox” followers of Christ (heretical in the opinion of their surroundings), as well as participants of other religions, from enjoying religious toleration in a “Christian state” where people, supposedly trusting in God’s mercy, are obliged to show mercy to their neighbours? The logic of this argument of the author of *Religion’s Peace*... cannot be denied. Nevertheless, presenting James I, the king of the Christian nation, as less merciful than the Mohammedans of Constantinople was not only a provocation but an obvious impertinence.

Busher bids very high in his expectations. He demands religious toleration for all: “And the king and parliament may please to permit all sorts of Christians; yea, Jews, Turks, and pagans, so long as they are peaceable, and no malefactors”.⁶¹ Moreover, he argues that public peace will not be threatened even if the monarchy does not stand for an open discussion of worldviews, in which every view, reason, and argument are welcome, as long as they are derived from the Holy Scriptures, not from denominational tradition or sanctioned by the position of the reason-giver.⁶² Such a bold call to abolish censorship was unusual, because even in *Aeropagitica*, the most appreciated defence of free speech in the 17th century, published three decades after *Religion’s Peace*... John Milton did not allow himself to grant Catholics the right to publicly proclaim their doctrine. Even John Locke did not call for such broadly understood toleration in his 1689 *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.

Religion’s Peace..., *A Short Declaration*...and *Persecution of Religion* share the idea that earthly authority is impotent in matters of faith because the “rule of souls” belongs to another “Kingdom”. Busher argues:

Kings and magistrates are to rule temporal affairs by the swords of their temporal kingdoms, and bishops and ministers are to rule spiritual affairs by the word and Spirit of God, the sword of Christ’s spiritual kingdom, and not to intermeddle one with another’s authority, office, and function. And it is a great shame for the bishops and ministers not to be able to rule in their church, without the assistance of the king and magistrate; yea, it is a great sign they are none of Christ’s bishops and ministers. If they were, they would not be afraid nor ashamed of their faith; nor yet would they persuade princes and people to persecute, and force one another to believe them; but would use only the assistance of God’s word and Spirit, and therewith suffer their faith and doctrine to be examined, proved, and disputed, both by word and writing.⁶³

Busher believes, and Helwys and Murton would agree, that invoking the Old Testament to rationalise the involvement of secular power in the church's matters, to justify the enforcement of rites and religious doctrine with coercive law, demonstrates a clear lack of understanding of the effects of the Divine Incarnation. This is because "Christ hath only set us free from all ecclesiastical laws and ordinances, which himself hath not commanded in his last will and testament. Yea, from the ecclesiastical laws and commandments of the Old Testament". However, this does not mean that God's will has not entrusted secular power with the prerogatives in enforcing the commands of Moses' Second Table ("the moral and judicial law of God; for that the king is bound to execute, and we are bound to obey").⁶⁴

The idea of an official church with universal (obligatory) membership – like the Church of England – in Busher's view not only has no evangelical authorisation but is also unachievable in practice. It is an illusion. It would not be enough to require all of James I's subjects to be in compulsory membership of the Church of England. Every human would have to be included. The church would become the world and the world the church – or more precisely: the Church of England would become the world and the world the Church of England. This is unattainable. As Busher argues:

[If] all within the land be forced to be of the church, as the bishops and their ministers would still have it, then there would be no world in the land, but all the land would be the church, which is absurd and contrary to the scriptures. And great ignorance do the bishops and their ministers show, when they think the whole nation of people is the church of Christ: for then it cannot be said, out of Great Britain, *the Lord added to the church, from day to day, such as should be saved* (Acts 2:47 – note: RP); seeing, within the land there would be none without to be added.⁶⁵

It is hard to underestimate the attraction of this argument. If the ecclesial system of the English state church is an implementation of the evangelical pattern, then the Christian world (Christendom) must ultimately coincide territorially with the dominion of the English monarchs, so that all its inhabitants would ultimately be included in the embrace of the Church of England. Alternatively, no one who was not then a subject of James I – with obligatory membership in the Church of England – could *ipso facto* call himself a Christian. Only an individual who is a subject of the English sovereign and is incorporated into the Church of England in the act of baptism, administered by royal order, is saved. Indeed, this is a fundamental revision of the words we find in the Gospel according to St. Mark (Mark 16:16).

To be fair, let us recall that for Richard Hooker and other advocates of Erastianism, the Church of England is territorially limited to the English commonwealth and personally to the people of England. Therefore, it does not encompass *Christianitas*, the entire Christian world, because it is only a small piece of the church's universe, and *rex est imperator in regno suo*.⁶⁶ Although

the Church of Christ is one, in practice, its emanations are particular national churches, that is, local churches remaining under the jurisdiction of individual sovereign rulers who maintain supremacy in them, in accordance with the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. However, such an approach does not overcome the dilemma, described in *Ecclesia Anglicana*, of describing the church. This we find in the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*. For Busher, we face a simple alternative: Whether by the unity of the universal church we understand that it is a holy and apostolic community, united (doctrinally, institutionally, and liturgically) in the fight against schisms and heresies that disturb its cohesion, as was the case in the 4th century; or it is the church of those reborn in the Holy Spirit, unrestricted by political (institutional) and ritual (liturgical) forms, composed of members of local Christian communities. The first option comes down to recognising Anglicanism as another schism in the church, falling under peculiar condemnation, since it is motivated by political considerations (and the preservation of elements of Roman doctrine and ritual only strengthened this belief). This leads to challenging its apostolic nature. The second option disqualifies the possibility of the king and his bishops deciding what kind of institutional or ritual patterns are to be adopted by communities adhering to the apostolic teaching in the British Isles.

Hooker's identification of his *corpus politicum* with Calvin's visible church only superficially fits the ecclesiology of the *Lawes...* into the doctrinal findings of the Reformed tradition. After all, for Calvin, the visible church is, in fact, particular, local communities (congregations) of believers in Christ ("where two or three gather in His name"), making up the universal church, not a semi-universal, episcopally organised national church, subject to the authority of an earthly ruler. The formula of the English state church, based on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, proves doomed to failure, an attempt to construct an "intermediate level" between the universal church and local Christian communities, reflecting the essence of neither the former nor the latter. Busher explained this, if somewhat obliquely, in the passage quoted above.

In 1624, the London congregation of General Baptists experienced a serious crisis, one which most likely determined its fate, as well as that of the other four congregations affiliated with it. A group of 16, led by Elias Tookey, involuntarily left the community, having been accused by John Murton of being Anabaptists. Two years later, following a 13-year imprisonment, Murton died in Newgate,⁶⁷ and his community probably did not survive their leader's death, because we have no evidence of its activity after 1626.⁶⁸ However, theological and political texts came to light. In them, the first Baptists expressed their belief in the universality and inalienability of religious freedom and openly questioned the right of a public office to interfere in matters of religion. General Baptists would soon be revived. A community met at the corner of Bell Avenue and Coleman Street in London, pastored by Thomas Lambe.⁶⁹ Then, in 1651, the first formal association of General Baptist congregations in England was established.⁷⁰

Notes

- 1 In January 1604, the Hampton Court Conference took place, organised by the monarch in response to the “Millenary Petition” signed by influential Puritan clergy. In the conference between the monarch and the Anglican bishops, reference was made to the demands for reform of the Church of England submitted by the signatories of the “Millenary Petition”. The acceptance of some of the demands by the monarch heralded a relaxation of policy towards the Puritans. Meanwhile, in June 1604, after the death of John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, this position was taken by Richard Bancroft, who, during the Hampton Court Conference, became known as a strong opponent of concessions to the Puritans. The appointment of Bancroft as Archbishop of Canterbury brought a radical change in policy towards advocates of reform of the Church of England.
- 2 Additionally, the subject of controversy was the failure to condemn the “manifest sin” of Johnson’s close associate, church elder Daniel Studley, and the practice of using the English translation of the Bible when preaching the Word of God, as well as other books or hymnals, rather than relying on the text in the original language, which, according to Smyth, was a limitation to the work of the Spirit in the reader and a practice resembling the obligation to use *The Book of Common Prayer* during worship (see: S. Wright, *English Baptists, 1603–1649*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2006, p. 27; J. Early Jr., *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2009, pp. 20–21).
- 3 The above reconstruction of events comes from a popular study: A. L. Chute, N. A. Finn, M. A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*, B&H Academic, Nashville 2015, p. 17. However, studies of the early history of Baptists, which present the sequence of events in a different way, are not hard to find. For example, Robert Barclay claims that the community in Gainsborough was founded four years earlier, and that it reached Amsterdam between 1604 and 1606. This would mean that Smyth’s final move to Separatist positions was not related to the announcement of royal decrees, especially since, as Barclay informs, Smyth was a preacher in the Separatist community of Southwark at the end of the 16th century (R. Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth: Considered Principally with Reference to the Influence of Church Organization on the Spread of Christianity*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1877, pp. 43 and 50). Moreover, Barclay notes that, along with other members of Johnson’s congregation, Smyth was imprisoned for his Separatist views at Marshalsea Prison in Southwark (p. 52). After leaving prison due to poor health, he founded the Gainsborough community in 1602 and became its pastor. Barclay also maintains that the Scrooby congregation did not all join Smith’s group before its emigration to Holland, as there is a letter addressed to him and sent from Amsterdam by Smyth in 1606, in which year the Scrooby congregation had, in his opinion, yet to be created (pp. 52–53).

Henry C. Vedder, author of *A Short History of the Baptists*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1978, does not mention Smyth’s imprisonment. However, he maintains that between 1600 and 1605 he was to serve as a town lecturer (the mayor’s chaplain, obliged to preach the Word of God at least twice a week) or the pastor of the Anglican parish in Lincoln. Vedder adds that the Gainsborough community sought refuge in Amsterdam at the instigation of Helwys, who saw the growing threat after his wife’s imprisonment and who was also supposed to finance the crossing to the Netherlands. Moreover, according to Vedder, Smyth did not himself create this congregation. He joined it only in 1606, becoming its pastor, although he presented himself as its “teacher”, and the leadership at that time belonged to Helwys and John Murton (Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, p. 202). Like Barclay,

Vedder also assumes that the Scrooby group reached Amsterdam when the Gainsborough community was already present there (p. 203). However, Barclay does not rule out that Helwys was not a member of the Gainsborough congregation but could have belonged to John Robinson's Scrooby congregation (Barclay, *The Inner Life...*, p. 68). In turn, reading the biography of Thomas Helwys by Joe Early Jr., we learn that Smyth did take over as pastor of the congregation of Gainsborough in 1606, but at that time, there was no Brownist congregation in Scrooby, this town was the second place where the Gainsborough congregation met. The place of these meetings was to be the house of William Bradford, the future first governor of the Plymouth Colony. Robinson, according to Early Jr., served as Smyth's assistant. The situation changed a year later when the Gainsborough congregation was divided, resulting in the creation of the Scrooby congregation, with Robinson taking over as leader. Although Helwys lived in Scrooby, he remained a member of his congregation thanks to his friendship with Smyth. Despite the division, the congregations remained in the covenant and considered themselves essentially one church (Early, Jr., *The Life and Writings...*, pp. 17–18). Walter H. Burgess argues that Smyth's final break with the Church of England occurred in 1606 (see W. H. Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys, and the First Baptist Church in England: with Fresh Light upon the Pilgrim Fathers' Church*, James Clarke & Co., London 1911, p. 81). This author also states that separatist groups from Nottinghamshire (specifically from Scrooby) and Yorkshire declared their accession to the Gainsborough community at the time of its establishment, that is, in 1607 (Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 82), establishing an alliance, although in practice, as Burgess notes, citing Bradford's accounts, this congregation functioned as two bodies due to the considerable distances and local identification of members (Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 92). Ultimately, a separate separatist congregation was to be established in Scrooby – headed by Robinson – which considered the Gainsborough congregation its home base (Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 93). Burgess does not confirm Smyth's imprisonment but only indicates that he managed to avoid being arrested twice (Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 94). Emigration to the Netherlands, according to this author, most likely took place at the end of 1607 or at the beginning of 1608, with the congregation from Gainsborough first. As it was an escape, the Scrooby congregation encountered harassment from the authorities, who were concerned that Smyth's group had previously left England without permission (Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 95).

A historian examining the circumstances of the creation and functioning of separatist congregations has access mainly to theological treatises and other documents written by their leaders. Careful reading of these writings allows one to detect personal threads from the authors' lives. The historian also uses the diaries of members of these communities. As we are dealing with a group of people whose views have evolved and whose paths have often diverged, often making them opponents or even enemies, the accounts and assessments of the events described will necessarily differ from each other, especially given how hermetic these environments were. Confirming unity or division is no simple task, let alone indicating the specific moment when it took place, determining the causes of a possible division, and whom a given faction consisted of. Most likely, this accounts for the large discrepancies in the facts. S. Wright provides a recent reconstruction of Smyth's life and the history of his congregation in Amsterdam (Wright, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, p. 13–44).

- 4 See: R. Tudur Jones, A. Long, R. Moore (eds.), *Protestant Nonconformist Texts: 1550 to 1700*, vol. 1, Antony Rove Ltd, Chippenham 2007, p. 116; similarly, Burgess, *John Smith...*, p. 139.

- 5 Barclay, *The Inner Life...*, p. 68. James Robert Coggins maintains that Smyth's group did not leave the Ancient Church because it never found itself within it. He cites class differences between the two communities (members of Smyth's group were much better educated), as well as differences of origin (on the one hand, London; on the other, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire). According to Coggins, the alliance was also hindered by the ecclesiastical practice of Brownism, which promoted small communities of believers (see: R. J. Coggins, *The Smyths' Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence and the Elect Nation*, Herald Press, Scottdale 1991, pp. 74–76). Walter H. Burgess also doubts Smyth's close ties with Johnson's congregation, because reading *Principles and Inferences Concerning the Visible Church*, whose short treatise was published in 1607, prior to emigration to the Netherlands, demonstrates the insurmountable differences in the concept of the Church of the Gainsborough congregation and The Ancient Church (Burgess, *John Smith...*, pp. 98–99). Joe Earl Jr. also argues that the Gainsborough congregation in Amsterdam functioned independently. (Earl Jr., *The Life and Writings...*, pp. 20–21).
- 6 See more in: Burgess, *John Smith...*, p. 146.
- 7 In *The Epistle to the Colossians*, baptism is compared with circumcision (Col 2:11–14). Although both are symbols of covenant, the latter is not a ritual performed by human hands – although by God's command given to Abraham (Gen 17:9–14), but is “Christ's circumcision”. It is “burial in baptism” and “resurrection through belief in God's action”. For more on the evolution of Smyth's position from the concept of covenant typical of separatism to that typical of Baptists, read: J. K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smith. Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2003, pp. 145–152.
- 8 The ecclesiology of the Separatists was based on the concept of “conditional covenant”, preached by Robert Browne and Henry Barrow, which competed with the idea of an “unconditional covenant” promoted by conformist Puritans, including George Gifford. The church, for the advocates of the “conditional covenant”, consists of people chosen by the Creator for salvation, constantly trying to obey His law (in word and deed), which confirms their belief in God's election (2 Pet 1:10). In turn, Gifford's “unconditional covenant” seeks its model in the covenant that God made with Abraham, promising to bless both him and his descendants (Gen 17:1–9). The church, for Gifford, will therefore also include people who violate God's commands. Just as God unconditionally and irrevocably embraced with His blessing the “people of Israel”, constantly unfaithful to His Law, so in the church there is a place for people whose behaviour clearly does not correspond to the Gospel principles, because they were in it as an outcome of the Creator's will (unconditional membership). The man cannot formulate the conditions of membership in the church. Gifford's ecclesiology allowed him to recognise the true church in the English state church, despite its obvious weaknesses, while Brown and Barrow called for its abandonment. The vision of a church composed exclusively of believers undoubtedly fits into the concept of a “conditional covenant”, while the practice of infant baptism, according to Smyth, stood in the way of its realisation and was a manifestation of the inconsistency of the Separatists. See more: S. Brachlow, *Puritan Theology and General Baptists Origins*, “The Baptist Quarterly: The Journal of the Baptist Historical Society”, vol. 31, no. 4 (1985).
- 9 Chute et al., *The Baptist Story...*, p. 18. Richard Clifton, a close associate of Robinson, upon learning of Smyth's se-baptism, reacted to this “curiosity of the one-man church” in the treatise *Plea for Infants*. Smyth's move was also sharply criticised by Robinson and Johnson. An analysis of Smyth's discussion with Clifton and information about the position of Robinson and Johnson can be found in the following: Burgess, *John Smith...*, pp. 149–160.

- 10 Following Smyth's logic, we must confirm that his se-baptism was performed by an unbaptised person, who stayed outside the church. The Roman Catholic Church allows such a possibility in life-threatening situations, that is, in an emergency (can. 867§2, can. 868§2). Undoubtedly, recognising the gravity of Smyth's spiritual dilemmas, his situation was extraordinary in all respects.
- 11 Baptism by faith in the visible church is the essence of the Baptist understanding of the "covenant of grace"; the baptism of a child, as an act of faith of parents who want to implement God's command (in accordance with their understanding of this command), places this act within the "covenant of works".
- 12 See notes on *Paralleles...* by S. Wright (Wright, *The Early English Baptists...*, pp. 34–36). James Leo Garret adds:
- One would hardly dispute the claim, however, that ecclesiology was Smyth's most developed doctrine. He rigorously rejected the baptism of infants, asserting that baptism should only be administered to voluntary or professed believers who are regenerate, retained the baptismal mode of aspersion or affusion, and denied that succession in the administration of baptism was necessary. (J. L. Garret, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study*, Mercer University Press Macon 2009, p. 26)
- 13 See: Burgess, *John Smith...*, pp. 181–182.
- 14 M. D. Jordan, *John Smyth, and Thomas Helwys: The Two First English Preachers of Religious Liberty. Resemblances and Contrasts*, "The Baptist Quarterly", vol. 12, no. 6–7 (1947), p. 189.
- 15 The doctrinal dispute between Smyth and Helwys was an obvious outgrowth of the former's justifications for actions that led to a redefinition of both worldviews. Here, we can clearly see the doctrinal dilemma of Baptists. Assuming that the true visible church consists only of people who have believed in the Gospel, renounced sin, and been baptised, we are faced with a legitimate question as to whether communities practicing infant baptism participate in the Mystical Body of Christ. At this point, they both replied, "no". If the Christian communities they knew were composed of people who had been baptised involuntarily for generations, it seems that se-baptism, despite significant doubts – after all, baptism should be administered in the church (which transfers this sacrament from generation to generation) – was the only way to interrupt the "genealogical iniquity of the false church". Meanwhile, Smyth's willingness to be baptised by the Mennonites was a return to the doctrinal reality which Smyth and Helwys had just rejected. The first Anabaptists, naturally, were baptised by people baptised in childhood, that is, "non-believers" (non-Christians), in the opinion of Smyth and Helwys – after all, this was the reality of the Christian world – transferring the iniquity of the "false" church to the bosom of their communities. Without resolving the question of when and for what reasons infant baptism became popular among Christians – reference is usually made to the results of the synod in Carthage in 418, convened to condemn the teachings of Donatus of Carthage, Pelagius, and Celestius – this fact had irreversible consequences. The desire to maintain the integrity of the theses proclaimed by Smyth in *The Character of the Beast...* with the way his congregation functioned as a church of "true Christians" precluded receiving baptism from people involved in the history of the "the children by physical descent". Only the extraordinary, albeit controversial, solution of se-baptism could constitute a new beginning of the "regenerated church of believers". This act was not only understandable but necessary for Helwys. However, Smyth's recognition of the Waterlander Mennonites as a community with an evangelical founding, i.e. as a community within the framework of Christ's Bride – an emphasis on the issue of apostolic succession and baptism related to it ("apostolic baptism"), which again becomes important for Smyth, and even necessary for the continuation of the church – was unacceptable to Helwys (see the letter Helwys sent to Waterlander, warning against accepting the excommunicated Smyth and

others: Burgess, *John Smith...*, pp. 190–191). This does not mean that Helwys was hostile towards the Mennonite community as such. On the contrary, he initially participated in its daily life with brotherly commitment and devotion. However, he remained reserved towards its constitution and teaching, especially in relation to the nature of Christ (His corporeality). Therefore, unlike Smyth and many other members of his congregation, he did not apply to join Waterlander. Helwys and his supporters clearly distanced themselves from the Mennonites in 1611, in response both to Smyth's move and to the lack of negative reaction to his spiritual upheaval from the Waterlander community.

Of further note here is that for Baptists of the Landmarkist tradition, the above dilemma is apparent. As they argue, the practice of baptism of believers has survived in the persecuted communities of the Christian world, of whom they are one (among the Montanists, Novatianists, Donatists, Cathars, Waldens, and Albigenses). Hence, the "apostolic succession of the baptism of believers" has not been irretrievably lost, but is continuously present in the true church of the "rejected", including the Landmarkist communities [see: D. B. Ray, *Baptist Succession. A Handbook of Baptist History*, E. Stevens & Sons, Cincinnati 1871; B. W. Everts, *Baptist Succession*, "The Baptist Quarterly", vol. 11 (1877)]. Adopting the perspective of Landmarkism, we will consider Smyth's move as understandable, and the Helwys' congregation as remaining outside the church due to the lack of "baptismal succession". Furthermore, for Landmarkists, Smyth's act of se-baptism is not the beginning of the Baptists, and the Helwys' group would not be the first Baptist congregation, because credobaptism had existed since the day Jesus commanded His disciples to spread the Gospel and to baptise all nations in His name, the Father, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:16–20).

- 16 Breaking off his long-standing and proven relationship with Smyth was the price of staying true to his beliefs. Remember, however, these people did not hesitate to sacrifice their freedom, and sometimes their lives, in defence of their beliefs. Nonconformity was embedded in their everyday choices, regardless of the cost. The dictate of conscience was an authority that could not be denied.
- 17 Burgess, *John Smith...*, p. 276.
- 18 Burgess, *John Smith...*, p. 272.
- 19 See: Tudur Jones et al., *Protestant Nonconformist...*, pp. 116–117. *The Short Confession of Faith in the XX Articles* was an illustration of the beliefs shared by Smyth and those who joined him in applying to the Waterlander community for admission. This was their specific *credo*, which Mennonites were to comparatively evaluate in relation to their own confession in the process of examining applications for accession.
- 20 Assessing Smyth's place in the history of Baptists is problematic. The variability of his beliefs makes it difficult to place him in a specific tradition, both doctrinally and ecclesially. The instability of his position was accompanied by limited leadership skills, making it that much harder to recognise him as the father of Baptists, understood as a religious movement. Thomas White notes: "Smyth failed to serve as a solid leader for any movement. Continuously developing, Smyth's theology changed like leaves in the fall, moving from Anglicanism to Puritan to Separatist to Baptist and almost becoming Anabaptist". (T. White, J. G. Duesing and M. B. Yarnell (eds.), *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty*, B&H Academic, Nashville 2007, p. 57). For a detailed examination of Smyth's theological journey, see, Lee, *The Theology of John Smith...*
- 21 J. G. Clayton, *Thomas Helwys: A Baptist Founding Father*, "Baptist History & Heritage", vol. 8, no. 1 (1973), pp. 2–5.
- 22 E. A. Payne, *Thomas Helwys and the First Baptist Church in England*, The Baptist Union, London 1966, pp. 4–5.

- 23 T. Helwys (ed. R. Groves), *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, Mercer University Press, Macon 1998. The title of this pamphlet refers to the following in *The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*:
For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. (2 Thess 2:7–8, KJV) For Helwys, “the mystery of iniquity” is the work of Satan, built in solidarity in the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, with which the Puritans compromise and from which the Brownists only partially managed to separate themselves.
- 24 Helwys, *A Short Declaration*..., p. xxiv.
- 25 According to William T. Whitley, it was John Smyth who coined the term “pedobaptistry” (W. T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ’s College, 1594–8*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1915, p. vii).
- 26 He also criticised John Robinson, calling him a “malicious adversary of God’s truth” (Helwys, *A Short Declaration*..., p. 107).
- 27 Helwys, *A Short Declaration*, p. 53.
- 28 Helwys, *A Short Declaration*, p. 38.
- 29 *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, (Made in the Year 1603, and Amended in the Year 1865;) to which are Added the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Published under the Direction of the Tract Committee, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, London 1900, p. 6.
- 30 Helwys, *A Short Declaration*...p. 36.
- 31 Early Jr., *The Life and Writings*..., pp. 34–35.
- 32 Even John Locke, whose *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) is rightly considered one of the most important texts on religious freedom, was not so progressive.
- 33 Lecler, *Toleration*..., p. 462.
- 34 Helwys, *A Short Declaration*..., p. xxxiv. However, we should remember the debt he owed to Smyth in this respect. William Estep portrays Helwys as a man who incorporated the fundamental insights of his mentor, John Smyth, into what has been correctly called the “*First Baptist Statement of Faith*” [W. Estep, *Thomas Helwys, Bold Architect of Baptist Policy on Church–State Relations*, “Baptist History and Heritage” vol. 20, no. 3 (1985), p. 32]. Nevertheless, the issue of separation of church and state is Helwys’ own contribution. According to W. K. Jordan, thanks to *A Short Declaration*... Helwys went down in the history of the English Reformation as the one who completely separated public authority from the religious life of its subjects (W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England from the Accession of James I to the Convention of the Long Parliament (1603–1640)*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1936, p. 274).
- 35 In looking for the first attempts to establish the doctrine of the Baptists in relation to the competence of public authorities in matters of faith, we can refer to a text from 1612, which was written after John Smyth’s death, but undoubtedly from his inspiration, and in which members of his congregation, continuing their efforts to obtain membership in Waterlander, addressed this community with *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, Containing a Confession of Faith of Certain English People, Living at Amsterdam*. Article 84 of this document reads:
That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force and compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free, to every man’s conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, ect., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience. (James iv. 12) However, this was a document prepared in connection with accession to the Anabaptist Mennonite community, which

provides grounds for excluding it from the Baptist heritage. Additionally, its message does not deviate from the standard typical of Separatism, as the appeal for toleration refers to Protestant religious communities as those that should remain beyond the reach of public authorities. When it comes to freedom of conscience, we are talking about the conscience of members of such communities. Meanwhile, Helwys demanded *expresis verbis* toleration also for Mohammedans and followers of the Mosaic religion, as well as for Roman Catholics, which is an important difference. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that William L. Lumpkin, in his commentary on *Propositions and Conclusions...*, presented this text as “perhaps the first confession of faith of modern times to demand freedom of conscience and separation of church and state” (W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptists Confessions of Faith*, Judson Press, Chicago 1969, p. 124). The complete text of *Propositions and Conclusions...* can be found in: Burgess, *John Smith the Se-Baptist...*, pp. 241–257. It is worth noting at this point that Burgess maintains that the authorship of *Propositions and Conclusions...* should be attributed to Smyth, and that the text was written in the last months of his life (p. 293).

- 36 For Herbert Butterfield, applying the modern concept of human rights, the dynamic development of which has been recorded since the Enlightenment, to describe the reality of 17th century England is a manifestation of “liberal” (he himself uses the term “Whiggish” here) historiography. It is also an example of anachronism (see: H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, G. Bell and Sons, London 1963). Lee Canipe, invoking Butterfield’s authority, draws our attention to the dangerous tendency of contemporary researchers to also look at Smyth or Helwys as pioneers not only of Baptists, but also of religious freedom, in the understanding we give to this concept today (see: L. Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2011, p. 15).

A perfect illustration of the essence of the perception of human freedom by the fathers of the Reformation, in line with Helwys’ understanding of freedom of conscience, can be found in Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, which reads:

(...) Protestantism has never been liberal, in the sense that he did not make human freedom the starting point for his theology or ethics. The human freedom he speaks of is not a presupposition but a goal; as far as man is concerned, it assumes his bondage with sin. The true starting point is a free God. For Niebuhr, Protestantism is a “rejection of the liberal assumption that man must begin with himself, with his reason, his will, his ideals, his self-possession” (p. 25).

- 37 See: L. Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2011, pp. 29–32.

- 38 Helwys, *A Short Declaration...*, pp. 37–38.

- 39 In response to the Smyth group’s application for admission to the Waterlander community, Helwys presented a declaration of faith, the *Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining in Amsterdam*, in which he presented the doctrine of the group dissociating itself from the actions undertaken by its current leaders. The tenth point of the *Declaration of Faith...* states that:

the church off Christ is a compainy off faithful people 1 Cor. 1.2. Eph. i.r. separated from the world by the word & Spirit off God. 2 Cor. 6, 17. being kint vnto the Lord, & one vnto another, by Baptisme. 1 Cor. 12.13. Vpon their owne confession of the faith. Act. 8.37. and sinnes. Mat. 3.6. This may suggest that Helwys’ group had the same view as the Amsterdam Mennonites on the place of the church in the world or, more precisely, on distancing themselves from the affairs of this “world”. However, the first association can be misleading. This is not about literal separation from the “world”, as practiced by the members of Waterlander [faithful to the call for “a separation of the saved from the abomination” as delivered in the fourth article of the *Schleitheim Confession of Faith* (1527)], but about

- distinguishing oneself from it: Maintaining the awareness that one does not belong to it, despite the fact of remaining in it. Helwys believed that a Christian was sent to “the world”, which combined membership in the church and “citizenship of the world”. This dualism of belonging is given to him/her, so he/she cannot escape it by withdrawing from “the world”, because in this way he/she would lose the opportunity to bear witness (Mt 5:13-16), even if “the world” wants to imprison him/her or kill him/her for it. The texts of *Schleitheim Confession of Faith* and *A Declaration of Faith...* can be found in: W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia 1911, pp. 2–9, 85–92.
- 40 This attitude could be illustrated with the Apostolic lesson of St. Paul (1 Cor 9:19).
- 41 Early Jr, *The Life and Writings...*, pp. 152–153. See Canipe’s comment, *A Baptist Democracy...*, pp. 30–35; and his ‘*That Most Damnable Heresie*’ John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Baptist Ideas of Freedom, “Baptist Quarterly”, vol. 40 no. 7 (2004).
- 42 W. B. Shurden (ed.), *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, Mercer University Press, Macon, 1993, pp. 2–3.
- 43 The precise date of both Helwys’ birth and death is unknown. According to Stephen Wright, Helwys most likely did not live to see the end of 1615 (see: Wright, *The Early Baptists...*, p. 46).
- 44 Chute et al., *The Baptist Story...*, p. 20.
- 45 Jordan, *John Smyth and Thomas Helwys...*, pp. 194–195.
- 46 The text of *Persecution for Religion...* can be found in: Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. 95–180. As in the case of *A Short Declaration...*, the addressee of *Persecution for Religion...* is James I. It is also significant that Murton signed his work “Christ’s unworthy Witnesses, His Majesty’s faithful Subjects, commonly (though wrongly) called Ana-Baptists”, which shows that from the outset, Baptists had to struggle with being identified with Anabaptists. The lack of a personal signature under *Persecution for Religion...* allows us to assume authorship other than Murton’s. Joseph Ivey attributes them to Thomas Helwys [J. Ivey (foreword), *Persecution for Religion Judged and Condemned*, Wightam and Cramp, London 1827, p. 4].
- 47 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. 104–105.
- 48 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. 125–126.
- 49 “Gunpowder Plot of 1605” – on the night of November 4–5, 1605, Guy Fawkes (1570–1606) was arrested in the undercroft beneath the House of Lords, and a fuse was found on him. After searching the undercroft, 36 barrels of gunpowder were discovered. The ensuing investigation showed that for two years, a group of Catholics had been planning to assassinate King James I during his participation in a meeting of the House of Lords. Eight of the conspirators were sentenced to death, hanged, and then quartered. The “Gunpowder Plot” was the justification for a wave of repression against English Catholics.
- 50 E. B. Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution*, 1614–1661, Haddon, London 1846, pp. 114–116.
- 51 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. 226–227.
- 52 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, p. 215.
- 53 The declaration of *Dignitas Humanae* ushered in a radical change in this subject in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 54 The complete text of *Religion’s Peace...* can be found in: Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. 15–81.
- 55 The complete text of *Religion’s Peace...* can be found in: Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, p. 5; Barclay, *The Inner Life...*, p. 98; D. Massons, *The Life of John Milton*, vol. III, MacMillan & Co., London 1896, p. 102. Champlin Burrage, in turn, maintains that Busher belonged to a third faction of Smyth’s group, which emerged after the crisis following his request for baptism and membership in the

- Waterlanders. Thus, three groups were ultimately to be formed: Smyth's, Helwys' and a third, with the participation of Busher, who neither applied for admission to the Waterlander Mennonites in Amsterdam nor returned to England in 1612 with Helwys and Murton (C. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1912, pp. 32, 243–244). Burrage also does not rule out, following the findings of W. T. Whitley, that Busher was in fact a Dutch Anabaptist who had been naturalised in England and spent both his youth and old age in the homeland of his ancestors, and, even more importantly, had nothing in common with Smyth's Amsterdam Church, nor with the London congregation of Helwys and Murton (Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*..., p. 33). Busher's biography remains a mystery to us. We know nothing about the place and dates of his birth and death. Steve Wright provides a recent valuable insight into Busher's theological positions in: Steve Wright in: *Leonard Busher, Life and Ideas*, "Baptist Quarterly", 39:4 (2001).
- 56 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 6. This opinion is confirmed by Massons, *The Life of John Milton*, vol III, p. 102.
 - 57 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., pp. 17–18.
 - 58 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., pp. 21–22.
 - 59 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 22.
 - 60 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 24.
 - 61 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 33.
 - 62 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 51.
 - 63 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 23.
 - 64 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 67.
 - 65 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 56.
 - 66 The notion that Henry VIII was an *imperator in regno sue* was invoked in the Act of Restraint of Appeals to Rome (1533), the first act that confirmed the transfer of the church's jurisdiction to the English Crown, making the King the final legal authority in all ecclesiastical appeals in England, Wales, and other English possessions. The Act was drafted by Thomas Cromwell on behalf of Henry VIII.
 - 67 Early Jr, *The Life and Writings*..., p. 45.
 - 68 Tookey and his group moved theologically closer to Anabaptist positions. After leaving the Murton community, the expelled "Anabaptists" sought affiliation with the Waterlander Church, but their application was not approved. Jane Murton, Murton's widow, found refuge in Amsterdam and in 1630 was admitted to the Waterlanders, of which her parents were members (for the fate of Tookey's group and Jane Murton, see: Wright, *The Early Baptists* ..., pp. 58–64; W. H. Whitsitt, *A Question in Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptist in England Practiced Immersion before the Year 1641?*, Chas. T. Dearing, Louisville 1896, p. 61). Leonard Busher probably also lived out his days in exile in the Netherlands (Burrage, *The Early English*..., p. 278). Based on the reconstruction of the fate of the Murton group, delivered by C. Burrage, we assume that after the death of their leader, the remaining congregations, like Tookey's group before them, applied for admission to the Waterlanders (Burrage, *The Early English*..., p. 273). Hence, Burrage, presenting the fate of the first General Baptist congregations in the years 1624–1642, calls them Anabaptists (Burrage, *The Early English*..., pp. 270–280), an identification that may reflect their social reception in that period, but may also indicate an affinity with the Dutch Mennonites.
 - 69 A. Taylor, *The History of the English General Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1, T. Bore, London 1818, pp. 97–104.
 - 70 C. D. Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story*, Mercer University Press, Macon, 2008, p. 26.

4 Particular Baptists

Free conscience in the deliberations of Christopher Blackwood and Samuel Richardson

Although Smyth and Helwys are widely recognised as pioneers of English Baptists, the dogmatic, denominational, and ritual controversies related to their spiritual choices call for certain attention. Both men adopted the teachings of Jakob Hermanszoon, which led them to become closer to the Mennonites. Smyth sought baptism and membership in the Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonites. Helwys participated in the life of the Waterlander community in the period from leaving The Ancient Church until his departure from Smyth, finding in it, like Smyth, “a true church with true ministry”.¹ After returning to England, Helwys’ group remained in contact with the Dutch Mennonites. Neither group practised baptism by immersion, which leads us to consider the pioneers of Baptists as *de facto* Mennonites – that is, Anabaptists.² Doubts about the “Baptist heritage” of both are raised mainly by Particular Baptists who profess Calvinistic soteriology, which distinguishes them from General Baptists who support the Arminian doctrine. At the same time, Helwys’ refusal to join the Waterlanders and the significant doctrinal differences between him and the Amsterdam Mennonites lead one to doubt his true place was among the Anabaptists.³ Identifying the teachings and practices of the Spitalfields congregation with the doctrine of Anabaptists by both Anglican and Puritan circles was consistently repudiated by Murton. However, many members of his congregation expressed Anabaptist sympathies, which ultimately led to the 1624 crisis and most likely to the congregation’s collapse after Murton’s death.

4.1 Particular Baptists and the Puritan Revolution

Particular Baptists trace their origins to 1616, when in London’s Southwark,⁴ Henry Jacob established a non-conformist congregation⁵ (1563–1624). Following his death,⁶ John Lothrop succeeded him (1584–1653), and in 1637, Henry Jessey (1603–1663) succeeded Lothrop. The popular name of the group, derived from the first letters of the surnames of its first leaders, is the JLJ Church. In Jacob’s community, two ideas – that infants should not be baptised and that the church consisted of those baptised in an act of faith – gradually gained popularity. But they also aroused a great deal of controversy

and caused further divisions. As a result of the split, in 1633, a London community was established, with John Spilsbury as its pastor.⁷ Most of its members accepted the “baptism of believers”. In 1638, more “Anabaptists” from the one founded by Jacob joined Spilsbury’s community, which was now considered the beginning of the first congregation of Particular Baptists. In 1639, another London Baptist congregation was established in Crutched Friars, adhering to Calvinist soteriology.⁸ In March 1644, after the “believer’s baptism” controversy, William Kiffin left JLJ⁹ and founded – before becoming a very influential figure of the London Particular Baptists – another Baptist congregation.¹⁰ Finally, in 1645, Henry Jessey also adopted Baptist teaching on baptism and received the “believer’s baptism” at the hands of Hanserd Knollys¹¹ (1599–1691). As a result, the JLJ congregation eventually adopted the position of Particular Baptists (although it is not clear whether the entire congregation made the move).¹²

Richard Blunt, a member of the JLJ church, put forward the notion that, because in baptism the “old man” is buried so that a “new man” can be born, baptism must be accomplished by full immersion, which symbolises the burial of the “old man” in the earth, followed by the emergence, the “resurrection of the renewed one” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).¹³ In 1640, Blunt went to the Netherlands, where from 1619 such baptisms had been practised by the Collegiates from Leiden (a branch of Dutch Mennonites). The Collegiates professed Arminian soteriology; they were tolerant and did not perceive baptism as an act of entering the church (a condition for membership of a specific congregation). Nonetheless, and putting aside his Calvinism, they agreed to baptise Blunt.¹⁴

Baptism by immersion quickly became popular among London Baptists (including John Spilsbury’s community); hence, in *The London Confession of Faith of 1644*, adopted by seven Particular congregations, full-immersion became the only proper mode of baptism (Article XL).¹⁵ Moreover, Particular Baptists integrated baptism into the theology of the covenant, which was also strongly emphasised by the Puritans, especially the Separatist ones. The fathers of General Baptists, Smyth and Helwys, rejected the understanding of the covenant inherent in Separatism and looked at baptism as a visible act of incorporation into the church of Christ, universally understood, without emphasising its importance for membership in a specific congregation.

Meanwhile, early Particular Baptists promoted “covenant baptism”. Baptism is here not only a testimony of inclusion in the universally understood Bride of Christ, but also of membership in a particular congregation in which it was accepted (all the rights and obligations related to membership). Calvinistic soteriology and covenant theology, although understood differently from that promoted by Presbyterians and Brownists, allowed Particular Baptists to maintain contact with the theological discourse within the English Reformation.¹⁶

The first confession of faith of the Particular Baptists (*The Confessions of Faith of 1644*) saw the light of day when England was embroiled in the King’s

civil war with Parliament.¹⁷ The victory of the Army of Parliament over the royal forces did not herald the introduction of religious freedom in the kingdom, but a revision of the nature of the established religion. From that point on, it was no longer intended to strengthen the monarch's power, but to establish a Presbyterian "republic of saints". In the reality of the new construction of the English state religion, there was no place for non-conformist Baptists, just as there had been no place under Laud's rule. The religious pressure of the king's orders was to be replaced by the orthodoxy established by the Westminster Assembly of Divines.¹⁸ The political use of religion by the monarch was to give way to the construction of the Puritan New Jerusalem, which produced the *Directory of Public Worship of God* to replace the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in 1645, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) to replace the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles of Faith*.

With the introduction of the 1644 *London Confession of Faith*, Particular Baptists reaffirmed their commitment to Calvinistic soteriology, dissociating themselves from Arminian "Anabaptists", including General Baptists ("*Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne*" as they were presented). By articulating their fidelity to the principle of double predestination, they declared their devotion to the idea of the "covenant of grace", the central element of Puritan ecclesiology.

At the same time, they clearly distance themselves from all "antinomist" religious movements of the English Reformation ("disclaiming of Magistracy, denying to assist them either in persons or purse in any of their lawfull Commands"), to which Presbyterians also counted in Baptists. Repeatedly accused of spreading anarchy before the Westminster Assembly of Divines – where they hear from Presbyterians "bitter invectives against the toleration of the sectaries", as Underhill puts it¹⁹ – Baptists strive hard to improve their positive image.

Therefore, in principle, they did not publish disturbing manifestos in defence of freedom of conscience, prepared in an accusatory and confrontational tone, as Helwys, Murton, or Busher had all done. Their way of overcoming the hostility of the confessional environment was to clearly declare their own beliefs, expressed in the *Confession of Faith of 1644*. This document is not so much an exposition of the doctrine of Particular Baptists, but an attempt to confirm its compliance with Calvinist orthodoxy, despite insisting on credobaptism. While General Baptists, stubbornly seeking an uncorrupted church and finding no place in it for the unregenerate, exposed their differences, Particular Baptists used their declarations of faith not to confirm differences but to demonstrate compatibility (similarity) with the confessional environment.²⁰ While General Baptists demanded liberty of soul for everyone, because, as they suspected, only in this way could they freely implement their "radical" vision of the church, their Particular counterparts appealed for toleration for "slight deviation" from the Calvinist teaching on the visible church. Generally speaking, their main goal was not to spread the idea of full freedom of conscience, but toleration for their ecclesiology, an

inseparable element of which is the “believer’s baptism”, which is not, as they convinced those around them, “heterodoxy and fundamental error”.²¹ They also proved their loyalty to the “new order” by serving in the Army of Parliament. Rejected by the Presbyterian faction, they looked for support of the Independent party – ready to enact toleration for non-Catholic Christians, as long as they remain faithful to the conclusions of the synod in Dordrecht²² – in the Westminster Assembly of Divine and sided with Oliver Cromwell in his dispute with the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament in 1648. It is worth noting, however, that some Particular Baptists did not follow this cautious approach. Figures such as Christopher Blackwood and Samuel Richardson argued vigorously for broad religious toleration during the turbulence of the English Civil War.

4.2 Christopher Blackwood, a voice on religious toleration for Baptists

Of Christopher Blackwood (c. 1605–1670), relatively little is known.²³ He was born in Yorkshire, graduated from Cambridge University in 1625, and three years later accepted Anglican ordination, ultimately joining the Puritans. In 1635, he spent a short time in Massachusetts. By 1644, influenced by the teaching of Francis Cornwell, a General Baptist and a chaplain in the Army of Parliamentary, he came to believe that infant baptism was “an Antichristian Innovation, a human Tradition, and that it had neither precept nor example, nor yet true deduction from the Word”. This led him to become a Baptist.²⁴ After receiving the “believer’s baptism” at the hands of William Jeffrey, who was also a General Baptist, he became the co-minister of the General Baptist church at Spillshill House, near Staplehurst, Kent.²⁵ In spite of his strong ties with General Baptists, he remained faithful to Calvinist soteriology. After several years of service in the church, he enlisted in the army. He participated in the Irish campaign and then became the pastor of a Baptist congregation in Dublin – and the informal leader of Particular Baptists in Ireland. With the restoration of the monarchy, he returned to England, settling in London, though only temporarily. In 1661, he was off to Amsterdam, and then, a year later, back to Dublin, where he remained until his death.

In his text *The Storming of Antichrist in His Two Last and Strongest Garrisons, of Compulsion of Conscience and Infant Baptism* (1644), Blackwood became known as an opponent of both Anglicanism and the “Presbyterian party”, which he accused, rightly, of religious prejudice. His pamphlet, in addition to arguments in favour of “believer’s baptism”, is a defence of freedom of conscience, in which the author provides 29 arguments against conscience compulsion, then sums up 24 arguments from advocates of this type of compulsion, and ends with a reflection on the practical establishment of religious toleration (in relation to the actions of political authorities in this regard, as well as recommendations for people striving to establish it). As he argues, conscience is one of the five properties of the human soul, with the others being understanding, will, affectation, and memory. Every

person has a “natural conscience”, but it is corrupted by sin (“benumbedness and other defilements, the Ears full of filthy listnings, the Eyes full of wanton gazings”²⁶). A regenerated individual differs from an unregenerate one in that, realising his or her sinful nature, he/she does not stop trying to keep his/her conscience pure.²⁷ Conscience, responding to the call of love for God and one’s neighbour, undergoes transformation thanks to the light of the Holy Spirit given to people who listen to His Word. As Blackwood emphasises, it is impossible to force a person to see this light or experience such a transformation. Doing so is not only ineffective but also brings violence to the “natural conscience” of man.²⁸

Compulsion to participate in religious ceremonies (here Blackwood mainly targets the baptism of children) is an unauthorised interference in the processes taking place in a person’s conscience. In turn, imposing a specific interpretation of the Word of God is an obstacle to the action of the light of the Holy Spirit in the person studying it. Those who enforce orthodoxy, consistent with their understanding of the message of God’s Word, risk that the light of His Spirit will not reach the consciences of those to whom it is imposed, leaving all mistakes uncorrected. Compulsion builds a barrier between conscience and the light of spiritual comprehension.

At the same time, religious pluralism within one political community is, for Blackwood, an obvious consequence of God’s love for creation:

Christian brethren, who differ in judgement in smaller matters, as the Presbyterian, Independent, and Anabaptist (though falsely so called) may each of them in point of conscience enjoy his own way, to worship God under one and the same State, in one and the same Kingdome, according to that which each of them thinketh to be truth.²⁹

Without ignoring doctrinal and liturgical differences, Blackwood downplays their importance in the work of building the Kingdom of God on Earth to which Christians have been called. At the same time, it clearly separates participation in the Kingdom of God from citizenship of an earthly state, whose attempt to interfere in the work of building the former is tantamount to claiming authority in the church that belongs exclusively to Christ.³⁰ A similarity to the arguments of Helwys, Murton, and Busher becomes clear here. This challenges the claims of the magistrates who, like the kings of ancient Israel appointed by God, now sought – contrary to the teaching of the New Testament – the authority to regulate how people worship.³¹

I shall now turn to a controversial fragment of the argument presented in *The Storming of Antichrist...*, in which Blackwood distinguishes three categories of “evil works”. For the first two, he entrusts punishment to the state, while the third he leaves in the hands of the visible church. The first category is crimes against the light of nature and reason, including praising false gods, atheism, polytheism, blasphemy, murder, adultery, perjury, theft,

disobedience to parents, homosexual acts, drunkenness, and disturbing public order. The second is crimes against the “light of nations”, that is, crimes that no society in the world should leave unanswered. These include open public speeches against Christ, denying that the Scripture is His Word, and claiming that the Apostolic Epistles were addressed only to their addressees. The third category of crimes, the punishment of which Blackwood reserves for the visible church (admonition and excommunication), are crimes against the “light of faith”, including hypocrisy, heresy, lack of faith, and lack of repentance.³² The considerations on the prerogatives of the state and the church, along with the quoted fragment of the postscript, disturb the reception of *The Storming of Antichrist...* as a work in defence of freedom of conscience and religion. Adopting not only contemporary standards of religious freedom, but also the Baptist model – if we consider the findings of Helwys, Murton, and Busher as such – leads to the conclusion that the scope of religious freedom in Blackwood’s position is somewhat limited: He is closer to the findings of John Calvin than to the General Baptists. The secular authorities, according to the author of *The Storming of Antichrist...*, retain significant prerogatives in enforcing the First Table of the Decalogue. For the sake of maintaining public order and social unity, Blackwood appears to have consented to far-reaching concessions at the expense of religious freedom. One can only suspect that Blackwood’s primary goal was to fight for toleration for Baptists during the difficult time of the Civil War. Although the argument for freedom of conscience foreshadows Blackwood’s maximalist expectations in this respect (i.e. religious freedom for everyone), moving to the practical dimension (the authoritative powers of the magistracy), the author of *The Storming of Antichrist...* is satisfied with the minimum plan (i.e. toleration for Baptists).

Doubts regarding Blackwood’s position on the limits of religious toleration and freedom of expression in matters of faith are reinforced by the conclusion of the second pamphlet, where the author leaves his memory in posterity, that is, in *Apostolicall Baptism* (1645), where he wrote:

Let the reader also further enquire, whether the Magistrate have power to punish grosse idolatry, and blasphemy against God, Father, Christ, the Scripture, and holinesse, and seducements of persons by corrupt doctrines in fundamental points, when there is no violation of the publike peace; These being reall doubts to me, I will determine nothing on any side.³³

Unwilling to take a clear position, Blackwood opts to remain silent. However, this sends a subtle signal to the reader that his conscience tells him (though the New Testament offers no arguments to back his claim) that in the name of maintaining peace and public order, public authorities may legitimately erect obstacles to the preaching of “unorthodox” teachings.³⁴

4.3 Samuel Richardson, freedom of conscience and religious toleration for everyone

If Blackwood's biography is full of mysteries, we know even less about the life of Samuel Richardson (?–1658). None of the voluminous writing he left behind offers an account of his private life. Edward B. Underhill maintains that he was most likely a member of John Spilsbury's congregation, perhaps even his associate minister. Richardson's signature appears on the *Confession of Faith of 1644*.³⁵ Richardson's authorship of *The Necessity of Toleration in Matters of Religion*, a pamphlet of 1647 addressed to the Westminster Assembly of Divines, makes him an interesting figure.

Among the Particular Baptists, Richardson is distinguished by his commitment to freedom of conscience for all. He does not defend toleration for his own (credo-Baptist) worldview, but desires "that all, of any and all sentiments, be embraced within the compass of the blessing".³⁶ The text of *The Necessity*... was not an essay or dialogue, the preferred forms in the author's day, but a kind of Q&A about religious policy and a detailed argumentation for religious freedom.³⁷ Richardson presents reasons with which we are familiar from the writings of other Baptists, without actually adding anything new to the discussion between supporters of the impotence of public office in matters of faith and defenders of the institution of the state church.³⁸ The clarity of his message makes up for its lack of originality. One may suspect that the author's primary goal was to present as simply as possible the arguments Baptists have put forth and debated since Helwys' *A Short Declaration*.... Nevertheless, bearing in mind previous comments on the methods of Particular Baptists fighting for toleration for their convictions, it is worth considering these words at the end of *The Necessity*... With Richardson accusing Presbyterian clergy at the Westminster Assembly of Divines, the tone they strike is anything but conciliatory:

Mr. Presbyter, your principles are large and dangerous, who can tell what you will judge tolerable? Such as cannot dance after your pipe, and rule in your way, you judge heretics, and they must appear before your dreadful tribunal, to receive your reproof, which is sharp and terrible, and strikes at our liberties, estates, and lives. Your care is to destroy, which is contrary to the Word of the Lord, which saith, *they shall not kill nor hurt in my holy hill* (Is 11:9). Is your church this holy hill, seeing it is so corporal?³⁹

Your argument is authority; what you say must be an oracle of all men, to be deferred to without opposition, or contradiction. What is contrary to you is heresy, *ipso facto*, to be punished with fagot and flaming fire.

(...)

What, are you worthy of the name of Christians, of ministers of the gospel, and yet seek only your own things? You would all be tolerated, and would have none tolerated but yourselves; you would suffer none to live quietly, and comfortable, but those of your way.⁴⁰

For Richardson, the state church means repression, and it does not matter whether it takes the form of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, or Presbyterianism. The intolerance of the Presbyterian-dominated Westminster Assembly of Divines, together with the Parliament tracking sectarianism, spreading like “weeds in the garden of the church”, does not portend peace in the Kingdom of England, but an endless religious war.

4.4 Particular Baptists and the postulate of religious freedom during the English Civil War

Voices of Blackwood and Richardson remained isolated among Particular Baptists. The realities of war are not conducive to spreading tolerance. On the contrary, an opponent’s worldview differing from one’s own makes it all the easier to take his life. The English Civil War (1642–1652), which spilled into Scotland and Ireland, bears this out. In such difficult times, human life and respect for the convictions of others are not highly valued. We must further bear in mind that, unlike the Anabaptists, the Baptists were not pacifists. Service in the Army of Parliament – among both General and Particular Baptists – meant participating in a war that had not only political goals but also a religious justification. This was especially visible in the course and fruits of the expeditionary mission in Ireland, where General and Particular Baptists played an active role.⁴¹ The expeditionary troops of Parliament, from October 26, 1651, to November 1652, were led by Lieutenant General Edmund Ludlow (c. 1617–1692), a Particular Baptist, under whose command the conquest of Ireland was completed. Many Baptists can also be found among the “Irish” officer cadre, including in the highest ranks. Henry Lawrence (1600–1664), who served as Commissioner for Ireland before being appointed to Oliver Cromwell’s Council of State in 1653, was also a Particular Baptist. Awareness of the realities may explain why, as Louise F. Brown notes, the toleration promoted by Baptists was theoretical rather than practical:

There is no indication that when Baptists were in positions of power they were inclined to grant to others that liberty of conscience which they so earnestly advocated. To be sure, it is chiefly from conditions in Ireland that we have to draw our conclusions upon this point, but when all allowances are made, it is hard to believe that, in practice, the majority Baptists were in advance of their generation in tolerance.⁴²

The repression that affected Irish Catholics did not arouse any opposition from Particular Baptists. Furthermore, by serving in the army, they themselves took part in it. Also in their native England, they did not attempt to prevent the persecution of “Papists” and Quakers, especially since many who joined the Society of Friends left Baptist congregations first. In Scotland, their victims were Presbyterians. So, the aversion to the Baptists among Christians of other

denominations resulted not only because of the Baptist radical attitude towards paedobaptism, but also from numerous examples of resorting to violence against those who practised it.⁴³ In other words, having often experienced social rejection, despite their doctrinal commitment to religious freedom, Baptists were not willing in this harsh time to certify with their lives the truth of the motto attributed to Voltaire by Evelyn Beatrice Hall: “I Disapprove of What You Say, But I Will Defend to the Death Your Right to Say It”.

In 1659, the Particular Baptists published their manifesto, *Declaration of Several of the People called Anabaptists, in and about the City of London*, in which they refused to tolerate “Papists” and non-Christian beliefs (i.e. according to Puritans, false religions).⁴⁴ In 1660, in response to this act of loyalty to the new public order and prevailing public sentiment, the General Baptists published *A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith*, in which, in section XXIV, they stated:

That it is the will, and mind of God (in these Gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own Consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution, as simply upon that account; and that for any in Authority otherwise to act, we confidently beleive is expresly contrary to the mind of Christ, who requires that whatsoever men would that others should do unto them, they should even so do unto others, Matt 7.12. and that the Tares and the Wheat should grow together in the field, (which is the world) until the harvest (which is the end of the world,) Matt 13.29, 30, 38, 39.⁴⁵

Despite the political turmoil of the Civil War and the Interregnum, the General Baptists’ unequivocal position on complete religious toleration remained the norm, according to their understanding of the message of the Good News regarding the church and the role of secular authority in it.⁴⁶

A comparison of the expectations of General and Particular Baptists vis-à-vis religious toleration in the 17th century reveals two possible models: Jurisdictional toleration and separatist toleration.⁴⁷ The former assumes a close relationship between the state and the religion of the majority (majority denomination), while accepting the fact that minority religions (confessions) exist within its borders, which, although they constitute a departure from the norm, are nonetheless tolerated.⁴⁸ In turn, separatist toleration demands the separation of church and state, their full independence. Although Baptist doctrine, both General and Particular, includes a call for separatist toleration – de Marchii himself points to Baptists as advocates of such toleration – disregarding the doctrinal differences between them would be a mistake. In fact, during the Civil War and the Protectorate, the Particular Baptists seemed to be content with jurisdictionalist toleration (they recognised the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as the doctrinal basis of the English state religion, merely adding their appeal for toleration of credobaptism). The exception here will be the position of Samuel Richardson, a staunch separatist.

Notes

- 1 Barclay, *The Inner Life*..., p. 71.
- 2 Barclay, *The Inner Life*..., pp. 72–73. In fact, we have no certain knowledge of how the early General Baptists administered baptism. It therefore cannot be ruled out that they practised immersion and that Smyth, Helwys, and Murton were rebaptised in this way. Some indications for the immersion thesis can be found in: Burgess, *John Smith*..., p. 327; and in Leonard Busher's statement in *Religion's Peace*..., where he presents baptism as a command of Christ, requiring it to be an act "willed and joyfully accepted, carried out with His will in water, that is, by immersion in water, which symbolises death" (Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*... p. 59). Let us add that the emergence will be a symbol of new life (rebirth).
- 3 See: Coggins, *The Theological Position*... Coggins maintains that Helwys did not share Melchior Hoffman's Christology, typical of the Amsterdam Mennonites and their attitude to political power, which, however, in his opinion, does not mean that he cannot be considered a Mennonite (p. 258). Helwys accused Smyth himself of unorthodox teaching about the corporeality of Christ, after their final separation, against which the latter, however, consistently defended himself [see: Lee, *The Theology of John Smith*..., pp. 221–222]. A different point is presented by Walter H. Burgess, who argues that it was Smyth's acceptance of the Mennonite teaching on the incarnation of Jesus that was the main reason for the division in Smyth's congregation, and the issue of his efforts to be rebaptised by Mennonites only sealed the matter (see: Burgess, *John Smith* ..., pp. 179–181). Helwys also rejected the teaching on freedom from the consequences of original sin, specific to Mennonites and ultimately adopted by Smyth. The reader will find a detailed comparison of Smyth's and Helwys' positions in: Jordan, *John Smyth and Thomas Helwys*... Arminianism of Smyth and Helwys also seems inconsistent when one takes into account their attitude to the issue of free will (see: Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy*..., pp. 31–33). It is also worth noting here that in point six of the letter to Waterlanders, which accompanied *A Declaration of Faith*... sent to the Mennonites, Helwys accused Smyth of adhering to a principle alien to his group, but specific to Anabaptists, stating that people who share in power and reach for the "sword" in defence of the justice of the secular "world" cannot belong to the church (the sixth article of *The Schleithem Confession of Faith*, 1527). Smyth responded to Helwys' letter, refuting the accusations against him, but did not refer to the sixth point, which allows us to assume that he actually accepted this principle of Anabaptists as his own. The radical separatism of state and church – making the former part of a sinful "world" from which a Christian should distance himself for fear of possible corruption of his soul – was, in Helwys' opinion, inconsistent with biblical teaching (see point 24 of *A Declaration of Faith* ..., which points to the role of power in the economy of salvation, referring here to Chapter 13 of *The Epistle to the Romans*). The reader will find a list of Smyth's "errors" pointed out by Helwys in: McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*..., pp. 92–93.
- 4 Jacob gathered around himself the scattered members of Francis Johnson's Ancient Church, who did not decide to follow in the footsteps of their pastor and remained in Southwark, instead of seeking refuge in Amsterdam (see: Barclay, *The Inner Life*..., p. 98).
- 5 Although he himself emphasised that his community remained in unity with the English state church.
- 6 Jacob spent the last two years of his life in Virginia.
- 7 John Spilsbury (1593–c. 1668) – shoemaker born in London; author of *A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme* (1643), where he presented his understanding of the New Testament church, and *God's Ordinance, The Saints Privilege* (1646), where he presented his understanding of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

- 8 B. Evans, *The Early English Baptists*, vol. II, Heaton and Sons, London 1864, pp. 76–77.
- 9 William Kiffin (1616–1701) – leather merchant born in London, a main leader of early Particular Baptists. Kiffin was a member of the Separatist Devonshire Square congregation, where, despite having no formal theological training, he was asked to proclaim the Word of God. Under his influence, the community adopted a Baptist stance and will be remembered as Devonshire Square Baptist Church. In 1644, Kiffin helped draft *The First London Confession of Faith*. His public appearances in defence of the theology and ecclesiology of Particular Baptists made him one of the most recognisable Baptists of his time; Parliament’s support in the dispute with the king brought him considerable popularity, thanks to which he became MP for Middlesex in Cromwell’s last Parliament in 1656–1658. After the restoration of the monarchy, Kiffin was briefly imprisoned. After regaining his freedom, he became involved in the release of other dissenters, including the General Baptists. In 1670, he was elected Sheriff of London and Middlesex, but was refused the position because of his nonconformism. In 1861, Kiffin published *A Sober Discourse of Right to Church Communion*, the first Baptist treatise to promote “closed communion”. In response to the Parliamentary *Act of Toleration of 1689*, Kiffin, along with other leaders of Particular Baptist congregations, led the formation of the first national association of Particular Baptists in the British Isles to adopt *The Second London Confession of Faith*.
- 10 D. C. Bustin and B. R. Howson, *Zealous for the Lord: The Life and Thought of the Seventeenth-Century Baptist Hanserd Knollys*, Pickwick Publication, Eugene, 2019, p. 20.
- 11 Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691) – born in Calwell (Lincolnshire), son of an Anglican clergyman and graduate of St. Catharine’s College (Cambridge). In 1629, Knollys adopted Anglican ordination. Due to his non-conformist views, he was summoned to the High Commission in 1636, but he failed to fulfil his obligation, fleeing first to London and then to New England. He returned to England in 1641. On his return, he served as pastor in the Army of Parliament for a short time and then joined Henry Jessey’s congregation. In 1658, he became a curate in his father’s Anglican parish in Scartho, although he had previously been deprived of the right to serve in the Church of England. At the same time, he presided over the congregation of Particular Baptists that he founded in London. He was imprisoned many times for his Baptist beliefs. Knollys was involved in the process of association of Particular Baptist congregations in England and is also the author of *A Moderate Answer to Dr. Bastwick’s Book Called Independency Not God’s Ordinance* (1645), *The Shining of a Flaming Fire in Zion* (1646), and *An Exposition of the Whole Book of Revelation* (1689).
- 12 Evans, *The Early*. vol. II., pp. 149–150.
- 13 Burgess, *John Smith*..., 161.
- 14 Read about Blunt’s mission in the following: C. Burrage, *The Restoration of Immersion by the English Anabaptists and Baptists* (1640–1700), “The American Journal of Theology”, vol. 16, no. 1 (1912).
- 15 Burrage, *The Restoration of Immersion*..., p. 162.
- 16 About the covenant theology of early Baptists and its discussion with the Protestant environment, especially with Puritan paedobaptism, see: P. Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, Solid Ground Christian Books, Birmingham 2013; and M. C., Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals. Baptist Identity in the English Revolution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019.
- 17 The direct cause of the English Civil War, which broke out in 1642, was an attempt to submit Presbyterian Scotland to the jurisdiction of the Church of

- England, which led to an armed conflict between two monarchies connected by a personal union. The Parliament of England, convened in the spring of 1640 by Charles I of England, refused to finance the war with the Scots, holding the royal court and Archbishop Laud responsible for starting it. In response, the king dissolved Parliament and convened another, the so-called Long Parliament (session from the fall of 1640 to April 1653). The new Parliament only strengthened the Presbyterian faction, which not only did not support the king in the war with Scotland, but also accused the Archbishop of Canterbury of “corrupting religion” in England, whose policy of religious uniformity in the Kingdom was interpreted solely as a work to strengthen the monarch’s power. As it ultimately turned out, Charles I and Archbishop Laud failed to incorporate the Presbyterian Church of Scotland into the Church of England. The effect of their imprudent policy was to undermine the position of the latter in England itself.
- 18 Westminster Assembly of Divines – a council of the English Parliament, functioning in the years 1643–1653, composed of 121 Puritan clergy (theologians) and deputies of the House of Commons; established for the purpose of reforming the Church of England so that it could achieve doctrinal and liturgical communion with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.
 - 19 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, p. 244.
 - 20 H. L. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1987, p. 68.
 - 21 T. George, *The Reformation Roots of the Baptist Tradition*, “Review & Expositor”, vol. 86, no. 1 (1989), p. 11.
 - 22 A. Zakai argues that attributing tolerant sympathies to the Independents in the Westminster Assembly of Divines is highly risky because it is difficult to distinguish their attitude towards “sectarianism” from that of the Presbyterian faction. Moreover, the Independents were not ready to accept the Baptist postulate of separation of church and state. (A. Zakai, *Orthodoxy in England and New England: Puritans and the Issue of Religious Toleration, 1640–1650*, “Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society”, vol. 135, no. 3 (1991), pp. 425–429). Nevertheless, it was only among Independents that Baptists could seek support for their cause.
 - 23 A reader interested in biography and scholarship on Blackwood should read the following texts: M. B. Yarnell III, *Christopher Blackwood: Exemplar of the Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptists*, “Southwestern Journal of Theology”, vol. 57, no. 2 (2015), pp. 181–205; D. Brown, *Christopher Blackwood: Portrait of a Seventeenth Century Baptist*, “Baptist Quarterly”, vol. 32, no. 1 (1987), pp. 28–38.
 - 24 Yarnell III, *Christopher Blackwood...*, p. 185.
 - 25 J. M. Cramp, *Baptist History: From the Foundations of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1869, p. 399.
 - 26 A phrase Blackwood coined in *A Soul-searching Catechism, Wherein is opened and explained, Not only the Six Fundamental Points set down Heb. 6.1., but also many other Questions of highest concernment in Christian Religion*, printed for Giles Calvert, at the black Spread-Eagle at the West-end of Pauls, London 1653, p. 14.
 - 27 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist...*, place of publication unknown, 1644, p. 14.
 - 28 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*, pp. 16–17.
 - 29 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*, p. 30.
 - 30 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*, p. 14.
 - 31 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*, pp. 22–23.
 - 32 Blackwood, *The Storming of Antichrist*, p. 23.

- 33 C. Blackwood, *Apostolicall Baptisme, postscriptum*. Quotation taken from: McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*..., p. 109.
- 34 McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, pp. 109–110. According to John Coffey, even asking this kind of question was unusual in Blackwood’s era (see: J. Coffey, *Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution*, “The Historical Journal”, vol. 41, no. 4 (1998), p. 967).
- 35 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., p. 237.
- 36 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, p. 243.
- 37 The complete text can be found in: Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, pp. 255–285.
- 38 Richardson recalls the *Parable of the Wheat* (Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, p. 258); he also refers to the argument that God will not accept glory from people forced to give it (Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, p. 261); and draws the reader’s attention to the fact that nowhere in the New Covenant do we find confirmation of the prerogatives of the magistracy in matters of religion, typical of the powers of the kings of ancient Israel (Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*, p. 272)
- 39 A little earlier, Richardson argued that the true, visible church has a spiritual, not a corporeal, nature. The latter belongs to the magistracy, so it has no authority over the spiritual reality of the church.
- 40 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty*..., pp. 283–284.
- 41 A. R. Cross, *Baptists, Peace, and War: the Seventeenth-Century British Foundations* in: G. L. Heath, M. A. G. Haykin (eds.), *Baptists and War: Essays on Baptists and Military Conflict, 1640s–1990s*, The Lutterworth Press, Cambridge 2015, pp. 17–19.
- 42 L. F. Brown, *The Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England During the Interregnum*, Oxford University Press, Washington, 1912, p. 9. See also: T. D. Bozeman, *John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty*, “Church History”, vol. 75 (2006), pp. 69–70.
- 43 Brown, *The Political Activities*..., pp. 138–139.
- 44 Coffey, *Puritanism and Liberty*..., p. 961.
- 45 McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*..., pp. 119–120.
- 46 A call for as wide as possible religious toleration can be found, for example, in the petition of a General Baptist minister from London pastor, Edward Barber, *To The King’s Most Excellent Majesty and Honorable Court of Parliament*, edited in 1639, during his imprisonment in Newgate, to which he was sentenced in response to the refusal to certify that God ordered children to be baptised by sprinkling (see: K. E. Durso, *No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s–1700s*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2007, pp. 62–64). Barber cites numerous passages of the *Holy Scripture*, including the *Parable of the Tares*, arguing against religious coercion. The second outstanding example is Henry Denne (c. 1605–1660), author of *The Quaker No Papist, in Answer to The Quaker Disarm’d* (Francis Smith, London 1659); imprisoned twice for his Baptist beliefs, member of the Leveller group and soldier of the the Army of Parliament, which he left after Banbury’s rebellion, for his participation in which he was sentenced to death, but was eventually pardoned after distancing himself from the conspirators; assistant to Thomas Lambe in the London congregation of General Baptists (See: Durso, *No Armor*..., pp. 64–70). In his pamphlet, Denne strongly defends the Quakers, despite the clearly negative opinion of Baptists about their doctrine and practices. Baptists’ antipathy towards Quakers was intensified by the fact that Quakers often gained followers among them. Hence, Denne, defending the Quakers, exposed himself not only to the followers of paedobaptism but also of credobaptism.

Perhaps the radical attitude to freedom of conscience and religious toleration of the General Baptists and a certain conciliation of the Particular Baptists in this respect, can be explained by their origins. Although both traditions stem from

Brownist Separatism, there are subtle differences. The separatism of Smyth and Helwys was radical (they perceived the Church of England as a creation of the Antichrist). Meanwhile, the first Particular Baptists were, as Henry Leon McBeth emphasises, semi-Separatists who, in their critical attitude towards the English state church, condemning its iniquities, did not deny it the right to be a true church (McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage...*, p. 39). Undoubtedly, the Calvinist reform of the state church in the 1950s improved its reception among Particular Baptists.

- 47 J. Locke, *List o tolerancji* (Polish edition, preface, E. de Marchi, transl. L. Joachimowicz), PWN, Kraków 1963, p. XXVI.
- 48 This understanding of tolerance is appropriate, for example, for technical sciences, where, when making measurements, we tend to accept the lack of precision in determining the value, due to the prevailing measurement conditions, within the previously adopted limits: The tolerable measurement error. Here we have a norm and an accepted deviation from it.

5 Part 1

Concluding remarks

In his introduction to an anthology of texts on religious freedom written in an extremely turbulent period of English history (1614–1661), Edward Bean Underhill presents Baptists as uncompromising advocates of the visible church understood as a community of “saints” united by faith, and aroused by the action of the Spirit, not by the compulsion of the “sword”; in which the doctrine, liturgy or church hierarchy are not determined by any secular orders, because neither Jesus nor his Apostles sanctioned or ordered them. The church, composed of “saints”, leaves the “unregenerated” outside. In the church understood in this way, there is no place for secular interference, for the intervention of secular law or subjection, because only the Spirit shapes its form, working in the faithful through the Word of God.

The teachings of the fathers of the Reformation and the architects of the Church of England remained at odds with this definition of the mystical Body of Christ.¹ The Church of England did not give up the possibility of using “external instruments” in the work of “internal transformation” of a person marked with the “seal” on the day of baptism, an act confirming membership in the Church. For the Baptists, a church of people baptised without their will is a false church, one that grows by the power of man (baptising an unconverted person), not the Spirit of God. The false church gathers people inclined to walk in the “broad road”, which inevitably leads to destruction, instead of accepting God’s help to follow the “narrow gate” of truth and justice (Matt 7:13–14). Hence, the oppressive intervention of civic power, involved in the functioning of the false church – which, like a concerned parent, cannot avoid the obligation to punish a naughty child – becomes indispensable. In other words, the false church cannot exist without violence, without the imposition of doctrinal verdicts, established rituals and hierarchies, and, most importantly, without relying on secular authority and its “sword” to enforce submission.²

As Underhill points out:

The fundamental idea of the baptists was antagonistic with all this (the Reformation concept of the church and the role of the state in strengthening it – remark: RP). They thought and said that the temple could not be built until God had provided the stones. Holy men must be first

produced by the power of the Spirit of God, and then shall a building rise to the glory of Him who had redeemed them by his blood. No human workman could be of use but as the channel of blessing; it was the prerogative of God to create anew in Christ Jesus. His word was the only effectual instrument of divine energy: force and coercion of every kind were inadmissible. *Faith is the gift of God. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*; and no other weapon must the ministers of God's word employ.

Since then the church ought to be the aggregated result of an internal divine operation, exerted on every individual before he becomes a member of it, so in its formation no kind of outward compulsion can be permitted. The unconscious babe cannot be *made* a member of a community, where a hearty willing assent of the regenerated mind is an essential condition of membership, since intelligence is not there to give value and significance to the deed (i.e. the act of baptism – remark: RP); nor may men be driven by force or fear, as foolish sheep, within the fortified barrier of the nation's church, since these cannot convert the soul.³

The early Baptists did not contest that the “sword” of the magistracy was commanded by God (Rom 13:1–7), but this “sword” does not hover over His church, the community of “saints in Christ”. The “sword” wielded by secular authority rightly punishes offences against state law, even with death. But in the church, the ultimate penalty for apostasy or heresy is excommunication (Matt 18:15–18), not execution. State law regulates interpersonal relations and the affairs of the temporary world, but it does not interfere with the relations between members of the imperishable church, because someone else is the legislator and enforcer of the law here. Intolerance and violence against dissenters (religious dissidents) result from the confusion of the earthly and spiritual orders.

The impotence of state power in matters of the church's organisation, its teaching and discipline, remains, in the eyes of the fathers of the Baptist movement, closely related to credobaptism. Their position was in sharp opposition to the paedobaptist defence of infant baptism promoted in the *Heidelberg Catechism* (answer to question number 74).⁴ A Baptist congregation composed only of “saints” will last, even if surrounded by unbelievers. Both “saints” and “infidels”, jointly subjected to public authority, are obliged to obey its orders and prohibitions, conditioning the peaceful co-existence of both groups within one civic body (commonwealth). However, the church will not coincide with the political body due to human expectations, desires, or decisions, even if the latter has the power of the “sword”. The church is in the world, but it is not the world; it operates in areas occupied by particular countries, but their borders do not describe its scope – the church is not “territorial” in nature but is a community (assembly) of believers, united by one spirit. Thus, the “territorial” state church, with universal (inclusive, *de facto*

obligatory) membership, which, in the designers' intention, was to be the Church of England, is the work of humans sinning by lack of humility towards the Creator's plan. Indeed, the Church of England's internal struggles to achieve unity, *ipse facto* homogeneity, became the very environment that gave rise to the Baptists. The Church of England is not a true church and cannot be one, as the first Baptists maintained.

The term "territorial church" (national, state) is an oxymoron. The separation of "saints" from infidels forces a radical separation of the church from the state (magistracy), as well as from the Church of England, because the hope for an internal transformation of the latter is vain. At the same time, this separation does not mean the "saints" turning away from the concerns of this world, from those who live only in its affairs. The separation does not suppress Christians from being active members of political society; to engage in the affairs of the state (commonwealth). On the contrary, a member of the church is concerned with the common good but clearly distinguishes it from the good of the church. This is the fundamental difference between Baptists and the Anabaptist movements of continental Europe. This difference was raised by Thomas Helwys and John Murton – defining the character of their congregation in clear opposition to the Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonites – though many of their contemporaries ignored the difference.⁵ As Timothy George writes:

By maintaining a fundamentally positive view of the state, while at the same time sharply separating the spiritual and temporal realms, the Baptists positioned themselves between the radical pacifism of the Anabaptists and the Calvinist tradition of magisterial reformation. The juxtaposition of civil loyalty and religious conviction enabled the Baptists to work for positive change within the political system (England in the era of the Puritan Revolution – remark: RP).⁶

In the writings of the first Baptists, freedom of conscience functions not as a natural right of a man who freely shapes his worldview, but as an acknowledgement of the sovereign power of God who inscrutably guides the thoughts of the believer; after all, the Spirit blows from wherever it wishes, how it wishes, and when it wishes. Helwys strongly emphasised this in *A Short Declaration*...as did Busher in *Religion's Peace*...and Murton in *Persecution for Religion*.... The matter is effectively reflected in Article XLVI (entitled: *Of Liberty of Conscience*) of *An Orthodox Creed* of the General Baptists of 1678:

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is King of kings, and Lord of all by Purchase, and is Judge of Quick and Dead, is only Lord of Conscience; having a peculiar right so to be; He having died for that end, to take away the Guilt, and to destroy the filth of Sin; that keeps the Consciences of all Men in Thralldom, and bondage, till they are set free by his special

Grace. And therefore he would not have the Consciences of Men in Bondage to, or imposed upon, by any Usurpation, Tyranny, or command whatsoever, contrary to his revealed Will in his Word, which is the only Rule he hath left, for the Consciences of all Men to be ruled, and regulated, and guided by, through the assistance of his Spirit.

And therefore the obedience to any Command, or Decree, that is not revealed in, or consonant to his Word, in the holy Oracles of Scripture, is a betraying of the true Liberty of Conscience. And the requiring of an implicate Faith, and an absolute blind Obedience, destroys Liberty of Conscience, and Reason also, it being repugnant to both. And that no pretended good end whatsoever, by any Man, can make that Action, Obedience, or Practice, lawful and good, that is not grounded in, or upon the Authority of holy Scripture, or right Reason agreeable thereunto.⁷

Individuals enjoy freedom of conscience because they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, the only ruler of their conscience. A follower of Christ looks only in the Holy Scripture for answers to questions about what doctrine he should profess and how he should practice his faith. This point has been presented clearly here. In matters of conscience, a Christian enjoys autonomy in relations with secular authorities and other people, while recognising the authority of His Word, the teaching of which he reads with the help of His Spirit. In the relationship with the Redeemer, the independence of the believer disappears, giving way to the heteronomy of the Revelation. Such a presentation of freedom of conscience is at odds with the liberal understanding of individual autonomy, which should be absolute (in relation to everyone and everything) if it is to be genuinely autonomous.

Religious persecution, resulting from the denial of freedom of conscience to religious dissidents, turns out to be sacrilege, an invasion of the earthly *potestas* into the territory of God's *dominion*, an iconoclastic attack on His *imperium*, in man's proud desire to achieve *potestas absoluta* (omnipotence unique to Him). One's personal relationship with God constitutes a *sacrum*. And it does not matter what kind of motives guide the earthly ruler and who inspires his actions. If people of the church encourage the magistracy to raise its "sword" against "dissidents", then they too are committing profanity.

At the centre of the argument of the early Baptists may be found the opposition of the earthly realm to the Kingdom of God, and in the depiction of the latter, there is a clear focus on its spiritual emanation ("order of grace"), continuing while waiting for the arrival of the "order of glory". In the Kingdom of God, understood this way, earthly power does not participate. However, the assembly of the faithful, that is, the visible church of "saints", has a share in it.

The People of God in ancient Israel were led by royals also in the spiritual matters, because God called David, Solomon, and others over the people of Israel, to be rulers based on God's law, which established their monarchical

authority in matters of religion. However, as Helwys argued, and Murton further contributed, the Incarnation accomplished this period of God’s people’s existence. The logic of the Old Covenant monarchical prerogatives no longer applied, because it pleased God to establish another King in God’s Kingdom, Jesus Christ; it is He who sits on the “throne of David”, and no earthly ruler can take that place without falling into the sin of sacrilege.

The political theology of the imperial court in the Roman Empire, medieval monarchies, and the spokesmen of Anglican Erastianism (like Richard Hooker) turns out to be heretical in nature. It diminishes the authority of the exclusive King of God’s people, an authority in which the rulers of this world have no share, even if they choose to call themselves, like David, “God’s anointed”, which was to be confirmed by “sacred rites” in the company of the Bishop of Rome or any other church hierarchy (e.g., the Archbishop of Canterbury).⁸ When one is accused of spreading heresy, the accuser is brought to face the same accusation [violation of the provisions of *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* (1603), in this case, Point Two of the Section on the Church of England (*Impugners of the King’s Supremacy censured*)]. However, it is the one who responds with incrimination to the accusation of dissent, holds a “steel sword”, which he does not hesitate to use. Both Helwys and Murton learnt this harsh lesson and finished their lives behind the walls of Newgate Prison.

In their understanding of the visible church, the conditions of membership in it, and its role in the world, the first Baptists opposed the tradition that had been developed in the Christian world since Theodosius, for which the optimal situation is compatibility of membership in the political body (state) and the church. This sufficed to be perceived as enemies not only of the Church of England, but of all public order in which parish (church) membership was associated with political recognition, that is, membership in the political community (the commonwealth). In a world in which political power grounded its authority on the legitimacy provided by the institutional church and in which the institutional church sought support from the magistracy as the guarantor of its successful development, Baptists demanded a return to the widely forgotten reality of the first generations of Christians, for whom the separation of memberships in the earthly order and in the transcendent Kingdom of God was an unshakable norm, while the only guarantee of the church’s survival was Providence (Matt 16:18).

It must be strongly emphasised here that the goal was not to “privatise” religion, but to “depoliticise” it. One will not find in the writings of Helwys, Murton, or Busher any proof for the accusation they faced – that the claim they formulated for the unconditional recognition of individual soul liberty was, in fact, tantamount to the desire to “privatise” the voice of the Spirit. For them, demanding the right to individually follow the voice of conscience did not signal a desire to “dismember” the church (turning away from other followers of Christ). Rather, it was an act of trust in God’s providence.⁹ As opponents of state religion and what might be called a “public cult”, they

were not advocating for a “private cult” because the church is an assembly of saints, not a one-person club, where religious practice is confined to the inner, spiritual realm of the individual.

For the First Baptists, the church remains an assembly of the faithful, developing not due to the care of those in possession of political power, but by the breath of the Spirit, by fidelity to the mission of the Apostles, by listening to the prophecies, and above all, by the will of its head, Jesus Christ. *The Epistle to Ephesians* offers the following passage: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners [Greek ξένοι (xenoi)] and strangers [Greek παροικοι (paroikoi)], but fellow citizens with God’s people [Gr. συμπολιται τῶν ἁγίων (sympolitai tōn hagiōn)] and also members of his household [Greek: οἰκεῖοι τοῦ Θεοῦ (oikeioi tou Theou)], built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19–20). Paul describes membership in the community of the church, which he called “His household” (Old Testament Bethel), using the term “fellow citizens”, which is usually used in reference to the political sphere [Greek: πόλις (pólis)]. Thus, the “House of God” is not placed by the Apostle of the Nations in the private sphere [Greek: οἶκος (oikos)], but it becomes a kind of “city”, functioning in the public, though non-political, sphere.¹⁰ Even if Christians are strangers, or at least strangers to the members of the political community in which they function – as the addressees of Paul’s epistle were strangers to the people of Israel – they remain fellow citizens of the “House of God”. In turn, as the author of *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (1 Pet 2:13–19) wrote, even if Christians are “foreigners” and “strangers”, then, for the sake of their Lord, they remain subject to the civil authority, to the king and his governors, whom they must obey. And this obligation remains valid even when it involves the necessity of enduring “unjust suffering”, because the human master is not always good and gentle, but can also be harsh.

The early Baptists did not renounce citizenship in the English commonwealth but strictly distinguished it from the “citizenship of the saints”, submitting the former to the latter. In the name of loyalty to the “citizenship of saints”, they were pushed to society’s margins, often enduring imprisonment and banishment, but not questioning the need for human authority and accepting its harsh sentences. However, a period of particular tribulation came with the war between the Puritan Parliament and Charles I, the king of England and Scotland, in which they sided with the former and joined its army. This gave the Baptists a hand in challenging the authority of “God’s anointed” as well as in his trial and execution. Baptists were likewise among the conspirators who plotted the assassination of Charles II in 1683 (Rye House’s conspiracy of 1683) and among the insurgents of Monmouth’s rebellion of 1685, who sought to overthrow James II.¹¹

The ecclesiology of the early Baptists was based on the experiences of the non-conformist Brownists. The fathers of General and Particular Baptists clearly originated from the Separatist movement. One could say that it was radicalism in the search for “holiness”, irreconcilable non-conformism in the understanding of the essence of the visible church, that prompted the group

of Brownists in Amsterdam, gathered around Smyth and Helwys, and in London, under the leadership of Spilsbury, to take their separate paths. It turned out that the programme of purifying the Church of England through Presbyterian Puritanism, and even the Separatists' belief in the need to abandon it in the name of permanently separating the "saints" from those unworthy of being called Christians, was no longer sufficient. The true visible church is a gathering of regenerated people – consciously professing faith in the Triune God and voluntarily being baptised into the community of God's covenanters – and only they can participate in it.

This perception of the visible church significantly limits its scope. One may suspect that the first General Baptists defended freedom of conscience not only for themselves but for everyone, also because they outlined the boundaries of the visible church so narrowly. Since only God knows human hearts (and only He knows who belongs to the invisible church), why should one person decide for others if they may be included in the visible church (baptising those unaware of the importance of this act and its consequences)? Only the Father is able to draw a human being to Himself (John 6:44), so that he can sincerely confess faith in the Holy Spirit, in the redemptive work of His Son, and, consequently, find his place in the visible church, voluntarily being baptised into it. Freedom of conscience is the freedom to follow the voice of God's Spirit, because faith comes from listening to God's Word ["Listen, O Israel" (Hebrew: *שמע ישראל*, *Shema Yisrael*) – the command opening the First Commandment (Deut. 6:4; Rom 10:17)]. Anyone who does not hear this voice, or when hearing does not listen to it, should not be forced by circumstances to become a member of the visible church. Therefore, the promotion of freedom of conscience and religious toleration is not a secondary effect of adopting the Baptist position because it is at the heart of the concept of the "believers church". It is not an emanation of the self-preservation instinct of religious dissidents, repression experienced by members of the majority denomination, armed with the "sword" of secular authority, but an important element of their identity, founded on theology and the ecclesiology of Baptists.¹²

Contrasting the realities of the church of the Old Testament with those specific to the New Covenant and the resulting political theology – recognising the religious prerogatives of the kings of ancient Israel and emphasising the impotence in this respect of the magistrates in the world after the act of God's incarnation, radically changing human history – is the first of the dominant narrative threads in the struggle for freedom of conscience and religious toleration of the First Baptists. The second is the Gospel's image of God's field in which wheat and tares grow side by side. Both narratives point to the person of Christ. It is He, not the earthly ruler, who sits on the "throne of David", and it is He, not the one wielding the earthly "sword", who will separate the "good grain" from the "weed". The "wheat" illustrates the visible church of the "saints", while the "tares" are the hypocrites in this church, people without faith. The "good grain" and the "tares" live side by side until the "day of judgment", and the judge will be the Heavenly King.

To sum up, the “free church of free people” is smaller in number in relation to the community of “saints” accompanied by their children, regardless of their state of spirit (manifestations of grace or lack thereof), and definitely smaller than the state church, territorially (jurisdictionally) described, with universal membership. Such a radical narrowing of the scope of the visible church led to widespread rejection of Baptists as a dangerous, anti-state (Anglicanism), and anti-social (Presbyterianism, and, to some extent, Independentism) sect that had to be fought ruthlessly. The negative attitude towards Baptists was only further reinforced when they were identified with Anabaptists,¹³ who would long be associated with the anarchism of the Münster commune.¹⁴ Although during the Protectorate the political position of Baptists (especially Particular Baptists) improved significantly, the practice of credobaptism was commonly rejected and condemned.

Notes

- 1 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. lxxiv–lxxv.
- 2 Bill J. Leonard introduces the 17th-century Baptist and Anabaptist as precursors of the phenomenon that we today call the “second generation of the Reformation” (or “second Reformation”) – crediting them with initiating the tradition of the “Free Churches Tradition”, which are characterised by a democratic ecclesial system (today described as congregationalist), conversionism, theological diversity, biblical orthodoxy, and the promotion of freedom of conscience (B. J. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*, Baylor University Press, Waco 2010, p. 4).
- 3 Underhill, *Tracts on Liberty...*, pp. lxxvi–lxxvii.
- 4 The *Heidelberg Catechism* – written in 1563, on the initiative of the Prince-Elector Palatinate, Frederick III Wittelsbach (reign 1559–1576). This is one of the basic doctrinal documents of the Reformed Churches, originally intended to constitute the basis for theological compromise between the Calvinist and Lutheran currents. The catechism was a popular exposition of Protestant theology among the Puritan reformers of the Church of England; at the same time, it gradually gained recognition within the church itself.
- 5 The text of *Persecution for Religion...* John Murton signed as follows: *Unworthy Witnesses of Christ, His Majesty's faithful Subjects, commonly (though wrongly) called Ana-Baptists*. Murton's comment indicates that, from the very beginning of their existence, Baptists struggled not to identified with the Anabaptist movement.
- 6 T. George, *Between Pacifism and Coercion: The English Baptist Doctrine of Religious Toleration*, “Mennonite Quarterly Review”, vol. 58, no. 1 (1984), p. 37.
- 7 McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions...*, pp. 158–159.
- 8 The belief that the monarch is an instrument in God's hand, appointed by Him not only to maintain order in secular affairs and public peace, but that he also has a share, resulting from his office, in the work of building the Kingdom of God on Earth, will accompany secular superiors from the time of Constantine, who is presumed to have declared:

He examined my service and approved it as fit for his own purposes; and I, beginning from that sea beside the Britons and the parts where it is appointed by a superior constraint that the sun should set, have repelled and scattered the horrors that held everything in subjection, so that on the one hand the human

race, taught by my obedient service, might restore the religion of the most dread Law, while at the same time the most blessed faith might grow under the guidance of the Supreme [Book II, 28 (2)]; and similarly, having the power of this God as ally, beginning from the shores of Ocean I have raised up the whole world step by step with sure hopes of salvation, so that all those things, which under the slavery of such great tyrants yielded to daily disasters and had come near to vanishing, have enjoyed the general restoration of right, and have revived like a patient after treatment. The God I represent is the one whose sign my army, dedicated to God, carries on its shoulders, and to whatever task the Word of Justice summons it goes directly; and from those men I get immediate and happy recompense in marks of signal victory. This is the God I profess to honour with undying remembrance, and him I clearly perceive with unsullied and pure mind to take highest place.

[Book IV, 9] (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, introduction, translation, commentary by A. Cameron, S. G. Hall, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 104–105, 157)

Here, the ruler is obliged to fight schismatics and heretics in the name of the unity of the church, heralding the coming of the Kingdom of God.

- 9 Burgess, *John Smith...*, p. 307. This accusation was reinforced by the accusation of the antisocial nature of the Baptist movement, as unfettered freedom of conscience was supposed to lead to the loosening of social bonds, relaxation of morals, and even anomie – the association with the Anabaptists from Münster was not accidental here.
- 10 It is worth recalling here that it comes from the Greek *ekklēsia*, in its original meaning, one that does not evoke associations with a transcendent reality or having a religious character, but rather, clearly, a political one: with an assembly of citizens summoned by a herald to take part in collegial deliberations. Here, scattered people are called to form a group of citizens. The called [Gr. *ἐκκλητοί* (*ekkletoi*)] is the community of the called out [Gr. *ἐκ κάλε* (*ek kaleo*)], whose civic task is to make decisions regarding this community. Christianity's adaptation of the term *ekklēsia* was accompanied by its juxtaposition with the Latin *congregatio*, as a result of which we received a concept that accurately reflected the essence of the church: *Ecclesia convocata et congregata* – that is, an assembly created as a result of God's call. The church turns out to be a “community of the called”, that is, a community of those summoned and gathered, but the “herald” here will be the Holy Spirit. Here we are again faced with the intriguing question of the scope of the Church, which the Puritans asked of the advocates of the national universalism of the Church of England. Since, etymologically, the Church is called from the “world”, it will not subjectively coincide with this “world”, in this case with the English commonwealth, contrary to the “geometric proof” carried out by Richard Hooker.
- 11 Cross, *Baptists, Peace, and War...*, pp. 17–24.
- 12 W. B. Shurden, *Baptist Freedom and the Turn toward a Free Conscience: 1612/1652*, in: M. E. Williams, Sr., W. B. Shurden (eds.), *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2008, pp. 23, 28–32.
- 13 Joseph Lecler, tracing the scale of repression under the rule of the Tudors and the first Stuarts, points to the Anabaptists as the religious group subjected to the most severe persecution in England. The Anabaptists did not pose a real threat to Erastianism, but the widespread aversion to them made it easier to treat them with the utmost severity (Lecler, *Toleration ...*, p. 340). It is worth noting that pyres for Anabaptists were also ignited under the rule of Mary I Tudor (Lecler, *Toleration...*, p. 345).

- 14 The Münster commune – an Anabaptist community in Münster (Westphalia), operating in the years 1534–1535. Its creation is associated with eschatological moods and egalitarian tendencies of the German Peasant War. In Münster, radical Anabaptists attempted to create a theocratic “kingdom of God”. Having gained the support of the local Lutheran pastor, Bernhard Rotmann (c. 1495–c. 1535), the Anabaptists managed to convince influential townspeople, including Bernhard Knipperdolling (c. 1495–c. 1536), the mayor-designate, that Münster was in fact an apocalyptic “New Jerusalem”. In addition to forced baptism of adults, polygamy and the death penalty for the slightest offences were practised in Münster, private property was abolished, and the reading of books except the Bible was banned. Townspeople who refused to be rebaptised were forced to leave the city. Ultimately, the community was headed by a tailor, John of Leiden (c. 1509–c. 1536), who declared himself the heir of King David, claiming absolute power in the city as the “king of Zion”. After the city was besieged by the troops of the expelled Catholic bishop with Lutheran sympathies, Prince Franz von Waldeck (1491–1553), supported by other German princes, both Catholic and Lutheran, the commune collapsed, and its leaders were executed.



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Part 2

Church–state relations in the thought of the first Baptists in America

“Briers and Thorns” in the “Garden” of the Church of Massachusetts



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6 Part 2

Introductory remarks

6.1 The Puritan city upon a hill in New England

Since the times of the Apostles, Christians have been expecting the imminent second coming of Christ, because “The time has come (...) The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). It was no different during the reign of the last Tudors and the first Stuarts. As H. Richard Niebuhr notes: “The Protestants of the 17th century lived between two revolutions: they looked back to the revolutionary revelation of God in Christ and they looked forward to his full unveiling, to the ultimate redemption which faith promised them”.¹ The Puritan reform of the Church of England was supposed to be proof that “the wise virgins did not lack oil to their lamps” (Matt 25:1–13). A specific “eschatological fever” explains not only the zeal of Puritanism, but also the nonconformity of its radical wing, described by its opponents as fanatics – because nothing can stand in the way of the “saints”, looking for the coming of the millennial Kingdom of Christ, in which only they, as the truly faithful, can have share. However, the policy of the first Stuarts was so harsh that some religious dissidents decided to leave their homeland. Believing in God’s Providence, instead of preparing the “New Jerusalem” in their native England, a group of Puritans decided to engage in its construction on the other side of the Atlantic, in pristine New England. To be a Puritan was to radically turn away from the sin of this world. Since the hopes associated with the ruler of Presbyterian Scotland, as James VI taking the throne of England as James I turned out to be in vain, due to his full devotion to Anglican Erastianism, leaving the homeland seemed to be a reasonable solution. At the same time, there was still hope that the success of the “commonwealth of saints” abroad would ultimately change the fate of England, which, seeing God bless this “holy experiment”, would follow the example of New England.² Otherwise, nothing would save the former from perdition.³

In March 1629, Charles I dissolved Parliament and imprisoned its Puritan leaders. In April 1630, a group of four small ships, carrying about 400 men and their belongings, left Cowes on the English Isle of Wight. The expedition was commanded by John Winthrop (1588–1649), who, authorised by the

Massachusetts Bay Company, was to coordinate the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (hereinafter referred to as MBC), which had been established a year earlier. Along the way, the team was joined by seven more ships, bringing the total who had embarked to that point to more than a thousand. After two months of travel, the “Winthrop fleet” (as history will remember the participants of the expedition) docked at the port of Salem, a settlement founded in 1626 by several hundred Puritans. Shortly after his arrival, Winthrop took over the position of Governor from John Endecott (c. 1600–1665).

The colony was a commercial venture of the Massachusetts Bay Company: A group of private investors planning to settle in the vicinity of the Plymouth Colony (hereinafter referred to as PC), established in December 1620. The MBC population was growing rapidly, overshadowing Plymouth. In just a decade, approximately 20,000 settlers of the Great Migration disembarked there.⁴

Both PC and MBC were to become a source of profit for investors,⁵ as well as an asylum for freedom-seeking religious dissidents of the English Reformation; a refuge from the gaze of the Anglican bishop and the king’s judge; a place where one could live a pious and righteous life in the eyes of God. However, PC was the creation of the Brownists, a democratically governed, Separatist community whose early history is closely intertwined with the fate of the Scrooby-Gainsborough community of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. The founders of MBC, in contrast, had declared an allegiance to the Church of England, and the democratic sympathies of the Brownists were alien to them.⁶ The Pilgrims sought freedom for their beliefs in the New World, away from a world corrupted by sin, choosing emigration to remain faithful to them. The colonists of the Winthrop Fleet did not leave the Old World to save themselves from destruction, but to save the world itself.⁷

New England was not just a refuge for the members of the fleet, but also a beacon for old England. Their church was not a “garden” separated from the “desert of the world”, passively awaiting the arrival of the expected “end of the ages”, but a life-giving fountain that would transform the “desert of the Old World” into the fertile land of the Kingdom of God. In his famous sermon – perhaps the most frequently quoted text in the story of the Puritan “holy experiment” – John Winthrop addressed those involved in this noble mission with these words:

For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are upon us. Soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our God in this worke wee haue undertaken, and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. Wee shall open the mouthes of enemies to speake evill of the wayes of God, and all professors for God’s sake. Wee shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are a going.⁸

While this may sound like a warning against possible embarrassment, a fiasco was not an option. The “saints” would not fail, because their faith was based on a strong foundation. Christ’s words about the inhabitants of a “city upon a hill” were finally to be fulfilled. Many generations of Christians had been waiting for this time to come. The world, plunged into chaos and injustice, had to reach such a state of decline that the light of the inhabitants of the city upon a hill would finally shine. Its construction could finally begin, as both the builders (the Puritan saints) and the building materials (Puritan, Calvinist doctrine) had been properly selected. Here, the visible church and the commonwealth achieved harmony because, in fact, every member of the former was also a member of the latter, not by the command of those in possession of political power but by the decisions of those involved in this holy experiment, whom God called to contribute to His sacred work. Is this not the very definition of the Kingdom of God, in which He becomes “all in all”? Here, the “New Jerusalem” of John’s prophecy was revealed to the world, not as an idea (an invisible church or the Kingdom of God in the spiritual dimension), but as a real entity: The New English “Republic of Saints”, the Holy Commonwealth.⁹ Since the visible church in Massachusetts was the church without defects – “without stain or wrinkle”, as Edmund Morgan put it, using an image from the *Letter to the Ephesians* (Eph 5:27)¹⁰ – MBC would undoubtedly be the place where Christ would accomplish His deed, and the visible church would be transformed into His Kingdom, giving rise to His millennial reign on Earth.¹¹

The prerequisites for this bold project seemed encouraging. Firstly, the people involved in its implementation had been carefully selected¹²: They constituted the visible church of the regenerated, united by the covenant. Secondly, there were no significant theological differences among them or opinions on how the church should be organised. Doctrinally, they remained faithful to the teachings of John Calvin, supplemented by the conclusions of the synod in Dordrecht. As for the church system, they supported the independence of local congregations. However, over time, autonomous fellowships accepted the authority of the Massachusetts Church Synod – developing a unique structure, functioning at the intersection of Presbyterianism and Independentism, which we today describe as New England Way Congregationalism: A specific federation of congregations, the basis of which, in accordance with the etymology of this concept (Latin: *fidere*) was the mutual trust of the entities creating it. In this unique formula of the visible church, theoretically autonomous gathered churches, composed of regenerated people, were in practice incorporated into the structure of the territorial functioning (in the jurisdiction of the colony) Church of Massachusetts (the name here is used conventionally, taking into account the specificity of Congregationalism; it was popularly called “the Standing Order”).¹³

What appeared certain to Winthrop and other colonists proved to be an unattainable utopia.¹⁴ Unattainable because the spiritual unity of the Church of Massachusetts could not be maintained in the long run.¹⁵ The challenge to

this unity, just a few years after the beginning of this “holy experiment”, came from: The Antinomians, led by Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) and John Wheelwright (1594–1679); the rebellious preacher Roger Williams; and, a little later, the Quakers, principally undesirable troublemakers in the “garden of the righteous”. Anarchy erupted in the “New Jerusalem”, the strike of the Evil, who entered into a deadly fight with the Puritans for the future of the church and stood in the way of Christ’s rule in His Kingdom. Maintaining unity required an appropriate reaction. In a world where the church and the political body were working together to advance the Kingdom of God, the response was twofold: Excommunication of the unorthodox (exclusion from the church) and banishment (exclusion from the commonwealth). This solution was effective as long as nonconformity was rare, but its spread portended the inevitable collapse of the “holy experiment”. Ultimately, the “republic of saints” failed to overcome the internal contradiction of the Puritan reform. As Vernon L. Parrington emphasises, having challenged the traditional solidarity of English institutions, Puritanism released the element of individualism, which, however, it could not keep under control; breaking the corporate feudal order of hierarchical society, it replaced it with unorganised citizens looking for opportunities to create new communities. Spontaneously emerging Brownist congregations would also be such communities. The disintegration of the Church in England could no longer be stopped. The close interweaving of church and state is no longer an unquestioned norm because diversity (worldview and political pluralism) has become so.¹⁶ The implementation of the postulate of renewal of the visible church resulted in its dismemberment. The rejection of the “false church” produced many “true” ones. The democratic idea of the universality of priesthood emboldened outstanding minds – in colonial America, it would be Anne Hutchinson or Roger Williams, for example – to demand recognition by the social environment of their spiritual autonomy (freedom of conscience, in a practical sense) in search of their own path, even if for others it seemed to lead to perdition.

6.2 The “Republic of Saints” in the Massachusetts Bay Colony

In the England of Charles I, the Puritans were religious dissidents, initially in disputes with his bishops and judges, and later in open civil war, for whom “God’s anointed” would be blamed by Parliament for treason and for whom Charles would ultimately, in 1649, pay with his head.¹⁷ In New England, the Puritans were to establish the socio-political and ecclesial orders, not to reform them. In the old country, they had struggled with the rules of the state church, while in the new, they established them themselves. In MBC, they did not have to strive for freedom because they defined its scope. They did not have to endure accusations of heresy because they were the ones who imposed orthodoxy. What they desired was a pure church, and its purification was not a revolutionary act challenging the public order, but a restoration of regularity – that is, a restoration of the eternal, perfect order in which God is

sovereign; in which the “saints” humbly carry out His will. Their call was not “Liberty!”, but “Order!”, however distinct from what had prevailed in Charles’ I Church of England, with its “papistic traditions” on the one hand, and the “Arminian innovations” of William Laud, on the other. As Avi Hu Zakai emphasises:

Puritanism needs to be seen less as a revolutionary movement whose aim was to destroy existing established order and more as a conservative religious movement designed to secure its own utopian vision of order and authority by enforcing unity and conformity in religious affairs, and by rejecting any plea for liberty of conscience and religious toleration.¹⁸

The settlers of Massachusetts consistently pursued this understanding of Puritanism. “Religious innovators” could not count on the kindness of the Puritan mainstream, because it was not progress or denominational heterogeneity that were the main values, but the defence of Calvinist orthodoxy.¹⁹

MBC’s political system, a theocracy, did not identify the church with the state (magistracy). Although the church and public authorities both sought the Kingdom of God, they each carried out different tasks, and each was formally separate from the other. At the same time, religion was the foundation of both structures, so it would not be inaccurate to consider Congregationalism the established religious order of the colony, in its own way integrated with the political order. This system was described by contemporaries as the New England Way.²⁰ Because the Church of Massachusetts was in fact an aggregation of essentially autonomous communities (self-sufficient and self-governing congregations), it looked like the magistrate (colonial and local municipal authorities) had an advantage over the fragmented structure of the decentralised church. However, in practice, the system was one of “checks and balances” between two authorities, ecclesiastical and secular. It was designed for the state civil authority to remain on the “path of justice” (using its powers prudently for the public benefit), not abusing its power to the detriment of the “saints”,²¹ while the church – the individual congregations – would not fall into heresy. The spirit of the covenant hovered over the entire social structure – the central authorities of the colony and municipalities, as well as the Church of Massachusetts and its individual congregations – constantly reminding everyone that they were in fact one body (the Holy Commonwealth): Both a civic community and a visible church.²² In such a manner, New England Congregationalism advanced the covenant from the level of individual congregations to the entire Church of Massachusetts. This church would enjoy God’s promises, and the land inhabited by its members would be continually healed as they insistently call the name of the Lord, humble themselves, persevere in prayer, and truly seek God’s will (2 Chron. 7:14).

Looking for guidance in John Calvin’s *Institutio religionis christianae*, they eagerly tailored an order the Creator would appreciate. But unlike Calvin’s vision for the relationship between the church and the state, it did not subordinate the civic body to the church. H. Richard Niebuhr warns us:

It is an error to regard Calvinism as hierocratic: the state was no more subordinate to the church in its theory and practice than the church was to the state. They were both subject to a common constitution, the will of God declared in Scripture and nature, and their cooperation was to be assured by their common loyalty to the kingdom which overreached them both.²³

Michael P. Winship depicts this political-ecclesial construction as a “Godly republic”, in which we see the transition of “Godly ecclesiastical republicanism” into “Godly civic republicanism”.²⁴ The primary goal of both structures (ecclesiastical and civic) was to strengthen the “city on a hill”, its inhabitants living under the watchful eye of Providence.²⁵ Therefore, congregations had full autonomy in choosing people to hold church positions and control over daily functioning. However, to create a new congregation, the consent of the secular authority was required, and that authority could indict, imprison, or banish clergy committing common crimes or heresy. Additionally, and uniquely for the time, clergy could not hold any public functions.²⁶ At the same time, those who applied for it were obliged to belong to one of the official communities of the Church of Massachusetts, which required them to have voting rights (both active and passive suffrage). The clergy retained the ability to influence the world of politics, preaching in sermons about the need to elect the right candidates – citizens with Christian virtues. Clergy also advised elected officials and legislative bodies. Officials falling into iniquity were at risk of excommunication, but their possible exclusion from the congregation did not constitute grounds for losing their office (even if the excommunication was related to holding it). Local authorities were required to secure facilities for the needs of local churches; they were also obliged to financially support the clergy. Members of the congregation were required by law to attend services regularly, and all inhabitants of the colony, including those who were not members of the Church of Massachusetts, were subject to a tax for church activities.²⁷

To standardise teachings and practices in a church made up of autonomous congregations, in May 1646, a group of clergy invoked the Great and General Court – the colonial legislature that also exercised administrative and judicial powers – to convene a synod of the Church of Massachusetts, which was to develop a doctrinal standard in the Church. As a result of its effort, in 1648, *The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline* was created. It recognised the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as the basis for teaching in the Church of Massachusetts and defined its order, including conditions of membership and the requirement of “communion of the Lord’s Table” of

individual congregations, that is, intercommunion. It also laid down the rules governing its cooperation with the public authority, which was obliged to prosecute and punish violations of the commandments of both Tables of Mosaic law. Chapter XVII, point six reads:

It is the duty of the magistrate to take care of matters of religion, and to improve his civil authority for the observing of the duties commanded in the first, as well as for observing of the duties commanded in the second table. They are called gods. The end of the magistrate's office, is not only the quiet and peaceable life of the subject in matters of righteousness and honesty, but also in matters of godliness, yea, of all godliness.²⁸

Adoption of *The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline* may be interpreted, as William G. McLoughlin does, as a negative verification of the belief in the permanent and unthreatened confessional consensus of the Church of Massachusetts, which sought defence against dissenters in formalism, since "a consensus could no longer be taken for granted".²⁹ If the church turned to formalism, it had to take the form of "Mosaic law", because Christ's "rule of love", by its very nature, cannot be translated into civic legislation. Civil law regulates behaviour through obligations, orders and prohibitions; It cannot enact the command to "Do everything in love" (1 Cor. 16:14).³⁰ It could be argued that in MBC those seeking the "order of grace" and looking forward to the "order of glory" ultimately turned to the "order of divine justice" in their search for the Kingdom of God.

However, the situation was different for the founders of MBC. They did not detect any tension between legalism (the legal implementation of the "order of God's justice") and the "rule of love". They had no doubt that the principles they followed – the actual implementation of the call to love the Father and neighbours – were the right ones. After all, Christ also stipulated that He "did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34). As H. Richard Niebuhr maintains:

These early American Protestants believed in the kingdom of God, but it was not a society of peace and concord to be established by men of good will; it was rather the living reality of God's present rule, not only in human spirits but also in the world of nature and of human history. His kingdom was not an ideal dependent for its realization on human effort; men and their efforts were dependent upon it; loyalty to it and obedience to its laws were the conditions of their temporal and eternal welfare.³¹

It is not the unforced moral dispositions of people of good will, in whose spirit God's Word prevails, that are the condition for the success of the entire enterprise, but God's law, regulating the natural order and determining the

direction of the development of the history of the humankind. Trust in the “law” based on the *Holy Scripture*, even if in the opponents of the “republic of saints” it evoked associations with authoritarianism or the idolatry of “biblical constitutionalism”, was supposed to protect the public order from being subjected to randomness: The spiritual subjectivism of the Quakers, as well as other pursuers of the guidance of the Spirit, regardless of where they want to lead their followers (e.g. Antinomians).³²

The New England Puritans, both as church and political community – united in the doctrine of the covenant into one body – sought not peace and harmony, but “the kingdom of God and its righteousness”, the principles of which are to be fulfilled here and now, which, once recognised, cannot be ignored, because for the faithful they are not an external reality but an immanent one. MBC’s system is the implementation of God’s plan for His People, not a pattern of architects of a temporal order, looking for a *modus vivendi* in the Augustinian *civitas terrena*, a “city” constantly challenging God’s will.³³

Since Elizabethan times, in order to garner the widest possible social support, the Church of England had been looking for a doctrinal balance between the socially established Catholic tradition and the expectations of the advocates for a deep reform of the state church. The radicalism of the nonconformist Puritans could not be indulged. However, anyone who would see Puritans – victims of religious persecution in England – as advocates of religious freedom would be mistaken. That is, unless they presented their expectations vis-à-vis freedom in the way Thomas Babington Macaulay describes in his essay to James Mackintosh, on the Glorious Revolution of 1688:

The doctrine which, from the very first origin of religious dissensions, has been held by all bigots of all sects, when condensed into a few words, and stripped of rhetorical disguise, is simply this: I am in the right, and you are in the wrong. When you are the stronger you ought to tolerate me; for it is your duty to tolerate truth. But when I am the stronger, I shall persecute you; for it is my duty to persecute error.³⁴

This doctrine, equipped with a “rhetorical disguise”, can also be detected in John Winthrop’s lecture on liberty. Governor Winthrop distinguishes two liberties: “natural” and “civil (federal)”. The first is supposed to result from the sinful nature of man and consists in doing to other people what you want. It is freedom to do both good and evil. “Natural freedom” cannot be reconciled with any power, authority, or order. Striving for this form of freedom degrades humans to the state of wild beasts, or maybe even something worse, because, as Winthrop notes, using Terence’s phrase, *omnes sumus licentia deteriores*. It is the enemy of peace and truth. In turn, “civil” or, as Winthrop calls it, “moral freedom”, is freedom based on God’s covenant with a human, on moral law, and all institutions created by man for its enforcement. It is freedom to do what is right and just. It is freedom that requires submission to the authority, because it is realised in that authority’s actions. This is the freedom

that Christ wants for his people. Supporting the government is tantamount to defending true freedom: “civil liberty”.³⁵ The problem with Winthrop’s reasoning is that when he deliberates about power, he has in mind its specific form, the MBC’s magistracy, ready to reach for the “sword” whenever it observes a failure to uphold public order, including “theological heterodoxy”. Vernon L. Parrington presents Winthrop’s understanding of freedom this way:

(...) the philosophy of natural rights whittled down to a covenant between God and man. It rests on the assumption of an absolute law, superior to expediency. But may not honest men disagree as to what constitutes the good, just, and honest? and may not godly authority imperceptibly slide over into plain tyranny? Although the Saints may have professed themselves satisfied with Winthrop’s doctrine, the pages of early Massachusetts history bear ample record of the dissatisfaction of the sinners.³⁶

A range of questions arises here. What type of freedom was exercised by Winthrop and those with him, leaving England? In the name of what freedom did he question the authority of the royal power, which repressed the Puritans in order to preserve the unity of the Church of England? How did the religious policy of the magistracy of Charles I differ from that pursued in the Colony of which Winthrop became a governor?

All these questions were answered by Macaulay. In this context, the prerogative Court of the Star Chamber and the ecclesiastical Court of the High Commission illegally oppressed the subjects of Charles I, who stood in the truth, raising the sword against the Puritan faithful to Christ’s truth. Meanwhile, MBC’s magistrate rightly uses the sword against the unorthodox, because false teachings cannot be tolerated. Repressed in their homeland, considered heretics in the Church of England, Puritans head to New England in search of liberty, persecuting those who wrongly use their freedom, whom Winthrop does not hesitate to call “beasts”, because their freedom is not noble “civil freedom”, but an inferior, egoistic, “natural”, capricious self-will. As it turns out, it is the readiness to “stand in the truth” – from which there are no deviations – that determines whether we are “citizens-saints” who participate in the covenant, enjoying their “civil freedom” without any hindrance, or heretics who, like animals, claim “natural freedom”. The point is that the exclusive right to determine the content of this “truth” was secured by the ecclesial-political establishment of MBC. Perry Miller acquainted us with the essence of the reasoning of the New England Puritans, at the same time emphasising that it was not particularly exclusive at that time:

Every respectable state in the Western world assumed that it could allow only one church to exist within its borders, that every citizen should be compelled to attend it and conform to its requirements, and that all inhabitants should pay taxes for its support. When the Puritans

came to New England the idea had not yet dawned that a government could safely permit several creeds to exist side by side within the confines of a single nation. They had not been fighting in England for any milk-and-water toleration, and had they been offered such religious freedom as dissenters now enjoy in Great Britain they would have scorned to accept the terms. Only a hypocrite, a person who did not really believe what he professed, would be content to practice his religion under those conditions. The Puritans were assured that they alone knew the exact truth, as it was contained in the written word of God, and they were fighting to enthrone it in England and to extirpate utterly and mercilessly all other pretended versions of Christianity. When they could not succeed at home, they came to America, where they could establish a society in which the one and only truth should reign forever.³⁷

Religious toleration turns out to be the choice of a hypocrite, religiously indifferent; it is not of value to the one who really knows the truth and trusts it, but to the one who only hypocritically proclaims that he believes in it. Consequently, for the New England Puritan, true religious freedom is the right to establish one true religion, not the legal recognition of pluralism: A regime in which everyone possesses one's own "truth".

If we adhere to the approach we previously applied to Thomas Helwys' reflection on freedom, using Berlin's language, we could, to some approximation, consider Winthrop's "natural freedom" as "negative freedom" and his "civil freedom" as a "positive freedom". The former is not limited by any external force: The autonomously acting self, implementing one's own will, regardless of the moral assessment of the effects of the actions undertaken. In the case of the latter, my "self" fits into a specific ideal of a good, just, desirable life (a life worth living). The difference between Helwys' and Winthrop's positions is clear. Helwys hands over the right to establish a "positive" plan for man directly and exclusively to the Creator Himself, who, in His Word, by giving His Spirit, guides man who wants to remain in a relationship with Him. Winthrop does not hesitate to entrust the task of establishing this plan to the ecclesial-political establishment of the Colony, which, thanks to its members' "sanctity", recognises the "narrow gate" of righteousness among the wide ones of lawlessness.

Taking the above into account, we are faced with a crucial question: Does not the nature of the Church of Massachusetts correspond to the characteristics of the Church of England in the times of Charles I, with which it officially remained united?³⁸ The New England Puritans would say it did not. After all, the Church of England is a political entity full of open sinners that enforces religious conformity in order to exercise political power over the English people even more effectively. The Church of Massachusetts is a covenant church, created by "saints", which demands conformity in the name of defending orthodoxy, because only standing in true faith can bring the Kingdom of God closer to Earth. In the Church of England, the highest

magistrate (the monarch) is also its head (its Supreme Governor, as stated in the royal declaration of November 1628); the only head conceivable of the visible Church of Massachusetts is Christ himself. Putting aside the evaluation of this comparative argument, we see that the ultimate result for all types of nonconformists is essentially the same: Social ostracism, persecution, banishment, imprisonment, and even the death penalty.

Nathaniel Ward (1578–1652) – who arrived in Massachusetts four years after Winthrop, pastor of the community in Ipswich and author of the first code of laws in New England (*The Body of Liberties*), adopted by the General Assembly of MBC in December 1641 – presented a very clear position on religious liberty, declaring as follows:

I dare take upon me, to bee the Herauld of New-England fo farre, as to proclaime to the world, in the name of our Colony, that all Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other Enthusiasts shall have free Liberty to keepe away from us, and such as will come to be gone as fast as they can, the sooner the better.³⁹

Whoever knows the truth does not need to associate with those who are still wandering. Moreover, he simply does not want to have any contact with them, because they belong to another world, to Babylon. Whoever knows the truth wants to preserve it in its pure form, as a legacy for subsequent generations, and contact with dissenters does not serve to achieve this goal. The New England orthodox Puritan does not expect that everyone will take part in his visible church; after all, it is the church of “saints”. Also, not everyone has to fit into the political dimension of the “holy experiment”, because not everyone truly seeks His justice on earth. As Frank Lambert puts it:

The Holy Commonwealth was not intended for everyone, not even for all Christians. Of course, Catholics or “papists” were unwelcome, but so were other Protestants, including Anglicans, Quakers, and Baptists. To Puritans, intolerance in the name of Christian purity was not only defensible but mandatory for a covenanted people. In Massachusetts, religious freedom was defined as freedom from error.⁴⁰

Contemporaries tend to identify “God’s experiment” with the eschatological belief in the imminence of the kingdom of God on Earth (in the sense of the “order of glory”) and the utopian state of “saints”. The construction of that state was accompanied by the application of strict discipline to the people participating in it. This naturally leads to questions about the scope of freedom of those subjected to this discipline, as well as violence against dissenters. However, as Piotr Stawiński warns us, we should not “identify discipline with enslavement, and a clearly outlined system of values protected by the office with autocracy”.⁴¹ Let us remember that the covenant between the inhabitants of the “city on a hill” was consensual. It was the basis for the

establishment of a state church, founded, however, on the consent of its members, and not on the will of political authority (the case of the state Church of England). In other words, those who wanted to live in such a “city” chose to do so consciously: Trusting in God’s guidance, they were prepared to voluntarily submit to the discipline of both the church and the local magistracy, closely cooperating in this “Divine project”.

It is also worth recalling that MBC was a private venture of the shareholders of the Massachusetts Bay Company, operating on the basis of a royal charter, but enjoying far-reaching autonomy in establishing the rules of its operation. It can be assumed that the religious policy of MBC was the implementation of ownership rights, involving the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*⁴² – except that it was not based on the powers of a sole ruler (as the exercise of rights arising from his *dominium*), but as a consequence of the ownership of corporate shares by the stakeholders managing the Colony in unison. A description of the Puritan experience in New England by Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt contained the following:

The Puritans came to create a pure church and to conduct a holy experiment free of opposition, distraction, and error. They were not hypocrites who demanded freedom of religion then denied that same freedom to others. Freedom of religion across the board was never the plan, never the commission or errand. They came to prove that one could form a society so faithful, a church so cleansed, that even old England itself would be transformed by witnessing what determined believers had managed to achieve many thousands of miles away. That was the vision to be steadily pursued, without weakening or wavering, without transgressing or backsliding, without ever forgetting the awesome obligations of a covenant with God.⁴³

Since, by definition, tolerating all beliefs was not a concern of the architects of MBC, or even a by-product of the plan or its calculated effect, severe repression against dissenters was acceptable. For example, four Quakers were sentenced to death for failing to stop proclaiming their convictions, despite receiving court bans.⁴⁴ However, it was not a consequence of the denial of the right to the existence of other doctrines or religious communities, but a justified way of ridding the “New Jerusalem” of uninvited guests. Dissenters were not disturbed, provided they agreed to remain outside MBC’s jurisdiction. The Puritan “commonwealth of saints” was not an “open society” – at least not in the sense given to the term by Karl Popper (1902–1994) in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945): Conformism was the *sine qua non* condition for the existence of the “republic of saints”. Besides, there were plenty of equally good places to live outside the borders of MBC⁴⁵ – in the tolerant Maryland of the Calverts or in the community Roger Williams was creating, that is, the Colony of Providence Plantations (hereinafter CPP).

Notes

- 1 H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1988, p. 47.
- 2 S. Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims: New World Settlers & the Call of Home*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, pp. 45–50.
- 3 A. Zakai notes:

“An examination of Puritan reasons for emigrating to New England, on the other hand, reveals a totally different revolutionary picture (...) the Puritan emigrants denied England any important role in sacred, providential history except that of apostasy, and therefore emphasized time and again the apocalyptic gulf separating England and New England in the history of salvation. Having failed to bring about a more perfect religious reformation in the Church of England, Puritans increasingly tended to regard their relationship with the established church as an apocalyptic struggle between Christ and Antichrist. Their migration to America was based, to a large extent, upon a deep eschatological consciousness of the true church fleeing into the wilderness in face of the imminent fate soon to befall sinful England and the Old World in general”

(A. Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom, History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 63).

- 4 When the “Winthrop fleet” reached Salem, only a few hundred people lived in Plymouth. A decade later, it was no more than a thousand. In 1660, approximately two thousand colonists lived in Plymouth (E. S. Gaustad, L. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 2004, p. 52). In 1692, PC, along with MBC, became part of the royal Province of Massachusetts Bay, ending the political history of both.
- 5 On the commercial face of New England colonialism, read: J. F. Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century*, University of North Carolina Press, Williamsburg 1991; B. Baylin, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1955.
- 6 Pastor Francis Higginson, aboard a ship sailing to New England’s Salem, was to deliver an oration on May 1, 1629, in which he outlined the differences between the Massachusetts Bay colonists and the Pilgrims from Plymouth. This is what he told his fellow passengers:

We will not say, as the Separatists were wont to say at their leaving of England, Farewell, Babylon! farewell, Rome! but we will say, Farewell, dear England, farewell, the church of God in England and all the Christian friends there. We do not go to New England as Separatists from the Church of England, though we cannot but separate from the corruptions in it; but we go to practice the positive part of church reformation, and propagate the Gospel in America.

(L. W. Bacon, *Congregationalists*, The Baker & Taylor Co., New York 1904, p. 21)

- 7 In the leaflet *Reasons to be considered for justifying the undertakers of the intended Plantation in New England, and for encouraging such whose hearts God shall move to join with them in it*, prepared and distributed to those interested in joining in this “holy experiment”, Winthrop argued about the importance of this work in the history of the world and the church. In it, he announced the coming time of God’s wrath, which would affect the unrighteous churches in Europe. The only chance one had was to take refuge in the “wilderness place” prepared by God for the members of the true church, where barricades would be erected

against the kingdom of Antichrist (points 1 and 2). The colonists were to participate in the adaptation of this place, led by his faithful “servants of God”, to whom the Lord revealed the purpose of the mission, emphasising the need to participate in His work, in serving the good of His church (point 9). The complete text can be found in: J. H. Robinson, *Readings in European History – Vol. II*, Ginn, Boston 1906, pp. 225–226.

To reflect the state of mind of the participants of the “Winthrop fleet” one can use Isaiah’s prophecy (Is 52: 10–11a).

- 8 J. Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630), 3rd series, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston 1838, p. 47.
- 9 The Massachusetts Bay colonists were “the chosen people”, participants as Sacvan Bercovitch, a renowned scholar of Puritan American history - of secular events in the hallowed τέλος [S. Bercovitch, *New England’s Errand Reappraised*, in: J. Higham and P. K. Conkin (eds.), *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1979, p. 89], because “The New World, like Canaan of old, belonged wholly to God. The remnant that fled Babylon in 1630 set sail for the new promised land, especially reserved by God for them” (S. Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2011, p. 100). Artur Schlesinger Jr., in his reconstruction of Winthrop’s political theology – recalling Bercovitch’s words – notes:

This geopolitical specification of the millennium – this identification of the New Jerusalem with a particular place and people – was rare, even in a time of millennial fervor. ‘What in England, Holland, Germany and Geneva,’ Bercovitch writes, ‘was an a priori antithesis [between the saints and the state] became in America the twin pillars of a unique federal eschatology.’ For the old world was steeped in iniquity, one more shameful episode in the long shame of providential history. The fact that God had withheld America so long – until the Reformation purified the church, until the invention of printing spread the Bible among the people – argued that He had been preparing it for some ultimate manifestation of His grace. God, said Winthrop, having ‘smitten all the other churches before our eyes,’ had reserved America for those whom He meant ‘to save out of this generall callamitie,’ as he had once sent the ark to save Noah. The new land was certainly a part, perhaps the climax, of redemptive history; America was divine prophecy fulfilled”

(A. Schlesinger, *America: Experiment or Destiny?* “The American Historical Review”, vol. 82, no. 3 (1977), p. 515).

- 10 E. S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, University Press, New York 1963, p. 2. Morgan adds:

“the English emigrants to New England were the first Puritans to restrict membership in the church to visible saints, to persons, that is, who felt the stirrings of grace in their souls, and who could demonstrate this fact to the satisfaction of other saints”

(Morgan, *Visible Saints...*, p. 113).

- 11 Puritan millenarianism remains at odds with the eschatological doctrine that predominated in the Christian world of the 17th century, which places the prophecies of St. John on the millennial Kingdom of Christ in the history of the visible church, which began on the day of sending the Holy Spirit to the church. Christ would not begin His reign when the visible church was prepared for it (cleansed of iniquity), because it was already present in His relationships with people who remain faithful to Him.

The dynamic evolution of Puritan millenarianism would take place during the Civil War. In the ranks of the Army of Parliament, after the execution of Charles I, the Fifth Monarchy Movement would develop, in which, apart from independents, Baptists would play a significant role [including John Carew (1622–1660) and John Pendarves (1622–1656), the main propagators and doctrinaires of the Movement]. The name of the Movement refers to the message of the second chapter of the *Book of Daniel*, which announced the fall of the next “four kingdoms” (Assyrian, Greek, Greek, and Roman), after which the fall would come the time of the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ, whose thousand-year reign on Earth would exclude the possibility of any other authority functioning. Both the death of King Charles I and Cromwell’s dissolution of the “Hack Parliament” in 1653 were interpreted by the members of the Movement as the beginning of Christ’s millennium reign on Earth.

Cromwell’s issuance of the *Instrument of Government*, which made him Lord Protector, was seen as a sacrilege, making him an enemy of the Movement. Due to the anarchic nature of the Movement, Baptists would eventually distance themselves from it, mainly due to the strenuous efforts of William Kiffin, who was its staunch opponent. About the origins, doctrine, connections with Baptists and the political role of the Fifth Monarchy Movement during the Civil War and the reasons for its collapse during the Cromwellian Protectorate, read: Brown, *The Political Activities...*; I. Birch, *Baptists, Fifth Monarchists, and the Reign of King Jesus*, “Perichoresis”, vol. 16, no. 4 (2018); B. R. White, J. Pendarves, *Calvinistic Baptists, and Fifth Monarchists*, “Baptist Quarterly”, vol. 25 (1973). About the influence of the Fifth Monarchy Movement on the founders of Puritan New England, read: J. F. Maclear, *New England and Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium and Early American Puritanism*, in: T. Vaughan, T. Alden and F. J. Bremer (eds.), *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture*, St. Martin’s Press, New York 1977, pp. 66–91; A. Zakai, *Puritan Millennialism and Theocracy in Early Massachusetts*, “History of European Ideas”, vol. 8, no. 3 (1987).

Tomasz Żyro emphasises that although New England Puritans participated in the eschatological exultation prevailing in their native England – seeing corruption and degeneration everywhere, heralding the imminent end of the surrounding reality – their “sacred mission” was clearly lit by the fire of hope, which in the hopelessness of the world corrupted by sin allowed them to dream of a republic of the “righteous and just”, which would become an inspiration for this world. As he notes: “

It is no coincidence that the New England Puritans did not fully share the pessimistic version of history prevailing in the 17th century, imposed by Calvin. The image of the wrathful Israelite Jehovah, whose acts of severity make the history of mankind, dominates the life of Puritan congregations. With one symptomatic exception – a bright moment in the history of humanity was the moment when the Puritans, ‘faithful disciples of God’, set out to conquer the American wilderness. In the puritanical English Revolution, the mood of the Apocalypse dominates, and its extreme advocates are the followers of the Fifth Monarchy. In America, preminellarianism has many supporters, which is especially visible in the Great Awakening, but it cannot obscure the fundamental and optimistic act of the great migration to America for the chosen people. This happy beginning radiates to other colonies until it is finally justified in responsibility for the fate of humanity”

(transl.: RP) (T. Żyro, *Boża plantacja. Historia utopii amerykańskiej*, PWN, Warszawa 1994, pp. 19–20).

It should be noted here that among experts on Puritanism and the early history of New England, there are voices questioning the importance of this “eschatological fever” in shaping the mentality of the first settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Theodore D. Bozeman considers the need for freedom from the

repression of Archbishop Laud, the Court of High Commission, and the Court of Star Chamber, as well as the desire to live in the church following the example of the first Christian congregations of the apostolic times, as the primary motivation for emigration. As he claims, the idea that God entrusted the colonists with a special mission to save the world was a sign of arrogance for most Puritans. They did not look for Armageddon, but for the simple life of the first (primitive) Christians. They sought a pure church for themselves, not for the whole world (see: T. D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives, The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*, UNC Press Books, Chapel Hill 1988, pp. 81–90). Bozeman accuses the most popular author in the historiography of early New England, Perry Miller, of distorting the image of the mentality of the Great Migration. According to Bozeman, Miller paid too much attention to the jeremiads of the second and third generations of the first colonists, who selectively recreated the atmosphere of the Great Migration, instead of looking for the testimonies of those who actually participated in it (p. 83).

The discussion about the “end times” in American society will continue. Today, it takes the form of a theological dispute between premillennial dispensationalists (in various versions of this position) and those who hold the postmillennial and amillennial positions.

- 12 Within the first year, about two hundred of the settlers who had come with Winthrop returned to England, half of them embarking as soon as the ships of his fleet were preparing to sail back to England (Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims...*, p. 36). Not everyone was able to bear the burden of the task ahead of them, and the elimination of those “without a calling” was very efficient.
- 13 The Congregationalism of the New England Way was not a strict implementation of the separatist pattern, as Brownist communities held a principled negative attitude towards the institution of the state church. It is worth emphasising, however, that nowadays the New England ecclesial experience functions as an outline of congregationalism.
- 14 About the Puritan political doctrine, the constructors of the New England “republic of saints” and the reasons for its collapse read in: V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought. Volume I, 1620–1800: Liberalism, Puritanism and the Colonial Mind*, Routledge, New York 2017, pp. 5–117. Parrington emphasises the importance of economic issues in the dissolution of the Puritan commonwealth. Another important factor was the loosening of social bonds as a result of the growing territorial dispersion of the colonists, which effectively made it difficult to lead a congregational life, which included, among others, brotherly admonition (discipline).
- 15 History proves that the very expectation that this unity could be preserved was fundamentally utopian. To borrow Jerzy Szacki’s terminology, we must confirm that John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill” turned out to be a “utopia of eternal order”, but at the same time it was not an “escapist utopia” (J. Szacki, *Spotkania z utopia*, Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warszawa 1980, pp. 105–108) – at most the Brownists from the Plymouth Colony can be suspected of participating in such a utopia – as the Puritans, as emphasised by Stanisław Filipowicz, sincerely wanted to set an example for the whole world (S. Filipowicz, *O władzy grzechu i grzechach władzy. Rozważania o rodowodzie amerykańskiego antyutopizmu*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1992, p. 84). They built their city in the New World, but not in complete isolation from or against the Old. The Old World was finally to follow the new one.

Yet, let us note that perceiving the Puritan “New Jerusalem” in Massachusetts as a utopian project requires circumspection. As H. Richard Niebuhr notes:

Seventeenth century Protestants could not be utopians or idealists in the popular sense of these words, for they did not share the fundamental presuppositions of utopianism – the belief that human ills are due to bad institutions, that a fresh

start with good institutions would result in a perfect commonwealth, and that human reason is sufficiently wise, or human will sufficiently selfless, to make the erection of a perfect society possible. They were for the most part thoroughly convinced that mankind had somehow been corrupted; they knew that the order of glory had not yet been established; they were pilgrims all who did not expect to be satisfied in the time of their pilgrimage.

(Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 49)

The perfect world was their horizon, not the place where they stood. However, independence from the Church of England and the king allowed them to submit their world to God's rule, thanks to which the desired horizon would steadily draw closer.

- 16 See: Parrington, *Main Currents...*, pp. 5–6.
- 17 Two influential Particular Baptists were personally involved in the trial and execution of Charles I: Edmund Ludlow and John Carew.
- 18 A. Zakai, *Orthodoxy in England and New England: Puritans and the Issue of Religious Toleration, 1640–1650*, "Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society", vol. 135, no. 3 (1991), pp. 402–403.
- 19 W. K. Jordan presents the Puritans' position on religious toleration in the following words:

The Puritan saw in the Bible a complete repository of divine truth and from its pages he received a religious commission which was at once powerful and intolerant. This literalism sought in the Bible the precise outline of civil and ecclesiastical policy and refused to accept the milder persuasions of reason and of tradition. The hand of God rested upon the Puritan, and he observed a world of sin and ignorance which could be saved only by the imposition of the order of society, civil and religious, which God had revealed to him. The Puritan was vigorous in his religious outlook and despised the moderate leaders in Church and State as 'neuters'; 'they reckon a singular witty part, that they can craftily cloak and dissemble themselves in all other affairs after such sort, as if a man were familiarly linked to both parties: not altogether gone from the papists, lest he be counted a stubborn fellow; not altogether divested from the Gospellers, lest he be called an Apostate: and by that shift to walk, as it were, in the middle and the most safe way: to be indifferent to both sides: to keep peace, substance, honour, and doctrine safe.' (...) He despised the English ecclesiastical structure as a creature of governmental policy, which he regarded as governed by the unworthy ends of political expediency

(W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England from Beginning of the English Reformation to the Death of Queen Elizabeth*, Peter Smith, Gloucester 1965, pp. 239–240).

- 20 See: Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims...*, pp. 38–45. Despite the differences between the components of this system, they constitute an inseparable whole (union) due to the functional meta-goal (destiny), the implementation of which is the reason for their existence. Today, for us, grasping the phenomenon of the New England Way, using our conceptual apparatus and dominant ideas about well-organised relations between the state and the church, is not an easy task. As Edwin S. Gaustad notes: "We of today ask where the state left off and the church began; they of yesterday can only shake their heads in wonderment at so meaningless a question. It is like asking where culture starts, or society stops" (E. S. Gaustad, *Neither King nor Prelate: Religion and the New Nation, 1776–1826*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 12).
- 21 J. Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*, Livewell Chapman, London 1655, pp. 108–112.

- 22 For John Winthrop, the “city upon a hill” is:

It is by a mutuall consent, through a speciall overvaluing providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seeke out a place of cohabitation and Consorteshipp under a due forme of Government both ciuill and ecclesiasticall. In such cases as this, the care of the publique must oversway all private respects, by which, not only conscience, but meare ciuill pollicy, dothe binde us.
(Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity*..., p. 45)

- 23 Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God*..., p. 39.
- 24 M. P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 10, 183–205.
- 25 As S. Stout notes, without the idea of a covenant which would unify the spiritual and political life, the Massachusetts Bay Colony would inevitably plunge into anarchy (H. S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*, Oxford University Press, New York 1986, pp. 15–20). Frank Lambert adds that the theology of the covenant influenced not only spiritual and political life, but also the colonial economy, providing a doctrinal undercurrent of the economic reality of slowly emerging capitalism (F. Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2003, p. 79). It can therefore be concluded that the covenant was an organising force in all aspects of life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- 26 E. S. Morgan, *Roger Williams, the Church and State*, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., New York, 1967, p. 79.
- 27 Lambert, *The Founding Fathers*..., pp. 82–83; E. S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma. The Story of John Winthrop*, Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1958, pp. 95–96.
- 28 N. Emmons, *The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline, Adopted in 1648: And the Confession of Faith, Adopted in 1680*, Congregational Board of Publication, Boston 1855, p. 84.
- 29 W. G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists’ Struggle in New England, 1630–1833*, Brown University Press, London 1991, p. 36. Interpreting the adoption of the Cambridge Platform using the language of H. Richard Niebuhr, we will conclude that it was the result of institutionalisation (and crystallisation) of what was prophetic in New England Puritanism; an attempt to leave to posterity the faith of the fathers (the living reality of their spirit), preserved in symbols, doctrine and rules. Moreover, this mechanism is specific to Christianity since “the living Christianity of the apostolic period was made concrete in the rituals, organisations, disciplines and creeds of the Greek and Roman churches” (Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God*..., p. 166). Similarly – with “monotonous regularity”, as Niebuhr notes – it was with the Renaissance religious revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which was dulled by scholasticism and ecclesial institutionalisation; with the continental Reformation, which succumbed to the temptation to build a state church. One can add here that it was similar to the authentic faith of the Puritans, the work of codification of which was undertaken by the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Practice suggests that the petrification of “living faith” is a natural human desire, although this sincere craving to hold still what is essentially dynamic inevitably leads to the loss of what cannot be a static order (i.e. faith). Therefore, subsequent religious revivals that challenge what is “firmly established” inevitably become the antithesis of their original manifestations of faith. Executing adherence to the doctrine that is only a reflection of the faith of the fathers has a limited power to arouse faith in the offspring. The rigorism that is the response to this situation does not bring the expected results and does not allow the Kingdom of God to grow. As Niebuhr notes:

The sovereignty of God was no longer the dynamic activity of the being who created, judges and saved mankind in every moment of time; it was now rather rule of his law, while the kingdom of Christ came to mean either the present church on earth, or heaven with its eternal rewards.

(Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 170)

- 30 As Niebuhr affirms: "The Puritan tended toward legalism and authoritarianism because of his desire to avoid individualism and to establish himself in a safe position under divine sovereignty (...)" (Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 63).
- 31 Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 51.
- 32 Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, pp. 62–63.
- 33 See: Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 56.
- 34 T. B. Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, Vol. 2, Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, London 1883, p. 336.
- 35 R. S. Dunn, L. Yeandle (eds.), *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, The Belknap Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 282–284.
- 36 Parrington, *Main Currents...*, p. 49.
- 37 P. Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 1956, p. 144.
- 38 It is symptomatic that although the Church of Massachusetts adopted the Congregationalist organisational formula, distinctive for the Separatist wing of Puritanism, in its attitude to the institutions of the Church of England, it showed the moderate position typical of conciliatory Puritanism.
- 39 N. Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1969, p. 6.
- 40 Lambert, *The Founding Fathers...*, p. 75.
- 41 P. Stawiński, *Boży eksperyment*, Polihymnia, Lublin 2012, p. 114.
- 42 McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty...*, pp. 14–15.
- 43 Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History...*, p. 54.
- 44 Only in the case of Quakers and Jesuits, unauthorised return from exile was punished with mandatory death penalty (cf.: D. Wait Howe, *The Puritan Republic of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, The Bowen-Merrill Company, Indianapolis 1899, p. 56).
- 45 M. A. Noll, *The Work We Have to Do. A History of Protestantism in America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, p. 33.

7 Roger Williams

A man of the “Wilderness” longing for the “Garden”

At the beginning of February 1631, just over half a year after John Winthrop’s arrival, a young pastor from London, Reverend Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683), appeared at MBC with his wife. His outstanding intellect, thorough education at Cambridge and apprenticeship with Edward Coke, as well as his spiritual qualities, made him a well-regarded person in the Colony. After a unanimous vote, the Boston community offered him the position of pastor on March 29th. Williams could not have hoped for greater distinction in New England. To the utter surprise of the Bostonians, he rejected their prestigious offer, citing his inability to lead a congregation that had not severed its connection with the Church of England, when it was Separatism that had forced Williams to leave his homeland. Thus, at the very outset of his stay in New England, Williams manifested non-conformism. Not only did he become known as a person convinced that the visible church should consist only of “authentic Christians”, denying the Church of England the right to belong to the church of Christ, he also spoke in a similar tone about the “saints” in Boston, whom he described as people corrupted and unseparated. In his opinion, the true church of God does not seek compromise with the authorities: It is either a gathering of authentic, reborn Christians, or an element of the political system, as a state “territorial” church.

The offensive tone of his comments towards the Boston community was not Williams’ only offence. He also aimed his criticism at the colonial magistracy, which by law required people in its jurisdiction to follow the rules of the first table of Moses.¹ Thus, Williams quickly gained a reputation as an uncompromising Separatist: A spokesman for the concept of a visible church that is absolutely separated from Babylon (the unregenerate people) and free from the influence of the institutions of political life. The “sacred enterprise” of Winthrop and others, sincerely and deeply convinced of their special share in the work of bringing closer the coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth, now faced an eloquent critic whose voice did not come from outside (the old England), but from within (the intellectual elite of colonial society). Williams turned against his Pilgrim brethren and unexpectedly suspected the righteousness (evangelism) of the very structure of their “city on a hill”, questioning its participation in God’s blessing.

Williams required brothers and sisters in Christ to deny sin and condemn corruption; separation from everything that causes disgrace. The church – which Williams identifies with a particular gathering of “saints” (gathered church) – is a “garden” in which each tree produces only good fruit; in which the Son of God placed the “golden candlestick” of God’s blessing with his own hand.² The “garden” of the church, illuminated by the flame of the golden candlestick, was surrounded by the “desert” of the world immersed in darkness. Both worlds should not only be distinguished from each other, but also be strictly separated.

7.1 In search of the “true church”

Having found no “true Christians” in Boston, Williams was forced to look for a suitable community elsewhere. He found it in Salem, where the local church offered him the assistantship to its pastor, Samuel Skelton. Political power in Salem was held by John Endecott, whom Winthrop had replaced as the governor of MBC. Endecott decided to provide Williams with asylum. On April 12, 1631, he began his pastoral service in Salem. However, due to the pressure from the hostile Boston establishment, it lasted only a few months. Not without significance was Williams’ renewed speech against his fellow congregants, whom, like those in Boston, he accused of hypocrisy – as they participated in Anglican services during their stay in the motherland. Another church proved insufficiently “pure” for Williams.

At the end of the summer of 1631, Williams took up the position of aide to the pastor in Plymouth, whose congregation had maintained a distinctly Separatist character since its founding. In mid-1632, he was appointed assistant pastor. Despite attempts by Massachusetts authorities to discredit him, Williams managed to retain the trust of Bradford, Governor of PC, the first pastor Ralph Smith, and other members of the congregation. While enjoying relative tranquillity, Williams became interested in the native inhabitants of New England, the Narragansett tribe. After learning their language and culture, Williams began to question the colonists’ royal claims to Narragansett land. His dispute with the colonial authorities, as well as with New England society, took on a new dimension – the matter was no longer limited only to issues of worldview (definition of the visible church) and public order (legal enforcement of the *Decalogue*), but was extended to include property rights to the land in the limits of the Colony, that is the material basis for the functioning of Puritans in the colonial world.

Williams’ restless nature and his implacable attitude to the purity of the church brought him into disagreement with his new congregation, which he and his adherents eventually abandoned, moving to Salem in August 1633.³ Purportedly, commenting on his departure, the religious leader of the Plymouth Colony, an elder of the local church, William Brewster, uttered prophetic words about him: He would “run the same course of rigid separation and anabaptistry, which Mr. John Smith, the Se-Baptist, at Amsterdam,

had done”.⁴ After Skelton’s death, the Salem congregation entrusted Williams with the position of pastor, which set in motion the process of his eventual removal from MBC.⁵ Williams had not allowed himself to be forgotten as a critic of the colonial authorities.

Another subject of dispute was the introduction by the General Assembly of the obligatory oath of allegiance to the Colony for male residents over 16 years of age. The oath included the *invocatio Dei*, and participation in this act was required of both the “regenerate” and the “unregenerate” (refusal was punished by banishment). For Williams, the new law was a manifestation of idolatry (deification of secular authority), blasphemy (an unbeliever takes “the name of the Lord in vain”), and a clear violation of freedom of conscience. At the same time, as the pastor of the Salem Church, he once again began to question the rebirth of some of his brethren, a trait he had been unable to shake off.

Between April and October 1635, Williams’ fate was decided. After a hearing before the General Assembly, he was charged with being a constant menace.⁶ He was expelled from MBC, with no right to return without the Assembly’s consent. Ultimately, in late 1635 or early 1636, Williams involuntarily left Massachusetts. On Narragansett Bay, in a place beyond the jurisdiction of both MBC and PC, he purchased land from the Native Americans,⁷ where he began organising a settlement named Providence. It would become the capital of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (hereinafter CRIPP).⁸

In the spring of 1636, Williams was joined by his wife, children, and companions, who aligned with Williams’ views and who decided to share their fate with him. Thus, by questioning the “sanctity of the garden” of the congregations in Boston and Salem, and even in Separatist Plymouth, he was himself banished to the “desert” that he would have to meliorate. Although he found vocation with the clergy, he was forced to become a politician – or, as T. J. Zieliński depicts him, a diplomat, publicist, and statesman.⁹

The settlement Williams and his followers created was founded on completely different principles from those that governed the one from which he had been expelled. In his critical attitude to the idea of a territorial church, and therefore also to any interference by public authorities in matters of religion, he laid the foundations for the first political community on American soil that had a completely secular character. Although he did not challenge the divine origin of public authority, he made its exercise dependent on the consent of the governed. He did not consider the functions of public authorities in building the Kingdom of God on Earth, but in the arrangement of earthly affairs in such a way that people enjoying freedom (with particular emphasis on freedom of conscience) could coexist peacefully. Because this is the sole purpose of the concern of those in power, who are obliged to promote the public good, understood in a completely secular way, without transcendent references. The basis for the creation of a political community was the popular consent of the free people constituting it, exercising their

natural rights; a social contract of citizens (compact), not a covenant of “saints”, concluded in God’s name and with His blessing.¹⁰ Based on such principles, Providence quickly became an asylum for all religious dissenters; “a shelter for persons distressed of conscience”, as Williams declared, including himself in this category of beings.¹¹

7.2 The false church of the “City on a Hill”

Williams’ expulsion was an *ad hoc* solution and did not address the ideas he preached, which could have a negative impact on the inhabitants of the “city on a hill”. The strength of Williams’ intellect required that an appropriate interlocutor be named, one capable of meeting the challenge of engaging in polemics with him. The role was taken on by John Cotton (1585–1652), as important a figure for the Church of Massachusetts as John Winthrop was for the political establishment of the Colony. This distinguished Puritan preacher of unquestioned authority arrived in Massachusetts in September 1633, personally welcomed by Governor Winthrop. His arrival was read as further evidence that God was blessing this “hallowed enterprise”. Cotton became the pastor of the first Puritan congregation in Boston, in which Williams did not want to serve, justifying his refusal with its unrighteousness.

Cotton was known to his contemporaries mainly because of his dispute with the Antinomians and the debate with Williams, the actual subject of which was not so much religious freedom as the latter’s belief in the contaminated nature of the Church of Massachusetts. However, today this discussion appears to us as a dispute about religious toleration, or as the case may be, its deficit, in the Puritan “republic of saints”. As Everett H. Emerson notes, on one side we place John Cotton, who is supposed to have a “medieval” perspective on issues of religious liberty; and on the other we put his brave opponent, Roger Williams and his “enlightened modernism”.¹² While narrow-mindedness is often attributed to the former, and the status of free-thinker to the latter, this generalisation, as usual, is somewhat hasty.

In 1643, Cotton sent a letter to Williams (subsequently published in London¹³), to which he replied a year later in *Mr. Cotton’s Letter Lately Printed, Examined, And Answered*. In 1644, another text appeared, with Williams continuing his dispute with Cotton: *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience. A Conference between Truth and Peace, presented to the High Court of Parliament, in all Tender Affection, amongst other Passages of Highest Consideration*.¹⁴ In response to Williams’ objection to the insufficient purity of the Church of Massachusetts, Cotton reminded him that the very decision to leave their native England and choose life in the wilds of New England was sufficient proof of the colonists’ renunciation of the sins of this world, a testimony of their fortitude and sincere dedication to the work of building the Kingdom of God. Williams’ attempts to exclude the “unworthy” from the church were to Cotton like “depriving the bread of life that feeds hungry souls”.

As Emerson notes, the axis of the dispute was the interpretation of the *Parable of the Weeds* (Matt 13:24–30).¹⁵ Cotton attempted to defend the imperfections in the Church of Massachusetts using biblical text, reminding Williams that there is a difference between a “seed” and a “thorn”, that is, an obvious evil that, being visible to the naked eye, once recognised, must be removed from the “garden” so that it does not multiply, choking out the “good seed”, and make it impossible to bear the expected fruit (Matt 13:7). The “Lord of the harvest” forbade his “servants” to pluck the “tares” because they too closely resembled “wheat” and risked destroying the “good harvest” (Matt 13:29). Only the “Lord of the harvest” has the trained eye to distinguish between “wheat” and “weed”. However, the handicapped eye of the “servant” can see the differences between the “thorn” and the “wheat”. Therefore, hypocrites in the church – people with hard hearts, effectively hiding their true (unrighteous) face from those around them – that is, “weeds” in “God’s garden”, are to remain there until the “harvest”; and the unquestionable, obvious evil (“thorn”) must absolutely be removed.¹⁶ After all, Paul also encouraged separation from a “brother or sister” who turned out to be “sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler”, so as to leave them “outside”, and God would judge them in due time (1 Cor 5, 9–12).

But Cotton’s argument was a double-edged sword. Recall that his adversary had himself experienced excommunication and expulsion from the “republic of saints” – like many others, including Antinomians, who found refuge on Rhode Island (Aquidneck Island). For Williams, the visible church had to fight sin within itself at any cost, ultimately excommunicating those unworthy of membership, but without involving the authority of the political power that had the “sword” that was raised in Massachusetts against many of “God’s people”, including him alone. Additionally, Williams warned against equating fraternal admonition with God’s judgement on “infidels”, which the New England establishment decided to assign to itself, punishing at its discretion with imprisonment or exclusion (excommunication, often accompanied by banishment) of heretics, idolaters and blasphemers it designated: All unworthy not only of membership in the church, but also of political (legal, civil) protection, apostates from the Gospel.¹⁷

Williams agreed with Cotton that there was no place within the church for those who fall into idolatry, preach false doctrines, or openly oppose the church. In fact, for his radical approach to “purification” of the church, he was unmatched. Paradoxically, it was Williams who came to be considered a “thorn bush”, torn from the “garden” of the Church of Massachusetts and thrown into the “desert” (for it is the desert that should be the dwelling place for the “thorn”; it is where it belongs, as we read in the *Song of the Vineyard*). He was forced to leave his home in the wintertime and seek refuge in a hostile world, and this was done by the colonial magistracy – the General Assembly headed by John Winthrop – which, in his opinion, wrongly accused him of being a troublemaker, instigated by the Evil, sowing confusion in the church and deceiving its members.

Williams interprets the text of Matthew 13:24–30 differently. For him, the “weed” did not symbolise iniquity within the church, but people outside it who should remain undisturbed by both the church and civil authorities. They will be separated eternally from the “wheat” on the Day of Judgement. This does not mean that the church of Christ is obliged to tolerate the “unworthy” within its boundaries.¹⁸ Excommunication remains an indispensable instrument for maintaining the purity of the visible church. It is also a sufficiently effective instrument.

The difference between Williams’ interpretation of the *Parable of the Weeds* stands in clear opposition to the historical one, aroused from its reading by Augustine (in *The Letter against Parmenian*), who identified “the field” with the church. The Bishop of Hippo’s exegesis may be found in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Cotton as well. For William, the “field” was not the church but the world, the “servants” were people in power (the magistrate), and the “tares” represented hypocrites who only name themselves “Christians” but are actually infidels, dissenters, and non-believers living in civil society. So, the addressee of this parable is not the church, but the state.¹⁹ The church is able to maintain its holiness without the help of the state.

According to Williams, the parable was not an appeal for acceptance of the impossibility of freeing the church from manifestations of unrighteousness but, rather, an admission that there are people who do not belong to it. It is a call to: (1) Affirm their freedom to stay outside the church (using modern terminology, we will say: “freedom from religion”); (2) Deprive civil authorities of the ability to legally assess the quality of the convictions of those who are under their power; (3) Abandon attempts to build a state church. People are divided here into two classes, the “wheat” (those in grace, i.e. regenerated members of the church, faithful and pious) and the “weeds” (the unregenerate, who do not belong to the church). And they live together until the “day of judgment” comes, when the “Lord of the harvest” will finally separate the two groups. The former will be brought into His “barn”, and the latter “tied in bundles to be burned” (Matt 13:30). The state’s task is not to distinguish them, but to maintain public peace so that both “realities” can exist harmoniously. The state is not a “servant” in the “field of the Lord of the harvest”, obliged to pass by the “weeds” indifferently, while at the same time watching out for “thorn bushes” which it should systematically and with full commitment remove. The magistrate serves both the “wheat” and the “tares” or “thorns”, remaining completely blind to the obvious or possible differences between them. Indeed, in Williams’ era, this was a truly revolutionary idea.

For Williams, a “weed” is a “weed” because it can be such – it has the right to remain peacefully in the ground and grow like “wheat”. It received God’s permission to grow next to “wheat”. Religious pluralism, toleration, and freedom of conscience – without exception – are elements of God’s plan, as the Gospel says (Matt 13:24–30).

However, it should be kept in mind to look at the freedom of conscience promoted by Williams from the Incarnation perspective, not from the position of the Enlightenment philosophers on natural abilities and qualities. In the opening words of *The Bloudy Tenent...*, Williams presents and supports the 12 theses of his treatise. The sixth thesis presents the following theorem:

It is the will and command of God that, since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-Christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries: and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only, in soul matters, able to conquer: to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the word of God.²⁰

Because we encountered *the Parable of the Weeds* when analysing John Murton's *An Humble Supplication...*, it is worth noting that Williams, remaining faithful to Calvinist soteriology, does not defend the “weed's” right to grow, even if it does have the potential to become “wheat” before the “last hour of the day” strikes. His defence of freedom of conscience is not related to the Arminian hope for the conversion of all creation (universal redemption of the human race), that should be free, because we do not know when God will want to speak to it, and if it is eager to listen to Him, when He will want to draw it towards Him. For Williams, the “wheat” is those chosen without their will. The “weed” will not change its nature – in its repentance, it will not become “wheat” at the eleventh hour of the day – radically changing its hopeless fate, but this does not diminish its right to grow. Williams argues:

But the Son of man, the meek Lamb of God—for the elect's sake which must be gathered out of Jew and Gentile, pagan, anti-Christian—commands a permission of them in the world, until the time of the end of the world, when the goats and sheep, the tares and wheat, shall be eternally separated each from other.²¹

The “desert of the world” persists for the sake of the “elected”, gathered in the “garden of the church”, and not as an expression of hope for the conversion of the wicked. They received their time from the “Lord of the harvest” not so that they could take advantage of the opportunity for conversion, but so that their sinful nature could be fully shown, revealing the face of the one who actually sowed their seed. Williams recapitulates his reflections on this topic as follows:

(...) I conclude that these are sinners of another nature—idolaters, false worshippers, anti-Christians, who without discouragement to true Christians must be let alone, and permitted in the world to grow and fill up the measure of their sins, after the image of him that hath sown them, until the great harvest shall make the difference.²²

Iniquity has the right (and time) to manifest itself, so that hypocrisy becomes visible to all when the wicked – to use the words of François de La Rochefoucauld – pays a compliment to virtue and its justice.

How Cotton and Williams read this parable explains the difference between their positions.²³ Any possible agreement was further hampered by the former's belief that if in ancient Israel the authorities punished blasphemers, idolaters, and "preachers of false teachings" who deceived God's people, the magistracy of MBC, perceived as the New Jerusalem, should do the same.²⁴ The "sword" of secular power participates in the preparation of the Parousia. Meanwhile, Williams, deprived of his membership in the Church of Massachusetts, openly states that the church is not "the Lord's vineyard" but a "desert", as evidenced not only by its tolerance of sin, but also its close cooperation with the magistracy. According to the author of *Bloudy Tenent...*, the contemporary Christian world, which included Winthrop and Cotton's "republic of saints", does not resemble the House of Israel, and any attempts to resemble it distort the message of the Good News, bring ruin to the church, and are a source of suffering for its members. After all, Christ's church of the covenant of believers is not identical to the covenant concluded with the offspring of Jacob. Hence, in the world that came with the Incarnation, the role of power is different. As Williams contends:

(...) the national church of the Jews, whose shadowish and figurative state vanished at the appearing of the body and substance, the Sun of righteousness, who set up another kingdom, or church, (Heb 12:27), ministry and worship: in which we find no such ordinance, precept, or precedent of killing men by material swords for religion's sake.²⁵

For a follower of Christ, there is no return to the reality of the Old Testament. In the "garden" of the Old Covenant, God placed a "silver candlestick"²⁶ of royal orders, priests, prophets, and temple offerings. However, time passed away following the coming of Christ, the giver of the "golden candlestick", shining with such a bright flame that it leaves everything in shadow, even the light of the "silver candlestick".²⁷ A Christian seeking to remain faithful to God should follow in the footsteps of Christ, the path illuminated by His light. He should not merely act out of a fear of perdition (carelessly leaving the narrow path of God's justice), stubbornly seeking security in the "official" implementation of Mosaic law (in the legal enforcement of the principles of both tables of the Decalogue), as the Massachusetts magistrate did, making the church of the New Covenant similar to the national church of the Jews.²⁸ Describing the difference between the Old and New Covenants, Williams sounds like a Platonist: The national church of the Jews was only a "shadow" of the original, authentic church of Jesus Christ, which in His perfect work of redemption made us aware of the imperfect nature of the former through "embodiment", the "flesh and substance" (as Williams puts it) of the latter. The Incarnation of the Deity, in the person of Christ, the

eternal Logos, the head of the church of the New Covenant, overshadows the one proper to the Old Covenant. “Body” is a complete (finite) reality; the “shadow” is merely its ersatz, even if to those who look at it – to people mentally trapped in the “Platonic cave” of the state church – it appears to be a perfect thing. A Christian is obliged to irrevocably leave the “cave”, following the light of the “golden candlestick”. Those who remain in it benefit from the flames of the hearth (ergo the “silver candlestick”), painting on the walls only a shadow (the state church) of reality (the church of Christ).²⁹

The contrast between the realities of the New and Old Testaments is the central theme of both of Williams’ texts. It is the key to understanding his lecture on the visible church, the role of political power, its attitude towards it, as well as the defence of freedom of conscience.

At this point, we must emphasise the significant similarity of Williams’ arguments with the theses advanced by Thomas Helwys and later developed by John Murton. This is by no means a coincidence. Williams himself admits to being inspired by the claims of what he calls “the Newgate prisoner of conscience” that he found in *An Humble Supplication to the King’s Majesty*.³⁰ Reading the pamphlet of the General Baptist from London helped him to locate the source of the obvious evil – violence against dissenters, which Christians with political power, eagerly and enthusiastically invoking the name of the Lord, have not hesitated to use, for centuries, against other disciples of Christ, bringing them immeasurable suffering. In the name of defending orthodoxy, they are not reluctant, like Saul, to inflict suffering on the followers of the Gospel. Williams, in his next pamphlet, a continuation of the exchange of arguments with Cotton, presents his motivations in a very suggestive way:

My end is to discover and proclaim the crying and horrible guilt of the bloody doctrine, as one of the most seditious, destructive, blasphemous, and bloodiest in any or in all the nations of the world, notwithstanding the many fine veils, pretenses, and colors of not persecuting Christ Jesus but heretics, not God’s truth or servants but blasphemers [and] seducers, not persecuting men for their conscience but for sinning against their conscience. My end is to persuade God’s Judah (especially)³¹ to wash their hands from blood, to cleanse their hearts and ways from such unchristian practices

toward all that is man, (being) capable of a religion and a conscience, but most of all toward Christ Jesus, who cries out (as he did to Saul) in the sufferings of the least of his servants: Old England, New England, King, Parliaments, General Courts, Presbyterians, Independents, why persecute you me?³²

It is significant that the New England Puritans, pointing to numerous iniquities in the Church of England, had no doubts regarding the traditionally

sanctioned principle that the magistracy in a Christian state – taking the kings of ancient Israel as a reference point – rightly draws the “sword” to punish idolaters, heretics, and schismatics.

Importantly, in *Mr. Cotton’s Letter Lately Printed, Examined, And Answered...* one finds a *passus* – probably the most frequently quoted text by Roger Williams today. In it, the author reminds us that, in the history of ancient Israel as well, there were moments when God’s people lost His grace, when God did not approve using the divine name for political goals. Although in the realities of the Old Testament church, illuminated by the flame of the “silver candlestick”, kings together with prophets and priests built its strength, when the former fell into idolatry and forced it on their subjects, such as Ahab under the influence of Jezebel – in his hypocrisy still praising the name of the Lord – God withdrew His blessing, turning Israel’s “garden” into a “wilderness”. As Williams clarifies:

(...) the faithful labours of many witnesses of Jesus Christ, extant to the world, abundantly prove that the church of the Jews under the Old Testament in the type, and the church of the Christians under the New Testament in the antitype, were both separate from the world; and that when they opened a gap in the hedge, or wall of separation, between the Garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, *et cetera*, and made his garden a wilderness, as at this day. And therefore if he will ever please to restore his garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly to himself from the world, and all that shall be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the world, and added unto his church or garden.³³

In Williams’ typology, Christianity is a counterculture (antitype) to the ecclesial and political order of ancient Israel. The church of the New Testament is a model opposed to the archetypal church of the Old Covenant. In effect, the reality of Williams and Cotton should be based on a different pattern. When Cotton detects an analogy between the people of Israel and the Church of Massachusetts, between the Kingdom of David and Solomon and the magistracy of MBC, Williams reacts with a declaration of defeat, like a new Isaiah.³⁴ The Church of Massachusetts was plunged into darkness because the Lord had already brought out His “candlestick” from the “republic of saints”. Once again, Williams declares that the “city on a hill” built by the New England Puritans, the result of the union of the political body and the church, prompts Divine Providence to deprive those who invoke His holy name for an illegitimate purpose of blessing. Because God’s plan for the church requires that it be separated with a high “wall”, keeping the “desert of the world” from the “garden of the church”. Without the shield provided by the “wall”, sand will invade everywhere, contaminating what should

remain “sacred”. The state will also suffer damage, as the social peace will be violated, plunging the political community into chaos and confusion.³⁵ And it does not matter whether we are talking about the church of the Old Testament or the New Testament. Whenever there is a weld of church and state, God is ultimately forced to withdraw His favour. For every sacralisation of political order ultimately takes the form of idolatry, which cannot remain unnoticed by the One who sees everything, even in complete darkness. The state becomes indistinguishable from the church, so that the latter inevitably “deserts”. The supposedly divine order of the Puritan republic of the covenant, which is to last until the second coming of the Messiah, is in fact an impermanent constellation of children of the church who sinned with arrogance.

Contrary to the belief of Christendom (Latin: *Christianitas*) that has consistently been erected since the 4th-century A.D., securing political support for the church in no way guarantees its development. Secular authority is the apparent benefactor of the church. In Williams’ opinion, the greatest evil in the church of Christ appeared thanks to Emperor Constantine, because it was the “Constantinian turn” that laid the foundation for the “anti-Christian state of Christians”, fighting heretics and dissenters with the iron sword. The Church of England had not broken with this wicked practice. The “republic of saints” of John Winthrop and John Cotton also remained within it. As the author of *The Bloody Tenent* argues...:

The unknowing zeal of Constantine and other emperors, did more hurt to Christ Jesus’s crown and kingdom, than the raging fury of the most bloody Neros. In the persecution of the latter. Christians were sweet and fragrant, like spice pounded and beaten in mortars. But these good emperors, persecuting some erroneous persons, Arius, etc., and advancing the professors of some truths of Christ—for there was no small number of truths lost in those times—and maintaining their religion by the material sword—I say, by this means Christianity was eclipsed, and the professors of it fell asleep. Babel, or confusion, was ushered in, and by degrees the gardens of the churches of saints were turned into the wilderness of whole nations, until the whole world became Christian, or Christendom.

Doubtless those holy men, emperors and bishops, intended and aimed right to exalt Christ; but not attending to the command of Christ Jesus, to permit the tares to grow in the field of the world, they make the garden of the church and field of the world to be all one ; and might not only sometimes, in their zealous mistakes, persecute good wheat instead of tares, but also pluck up thousands of those precious stalks by commotions and combustions about religion (...)³⁶

This misleading conviction that the visible church can become the world, and the world can become the church, thanks to the efforts of humans, even

extremely pious ones, must result in the loss of God's blessing. In such conditions, Christians, enveloped in the "darkness of the world", instead of radiating the "light of Christ", go to sleep like everyone else when the night comes. But in their case, the night has lasted for thirteen centuries, and the Reformation has not changed this situation. Inviting the state into the Church is like letting the most dangerous and voracious pest into the garden, and it will not be satisfied with one fruit but will eventually consume all. It will also not hesitate to devour that most precious and sweetest of fruits, which, for Williams, was the freedom of conscience.

There is a clear similarity here with the line of reasoning developed by Helwys, Murton, and Busher. The author of *The Bloudy Tenent* maintains: "(...) Whatever worship, ministry, ministration, the best and purest, are practised without faith and true persuasion that they are the true institutions of God, they are sin, sinful worship, ministries, etc".³⁷ In the church, everything is built on faith, not compulsion, and what is done without sincere faith is worthy of condemnation. Hence, sacraments administered without the trusting faith of those receiving them remain ineffective (they do not work *ex opere operato*) and are a manifestation of violence against their conscience. At the same time, the church should be free from coercion in terms of ritual (including the legally imposed *The Book of Common Prayer*) and doctrine (including the legally imposed Anglican *The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*). The church's freedom from coercion implies its strict separation from the state. If the state takes any action regarding confessional issues, it is only to defend the freedom of religious practice of those who are hindered by their fellow citizens.³⁸

7.3 The Baptist episode of Roger Williams

The affinity of Williams' and early Baptists' beliefs about the visible church had important consequences for his life. This former Anglican clergyman, an implacable Puritan Brownist, decided to accept the "believer's baptism".³⁹ It happened in March 1639. Williams was baptised by Ezekiel Holliman, who was then "rebaptised".⁴⁰ He also baptised the entire congregation that Williams had led since 1638, consisting of residents of Salem and Plymouth who followed him to Providence after his banishment. In this way, the first 12-member Baptist community in America was established.⁴¹ However, not later than June (or July) 1639, Williams renounced the leadership of his congregation and left it permanently.

He had several important reasons for doing so. In his opinion, the nationalisation of the church in ancient Rome ruined the "apostolic succession", which also extinguished the command that Christ gave to the Apostles: To evangelise, baptise, and establish churches (congregations). Without "apostolic succession", there is no "apostolic baptism", and all attempts made by people to return to the reality of the apostolic church are in vain. The renewal of the church is possible only through divine intervention. This will happen

as a result of the Second Coming, opening the thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth. Longing for the true church (for the “garden”), premillennialist Williams was eager for the coming of the end times, which explains why he remained, until the end of his life, outside any ecclesial structures. All he had to do was to wait patiently for the Second Coming of Christ, who would call new apostles to send them out to teach, baptise in the name of the Holy Trinity, and establish authentic (untainted) Christian communities.⁴²

Williams’ doctrinal position, sceptical of all ecclesial forms in the post-Constantine world, an uncertainty he maintained until his death, shows him as a “seeker”.⁴³ He had baptised his fellow congregants, who had followed him from Plymouth and Salem, and they were his friends. Nonetheless, they were unsure of the direction Williams was taking and chose not to follow him on his spiritual journey. In the end, only two or three people left the church with him.⁴⁴ The congregation was led by Chad Brown (1600–1650), co-founder of the Providence settlement.⁴⁵ The first Baptist community on American soil, called by contemporaries the First Baptist Church in America (FBCA), whose first pastor was Williams, continues to this day in Providence, surviving despite divisions and doctrinal controversies.

7.4 The legacy of Roger Williams, the author of *The Bloudy Tenent...*

How extraordinary and mysterious a figure Roger Williams was, and particularly his reflections on the nature of the church and properly arranged relations with the state, cannot be overemphasised. Searching in Calvinism for answers to questions about the source of true faith, the proper organisation of the church, and the role of secular authority, Williams crossed the horizon outlined by the reformer of Geneva, bringing Puritan theology to a place it had not been intended to approach. By asking questions about the essence of universal priesthood, the value of man as a child of God redeemed from perdition, and the proper relations between the church and the state, he reached the theses that currently function within the demoliberal theory of the state.⁴⁶ He appears to us as a man with such a desire for purity in the church – rigidly separated from the sinful world – that he finally fell into oxymoronic “ecclesial loneliness”. His radicalism turned the world against him, where he had searched unsuccessfully for such a church. However, he himself did not turn against the world, as the Anabaptists retreated from public life, anxious about its disastrous impact on the purity of their communities. Since the environment (MBC) did not share his passion for searching for a pure “garden” of the church, ruined by Constantine and not renewed by subsequent generations of Christians, he decided to develop the “desert” (specifically Providence) in such a way that it would not pose a threat to the “garden” when finally, here will be a chance for its recultivation. By separating the institutions of public life from “God’s affairs” (the garden) with a “wall”, he led to the complete secularisation of “this world” (the desert).

This project exceeded the expectations of Helwys, Murton, and Busher, who wanted to separate the magistracy from the church, but not from religion. Williams' idea will be adopted in the 20th century by "secular humanists", with whom the "New Religious Right" (including many Baptists) will enter into an ideological fight.⁴⁷ However, it must be emphasised that although we find references to legal naturalism (and the idea of a social contract) in his theory of the state,⁴⁸ his understanding of freedom of belief is collinear with what Thomas Helwys proclaimed – man enjoys a free conscience because the sovereign power over his thoughts is not exercised by the magistrate, but by God himself, with whom he remains in relationship.⁴⁹ In the summary of his book on Roger Williams and his legacy, Perry Miller notes:

I trust, perceive that great as has been his symbolic role, he himself was thinking on a deeper plane than that which simply recognizes religious liberty as a way for men to live peaceably together. He was not a rationalist and a utilitarian who gave up the effort to maintain an orthodoxy because he had no real concern about religious truth, but was the most passionately religious of men. Hence he is an analyst, an explorer into the dark place, of the nature of freedom. His decision to leave denominations free to worship as they chose came as a consequence of his insight that freedom is a condition of the spirit.⁵⁰

In turn, James McClendon Jr. emphasises that the fundamental intention of Williams, demanding complete freedom of conscience, was to prevent public authorities from attempting to blasphemously establish themselves on the "throne of God".⁵¹

Thus, the man who persistently searched for a "garden" did not find it in his lifetime, but instead became involved in developing the "desert". The disappointed preacher and extraordinary theologian became a politician. He did not lose faith in the Kingdom of God on Earth, but in man's participation in bringing it closer. While waiting for God's intervention, he did not fall into bitterness and apathy but focused on improving what surrounded him. Since it was not the "garden of the church", he contented himself with working in the "desert of the world" (to which he was exiled and where he accepted to live his life) – serving as Governor of CPP (1633–1644), Chief Officer of Providence and Warwick (1644–1647), and President of CRIPP (1654–1657). At the same time, however, he abandoned the desire for the "desert" to become green like a "garden". The "desert" would remain a "desert" because that is its nature; things were arranged by the Creator as he believed. Separated by a "wall" from the "garden", it would not benefit from its invigorating holiness. A person arranging a "city in the wilderness" does not follow the construction design of the House of God – Babylon is not Bethel and would not be such until the day when Christ, returned, takes over its rule – because he cannot read its figures or design briefs; he does not build a "city

on a hill” because he lacks appropriate building resources and is not willing to use any substitute material. Instead, with the cool precision of a designer who is closer to the laws of physics than to metaphysics, he arranges peculiar elements into a relatively harmonious whole, without differentiating them according to shape, merit, or quality (especially when religious orthodoxy is at stake). His imperative is to remain fully impartial towards the elements he handles. From the perspective of public authority, religious assemblies (including the one Williams created and left in 1639) are merely non-governmental organisations, to borrow from our modern lexicon, and are qualitatively no different from other organisations of this type. They are purposeful associations, established by free people who join them voluntarily, united by a common set of beliefs and needs.⁵²

In CPP and later in CRIPP, every religious association was to enjoy freedom, like any other form of voluntarily organising society, as long as it did not transgress the fundamental rule of the “city in the desert”. The goal of this “city” was not holiness, but social peace, *modus vivendi* of various interests in the reality of an essentially heterogeneous political society. Indeed, Williams’ “master plan” may not have seemed particularly ambitious to his contemporaries – a deliberate abandonment of participation in the eschatological work of the “saints”. But when we look at the experience of Western civilisation since the founding of Providence, we appreciate the scope of the project. Tadeusz J. Zieliński introduces his readers to the author of *The Bloody Tenent*... as the “creator of modern relations between the state and the church”, even if it may be more accurate to call him a “prophet” of these relations, because the time of their creation, on a scale visible to observers, had been waiting to come,⁵³ and his legacy would long await the discovery and recognition it undoubtedly deserved. Unquestionably, Williams was far ahead of the era in which he lived. And this led H. Richard Niebuhr to name him “the most otherworldly man of all New Englanders, a Protestant monk”.⁵⁴

Notes

- 1 Which was in line with John Calvin’s teaching on the duties of political power (see book four, Chapter 20, Sections 2 and 9 of *Institutio*...). The contagious Augustinian tradition of justifying violence against heretics, schismatics, and blasphemers was revered in New England’s “republic of saints”.
- 2 R. Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed; and Mr. Cotton’s Letter Examined and Answered*, (ed. E. B. Underhill), J. Haddon, London 1848, p. 403.
- 3 H. S. Burrage, *A History of the Baptists in New England*, American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1894, p. 16; J. D. Knowles, *Memoir of Roger Williams: The Founder of the State of Rhode-Island*, Lincoln, Edmands and Co., Boston, 1834, p. 55.
- 4 Knowles, *Memoir of Roger Williams*..., p. 53.

- 5 H. S. Burrage, *Why Was Roger Williams Banished?* "The American Journal of Theology", vol. 5, no. 1 (1901), pp. 4–5.
- 6 Roger Williams, presenting the charges brought against him by the colonial authorities, lists four claims he made that got him into trouble with the law:

First, that we have not our land by patent from the king, but that the natives are the true owners of it, and that we ought to repent of such a receiving it by patent. Secondly, that it is not lawful to call a wicked person to swear, [or] to pray, as being actions of God's worship. Thirdly, that it is not lawful to hear any of the ministers of the parish assemblies in England. Fourthly, that the civil magistrate's power extends only to the bodies, and goods, and outward state of men (...).

(see: Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. 375)

- 7 The issue of ownership of Native Americans' lands to which the colonists claimed rights, both in PC and MBC, and which Williams consistently denied, was another reason, apart from religion, for Williams' conflict with the New England establishment.
- 8 Williams obtained the founding charter for the Colony, including Providence and two settlements on Rhode Island (Portsmouth and Newport, set up by other dissenters seeking religious freedom outside Massachusetts) on March 24, 1644, during his stay in London. The issuing entity was the Parliament. The incorporation patent was titled: *Incorporation of Providence Plantations in Narragansett Bay in New England*. However, it was not until four years later that the three cities established a joint colonial government, when a colonial assembly of delegates and city commissioners, the General Assembly, was established. The colony would be transformed into CRIPP in 1663, based on a royal charter obtained by John Clarke, a resident of Newport.
- 9 T. J. Zieliński, *Roger Williams: twórca nowoczesnych relacji państwo-kościół*, Semper, Warszawa 1997, p. 51.
- 10 Zieliński, *Roger Williams...*, pp. 182–204. Experiences of the Providence settlement are the history of the implementation of the idea of a social contract, devoid of any transcendent references. The first contract, establishing the Town of Providence, was signed on August 20, 1636, by thirteen men, representing their families, pledging loyalty to each other and submission to the law made jointly for the common good, "only in civil matters". See in: *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England, vol. 1*. A. Crawford Greene and Brother, Providence 1856, p. 14. However, as Sydney V. James notes, it is difficult to treat this original contract as a practical implementation of the concept of the social contract. Initially, the Providence organisation resembled a "commune of equals" rather than a functionally organised political body. This was partly due to Williams' tendency to set up the social order on the "natural principles of human societies", rather than on the basis of the theory of contractualism, which differentiated the social positions of its members. Providence's political order was uncomplicated. Power rested in the hands of family heads (men) – because Williams perceived the family as a natural social unit – that made decisions collectively by a majority of votes during general meetings. Any disputes were resolved by arbitration, although there was no institution that enforced compliance with the decision (apart from neighbourly pressure). It was only in 1640 that a political community was established based on a social agreement (*Plantation Agreement at Providence*), which had to be signed by all people wishing to have the right to vote (a few women also signed it, although we have no evidence that they exercised their right), both the original inhabitants Providence,

as well as the newcomers (see: S. V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island. A History*, Scribner, New York 1975, pp. 54–55).

- 11 *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island...vol. 1*, p. 22.
- 12 E. H. Emerson, *John Cotton*, Twayne Publishers, New Haven, 1965, p. 132.
- 13 The subtitle: *A letter of Mr. John Cottons, teacher of the Church in Boston in New-England, is Mr. Williams, a preacher there: wherein is shewed that those ought to be received into the Church who are Godly, though they doe not see nor expressly bewaile all the pollutions in church-fellowship, ministries, worship, government.*
- 14 The year 1644 was particularly successful for the development of the idea of freedom of conscience in England. In addition to Williams' texts, a number of works defending this freedom and freedom of speech were published: William Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane*; Henry Robinson, *Liberty of Conscience*; John Milton, *Areopagitica*. Without a doubt, the authors of these texts hoped to influence the tone of the debate in Parliament and in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, dominated by the Presbyterian wing of the English Reformation, which was opposed to religious toleration. For the sake of order, note that during his stay in London in 1643–44, Williams took an active part in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly of Divines.
- 15 Emerson, *John Cotton...*, pp. 136–137. James Byrd notes that the *Parable of the Weeds* was probably the favourite text of Protestant radicals in England in the sixteenth and 17th centuries (see: J. Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams: Religious Liberty, Violent Persecution and the Bible*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2002, p. 97). For the exegesis of this parable in subsequent centuries of the church's struggle with unorthodox teachings read in: Roland H. Bainton, *The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century*, "Church History", vol. 1 no. 2 (1932); and the above-mentioned work by Byrd (pp. 97–127).
- 16 Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams...*, p. 108. An analogy can be sought between the way John Cotton and Richard Hooker read the *Parable of the Weeds (Tares)*. Recall that the latter used it to defend the sanctity of the Church of England in the face of Puritan accusations of its wrongdoing, the environment from which Cotton also came. Paradoxically, in his dispute with Williams, the former justified the imperfection of the Church of Massachusetts by also using an image from the Gospel according to St. Matthew. But the similarities end there, as Cotton introduced an important element into his argument: he distinguished the "tares" from the "thorn bush", from which, in his belief, the Church of New England Puritans was free, and which in the Church of England, in the era of Elizabeth Tudor, like the early Stuarts, it was deliberately to be tolerated.

Cotton's argument closely resembles that of Thomas Aquinas, who relies on Augustine's authority. In *Summa Theologiae (On Faith, 2.2., question 10, article 8)* we read:

How what the Lord says should be understood, 'Let both grow until the harvest,' appears from what is added: 'That, collecting weeds, you should not perhaps eradicate also with it the wheat.' Augustine says, 'Where he shows satisfactorily, when this fear is not present (...), that is, when the crime of each is known and it appears execrable to all, such that either none is defending it, or that he does not have such defenders that a schism could arise from them, the severity of discipline should not sleep'

(Thomas Aquinas, *On Faith, Summa theologiae, Part 2–2, Questions 1–16* (transl., intro. and notes) M. D. Jordan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1990, pp. 197–198)

Here, “the severity of discipline should not sleep”, for manifest iniquity must be punished before schismatics gain power. The answer to the question of who is to punish heretics can be found a little further, in question 11, article 3:

(...) two things are to be considered about heretics: one on their part; the other on the part of the church. On their part there is the sin by which they merit not only to be separated from the church by excommunication, but also to be excluded from the world by death. It is much more serious to corrupt faith, by which the soul has life, than to falsify money, by which temporal life is supported. So if falsifiers of money or other malefactors are justly handed over to death at once by secular princes, much more can heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, not only be excommunicated, but also justly killed. On the part of the church there is mercy, for the conversion of the erring. And so they are not condemned at once, but ‘after the first and second correction,’ as the Apostle teaches. After that, if the heretic is still found to be stubborn, the church, not hoping for his conversion, provides for the health of others, separating him from the church by a sentence of excommunication. And it further relinquishes him to secular judgment in order that he be exterminated from the world by death. For Jerome says (...) ‘Rotten flesh is to be cut away, and the scabrous sheep chased from the flock, that the whole house, mass, body, and flock not burn, be corrupted, putrefy, and perish. Arius was one spark in Alexandria: but since he was not extinguished at once, the whole world was peopled by his flame. (Thomas Aquinas, *On Faith*..., pp. 220–221)

Just as the ancient church took up the fight against the Donatists, Arians, other heretics and schismatics, so the Church of Massachusetts had to react to the heresy of the Antinomians, the troublemaking of Williams and other “Anabaptists”. Just as the ancient church called upon the emperor for help, so the Church of New England was right to make use of the colonial magistracy. Fortunately, Williams could be punished with banishment and was not executed, a punishment for which Thomas Aquinas had no difficulty justifying when the purity of the faith was at risk.

- 17 Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Examined and Answered*, Chapter III.
- 18 Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams*..., pp. 110–113.
- 19 Williams exegesis is congruent with the position of Menno Simmons (1496–1561), the leader of the Mennonites, for whom the “field” does not represent the church, but the state (Byrd, *The Challenges of Roger Williams* pp. 96–97, 110–127; cf: Davis J. C. (ed.), *On Religious Liberty. Selections from the Works of Roger Williams*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 28–29, 107–112, 186–188).
- 20 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*..., p. 2.
- 21 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*..., p. 75. It is worth noting here that Williams uses another parable from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, about goats and sheep (Matt 25:31–45). *Nomen omen*, this passage is sometimes used in disputes with advocates of predestination by emphasising the need for “good deeds”, that is, acts of mercy, confirming the real faithfulness to the Gospel by those declaring it.
- 22 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent*..., p. 80.
- 23 For a detailed reconstruction of Williams' dispute with Cotton on the proper exegesis of Matthew 13:24–30, see Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to Baptists*, vol. 1, D. Weston (ed.), Backus Historical Society, Newton, 1871, pp. 132–140.
- 24 S. Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1978, p. 42. On the tropes of the topos of New Israel in the sermons of New England preachers, read: Stout, *The New England Soul*..., 53–58.

25 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. 179.

26 For the record, let us recall that the figure of the “silver candlestick” symbolises the Mosaic law and prophecies, and not the light of “God’s presence” in the Jewish tradition. After all, the menorah, placed first in the Tent of Meeting and then in the Temple in Jerusalem, was pure gold.

27 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. 403.

28 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. 275. The accusation that Williams makes against the Massachusetts establishment is weighty: he shows that the New England concept of close cooperation between church and state, as visible effects of the covenant, while it should be based on the “covenant of grace”, is in fact exclusively founded on the “covenant of works”, taking as a model of action – both the state and the church – the realities of ancient Israel. It is difficult to imagine a worse invective aimed at the Calvinist. If we add Williams’ comparison of Puritans to “Papists” due to the involvement of the magistrates in the work of the church, we no longer need to look for reasons for his banishment.

Williams’ allegations are problematic because, when put in a broader perspective, they will not necessarily be addressed exclusively to Winthrop or Cotton. Their recipient can be anyone who identifies with the explanation of the idea of the covenant contained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Although the “covenant of grace”, in its essence, assumes that in its establishment the entire work (work) remains on God’s side, in practice, in the creation of a single community (gathered church) we also see the active participation of man who, in response to God’s call and standing before Him, creates a visible church with others. As Perry Miller notes:

(...) the saint was redeemed not simply by an infusion of grace, but by being taken into a league with God, an explicit compact drawn up between two partners, wherein the saint promised to obey God’s will and God promised infallibly to grant him salvation. Starting with this notion of a personal and inward covenant, the theologians (in New England – note: R.P.) extended it to the church and the state. They argued that a nation of saints, all of whom were personally in covenant with God, would also be in covenant with Him as a body politic, that as each individual had inwardly subscribed the bond, so a society formed by their regenerate action would swear to the covenant in outward unison.

(P. Miller, *Nation’s Nature*, Belknap, Cambridge 1967, p. 17)

Mark Noll, in turn, adds: “As covenant themes developed in early New England, it seemed natural that the first work of faith should be covenanting with God and other believers to form individual churches” (M. A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, p. 38). New England Puritans would add that not only the church, but also the state, cooperate in solidarity in the work of building the Kingdom of God on Earth. We see here a specific doctrinal tension between (1) The unshakable principle of Calvinism, emphasising the sovereignty of God, and (2) Man’s active involvement (work) in establishing a covenant with his Creator and then with others, in community with Him: The creation of a single visible church, with its ecclesiastical discipline; but also a “Christian state”, legally enforcing compliance with both tables of the *Decalogue*. In this way, we are inevitably approaching the “covenant of works”, which is, at least theoretically, a counterpoint to the Puritan “covenant of grace”. The internal tension in Puritan covenant theology highlighted here lies behind the dispute between the Antinomians and the Massachusetts establishment, led by Anne Hutchinson, who openly accused it of promoting a “covenant of works”.

29 Association with “Plato’s cave” does not exclude the indication of the biblical context of Williams’ argument: Heb 10:1 and Col 2:17 (“The law is only a

- shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship” (Heb 10:1); “These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”. (Col 2:17).
- 30 Edward B. Underhill draws attention to these inspirations in his foreword to *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. XXX.
- 31 Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, convinced his brothers not to kill Joseph but to sell him to traders going to Egypt. It was to Judah that Jacob promised the kingdom and gave the birthright. Finally, it was from the tribe of Judah that David and Solomon came. In Williams’ statement, this Old Testament figure symbolises the “royal house”, that is, secular authority.
- 32 J. C. Davis (ed.), *On Religious Liberty. Selections from the Works of Roger Williams*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 174.
- 33 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, p. 435.
- 34

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

(Isa 5:5–6)

- 35 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, pp. 355–356. See also: A. Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1955, p. 18.
- 36 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...*, pp. 154–155. Pointing to Constantine the Great as responsible for the “corruption of the church” does not result from the fact that during his reign, it became a state church. After all, it was Theodosius who determined its status. Rather, it results from the first secular authority’s involvement, in the name of unity of the church – in the dispute with the Arians and in attempts to end the Donatist schism using the “sword” of the secular authorities (confiscation of the property of Donat’s supporters and their banishment). The “Constantinian turn” will be understood here as the use of instruments of government to promote the truths of faith.
- 37 Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent...* p. 8.
- 38 That freedom of religion was a concern of the Providence civic body was demonstrated by the case of Joshua Verin, who came with Williams from Salem and was one of the first Providence residents to have done so. Joshua and Jane Verin were neighbours of Williams, who led religious services in his home. Joshua Verin refused to participate, which was accepted with understanding by the other inhabitants of the settlement. However, his wife took an active part until Joshua Verin forbade her from doing so. On May 21, 1638, a meeting of residents decided to deprive Verin of the right to vote there, as he had violated the founding agreement of Providence by limiting the freedom of conscience of one of its residents. The right to vote was to be restored when the accused waived the ban issued to his wife. Eventually, Mr and Mrs Verin left Providence and returned to MBC. Paradoxically, in MBC, it was Jane Verin who was punished for refusing to attend a Congregationalist service in Salem. For details of the Verin case, see: E. J. Eberle, *Rhode Island Interest: Another of Roger William’s Gifts: Women’s Right to Liberty of Conscience: Joshua Verin v. Providence Plantations*, “Roger Williams University Law Review”, vol. 399 (2004). The Verin case is interesting not only because of the issue of religious liberty, but also because it chronicles the right of a married woman to make decisions for herself about her own conscience.
- 39 The circumstances of Williams’s interest in the Baptist doctrine are not fully established, as noted by T. J. Zieliński (Zieliński, *Roger Williams...* pp. 49–50).

- 40 It should be noted here that we are not sure whether this baptism took place by immersion.
- 41 T. W. Bicknell, *Story of Dr. John Clarke: the Founder of the First Free Commonwealth of the World*, Providence 1915, p. 43; H. C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, Judson Press, Valley Forge 1978, p. 195.
- 42 For most contemporary Baptists, the issue of continuity of “apostolic succession” is of little importance if it is viewed as an uninterrupted continuation of the visible church, including in its sacramental ministry (emphasis on baptism and the Lord’s Supper), since the Apostolic times. The prevailing position among Baptists was succinctly articulated by Henry C. Vedder:

To Baptists, indeed, of all people, the question of tracing their history to remote antiquity should appear nothing more than an interesting study. Our theory of the church as deduced from the Scriptures requires no outward and visible succession from the apostles. If every church of Christ were to-day to become apostate, it would be possible and right for any true believers to organize to-morrow another church on the apostolic model of faith and practice, and that church would have the only apostolic succession worth having—a succession of faith in the Lord Christ and obedience to him.

(Vedder, *A Short History...*, p. 45)

- The first significant Baptist to ignore the importance of preserving historical Apostolic succession for the proper administration of baptism was John Spilsbury himself, who was to declare: “where there is a beginning, someone must be first” (see: H. L. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, Broadman Press, Nashville 1987, p. 47). If the 17th-century Baptist movement was to be a renewal of the church, then baptism also had to be performed “anew”.
- 43 Roger Williams and John Smyth shared a number of similarities in their spiritual paths: thorough theological education in Cambridge (the cradle of Puritan ideas); Anglican ordination; separatist Brownism; credo-baptism; rebaptism received in extraordinary circumstances; subsequent questioning of the correctness of its adoption, and thus the recognition of its invalidity; and above all, a strenuous and uncompromising search for the true church. In this last area, though, there is one important difference: Williams had given up hope of finding such a church among his contemporaries; Smyth applied for admission to the Waterlander Mennonites. The difference here is not based on the soteriology professed – Williams’ Calvinistic orientation, Smyth’s Arminianism – but on the consequences of losing faith in the effectiveness of rebaptism. Smyth once again came to believe in the importance of “Apostolic succession” while Williams remained convinced that “Apostolic succession”, *de facto* no longer existed and would not be regained until the Second Coming of the Saviour. While Smyth found people capable of giving him the “believer’s baptism”, Williams stopped looking for them.
- 44 Burrage, *A History of the Baptists...*, p. 23.
- 45 Bill J. Leonard points to Thomas Olney (c. 1600–1682), who was to be the pastor of Williams’ congregation until 1682 (B. J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways. A History*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 2003, p. 75). Other sources say that Olney left the First Baptist Church in Providence in 1653/54 to lead the second Baptist community in that settlement. The reason for his departure was an internal Arminian-Calvinist dispute, leading to the emergence of advocates of double predestination.
- 46 See: J. D. Wilsey, *One Nation Under God?: An Evangelical Critique of Christian America*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, 2011, p. 108. Wisley quotes here the words of Davies A. Mervyn, who, introducing Williams to us, notes:

(...) in him were realised and brought to fulfilment all the liberal implications of Calvinism. If Calvin opened the door to liberty for Western man, Roger Williams was one Calvinist who went through it. If Calvin planted seeds of democracy, Roger Williams nurtured them to their fullest harvest.

(D. A. Mervyn, *Foundation of American Freedom*, Abingdon, Nashville 1955, p. 172)

- 47 See: P. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Harvard University Press, London 2004, p. 42.
- 48 T. J. Zieliński emphasises that in his legal-naturalistic reflections, as well as those regarding contractualism (social contract theory), Williams, being a Calvinist, operates within the traditional, theistic view of the law of nature. Therefore, he did not, as Thomas Hobbes did, switch to “autonomist” positions, typical of legal-naturalism and devoid of references to religion (see: Zieliński, *Roger Williams...*, pp. 186–187).
- 49 As Edward J. Eberle points out:

For Williams, there is no real choice in this; conscience is your duty to God, and your guide in life. The freedom envisioned is the freedom to do God’s will. This freedom is preeminently rooted in religious belief, a spirituality emanating from God, not man. This is what Williams means by ‘soul liberty.’”
(Eberle, *Roger Williams’ Gift...*, p. 442)
- 50 P. Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition*, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, New York 1953, p. 255.
- 51 J. McClendon, *The Mennonite and Baptist Vision*, in: P. Toews (ed.), *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, Kindred Press, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1993, p. 220. See also: J. C. Davis, *Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution*, “History of Political Thought”, vol. 18 (1997), pp. 460–482; J. Coffey, *Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution*, “The Historical Journal”, vol. 41, no. 4 (1998), p. 981; Eberle, *Roger Williams’ Gift: Religious...*, pp. 293–299.
- 52 See more: Zieliński, *Roger Williams...*, 204–210. A trace of this way of thinking about religious relationships can be found in John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, a work written four and a half decades after *The Bloody Tenent...*
- 53 This is also how it is presented by, for example, Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (see: C. Beneke, C. S. Grenda, *The Lively Experiment. Religious Toleration in America from Roger Williams to the Present*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2015, p. 8).
- 54 Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 69.

8 John Clarke

A Newport Baptist, preacher, and statesman of the “Living Experiment”

As the wide interest in Roger Williams and his preachings attests, Williams is today an iconic figure for those interested in the history of American religious policy, religious freedom, and toleration. Numerous biographical studies in the 20th century rekindled interest in Williams, who had fallen into obscurity for a long time. The studies confirmed his special participation in building the American image of well-organised relations between the state and the church. Though a Baptist for only a fraction of his life, he has secured a prominent place in the history of American Baptists.¹ His metaphor of the “wall” separating the “garden of the church” from the “desert of the world” is a permanent element of the Baptist image of the role of the church in the world and the place of the world in the church. Although both the height of this “wall” and the degree of its permeability are the subject of dispute between Baptists, who have different understandings of separatism and heterogeneously identify its practical consequences, they unanimously refer to Williams’ legacy – probably with the exception of Landmarkists, who do not include Williams in the Baptist family.²

Williams’ popularity overshadows the figure of John Clarke (1609–1676), whose participation in the establishment of CRIPP, as well as in the beginnings of Baptists on American soil, does not pale against Williams’ contribution.³ Allegedly, Williams’ writing skills and his adversary – that is, the Reverend John Cotton – built up Williams’ popularity. His renown also shows that one is remembered when associated with an aphorism, phrase, or concept that stimulates the imagination of future generations. Undoubtedly, Williams’ “wall of separation”, separating the “garden” from the “wilderness”, did the trick. Today, this concept functions as a metaphorical representation of the pattern of American policy towards religious groups, separating the church (religion) from the state.

However, the phrase “the living experiment”, currently used to describe a political order in which guarantees of religious freedom are treated as a priority, can be attributed to Clarke. Clarke coined the phrase in his 1652 letter to King Charles II, in which he sought a charter for Rhode Island, as well as in the text of the charter itself. The “living experiment” was also used in the third section of Article One of *The Constitution of the State of Rhode Island*

and Providence Plantations of 1842, which laid down the guarantees of religious freedom. Whether residents of Rhode Island, let alone the rest of American society, today would be aware of Clarke's authorship of the term remains an open question, though it would seem doubtful.

Clarke was born on October 8, 1609, in Westhorpe (Suffolk County). A comprehensively educated physician who also practised law, he appeared in MBC at the end of 1637, a year after Williams' banishment, at a turning point in the "Antinomian controversy". Having sided with Anne Hutchinson, he quickly lost the favour of the local establishment. Together with the Hutchinsons and other dissidents of the "republic of saints", he left Massachusetts to find refuge on Aquidneck Island (Rhode Island), located in Narragansett Bay, establishing with them the settlement of Portsmouth and later, located nearby, the settlement of Newport. In 1640, he became the leader of the Church in Newport (according to Clarke's beliefs, the visible church can do without official pastoral ordination, implementing the principle of universal priesthood, which is why he did not formally become its pastor, contenting himself with the function of a "teacher").⁴

Whether Clarke was a Baptist when he reached Boston remains unknown.⁵ It is also unclear if the members of the church he founded in Newport were "baptised in faith" before 1644. However, John Winthrop's notes show that "rebaptism" was indeed practised on Aquidneck Island in 1640–1641. According to John Callender (1706–1748), who would later be a pastor in Newport, this community became a Baptist congregation in 1644.⁶ In 1649, a part of the congregation of Rehoboth (present-day Seekonk, Massachusetts, on the border with Rhode Island), a settlement then under the jurisdiction of the Plymouth Colony, attempted to transform it into a Baptist church. However, the colonial authorities forced the "Baptists" to leave the colony, and the banishment was accompanied by excommunication from the church in Rehoboth.⁷ Outlaws joined the community in Newport. Among them were Obadiah Holmes (1610–1682), who led them and had been baptised by Clarke and Mark Lucar (Luker)⁸ – an elder of the Newport Church, who had been a member of Spilsbury's London congregation before coming to New England – at the time of their visit to Rehoboth in 1649.⁹

8.1 *Ill Newes from New-England...*

In 1652, during his stay in London with Roger Williams and William Dyer (1609–1677),¹⁰ Clarke published *Ill Newes from New-England or a Narrative of New-Englands Persecution*: A pamphlet whose aim was to publicise the repression of MBC authorities against Baptists. The subtitle of this text is significant: *Wherin Is Declared That While Old England Is Becoming New, New-England Is Become Old*.¹¹ One of the text's main themes was to point out that freedom of conscience and toleration in Clarke's homeland were much better at that time than in MBC. The addressee of the pamphlet was the Parliament and the Republican Council of State, although one chapter

was titled *To the True Christian Reader*, which confirms the author's desire to reach a wider audience. Due to the fact that *The Bloody Tenent...* came to light after Williams had already left his Baptist congregation, questioning the value of his rebaptism, we can factually argue that Clarke's *Ill Neues...* is the first text in defence of freedom of conscience by an English Baptist living in America.

In November 1644, the General Assembly of MBC established an anti-Baptist law, according to which:

It is ordered and agreed, that if any person or persons within this particular jurisdiction shall either openly condemn or oppose the baptism of infants, or go about secretly to seduce others from the approbation or use thereof, or shall purposely depart the congregation at the administration of the ordinance, or shall deny the ordinance of magistracy, or their lawful right to make war, or to punish outward breaches of the first table, and shall appear to the Court willfully and obstinately to continue therein after due time and means of conviction, every such person or persons shall be sentenced to banishment.

This law was adopted in response to Thomas Painter's failure to provide parental consent to have his newborn child baptised. To justify his decision, Painter cited his belief that infant baptism was an anti-Christian practice. In response, the colonial authorities had him whipped.¹²

The direct cause of the publication of *Ill Neues...* was the issuance on July 31, 1651, by the MBC authorities, of a verdict condemning prominent citizens of Newport, Obadiah Holmes, John Crandall (1617–1676), and John Clarke, to be fined (or possibly whipped) for violating the anti-Baptist order. All three were accused of organising an illegal Baptist service on July 20, 1651, at the house of William Witter,¹³ located near Lynn (in the jurisdiction of MBC). A resident of Massachusetts, Witter was affiliated with the Newport Baptist Church. As he was blind and of advanced age, travelling to Newport was understandably difficult. A service was therefore organised at his place of residence. In addition to the guests from Newport and members of Witter's family, several bystanders participated. The authorities' response was repression against the citizens of Newport. The convicts were sentenced to a fine, which was to be changed to whipping if they refused to pay it. Crandall was fined £5, Clarke £20, and Holmes £30. Such a high punishment for the latter was most likely the result of his previous excommunication from the Church in Rehoboth (the first permanent Baptist church in Massachusetts had been established there in 1663), and hence his crime was treated as recidivism.¹⁴ Holmes categorically refused to pay the fine, so he was publicly whipped.¹⁵

To put aside the dominant theme and aim of *Ill Neues...* – the reconstruction of the description of the events that took place in Lynn and their consequences – several of his theses, intended to induce readers to condemn the politics of MBC magistrates towards dissenters, are worth considering.

How the relationship between the church and the state is presented stands out for how it constructs the concept of “two swords”, which only superficially resembles that proclaimed by Pope Gelasius I. Both see God’s will as the source of all power and its dualism (the “two swords” symbolise two powers) as the functional division of tasks between secular and spiritual authorities. However, assuming that the former is obliged to take care of peace in the state, public order, and general prosperity; and the second one of spiritual matters, then, unlike Gelasius I, Clarke does not build a hierarchy of importance between them and recognises spiritual power differently: It is not the institutional church that holds the spiritual power, but God’s Spirit acted directly in man through His Word (this approach is characteristic of Reformation theology¹⁶). For Clarke, the “two swords” correspond to two aspects of human existence – the “outer” and the “inner” man. Christ, the King of all creation, entrusts to the human magistracy the power of the “steel sword” over the “outer”, or “carnal”, man. This “sword” will rightly be used against the one who harms his neighbour. However, the “sword” of the human magistracy cannot be used against the conscience, the “inner” or spiritual man, because this “sword” belongs not to the secular authority, but to the Spirit, to the Word of God working in man. Here he illustrates the point:

...yet was it never appointed by Christ, (to whom all power, not only in Earth, but also in Heaven, is committed, and by whom all Earthly powers are to be judged, in that day in which he shall judge the World in righteousness; I say it was never appointed by Christ) to inform and rectifie the minds and consciences of men in the worship of God, in that great mystery of Godliness, and in those mysticall matters concerning the Kingdom of Christ, that being a matter that onely belongs to the Holy Spirit of Promise, and to the Sword of that Spirit, which is the Word (not of man, but) of God, to effect, much lesse to conform their outward man, contrary to their minds and consciences in the Worship of God; and therefore that Sword and Power ought to take heed how they meddle herein (lest they attempt to take the place, & enter upon the Throne and Kingdom of Christ) either to force such as be conceived to be true Worshipers, to the true Worship, and service of God, for it is written, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.¹⁷

In the quoted excerpt, ending with a verse from the *Book of Zechariah* (Zech 4:6b), Clarke expresses his belief that it was God’s will that the two swords were separated. Moreover, the Holy Spirit of Promise deliberately reduced the possibility of His interference with the “outer” man, giving way to political power, while maintaining a monopoly in relation to the “inner” one. The shaping of the latter would not take place by “force” or “power” – neither by Zerubbabel, the king of Judea, nor by those ruling in MBC – but by the

action of His Spirit. To again compare Gelasius' I and Clarke's thought, the latter not only confirms the autonomy of the "spiritual sword" authority, but also denies the "steel sword" of secular power a share in the work of building the Kingdom of Christ. This is a step the Pope of the late 5th century would not have been able to take. The temporal kingdom of the "outer" man is separated from the infinite Kingdom of the "inner". However, when the day of judgment comes, the One who gave the magistracy the "sword" of secular power over the "outer" man would hold it accountable for the way it was used, because everyone, without exception, would be responsible for what was entrusted to him; from how he multiplied the deposit placed in his hands (Matt 25:14–30).

Having established that the scope of secular authority does not include matters of conscience, Clarke expounds his understanding of the visible church (presented as the "house of faith"), which is closely related to the concept of the "two swords". As he notes:

For the nature of the household of Faith, they are a company of faithfull ones, that are bought with the price of his blood, knit together in one by his Spirit, founded wholly upon himself, built up by him to be a holy habitation of God, and therefore not in the least measure to be defiled with the inventions and commandements of men, from whence it is that they are still with their ey fixt upon him whom they look upon to be as well the finisher as the author of their faith, still in their hearts calling on him that hath bought them, and saying, Lord what wilt thou have me to doe, and still standing upon their watch to harken what this Lord will speak, for the voice of a stranger they will not hear; so that by this it evidently appears, that there is none that hath so much right unto this household of Faith by way of ordering it, not yet freedom in it by way of commanding, as hath Christ Jesus the Lord (...).¹⁸

With that in mind, Clarke questions the validity of the opposition to the creation of Baptist communities in both PC and MBC. The fact that the magistracy of the "republic of saints" has assigned itself the right to license newly established Christian congregations is, for him, key evidence that Massachusetts is, in fact, modern-day Babylon.

On a point of order, I would add that in his defence of the universal right to freedom of conscience, Clarke also uses the *Parable of the Weeds*.¹⁹ He likewise alludes to an argument Murton put forward – that denying freedom of conscience to dissenters leads to disturbances of public order and bloodshed – from which the magistracy is supposed to protect its subjects, not to cause them – and which, thanks to wide toleration, could be avoided (let us recall that Murton used the "Gunpowder Plot" of Catholic conspirators as an example). In a tone similar to "The Prisoner of Newgate", Clarke argues that:

But this outward forcing of men in matter of conscience towards God to believe as others believe and to practice and worship as others do cannot stand with the Peace, Liberty, Prosperity and Safety of a Place, Commonwealth or Nation. Therefore, no servant of Christ can have any liberty, much less authority so to do.²⁰

Unlike those presented above, this argument is not based on theological reasoning but refers to practical reason. Clarke nonetheless looked for an illustration of its correctness in the pages of the *Holy Scripture* and not, as Murton did, using the experiences of his generation. Here, he recalls the biblical figure of Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, stained with the blood of the prophets, and merciless in her cruelty in establishing the cult of the idols she professed. The religious civil war that she caused ultimately brought about her own death, as well as those of her husband and their offspring. In Clarke's opinion, this biblical pattern of violence is constantly repeated – bringing unspeakable suffering, also in contemporary times – according to the author of *Ill Newes*... Here, the people of the church use the “steel sword” of the magistracy, like Jezebel controlling Ahab, to persecute dissenters whose only guilt is their non-conformity to the church's worldview. Clarke announces:

(...) there can be no expectation of peace in the earth, but still of wars, and rumors of wars, untill men's hearts fail them: for so long as there is an outward force or power to be had to maintain and uphold the carnall interests and advantages of some upon religious accounts, and to persecute others who for conscience sake towards God, dare not, yea cannot conform to their way. What hopes are hereby begotten and nourished in some? what jealousies, suspicions and fears in others? what revengeful desires in most? yea, what plottings and contrivings in all? And as a fruit and effect hereof, what riding? running? troublesome and tumultuous assemblings together and sidings? yea, and outrageous murderings and bloodshedings are hereby produced in a Nation, to gain that power and sword to their party either to crush, suppress, or cause the other to conform or at the least and best to save themselves from being crushed, suppressed or forced to conformity?²¹

Religious violence never ends when both perpetrator and victim look at “Heaven” – at Providence, seeking support and legitimacy for “their party”, for their “holy cause”. At best, the parties will switch their positions over time, avenging the suffering they have endured (because it is extremely difficult for Christians to “turn the other cheek”). The English Civil War is eloquent evidence of this. Breaking the closed circle of violence is only possible by separating the affairs of the state from the life of the church, the authority of the “external” man from the “internal” one, by permanently separating the “two swords”, as John Clarke went to great lengths to convince the reader in *Ill Newes*....

To conclude this thread, I would like to compare Clarke's thoughts with those of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), an outstanding thinker of that era. Both were eyewitnesses to what uncontrolled and maddening fear, what cruel and destructive violence the religious civil war of all against all leads to. However, they found a remedy for this state of affairs in something else: The author of *Leviathan* equips the state with the *potestas absolute*; a Baptist Clarke sees the primary cause of religious strife in the desire of people in power to achieve the “omnipotence of things”, and therefore calls for the permanent separation of the “two swords” (steel and spiritual). For Hobbes, the collapse of *Christianitas* in England was the primary cause of the civil war; for Clarke, its very creation, through the alliance of the “two swords” in the Roman Empire in the 4th century, foreshadowed the events of the 17th century. The painful experiences of Baptists in New England are only a tiny spot in the overall picture that had been consistently painted from the 4th century – with the blood of dissenters, and of which subsequent generations of Christians should only be ashamed when presenting this image to their God, because He certainly would not be glorified in it.

For Hobbes, a return to *Christianitas* is no longer possible, so he proposes a social contract creating a mortal God (Leviathan). In turn, Clarke transfers contractualism from theory to practice: It desacralises the Puritan covenant and establishes the socio-political order based on civil mutual agreement (a compact). The Newport Residents' Agreement, and later the CRIPP fundamental law, is exclusively civil (civil and secular) in nature, without transcendent references, without any aspirations to determine what is and what is not divine (in terms of doctrine or ritual). Hobbes' state dominates religion, irrevocably wielding both “swords” as an inalienable condition of social peace; Clarke's state is separated from it, and the condition of peace the author of *Ill Neues...* finds in entrusting the magistracy with only the “steel” one.

8.2 The Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as the “living experiment”

The mission of Williams, Dyer, and Clarke achieved its goal: The Colony of Providence Plantations' parliamentary patent was upheld. Dyer returned to America in 1653, as would Williams a year later, to assume the position of President of CPP. Clarke decided to remain in London as the representative and defender of the rights of the associated cities. He would not return to Rhode Island until 1663.

Lord Protector Olivier Cromwell died in 1658. His son, Richard Cromwell (p. 1658–1659), ruled ineptly, prompting Parliament to enthrone Charles II of England (p. 1660–1685), thus restoring the English monarchy. The restoration of the Stuart dynasty resulted in the annulment of the provisions of Parliament adopted during the Republic, among which was the patent for the associated towns of the CPP. Anglicanism was re-established as the state

religion, which resulted in the persecution of non-Anglican clergy and the removal of opponents of Erastianism from public functions (the *Clarendon Code*). During this extremely difficult period for non-conformists, Clarke – who had remained a member of William Kiffin’s Particular Baptists during his stay in London – made strenuous efforts to obtain a royal charter, securing the political future of the Colony. Once again, this Baptist preacher assumed the role of diplomat. In 1662, on behalf of the people of Rhode Island, he submitted two petitions to Charles II, in which, assuring the monarch of their unwavering loyalty, and at the same time appealing for sympathy for their proper attachment to religious freedom and the idea of toleration, he asked for formal recognition of the existence of a colony where “free people create a free church”. In the second petition, he was to summarise his argumentation as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray your Majestys favourable aspect towards them, who have still in their removes, and in the rest of their actings made it manifest, that they as the true natives of England, have firmly adhered in their allegience and loyalty to the sovereignty thereof, although by strangers, by many faire proffers againe and againe allured therefrom, and have it much on their hearts (if they may be permitted) to hold forth a lively experiment, that a flourishing civill State may stand, yea, and best be maintained, and that among English spirits, with a liberty in religious concernments, and that true pyety rightly grounded upon gospell principies will give the best and greatest security to true sovereignty, and will lay in the hearts of men the strongest obligations to truer loyalty (...) ²²

For Clarke, unfeigned loyalty to secular authority – in this case, the sovereign power of Charles II – is based on sincere faith in the Gospel (Rom 13:1). Thus, it is in the king’s interest, Clarke argues, to allow his subjects to live free from religious pressure. This conviction, rejected in England, was to be confirmed in the “living experiment” of Rhode Island, where appropriate conditions were to be created for the development of such an organised civic body. Although the religious policy of the English monarchy during the reign of Charles II did not provide toleration for dissenters in the British Isles, the sovereign allowed it to be maintained in a small, New England colony – composed of only a few settlements in total – the existence of which the monarch could ignore. After all, the population of Rhode Island at that time numbered a mere 1500 inhabitants, while in neighbouring Massachusetts there were nearly 20,000 of the king’s subjects, and in Plymouth about 2000. The population of London alone numbered over 400,000. Nevertheless, it was an undisputable diplomatic success for John Clarke, who was tasked with preparing the charter establishing the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. In this very extensive document, Clarke was quoted above from

the passage from the petition to Charles II. It served as an introduction to the following words:

Now know nec, that wee beinge willinge to encourage the hopeful! undertakeinge of oure sayd loyall and loveinge subjects, and to secure them in the free exercise and enjoyment of all their civill and religious rights, appertaining to them, as our loveinge subjects; and to preserve unto them that libertye, in the true Christian ffaith and worshipp of God, which they have sought with soe much travaill, and with peaceable myndes, and loyall subjectione to our royall progenitors and ourselves, to enjoye; and because some of the people and inhabitants of the same colonie cannot, in their private opinions, conforme to the publique exercise of religion, according to the litturgy, formes and ceremonies of the Church of England, or take or subscribe the oaths and articles made and established in that behalfe; and for that the same, by reason of the remote distances of those places, will (as wee hope) bee noe breach of the unitie and unifformitie established in this nation: Have therefore thought ffit, and doe hereby publish, graunt, ordeyne and declare, That our royall will and pleasure is, that noe person within the sayd colonie, at any tyme hereafter, shall bee any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinione in matters of religion, and doe not actually disturb the civill peace of our sayd colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from tyme to tyme, and at all tymes hereafter, freelye and fullye have and enjoye his and their owne judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments, throughout the tract of lande hereafter mentioned; they behaving themselves peaceable and quietlie, and not using this libertie to lycentiousncsse and profanenesse, nor to the civill injurie or outward disturbance of others; any lawe, statute, or clause, therein contayned, or to bee contayned, usage or custome of this realme, to the contrary hereof, in any wise, notwithstanding.²³

Thus, by the will of the sovereign, a small colony is established in his dominion as a shelter for religious non-conformists – who are allowed to enjoy freedom of conscience, as long as they do not cause scandal, in peace and silence, in a place virtually invisible to the eyes of the inhabitants of the British Isles – who want to worship God in their own way. The monarch, in Clarke's words, also expressed hope that granting the privilege to the people of Rhode Island would not threaten "the unitie and unifformitie established in this nation".

The Royal Charter, drafted by John Clarke, remained the supreme law of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations for nearly 200 years, until 1842,²⁴ when the state drafted its constitution. It is remarkable that it was used successfully so long after the end of the British presence in New England, during the subsequent decades of London's lack of sovereignty over the territory.

Section 3, Article 1 of the State Constitution of 1842, in force to this day, offers the following words:

Whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free; and all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness; and whereas a principal object of our venerable ancestors, in their migration to this country and their settlement of this state, was, as they expressed it, to hold forth a lively experiment, that a flourishing civil state may stand and be best maintained with full liberty in religious concerns: We, therefore, declare that no man shall be compelled to frequent or to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever, except in fulfillment of his own voluntary contract; nor enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods; nor disqualified from holding any office; nor otherwise suffer on account of his religious belief; and that every man shall be free to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, and to profess and by argument to maintain his opinion in matters of religion; and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect his civil capacity.²⁵

Thus, Clarke's "living experiment" was commemorated by the citizens of Rhode Island.

After returning to Newport, Clarke reassumed leadership of the local Baptist church, remaining its pastor until his death on April 20, 1676. During this period, the congregation experienced two splits: In 1665 (1666), a group of 21 people with "General" sympathies left it; and in 1671, the "Sabbatarian" faction left, forming the first American Seventh-day Baptist congregation.²⁶ During this period, Clarke also remained politically active. In the years 1669–1670 and 1671–1673, he served as Deputy Governor of CRIPP. It is something of a paradox that this implacable advocate of the separation of church and State, while remaining the leader of the church, occupied a prominent public position. Yet, his ability to maintain the functional separation of the activity of a participant in the magistracy and a person with special responsibility in the church proves the strength of Clarke's Baptist identification – a call to full involvement, also politically, in the improvement of the world surrounding the follower of Christ (in the future this command would be strongly affirmed by Methodism). This stood in contradiction to the teaching of world-renouncing Anabaptism (e.g. the Amsterdam Waterlander Mennonites), but was compatible with the position of Helwys and Murton.²⁷ For Clarke, the interest of the sphere of public power concerned only secular – in his own words, "carnal" or "external" – matters; concern for peace and public safety, for the general prosperity of all those subject to "external administration", and to defend their rights against violence from a neighbour. The multitude of matters that can be improved to achieve these goals is more than enough to prevent the secular government from getting involved in the affairs of the "inner man".

Notes

- 1 L. Moore, *Roger Williams as an Enduring Symbol for Baptists*, “Journal of Church and State”, vol. 7, no. 2 (1965), pp. 181–189.
- 2 Due to being baptised outside the church, by a person baptised in a paedobaptist manner. In addition, Williams’ rebaptism was most likely not by immersion. The very fact of rejecting his Baptist belonging, after only a few months, also serves as evidence against Williams’ Baptist identification [See: D. B. Ray, *Baptist Succession: Handbook of Baptist History*, Geo. E. Stevens Co. Cincinnati 1871, pp. 42–51; J. R. Graves, *The First Baptist Church in America*, Southern Baptist Book House, Memphis 1890. Compare with: W. H. Whitsitt, *A Question in Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptist in England Practiced Immersion before the Year 1641?*, Chas. T. Dearing, Louisville 1896, pp. 147–164; M. R. Ellis, *Was Roger Williams a Baptist?* “The Baptist”, vol. 9, no. 6 (1928), pp. 408–410].
- 3 G. Selement, *John Clarke and the Struggle for Separation of Church and State*, “Foundations”, vol. 15, no. 2 (1972), p. 111. Edward Peterson compared the historical importance of Williams and Clarke in the founding of Rhode Island with the share of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci in the discovery of America. It took its name from the name of the second of these great explorers, covering him with eternal glory, although he was not its actual discoverer (see: E. Peterson, *History of Rhode Island*, John S. Taylor, New York 1853, p. 69). Christopher Columbus had to wait for the importance of his achievements to be recognised. The same goes for Clarke, although he seems to still be stranded in wings, remaining essentially anonymous. There is no doubt that it was Williams who coined the name Rhode Island for the island, which in the language of the Narragansett tribe was described as Aquidneck. Two settlements were first established on this island, Portsmouth and Newport. Clarke was involved in founding both.
 The settlement of Providence created by Williams is not located on Aquidneck Island (Rhode Island), but on the mainland. CPP, whose charter (*Act of Incorporation*) was issued by Parliament in 1644, cannot therefore be considered the colony of Rhode Island, which is reflected in its proper name of the latter (CRIPP), which originally included two settlements on Aquidneck Island and two more on the mainland, Providence and Warwick (the settlement of the latter was established in 1642 on the initiative of Samuel Gorton). Formally, the creation of CRIPP should be associated with obtaining the royal founding charter by Clarke in 1663, so his merits in the creation of this colony are unquestionable. Although, in fact, Roger Williams did not participate in the establishment of any settlement on Rhode Island and his efforts did not result in obtaining a royal charter, he is widely credited with founding the Colony of Rhode Island, because CRIPP is the actual continuator of the CPP. Under the Act, both the CPP and CRIPP are usually referred to as the Colony of Rhode Island. A similar simplification can be observed in the case of the modern state of Rhode Island, whose actual name is the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, which commemorates the beginnings of organized settlement in this part of colonial America. On November 3, 2020, the State’s voters approved an amendment to the State Constitution formally dropping “and Providence Plantations” from its full name. The intricacies of the history of the establishment of the Rhode Island Colony are explained in an accessible way by Patrick T. Conley and Robert G. Flanders, Jr. *The Rhode Island State Constitution: A Reference Guide*, No. 44, PRAEGER, Westport 2007, pp. 3–13.
- 4 For details of the “Antinomian controversy” and Clarke’s participation in it, see: S. V. James and T. D. Bozeman, *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island, 1638–1750*, Penn State University Press, University Park 1999, pp. 4–12. More details on Clarke’s attitude to positions in the church find in James and Bozeman, *John Clarke...*, pp. 21–26.

- 5 McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage...*, pp. 137–138. Thomas W. Bicknell speculates that Clarke may have been a member of the Smyth-Helwys congregation in Amsterdam during his stay in the Netherlands (Bicknell, *Story of Dr. John Clarke...*, p. 74).
- 6 Burrage, *A History of the Baptists...*, p. 25.
- 7 Burrage, *A History of the Baptists...*, pp. 25–26.
- 8 Mark Lucar was a Puritan of Greek origin who in London joined the “Baptist faction” of the JLJ Church, which ultimately left it in 1633. According to McBeth, Lucar was an advocate of baptism by immersion even before Richard Blunt performed it (McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage...*, p. 43). Lucar served as an elder in Clarke’s congregation.
- 9 E. S. Gaustad, *Baptist Piety: The Last Will and Testimony of Obadiah Holmes*, Christian University Press, Grand Rapids 1997, pp. 17–18.
- 10 William Dyer was the spouse of Mary Dyer, one of the four fatal Quaker victims of religious persecution in MBC. Dyer was hanged in Boston on June 1, 1660. William Dyer was also a co-founder of Portsmouth and Newport, and defended the Parliamentary patent for the Colony of Providence Plantations in 1644.
- 11 The edition printed by Henry Hills in London (1652) is used in this monograph.
- 12 Burrage, *A History of the Baptists...*, p. 32.
- 13 Witter was previously indicted for promoting credobaptism. On February 28, 1643, he was found guilty of preaching heretical teachings and obliged by the court to acknowledge his sin and apologise to the pastor of his community in Salem (we have no evidence that he complied with this order). On February 18, 1646, he was accused again of expressing a “heretical opinion” because he publicly claimed that “people baptised as children are followers of the Devil”. Once again, he was obliged to acknowledge his sin. Because the order was not carried out, Witter was finally excommunicated, which is confirmed by the court register of July 24, 1651 (see: Durso, *No Armor for the Back...*, pp. 202–203).
- 14 Although Rehoboth was not within the jurisdiction of Massachusetts at that time, there was close cooperation between the Plymouth Colony and the Massachusetts Bay Colony in its policy towards the “Anabaptists”.
- 15 A description of the circumstances of the entire event and its consequences can be found in: Burrage, *A History of the Baptists...*, pp. 33–39; James and Bozeman, *John Clarke...*, pp. 45–48; K. E. Durso, *No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s–1700s*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2007, pp. 203–219.
- 16 Undoubtedly, we can easily see clues here that lead us to Martin Luther’s reflections on the “two kingdoms”.
- 17 J. Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England or A Narrative of New-England’s Persecution. Wherein Is Declared That While Old England Is Becoming New, New-England Is Become Old*, printed by Henry Hills, London 1652, pp. 13–44.
- 18 Clarke, *Ill News...*, p. 48.
- 19 Clarke, *Ill News...*, pp. 70–71.
- 20 Clarke, *Ill News...*, p. 72.
- 21 Clarke, *Ill News...*, pp. 73–74. Reading these words brings to mind a passage of John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, a work belonging to the canon of treatises in defence of freedom of conscience, which is a fragment that closely resembles the argumentation of the Baptist from Newport. Locke argues:

No body therefore, in fine, neither single Persons, nor churches, nay, nor even Commonwealths, have any just Title to invade the Civil Rights and Worldly Goods of each other upon pretence of Religion. Those that are of another Opinion, would do well to consider with themselves how pernicious a Seed of Discord and War, how powerful a Provocation to endless Hatreds, Rapines, and Slaughters, they thereby furnish unto Mankind. No Peace and Security, no not

so much as common Friendship, can ever be established or preserved amongst Men, so long as this Opinion prevails, That Dominion is founded in Grace, and that Religion is to be propagated by force of Arms.

[J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings* (ed. and introd. M. Goldie), Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis 2010, p. 23]

The striking similarity of these statements makes us appreciate even more fully Clarke's contribution to the fight for toleration and freedom of conscience. After all, the publication of *Ill Neues...* precedes the publication of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* by almost four decades.

- 22 *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island ... vol. 1.* pp. 490–491.
- 23 *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*, vol. 2. A. Crawford Greene and Brother, Providence 1857, pp. 5–6.
- 24 Only the oath of allegiance to the Crown by those taking public office was excluded from the text of the Charter [see: S. D. Gerber, *Law and the Lively Experiment in Colonial Rhode Island*, “British Journal of American Legal Studies”, vol. 2, no. 2 (2013), p. 460, footnote 32].
- 25 *The Constitution of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations with the Amendment Thereto*, Providence 1919, p. 7.
- 26 McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage...*, p. 139.
- 27 In this context, we recall the well-known aphorism attributed to Martin Luther: “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree”. Similarly, Clarke, although he looked intensely at the second coming of Christ and became involved in the Fifth Monarchy Movement during his stay in London, worked with full commitment both in the “garden” of the church and in the “wilderness” of the world. The expectation of the imminent fulfilment of the millennium prophecies did not discourage his actions but was additionally motivating, as the time remaining to him was quickly running out.

9 Part 2

Concluding remarks

Williams' and Clarke's views on the church and its properly arranged relations with the state show a strong affinity with the thought of the first London Baptists. Uncovering the foundation of this similarity would mean a radical turn to the past, to pre-Constantinian times. Although this turn is based on theological considerations, it consequently concerns ecclesiology and religious policy, which, in the opinion of the first Baptists, are permanently intertwined. The Kingdom of God as a spiritual relationship between the believer and his/her God, that is, as an "order of grace", is the central concept. Although their minds are also occupied with the Kingdom of God of the "last things" (especially in Clarke's case), that is the "order of glory", they consider any attempts to bring it closer, especially using instruments of political power, as contrary to the Word of God and, given the utopian nature of this venture, also with common sense. In their reflection, the Kingdom of God is mainly the "pneumatic reality" of the believer, in which "God becomes everything". Hence, the visible church (composed only of those who remain in this relationship) is the only materialisation of this transcendent reality that can be comprehended and implemented without falling into heresy and idolatry.

The efforts of Archbishop Laud, accompanied by a judge and a sheriff, to make God "all in all" in the Kingdom of England are a hopeless struggle to transfer the reality of the "last things" from John's prophecies to the realities of 17th-century England. The call to ultimately reject efforts to build a territorially described Kingdom of God in favour of its clearly personal (relational) dimension will lead Williams to "ecclesial dilemmas". They led him to question the possibility of an authentically pure church of "saints" functioning in the realities of the world in which he lived. John Clarke, his companion in the struggle to establish a colony that did not aspire to be a territorially understood "city on a hill", did not succumb to such doubts. Thanks to this resistance, he was remembered as the founder and first pastor of the Baptist community in Newport, of which he remained a member until his death.

Although the struggle to erect the New Jerusalem has spanned nearly two millennia, we identify the first Baptists as uncompromising critics of these

efforts, which moved beyond the religious component to become a political project. Theodosius' *Imperium Romanum* was intended to be a "Christian civitas": A world subjected to the rule of Christ, whose earthly vicar was the emperor. Similarly, Henry VIII did not hesitate to submit his royal rule to the territorially designed *dominium* of God's Son (Christendom), and Richard Hooker, the Elizabethan theologian, eloquently illustrated this submission using a geometric metaphor reflecting the nature of the English commonwealth, a state inhabited by God's people. The "New Jerusalem" was thought to be a renewed Kingdom of Israel (a politically organised entity of God's nation) built consistently and with sincere commitment by the Puritans of New England. However, their design, unlike the Roman model and its Erastian reflection, is exclusive (the doctrine of double predestination), so not everyone fits the mould. But what about Jesus' reaction when asked by his disciples about when he would restore the Kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6–8)? What about His conversation with Pilate when He pointed at the nature of His kingdom (John 18:36)? Ignoring it, impatient followers of Christ, instead of persistently waiting for the returning of Christ in His glory, no longer as a sacrificial Lamb, but as a victorious Lion, were devoutly engaged in erecting a utopian "commonwealth of saints" in the Massachusetts Bay.

In *Soul Liberty. The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630–1833*, William G. McLoughlin presents the first Baptists on American soil as followers of Christ with an uncertain identity, both in terms of doctrine and rituals. For they were indecisive: Whether they were closer to the teachings of Arminius or to the provisions of the *Canons of Dort*; whether their communities should definitely separate from the state church or not; whether they were radical Puritans or a completely new strand of the English Reformation; whether they should admit other Protestants to the Lord's Supper or not; whether properly administered baptism requires immersion or sprinkling or pouring water is sufficient; whether the seventh or first day of the week should be celebrated; whether laying hands on heads of the blessed is sacramental or not, and should newborn children of the regenerate be blessed in this way? Baptists of Providence and Newport could not look to the Baptist tradition for answers – no such tradition existed.

The unsettled identification of the first Baptists was accompanied by a lack of common knowledge about the specificity of this current of the English Reformation. This explains New Englanders' distrust of opponents of infant baptism, regardless of their motivations. McLoughlin explains:

At first the Puritans looked at them as eccentric fanatics – a dangerous resurgence of 16th century Munsterite Anabaptism. At other times they equated them with Brownists, Antinomians, Levellers, Familists, Quakers, and even 'Papists'. In the battle of words and whips that the Puritans of Massachusetts waged to extirpate these dissenters between 1635 and 1682 the basis of the differences between them was slowly hammered out.¹

In short, everything that was foreign to the Puritan spirituality, teachings, and practices of the Church of Massachusetts was identified with this seditious sect, which was believed to be composed of theologically ignorant and dangerous intriguers. Credobaptism was synonymous with anarchy and chaos, and anyone who joined a Baptist church was believed to eventually join the Antinomian or Quaker communities.² The lack of reliable knowledge about the “others” suggests that we should be particularly careful with them. An effective and often practised solution to “neutralising the other” is their isolation. Additionally, the Puritans’ unshakable belief in remaining in the one, true church led to hostility towards dissenters. Tensions between the establishment of the “republic of saints” and the Baptists were inescapable. The potential of the different societies determined the outcome of the competition. In the 17th century, the position of the Church of Massachusetts was unthreatened, and those with Baptist inclinations had to leave the area of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, seeking refuge in the territorially small and politically insignificant Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Today, we look to Roger Williams and John Clarke as brave defenders of freedom of conscience and as important figures in the fight for the separation of church and state in colonial America. However, we should not forget that it is difficult to consider them as winners in the struggle with their Puritan surroundings. Roger Williams was an outlaw, exiled from “New Jerusalem”, a radical fighter for freedom for those looking for the true church, even if he ultimately failed to find it for himself. He demanded the separation of the church and the state, but his expectation was not met in the world in which he formulated this demand and to which he presented reasons for the separation.³ His arguments against the New England state church did not gain him supporters in his homeland. Williams’ most famous pamphlet, *The Bloudy Tenent...* was publicly burned by Parliament, only to be attacked in over a hundred Puritan pamphlets and quoted twice in *Gangreana*, Thomas Edwards’s 1646 catalogue of heresies.⁴ John Clarke, in turn, having opposed the colonial establishment during the “Antinomian controversy”, was forced to seek refuge on Aquidneck Island, and in response to his attempt to sow a Baptist seed in the “garden” of the Church of Massachusetts (events at Lynn), he was effectively punished. The lesson was so severe that in the following years, Baptists did not conduct missionary activity in MBC, and the first Baptist congregation was not gathered in Boston until 1663, and the church was planted two years later.⁵

The colony built by Williams and Clarke on Narragansett Bay was perceived by the inhabitants of MBC as a kind of sewer, where all the maladjusted, spiritually lost malcontents, permanently unable to fit in with their views in the “city on a hill”, ended up. It was a “wilderness” separated by a “great and high wall” from “New Jerusalem”, as John foretold in his prophecy; a world of “those who do what is shameful or deceitful” (Rev 21:12, 14, 27). It became a refuge for Socinians, Quakers, Familists, Baptists of different views, and all kinds of mystics, undesirable and despised in Puritan New

England. As William G. McLoughlin emphasises, for Williams' and Clarke's contemporaries, CRIPP was not an oasis of freedom, but a den of iniquity, living proof of the dreadfulness that the practical implementation of the demand for religious toleration for everyone can lead to. Their colony was not perceived as the centre of freedom, but the periphery of the Puritan world, consistently pushed into oblivion, where it should remain forever.⁶ Outlining the reality of the towns that made up CRIPP, Sydney V. James notes:

Small wonder that ordinary Puritans in Massachusetts regarded Rhode Island as a cesspool of vile heresies and irreligion. Within a short time all the towns had adopted religious liberty as the only practical policy, leaving zealots to wrangle over doctrines and ceremonies, with all contenders far beyond the limits of respectability as reckoned in the neighboring colonies. People proposed ideas that denied the significance of good conduct for God's elect, denied predestination, denied the possibility of organizing a church, and denied the authority of ministers and magistrates. Nobody defended infant baptism, the use of religion to benefit human society, the value of a university education for ministers, or the wisdom of confining political rights to the godly. Some even denounced war as unchristian, and so many thought it sinful to take oaths to serve in public office or give testimony in court that the colony from the outset never required them—this in an age when conscientious refusal to take oaths by Quakers elsewhere was enough to create a political furor. Worse, a substantial number of Rhode Islanders believed in immediate revelation from God. Almost as bad, a great number neglected religion completely, and the whole lot was probably sliding into ignorance and illiteracy.⁷

Indeed, to contemporaries, this picture appeared as a description of unimaginable anarchy and depravity, a nightmare haunting on a restless night an orthodox inhabitant of the "city on a hill", unshakably clinging to Calvinist orthodoxy. Nothing good could come from CRIPP. From this colony there emanated nothing but vapours poisoning souls—"truths" harmful to Puritan society.

The self-purification mechanism of the "republic of saints" functioned efficiently. In 1654, the first president of Harvard College, Henry Dunster, refused to have his infant baptised and was consequently removed from office, thereby confirming the uncompromising nature of the colonial establishment.⁸ By the end of the 17th century, there were six Baptist congregations in CRIPP, three in the Plymouth Colony, only one in Boston (founded in 1665), and none in Connecticut, another New England Puritan colony established in 1636.⁹

The Congregationalist state church was not abolished in Massachusetts, the last state in the American Federation to do so, until 1833. In Connecticut, Congregationalism had lost this status only in 1818. A profound transformation

of the religious reality of New England occurred during the Great Awakening, releasing spiritual energy at the end of the colonial period. The process was slow, but changes were inevitable. After Williams and Clarke, the struggle with the institution of the state church continued. Baptists from Massachusetts had another hero in the fight for “free conscience” and the separation of church and state, Isaac Backus (1724–1803). Although the Baptists’ involvement was sincere and consistent, and the pressure exerted on them by the Congregationalist state church was weakening, its final collapse would not occur until two centuries after Williams’ banishment, and Quakers, Episcopalians, and even Presbyterians played a significant role in it.¹⁰

The above remarks in no way diminish the value of the efforts of the first Baptists on American soil in abolishing the institution of the state church, especially in New England. After all, as the *Holy Scripture* states: “One sows and another reaps” (John 4:37). Their ideas became the basis for a tradition that was saved from oblivion by, among others, Isaac Backus, whose *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* glorifies the legacies of Williams and Clarke. Although we associate the concept of the “wall of separation” mainly with Jefferson, the figure of the “garden separated by a wall from the wilderness” by Roger Williams is present today not only in Baptist literature popularising the ideas he preached, but also in textbooks on American constitutionalism, and even in the jurisprudence of the US Supreme Court, in cases regarding violations of the religious clauses of the First Amendment to the federal *Constitution*.¹¹

Notes

1 McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*..., p. 14.

2 McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*..., p. 17.

3 As W. G. McLoughlin reminds us:

Roger Williams’ experiment was a failure because of the inability of Rhode Islanders to shape, by example or evangelism, the destiny either of New England or any of the other colonies. Despite the valiant efforts of Williams, almost no one in colonial New England ever praised his experiment, sought his advice, quoted his books, or tried to imitate his practices. Even in Rhode Island he was often assailed as unsound, and to the other New England colonies, Rhode Island was always a prime example not of the virtues but of the horrors of religious liberty. Those who fought hardest for religious freedom in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire considered Rhode Island an embarrassment rather than an asset to their cause. During and after the colonial period, Rhode Island, “the licentious Republic” and “sinke hole of New England,” was an example to be shunned.

(W. G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630–1833, Volume I*, Harvard U. P., Cambridge 1971, p. 8)

4 Coffey, *Puritanism and Liberty*..., p. 965.

5 Numbering only nine people. Only after 15 years did the number of members increase to over 80 (see: McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*..., p. 21).

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(McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, p. 8)

7 James, *Colonial Rhode Island...*, p. 37.

8 Wait Howe, *The Puritan Republic...*, p. 237. Ultimately, Dunster voluntarily left MBC and settled in Plymouth, where, however, he did not provoke his surroundings with the Baptist doctrine, thanks to which he could occasionally preach the Word of God in Scituate (see: McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty...*, pp. 32–34).

9 It is worth recalling the preamble to the fundamental law of the Colony of Connecticut, that is, the *Fundamental Orders of Connecticut*, of January 14, 1639:

Forasmuch as it hath pleased the Allmighty God by the wise disposition of his diuyn^e1 prudence so to Order and dispose of things that we the Inhabitants and Residents of Windsor, Harteford and Wethersfield are now cohabiting and dwelling in and vpon the River of Conectecotte and the Lands thereunto adioyning; and Well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to mayntayne the peace and vnion of such a people there should be an orderly and decent Gouverment established according to God, to order and dispose of the affayres of the people at all seasons as occasion shall require; doe therefore assotiate and conioyne our selues to be as one Publike State or Commonwelth; and doe, for our selues and our Successors and such as shall be adioyned to vs att any tyme hereafter, enter into Combination and Confederation together, to mayntayne and prsearue the liberty and purity of the gospell of our Lord Jesus wch we now prfesse, as also the disciplyne of the churches, which according to the truth of the said gospell is now practised amongst vs; Affaires to be guided and gouerned according to such Lawes, Rules, Orders and decrees as shall be made, ordered & decreed, as followeth (...).

The quoted excerpt shows us how the Puritan doctrine functioned in political practice covenant. By comparing this text with the original law of CPP and CRIPP, we can easily detect differences in the perception of the functions of the state and in the understanding of the purpose of political power.

10 McLoughlin describes the importance of the Baptists' contribution: "In the fight for separation of church and state in New England, the Baptists were only one of several battalions of dissenters. Ultimately, however, they proved to be the most consistent, the most numerous, and the most effective" (McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty...*, p. 20).

11 Williams' position was cited in the opinions of Supreme Court justices in the following cases: *Minersville School District v. Gobitis*, 310 US 586 (1940); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 US 421 (1962); *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 US 203

(1963); *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 US 783 (1983); *Mitchell v. Helms* 530 US 793 (2000). An overview of the arguments in the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, inspired by the thought of Roger Williams, can be found in Eberle, *Roger Williams' Gift...*, pp. 472–485. A successful attempt to incorporate Roger Williams' thoughts on freedom of conscience and the relationship between the church and the state into the discussion surrounding the interpretation of the First Amendment to the federal Constitution was made by Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State: Roger Williams and Religious Liberty*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1998.

10 Summary

As the thought of the first Baptists shows, freedom of conscience and religious toleration, as absolute and non-negotiable values, are central to the Baptist tradition. Summarising their achievements, Edward Bean Underhill noted:

Thus the baptists became the first and only propounders of ‘absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty.’ For this they suffered and died. They proclaimed it by their deeds, they propagated it in their writings. In almost every country of Europe, amid tempests of wrath, stirred up by their faith, and their manly adherence to the truth, they were the indefatigable, consistent primal apostles of liberty in this latter age. We honor them. We reverence them.¹

Although these words, at least to contemporaries, sound a bit pompous, in fact, their author is not far from the truth. Baptists were among the first and most radical defenders of freedom in spiritual matters in modern Europe.

The role of Baptists in advancing freedom of conscience and religious toleration in 17th-century England – through the reigns of the early Stuarts, the English Civil War, the Protectorate and the Restoration – remains the subject of scholarly debate. A widely held interpretation presents Baptists as consistent and forceful advocates of liberty in matters of belief, insisting on the right of every individual to determine faith regardless of its content. This insistence accompanied Baptists from their earliest communities, whether identified with Smyth’s community in Amsterdam and Helwys, or with Splisbury’s congregation in London. However, this view is increasingly challenged by the argument that Baptist appeals to religious toleration were not wholly principled but, at least in part, tactical and opportunistic – primarily serving the interests of dissenters excluded from the established Church of England. This Baptist opportunism was supposed to result from situating humans, as beings entrusted with freedom of religion, into the light of the economy of salvation, which shifted the emphasis from the expectations of an autonomous individual to the prerogatives of a transcendent Power. At this point, individuals enjoy freedom of conscience not because of their humanity or nature, but

because of circumstances resulting from the radical change in their position as an outcome of the Incarnation. With the first coming of Christ, secular authority lost its influence over the consciences of those under its authority. The royal powers of David and his successors in matters of worship *de facto* expired on the day of the birth of the One whose coming was to be foretold by the Old Testament Prophets and announced by Gabriel to Mary – although since the time of Constantine, Christians, as the early Baptists emphasise, seem not to have noticed this radical change. Therefore, for them, freedom of conscience is not an inherent and inalienable (irrevocable) natural right, but a gift from God, or, to be more precise, a deposit that will, in due time, return to the One who decided to lay it in human hands. The end of his “lending” has already been determined: It will be Parousia, when the Lord of the harvest returns to His field to gather the crops, gathering the wheat in His barn, and throwing the weeds (tied in bundles) into the fire (Matt 13:30); when the Kingdom of God will be fully revealed. John Coffey reconstructs this way of thinking as follows:

Religious pluralism was coming to an end. Tolerationist dichotomies (nature and grace; the kingdom of the flesh and the kingdom of the Spirit - note: RP) were to be swallowed up by millennial holism. A naturalistic politics intended for a pluralistic society was to be replaced by a supernatural age in which dominion would be founded on grace and all men would worship the true God.²

Religious pluralism is not a permanent state, but a transient formula for the functioning of a sinful world. It will give way to the monopoly of Truth at the end of time. In other words, freedom of conscience is not an individual human property, but a temporarily limited privilege – with the proviso that, although we can fairly accurately pinpoint when this right emerged, when it will expire remains unknown. William S. Lamont, J. C. Davis, and Theodore D. Bozeman correctly emphasised the significant tension between the concept of freedom of conscience derived from the theory of natural law (under which liberal thought will develop) and that based on the theology of the early Baptists.³ Baptists seek justification for freedom of conscience and religious freedom in Matt 13:24–30, and not in reflection on human nature or the inherent and inalienable rights resulting from it. This does not mean, however, that the Baptists (at least those whose texts I have examined here) regarded freedom of conscience merely as a tactical position, a “second-best” option necessitated by the impossibility of achieving, through human effort, the eschatological nature of the Kingdom of God – what Lamont suggests, questioning radical (at first glance only) defence of religious freedom: That of Roger Williams and millenarian-oriented London Particular Baptists.⁴

The matter here does not come down to mere calculation (tactics or acceptance of the “second choice”), due to the permanent inability to organise our world in the pattern of the “House of God”. It bears repeating: The

promotion of freedom of conscience, toleration, and ideological pluralism is not the “second choice” of a prudent person; it is not an element of a well-thought-out tactic on the way to establishing Christ’s rule on Earth, treated as an instrumental means (temporary *modus vivendi*) to a desired, sacred goal. It is absolutely the “first choice” in the time stretching from the Incarnation to the Second Coming of Christ. Indeed, uncompromising advocacy of freedom of conscience is not a manifestation of opportunism but a humble and faithful implementation of God’s plan, which cannot be disputed. Despite the early Baptists intensely anticipating the coming Day of Judgment, they did not view the world around them as inherently hostile to authentic followers of Christ, who should be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16) and find a clever way to survive in a hostile environment.

Although they did not know the date of Parousia, they had knowledge of what the relations between the state and the church should look like in anticipation of it, and their attitude was clearly different from those around them. In their radicalism, they did not turn away from the affairs of this world, as the Dutch Mennonites did, but they made efforts to ensure that the world around them, without any exceptions, implemented the rule which, in their opinion, results directly from God’s Word – proclaiming that no one should be disturbed for the beliefs they have adopted. In their radicalism in defending the purity of the church, they did not, unlike the advocates of Erastianism and Presbyterian Puritans, justify the use of violence against dissenters, but they clearly demanded the complete separation of secular authority from the affairs of the church. And such was the case in Providence and Newport, and later in CRIPP.

Lamont supports his critical comment on the Baptist commitment to freedom of conscience with an extremely evocative description of how the “hosts of heaven” would deal with the “servants of Antichrist” at the end of time, a description written by Roger Williams.⁵ Again, this does not change the essence of the matter. We must strictly separate the realities of life in 17th-century England and New England from the announcements of Jesus (Luke 21:5–19) and the prophecies of Daniel and John, even if in many places and on many occasions – the cruelty of the English Civil War and the execution of Charles I – evidence was found for their immediate fulfilment.

The problem is that the realities and prevailing thinking of English society at that time are inscrutable to us today. Indeed, how Williams’ and Clarke’s contemporaries understood “freedom of conscience” is striking in its exoticism. Freedom of conscience today is not synonymous with religious freedom, but more with freedom of thought and belief, all of which, in principle, remains beyond the state’s regulatory reach. Our concern today is limited to securing religious freedom in its external aspect – that is, freedom of religious practice and other activities motivated by beliefs, because we treat freedom of thought (conscience) as obvious and inviolable. Freedom of conscience is regarded as an affirmation of human autonomy, in which a person, in their

innermost self, seeks answers to existential questions. We placed it at the centre of what Berlin called “negative freedom”. Freedom of conscience, like freedom from slavery or freedom from torture, is not only an unlimited and non-derogable right, but a clear affirmation of the autonomy of those who want to be free from the influence of their surroundings, being the sole decision-makers regarding their beliefs.

To remind, freedom of conscience thus understood was not Helwys’ ideal: For him, spiritual liberation from “the world” was tantamount to trusting the authority of the Creator, His Word, and following the call of His Spirit. When the issue is examined in the light of the principle of double predestination, professed by Particular Baptists, the situation becomes even more complicated. The claim of freedom of conscience is addressed to the state or the state church, and in no case is it directed by man towards God, demanding that He recognise the autonomy of humans. For Helwys, this would be tantamount to denying His existence, and for Particular Baptists, an obvious absurdity. As Lee Canipe reminds us, the understanding of freedom of conscience in the first half of the 17th century had little if anything to do with freedom of choice but rather with matters of judgment and responsibility (the associations with Berlin’s positive liberty are clear). Early Baptist thought was no exception. God, the master of human conscience, shapes it as He sees fit. If God’s grace is the organising force of human conscience, then considerations about its autonomy become pointless. “Choice”, as Canipe notes, is the human response to grace. Freedom functions here as a theological category, not as a human natural quality, as his or her natural right. Conscience thus understood resembled the position of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. At that time, it would have been in vain to look for a forerunner of the Enlightenment pattern of the autonomous agent, which can be found, for example, in Immanuel Kant’s ethics.⁶

John Coffey’s observation calls for further commentary, harkening back to the paradox of early Baptists’ position, which combined the promotion of religious toleration with an aggressive, even scathing message about the doctrine of Catholics, Anglicans, and subsequently also Quakers, and essentially all who practised paedobaptism.⁷ This, too, is relatively easy to explain. For the First Baptists, religious toleration was to be an imperative of public policy and only public policy. It is not the ideal of the church that fights for its “purity”. Even a cursory reading of the texts examined in this study reveals explicit opinions about Catholics, as well as the Anglican and Presbyterian clergy. Describing other Christians as collaborators of the Antichrist, the Catholic or Anglican church as a harlot, or the Beast from John’s *Apocalypse*, does not, however, make Baptists disingenuous advocates of toleration, as long as we understand by it a specific public policy. Because the concept of religious toleration here should be read only in the context of religious policy, founded on the principle of separation of church and state, and not to be incorporated into the perspective of interreligious or interdenominational dialogue.⁸

Limiting toleration to political governance may appear today, to those unfamiliar with the realities of 17th-century England and New England, as an unbearably minimalist project. After all, toleration has become a social ideal, encompassing not only the recognition of differences in opinions, attitudes, or ways of life worth experiencing, but also friendly treatment, as well as affirmation of pluralism, and finally, sincere enthusiasm for heterogeneity in this respect. As Magdalena Środa maintains:

Tolerance, initially understood as resignation and understanding for differences (primarily religious), and implemented in this way (religious neutrality of the state), was modified in subsequent eras, taking on various shades: from indifference, acceptance and refraining from aggression, through gentle kindness, openness, respect for the Other and his rights, up to the affirmation of Otherness as Otherness, and even enthusiasm for individual diversity (transl. RP)⁹

Tolerance today, as Środa argues, does not stop at “passive understanding for Others” or recognition of their rights. It calls for openness, active affirmation, and curiosity of “the Other”. Meanwhile, the Baptist ideal of the visible church does not provide for broad tolerance for non-standard views and visions of a successful life: After all, Bethel remains separated from Babylon. Many Baptist communities, in the 17th century as well as those today, are characterised by a “minimal margin” of approval of “non-standard” (non-orthodox) views or behaviour, earning them the label of “fundamentalist” – one that many modern Baptists proudly use to describe themselves.¹⁰ The purity of the church excludes tolerance for sin within it. Insurmountable doctrinal differences, usually resulting from different interpretations of the Bible, can divide congregations or even entire associations of cooperating Baptist assemblies. Such divisions also grow out of a lack of consent for “the choices of this world”, for example, in the matter of sexual ethics. The lack of external authority (the state and a “higher church authority”, e.g., something like the Roman Catholic Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) leads to “development through division”. Heterogeneity, therefore, is an indelible feature that Baptists accept as part of their identity.

In any case, the Baptists of the 17th century did not promote freedom of conscience and religious toleration out of a desire to adopt the theory of the social contract or to affirm natural human rights, but as a result of trust in the *Holy Scripture*.¹¹ They did not call for the reconciliation of Christ’s followers in the spirit of ecumenism because it was not in line with their idea of a pure church. This does not mean, however, that their defence of this freedom and the promotion of toleration was in any way insincere, inauthentic, opportunistic, or incomplete. Obviously, numerous testimonies confirm the hypocrisy of Baptists, especially Particular Baptists during the English Civil War, and especially during the Irish campaign, when the declared freedom of conscience was a “strictly rationed commodity”; when physical violence

caused by Baptists against dissenters was not uncommon; when they themselves crossed the line whose inviolability they loudly demanded, using the “sword” of secular power in the fight against dissenters. However, this should not affect our general assessment of the importance of freedom of conscience for Baptists as: (1) An “internal imperative” of the Baptist’s theology as well as ecclesiology (church of believers); and (2) The central element of the “external programme”, directed towards the “world”.

By comparison, we should not forget that the natural law perspective somehow did not lead John Locke – the 17th century’s most appreciated advocate of religious toleration – to recognise the inherent and inalienable right of Mohammedans and Catholics to enjoy freedom of conscience if they stayed in the Kingdom of England. Living there, they were seen as incapable of freeing themselves from subordination to external authorities (the Mufti of Constantinople or the Pope). Locke also denied this right to atheists.¹² Locke’s vision of toleration will not include those who pose an apparently obvious threat to the security and stability of the state. One only wonders who has eyesight sharp enough to identify those who pose such a threat. After all, caution suggests not trusting the individual judgment of even such an outstanding thinker as the author of *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.¹³ Unfortunately, we tend to remember Locke’s defence of religious toleration while forgetting, at the same time, the participation of the first Baptists in the deed of promoting it. Certainly, the argumentation and position laid down in the excellent *Two Treatises of Government* were of decisive importance here. With English society threatened by the monarch’s absolutism (using religion to fulfil it)¹⁴ and the chaos of Puritan dogmatism, Locke referred to the natural law and universal rationality, arguing in favour of toleration as a condition of social peace.¹⁵ The order of toleration becomes here a specific principle of public ethics to which rational beings should agree.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the writings of Baptists were the cry of persecuted religious dissidents who, calling for help and appealing for freedom of conscience for everyone (General Baptists, Richardson, Williams, and Clarke) or at least for credo-Baptists professing the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination (Blackwood), sought to support their argument with the authority of the *Bible*. Although half-hearted attempts to engage the concept of natural rights and traces of universal rationality can be found in Busher’s text (based on an appropriate interpretation of the history of Christianity, which is not free from religious violence). It can also be traced in Murton, Williams, and Clarke, who each time only reinforce the main line of argumentation advanced from God’s plan for the creation and salvation of the world. The engagement of extra-biblical argumentation is peripheral. While Locke’s language (reasoning) is relatively easily digestible for a modern reader, the Baptists’ message requires at least basic knowledge of the *Holy Scripture*, and perhaps, furthermore, also recognition of its authority. The difference is significant.

This limitation of the early Baptists to the *Bible*’s hermeneutics is understandable. Their Puritan origins allowed them to recognise only the Word of

God as the source of reliable knowledge, not only about God but also about His creation; the truth about the church, but also the world in which the church has to function; about the nature of God's order, but also the essence of the order created by man (morality and law made by people). Arguments that go beyond *Scripture* are only conditionally admissible. In the end, one must ask oneself: "What does God's Word say on this subject?" Because only God's Word is infallible, only it is worth trusting. The Evil One may be whispering his ideas in humans' ears.

When Richard Hooker tried, in *Of the Lawes....*, to prove false the arguments of Puritan dissenters questioning the orthodoxy of the Church of England, he invoked the authority of Calvin. But he did not refrain from engaging "natural reason", while accusing Cartwright and his followers of "bibliolatry".¹⁷ The Puritan opposition found his arguments unorthodox and therefore unreliable. When Helwys and Murton turned to the English sovereign, it was to the *Holy Scripture* that they looked for an irrefutable argument to defend the omnipotence of His power over man's conscience. When Blackwood and Richardson appealed to the Presbyterians for religious toleration, they found its basis in the Word of God. John Locke, averse to both monarchical absolutism and the fanaticism of Puritans, looked for convincing arguments in reason, because he was able to see firsthand what a dispute could portend both sides, citing the *Holy Scripture*, remaining convinced of their infallibility, and presenting their opinions as unwavering truths. Inevitably, when the force of arguments is no longer enough, force becomes an argument, and the interlocutor is called a troublemaker and a heretic who deserves to be punished harshly. When a theological dispute appears unsolvable, excommunication and persecution soon follow.

The above shows why the writings of the first Baptists are not included in the canon of the world heritage of texts in defence of freedom of conscience and religious toleration, although they fully deserve to be there.

* * *

If the key to being understood is to use the right words, then those used should weaken neither one's identity nor one's message. Undoubtedly, we observe this in the case of the lecture on religious freedom of the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) led to the adoption of the declaration *Dignitas humanae*, a groundbreaking text for the Catholic approach to religious freedom and the basis of freedom of conscience for every person, regardless of the worldview they profess. The declaration stands in art. 2:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a

manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.¹⁸

The Word of God is given as the source of knowledge about the condition of man, who is to enjoy freedom in searching for answers to existential questions. However, religious freedom “has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself”. Pointing to personal dignity, which can be known “by reason alone”, allowed the Catholic Church to integrate its social teaching on freedom of conscience into a description appropriate to the universal discourse of human rights. After all, as in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, personal dignity is central to the human rights system, both in international treaties and many national constitutions (Article 30 of *the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997*, for example). The Roman Catholic Church, by activating legal and natural threads – the natural and inalienable dignity of man as a source of fundamental freedoms (rights), including freedom of conscience – has gained the ability to communicate with those who do not derive the truth about man from the *Holy Scripture*.

The Baptist understanding of freedom of conscience also had to change if it was to resonate in the mainstream of public debate. Using the terminology of John Rawls (1921–2002) here, one might say that the “comprehensive doctrine” of the Baptists had to find an effective – reasonable, that is – way to communicate its values using arguments appropriate to “public reason”. However, it was much later generations of Baptists than those chronicled here who would make the change.

The most frequently cited example of openness to the natural rights argumentation of defenders of freedom of conscience is John Leland (1754–1841), James Madison’s companion in the fight against the institution of the state church in Virginia. Leland was strongly influenced by the liberal views of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. The shift of attention from the person of the sovereign God to man, striving to secure his freedom and autonomy, was a sign of the times in which Leland lived – times that differ significantly from the era of the early Baptists.¹⁹ In any case, Leland’s defence of freedom as a civic (political) ideal did not have a direct impact on his religious beliefs, because he remained faithful to the Calvinist orthodoxy underpinning God’s sovereignty.

Nevertheless, many Baptist circles considered conservative, and sometimes even fundamentalist (in the pejorative sense) to this day reject the possibility

of transitioning the language of the story about the origin and purpose of freedom of conscience, which is why the reception by the “world” of achievements of the early Baptists in this respect was difficult – and even potentially impossible for many people closed to the Gospel. When we consult the statement of the Southern Baptist Convention – the largest Baptist denomination in the United States – on the subject of religious freedom (and human rights), we do not encounter appeals to legal and natural principles. Instead, we find multiple and precise references to biblical texts addressing the issue. This indicates that the Baptist commitment to human freedom, including freedom of conscience, remains essentially the result of biblical hermeneutics. There are no natural rights threads to be found in the memorable speech on Capitol Hill by the Reverend George W. Truett,²⁰ *Baptists and Religious Freedom* (May 16, 1920). Nor can any be found in official SBC resolutions: *Resolution Concerning Government and Fundamental Human Rights* (1938); *Resolution Concerning Freedom of Religion* (1940), *Resolution on Human Rights and Certain Misapplications* (1977), *Resolution on Human Dignity* (2018). Finally, the largest global Baptist organisation, the Baptist World Alliance, in its resolutions devoted to religious freedom and the need for its implementation in various places around the globe, points to the biblical basis for the truth about human freedom.

Yet, the final point of *Pronouncement upon Religious Liberty*, a joint declaration of the three largest Baptist denominations (SBC, NBC, and National Baptist Convention, USA) from 1939, popularly known as the *American Baptists Bill of Rights*, announced the following:

Believing that religious liberty to be not only an inalienable human right, but indispensable to human welfare, a Baptist exercise himself to the utmost in the maintenance of the absolute religious liberty for his Jewish neighbour, his Catholic neighbour, his Protestant neighbour, and for everybody else.²¹

However, the reference to the notion of “inalienable human rights” here is directly related to the “competence of free conscience”, introduced as God’s gift to man, as the following remark was also included in the document:

The conception of the dignity of the individual, as held by Baptists, is grounded in the conviction that every soul possesses the capacity and the inalienable right to deal with God for himself, and to deprive any soul of his right of direct access to God is to usurp the prerogatives of the individual and the function of God.²²

Why “conservative” Baptists have been reluctant to engage the theory of natural law and natural rights in the work of affirming religious freedom remains a pressing question. After all, it is impossible to put forward a Baptist equivalent of, say, John Finnis (1940-). Perhaps the answer may be found in Baptists’s

reluctance to practice “natural theology”, which occupies an important place in Catholic thought. Baptists, not only Calvinist ones, are much closer to the position of Karl Barth (1886–1968) than to Thomas Aquinas. Barth warned against seeking knowledge about God, but also the nature and destiny of man outside Revelation (the Word of God), while Aquinas did not refrain from looking for knowledge about God in His creation, in nature. A second possible answer, concerning Baptists professing dispensationalism, emphasises how tiny changes have taken place in this tradition of Baptist thought. The pre-millennial perspective is a useful key to understanding the remaining elements of its teaching, including in relation to freedom of conscience, religious toleration, and ideological pluralism. The third possible reason that Baptists have been reluctant to engage the theory of natural law comes down to locating the concept of natural rights in the orbit of liberal theology. Explicitly rejecting it is one of the key elements of the self-identification of “conservative” Baptists of the Southern Baptist Convention.²³

Baptists used to advocate the separation of church and state as a desirable model of religious policy, opting for surrounding the “garden” with a “wall” to protect it from being absorbed by the “desert of the world”. Today, separatism – understood as a political construction – is presented as a tool to protect the state against undesirable involvement in ideological disputes and from becoming entangled in theological conflicts. In other words, it is seen as a way of liberating the state from religion. By contrast, the original and consistent intention of the Baptists was to liberate the church (the garden) from the interference of secular authority (the desert). Although freedom of conscience in Western civilisation is nowadays also understood as “freedom from religion” (in its secular justification), for the first Baptists, it remained a fundamental claim of a person who does not agree to submit his/her thoughts and beliefs to the pressure of others, especially those wielding political power. The only authority in this respect belongs to a jealous God.

* * *

The Baptists have come a long way since the day of John Smyth’s se-baptism. Their development on American soil is particularly noteworthy: From a small sect, pushed beyond the pale of the New England “republic of saints”, to the most numerous stream within American Protestantism – today, a third of the total number of Protestants in the United States are Baptists, and the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the country.²⁴ This undeniable success of Baptists has influenced their character. In his presentation of Baptists in the period from the end of the American Revolution to the disestablishment of the State Church of Massachusetts, William L. McLoughlin notes:

By entering the mainstream the Baptists ceased to be critics of American society; their piety relaxed, and they became the captives of the culture against which they had fought for so long. As the embodiment of

American values, they were guilty of what Reinhold Niebuhr called “absolutizing the relative.” That is, they came to believe that because the American social order had accepted their evangelical views, then America must be the equivalent of a Christian society. They concluded that the United States was, in fact, the most Christian society the world had ever known and that the Baptist Cause must sink or swim with America. To be a good Baptist one should be a good American, and to be a good American one should be a good Baptist. Which meant, in effect, that the Baptists began to act as though they were the establishment. In short, between 1630 and 1833 the Baptists went through the classical evolution from a dissenting sect to an established church. In a way, the history of the Baptists is a paradigm of the American success myth: from rags to riches, from outcast to respectability, from pariah to pillar, from heresy to orthodoxy, from criminal deviant to authoritarian standard-bearer.²⁵

These words, critical and acerbic, warrant comment. Although they may be found in the introduction to a collection of articles devoted to the history of Baptists in New England until 1833, they are in fact a commentary on the events and processes observed by McLoughlin in 1991, at the time of the publication of *Soul Liberty*.... The political involvement of conservative Baptists, ones mainly identified with the SBC, in promoting the Republican Party’s candidates and electoral platform, and, more broadly, in the defence of “Christian (*ergo* American) values” against the permissivism of contemporary liberal culture, was strongly opposed by Baptists supporting the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. The fundamental division among Baptists today does not concern the findings of the Synod of Dort, but the political involvement in the New Religious Right, and thus the dispute over what the separation of church and state is about.

When McLoughlin, recalling the term used by H. Richard Niebuhr (erroneously attributing it to his brother Reinhold), observes that contemporary mainstream Baptists “absolutise the relative” – that is, placing what is relative, not only religion or the church, but also Christian ethics, as well as “Christian society” in the position reserved to the Almighty God (the Absolute), what is a sin of idolatry²⁶ – he is arguing nothing less than that the first Baptists would probably have fought against what many, though not all, Baptists ultimately became: Spokespersons for a specific state religion (public or civic religion). Such individuals tended to identify the society of a specific country with the church, and perhaps even with the Kingdom of God (the concept of Christian America). Although the Kingdom of God, as the first Baptists claimed, is, as a result of the Incarnation, the immaterial reality of the faithful who remain in a spiritual relationship with God, in the United States it has taken on a material, territorial form. Here, the United States, with its “civic religion”, has become something like old England, with its state church, where culture and religion were inextricably linked; it has come to profess the modern version of “Constantinianism”. Today, many American Baptists

(especially Southern Baptists) recognise in the Gospel the indelible foundation of the American way, including the basis of American political culture (what we depict today with the phrase “Christian nationalism”).²⁷ This type of thinking has a well-established tradition, dating back at least to Edgar Young Mullins,²⁸ who recognised the American “religio-civic axiom” in the Baptist principle of “a free church in a free state”.²⁹ He also closely linked the “Baptist issue” with American constitutionalism (American republicanism), and even more broadly, with the American way, stating that “we may regard American civilisation as a Baptist empire, for at the basis of this government lies a great group of Baptist ideals”,³⁰ including the separation of church and state.³¹ In this interpretation of the political history of the United States, American civilisation functions as a specific, original (unique) synthesis of culture, politics and religion, in which the people of God were harmoniously integrated, also axiologically, into the political environment; in which “[t]he old idea of American Christians as a chosen people who had been called to a special task grew into the notion of a chosen nation especially favoured”³² by Providence. To again turn to Leonard Busher, slightly modifying his words:

And great ignorance of those politically engaged Baptists, when they think the whole nation of American people is the church of Christ: for then it cannot be said, out of the United States, the Lord added to the church, from day to day, such as should be saved; seeing, within the land there would be none without to be added.

The church of Christ in American society (and the American Kingdom of God) has been universalised.³³ Despite the fact that for 17th-century Baptists, people (including those with political power) are not able to permanently and significantly (given the notion of eternity) prepare this world for the “end of history”. It will come one way or another, after all, and man cannot accelerate or delay its coming. What one can do is prepare through the experience of personal spiritual rebirth. In the contemporary United States, many Baptists are engaged in a cultural, but also political, fight between the “Christian civilisation” and the “civilisation of death” (the secular Empire of Evil), as if Armageddon were already upon us, and in such circumstances, no Christian is allowed to remain passive or neutral.

McLoughlin’s accusation that Baptists (most likely those of the SBC) “absolutised the relative” should be taken seriously, as it refers to Baptists’ loss of their original nature. The Baptist movement, as McLoughlin suggests, has lost its “dynamism” and has become the defender of the “static” American civil religion, that peculiar manifestation of the *American way*. This opinion obviously contradicts the thesis put forward in the introduction to this study – that the Baptist movement is a Christian movement locked in a “permanent revolution”, challenging established doctrines, principles and rituals, especially those supported and sanctioned by the secular authority which tries to enforce by law of “this world” the “Kingdom not of this world”; which – to use Eric Voegelin’s (1901–1985) term – tries to “immanentise the eschaton”.

However, as it turns out, the multi-generational fight for the “free conscience of the believer” who is ready to make sacrifices in the struggle against the state church, which has the “sword” of public power at its disposal, was to bring an unexpected result. As many conservative Baptists argue, when the alliance between the state and the church was broken, a new coalition was established: With “moral relativism”, “permissive liberalism”, and postmodernism. And this alliance is allegedly eager to attack the people of God, the traditional family model, Christian ethics, the Christian education of young people, and ultimately also religious freedom. Every political system, bar none, functions in a specific social environment, one in which certain moral patterns are promoted at the expense of others. If these are not patterns appropriate to Christian ethics, their place is necessarily taken by others, which are perceived by many SBC leaders as not only divergent from Christian but even hostile to them. Effective resistance can only be provided by those who commit themselves to “undoing” politics, regaining its “language” and, ultimately, also the “state”. Hence the support or active participation of many prominent SBC members in the New Religious Right; hence the belief that the “wall of separation” is a myth used by “liberals” to remove Christians from political life³⁴; hence the promotion of accommodationism (“benevolent neutrality”) and the rejection of “strict separatism” as the standard of American religious policy³⁵; and hence, finally, the inclination to “absolutise the relative”, as McLoughlin notes, in the name of defending “Christian America”.

To be fair, the “Constantinian” tendency of deification of American democracy and society, on the one hand, and the readiness to wage the final war with the “forces of darkness”, with eager use of “political factors”, on the other, present in a number of Baptist communities, gathered mainly in the SBC, have been severely criticised by Russell D. Moore (1971–), former chairman of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission,³⁶ one of the most influential mid-generation Baptists, whose *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* and *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America*³⁷ are an insightful evaluation of the current condition of American religiosity, and not only that of the Baptists. Moore states emphatically: “Our end goal is not a Christian America, either of the made-up past or the hoped-for future. Our end goal is the kingdom of Christ, made up of every tribe, tongue, nation and language”,³⁸ because

[w]e are, if we ever were, a moral majority no longer. We are, on our best days, a prophetic minority. This doesn’t mean that we should disengage, and it doesn’t mean we are victims. It means we know who we are, and where our power is.³⁹

The purpose of a Christian social involvement is not to build (or perpetuate) the Kingdom of God on Earth, using political power, but to give authentic testimony on the submission of one’s life to God’s rule (guidance) and

dissemination of the prophetic announcement of Parousia. Consequently, the goal of a Christian in the United States is not to preserve (or possibly restore) the Christian character of American statehood or American society ("Christian nationalism"), as his/her proper task is to preach the Gospel and provide needed support to those who experience injustice. The Christian must be content with the position of outsider, because his/her Master was not an insider either. Called to live in the "garden", church members also inhabit a "desert", but they cannot confuse the two, or fail to understand that this dichotomy explains their "outsiderness", as they think of themselves as traversing the "desert" every day.

Notes

- 1 E. B. Underhill, *Struggles and Triumphs of Religious Liberty*, Lewis Colby, New York 1851, p. 201.
- 2 J. Coffey, *Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution*, "The Historical Journal", vol. 41, no. 4 (1998), p. 978.
- 3 W. S. Lamont, *Pamphleteering, the Protestant Consensus and the English Revolution*, in: R. C. Richardson and G. M. Ridden (eds.), *Freedom and the English Revolution: Essays in History and Literature*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1986; J. C. Davis, *Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution*, "History of Political Thought", vol. 18 (1997), pp. 460–482; T. D. Bozeman, *John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty*, "Church History", vol. 75 (2006), pp. 69–93.
- 4 Lamont, *Pamphleteering...*, pp. 81–87.
- 5 Lamont, *Pamphleteering...*, p. 82.
- 6 L. Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free*, Mercer University Press, Macon, 2011, pp. 20, 28, 31.
- 7 J. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1588–1689: Study in Modern History Series*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 186.
- 8 It is highly probable that many of the statements made by the early Baptists towards members of other Christian denominations would be considered "hate speech" today.
- 9 M. Środa, *Indywidualizm i jego krytycy*, Warszawa, Aletheia 2003, p. 390.
- 10 In the United States, these will include Baptists associated with: Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International; The Baptist Bible Fellowship International; World Baptist Fellowship; Independent Baptist Fellowship International. Many congregations associated with the SBC are also considered fundamentalist and see themselves as such.
- 11 As Bill Leonard puts it:

Early on, Baptists understood conscience and dissent in light of the need for sinners to be 'regenerated,' made new through conversion to Christ. (...) Conscience and religious liberty were not based on secular theories (although they would ultimately impact them) but on the necessity of uncoerced faith uniting the converted with a congregation of Christian believers. A commitment to freedom of conscience led Baptists to oppose religious establishments and develop principles of religious liberty that anticipated modern pluralism.

(B. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future*, Baylor University Press, Waco 2010, p. 118; compare with: H. L. McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, Broadman Press, Nashville 1987, pp. 85–86)

In turn, Lee Canipe notes: “When the early Baptists wanted to talk about freedom, they first read their Bibles – or, to put it more accurately, when the early Baptists read their Bibles, they ended up by talking about freedom” (L. Canipe, *Loyal Dissenters. Reading Scripture and Talking Freedom with 17th-Century English Baptists*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., Macon 2016, p. 6).

- 12 Let us recall here that the *Parable of Weeds* was enough for the first Baptists to extend the privilege of “free conscience” also to “Turks”, “Papists”, and “Atheists”.
- 13 For Locke, the decision in this matter belongs to the sovereign power. As John Dunn explains the position of Locke:

To worship one’s God is a private ‘concernment’ between oneself and the deity in question. But to worship one’s God in a Catholic rite in a Protestant country amounts to constructive subversion. The judgement of whether or not religious behaviour remains a successfully private transaction must be left to the conscientious decision of the sovereign.

(J. Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke. An Historical Account of the Argument of the ‘Two Treatises of Government’*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969, p. 37)

- 14 See more: C. Nadon, *Absolutism and the Separation of Church and State in Locke’s “Letter Concerning Toleration”*, “Perspectives on Political Science”, vol. 35, no. 2 (2006), pp. 94–102.
- 15 This somehow explains his reserve in relation to Catholicism and atheism (which Locke perceives as anti-state doctrines), thanks to which his thought may find understanding in the eyes of his contemporaries, who will explain the subjective limitations of toleration in Locke’s proposal with conditions specific to his times. Simultaneously, we should remember that although Locke, as a spokesman for natural and inalienable rights and the theorist of contractualism, is rightly considered one of the fathers of liberalism, in his search for the formula of a well-ordered state, he adopted the perspective of both theology and Christian ethics. For him, natural law remained an element of God’s plan, the legal content of which remains accessible to human reason, and the Revelation only strengthened him in this belief. The Christian background of Locke’s investigations is reconstructed by Jeremy Waldron, especially with regard to the assumption of human equality in their basic being and its practical consequences (see the following: J. Waldron, *God, Locke and Equality: Christian Foundations of Locke’s Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002). It is also worth noting here that Locke did not see any significant tension between faith and reason, and he sought confirmation of the truth of the Christian faith both in Revelation and in the hints of reason, which he expressed in his most important theological treatise, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*. Locke’s natural law theory had a strong theological foundation. As John Gray maintains, following observations of John Dunn (Dunn, *The Political Thought...*, Chapter 9, *The State of Nature*, pp. 96–119):

Locke’s doctrine of natural rights is fully intelligible only in the context of his conception of a natural law which is the expression of the divine nature. Natural rights in Locke embody the conditions we need in order to protect and preserve our lives under the natural laws given us by God. Under these laws, we have a right to liberty and the acquisition of property with which none may interfere, but, because we remain God’s property, we may not alienate our liberty completely and irreversibly, as in a contract of slavery, and we are not permitted to alienate our lives by suicide. As God’s creatures, we may acquire unencumbered rights over nature and over objects we have ourselves manufactured, but we enjoy and exercise our liberty to do so under God-given laws.

(J. Gray, *Liberalism*, second edition, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003, pp. 13–14)

The purpose of God is an inalienable perspective of Locke's investigations, both in relation to the natural rights of man, as well as to toleration and the relationship between the state and the church. Contemporary Anglo-Saxon liberal thought has liberated itself from theological threads in this respect.

- 16 One of Locke's most convincing remarks, which can be found in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, referring to power of reason and free will in recognising dogmatic truths, is as follows:

The *Articles of Religion* are some of them *Practical*, and some *Speculative*. Now, tho' both sorts consist in the Knowledge of Truth, yet these terminate simply in the Understanding, Those influence the Will and Manners. Speculative Opinions, therefore, and *Articles of Faith* (as they are called) which are required only to be believed, cannot be imposed on any church by the Law of the Land. For it is absurd that things should be enjoined by Laws, which are not in mens power to perform. And to believe this or that to be true, does not depend upon our Will. But of this enough has been said already. But (will some say) let men at least profess that they believe. A sweet Religion indeed, that obliges men to dissemble, and tell Lyes both to God and Man, for the Salvation of their Souls! If the Magistrate thinks to save men thus, he seems to understand little of way of Salvation. And if he does it not in order to save them; Why is he so solicitous about the Articles of Faith as to enact them by a Law?

[J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, (ed. and introd. M. Goldie), Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis 2010, p. 44]

Comparing this thesis with the arguments of the first Baptists allows us to see similarities, but also a fundamental difference. A similar thing is the questioning of a person's ability to have full control over his thoughts, to control irrefutable statements, and to control the truthfulness of his worldview. Since a person does not have power over the content of beliefs that appear to him as true, he does not have the ability to modify them in response to the conformity required by law – therefore the very expectation of conformity by “Others” (including secular authority) turns out to be unreasonable. Baptists differ from Locke in pointing to the Holy Spirit as an external power shaping the Christian's worldview and to the dictate of conscience in relation to practices related to the professed worldview. John Locke avoids this type of indication and contents himself with the common experience of a rational human being to whom certain propositions appear to be absolutely true, even if he/she is unable to identify the sources of belief (Locke, by no means, excludes the whispering of the Holy Spirit here); even if his/her irresistible arguments are not understood by those around him/her, because things appear differently to them.

- 17 B. Szlachta, *Monarchia prawa? Angielska myśl polityczna doby Tudorów*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2008, pp. 597–598.
- 18 *Declaration on religious freedom Dignitatis humanae* [in:] Second Vatican Council. Constitutions, decrees, declarations (https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).
- 19 Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy...*, pp. 37–51. Cf.: C. W. Freeman, *Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?* “Perspectives in Religious Studies”, no. 24 (1997), pp. 281–283.
- 20 George Washington Truett (1867–1944) – pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas (1897–1944); president of the SBC (1927–1929); one of the most influential Baptist ministers of his time.
- 21 *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Nine*, Oklahoma City, May 17–21, 1939, p. 116.

- 22 *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention...*, p. 115.
- 23 We have a very rich literature on the “conservative turn” in the SBC, but in the context of the topic we are interested in here, it is especially worth reading: Freeman, *Can Baptist Theology...*
- 24 Pew Research Center Report, *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, PRC, Washington, 2015, p. 15.
- 25 W. G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists’ Struggle in New England, 1630–1833*, Brown University Press, London 1991, p. 2.
- 26 H. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1941, pp. xvii–x; H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, HarperCollins, New York 1951, p. 145; H. R. Niebuhr, *Theology, History, and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1996, p. 149. In *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr notes:

The effort to bring Christ and culture, God’s work and man’s, the temporal and the eternal, law and grace, into one system of thought and practice tends, perhaps inevitably, to the absolutising of what is relative, the reduction of the infinite to a finite form, and the materialization of the dynamic. It is one thing to assert that there is a law of God inscribed in the very structure of the creature, who must seek to know this law by the use of his reason and govern himself accordingly; it is another thing to formulate the law in the language and concepts of a reason that is always culturally conditioned.

(p. 169)

These words accurately reflect the essence of politicisation (nationalisation) of the spiritual reality (the mystical Body of Christ), which in statutory law tries to stop what is dynamic and materialise what is immaterial. It resembles an insect (*ergo* the commandment of love) immersed in resin (*ergo* statutory law), while one maintains that the breathless insect remains alive. The institutionalisation of faith and practices related to it turns it into a cultural phenomenon.

- 27 An example here is the famous legal dispute between Judge Roy Moore (a Southern Baptist from Alabama) and the federal judiciary, which resulted from Moore’s placement of a monument to the Mosaic tablets in the building of the Supreme Court of the State of Alabama [*Glassroth v. Moore*, 242 F.Supp.2d 1067 (M. D. Ala.2002)].
- 28 Edgar Young Mullins (1860–1928) – theologian, SBC pastor; in the years 1899–1928 president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, the most important academic centre of the SBC; most influential SBC Baptist in the 20th century; led to the adoption in 1925 of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, the first statement of faith in the history of the SBC. The *Baptist Faith and Message* can only conditionally be considered a kind of “symbol of faith” of the SBC (*creed*). Moreover, Mullins himself was cautious about the need to standardise faith, admonishing mistake the shell for the kernel, the form for the life”, as “creeds that are forged when religious life is at white heat may remain after the fire has gone”, and deprived of life turn out to be “a chain to bind, not wings on which the soul may fly”. As he stipulated, symbols of faith should, at most, fulfill educational goals, supporting the growth of “life-giving faith”, and not be an instrument of articulation of religious orthodoxy “worn as death masks” (E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, The Judson Press, Valley Forge 1974, p. x).
- 29 E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion; a New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*, American Baptist Publication Society, New York, 1908, pp. 185–200.
- 30 Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion...*, p. 255.
- 31 In a commentary on this Mullins opinion, Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins note: “This axiom rested on Baptist history, practicality, and Americanism, rather than natural law, the doctrines of creation and fall, the sinfulness of humanity, the Bible, or even Christian experience”. (T. S. Kidd, B. Hankins, *Baptists in America. A History*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 182).

- 32 H. R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1988, p. 179.
- 33 Here I would cite H. R. Niebuhr, who aptly illustrated the question of universality by referring to the Social Gospel:

What is true of the nation as a whole with its recurrent faith in national destiny, more or less religiously conceived, is then true also of the separate parts, of sections and groups who find and form a faith which enables them to preserve their solidarity and to defend their peculiar institutions. The kingdom of God in America, so regarded, is the American kingdom of God; it is not the individualization of a universal idea, but the universalization of the particular. It represents not so much the impact of the gospel upon the New World as the use and adaptation of the gospel by the new society for its own purposes.

(Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God...*, p. 9)

This quote faithfully reflects the meaning of the postulate of “nationalisation” of the Gospel, promoted by the New Religious Right. Here, the Kingdom of God no longer covers only those who are in relationship with Him, but takes on a territorial dimension: The United States as a “truly Christian country”, or “a country of true Christians”, in which they constitute the “moral majority” (association with the Moral Majority, whose co-founder and leader was Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist Baptist pastor, is not accidental here). The Kingdom of God ultimately becomes a social (or political) phenomenon.

As a commentary on the passage quoted above from Niebuhr’s *The Kingdom of God...* consider the warning issued by Derek H. Davis (director of the J. M. Dawson Institute on Church and State at Baylor University):

There is a constant danger of idolatry or of watering down our Christian faith! We in the United States stand in constant jeopardy of replacing our thankfulness to God for the freedoms of this nation with a worship of the nation. We stand in constant jeopardy of replacing our recognition of God as the source of all authority and acting as though the government ought to act with the authority of God. We stand in constant jeopardy of replacing a reverence for the national heroes who have bled and died for freedom with a sanctifying of national heroes as God’s warriors. We stand in constant jeopardy of replacing the particular faiths and particular histories of the peoples of this nation with a perverted story that claims this nation is the fruition of a divine plan for the universe.

[D. H. Davis, *Civil Religion and Religious Liberty*, in: W. B. Shurden (ed.), *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Religious Liberty*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., Macon 1997, p. 132]

- 34 B. Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture*, Chapter 4, *The Search for a Useable Past: Religious Liberty in a Hostile Culture*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 2002, pp. 107–138; B. J. Leonard, *Southern Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, “Review & Expositor”, vol. 83, no. 2 (1986), pp. 195–207.
- 35 Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon...*, Chapter 5, *Using a Useable Past: Church-State Positions*, pp. 139–164.
- 36 Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) – an SBC agency whose task is to present the SBC’s position to the public and authorities on ethical issues related to religious policy and the social mission of the SBC. Since June 1, 2003, the president of ERLC is R. D. Moore, who, before assuming this position, was dean of the theological faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The ERLC was established as a result of the SBC’s gradual withdrawal from cooperation with the BJCPA.

Being a harsh reviewer of the involvement of numerous SBC leaders in the election campaign of Donald Trump and the Republicans, and also baldly calling for awareness of and justice for victims of sexual assault in SBC churches, Moore was forced to resign from the ERLC and ultimately left the SBC in 2021. Since then, he has been working for the evangelical magazine “Christianity Today”. In August 2022, he became editor-in-chief of CT.

- 37 R. D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*, Broadman & Holman, Nashville, 2015; *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America*, Sentinel. Penguin Publishing Group, New York, 2023. See also: R. D. Moore, *Can the Religious Right be Saved?* “First Things”, 1 (2017).
- 38 Moore, *Onward: Engaging...*, p. 9.
- 39 Moore, *Onward: Engaging...*, p. 45.

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