The Trinitarian Crisis in Church and State: Religious Controversy and the Making of the Postrevolutionary Church of England, 1687–1702

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Abstract This article sets the wide-ranging controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity that erupted in late seventeenth-century England firmly within the political context of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689. Against a voluminous historiography that confines the trinitarian controversy within the apolitical narrative of an incipient English enlightenment, this article considers the controversy as part of the broader political crisis that befell church and state in the final years of the century. The trinitarian controversy must be understood not simply as a doctrinal dispute but as a disciplinary crisis: a far-reaching debate over not only the content of orthodoxy but also the constitutional apportionment of responsibilities for its enforcement. As such, the controversy featured interventions from an unprecedented array of public authorities—Crown, Parliament, university, episcopate, and convocation—all claiming the preeminent custody of orthodoxy in an institutional landscape profoundly unsettled by revolutionary upheaval. This institutional dimension, long ignored by historians and theologians, placed the trinitarian controversy at the heart of civil and ecclesiastical politics during the reign of William and Mary. Indeed, the trinitarian controversy may be considered the defining event in church politics in the postrevolutionary era, exercising a prevailing influence on the content of Anglican ecclesiastical partisanship for much of the early eighteenth century. While recognizing the importance of these disputes to the emergence of an English enlightenment, this article insists that the trinitarian controversy is equally indispensable for understanding the rage of political parties in postrevolutionary England.

"Of all the controversies we can touch upon at present," warned Edward Wettenhall, bishop of Cork and Ross in 1691, "this of the trinity is the most unreasonable, the most dangerous, and so the most unseasonable." Adopting the style of a "melancholy stander-by," Bishop Wettenhall watched with mounting despair as the controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity roiled the peace of the Church of England in the final decade of the seventeenth century. In the two years since the clergy of the established church had undertaken in earnest the public refutation of resurgent antitrinitarianism, the champions of orthodoxy had bitterly fallen out among themselves, and their manifold

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and increasingly incompatible apologetics had thus far failed to still the pens of the heterodox. Wettenhall advised his brethren to "forbear these controversies," to resist the urge to contribute additional publications to the already protracted debate. For not even the most learned tract would bring the intractable dispute to a conclusion. "An answer will only breed a reply," he warned, "that a rejoinder, that a triplication, and so *in infinitum*." Meanwhile, ceaseless doctrinal controversy, he feared, would only serve to polarize the established church and erode the integrity of public worship. The trinitarian controversy, Wettenhall asserted, would be resolved not by witty pamphlets or novel explications of doctrine but by recourse to public authority. For, "when we have moved every stone" in the dispute over orthodoxy, "authority must define it."[1] Wettenhall put his faith in the constitution in church and state, supremely confident that orthodoxy would be secured not by disputatious clergy but by civil and ecclesiastical law. He could not foresee that the interventions of public authority, far from arresting the controversy, would only become fresh ground for contention.

The trinitarian controversy of the 1690s was never simply a contest over the doctrine of the Church of England. The theological imperative to vindicate trinitarian orthodoxy was from the beginning embedded in what might be thought of as a disciplinary crisis, a series of constitutional and ecclesiological controversies over precisely which civil and religious institutions bore responsibility for undertaking such vindications. The trinitarian controversy was distinctive for the sheer variety of public authorities involved. No less than five sitting bishops participated in the controversy alongside a host of lay and clerical writers. The matter was taken up by the convocation of the province of Canterbury and elicited two separate condemnations from Oxford University convocations, a royal directive to the episcopate, and a parliamentary statute within the space of a decade.[2] For all the attention paid to the controversy as a crisis in English theology and epistemology, this institutional dimension has largely gone unstudied. This neglect, in turn, has reinforced the sense that the trinitarian controversy was for all intents and purposes a mere paper war—"a pamphlet skirmish" or "a stream of worthless pamphlets"—largely confined within a nascent public sphere hospitable to a wide variety of critical-rational discourses.[3] Such a

[1] [Edward Wettenhall], *An Earnest and Compassionate Suit for Forbearance* (London, 1691), 5–8, 17; William Sherlock, *An Apology for Writing against Socinians* (London, 1693); [Edward Wettenhall], *The Antapology of the Melancholy Stander-By, In Answer to the Dean of St. Paul's late Book* (1693).

[2] The bibliography of the controversy in John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England from the Reformation to the End of Last Century: A Contribution to the History of Theology*, 3 vols. (London, 1870–71), 2:273–78, lists nearly seventy different pamphlets published between 1689 and 1699.

[3] Gerard Reedy, "A Preface to Anglican Rationalism," in *Eighteenth-Century Contexts: Historical Inquiries in Honor of Phillip Harth*, ed. Howard D. Weinbrot, Peter J. Schakel, and Stephen E. Karian (Madison, 2001), 55; John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England, 1660–1750* (London, 1976), 169; for the pioneering formulation of the concept of the public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 14–26, 57–67; on the place of religion in the public sphere, see David Zaret, "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 212–35; David Zaret, "Religion and the Rise of Liberal-Democratic Ideology in 17th-Century England," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 2 (1989): 163–79; R. D. Lund, "Guilt by Association: The Atheist Cabal and the Rise of the Public Sphere in Augustan England," *Albion* 34, no. 3 (2002): 391–421; on the career of the concept of the public sphere in early modern British history, see Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 2006): 270–92; Brian Cowan, "Geoffrey Holmes and

perspective tends to displace the controversy from the unsettled institutional landscape of postrevolutionary England into the rarefied air of the European enlightenment. Moreover, this perspective often leads scholars to trace the legacy of the trinitarian controversy almost exclusively to subsequent theological and philosophical debates in England and elsewhere, to the general disregard of its impact on the volatile politics of the reign of William and Mary. As a result, the trinitarian controversy of the 1690s has loomed remarkably large in the historiography of an incipient English enlightenment, while remaining curiously peripheral to the historiography of postrevolutionary politics. Simply put, the trinitarian controversy is still widely considered "the major *non-political* controversy of these years in England."[4] The artificial separation of the doctrinal dispute from the disciplinary crisis in which it was embedded has effectively banished the controversy from the historiography of the Glorious Revolution.

The trinitarian controversy of the 1690s was, in point of fact, fraught with "revolution politics." The considerable scale and duration of the controversy must be attributed in large measure to the perceived inadequacy of postrevolutionary political and ecclesiastical institutions to manage the dispute to any general satisfaction. The result was a theological controversy routinely punctuated by disciplinary interventions of decidedly limited effectiveness, which in turn triggered subsidiary disputes over the proper methods of enforcing orthodoxy. Doctrinal controversy continually provoked disciplinary interventions by one public authority or another, which in turn generated further contention. For instance, the Oxford condemnation of the trinitarian theology of the clergyman Joseph Bingham in 1695 arguably generated less printed controversy concerning Bingham's orthodoxy than it did concerning the right of the university to issue such pronouncements. Throughout the trinitarian controversy of the 1690s, doctrinal dispute routinely opened up onto constitutional conflict as a variety of civil and ecclesiastical authorities claimed a (rarely uncontested) right to intervene. This institutional dimension of the dispute, touching as it did the constitutional apportionment and effective application of disciplinary powers, could not but shade into the civil and ecclesiastical politics of the 1690s.

Anglican ecclesiastical politics, in particular, assumed its recognizable postrevolutionary cast in the crucible of the trinitarian controversy. While the revolution settlement had already fractured the remarkable unity exhibited by churchmen under James II, it was in the trinitarian controversy that the church parties forged their competing programs of ecclesiastical governance. A "new high church party" markedly distinct from that of the Caroline episcopate coalesced around the campaign to restore the traditional disciplinary apparatus of the established church, the ability of ecclesiastical institutions such as the universities, the spiritual courts, and the provincial assembly of convocation to police and punish both heresy and immorality. Meanwhile, the Williamite bishops and clergy, assuming the mantle of an increasingly

the Public Sphere: Augustan Historiography from the Post-Namierite to the Post-Habermasian," *Parliamentary History* 28, no. 1 (February 2009):166–78. Also see Jonathan Sheehan's call for the development of an historiography of the Enlightenment that focuses on "technical practices and institutions," in Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2003): 1061–80.

    [4] John Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism, 'socinianism' and Unitarianism," in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 2000), 139 (emphasis mine).

courtly and Erastian "Church whiggery," came to rely ever more directly on the royal supremacy to govern the church and curb the lower clergy's pretensions of independence.[5] The trinitarian controversy did not, in fact, cleave the established church into warring theological camps, but rather into proponents of two distinct *political ecclesiologies*, that is, two competing apprehensions of the functional relationship between church and state. The polarity between clerical and Erastian disciplinary programs, based respectively on ecclesiastical institutions and the royal supremacy, was among the most enduring legacies of the controversy, comprising the framework of ecclesiastical politics well into the reign of George I.[6] The coalescence and persistence of these competing programs is certainly no less crucial to understanding the postrevolutionary Church of England than the succession of heterodoxies by which the Anglican establishment was periodically beset.

The successive assaults on Christian orthodoxy that ensued in the wake of the trinitarian controversy of the 1690s have long preoccupied scholars of the English enlightenment and, indeed, have reinforced the historical reputation of the final decade of the seventeenth century as a watershed in the modernization of English Christianity. Mark Pattison located in the trinitarian controversy and cognate debates over deism and creedal minimalism the origins of what he called the "*seculum rationalisticum*" of the eighteenth century, the moment at which "the rationalizing method possessed itself absolutely of the whole field of theology."[7] Following Pattison, Leslie Stephen credited the antitrinitarian writings of this decade with initiating a process by which "Christianity is being gradually transmuted by larger infusions of rationalism."[8] Contemporary scholars mostly concurred with their Victorian forebears. The trinitarian controversy was, in John Redwood's estimation, "the great testing ground for Christianity," in which orthodoxy was tried by reason and found wanting.[9] The philosopher Frederick Beiser likewise deems the theological controversies of the 1690s, "the beginning of the enlightenment in early modern England," the point at which reason, long the handmaiden of theology, effectively became "critical of faith."[10] Other historians have suggested the commencement of a peculiarly "clerical enlightenment" in these debates, a process by which English churchmen accommodated rationalist theology and liberal antidogmatism within the framework of the Anglican establishment.[11] The theologian

[5] G. V. Bennett, "Conflict in the Church," in *Britain after the Glorious Revolution, 1689–1714*, ed. Geoffrey Holmes (London, 1969), 165; Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (London, 1973), 29–30; Stephen Taylor, "The Character of a Church Whig" (lecture, Dr. Williams's Library, London, 24 November 2007). I am grateful to Dr. Taylor for making a copy of his lecture available to me.

[6] See Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716–1721* (Woodbridge, 2007).

[7] Mark Pattison, "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688–1750," in *Essays and Reviews*, 2nd ed. (London, 1860), 259.

[8] Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1876), 1:111–12; see also Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:194–222.

[9] Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, 156–72.

[10] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason* (Princeton, 1996), 223; see also Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688–1791* (Oxford, 1986), 243–56; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (New York, 2000), 96–129.

[11] B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998), 19–44; see J. G. A. Pocock, "Within the Margins: The Definition of Orthodoxy," in *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660–1750*, ed. Roger D. Lund (Cambridge, 1995), 33–53; John

William Babcock, however, is unequivocal about the secularizing implications of the trinitarian controversy, crediting it with beginning the wholesale abandonment of the Christian God.[12] The historical theologian Philip Dixon traces a "fading of trinitarian imagination" in the later seventeenth century, citing the disputes at century's end as the culmination of "the emptying of the devotional and emotional appeal of the doctrine" of the Trinity.[13] Even historians who tend to doubt the modernizing imperatives of late seventeenth-century antitrinitarianism, viewing it instead as the recrudescence of an older strain of radical biblicist or humanist critique, concede its inadvertent contribution to an English enlightenment.[14] Stephen Hampton's recent study of the trinitarian controversy, it should be noted, deliberately eschews the enlightenment context, situating these debates instead amid a broadly European confrontation between reformed theology and its Arminian critics. Yet even Hampton posits "the flourishing intellectual culture of rational inquiry" in the late seventeenth century as the basic ecology of these debates.[15] Even accounting for variations in emphasis and interpretation, it seems that the preferred context for assessing the historical significance of the trinitarian controversy has largely been the forward sweep of religious and philosophical enlightenment.

The enlightenment context has proven quite illuminating for understanding the religious and intellectual ferment of the age. But there is a significant danger in wholly consigning the trinitarian controversy of the late seventeenth century to a narrative of inexorable rationalization. Such an approach makes little allowance for what are among the most politically significant developments in the trinitarian controversy: the waning confidence among churchmen of all stripes in the ability of reason to successfully carry the day and the concomitant turn toward public authority to resolve the dispute. The historian Justin Champion has perhaps most effectively situated the trinitarian and cognate controversies of the 1690s within a broader crisis of public authority, which he deems "the politics of knowledge." For Champion, the significance of the controversy lay primarily in the radical and antitrinitarian assault on the politically demarcated parameters of true faith; their critique threatened to devolve authority "away from public institutions into the private epistemological world of the individual conscience." The problem, however, in positing the fault line exclusively between "conscience and authority" is that such a view tends to homogenize ecclesiastical and civil

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Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1989); Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 235–77; on clerical enlightenment, see Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment in England," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1981), 1–18.

[12] William S. Babcock, "A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century," *Interpretation* 45, no. 2 (April 1991): 133–46.

[13] Philip Dixon, *"Nice and Hot Disputes": The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 2003), 19–29; see also William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, 1996), 164–78.

[14] Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (New York, 2006), 115–34; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010), 233–41.

[15] Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford, 2008), 129–91; the long-standing historiographical association of Arminianism and enlightenment is not disputed in Hampton's study, leaving open the possibility of reading it too as a narrative of (contested) religious modernization.

power in the postrevolutionary period, investing the Anglican establishment with a public authority that seems more coherent, monolithic, and uncontroversial than was actually the case. Moreover, it fails to account for the various ways in which the clear-cut enlightenment "politics of knowledge" signally failed to align with the far murkier "revolution politics" of church and state in the 1690s.[16]

The trinitarian controversy repeatedly exposed the absence of any Anglican consensus on the methods and instruments of enforcing orthodoxy, whether through the universities, Parliament, or convocation. The very real revolt against ecclesiastical authority that Champion describes must not be allowed to eclipse the equally serious crisis occurring *within* ecclesiastical authority. The latter came to the fore in the final years of the reign of William III, as the trinitarian controversy gave way to the great convocation controversy, the campaign to revive the dormant provincial synods of the established church. The convocation controversy, a wide-ranging debate that addressed not simply the constitutional status of the synods but the respective disciplinary powers of the clergy, the bishops, Parliament, and the Crown, defined the terms of ecclesiastical (and indeed, political) partisanship for at least a generation. It is vital then to trace this alternate path out of the trinitarian controversy of the 1690s, for it leads not to the politeness and antidogmatism of the *seculum rationalisticum* but toward the bitterness, invective, and instability of the early eighteenth-century "rage of party."

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A minor trinitarian controversy occurred in England during the reign of James II. Though the dispute involved many of the same participants as that of the subsequent reign, the points in contention were dissimilar. The debate over the doctrine of the Trinity in the mid-1680s was but a subsidiary of the far broader "rule of faith" controversy between Anglican churchmen and English defenders of Roman Catholicism.[17] Court-sponsored Catholic writers routinely sought to expose the inadequacies of the Anglican rule of faith, which championed the instrumentality of human reason in discovering the validity and soteriological sufficiency of scripture. Reason, charged Catholic controversialists, was an unstable element that must be contained by authority and tradition. Otherwise, it threatened not only to denude revelation of mystery but also to atomize orthodoxy to the judgment of individuals.[18] All Protestantism, it was charged, tended toward "Socinianism"—or at the very least, the modes of rationalist scriptural hermeneutics that had in late seventeenth-century England come to be branded "Socinian" for their critical treatment of trinitarian orthodoxy or religious

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[16] J. A. I. Champion, "Making Authority: Belief, Conviction and Reason in the Public Sphere in Late Seventeenth-Century England," *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siecle* 3 (1999): 143–90; J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992), 99–120; J. A. I. Champion, "'Religion's Safe, with Priestcraft Is the War': Augustan Anticlericalism and the Legacy of the English Revolution, 1660–1720," *European Legacy* 5, no. 4 (2000): 547–61; J. A. I. Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester, 2003), 69–90.

[17] C. W. Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine in England from Hooker to Waterland* (London, 1942), 124–34; Louis I. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* (Ann Arbor, 1934), 73–129; J. Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, 1991), 115–16; Raymond D. Tumbleson, "'Reason and Religion': The Science of Anglicanism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, no. 1 (January 1996): 131–56.

[18] See R. H. [Abraham Woodhead], *The Protestants Plea for a Socinian* (London, 1686).

mystery more broadly.[19] The doctrine of the Trinity featured prominently in these exchanges, not as a point of substantive disagreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, but as an acid test of the rule of faith. The Anglican rule of faith, it was claimed, could not comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, which neither comported to reason nor rested on incontrovertible biblical foundations, while simultaneously excluding the equally mysterious Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. As one Catholic writer argued, "'tis as equally unreasonable, and as seemingly repugnant to say one is three, as it is to say a body is not what it appears." As mysteries impervious to human reason and only figuratively adumbrated in scripture, the doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation seemed to stand or fall together. "Both doctrines will be at a loss, and both equally require the authority of the Church to support them."[20]

The defense of Anglican orthodoxy during the rule of faith controversies largely fell to the dynamic preaching clergy of the great metropolitan parishes of London and Westminster. The London divines began assembling, often at the residence of William Sherlock, master of the Temple, to strategize their defense against the vigorous Romanizing of the court of James II.[21] Their efforts during the three years of James's reign produced over two hundred volumes against popery, in which the defense of the Trinity comprised something of a leitmotif.[22] This clerical vanguard in London has, of course, long been associated with the "latitudinarian" wing of the Church of England. Recent scholarship has, it must be noted, questioned the coherence and utility of the concept of latitudinarianism, denying both its putative liberalism and any substantive theological or ecclesiological divergences from the mainstream of Restoration Anglicanism.[23] However, the term is quite indispensible

[19] The term "Socnianism" was employed with little precision to indicate an array of rationalist or antitrinitarian heresies in this period; it did not necessarily signal adherence to the humanist tenets of the sixteenth-century Italian émigré Fausto Paolo Sozzini, from whose name the term is derived. See H. J. Maclachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1951); Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia, 1985), 119–20; on the use of the term by Catholics, see Martin Greig, "Heresy Hunt: Gilbert Burnet and the Convocation Controversy of 1701," *Historical Journal* 37, no. 3 (1994): 569–92.

[20] *A Dialogue between a New Catholic Convert and a Protestant* (London, 1686), 3, 6; Lewis Sabran, *An Answer to Dr. Sherlock's Preservative against Popery* (London, 1688), 7; Sabran, *Dr. Sherlock's Preservative Considered* (London, 1688), 45.

[21] Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1833), 3:104–6; "The Autobiography of Symon Patrick," in *The Works of Simon Patrick, D.D.*, 9 vols., ed. Alexander Taylor (Oxford, 1858), 9:490; *Diary of John Evelyn*, 4 vols., ed. William Bray (London, 1906), 3:11; *The Life of Richard Kidder, D.D., Bishop and Wells Written by Himself*, ed. Amy Edith Robinson (Somerset Record Society, 1924), 37; William Sherlock to ——, Temple, 2 September 1685, Tanner MS, 31, f. 190, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[22] Edward Gee, *The Catalogue of all the Discourses Published against Popery, during the Reign of King James II by the Members of the Church Of England* (London, 1689); Francis Peck, *A Complete Catalogue of all the Discourses Written, Both for and against Popery, in the time of King James II* (London, [1735]).

[23] John Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men, 1660–1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson, and 'Hobbism,'" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 3 (July 1985): 407–27; John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," *Historical Journal* 31, no. 1 (1988): 61–82; Spurr, *Restoration Church of England*, 296–311; Richard Ashcraft, "Latitudinarianism and Toleration: Historical Myth versus Political History," in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640–1700*, ed. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), 151–77; William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688–1832: Unity and Accord* (London, 2001), 48–61; Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 27–28; Tony Claydon,

for the purposes of this article. It served late seventeenth-century contemporaries as a virtual by-word (and often a term of obloquy) for the prominent London divines who opposed James II and received advancement under his successors, William and Mary. Moreover, the term conveyed their conspicuous championship of the anti-Calvinist "Anglican rationalist" tradition evident in their critique of both Roman Catholicism and Protestant nonconformity. The Anglican rationalist tradition of the later seventeenth century broadly defended the reasonableness of scripture and the general availability of its fundamental, saving truths to the plain sense of all readers. This tradition, as Gerard Reedy rightly emphasizes, did not hold reason to be the primary arbiter of doctrine, nor did it reduce the whole of Christianity to clear and distinct ideas. Indeed, many of the London controversialists both before and after the revolution of 1688–1689 made generous allowances for the presence of mystery in religion. Their objective was to ensure that the persistence of mystery in revelation did not compromise the accessibility of saving truths to the general reader nor invite the routine doctrinal determinations of ecclesiastical authority.[24]

One of the primary obligations of the Anglican campaign against Roman Catholicism was the defense of a vital, yet circumscribed rationalism capable of distinguishing the mysterious truth of the Trinity from the error of transubstantiation.[25] William Sherlock particularly resented the Catholic claims of epistemological equivalence between the doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation; he sardonically accused Catholics of holding the former doctrine, "for no other reason, but to justify the absurdities and contradictions of transubstantiation."[26] Edward Stillingfleet, dean of St. Paul's, took up the problem directly in his 1687 dialogue, *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Transubstantiation Compared*. The papist in the dean's dialogue echoes the prevailing English Catholic line in the rule of faith controversy: "Do you believe that there are any mysteries in the Christian doctrine above reason or not?" the papist character asks his Protestant interlocutor. "If not, you must reject the trinity; if you do, you have no ground for rejecting transubstantiation, because it is above reason." Stillingfleet's Protestant responds by distinguishing "our not apprehending the manner of how a thing is" from "the apprehending the impossibility of the thing itself." The claims to rationalism in the Anglican rule of faith were predicated on the frequently reiterated "distinction of things above our reason, and

"Latitudinarianism and Apocalyptic History in the Worldview of Gilbert Burnet, 1643–1715," *Historical Journal* 51, no. 3 (September 2008): 577–97.

[24] Reedy, "Preface to Anglican Rationalism," 44–59; I. Simon, *Three Restoration Divines: Barrow, South, Tillotson*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1967), 1:76–148; Phillip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism* (Chicago, 1961); John Spurr, "'Rational Religion' in Restoration England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, no. 4 (October–December 1988): 563–85; Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and the Sources of John Locke's 'The Reasonableness of Christianity,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 1 (January–March 1984): 49–66.

[25] Richard Kidder, *A Second Dialogue between a New Catholick Convert and a Protestant Shewing Why He Cannot Believe the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, Though He Do Firmly Believe the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1687), 7; William Sherlock, *An Answer to a late Dialogue between a New Catholick Convert and a Protestant to Prove the Mystery of the Trinity to be as Absurd a Doctrine as Transubstantiation* (London, 1687), 13.

[26] William Sherlock, *A Vindication of Both parts of the Preservative against Popery* (London, 1688), 56–57.

[those] contrary to our reason."[27] This critical differentiation absolved Anglican churchmen of the obligation to render all mysteries intelligible, without impairing their ability to effectively declaim against error and contradiction. The latter capacity was obviously vital in the controversy with the resurgent Catholicism of the court of James II. The former, Stillingfleet's Protestant noted in something of an aside, gave the Church of England an "advantage in point of reason" against "the anti-trinitarians themselves."[28]

Roman Catholic and Anglican conjuring with the names and notions of Socinianism elicited a genuinely antitrinitarian intervention by the Hertfordshire clergyman Stephen Nye in 1687. Though Nye's tract, *A Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians*, is widely credited with initiating the great trinitarian controversy of the final decade of the seventeenth century, it was more likely a contribution to a dispute already in progress. Nye's *Brief History* was an avowedly Protestant entrant in the rule of faith controversy, though one that echoed a number of the premises of contemporary Catholic works. Unlike the London Anglican controversialists, Nye conceded the point made by Catholic controversialists that the doctrine of the Trinity was rationally and biblically indefensible. The Catholic apologists seemed to be justified in attributing the prevalence of the doctrine solely to the authority of the Church. And indeed, they were quite correct to adjudicate the doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation by identical epistemological standards. Of course, Nye proceeded from these premises to radically antithetical conclusions. The *Brief History* argued that a theology that subordinated the Son to the Father was more agreeable to reason, scripture, and the beliefs of the earliest Christians. Trinitarian Christianity was, wrote Nye, "absurd, and contrary both to reason and to itself." The doctrine had been historically imposed by ecclesiastical authority, buttressed by persecution and violence, and "established by so many terrible, penal laws." The doctrine of the Trinity was, like that of transubstantiation, a relic of popery. Abandoning the hedged rationalism of the London Anglicans, Nye argued "that interpretation of Scripture can never be true, which holds forth a doctrine or a consequence that is absurd, or contradictory and impossible." As a contribution to the rule of faith controversy, Nye's *Brief History* was a work of retrenchment, abandoning to popery the indefensible doctrine of the Trinity, the better to hold the Protestant line. The appended letter by the antitrinitarian laymen Henry Hedworth of Huntingdon made this point explicitly, excoriating those trinitarians who would "join hands with papists in contradiction to Protestant doctrine."[29]

The circumstances that prompted Stephen Nye to pen his anonymous *Brief History of the Unitarians* remain a matter of conjecture. The publication of the *Brief History* coincided with James II's issuing of his first Declaration of Indulgence in 1687,

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[27] Edward Stillingfleet, *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Transubstantiation Compared as to Scripture, Reason, and Tradition* (London, 1687), 4–7; on the centrality of this distinction to the Anglican rationalist tradition, see Gerard Reedy, "Socinians, John Toland and the Anglican Rationalists," *Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 3/4 (July–October 1977): 285–304.

[28] Stillingfleet, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 7; this was probably intended to deflect against the Catholic tactic of pressing the Anglican "rule of faith" to what was purported to be its rationalist or Socinian conclusions.

[29] Stephen Nye, *A Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians* (1687), 24, 28–29, 158–59, 160, 168–69.

which summarily suspended all penal laws against Protestant and Catholic noncon-formists. Given the tract's broad-minded embrace of religious toleration and its con-spicuous deviance from the standards of orthodoxy embraced by the Anglican opposition in London, it is tempting to view the tract as the work of one of James's so-called Whig collaborators, the diverse group of Protestant religious and political radicals who supported the king's ecclesiastical policies in the final two years of his reign.[30] However, the involvement of the prominent London mercer and philanthropist Thomas Firmin in the commissioning and publication of Nye's antitrinitarian pamphlets makes this reading extremely unlikely. Firmin not only directed the publication of the work but also was mistaken by some for its author.[31] His patronage would likely tell against any collaboration with the court. Though his own antitrinitarian leanings were well known, Firmin was an intimate of the prominent London clergy, the so-called latitudinarians who comprised the van-guard of opposition to James II's ecclesiastical policies, most notably John Tillotson, Edward Fowler, "and others of the same leaven." Like them, Firmin was a "principal encourager and promoter" of the campaign against the Declaration of Indulgence.[32] Firmin's collaborations with the London clergy and his philanthropic activity on behalf of Protestants abroad suggest that Nye's *Brief History* is perhaps best under-stood as a work of Protestant ecumenism.[33] Nye gave his antitrinitarianism a con-spicuously respectable pedigree, claiming as sympathizers Desiderius Erasmus and Dutch Remonstrants such as Hugo Grotius and Simon Episcopius, theologians likely to find favor with the largely Arminian London clergy.[34] Hedworth's appendix urged trinitarians "to own unitarians for Christian brethren."[35] The irenic tone of the *Brief History*, its fidelity to the language of scripture and the "law of common reason," its trenchant anti-Catholicism, and the patronage of the ecumenical Thomas Firmin all place the work among the growing number of calls and proposals for Protestant union issued in the aftermath of James II's Declaration of Indulgence.[36] Stephen

[30] Stephen Trowell, "Unitarian and/or Anglican: The Relationship of Unitarian to the Church from 1687 to 1698," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, no. 1 (1996): 77–101; J. R. Jones, "James II's Whig Collaborators," *Historical Journal* 3, no. 1 (1960): 65–73; Mark Goldie, "John Locke's Circle and James II," *Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992); Scott Sowerby, "Of Different Complexions: Religious Diversity and National Identity in James II's Toleration Campaign," *English Historical Review* 124, no. 506 (February 2009): 29–52.

[31] *An Account of Firmin's Religion, and the Present State of the Unitarian Controvery* (London, 1698), 52; the author misstates the original date of the *Brief History's* publication as 1689; see Robert Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography; or, Sketches of the Lives and Writings of Distinguished Antitrinitarians*, 3 vols. (London, 1850), 1:182–83; Philip Bliss ed., *Reliquiae Hearnianae: The Remains of Thomas Hearne, M.A.*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1857), 1:66.

[32] *The Life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, Late Citizen of London* (London, 1698), 61–62; *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, 1:66; *The Charitable Samaritan; or, A Short and Impartial Account of that Eminent and Publick-Spirited Citizen, Mr. Tho. Firmin* (London, 1698), 9–10; Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 3:387–88; *Journal of the Very Rev. Rowland Davies, LL.D. Dean of Ross (and afterward Dean of Cork)* (London, 1857), 9–10, 23, 25.

[33] *Account of Mr. Firmin's Religion*, 5–6.

[34] Nye, *Brief History*, 31–37; on Arminianism among the London clergy, see Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 59–75.

[35] On the tolerationist arguments of Nye's *Brief History*, see John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 391–92.

[36] Roger Thomas, "Comprehension and Indulgence," in *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662–1962*, ed. Owen Chadwick and Geoffey F. Nuttall (London, 1962), 225–31; John Spurr, "The Church of England, Comprehension and the Toleration Act of 1689," *English Historical Review* 104, no. 413

Nye's *Brief History*, it seems, was born not of an incipient enlightenment but of the deepening crisis of English Protestantism.

■■■

The revolution of 1688–1689 catalyzed the great trinitarian controversy of the 1690s. While scholars such as Philip Dixon, Stephen Hampton, and Sarah Mortimer have done commendable service in tracing the national and international genealogies of the theological ideas in contention, it is still important to understand the ways in which these debates were shaped by the dramatically altered political and religious environment of postrevolutionary England. Indeed, what these and other scholars have affirmed as the relatively shopworn character of the competing arguments makes the severity and scope of the controversy at the end of the seventeenth century that much more puzzling.[37] Moreover, the unprecedented array of public authorities involved further distinguishes the controversy from antecedent debates. Given the extent and diversity of civil and ecclesiastical institutions involved, it seems fair to consider the dispute over the doctrine of the Trinity as much a theological controversy as a full-blown "crisis in Church and state."[38]

The trinitarian controversy erupted amid a religious and political landscape significantly reconfigured by the revolution of 1688–1689 and the ensuing settlement in church and state. The revolution had propelled the stalwarts of the Anglican opposition in London overwhelmingly into the highest offices in the Church of England. Of the sixteen men William and Mary raised to the episcopal bench in the first two years of their reign, eleven (including Gilbert Burnet, a popular preacher at the Rolls Chapel prior to his exile under James II) previously held livings in the metropolis. Many of the new bishops were veterans of the anti-Catholic controversies of the 1680s, as was William Sherlock, who succeeded John Tillotson as dean of St. Paul's after a temporary refusal to accept the new monarchs. Even if the term "latitudinarian" is no longer considered quite apposite to describe the bulk of the Williamite episcopate, there can be no doubt that many of these men identified rather strongly with the Anglican rationalist tradition and had been among the most forward in courting the support of nonconformists during the previous reigns. The revolution had also effectively reignited the argument over ecclesiastical comprehension, the program of reforming Anglican liturgy and discipline to permit nonconformists to return to the communion of the established church. Suddenly, there was a genuine opportunity to institutionalize the professions of Protestant solidarity that had characterized the last years of the reign of James II.[39] The renovation of the Anglican episcopate and the imperatives of

(October 1689): 927–46; George Every, *The High Church Party, 1688–1718* (London, 1956), 22–25; Timothy J. Fawcett, *The Liturgy of Comprehension 1689* (Southend-on-Sea, 1973), 16–22.

[37] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 34–35; Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 129–62; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 233–41.

[38] The phrase is obviously borrowed from G. V. Bennett's *The Tory Crisis in Church and State, 1688–1730: The Career of Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester* (Oxford, 1975).

[39] Craig Rose, "Providence, Protestant Union and Godly Reformation in the 1690s," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., no. 3 (1993): 151–69.

Protestant union placed the prospect of substantive church reform on the agenda for the first time since the later 1670s.[40]

Controversy erupted amid the attempted settlement of the Church of England in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the vicissitudes of which are quite well known.[41] The revolution created a genuine opportunity for ecclesiastical comprehension, while simultaneously alleviating the pressures of Catholic absolutism that had made Protestant reconciliation seem so urgent. Churchmen and dissenters alike emerged from the revolution crisis with less incentive to affect some meaningful comprehension. Conservative churchmen, still coming to terms with their new Dutch presbyterian monarch, the possible deprivation of their nonjuring brethren, and the wreck of their battered political theology, were wary of new concessions.[42] Nonconformists, for their part, found the likely prospect of legislative toleration for their congregations (and the less likely prospect of repealing the Test Act) more appealing than the compromises with episcopacy that comprehension would entail. Thus, the two bills for comprehension and toleration drawn up by the new secretary of state, Daniel Finch, earl of Nottingham, in consultation with the leading London divines, met two very different fates. The bill for religious toleration proceeded through Parliament with minimal controversy, while the comprehension scheme stalled. Many members grumbled that the church had not been formally consulted in measures that would alter the terms of its communion. The long dormant assembly of convocation was thought the proper forum for such an undertaking.[43] On 13 April 1689, a committee of the House of Commons submitted an address to the king, requesting that he issue writs for the calling of convocation "according to the ancient practice and usage of this kingdom in time of Parliament."[44] The king responded to the address by pledging to summon convocation and urging the Parliament to proceed with the indulgence for Protestant nonconformists.[45] A bargain seems to have been struck.[46] The indulgence, widely known as the Toleration Act, received royal assent on 24 May 1689. The issue of comprehension was dropped in Parliament and reserved for the convocation as "a due respect to the Church."[47]

[40] Norman Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History, 1660–1768* (Cambridge, 1959), 188–224; Stephen Taylor, "Bishop Edmund Gibson's Proposals for Church Reform," in *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany*, ed. Stephen Taylor (Woodbridge, 1999), 169–75; see also William J. Bulman, "Enlightenment and Religious Politics in Restoration England," *History Compass* 10, no. 10 (2012): 752–64.

[41] Henry Horwitz, *Revolution Politicks: The Career of Daniel Finch, Second Earl of Nottingham* (Cambridge, 1968), 86–95; Henry Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics in the reign of William III* (Manchester, 1977), 22–29.

[42] Mark Goldie, "The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution," in *The Revolutions of 1688*, ed. Robert Beddard (Oxford, 1991), 102–36; Gerald M. Straka, *Anglican Reaction to the Revolution of 1688* (Madison, 1962).

[43] Earl of Clarendon to Thomas Tenison, 9 April 1689, Add MS 3512, f. 38, British Library (BL).

[44] "*House of Commons Journal* 10, 13 April 1689," *Journal of the House of Commons,* 77 vols. (1802), 10: 86–87, http://193.39.212.226/report.aspx?compid=28800 (accessed 11 July 2011).

[45] *The Memoirs of the Honorable Sir John Reresby, Baronet* (London, 1734), 195; see also Thomas Birch, *The Life of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1752), 179–80; Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 4:19–20.

[46] Keith Feiling, *A History of the Tory Party, 1640–1714* (Oxford, 1924), 262–65.

[47] Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 4:53–54; for a discussion of these events, see Mark Goldie, "John Locke, Jonas Proast and Religious Toleration, 1688–1692," in *The Church of England, c. 1689–c.1833:*

In addition to issuing writs for convocation to meet and transact business for the first time since 1664, King William gave the assembly a substantial mandate for ecclesiastical reform. To that end, the king commissioned ten bishops and twenty divines to prepare the agenda for this momentous synod. The ascendant London clergy who had overseen previous comprehension schemes predominated. Their influence over the ecclesiastical commission only grew as the conservative appointees either absented themselves entirely or withdrew early on in the proceedings. The conservatives' withdrawal left the commission subject to the virtually unchecked influence of a largely London-based core of Williamites, nearly all of whom would be elevated to the episcopal bench by William and Mary.[48]

Reactions to the composition of the new ecclesiastical commission were decidedly mixed. Thomas Tenison depicted his fellow commissioners as the heroes of the Glorious Revolution: "[T]hese very men with true Christian courage hazarded all that was dear to them in this world, in order to support the Church and the true religion professed by it."[49] But others seized on the ideological and geographical bias of the commission, which was dominated by "city divines" and "ministers of the great town." Critics further resented the court favor bestowed on the leading commissioners, men who were "known to be latitudinarians indeed, and have monopolized Church-preferments."[50] The withdrawn commissioner William Jane, regius professor of divinity at Oxford, impugned both the orthodoxy and the motives of the rump of the commission as men possessed of "tenderness and moderation enough to part with anything but their Church preferments."[51] The commissioners, then, set about forging a program for comprehension amid an ecclesiastical environment characterized by resentment and reaction, and increasingly wary of change.

The ecclesiastical commissioners effectively reignited the debate over the Trinity when they considered the status of the Athanasian Creed in the liturgy of the established church. At the 23 October 1689 session, the commissioners debated the provenance and authenticity of this lengthy statement of trinitarian orthodoxy, erroneously attributed to the third-century bishop of Alexandria. Gilbert Burnet ventured that the creed was "not very ancient" and its inclusion therefore violated the council of Ephesus's prohibition on new formulations. Stillingfleet suggested leaving the creed in the liturgy, but including a rubric mitigating the anathemas that declared salvation conditional upon true and firm belief in the content of the creed, including its firm recognition of the equality of the three persons of the Trinity. The commission thus drew up a rubric that applied these so-called damnatory

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From Toleration to Tractarianism, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge, 1993), 156–58.

[48] Fawcett, *Liturgy of Comprehension*, 26–30, has a very useful prosopographical analysis of the composition of the ecclesiastical commission.

[49] Thomas Tenison, *A Discourse Concerning the Ecclesiastical Commission, open'd in the Jerusalem-Chamber, October the 10th, 1689* (London, 1689); see also Locke's opinion, quoted in Goldie, "John Locke, Jonas Proast," 157.

[50] *A Just Censure to the Answerer to Vox Cleri* (London, 1690), 8; Thomas Long, *Vox Cleri, or, The Sense of the Clergy Concerning the Making of Alterations in the Established Liturgy* (London, 1690), 16.

[51] William Jane, *A Letter to a Friend, Containing Some Quaeries about the New Commission for Making Alterations in the Liturgy, Canons, &c. of the Church of England* (London, 1689), 4; see William Payne's response to the charge of "latitudinarianism" in William Payne, *An Answer to Vox Cleri* (London, 1690), 4.

clauses "only to those who obstinately deny the substance of the Christian faith," rather than the exact letter of trinitarian orthodoxy outlined in the creed.[52] On 1 November, Edward Fowler, having surveyed several Anglican and nonconformist ministers around London about their use of the creed, moved that the question of the Athanasian Creed be reopened. Many Anglican "men of eminence," he found, "had not read it in many years." The nonconformists he interviewed disliked all creeds not "conceived in Scripture expressions." Fowler suggested that the revised prayer book leave ministers at liberty to dispense with the creed entirely. The commission overruled him, thinking such a drastic alteration best left to the consideration of the full convocation.[53] The commissioners, it must be emphasized, were not impugning trinitarian orthodoxy, merely the soteriological indispensability of assenting to the exposition of it contained in the Athanasian Creed.

As clerical opinion in advance of the convocation seemed to harden against comprehension, the commissioners and their allies took to print to defend their proposals for reform. In *A Letter from a Minister in the Country to a Member of the Convocation*, which Timothy Fawcett has persuasively attributed to Gilbert Burnet, the anonymous author depicts the work of the commission as necessary for the established church, regardless of the prospect of comprehension. The commission would alleviate all misgivings about controversial matters such as the status of the Apocrypha, the translation of the Psalms, and the Athanasian Creed.[54] The archdeacon of Suffolk, Humphrey Prideaux, similarly defended the commission's mitigation of the creed, asking, "must we always be necessitated to pronounce all damned that do believe every tittle of Athanasius's Creed, which so few do understand?"[55] Another pamphlet concurred with the revisions to the creed, stating, "[W]e think it no more becomes us to damn folks in the Church, and at divine service, than in the streets and in common discourse."[56] Omission or qualification of the creed, noted the London clergyman William Basset, would remove a formidable obstacle to comprehension.[57]

This well-publicized relinquishing of the Athanasian Creed presented Stephen Nye and Thomas Firmin with an opportunity to resume their antitrinitarian agitation. Nye clearly designed his *Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius* to capitalize on what appeared to be a mellowing of trinitarian orthodoxy among the ascendant London clergy and their allies. Echoing the commission's mitigation of the damnatory clauses, Nye asserted that "a right belief in these points that have always been controverted in the Churches of God, is in no degree necessary, much less necessary before all things." The Athanasian Creed, he claimed, "has damned the whole world,"

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[52] Fawcett, *Liturgy of Comprehension*, 66–67, 166, 200–01; Birch, *Life of Tillotson*, 190; William Nicholls, *A Defence of the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England*, 3rd ed. (London, 1730), 110.

[53] Fawcett, *Liturgy of Comprehension*, 169; and see "Letter to Dr. Tillotson, bearing date Oct. 6, 1689," in *A History of Conferences and Other Proceedings Connected with the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Edward Cardwell, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1849), 452–55.

[54] N. L., *A Letter from a Minister in the Country to a Member of the Convocation* (London, 1689), 14–15.

[55] [Humphrey Prideaux], *A Letter to a Friend Relating to the Present Convocation at Westminster* (London, 1690), 15.

[56] *Vox populi; or, The Sense of the Sober Lay-Men of the Church of England, concerning the Heads Proposed in his Majesties Commission to the Convocation* (London, 1690), 4; and see Edmund Hickeringill, *The Ceremony-monger, His Character* (London, 1689), 33, 120.

[57] [William Basset], *A Vindication of the Two Letters concerning Alterations in the Liturgy* (London, 1690), 29–31.

for it demands affirmation of what is unintelligible and therefore cannot elicit rational assent. The suspension of reason mandated by the creed as the condition of salvation was the very hallmark of "Roman bondage," as he saw it, and therefore unfit "to be retained in any Christian, much less a Protestant and reformed Church."[58] Nye shrewdly positioned his radical theological notions on a continuum with those of the prominent London Anglicans with whom his patron Thomas Firmin associated. Just as he had pushed their vindication of "right reason" during the rule of faith controversy into a thoroughgoing theological rationalism, he was now pressing their relaxation of the Athanasian Creed into a repudiation of trinitarian Christianity.

The continuities between the ecclesiastical commission's members and antitrinitarianism's proponents were by no means lost on the enemies of comprehension. The Devonshire clergyman Thomas Long, a proctor to the new convocation, denounced the commissioners' objections to the Athanasian Creed and demanded that they "consider what occasion it hath given to the anti-trinitarians to proclaim their blasphemies against the Blessed Trinity, and consequently against the Christian Religion." Such heresies were implicated in the very project of comprehension, for the enemies of the church designed "to improve the objections of dissenters into very dangerous and destructive errors."[59] Another critic of the ecclesiastical commission explicitly associated the mischief of "the latitude principle" with the proliferation of antitrinitarian writings, reporting that he was "credibly informed, that the author of the *Notes on Athanasius's Creed* and of the *History of the Unitarians*" was a divine of the Church of the England. "If you would know who I mean, you must ask honest T. F. [Thomas Firmin]."[60] Firmin's association with antitrinitarian writings, on the one hand, and prominent members of the ecclesiastical commission, on the other, seemed to implicate them all in a common heterodoxy.[61] Henry Maurice, Archbishop William Sancroft's domestic chaplain, bid the commissioners "send for T. F. [Thomas Firmin] and the Socinians" and inform Firmin "how for his sake you have either taken away the Athanasian Creed or pulled out the sting of it." Maurice predicted that Firmin and his ilk would not be satisfied until the Nicene Creed, "the spring of all the doctrines, which makes up your mystery and their abomination," was similarly struck out.[62]

The fault lines exposed in the controversy surrounding the ecclesiastical commission reappeared at the commencement of convocation in November 1689. On 21 November, John Tillotson's bid to become prolocutor of the lower house was overwhelmingly defeated in favor of that of the withdrawn commissioner William Jane,

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[58] Stephen Nye, *Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius*, reprinted in J. Savage, *An Antidote Against Poison, or, An Answer to the Brief Notes upon the Creed of St. Athanasius by an Anonimous Author* (1690), 1, 2, 5, 7–8.

[59] Long, *Vox Cleri*, 32.

[60] *Just Censure to the Answerer of Vox Cleri*, 15.

[61] George Hickes to Arthur Charlett, 6 September 1690, Ballard MS 12, f. 65, Bodleian Library, in which he recommends circulating anticomprehension literature "to some of the London divines who are not of the latitudinarian party."

[62] Henry Maurice, *Remarks from the Country, upon the Two Letters Relating to the Convocation and Alterations in the Liturgy* (London, 1690), 9; and see, *To the Revered and Merry Answerer of Vox Cleri* [London?, 1690?], 15, which also alludes to Firmin's influence on the commission.

one of the sharpest critics of comprehension.[63] Bishop Compton, acting president of the convocation during the suspension of Archbishop Sancroft, reportedly "made a learned speech upon the topic of uniting," but its sentiments were drowned out by the mounting conservatism among the clergy, given voice by Jane as well as Henry Aldrich, dean of Christ Church, Oxford, who "harangued mightily about the beauty of the present settlement of religion." Upon being presented by Compton, Jane applied the cry of "*Nolumus leges Angliae mutari*" to the ecclesiastical constitution. It was an unsubtle dig at the bishop of London, for these had been the very words emblazoned on his standard when he appeared in arms at Oxford for the prince of Orange the previous year.[64]

Given the mood of obstinacy among the clergy, it was perhaps not surprising that the comprehension scheme painstakingly devised by the ecclesiastical commission over the preceding eight weeks failed to reach the floor of convocation. The proctors in the lower house instead set about the refurbishing of the disciplinary powers of the clergy, the better to contain the fallout from the controversy surrounding the work of the ecclesiastical commission. On 11 December, the lower house requested that the prolocutor bring to the attention of the bishops in the upper house "several books of very dangerous consequence to the Christian religion, and the Church of England particularly." The first book named was Stephen Nye's *Brief Notes upon the Creed of St. Athanasius*. It was cited alongside the "two letters relating to the present Convocation," the defenses of the ecclesiastical commission attributed to Gilbert Burnet and Humphrey Prideaux. The clergy of the lower house inquired of the bishops "in what way, and how far . . . the convocation may proceed" in suppressing such books and censuring their authors. On 13 December, Bishop Compton, his growing wariness of Tillotson and Burnet seemingly outweighing his active collaboration with the commission, concurred with the clergy regarding the "ill consequence of those books." Upon investigation, however, Compton remained uncertain, "how far the convocation might proceed in that affair."[65] The same day, the convocation was adjourned to 24 January 1690 and soon after dissolved with the convention Parliament without any tangible accomplishments.

The aftershock of the controversy surrounding comprehension struck Oxford in the spring, when Arthur Bury, rector of Exeter College, published *The Naked Gospel*, a work of creedal minimalism that castigated the "metaphysics" of "modern theology" and reduced the whole of the Gospel to "repentance and faith." Bury allowed that mysteries such as the doctrine of the Trinity persisted in religion, but he contended their comprehension was "needless to saving faith." As such, Bury could only agree with the ecclesiastical commissioners who sought to mitigate the force of the Athanasian Creed, disputing not its content but only "those rigid sentences, which denounce everlasting destruction to those who believe them not."[66] In a subsequent edition of *The Naked Gospel*, Bury claimed that he had intended the book as a contribution to the project of Protestant reconciliation, "the great affair

[63] George Royce to Robert Nelson, 18 Jan 1689/90, Add MS 45511, f. 34, BL; and see White Kennett's memorandum on the election in Lansdowne MS 1039, f. 7, BL.

[64] *HMC Seventh Report*, part II, Ormonde MSS, 759; Birch, *Life of Tillotson*, 202.

[65] "An Historical Account of the Present Convocation," in Long, *Vox cleri*, 69, 72.

[66] Arthur Bury, *The Naked Gospel* (1690), 8, 51–52, 59.

which convocation was to meet about." Like Nye, Bury rather cleverly enlisted his tract in the comprehension debates. The objective of *The Naked Gospel*, he claimed, was to inspire "a more comprehensive charity than many have attained to." Of course, *The Naked Gospel* appeared months too late to be of any use to the convocation, the dissolution of which Bury attributed exclusively to "the temper of the lower house of convocation."[67]

Though Bury's book did not revive the moribund project of comprehension, it did not go unnoticed. Indeed, the *Naked Gospel's* heterodoxy became another item added to the growing list of the rector's alleged offenses, including incontinence, selling of offices, and negligence of duty, all of which soon attracted the attention of the ordinary Bishop Jonathan Trelawny of Exeter.[68] Bury resorted to physical force to impede the bishop's visitation, barring him on one occasion from entering the college chapel, and on a subsequent occasion shutting the college gates against him. These tactics only succeeded in delaying Trelawny's visitation and, on 26 July 1690, Bury was ejected from his rectory. On 19 August, a convocation of the university issued a judgment and decree against *The Naked Gospel* as containing "impious and heretical" propositions and charged that the book "destroys the foundations of the primitive faith." The book was forbidden to be read by students of the university and ordered to be "burnt by an infamous hand" in the area of the schools.[69]

Though steeped in local college politics, the Bury affair exhibited broad continuities with the earlier comprehension debates in London. Bury was hounded not only by Bishop Trelawny but also by the two deans William Jane and Henry Aldrich, who engineered the condemnation of *The Naked Gospel*.[70] All three had previously refused to serve on the ecclesiastical commission, and the latter two led the opposition to comprehension in the lower house of convocation. Moreover, Thomas Long, a predendary at Trelawny's cathedral at Exeter and the author of the popular anticomprehension tract *Vox cleri*, returned to print in 1691 to excoriate "the charitable heresy of the latitudinarians" exemplified in the irenicism of Bury's *Naked Gospel*.[71] There seemed to be a palpable sense of relief that Bishop Trelawny and the university had acted resolutely in orthodoxy's defense where the convocation at Westminster had failed. The archdeacon of Wiltshire, Robert Woodward, congratulated Arthur Charlett on the condemnation.[72] The nonjuring dean of Worcester, George Hickes, was similarly elated at the courageous display of "public censure."[73] George Smalridge of Christ Church, Oxford wondered whether the university

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[67] Arthur Bury, *The Naked Gospel*, 2nd ed. (London, 1691), i–ii; William Nicholls, *An Answer to an Heretical Book called, The Naked Gospel* (London, 1691), 88; *The Account Examined; or, A Vindication of Dr. Arthur Bury* (London, 1690), 5.

[68] *An Account of the Proceedings of the Right Reverend Father in God Jonathan Lord Bishop of Exeter in his late Visitation of Exeter College in Oxford*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1690), 31–32.

[69] The text of the judgment is reprinted in Thomas Long, *An Answer to a Socinian Treatise, call'd, The Named Gospel* (London, 1691), 3–7; *Judicium & decretum Universitatis Oxoniensis latum in convocatione habita August 19, anno Dom. 1690* (London, 1690); White Kennett, Ecclesiastical History Notes, Lansdowne MS 1024, f. 69, BL; Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 4 vols., ed. P. Bliss (Hildesheim, 1969), 4:482–84.

[70] Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 30–40.

[71] Long, *Answer to a Socinian Treatise*, 18; Nicholls, *Answer to an Heretical Book*, 88–89.

[72] Robert Woodward to Arthur Charlett, 26 August 1690, Ballard MS 34, f. 159, Bodleian Library.

[73] George Hickes to Arthur Charlett, 18 August 1690, Ballard MS 12, f. 63, Bodleian Library.

might have gone farther than merely condemning the work and inquired whether the statutes permitted "punishing the authors of heretical books."[74]

While many churchmen cheered the enforcement of orthodoxy, others saw in the Oxford condemnation ominous signs of resurgent clerical authority. Arthur Bury's defenders railed against the university as men who would "set up among themselves a Holy Inquisition."[75] The fiery Whig schoolmaster James Parkinson similarly insisted that "the University are not the proper judges of heresy; that they have no statute (as I can hear of) for burning of books."[76] When Thomas Firmin republished a large collection of antitrinitarian tracts in 1691, a new essay titled "An Exhortation to a Free and impartial Enquiry into the Doctrines of Religion" served as its preface.[77] As the prospects of Protestant reconciliation dimmed, the pretense that antitrinitarian writers were contributing to a discourse of comprehension was largely abandoned. The Oxford condemnation and the chorus of Anglican church-men demanding a more strenuous exercise of discipline threatened to transform the controversy into a referendum on ecclesiastical authority.

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The trinitarian controversy exploded just as the likelihood of further alterations to the ecclesiastical constitution diminished. The first stirrings of the controversy coincided with the revolutionary crisis in church and state and the ensuing period of political and ecclesiastical reconstruction. By 1691, however, the church had been effectively settled: comprehension was a dead issue, convocation was in abeyance, and in prac-tice, "King William's toleration" proved a good deal more capacious than the narrow indulgence passed by Parliament in May 1689.[78] The episcopal vacancies left by death and deprivation had been filled up, for the most part, with reliable Williamite divines drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the London controversialists. Bishop Wettenhall's judgment on the value of further controversy seems even more sensible in hindsight: the establishment was safe, the articles and liturgy unal-tered, and toleration a fact of law. Doctrinal dispute simply risked "unsettling the whole superstructure."[79]

[74] [Smalridge?] to Atterbury, 1 September 1690, in *The Epistolary Correspondence, Visitation Charges, Speeches and Miscellanies of the Right Reverend Francis Atterbury, D.D.*, 5 vols., ed. J. Nichols (London, 1783), 1:5–6.

[75] *Two letters touching the Trinity and Incarnation. The First Urging the Belief of the Athanasian Creed. The Second, an Answer thereunto* (1690), 3; Pierre Allix, *A Defence of the Brief History of the Unitarians Against Dr. Sherlock's Answer in His Vindication of the Holy Trinity* (London, 1691), 1; Jean Le Clerc, *An Historical Vindication of the Naked Gospel* (London, 1691), ii.

[76] James Parkinson, *The Fire's Continued at Oxford, or, The Decree of the Convocation for Burning The Naked Gospel Considered* (London, 1690), 13.

[77] "An Exhortation to a Free and Impartial Enquiry into the Doctrines of Religion," in *The Faith of One God who is Only the Father* (London, 1691), 3; William Freke, *A Vindication of the Unitarians, against a late Reverend Author on the Trinity*, 2nd ed. (London, 1690), ii.

[78] Henry Horwitz, "Comprehension in the Later Seventeenth Century: A Postscript," *Church History* 34 (September 1965): 342–48; Jonathan I. Israel, "William III and Toleration," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, 1991), 129–70.

[79] Wettenhall, *Suit for Forbearance*, 7–8.

Curiously enough, the new Williamite governors of the established church played no small part in keeping the trinitarian controversy alive, though many of its excesses had seemingly already redounded to their discredit. Over the next four years, the revolution bishops Edward Stillingfleet, Edward Fowler, John Tillotson, Gilbert Burnet, and John Williams, all men of the London ascendancy and leading figures in the ecclesiastical commission, weighed in on the dispute. As conscientious prelates, these men were no doubt mindful of the obligations of their new offices. Their ally, the London clergyman and future metropolitan William Wake, was certainly conscious of "the danger we shall run of being thought to desert the Church after having got her preferments, i.e. if the Socinians be not attacked."[80] It is not inconceivable that the bishops also wished to deflect the subtle charges of heterodoxy incurred for their alleged latitudinarianism, their earlier compromises on the force of the Athanasian Creed, or their conspicuous friendship with the likes of Thomas Firmin and John Locke.[81] Most important, the new bishops, befitting clergymen long inured to the cut and thrust of religious controversy, betrayed an almost naïve faith in the power of public disputation to vindicate orthodoxy. On the whole, their performances hewed fairly closely to the Anglican rationalist line, defending the use of reason in religion while making necessary allowance for the persistence of mysteries.[82] Stephen Nye mockingly responded to the collective output of the bishops, holding their claims to the Anglican rationalist tradition against them. "I thought the whole pretense of these men," wrote Nye, "had been only this, to free religion from all uncouth, odd and absurd notions, to make it easy, intelligible and rational."[83]

The caution exhibited by the Anglican rationalists in their allowance of mystery was famously eschewed by their erstwhile colleague William Sherlock. Sherlock was the prodigal son of the London Anglicans. A product of Interregnum Cambridge and a leading voice in the controversy with Roman Catholics during the reign of James II, he was among the ten London clergymen recommended for promotion to William of Orange by Gilbert Burnet at the end of 1688.[84] Sherlock, however, refused to take the oaths to the new sovereigns and was deprived of the mastership of the Temple. Sherlock's position on the oaths softened over the course of 1690, and he finally took them in August, mere weeks after the Jacobite defeat on the Boyne River in Ireland. For his newfound allegiance, Sherlock was allowed to share in the court favor bestowed upon the other London Anglicans; he was restored to the Temple, resumed his royal chaplaincy, and in June 1691

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[80] William Wake to Arthur Charlett, 2 April [1691], Ballard MS 2, ff. 57–59, Bodleian Library; although for Wake's assessment of the futility of the controversy, see Wake to Charlett, 5 February 1691/2, Ballard MS 3, ff. 51–52, Bodleian Library.

[81] Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 4:50–51; Birch, *Life of Tillotson*, 321; John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), 373–74.

[82] For an analysis, see Gerard Reedy, *Robert South (1634–1716): An Introduction to his Life and Sermons* (Cambridge, 1992), 122–51.

[83] [Stephen Nye], *Considerations on the Explication of the Doctrine of the Trinity occasioned by Four Sermons preached by His Grace the Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury; a Sermon preached by the Lord-Bishop of Worcester; a Discourse by the Lord Bishop of Salisbury* (1694), 8.

[84] *Diary of the Times of Charles the Second by the Honourable Henry Sidney*, 2 vols., ed. R. W. Blencowe (London, 1843), 2:281–88.

was named dean of St. Paul's.[85] Coinciding with his acceptance of the new regime in church and state, Sherlock's contribution to the trinitarian controversy, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity*, signaled the return of a forceful expositor of the Anglican rationalist tradition.[86] Unlike his colleagues, Sherlock did not depend upon the concept of mystery to limit the scope of human reason and defend the doctrine of the Trinity from critics. The preface to his work audaciously promised a "very easy and intelligible notion of a trinity in unity."[87]

The orthodox Christian, Sherlock explained, must fulfill two requirements in explicating the doctrine of the holy Trinity: the maintenance of three distinct persons in the Godhead and the affirmation of a single undivided substance. "The difficulty," Sherlock explains, "is how three distinct substantial persons can subsist in one numerical essence." To meet the challenge, Sherlock articulated a theory of divine personhood based upon a language of consciousness redolent of René Descartes and the Cambridge Platonists.[88] A divine person is an "infinite mind" possessed of "self-consciousness," that is, the intimacy of a mind with its own workings. Thus, the Trinity could be said to comprise "three distinct and infinite minds," distinguished from one another by "self-consciousness" of their own respective operations. Yet this trinity of infinite minds comprised a unity in that the persons are "united by a mutual consciousness to each other," that is, possessed of the same intimacy with the other minds as with their own. Sherlock's novel and ingenious reconceptualization of trinitarian theology certainly delivered, as he had promised, "a plain and intelligible account of this great and venerable mystery," one that seemingly eliminated the alleged contradictions targeted by antitrinitarians.[89] Indeed, the work was initially hailed by many as a masterpiece of theological reasoning, which significantly advanced the frontier of the Anglican rationalist tradition well into territory traditionally hedged off by mystery.[90] Even Thomas Firmin was reportedly informed that Sherlock's book would surely "reclaim him from his heresy."[91]

The initial favorable receptions of Sherlock's *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity* soon gave way to what one contemporary described as a "most terrible after-clap."[92] The dean's conception of "three infinite minds" was branded "polytheism, or plurality of gods." His theory of "mutual consciousness," it was charged, did not unify the divine persons into a single God; on the contrary,

[85] See Kenneth Padley, "Rendering unto Caesar in the Age of Revolution: William Sherlock and William of Orange," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, no. 4 (October 2008): 680–96; and see the commonplace book of William Lloyd, Bishop of Norwich, Add MS 40160, f. 79, BL, where the nonjuring bishop of Norwich William Lloyd marked Sherlock's name with the label "APOSTATE."

[86] Although a satirical letter advised Sherlock to "take care as to retract your anti-Socinian writings (to put yourself in the good graces of your new Primate)," the latitudinarian Tillotson. *The Copy of a Letter sent to Dr. Sherlock upon the Occasion of his Preaching at St. Margaret's on Jan. 30th, 1691* [1691].

[87] William Sherlock, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God, occasioned by the Brief Notes on the Creed and St, Athanasius, and the Brief History of the Unitarians, or Socinians* (London, 1690), sig A2r.

[88] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 109–14; and Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 129–61, have variously traced the Cambridge Platonist and Remonstrant roots of Sherlock's conception of the Trinity.

[89] Sherlock, *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity*, 48–49, 68, 98–99.

[90] Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 4:388.

[91] *Account of Mr. Firmin's Religion*, 53–54.

[92] *Ibid.*, 54; Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, 2:203–22; Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, 163–65; Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 122–37; Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 129–61.

it ratified their mutual alterity.[93] Stephen Nye lambasted Sherlock's "cabal or senate of Gods."[94] Another antitrinitarian rather shrewdly predicted that Sherlock, in spite of his vigorous trinitarianism, would soon find himself ranked among the Socinians and rationalists as another "destroyer of mysteries" for rendering the doctrine of the Trinity "a plain and easy truth."[95] This remark proved prescient, for the conservative Anglican response to Sherlock was predicated on the wholesale vindication of the place of mystery in religion.

Canon of Christ Church, Oxford and prebendary of Westminster Robert South eviscerated his former friend's scholarship and theological reasoning in the vituperative *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's book*. Moreover, he did so with a robust deference to both authority and tradition. The Trinity, South wrote, "is one of the greatest mysteries, if not absolutely the greatest in our religion." South used the notion of mystery not as a bar to further speculation but as the grounds of deference to tradition. In the twelve centuries since the first council at Nicaea, the Catholic Church has "not only held the same notion of a trinity, but expressed [it] in the same way and words." South took such intellectual and terminological constancy as evidence that the church had proceeded as far in the matter "as the reason of man could, or can, go." South then deployed the traditional scholastic doctrine of the Trinity in place of a "new, mushroom, unheard of notion, set up by one confident man preferring himself before all antiquity."[96]

Sherlock erred in identifying the three persons of the Trinity with "three distinct, infinite minds or spirits," which necessarily entailed three gods, a "perfect tritheism."[97] On the contrary, South argues, God is but "one and the same infinite mind," distinguished by three different modes of subsisting. The persons of the Trinity were not themselves modes; they were simply differentiated by their respective modes of relating to one another. The Father is characterized by "generation" of the Son; the Son by "filiation" from the Father. Father and Son are characterized by "spiration" of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost by "procession" from Father and Son. South would not elaborate upon what such relational processes consisted of: "Since such mysteries exceed the comprehension of humane reason, I am not in the least ashamed, most readily to own my ignorance thereof."[98]

South's intervention in the trinitarian controversy provided a standard around which the conservative clergy could rally, less for its scholastic exposition of trinitarian orthodoxy than for its full-throated affirmation of the centrality of mystery in religion. Mystery, for South, did not function simply as the horizon of theological knowledge, as it did for the so-called latitudinarian bishops who reluctantly conceded

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[93] *Brief Observations upon the Vindication of the Trinity and Incarnation by the Learned Dr. W. Sherlock* (N.D.), 5, 9, 12; Wettenhall, *Antapology of the Melancholy Stander-By*, 32.

[94] [Stephen Nye], *Considerations of the Explications of the Doctrine of the Trinity by Dr. Wallis, Dr. Sherlock, Dr. S—th, Dr. Cudworth and Mr. Hooker* (1693), 12.

[95] *An Impartial Account of the Word Mystery as it is Taken in the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1691), 20.

[96] Robert South, *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book, Entituled A Vindication of the Holy and Everblessed Trinity, &c.* (London, 1693), 1, 24–25, 283.

[97] See the contemporary ballad, "The Battle Royal": "When Preb replied like thunder/And roared out 'twas no wonder/Since Gods the Dean had three, sir/And more by two than he, sir/For he had got but one," printed in *Posthumous works of the late Reverend Robert South, D.D.* (London, 1717), 128–29.

[98] South, *Animadversions*, 1, 21–22, 24–25, 119–24, 243–45, 283; I have here generally followed Stephen Hampton's illuminating theological analysis of the work; see Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, 143–50.

the limits of human reason.[99] Rather, it deeply informed his conceptions of both piety and polity. God, preached South at Westminster Abbey in April 1694, has "hedged [religion] in with a sacred and majestic obscurity." Mysteries were not matters for speculation, over which honest men and orthodox churches could disagree; they were *credenda*, things to be believed. Their incomprehensibility served "to keep the soul low and humble." Moreover, such mysteries heightened the dependence of men upon authority, "the judging of the whole church in general and of their respective teachers and spiritual guides in particular." Mystery, for South, comprised one root of the clericalism that was rapidly becoming the central conceit of a new postrevolutionary strain of Anglican high churchmanship.[100] Echoes of South's repudiation of rationalism were soon commonplace among the writings of the men who came to dominate the postrevolutionary High Church movement.[101]

South couched his intervention in the trinitarian controversy in unmistakably partisan terms.[102] He was, he claimed, defending "the old doctrine of the trinity, against the sentiments of those new dons, who perhaps for fashion-sake, own a trinity and some such other articles of the Church of England."[103] South opened his initial critique of William Sherlock with a broader assault on the clergy of the London ascendancy, their advocacy of comprehension, and the consequent proliferation of heterodoxy.[104] "When providence took the work of destroying the Church of England out of the papists' hands," South mused, it might well have been delivered into the custody of those who "would have been contented with her preferments, without either attempting to give up her rights and liturgy, or deserting her doctrine." It has, he lamented, "proved much otherwise." The revolution, South implied, was at once responsible for the theological climate that bred Sherlock's heresies and the disciplinary lassitude that permitted them to go "without any public control."[105] Sherlock's *Vindication*, he noted, was "fitter to be censured by Convocation" than himself. [106]

If, as Philip Dixon claims, the overweening rationalism of Sherlock's *Vindication* marked the theological turning point in the trinitarian controversy, then surely South's devastating and aggressively political ripostes constituted a political turning point.[107] In South's wake came a number of partisan pamphlets, many from nonjurors, which attributed the entire trinitarian controversy to the

[99] Reedy, *Robert South*, 145; Sullivan, *John Toland*, 98.

[100] Robert South, "Christianity Mysterious and the Wisdom of God in making it so prov'd in a Sermon Preached at Westminster-Abbey, April 29, 1694," in *Sermons Preached upon several occasions,* 6 vols. (London, 1737), 3:212, 225, 227–28, 235, 242–44.

[101] W. Kolbrener, "*The Charge of Socinianism*: Charles Leslie's High Church Defense of 'True Religion,'" *Journal of the Historical Society* 3, no. 1 (2003): 1–23; Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-juror Thought* (Newark, 1993), 54–59.

[102] One critic believed his works "smelled so strong of Jacobitism" that they seemed the work of some "non-swearing divine" rather than a beneficed clergyman. *A Letter out of the Countrey to a Friend in the City concerning a late Book Entituled, Tritheism charged upon Dr. Sherlock's New Notion of the Trinity* (London, 1695), 2.

[103] Robert South, *Tritheism charged upon Dr. Sherlock's new notion of the Trinity* (London, 1695), 304.

[104] Somewhat unfairly, it should be noted, as Sherlock was hardly a proponent of comprehension; see Sherlock, *Apology for writing against Socinians*.

[105] South, *Animadversions*, i–v.

[106] Ibid., 374–77.

[107] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 110, 135.

revolutionary ascendancy of men of "latitudinarian principles" in the established church and their supposedly cherished projects for comprehending dissenters and antitrinitarian heretics within its communion. The Church of England, proclaimed the Irish nonjuror Charles Leslie, had been delivered over to "the Devil and his Socinian-Latitudinarian ministers."[108] The deprived dean of Worcester, George Hickes, bemoaned the state of the postrevolutionary English clergy, as "latitude in projects and opinions, looseness in discipline, and departing in practice from their principles have made them the scorn and contempt of the world." He accused the advocates of comprehension of seeking to dispense with the Sabbath, infant baptism, the two sacraments, and the holy Trinity in pursuit of a "union yet more glorious and comprehensive," which would include Anabaptists, Quakers, and Socinians.[109] Leslie famously accused Archbishop Tillotson of Socinianism for his doctrines of the atonement, the Trinity, and punishment of sins. "O God," exclaimed Leslie, "in what a condition is this poor Church, these miserable misled people of England, when such doctrine is taught from the Throne of Canterbury!" And from that great height, Tillotson promoted only, "those of his own principles, the latitudinarians; and by this means, he may bid fair to pervert the whole nation."[110] The cumulative sense was that of revolution politics threatening to overwhelm the theological dimensions of the trinitarian controversy. "'Tis expedient," the Whig parliamentarian Sir Robert Howard dryly observed in 1696, "that all Williamites should be represented as Socinians."[111] An anonymous defender of Tillotson considered such charges nothing less than a full-scale assault on the postrevolution Church of England, "that every bishop and presbyter of the Church of England that have owned Dr. Tillotson to be Archbishop of Canterbury may be esteemed not only as betrayers of the Church's rights, but also as betrayers of the Christian religion itself."[112]

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In the April 1694 sermon that has come to be known as "Christianity Mysterious and the Wisdom of God in making it so," Robert South argued that the persistence of mystery in religion justified the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. In service of his robust clericalism, South quoted Malachi 2:7, that "the priests lips should preserve knowledge," and quipped that such a remark would have the prophet branded a "a man of heat, or a high-church-man, nowadays."[113] For a growing number of men so labeled, the trinitarian controversy was not a theological problem but a problem

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[108] Charles Leslie, *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson considered* (Edinburgh, 1695), 2, 31.

[109] George Hickes, *Some Discourses upon Dr. Burnet and Dr. Tillotson, occasioned by the Late Funeral Sermon of the Former upon the Latter* (London, 1695), 47, 67–68; Samuel Hill, *A Vindication of the Primitive Fathers against the imputations of Gilbert Lord Bishop of Sarum* (1695); and see Pierre Allix, *Animadversions on Mr. Hill's Book entituled, A Vindication of the Primitive Fathers, &c.* (London, 1695).

[110] Leslie, *The Charge of Socinianism*, 4–6, 9, 16, 23; and see Thomas Wagstaffe, *A Letter out of Suffolk to a Friend in London* (London, 1694).

[111] Robert Howard, *A Twofold Vindication of the Late Arch-Bishop of Canterbury and of the Author of the History of Religion* (London, 1696), 38, 49; and see also John Williams, *A Vindication of the Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our B. Saviour* (London, 1695), 13.

[112] *Reflections on a Libel Printed, Entituled, The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered* (London, 1696), 65.

[113] South, "Christianity Mysterious," 243.

of ecclesiastical discipline.[114] The sense among High Church men, as the conservative clergy were increasingly known in the latter 1690s, was that the Williamite bishops and divines had mismanaged the controversy, refuting error rather than suppressing heresy. As the nonjuring historian Henry Dodwell advised Bishop William Lloyd, the new governors of the established church would never best "your new adversaries, the Socinians" unless they warmed to the vigorous exercise of ecclesiastical discipline. The security of the whole faith, Dodwell wrote, depends upon the "power of rejecting and stopping the mouths of heretics, and rebutting them with all authority."[115] The abeyance of discipline contributed to the growing sense among high churchmen that the Church of England was not well served by its new fathers who, out of regard to tender consciences, deference to the civil power, or perhaps some secret sympathy with heretics, had failed to act decisively in the maintenance of orthodoxy.

Given the dormancy of convocation and the suspicion of the Williamite episcopate, Anglican high churchmen sought to exercise discipline with the instruments they had at their disposal. In 1695, Robert South reportedly upbraided the divines of Oxford "as being afraid to condemn heresy, deism, Socinianism, tritheism, lest they should fall from ecclesiastical grace, and the door of preferment should be shut against them."[116] South was widely thought to be the animating spirit behind the university's condemnation of the young clergyman Joseph Bingham for a sermon preached at St. Peter-in-the-East on 28 October 1695. Bingham's meditation on the doctrine of the Trinity, in which he spoke of "three minds or spirits in the unity of the Godhead," seemed to veer dangerously close to the formulations of William Sherlock.[117] The university convened at South's prompting on 25 November, at which time Vice-Chancellor Fitzherbert Adams and the heads of the colleges and halls formally condemned the notion that "*there are three infinite distinct minds and substances in the Trinity*" as "false, impious and heretical."[118] The published version was careful to point out that "the propositions above-mentioned are Dr. Sherlock's."[119] Indeed, rumors circulated about the town that the sermon itself was but a "contrivance and a juggle," a setup engineered solely to gratify South's desire to see Sherlock formally condemned.[120] Yet many cheered the condemnation of Bingham as they had that of Arthur Bury. The nonjuror Abednego Seller congratulated Arthur Charlett on the decree: "May all the other heresies of the present age

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[114] Hickes, *Some Discourses upon Dr. Burnet and Dr. Tillotson*, 45–46; Leslie, *The Charge of Socinianism*, 31–32.

[115] Henry Dodwell to Bp of Coventry & Lichfield, 15 Feb 1696, Add MS 4275, f. 192, BL.

[116] William Sherlock, *A Modest Examination of the Authority and Reasons of the Late Decree of the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford* (London, 1696), 3.

[117] Joseph Bingham, "A Sermon on the Trinity," in *The Works of the Rev. Joseph Bingham, M.A.*, 10 vols., ed. Richard Bingham (Oxford, 1855), 10:361–83; the controversy surrounding the sermon is recounted in "The Life of the Author" in *Works*, 1: xviii–xx.

[118] Arthur Charlett to Tanner, 25 November 1695, Tanner MS 24, f. 90, Bodleian Library; *Reflections on the Poems made upon the Siege and Taking of Namur* (London, 1696), 9–10.

[119] *An Account of the Decree of the University of Oxford, against Some Heretical Tenets* (London, 1695); Sherlock, *Modest Examination*, 3.

[120] Joseph Bingham to Arthur Charlett, 21 January 1695/6, Ballard MS 15, f. 12, Bodleian Library; see also Bingham's lengthy self-defense in Joseph Bingham to Arthur Charlett, 12 December 1695, Ballard MS 15, ff. 9–10, Bodleian Library.

fall under the same just condemnation."[121] George Hickes similarly praised the judgment from his Bagshot redoubt, hoping that it signaled a new offensive against heretical books on the part of the church. "We should begin from [Thomas Hobbes's] *Leviathan* to the present day," he pronounced; "it is not yet too late."[122]

There were, however, many who questioned the legality of the Oxford decree, and in their contestations lay the origins of the broader convocation controversy. Sherlock predictably excoriated the university for arrogating "the authority of declaring and making heresy."[123] But university members denied that the decree constituted an adjudication of heresy. The decree, wrote the principal of Jesus College, Jonathan Edwards, "was made with a particular regard to members of their own body." It was aimed at Joseph Bingham, rather than Sherlock. "If Dr. Sherlock be of the same mind with that other person," wrote the Savilian Professor of Geometry John Wallis, somewhat disingenuously, "that is not our fault."[124] The university, Edwards explained, was merely observing the "strict and sacred obligation to prevent as far as in them lies, the growth of any pernicious doctrines in religion."[125] The Tory lawyer Sir Bartholomew Shower reminded Sherlock that the decree was not a judicial proceeding at all, "but a declaration rather of their opinion by way of caution to the members of the university under their care."[126] The new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Tenison, disagreed, informing Vice-Chancellor Adams on 24 December 1695 that jurists had been consulted and they found the proceedings "a high usurpation upon his Majesty's prerogative and a manifest violation of the laws of this realm." Adams reassured the archbishop that he and his brethren were only acting "to put a stop to some novel opinions about the greatest article of our Christian faith."[127]

In marked contrast to the tactics of his predecessor and brethren of the London ascendancy, Archbishop Tenison responded to the persistent doctrinal disputes not with theological engagement but with political action. In February 1696, he prevailed upon William to issue a set of directions to the episcopate "for preserving the unity of the church and the purity of the Christian faith, concerning the Holy Trinity."[128] In what seemed to be a vindication of orthodoxy, the directions mandated that the doctrine of the Trinity taught must be agreeable to scripture, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the three creeds. Furthermore, they forbade the use of new terms in explication of the doctrine. However, the prohibition of any "public opposition between preachers" seemed to tar all the disputants with the same brush, regardless

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[121] Abednego Seller to Arthur Charlett, 2 December [1695], Ballard MS 35, f. 38, Bodleian Library.

[122] George Hickes to Arthur Charlett, 8 December 1695, Ballard MS 12, f. 109, Bodleian Library.

[123] Sherlock, *Modest Examination*, 7; see also [William Wright], *A Letter to a Member of Parliament occasioned by a Letter to a Convocation Man* (London 1697), 53–60.

[124] John Wallis, *An Answer to Dr. Sherlock's Examination of the Oxford Decree*, 2nd ed. (1696), 3.

[125] Jonathan Edwards, *Remarks upon a Book Lately Published by Dr. Will Sherlock Dean of St. Paul's, &c. Entituled A Modest Examination of the Oxford Decree* (Oxford, 1695), 15, 16–17.

[126] Sir Bartholomew Shower, *The Master of the Temple as Bad a Lawyer as the Dean of Pauls is a Divine* (London, 1696), 11.

[127] Thomas Tenison to Fitzherbert Adams, 24 December 1695, MS 799, f. 149, BL; Adams to Tenison, 28 December 1695, MS 799, fol. 151, BL; Thomas Tension to Fitzherbert Adams, 24 December 1695, Ballard MS 9, ff. 28–29, Bodleian Library.

[128] White Kennett, Ecclesiastical History Notes, Lansdowne 1024, f. 151, BL; Edward Carpenter, *Thomas Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1948), 299–300.

of the soundness of their doctrine. The demand that the clergy "abstain from all bitter invectives and scurrilous language" would likely have been perceived as a shot at Robert South and the nonjurors, whose disparaging pamphlets routinely breeched standards of clerical decorum.[129] The *Directions* rather vaguely directed bishops (with the assistance of judges and magistrates) to restrain those who dispute or publish "against the Christian faith concerning the doctrine of the blessed trinity," but they by no means recommended the reconstruction of ecclesiastical discipline for which high churchmen clamored.[130]

The genius of Francis Atterbury's epochal *Letter to a Convocation-Man*, which appeared in late 1696, was its ability to channel Anglican discontent stemming from the trinitarian controversy into a movement for restoring convocation as the keystone of ecclesiastical discipline.[131] A product of the Christ Church, Oxford setting of Robert South, William Jane, and Henry Aldrich, and a client of Bishop Trelawny, under whom he had served during the deprivation of Arthur Bury, Francis Atterbury conceived of the *Letter* in collaboration with a veteran of the Bingham affair, Sir Bartholomew Shower.[132] The *Letter* proclaimed "a universal conspiracy of deists, Socinians, latitudinarians, deniers of mysteries and pretended explainers of them, to undermine and overthrow the Catholic faith," singling out as evidence William Sherlock's *Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity* and Gilbert Burnet's *Four Discourses* alongside the more notorious works of John Toland and John Locke. "If ever there was need of convocation, since Christianity was established in this kingdom," Atterbury pled, "there is need of one now." Much of the *Letter* reads like other tracts from the debate surrounding the condemnation of Bingham, examining the respective rights and powers of the variety of instruments available for the suppression of heterodoxy. After considering the limited powers of the bishops, the universities, and the House of Commons, Atterbury concluded that only the convocation, the "highest ecclesiastical court or assembly," was the proper forum for such a crisis, numbering among its responsibilities "the preventing or suppressing of heresies and schisms."[133]

"Now the controversy about the trinity being pretty much cooled," observed the future bishop of London Edmund Gibson in April 1697, "the dispute about Convocation is like to succeed it."[134] The controversies were in fact largely perceived as continuous, and many of Atterbury's respondents accused him and his allies of simply renewing their campaign against William Sherlock. The recorder of Oxford William Wright thought the *Letter* another instance of "the uncharitable fury which hath pursued" the dean of St. Paul's and which had "wounded religion more than any

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[129] *Reflexions on the Good Temper, and Fair Dealing, of the Animadverter upon Dr. Sherlock's Vindication of the Holy Trinity* (London, 1695).

[130] *Directions to our Arch-bishops and Bishops for Preserving the Unity of the Church and the Purity of the Christian faith, concerning the Holy Trinity* (London, 1695).

[131] But see Mark Goldie, "The Nonjurors, Episcopacy, and the Origins of the Convocation Controversy," in *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689–1759*, ed. Eveline Cruickshanks (Edinburgh, 1982), 15–35.

[132] Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 26–43, 48.

[133] Francis Atterbury, *A Letter to a Convocation Man, Concerning the Rights, Powers and Privileges of that Body* (London, 1697), 2, 6, 8–15, 29, 36.

[134] Edmund Gibson to Thomas Tanner, Lambeth, 1 April 1697, Tanner MS 23, f. 1, Bodleian Library.

inferences which can be forced from his works."[135] The movement to restore convocation among "our high Church-men," the freethinker Matthew Tindal reasoned, was the result of "the government's depriving them of the power of persecuting their brethren."[136] William Wake thought Atterbury's whole case for the convocation was "to have that learned body join hands with the *Animadverter*," Robert South, to pronounce against Sherlock's explication of the Trinity. Wake blackly joked that the dean must be thankful that the old writ *de haeretico comburendo* had been long put away, lest "his next motion be from his own chapter-house into Smithfield."[137]

Commissioned by Archbishop Tenison, Wake's massive rejoinder to Atterbury, *The Authority of Christian Princes over their ecclesiastical synods*, was a monument of Erastianism, snuffing out every High Church pretension to the independent exercise of ecclesiastical discipline.[138] It ridiculed the spectacle of a church synod assembling "to declare to all the world that it believes in our Savior's divinity; and holds a trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead," as well as the notion that the current controversies could somehow be attributed to the failure to do so. Worse, he found Atterbury's vision of a "convocation empowered to determine what they please to be heretical" downright troubling. Heresy, Wake argued, was a matter for the law; a timely reinstatement of the licensing regime that had lapsed in 1695 would do more for the maintenance of orthodoxy "than ten thousand canons made by the convocation, though an anathema were added to every one of them."[139] The Blasphemy Act passed by Parliament in the midst of the convocation controversy threatened loss of office or imprisonment to those who would "deny any one of the persons in the holy trinity to be God or shall assert or maintain there are more Gods than one."[140] Designed in some measure to remedy the end of censorship, the rather ineffectual act was further evidence of a willingness to confer the custody of orthodoxy to the state. The Williamite divines who supported such legislation and denied the necessity of recalling convocation, it seems safe to conclude, palpably feared the prospects of independent clerical authority a great deal more than the circulation of heterodoxy.

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By the last years of the reign of William III, ecclesiastical politics had assumed the form that it would retain for the next two decades. The Williamite bishops and clergy ossified into something of a court party under Archbishop Tenison. The

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[135] [Wright], *Letter to a Member of Parliament*, 9.

[136] Matthew Tindal, *An Essay concerning the Power of the Magistrate and the Rights of Mankind in Matters of Religion* (London, 1697), 193–94.

[137] William Wake, *The Authority of Christian Princes over their Ecclesiastical Synods Asserted with particular respect to the Convocations of the Clergy of the Realm and Church of England* (London, 1697), 328–30.

[138] William Wake Diary, MS 2932, f. 80, Lambeth Palace Library; R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1813* (Cambridge, 1987), 28–38; Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 48–56; David Douglass, *English Scholars, 1660–1730*, 2nd ed. (London, 1951), 195–221; Isaac Kramnick, "Augustan Politics and English Historiography: The Debate on the English Past, 1730–35," *History and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1967): 33–56.

[139] Wake, *Authority of Christian Princes*, 312–13, 341–42; and see Raymond Astbury, "The Renewal of the Licensing Act in 1693 and its Lapse in 1695," *Library* 5th ser., 33 (1978): 296–322.

[140] Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics*, 234; 9 Gul. III, p. 6, n.4; and see David Hayton, "Moral Reform and Country Politics in the Late-Seventeenth Century House of Commons," *Past and Present* 128, no. 1 (August 1990): 48–91.

dynamic reformism of the London ascendancy of the late Restoration mellowed into a sober church whiggery, deeply Erastian in ecclesiology and somewhat less convinced of the sufficiency of reason to arrive at orthodoxy unaided. They found themselves increasingly dependent on the use of the royal supremacy to defend the revolution settlement and govern a fractious church. The obloquy of "latitudinarian" gave way to that of "Low Church," bestowed upon divines insufficiently zealous for the rights and privileges of the established church.[141] Anglican high churchmanship, meanwhile, coalesced from a vague disaffection with the revolution settlement and religious toleration into an organized movement for the refurbishing of ecclesiastical discipline, one that for all its effusions on behalf of episcopacy and monarchy routinely found itself at odds with the bishops and the Crown.[142] Anglican ecclesiastical parties at the turn of the eighteenth century were not distinct theological camps so much as distinct ecclesiological camps, differentiated primarily by their divergent concepts of public authority and its role in maintaining the integrity of the national faith.

If the revolution settlement was the primary catalyst of ecclesiastical polarization in the postrevolutionary period, the trinitarian controversy was in fact broadly determinative of the competing ecclesiastical programs espoused. The Church of England was no doubt divided prior to the onset of the controversy, but the latter channeled antipathies into concrete political ecclesiologies. The Williamite bishops could not govern the established church as "latitudinarian" controversialists in the public sphere, nor could they simply devolve disciplinary power to the body of lesser clergy broadly suspicious of both their orthodoxy and their legitimacy. Increasingly, they relied upon the state to protect a revolution settlement arguably more threatened by High Church reaction than radical heterodoxy. For its part, the High Church movement was forced to repent of some of its cherished hierarchalism, seeking to refurbish the independent disciplinary capacity of the clergy in the teeth of obstruction from both Crown and episcopate. Perhaps the most remarkable accomplishment on this score was the restoration of convocation in 1701, which would serve as the platform for an ambitious High Church program of Anglican renewal and the preeminent forum for the embittered ecclesiastical politics of the next two decades.[143] Even after William was succeeded by the vastly more sympathetic Queen Anne, high churchmen by no means reverted to their traditional courtly orientation; they continued to press for independent powers of deliberation and discipline, which the queen was often quite reluctant to grant them. In the wake of the trinitarian controversy, Anglican high churchmen had been rather dramatically disabused of their faith in the state.

The politics of enlightenment, then, must not be simply elided with "revolution politics." Church and state were not rocked by a controversy over the competing claims of private conscience and public authority, reason and orthodoxy, but rather by divergent iterations of public authority, both of which belonged to a world

[141] See, for instance, Henry Sacheverell, *The Character of a Low-Churchman* (London, 1702).

[142] On the nature of Anglican high church opposition, see Brent S. Sirota, "'The Leviathan Is Not Safely to Be Angered': The Convocation Controversy, Country Ideology, and Anglican High Churchmanship, 1689–1702," in *Religion and the State: Europe and North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Joshua B. Stein and Sargon G. Donabed (Lanham, MD, 2012), 41–62.

[143] G. V. Bennett, "The Convocation of 1710: An Anglican Attempt at Counter-Revolution," *Studies in Church History* 7 (Cambridge, 1971): 311–19.

substantially remade by revolution. Setting the trinitarian controversy of the 1690s in its revolutionary context makes manifest its affinities with other more overtly politicized theological controversies such as the rule of faith disputes during the reign of James II or the convocation controversy at the turn of the eighteenth century. From this perspective, it becomes possible to understand disputes over the doctrine of the Trinity as part of a broader complex of institutional crises befalling a Church of England unsettled in turn by Catholic absolutism and revolutionary upheaval. These connections are in no way intended to replace the well-established continuities with mid-seventeenth-century theological controversies, debates in foreign Protestant churches, or the subsequent trinitarian heterodoxies of William Whiston and Samuel Clarke. Nor do they require that the controversy be considered as a mere cipher for partisan politics. There was indeed a very real debate on the doctrine of the Trinity afoot in postrevolutionary England. However, it was largely as a disciplinary crisis that the trinitarian controversy served as a determinant of ecclesiastical polarization at the end of the seventeenth century.