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Religious Toleration and its Enemies: The Independent Divines and the Issue of Toleration during the English Civil War*

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"Patterns sanctified by great historiographic traditions," wrote J. H. Hexter, "tend to become fixed. Frequently these patterns are neither logical nor coherent, but the sanction of use and wont behind them is so powerful that researchers tend to force new materials into the time-honored model."¹ This contention is nowhere more manifest than in the historiography of the Puritan Revolution, where studies of religious developments and struggles during the English Civil War indeed reveal a "time honored model" and tend to convey an almost univocal argument concerning the Independents and the rise of the idea of religious toleration. "As early as 1643," wrote one expert on the issue of toleration, "when the English Parliament was obliged to ally with the Scots in the Solemn League and Covenant . . . the issue of toleration came to the fore." Consequently, because "the Presbyterian Scots wished to impose their Calvinist order on England, against the opposition on the parliamentary side of a core of Independents led by Oliver Cromwell and Sir Henry Vane the Younger," the Independents "became the leading opponents of Presbyterianism and supporters of a general toleration."²

This historical explanation of the role of the Independents in advancing the idea and practice of religious toleration is familiar to anyone who deals with the political and religious transformation of England during the Civil War. Its use so widely pervades the historiography of the Puritan Revolution that it has been accepted almost everywhere without the slightest doubt or criticism. For example, a prominent historian of the English Civil War does not hesitate to argue that "one of the main issues on which opinion had been divided in the Westminster Assembly was toleration, which was supported, for obvious rea-

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¹J. H. Hexter, "The Problem of the Presbyterian Independents," *Reappraisals in History* (London, 1961), p. 163.

²Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (New York, 1967), p. 170.

sons, by the Independent minority and detested by the Presbyterian majority."³ The very same argument—namely that the Independents in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, being in the minority, leaned toward general religious toleration against the menacing ambitions of the Presbyterian majority—has led even to the curious suggestion that “Independency . . . detested Presbyterianism almost as much as it did Laudianism.” The same writer reiterates the alleged close association between Independents and toleration, by claiming that “after the battle of Naseby, when Cromwell’s star rose even higher in the political firmament, Independency, basing itself on toleration and the right to complete freedom of worship, also increased in power and popularity.”⁴ It is no surprise, then, that “Presbyterianism” almost always appears in the historiography of the Civil War as “the religious correlate of conservatism,” opposed to toleration, while the “adversaries” of Presbyterians included, among others, “the Independents in Parliament and the army, the Puritan ministers who favored congregational autonomy and opposed compulsion in religion.”⁵

Given the prominence in the historiography of the Puritan Revolution of this alleged correlation between Independents and the rise of religious toleration, one can only wonder how historians have forced their materials into this “time honored model,” and why they have apparently gone out of their way to prove it, despite overwhelming contemporary claims to the contrary. In vain would cry Roger Williams in 1644 that “under the wing of the Civil Magistrate do three great factions shelter themselves” in their uncompromised denunciation of religious toleration by strongly upholding the magistrate’s role in religious affairs, which was indeed the crucial issue of toleration at this time, “The Prelacy . . . the Presbyter . . . [and] that (so called) Independent.” More specifically, the Independents, continued Williams, “cast down the Crowne of the Lord Jesus at the feet of the Civil Magistrate” exactly as did the Presbyterians.⁶ Likewise, in vain would the “radical gentleman” Henry Marten, who advocated toleration of the hated Papists and the readmission of the Jews to England, cry that “*Presbyterians and Independents* [my emphasis] should not persecute” heretics such as “Brownists, Antinomians, and Anabaptists.”⁷ Yet, we tend not to listen to contemporaries, but rather to enforce our model upon past times. Thus, for example, the most prominent his-

³Robert Ashton, *The English Civil War, Conservatism and Revolution, 1603–1649* (London, 1978), p. 218.

⁴A. Tindal Hart, *Clergy and Society, 1600–1800* (London, 1968), pp. 40–41.

⁵Perez Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers, 1500–1660*, vol. 2, *Provincial Rebellion, Revolutionary Civil Wars* (London, 1982), p. 162.

⁶Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, in S. L. Caldwell, ed., *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 7 vols. (New York, 1963), 3: 349–351, 355–356.

⁷C. M. Williams, “The Anatomy of a Radical Gentleman, Henry Marten,” in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, D. Pennington and K. Thomas, eds. (Oxford, 1978), p. 125.

torian of Puritanism claims that Thomas Goodwin, one of the leading Independent Divines in the Westminster Assembly, “believed in toleration,”⁸ though Goodwin in fact, like other Independents, actually believed in the magistrate’s power over religious matters, the very stand which Williams so vehemently attacked during his stay in England in 1643–44. Furthermore, preaching before the House of Commons in 1645, Goodwin made it clear that “if any man think I am pleading for liberty for all opinions, of what nature and how gross so ever, I humbly desire them to remember that I only plead for Saints, and I answer plainly, *the Saints they need it not.*”⁹

The correlation between Independents and toleration is especially prominent among historians of the idea of religious toleration, even those who deal with religious beliefs, should know above all, that people do not so easily change their beliefs according to new historical circumstances and opportunities. Furthermore, though the word “toleration” now implies something positive, almost virtuous, in the seventeenth century it had a “perjorative meaning,” connoting “a lax complacency toward evil” (*Dictionary of History of Ideas*), or “the action of sustaining or enduring; endurance (of evil, suffering, etc.) 1623” (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*). If “to tolerate” in our time is to accept the right of something to exist, in the seventeenth century it signified suffering the existence of something that was evil, something that should be condemned and eliminated. Therefore, as Herbert Butterfield has noted, toleration in the seventeenth century

was not so much an ideal, a positive end, that people wanted to establish for its own sake; but, rather, a *pis aller*, a retreat to the next best thing, a last resort for those who often still hated one another, but found it impossible to go on fighting any more. It was hardly even an “idea” for the most part—just happening—the sort of thing that happens when no choice is left and there is no hope of further struggle being worth while.¹⁰

These cautious words concerning the historical context within which to examine the idea of religious toleration, however, have not hindered historians from accepting the common historical explanation concerning Independents and toleration. Thus, one historian chose to reiterate the alleged association between Independents and toleration in the context of a struggle between freedom and despotism. “The substitution of Presbyterianism for Anglicanism as the Establish Church during the Civil War (1640–49) brought, from the practical point

⁸Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (New York, 1984), p. 179.

⁹Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdomes* (1645), p. 53. See also David Walker, “Thomas Goodwin and the Debate on Church Government,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 1, (January 1983): 85–99.

¹⁰Herbert Butterfield, “Toleration in Early Modern Times,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (Oct.-Dec. 1977): 573. See Also Jay Newman, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance* (Toronto, 1982).

of view, only an increase of despotism. This is why Independency then developed into a political and religious coalition in defence of freedom."¹¹

Apparently, this identification of Independents with toleration is so appealing to historians, that the attempt has been made to pinpoint the exact time at which clerical Independents first began openly to advocate religious toleration. It has been suggested that with the publication of *An Apologetical Narration* by the Dissenting Brethren on January 3, 1644, a radical transformation among the Independents in the Westminster Assembly occurred: "Almost insensibly Independency was transformed into a powerful movement whose genius and thought were lay in character and whose sole cohesive force was devotion to the principle of religious toleration."¹²

Surprisingly, the fact that the *Apologetical Narration* nowhere mentions toleration and that its Independent authors never intended a call for religious toleration has not prevented historians from time and again emphasizing its "unique value" in advancing the issue of toleration. So it is argued that "it was, among other things, for a generous measure of toleration for non-Presbyterians that the *Apologetical Narration* had been pleading."¹³ This contention was advanced one step further by the claim that due to the alleged irreconcilable struggle between Presbyterians and Independents in the Westminster Assembly, "the non-separating Congregationalists," meaning the Independents, "made common cause with the Separatists . . . and worked with the sects for a policy of genuine, if limited, toleration." More particularly, this writer claims that "the Assembly Congregationalists," or Independents, "drew nearer to the sects, forming what was in some aspects a coalition with them," and "this coalition adapted the theory of toleration to the changing situation of 1644-45."¹⁴ As we will see later, while historians fail to discern the real character of the *Apologetical Narration*, contemporaries such as the Presbyterian Divine Charles Herle and the sectarian William Walwyn had no problem recognizing it immediately.

The consistent tendency on the part of historians to overlook the Independents' modes of action and conviction would certainly lead to some strange and curious suggestions. This is especially true when we neglect to analyze the Independents' system of church-government and the unique role they assigned to the magistrate over religious matters. Thus, for example, among the many reasons counted for the Independents' supposed quest after religious toleration is the claim that "Independency was more adaptable to toleration than

¹¹Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and Reformation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1960), 2: 456.

¹²W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 4 vols. (London, 1932-40), 3: 369-370.

¹³Aston, *The English Civil War*, p. 218.

¹⁴Ernest Sirluck, "Introduction," *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953-1982), 2: 74, 107.

Presbyterianism." On the whole, it has been generally accepted that there was an essential link between Independents and toleration: "In Massachusetts, toleration was not the essential part of its creed [sic!]; but in England, in order to make headway against official Presbyterianism, the Independents at first had to claim the right to be tolerated themselves, and their ground was the right of toleration for all Christians."¹⁵ Finally, the supposed unique role of the Independents in advancing the cause of religious toleration in England has had considerable influence on the historiography of Puritan New England. Given the fact that Independents in England and the Congregationalists in America stood on common ground concerning the issue of church polity, namely Congregationalism as a system of church-government, it has been assumed that the Independents' alleged advocacy of toleration signified the first breach between the Congregationalists on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. According to Perry Miller, the battle over toleration in England was the reason why Puritan Massachusetts "turned aside from the main current of English opinion." Consequently, the "isolation of Massachusetts" had been completed when the colony, "by gathering her holy skirts closer about her heel," proceeded on "her unlovely way" of Puritan orthodoxy and religious persecutions "alone."¹⁶

This common historical interpretation concerning the role of the Independents in advancing the cause of toleration during the Civil War raises many questions. The tendency to regard the relationship between the Independent clergy and the Presbyterian clergy as an uncompromising struggle persists despite warning against interpretations which stress a correlation between religion and politics, or, for example, between the Independents in the Westminster Assembly of Divines and Independents in the Long Parliament.¹⁷ This tendency is based on certain assumptions concerning the events preceding the convening of the Assembly and the debates within it. First, there is the

¹⁵George Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 45, 13.

¹⁶Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (Gloucester, 1965), pp. 280-281.

¹⁷On the controversy that follows Yule's attempt to find correlation between religion and politics, (*The Independents in the English Civil War*, p. 1), see: David Underdown, "The Independents Reconsidered," *The Journal of British Studies* 3 (1965): 57-84; Yule's reply "Independents and Revolutionaries," *The Journal of British Studies* 7 (1968): 11-32; Underdown replied to this in "The Independents Again," *The Journal of British Studies* 8 (1968): 83-93. See also Stephen Foster, "The Presbyterian Independents Exorcized," *Past and Present* 44 (August 1969): 52-77. For recent studies of Independents and Presbyterians, see Rosemary D. Bradley, "The Failure of Accommodation: Religious Conflicts between Presbyterians and Independents in the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1646," *Journal of Religious History* 12, no. 1 (June 1982): 23-47, and "Jacob and Esau Struggling in the Wombe: A Study of Presbyterian and Independent Religious Conflicts 1640-48" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 1975); J. K. Graham, "'Independent' and 'Presbyterian': A Study of Religious and Political Language and the Politics of Words during the English Civil War, c. 1640-1660" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1978).

assumption that with the convening of the Assembly in the summer of 1643, Presbyterianism had already been accepted by the majority of Puritans. If this were in fact the case, the need for the Independents to attend the Assembly remains unexplained. The words of the prominent Independent leaders in *An Apologetical Narration* are revealing:

If in all matters of *Doctrine*, we were not as Orthodox in our judgements as our brethren themselves, we would never have exposed ourselves to this tryall and hazard discovery in the Assembly.

Second, it is assumed that Presbyterians constituted a united front against all other beliefs concerning church government. But as Lord Say and Sele observed, "the Presbyterians are not of one mind."¹⁸ The third assumption is that the English Presbyterians were united with the Scots at the Assembly against the Independents and Sectarians. Yet even Baillie could count only six (among the total of 121 English divines who attended) English Presbyterians in the Assembly who wholly supported the Scots' discipline.¹⁹ Moreover, there are indications that within the Assembly Independents often joined forces with Presbyterians against proposals by the Scots, as in the question of ordination, and that Independents and Scots united against the Presbyterians, as on the issue of the ruling elders. It is an oversimplification to state that the Independents favored toleration while the Presbyterians opposed it. Many Presbyterians in the Assembly, men like Vines, Burges, Calamy, Lightfoot, and Herle, agreed with Palmer's words that "when the Scripture is obscure, the Spirit of God seems to teach, that all deductions attached thereto, are very sparingly to be imposed upon men's consciences."²⁰

Clearly, the picture of irreconcilable division between Independents and Presbyterians within and outside the Assembly is inadequate to explain the common views held on many issues by these two groups. Furthermore, a historical interpretation based upon clear-cut division between Independents and Presbyterians is not only a hindrance to an understanding of the Independents and their true stand concerning religious toleration, it also leads to a paradox: if it is assumed that the Independents sought common ground with sectarians rather than with Presbyterians, what accounts for their insistence upon the magistrates' coercive powers over religious matters?

This article seeks to reveal the true stands of the Independents in the religious controversies of the 1640s, and to determine whether there are indeed grounds to assume a close link between them and the search for religious

¹⁸Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughes, and William Bridge, *An Apologetical Narration*, Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament, London, January 3, 1644, p. 28. Lord Say and Sele, cited by E. W. Kirby, "The English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly," *Church History* 3 (1964): 418.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 419.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 423, 424, 423.

toleration during the Puritan Revolution. Toward this end it is appropriate to discuss the ideological premises of the Independents—stemming from their ecclesiastical polity or their views concerning church-government—and to examine how these premises influenced the Independents' attitude toward toleration. More specifically, the Independents sought to create a special system of church-government signifying a unique relationship between church and state, within which the magistrate had coercive powers in religious matters. The task here is to study how these ecclesiastical premises shaped the relationship between the Independents and other religious groups, such as the Presbyterians and Sectarians, in regard to the issue of religious toleration and liberty.

Some explanation of the words "Independent" and "Independency" is necessary. During this period, the name "Independent" was ambiguous: in relation to church and ecclesiastical order, contemporaries used it to refer to those who claimed the right of a particular church or congregation to be independent from any higher ecclesiastical order. Sharing a common ecclesiastical principle, a wide range of sects was included in the term ("For all sorts of Independents," wrote William Walwyn in 1645, "whether Anabaptists or Brownists, or Antinomians, or any other . . .").²¹ At the same time, this term was applied to a special group, the Independent divines. These ministers, dissatisfied with the name as an indication of their principles of church government, tried to explain and clarify their "Independency" throughout the 1640s. Consequently, the Independent divines sharply attacked the concept of Independency as used by the various sects, for whom Independency led to Separation from the national church.

The distinction which the Independent divines tried to make between their Independency and that of the sects was nowhere more pronounced than in their attitude toward toleration, an issue all the more complex for touching upon the very intentions of the Puritans in creating the right foundations of a godly Christian Commonwealth. From the point of view of the Independent divines, toleration was incompatible with their belief concerning the role of the Christian magistrate in society. On this pivotal issue Independent divines stood together with Presbyterians against the advocates of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

Furthermore the terms "Presbyterians" and "Independents" are used here in the religious sense rather than the political. Baillie notes that contemporaries stressed the religious aspect:

²¹William Walwyn, *A Help to the Right Understanding of a Discourse Concerning Independency* (1645), p. 6. See also, *A Short Answer to some Objections against the Practices of those who are called Independents* (1644), pp. 1–6; Robert Baillie, *The Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time, Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Cotton* (1654), p. 12; Alexander Rose, *A View of all Religions in the World* (1655), pp. 389–94; John Owen, *A Defence of Mr. John Cotton* (1658), pp. 22–25.

It has hitherto been their earnest desire to decline the infamy of Brownism and it was the charity of their brethren to distinguish them for that sect, under the new name of "Independent"; importing their chief difference from us [Presbyterians] to stand not in the point of separation, which is our proper quarrel with the Brownists, but alone in the point of church government which, against all the Reformed Churches, they maintain to be Independent; that is, not subject to the authority and jurisdiction of any superior synod.²²

According to the leading student of the Independents during the Civil War, there were "three manifestos issued by the Independents themselves: *An Apologetical Narration*, *The Ancient Bounds*, and Philip Nye and Thomas Goodwin's "Introduction" to Cotton's *Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*."²³ These works will be the subject of the discussion which follows concerning the Independents and toleration. In addition, the Whitehall Debates of 1648–49 will provide a perspective concerning the true stand of the Independents on toleration after the decline of Presbyterianism.

The first Independent manifesto, *An Apologetical Narration*, appeared on January 3, 1643. It was a joint publication of the "five dissenting brethren": Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughes, and William Bridge. The "Apology" presents a problem for historians who begin from the assumption that the Assembly, already in 1643, was a stage on which Independents and Presbyterians waged their first battle for and against toleration. For example, it has been argued that even before the publication of the "Apology,"

it was advocacy of the principle of religious toleration which set the Independents apart and since this principle gained for them the support of the sects, Independency was inevitably to be forced to the left by the radicalism of diverse groups fused under its leadership.²⁴

The writer of those lines, however, had to retreat from this association of the sects and Independents over the issue of toleration when he found that in the "Apology," the Independents "specifically renounced any support of any general principle of religious toleration, and spoke with orthodox fervour against

²²Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time*, cited by Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War*, p. 10.

²³Ibid., p. 10. In addition to these three Independents' manifestos, I have used the following tracts relating to the Independents: Alexander Forbes, *An Anatomy of Independency* (1644); Sidrach Simpson, *The Anatomist Anatomised* (1644); John Dury, *An Epistolary Discourse . . . whether the State should tolerate the Independent Government . . . Written by Mr. John Dury to Mr. Tho. Goodwin, Mr. Philip Nye, Mr. Samuel Hartlib* (1644); *An Answer to Mr. John Dury* (1644); *The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterianial Government* (1648); *The Papers and Answers of the Dissenting Brethren and the Committee of the Assembly of Divines* (1648); *Papers given to the Honorable Committee . . . For Accommodation* (1648, [1644]); *The Principles of Faith, Presented by Mr. Tho. Goodwin, Mr. Nye . . .* (1654); *Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and Practised in the Congregational Churches in England* (1659).

²⁴Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 3: 51.

the rising menace of sectarianism."²⁵ Indeed, this admission calls for a revision of the traditional interpretation that the "Apology" directed itself against the Presbyterians' hopes to construct another system of intolerance in England.

Another analysis of the tensions between Independents and Presbyterians in the Assembly stresses that the two groups differed in their "eschatological consciousness," and that this difference concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God shaped their relationship. Regarding the Independent clergy:

their vision of the Lord's kingdom as consisting of the communion of the saints gathered in Congregational churches and separated from the world was simply incompatible with the idea of a national synod with its directly related idea of national church.²⁶

Yet neither Independents nor Congregationalists rejected the idea of a national church. In contrast to the separatists, who negated the concept of a national church, the Independents came to the Westminster Assembly, as did the Presbyterians, to reform the Church of England as a national church. The same may be said concerning the idea of a national synod. It has been claimed that, "the very suggestion for a national synod frightened the Independent divines as a stumbling block in the establishment of the Lord's visible kingdom on earth."²⁷ The Independents, however, did not oppose the creation of a national synod, despite their reservations concerning its power over the particular churches. The Independents sought, in fact, a way in which the autonomy of the particular churches could be kept within the framework of a national church rather than outside its confines. Finally, it has been suggested that the Independents were unwilling participants in the Assembly: "It is true that the Independents themselves eventually sat in the Westminster Assembly, but that was not their choice."²⁸ The "Apology," however, reveals that, although they may not have been the most enthusiastic of those attending, their participation was based on positive and definite goals: "Above all, the due respect we have had to the peaceable and orderly Reformation of this church and state; the

²⁵Ibid., p. 371.

²⁶Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: The Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution, 1640–1660* (The Hague, 1973), p. 35. For the dimensions of apocalyptic visions and millenarian expectations before and during the Civil War, see: William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia, 1972), *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1955), and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London, 1963); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York, 1980); William M. Lamont, *Godly Rule, Politics and Religion, 1603–1660* (London, 1969), and "Puritanism as History and Historiography," *Past and Present* 44 (August 1969):133–146; J. G. A. Pocock, "England," in *National Consciences, History and Political Culture, in Early Modern Europe*, O. Ranum, ed. (Baltimore, 1975): 98–117, and "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time* (New York, 1973): 148–201. See also my essay, "Reformation, History, and Eschatology in English Protestantism," *History and Theory* 26, no. 3 (October 1987): 300–318.

²⁷Liu, *Discord in Zion*, p. 38.

²⁸Ibid., p. 38.

hopeful expectation we have been entertained with of an happy *latitude* and agreement by means of this *assembly*, and the wisdom of this parliament."²⁹

It could be argued, of course, that the emphasis in Congregationalism on the particular church necessarily led to the opposition to the synod and a national church; however, this argument leaves unexplained their view of the reformation of the Church of England. By what means did the Independents hope to reform the Church if they opposed the Assembly? The truth is that there was nothing in the Independent premises against a national synod; the Independents opposed, rather, the power of a synod over a particular church, and their clergy joined other radical Puritans in 1641 in demanding that Parliament deal immediately with the issue of calling a synod. The Independent William Bridge preached before the Commons in 1641, urging action on the issue of church reform: "Never did England see a Parliament more fitted for the service and work of God, than this now is."³⁰ Another Independent preached before the Commons that the ministers "will be of your religion still. There are many Ministers that are of this mind."³¹ In arguing that the Parliament settle the issue of the Church, Independent ministers such as Bridge, Burton, Thomas Goodwin, and Joseph Caryl, joined Calamy, Marshall, the two Sedgwicks, and others who were inclined to Presbyterianism. The common stand of these radical ministers in the "root and branch" sermons demonstrated that in the early forties the Independents and Presbyterians were in fact on the same side. According to William Lamont, "what emerges in 1641 is a clear division between those who argue for the retention of an episcopacy . . . and . . . those who press—like Burges—for a 'root and branch' destruction of episcopacy, a total reformation and the need for zeal." Presbyterians as well as Independents came to the Assembly with a common aim—to bring about the destruction of the "Whore of Babylon" or "lukewarm episcopacy."³²

Emphasizing millennialist and eschatological divisions and making these the basis for explanation of the relationships among the radical Puritans, is therefore unwarranted. The argument that Independency was incompatible with the

²⁹*An Apologetical Narration*, p. 26.

³⁰William Bridge, *Babylons Downfall* (1641), cited by Kirby, "Sermons before the Commons, 1640–1642," *American Historical Review* 44 (1938–39): 536. See also, H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament," in *Essays in British History* (New York, 1964): 85–138.

³¹Henry Burton, *England's Bondage and Hope of Deliverance* (1641), cited by Kirby, "Sermons before the Commons," p. 536. See also, Jeremiah Burroughes, *Moses His Choice* (1641); and *The Humble Petition of the Ministers of the Church of England* (1641).

³²Lamont, *Godly Rule*, p. 83. For Independent clergy's attitudes toward Parliament's actions concerning church reform, see Thomas Goodwin, *Zerubbabels Encouragement to Finish the Temple* (1642), p. 2: "I took the boldness to urge and encourage you to Church Reformation"; Sidrach Simpson, *Reformations' Preservation* (1643), pp. 3, 5: "All the well-affected in the Kingdom cry unto you . . . Help us: . . . Save us, for we are Sinking; Sinking in our estates, our Liberties, our Religion." "Every one may reform himself, but you only can the Nation, of those eviles, and unless those be removed, Actum Est De Religione."

idea of a national church will be dealt with later. What is important at present is to note that historians fail to deal with *An Apologetical Narration* in its historical context. The prominent Independent leaders in the Assembly tried in the "Apology" to present their contemporaries with an accurate picture of themselves from the time they went into exile on the continent in the 1630s until the moment of this tract's publication. Thus, the full meaning of this work can only be revealed if it is read as a historical document, not as a piece against the Presbyterians in the Assembly. The tract can then be most enlightening about the position of the Independents at that time toward toleration.

One of the clearest and most persistent arguments of the Independents in *An Apologetical Narration* is the quest for unity within the "Protestant party":

The danger of rending and dividing the godly Protestant party in this kingdom that were desirous of Reformation, and of making severall interests among them in time when there was an absolute necessity of their nearest union and conjunction . . . against common adversary . . . [the] Protestant party had enjoyed a long continued settlement which had rooted in the hearts of men . . . [and was] seconded by the instant and continuall advices, and conjurements of many *honourable*, wise, and godly *personages* of both *houses* of Parliament, to forbear what might any way be like to occasion or augment this unhappy difference.

This "unhappy difference" among the Puritan brethren, argued the five dissidents, did not prevent the Independents from coming into "strict engagement willingly entered into . . . for these common ends, with the rest . . . [of their] brethren of the Ministry. . . ."³³

There is some evidence that an agreement between Independent ministers and Presbyterian ministers was reached before the convening of the Assembly. In 1641, Philip Nye and Edmund Calamy, the prominent Presbyterian of London, had reached an agreement concerning the relationship between Independent and Presbyterian ministers in London. Both men had agreed that "(for advancing of the publike *cause* of a happy Reformation) neither side should Breach, Print, or dispute, or otherwise act against the other's way; and this to continue 'til both sides, in full meeting, did declare the contrary."³⁴ Moreover, there was an agreement, welcomed by members of Parliament, between Presbyterians and Independents in that same year in London, in which both "decided to abandon religious controversy for the duration of the war."³⁵ This argument of unity among the radical Puritans in the face of the war was used by Baillie when he wrote, "We have to get determined to our mutual satisfaction, if we were rid of Bishop, and till then, we have agreed to speak of nothing of anything wherein we differ."³⁶ It has been argued that the menace

³³*An Apologetical Narration*, pp. 25–26.

³⁴Nye and Calamy cited by Liu, *Discord in Sion*, p. 9.

³⁵Lawrence Kaplan, "Presbyterians and Independents in 1643," *English Historical Review* 84 (April 1969): 247–48.

³⁶Robert Baillie, cited by Liu, *Discord in Sion*, p. 9.

of the sects in 1641 led to assaults against them by both Presbyterians and Independents. Haller, for example, provides a long list of Presbyterian pamphlets against the sects; this list is significant in that the Presbyterians clearly distinguished between the Independents and the sects and did not attack the former.³⁷ This may also be revealing concerning the agreement between the Independents and the Presbyterians. By 1643 however, the picture had changed, and the Independents were associated with the sects, an association which resulted in the publication of *An Apologetical Narration*.

The importance of the truce between the orthodox Puritans was, as the Independents of the "Apology" argued, in its attempt

to unite the Protestant partie in this Kingdom, that agree in Fundamentall truths against Popery and other heresies, and to have that respect to tender consciences as might prevent oppressions and inconveniences.³⁸

Historians have found in this sentence—alone in the entire "Apology"—the plea of the Independents for toleration. Yet given the evidence of the agreement between them and the Presbyterians from 1641, it is clear that the Independents were in essence arguing not for the creation of a new system to include toleration, but rather for the continuation of the agreement with the Presbyterians to respect "tender consciences." It was the agreement itself (which had already worked well for over two years) and not toleration which became the issue in relationship of the Independents and the Puritan brethren in 1643–44. Corroboration of the fact that it was the breakdown of this agreement rather than the notion of toleration which led to the publication of the "Apology," may be found in the immediate circumstances surrounding the "Apology's" publication. *An Apologetical Narration* appeared on January 3, 1644, less than a week after the joint publication by Independent and Presbyterian ministers, on December 28, 1643, of a pamphlet entitled *Certaine Considerations to Dis-swade Men from Further Gathring of Churches*. The signatories of this earlier declaration included the "five dissenting" and other Independent divines along with the leaders of the Presbyterians in the Assembly.³⁹

It can be argued that the pamphlet of December is evidence of the "cautious moderation" exercised by the Independents in the Assembly and of their intention not to sharpen their controversy with the majority of the Presbyterians there.⁴⁰ Thus, one might see in the pamphlet "a reconciliatory declaration" between Presbyterians and Independents after their earlier skirmishes in the

³⁷William Haller, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–1647*, 3 vols. (New York, 1934): 1: 36.

³⁸*An Apologetical Narration*, p. 26.

³⁹*Certain Considerations to Diswade Men from Further Gathring of Churches in this Present Junction of Time* (London, 1643), p. 5.

⁴⁰William Haller, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution*, 1: 49.

Assembly.⁴¹ Such a line of reasoning, however, overlooks the significance of the tract. If one accepts the interpretation of an ongoing fight between Presbyterians and Independents in the Assembly in 1643, the publication of *Certaine Consideration*—a tract arguing against the gathering of Independent churches—leaves unexplained why less than week later the Independents insisted in their "Apology" on the Congregational Way.

To consider the *Certaine Consideration* exclusively in light of the differences that existed between the Independents and Presbyterians is too simplistic, for such an explanation neglects the historical campaign both groups waged against separation from the Church of England. This fierce opposition to separation was shared by Presbyterians and Independents, both prior to and during 1643. The Independents joined the Presbyterians in writing the *Certaine Consideration* with the common aim of speaking out against the Sectarrians, Brownists, Barrowists, Separatists, Anabaptists, Familists, and many more. Though these groups differed, they all had one thing in common—"the refusal to recognize the historic church."⁴² This was the essential point which separated the sects from the divines in the Assembly, and facilitated the united front in the *Certaine Consideration*. Pitted against one another were those who sought to divorce themselves from and refuse communion with members of the historic church on the grounds that this church was no more than "a false church," on the one hand, and those who sought to reform the Church of England as a national church and denounced Separation as schism. It is in the context of this division that the "Apology" must be read.

In November 1643, the Assembly "decided to launch a campaign against gathering congregations" and informed the House of Commons of "the liberty that many take in the city and other places in gathering churches . . . to anticipate the work of Puritan and Assembly." This campaign, however, does not mark "the first skirmishes between the Presbyterians and the Independents."⁴³ Instead, it indicates the extent to which the rise of the sects in London frightened the ministers there. The London ministers, as one contemporary observed, "make all the pulpits in London . . . ring against Anabaptists, Brownists, etc., so loud that the divine echoes thereof might easily be heard beyond the River Tweed."⁴⁴ In November, these ministers turned to the Assembly, complaining about "the increase in Anabaptists, Antinomians and sectaries, the boldness of some in the city, and about it, in gathering separate congregations."⁴⁵ The following month, in their joint declaration, *Certaine*

⁴¹Liu, *Discord in Sion*, p. 40.

⁴²Haller, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution*, 1: 35.

⁴³Liu, *Discord in Sion*, p. 39.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁵Kaplan, "Presbyterians and Independents in 1643," p. 254. See also the Presbyterian ministers of London's petition, "To the Honourable the Commons House of Parliament," *Mercurius Civi-*

Consideration, Independents and Presbyterians argued that "our miseries [are] increased by the severall ways of Brethren . . . entering themselves into Church-societies," and asked such brethren to amend their ways "until they see whether the Right Rule will not be commended to them in this orderly way" of the Assembly.⁴⁶ Less than a week later the Independents in *An Apologetical Narration* stated their opinion of the sectarians quite bluntly:

[it was] the most to be abhorred maxime . . . that a single and particular society of men professing the name of Christ . . . should . . . arrogate unto themselves an exemption from giving account or being censurable by any other. . . .⁴⁷

For both Independents and Presbyterians, the Assembly's declaration of *Certaine Consideration* was but another step in a long and historic battle fought jointly against Separation.

With the Independents leaning toward the principle of voluntary gathering of churches under which many of the sects flourished, resistance in the Assembly and in London to the sectarians placed the Independents in a peculiar situation. "Those that are called pure Independents," urged Richard Vines, had to show themselves clearly so that "pernicious opinions may not shelter themselves under their name and wing."⁴⁸ Even more than Vines, the Presbyterian, the Independents wished to distinguish themselves from any association with the sects. To just what extent Independency was associated in that time with the sectarians can be seen in contemporary pamphlets. According to W. K. Jordan

thirty-four orthodox titles which attacked the growth of sectarianism were examined in the McAlpin Collection [Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY] for the years 1641-1643. Of these, twenty-nine do not dissociate between Congregationalism and the more radical and eccentric sects which appeared in this period.

John Cotton, writing from New England to aid the Independents' cause in old and New England against Baillie's attacks, also lamented that behind the name of Independency were concealed a number of sects: "The Antipedobaptists, Antinomians, Familists, yea, and the Seeker too, do all of them style themselves Independents." He argued against Baillie's calling Independency a sect, and stressed that Independency "is compatible to a national church." Finally, Cotton, like the Independents in England, voiced discontent with the name Independency, as this name "neither truly describeth us, nor faithfully distinguisheth us from many others."⁴⁹

cus, no. 69 (September 11-19, 1644), p. 653, and "A Letter of the Presbyterian Ministers in the City of London . . . to the Reverend Assembly of Divines," January 1645, in William Assheton, *Toleration Disapproved and Condemned* (1670), pp. 56-59.

⁴⁶*Certaine Consideration*, pp. 1-2; Liu, *Discord in Zion*, p. 40.

⁴⁷*An Apologetical Narration*, p. 21.

⁴⁸Liu, *Discord in Zion*, p. 45.

⁴⁹Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 3: 355, n. 1; John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648), in John Cotton on the Churches of New England, ed. Larzer

An Apologetical Narration was published by the Independent leaders of the Assembly at the moment when the Assembly declared its objection to the free gathering of sectarian churches: "from the autumn of 1643 onwards the Independents began . . . to dissociate themselves from the radical sects."⁵⁰ Although, Independency had actually dissociated itself from the sects from its very beginnings this observation indicates that the "Apology" may be seen as an attempt to clear Independents of any association with the spread of the sects. Although it has been argued that, by the time of the publication of the "Apology" the Independents had sided with the sects against the Presbyterians,⁵¹ the authors of the "Apology" made it clear to all that their attack was directed not at the Presbyterians but at the sects.⁵²

The kind of Independency referred to in the expression "pure Independents" (Vine's words) should be distinguished from the Independency claimed by the sectarians. Philip Nye claimed

that Independency of churches was asserted in relation to a superior Church-power properly spiritual, and as such claimed *jure divino*; and not in relation to that Ecclesiastical Power which is in or exercised from, the Civil Magistrate⁵³

Baillie observed that the differences between the Independents and the Presbyterians were

not in point of Separation, which is our proper quarrel with the Brownists, but alone in the point of church-government, which . . . they [the] Independents maintain to be Independent; that is, not subject to the authority and jurisdiction of any superior synod.⁵⁴

Ziff (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 187. Cotton wrote this book against Baillie's *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time*.

⁵⁰Kaplan, "Presbyterians and Independents in 1643," p. 253.

⁵¹Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 3: 50-53.

⁵²*An Apologetical Narration*, pp. 7, 21, 23-24. For the controversy caused by the publication of the "Apology," see, for example, Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia: or, A Full Answer to the Apologetical Narration* (1644); John Goodwin (?), *The Inexcusableness of that Grand Accusation of the Bretheren, called Antapologia* (1644); *A Short Letter . . . Upon Mr. Edwards his Booke, he calleth Anti-Apologie* (1644); *A Short Answer to some Objections . . . Against those who are called Independents* (1644); Kathrine Chidley, *A New Yeares Gift, or a Brief Exhortation to Mr. Thomas Edwards* (1644); Adam Stewart, *An Answer to a Libell Intituled, A Coole Conference Between the cleered Reformation and the Apologetical Narration* (1644); John Goodwin, *A Short Answer to A. S. alias Adam Stewart* (1644); *A Reply . . . to A. S. [Adam Stewart] . . . upon the Apologetical Narration* (1644); *M. S. to A. S., [upon] the Apologetical Narration* (1644), and *A Reply . . . Upon the Apologetical Narration* (1644); *The Saints Apologie, or a Vindication of the Churches . . . from the odious names of Brownists and Separatists* (1644); *A Letter from a Person of Honour, Reconciling the Dissenting Bretheren . . . and the Presbyterians* (1644); *Unity Our Duty . . . Humbly presented to the Godly . . . Brethren, commonly called Independent* (1644); *Inquiries Into the causes of our miseries . . . [and] A Just vindication of the Way of worship very commonly misunderstood, very falsly interpreted, but very truly called Independent* (1644).

⁵³Philip Nye, cited by D. Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 5-6 (1935-40): 55.

⁵⁴Robert Baillie, cited by Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War*, p. 12.

In contrast to Presbyterianism's "jure divino" of the ecclesiastical order, Independency acted upon its premises of the particular church as a self-sufficient entity holding "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," and invested in the magistrate and (not in some order above the particular, independent church) the crucial role of preserving religious unity. Nye, for example, maintained:

Though we affirm Church-government is *Independent*, and immediately derived from Christ; yet we affirm also that the Civil Magistrate is even therein (that is, in Ecclesiastical Matters) Supreme Governor civilly. And though nothing may be imposed on the Christian Churches against their Will, by any *Spiritual* Authority (for so only we intend) yet we affirm withall, that the Civil Magistrate may pose on them spiritual Matters, by Civil Power, yea whether they like or dislike, if it be good in his eyes that is if he judge it within his commission from God.⁵⁵

In 1644, Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye published John Cotton's *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* with hopes that this book would clarify their concept of the independence of the church. Here Cotton echoes Nye's ideas concerning the dependence of the church on the civil magistrate, whose duty was to maintain the civil peace including "the establishment of pure religion, in doctrine, worship and government, according to the word of God."⁵⁶ This, no doubt, was an essential difference between Independents and Presbyterians. The independence of the particular church from the Ecclesiastical order is not, however, incompatible with the concept of national church: for it is the duty of the magistrate to uphold and maintain the true church among the particular churches. Thus, despite their differing concepts of church government, both the Independents and the Presbyterians sought religious unity and uniformity within the framework of a national church, the former through the magistrate who possessed a "commission from God," and the latter through an ecclesiastical order. Moreover, the stand on the magistrate's coercive power concerning religion and belief, rather than toleration, was affirmed in all the "official Independent manifestos."

The above discussion reveals the complexity of the relationships between Independency and toleration on the hand, and between the Independents and the sects on the other. In *An Apologetical Narration*, the Independents tried to clear themselves of the accusations made against them that they favored separation and condemned the Church of England as "Antichristian":⁵⁷

We have this sincere profession to make before God and all the world, that all *that* conscience of the defilements we conceived to cleave to the true worship of God . . . did never work in any of us any other thought, much less opinion, but that

⁵⁵Nye, cited by Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," p. 55.

⁵⁶John Cotton, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), in *John Cotton on the Churches of New England*, L. Ziff, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 153.

⁵⁷The Separatists denounced the Church of England and its ministers as Antichristian. See, for example, Champlin Burrage, *The Early Dissenters*, 2 vols. (New York, 1912 [1967]), 1: 186: Describing the formation of the separatist church in Gloucester, one separatist said, "They had left the Church of England as having an Antichristian Ministry, worship, confusion, &c. . . ."

the multitude of the assemblies and parochial congregations thereof, were *the true churches and body of Christ, and the Ministry thereof a true Ministry*: much less did it ever enter into our hearts to judge them *Antichristian*.

The Independents viewed the attitudes of the separatists to the Church of England with "ever . . . an horror to our thoughts"; furthermore, they affirmed their intention to continue to "hold a communion with them [the] churches of England as the Churches of Christ."⁵⁸

Brownism, taken from the name of Robert Brown (c. 1550–1633) was considered at the time to be the standard bearer of separation from the Church of England. The Independents, therefore, made endless attempts to dissociate themselves from that name:

We found . . . our opinions and ways . . . environed about with a cloud of mistakes and misapprehensions . . . as of Schism . . . or else the odious name of *brownism*, together with all their opinions as they have stated and maintained them.

While accusing the Brownists of "fatal miscarriages and shipwrecks of the *Separation*," the Independents stressed, concerning Presbyterianism, that "in all *points of doctrine* . . . our judgments have still concurred with the greater part of our brethren, neither do we know wherein we have dissented." Although the Independents acknowledge that there were differences between them and the Presbyterians with respect to the issue of discipline, they argued that these differences should not be an obstacle "to union as well as searching out the truth."⁵⁹ The authors of the "Apology" were not alone in their belief that the Independents' principles would pose no obstacle to union between them and the Presbyterians. The preface to the tract, by Charles Herle, one of the Presbyterian divines at the Assembly, provides an example:

This Apologetical Narration of our Reverend and dear Brethren the learned authors of it, 'tis so full of peaceableness, modesty and candour; and withall, at this time so seasonably needfull, as well toward the vindication of the Protestant party in general, from the aspersion of the Incommunicableness within itself, and incompatibleness with Magistracy.⁶⁰

The "Apology" itself gives no indication that the Independents thought that their former union with the Presbyterians was unobtainable at that time. To the contrary, the Independent leaders in the Assembly maintained in the "Apology" that once they had cleared themselves of the charge of separatism their union with the Presbyterians could resume as before.

The sectarians, as exemplified by William Walwyn, were well aware of the intentions of the Independents to continue this union. Historians who accept the view that the idea of toleration constituted a theme of contention between Independents and Presbyterians also tend to maintain that the Independents

⁵⁸*An Apologetical Narration*, p. 6.

⁵⁹*An Apologetical Narration*, pp. 23–24; 4, 29.

⁶⁰*An Apologetical Narration*, Charles Herle's "Preface."

sided with the sects on that issue against the Presbyterians. There is no clear evidence, however, that such was the case. Walwyn, upon reading the "Apology," concluded as follows:

Having heretofore met with an *Apologetical Narration* of Thomas Goodwin . . . I did with gladness of heart undertake the reading thereof, expecting therein to find such generall reasons for justification of themselves, to the world, as would have justified all the Separation. . . . But finding contrary to that expectation that their Apology therein for themselves and their Toleration was grounded rather upon a Remonstrance of the nearness between them and the Presbyterians, being one in Doctrine with them, and very little differing from them in Discipline, how they had been tolerated by other Presbyter Churches, and indulge with greater privileges, then the Separatists, how they differed from the Separatists, and had cautiously avoyded those rocks and shelves against which the Separatists had split themselves, confirming by these words, the people disesteem of Separatists, suggesting by that phrase of theirs, as if there were amongst the Separatists some dangerous by-paths or opinions, which they warily found, though no mention be made what they are, which is the worst sort of calumny.⁶¹

Walwyn's observations in *The Compassionate Samaritane* (July 1644) on the meaning of the "Apology" indicate that the supposed link between the Independents and the sects—and the assumed rift between the Independents and the Presbyterians—on the issue of toleration, is still unproven. The existence of an essential division on the issue of toleration between Independents and Presbyterians in the Assembly, becomes even more doubtful in the light of the sectarian pamphlets and their plea for complete toleration. In *The Power of Love* (September 1643) Walwyn challenged all those who attacked the sects: "Come, you are mightily afraid of opinions, is there no other that you feare? not the Anabaptists, Brownists, or Antinomians?" Addressing the Assembly of divines ("Our Divines [as they would have us call them]"), Walwyn maintained:

I am not a preacher of the law, but of the gospell: nor you under the law, but under grace: the law was given by Moses, whose minister I am not: but grace and truth came by Jesus, whose Minister I am.⁶²

He appealed to the Commons asking whether the Divines "obtained of you an Ordinance for suppression of all Anabaptisticall, Brownisticall, or Independent writing."⁶³

⁶¹William Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane*, pp. 1–3.

⁶²William Walwyn, *The Power of Love* (1643), preface "To the Reader," p. 20.

⁶³Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane*, preface "To the Commons of England." Walwyn here, as other sectarian writers in this time, used the word "Independent" freely to describe those who adopted the principle of free gathering of church and its independency in relation to ecclesiastical order, or a national church. Thus, Walwyn, John Goodwin, and others, put under the name of "Independents" Anabaptists, Separatists and other sects. Contemporaries, not only sectarians, used the name "Independents" as inclusive name for many sects, and it was the aim of the Independents divines to dissociate themselves and their "Independency" from the radical notion of Independency, concerning religion, that the sects claimed. See, for example, that the name "In-

The sectarian pamphlets of the time are impressive in their lack of distinction made between Independent and Presbyterian divines. From the sectarian perspective, until 1645 all the divines in the Assembly appeared as oppressors of men's consciences in religious matters. The Separatists John Goodwin warned the Assembly against "the danger of fighting against God" by trying to persecute different opinions, and based his argument for general toleration on the following principle: "For any man, or men, to attempt the suppression of any Doctrine, way, or practise that is from God, is to fight against God himself."⁶⁴ Walwyn, too, argued that any attempt on the part of the Assembly to suppress God's people would fail: "I trust the present endeavours of our Divines in striving to raise themselves upon their Brethren's disgrace and ruine, will . . . prove vaine and fruitless."⁶⁵ And Henry Robinson, in *Liberty of Conscience* (March 1644), attacked the idea of a national church: "I know that much is said and done in many places in behalfe of uniformity, a National Church, and Covenant. . . . But, wherefore such laboring in vaine. . . . Do we think that God's salvation is also National?"⁶⁶

Nor were the sectarians alone in attacking the Assembly and its divines. Henry Marten, for example "attacked the Assembly of Divines for its attempts to force its opinions on Parliament and people alike. . . . Brownists, Antinomians, and Anabaptists he thought honest men. Presbyterians and Independents should not persecute them."⁶⁷ The sectarians rigidly denounced the very notion of the Assembly of the Divines on the grounds that their aim was to achieve uniformity and to enforce it by both ecclesiastical order and the magistrate's sword. They demanded the right of the particular church to be independent from the "spiritual weapons" of an ecclesiastical order and the "magistrate's sword." This "Independency," however, differed greatly from that of the "Apology," which stated,

The common prejudice and exception laid into all mens thought against us and our opinions is, that in such congregational government . . . there is not allowed sufficient remedy for miscarriages . . . no powerful or effectual means to reduce church or churches that fall into heresy, schism, &c, but every one is left and may take liberty without control to do what is good in their own eyes.

The Independents in the "Apology" sought to elucidate their doctrine and clear themselves of allegations that they justified "liberty without control" in

dependents" was an inclusive name describing many sects, William Walwyn, *A Help to the Right Understanding of A Discourse Concerning Independency* (1645), p. 6: "for all sorts of Independents, whether Anabaptists or Brownists, or Antinomians, or any other. . . ."

⁶⁴John Goodwin, *O eomaxia, or the Grand Imprudence of Men Running the Hazard of Fighting Against God* (1644), p. 11.

⁶⁵Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane*, p. 72.

⁶⁶Henry Robinson, *Liberty of Conscience* (1644), p. 27.

⁶⁷C. M. Williams, "The Anatomy of a Radical Gentlemen—Henry Marten," p. 125.

religious matters. They sought to convince and assure their brethren in the Assembly that they could not be accused of "nourish[ing] . . . any Monsters or Serpents of opinions lurking in our bosomes."⁶⁸

The Independents' position favoring the granting of coercive powers to the magistrate in religious matters stood in sharp contrast to the sectarians' plea for toleration. An examination of the other "Independent manifestos" reveals that the Independents did not retreat from their emphasis on the role of the magistrate during the 1640s. To the contrary, in the early 1640s, the Independents' stand on this issue was regarded by the sectarians as an obstacle to be overcome in their efforts to realize their principle of freedom of conscience, efforts which required a position of toleration in order to bear fruit. Henry Robinson, for example, argued in 1644 that

if Civil powers, or others, have authority in matters of Religion, then their commands and Laws in that respect, must be absolute, as in other, and ought equally to be obeyed, which would engage the whole Kingdom still to the Discipline of the Common-Prayer-Book, and government of Episcopacy . . . a Liberty of Conscience must be permitted to us to enjoy our own opinions in matters of Religion, or else there is necessity of being liable and subject against conscience.⁶⁹

The fundamental difference between the sectarians and the Independent divines on this issue was widened still further with the publication in London of John Cotton's *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644). Cotton's book was welcomed by the Independent leaders in the Assembly, Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, as a work which would help clarify the Independent way:

As for ourselves, we are yet, neither afraid, nor ashamed to make profession (in that midst of all of the high waves on both sides dashing on us) that the substance of this brief *extract* . . . is that very *middle way* (which in our Apology we did in the general intimate and intent) between that which is called Brownism, and the Presbyterian Government.

While Nye's and Goodwin's introduction to Cotton's book deals only with the question of church government, or "that Church-Power, which Christ had left on earth,"⁷⁰ these two leaders of the Independents in the Assembly endorsed one of the toughest stands against toleration. Richard Overton, expressed his reaction to Cotton's views as follows:

The judgement of the Divines of New England are against the Toleration of any Church Government and way but one, they will not suffer Brownists, Anabaptists, &c. Mr. Cotton the Greatest Divine in New England . . . is against Toleration, and holds that men may be punished for their Consciences.⁷¹

Cotton's book, apart from exemplifying the continued effort of the Independents to further substantiate their "middle way," is significant for its declara-

⁶⁸An *Apologetical Narration*, pp. 15–16, 28.

⁶⁹Henry Robinson, *Liberty of Conscience*, p. 44.

⁷⁰Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, "Introduction" to John Cotton's book, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 77.

⁷¹Richard Overton, *The Araigement of Mr. Persecution* (1645), p. 19.

tion of the Independent view concerning the magistrate's power in religious affairs. According to Cotton, "the establishment of pure religion and the reformation of corruptions in religion, do much concern the civil peace." The churches' power in enforcing "pure religion" and fighting religious corruption was limited to mere "spiritual weapons," while the power of the magistrate on these matters is by "civil punishment upon the wilfull opposer."⁷² Philip Nye reiterated this stand when he emphasized that for the Independents "the Civil Magistrate may impose" on the churches "spiritual matters by Civil Power."⁷³

Roger Williams, who was in England from the summer of 1643 to the summer of 1644 in hopes of securing a patent for his settlement in New England, actively supported the cause of toleration during his stay. His observations on the rival Puritan factions show clearly that Independents and Presbyterians were equally fervent in their opposition to toleration:

Under the wing of the civil magistrate do three great factions shelter themselves . . . The prelacy . . . the Presbytery . . . [and] that so-called Independent . . . This latter . . . jumps with the Prelates, and though not more fully, yet more explicitly than the Presbyterians, cast(s) down the crown of the Lord Jesus at the feet of the civil magistrate.

According to Williams, the aim of the Independents was "to embrace themselves both as the State's and the People's bishops."⁷⁴ In *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, which was ordered to be burned by the Commons in August 1644, Williams denounced the assumption that the magistrate was commissioned by God concerning religious matters: "Magistrates have received their power from the people"; therefore, their power is "without respect to this or that religion." For Williams, as for other sectarians, the emphasis on the magistrate's power concerning religion was the underlying cause of the evil of persecutions. He therefore denounced both Presbyterians and Independents and warned them that "nor shall their confidence of their being in the truth . . . no, nor the truth itself—privilege them to persecute others, and to exempt themselves from persecution."⁷⁵

The alliance between the Independent divines and the sectarians on the issue of toleration was not formed, as evidence provided by both sides indicates, either in 1643 or 1644. It has been suggested that it might have taken place later:

Before the adoption of Presbyterianism in the Westminster Assembly in 1644 became imminent, the independents and the separatists of all sorts remained relatively obscure and seemed unimportant. After that date, they suddenly came forward to

⁷²John Cotton, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. 153.

⁷³Philip Nye, cited by Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," p. 55.

⁷⁴Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (1644), in A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (Chicago, 1978 [1938]), pp. 286–287.

⁷⁵Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, p. 289, 281.

oppose the majority of the Assembly, disrupt its plans . . . fill Cromwell's army, push forward a revolution far more sweeping than any which the original Puritan reformers had conceived.⁷⁶

Another historian who has studied the attitudes of the Independent divines in the Assembly, modifies this argument. According to Samuel Pearson, there was "a gradual shift in position on the part of the Assembly Independents from supporting a Presbyterian government with limited accommodation to demanding full toleration" in 1645.⁷⁷ This whole argument, however, is taken from Baillie, who from the very beginning of the Assembly accused the Independents of favoring toleration, whenever they took issue with the Presbyterians and especially whenever they opposed the demands of the Presbyterian Scots. Moreover, contemporaries noted that Baillie and the other Scots in the Assembly failed to perceive current events accurately. According to William Walwyn, "as for our Brethren of Scotland: there is no doubt, that they are sad observers of all the distempers and misunderstanding that are among us."⁷⁸

Any analysis of the alliance between the sects and Independents on matters of toleration must take into account the connection between the Independents and the New Model Army. According to the generally accepted interpretation, the formation of the New Model Army with its radical attitude toward toleration finally enabled the Independent divines to find support for their advocacy of toleration as opposed to the view of the majority of Presbyterians in the Assembly. According to W. K. Jordan "the heroic struggle of a handful of [Independent] leaders in the Assembly was to receive solid and powerful support from new sources during the summer of 1645. . . . The New Model . . . was united in a warm enthusiasm for the principle of religious freedom."⁷⁹ And Pearson notes that "the victories . . . of the New Model Army lessened the importance of the Scottish alliance and increased the urgency of toleration for the sects so strongly represented in the army."⁸⁰ M. A. Kishlansky, however, qualifies the interpretation of the New Model Army as the standard-bearer for toleration and religious radicalism and shows that while "radical chaplains and mechanic preachers did exist within the New Model . . . their existence . . . should not imply that the Army as a whole espoused or supported such viewpoints."⁸¹ Moreover, Kishlansky concludes his detailed study with a complete refutation of the idea that the New Model intended either to

⁷⁶William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 174.

⁷⁷Samuel C. Pearson, Jr., "Reluctant Radicals: The Independents at the Westminster Assembly," *Journal of Church and State* 11 (1969): 484.

⁷⁸Walwyn, *A Help to the Right Understanding of a Discourse Concerning Independency*, p. 7.

⁷⁹Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration*, 3: 65-66.

⁸⁰Pearson, "Reluctant Radicals," p. 483.

⁸¹Mark A. Kishlansky, *The Rise of the New Model Army* (London, 1979), p. 72.

play a role in the religious struggle or to advance the cause of toleration, as the contemporary Baillie and later historians argued:

No other issue had been so emphasized by Army detractors, who had predicted since the New Model's creation that the soldiers would enforce limitless toleration. This the Army denied, not only in its manifestos but in all its actions. The harmonious diversity of religious beliefs within the ranks may be served as an example for the common good, but it never was intended as a blueprint for the nation. At no point during its radicalization does it appear that the Army saw itself heir to the rich dissident tradition that linked Lollards to Marian exiles to the New England way.⁸²

Thus, if the clerical Independents did fight for toleration, evidence must be found within the Assembly of Divines. From 1644-45 Independents and Presbyterians at Westminster were engaged by order of the Commons in a search for how to accommodate Independency with the Presbyterian system or, as expressed in the "Apology" in a search for "the way of accommodating Dissenting Brethren to enjoy congregations within Presbyterian bounds."⁸³ Baillie, writing in the summer of 1645, provides evidence that the Presbyterians generally were not opposed to the professed aim of the Independents, to seek "a fair and legal toleration of their way."⁸⁴

Baillie's words imply that the toleration advocated by the Independent divines was limited. When Burroughes preached before the House of Peeres in November 1645, he made it clear that he did not seek total toleration: "There is a great outcry against toleration of all religions, and we are willing to join against such toleration." He argued, rather, in support of Independent ministers unable to "see sufficient ground to satisfie their consciences in that way of Ordination [Presbyterianism]." At the same time, he carefully qualified the extent to which he favored toleration: "I do not here stand to plead for liberty for every man to step up into the Pulpit that will be; it is fit men should be examined and approved of, and so sent to this work."⁸⁵ Another Independent divine, Joseph Caryl, preached in that year: "We see this day . . . loose libertine Protestants mixt with Papists against those who are close-covenanting, and close-walking Protestants." As previously declared in the "Apology," Caryl sought to preserve the union between Independents and Presbyterians, who "agree in every doctrine of faith, in the substance of worship and government, and in many formes," against a common enemy. Caryl concluded his sermon with an appeal to Parliament to take action to secure the purity of the church and of religion:

⁸²Ibid., p. 290.

⁸³William A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth, 1640-1660*, 2 vols. (London, 1900), 2: 39.

⁸⁴Robert Baillie, cited in *ibid.*, 2: 45.

⁸⁵Jeremiah Burroughes, *A Sermon Preached Before the Right Honourable the House of Peeres* (1645), pp. 45, 48.

As to bear all difference would make charity blinde, so not to bear some would make her more than lame. I know (honourable Senatours) you wisdom will easily find and discern the *limit-stone*, between *liberty*, and *libertinism*, between the *humours*, of men, and their consciences.⁸⁶

From 1645–46, both sides made serious attempts to accommodate one another in the Assembly. If these attempts later failed, from the point of view at least of the Independent divines, they did not signal the triumph of toleration, but rather, as Caryl foresaw, that “with our own hands we should (upon such dissents) pull down any, who are pillars in *sion*.”⁸⁷ Unwilling to relinquish their alliance with the Presbyterians, the Independents still did not side with sectarians. In the New Model Army, for example,

there remained considerable difference between independency and sectarianism. To the Scots, and the most rigid Presbyterians, no such subtle distinction could be drawn, but to most others, accommodation was to be a part of the nation’s future religious establishment.⁸⁸

When Richard Baxter joined the New Model Army as chaplain in 1645, all his efforts to correct soldiers’ “Error, and Rebellion, and Usurpation” were directed against the Sectaries: Separatists, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Familists, Libertinists, and Paganists; but not against the Independents.⁸⁹

In July 1645, the Assembly offered Parliament its proposals for a Presbyterian government, and in August of that year and March of the following year, Parliament passed two ordinances for the erection of the Presbyterian system. Despite these developments the Assembly, during the same years, worked toward the inclusion of Independency within the Presbyterian system. “The reluctant radicals,” as Pearson calls the Independent divines, demanded “accommodation for Independents within the Presbyterian establishment rather than advocating an Independent establishment.”⁹⁰ From the point of view of the Presbyterian divines, the chances of “fair accommodation” in the Assembly were good; Kirby notes that this group indicated its willingness to preserve the unity in the Assembly.⁹¹ Parliament, as well, recommended accommodation of the Independents. Who, then, stood opposed?

Burroughes, speaking before the House of Peeres on November 26, 1645, stated that two bodies were trying to assure the success of the accommodation of “tender consciences”—the committee of Lords and Commons, and the Committee of the Assembly. In the same speech he also mentioned that there

⁸⁶Joseph Caryl, *The Arraignment of Unbelief as the Grand Cause of Our National Non-establishment* (1645), pp. 2, 47. On the general issue of unbelief and Puritans’ attitude toward it in the seventeenth century see: G. A. Aylmer, “Unbelief in Seventeenth Century England,” in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, D. Pennington and K. Thomas, eds., pp. 22–46.

⁸⁷Joseph Caryl, *The Arraignment of Unbelief*, p. 48.

⁸⁸Kishlansky, *The Rise of the New Model Army*, p. 45.

⁸⁹Richard Baxter, cited by G. F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter* (London, 1965), pp. 36–37.

⁹⁰Pearson, “Reluctant Radicals,” p. 476.

⁹¹Kirby, “The English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly,” p. 421.

are those who “stirr up the Assembly and the City” against the Independents.⁹² He was referring to the London Presbyterian ministers who viciously attacked Parliament’s delimitation of the Presbyterianism at the expense of all other forms of worship. The ministers’ zealous emphasis on discipline contrasted with the attitudes of the Presbyterians in the Assembly who “were not in favor of such a rigidly disciplined church as the Independents and . . . Scottish Presbyterians.”⁹³

In the same speech in which he argued against using force in spiritual matters, Burroughes added that the Independents were indeed willing to join the Presbyterians in the “great outcry against toleration of all religions.” Unlike the sectarians, in 1645–46 neither he (“I do not here stand to plead for liberty for every man to step up into the Pulpit that will be”),⁹⁴ nor the other Independent divines demanded complete toleration. In 1645, as in 1643, they spoke of limited toleration of “tender consciences,” only in order to save themselves from oppression of conscience: “Among all oppressions the oppression of conscience is the greatest . . . let no violence be used to force people to things spiritual that they know not.”⁹⁵

The complexity of the Independents position toward toleration and liberty of conscience is clearly reflected in another tract, *The Ancient Bounds* (1645). Here the Independents continue to insist on the magistrate’s power in religious matters:

We have committed to the magistrate the charge of the Second Table; viz., materially, that is, he is not to see God dishonoured by the manifest breach thereof, or any part thereof. But is that all? No, surely. He may enter the vault even of those abominations of the First Table, and ferret the devils and devil-worship out of their holes and dens.

Idolatry, blasphemy, and profanation of the Lord’s day “ought not to be suffered by the Christian magistrate.” Denying the doctrine of the Trinity, “where the gospel was sounded, is not tolerable; or to deny the Resurrection, or a Judgment Day &c. I say, the Christian magistrate ought not to tolerate the teaching of such contradictions.”⁹⁶ Only a failure to grasp the Independent’s principle upholding the magistrate’s decisive role in religious affairs could explain the contention that it was “for propaganda reasons,” that “the Independent apologists so frequently upheld the right of the civil magistrate.”⁹⁷

⁹²Burroughes, *A Sermon Preached Before the . . . House of Peeres*, “The Epistle.”

⁹³Kirby, “The English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly,” p. 426. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 2 vols. (New York, 1844), 2: 18.

⁹⁴Burroughes, *A Sermon Preached Before . . . the House of Peeres*, pp. 45–48.

⁹⁵Joseph Caryl, *Heaven and Earth Embracing*, p. 10. Jeremiah Burroughes, *A Sermon Preached Before the . . . House of Peeres*, p. 44.

⁹⁶*The Ancient Bounds*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, pp. 250–51.

⁹⁷Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War*, p. 26.

The Ancient Bounds elaborates upon the magistrate's powers and responsibilities concerning religious matters: he is in charge of the First and Second Tables; he must safeguard the purity of the church; he is authorized by God not to tolerate any teaching or doctrine contrary to the Gospel; he should preserve "the external peace and order of the church"; he should offer the truth to all, and "apply means for the reclaiming of those that err"; and finally, he should be a "nursing father to the Church, to nourish the truth and godliness."⁹⁸ Thus, while the sects drew a line between church and state in an attempt to ensure freedom of conscience and worship, the Independents are shown by this tract to have remained closer to the Presbyterian demands for erecting some form of church-state.

As for the argument that *The Ancient Bounds*, when compared with the "Apology," is a sign of "considerable advance toward liberty of conscience" on the part of the Independents,⁹⁹ cautious consideration is required. The tract distinguishes between two kinds of conscience in every believer: "natural conscience" and "an enlightened conscience, carrying a more bright and lively stamp of the kingly place and power of the Lord Jesus, swaying him by the light of faith or scripture." It is because of this duality of conscience that the Independents' were so unwilling to cede to each and every demand for religious liberty based on conscience:

All vicious and scandalous practices, contrary to the light of nature or manifest good of society . . . deriving themselves not from conscience, but a malignant will and unconvinced spirit. Nor yet may all principles that derive themselves from conscience have the benefit of this plea of liberty, so as to save their owners.

The Independents had no desire to champion complete liberty of conscience. Instead, the tract emphasizes the need for means to restrain this liberty:

For the power of conscience itself, as it will not be beholden to any man for its liberty so neither is it capable of outward restraint: they must be moral or spiritual instruments that can work upon conscience. But the exercise or practice of conscience, or the person so exercising, is properly the object of outward restraint in question.¹⁰⁰

Thus the underlying aim of *The Ancient Bounds* becomes clear; while the magistrate may be unable to correct an erroneous or sinful conscience, it is his duty to restrain those who would try to exercise such a conscience in society. In other words, there was no way to correct erroneous beliefs, but a magistrate was called upon to correct erroneous worship.

For there are these two things go to religion: the thing itself, and the managing of it. Though conscience is not to be forced to or from the thing, yet the manner of the

⁹⁸*The Ancient Bounds*, pp. 250–51.

⁹⁹Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰*The Ancient Bounds*, p. 248.

practice is to be regulated according to the peace and comeliness by the civil magistrate.¹⁰¹

It is significant that the tract deals almost exclusively with the role of the magistrate, devoting only one page to the issue of conscience.

In the above distinction between the conscience and its exercising—the first subject to spiritual exhortation and the second to the coercive power of the magistrate—*The Ancient Bounds* indicates a shift in the Independent view concerning the magistrate's power. Whereas previously the Independents maintained that the magistrate could impose his rule in religious matters on the church ("though nothing may be imposed on the Christian churches against their will, by any spiritual Authority . . . yet we affirm . . . that the Civil Magistrate may impose on them spiritual matters")¹⁰², the Independents of *The Ancient Bounds* held that

Christ is the judge of controversies, and the interpreter of the Holy Scripture . . . now to give the magistrate this cognizance of differences in religion, were to set him . . . as judge of controversies and interpreter of scripture.¹⁰³

The Ancient Bounds therefore, marks a retreat by the Independents from their position that the magistrate possesses all embracing power concerning religious matters.

At the same time, it did not indicate a basic change in the Independent view concerning freedom of conscience and toleration. For despite the limitations which they now placed on the power of the magistrate in spiritual matters, the authors argued that conscience is not a justification for religious liberty or freedom to worship, and they upheld the magistrate's role of authority over the exercise of conscience in society.

[A] Christian magistrate, as he hath his authority from God, so he is to take the rise of exercising it from him who hath not committed to him the sword in vain. And he is to aim at the glory of God (the preventing or redressing his dishonour) in every act thereof, and to punish evil.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, nowhere in *The Ancient Bounds* or in the Independent divines' sermons at the time is there a plea for toleration. Preaching before the House of Commons in 1645, Thomas Goodwin maintained:

If any man think I am pleading for liberty of all opinions of what nature and how grosse soever, I humbly desire them to remember that I only plead for Saints, and I answer plainly, *The Saints they need it not*.¹⁰⁵

Joseph Caryl appears even to have encouraged the two houses of Parliament to persecute rather than tolerate:

¹⁰¹*The Ancient Bounds*, p. 252.

¹⁰²Philip Nye, cited by Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," p. 55.

¹⁰³*The Ancient Bounds*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁴*The Ancient Bounds*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁵Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdomes* (1645), p. 53.

Whatsoever (I say) is an error or heresie, let all the penalties which Christ hath charged upon it be executed to the utmost. . . . If Christ would not have had error to be opposed, why hath he left us means both for the opposition and suppression of error. . . . If, I say, we thus prosecute error and contend for truth, we may keep our hopes alive.¹⁰⁶

These sermons and *The Ancient Bounds* demonstrate repeatedly that the Independents sought acceptance among the Presbyterians; yet there is no evidence whatsoever for the notion that in order to achieve toleration for themselves they advocated toleration for all.

In 1645 Robert Baillie observed the dilemma of the Independent divines:

We hope shortly to get the Independents put to it to declare themselves either to be for the sectaries, or against them. If they declare against them, they will be but a small, inconsiderable company; if for them, all honest men will cry out upon them for separating from all the Reformed churches to join with Anabaptists and Libertines.¹⁰⁷

However, the Independents themselves showed no sign of urgency to take a sharp stand. Throughout the 1640s, as exemplified in *An Apologetical Narration*, they attempted rather to emphasize their unwillingness to be identified with Separation. When, for example, the issue of ordination was discussed in the Assembly, "Philip Nye, one of the most aggressive Independents, declared that his ordination by a bishop was valid."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, in their manifestos and sermons from the early 1640s until 1648, the Independent divines neither declared themselves for the sectaries nor joined them on the issue of toleration, but rather pleaded to keep unity "among the Saints," i.e., between them and the Presbyterians. There is no indication in that period that the Independents tried to widen "the protestant party" to include the sects. During the 1640s they stood with Presbyterians against complete liberty of conscience and religious liberty.¹⁰⁹

There is even less evidence that the sectarians sided with the Independents in search of toleration or on the issue of liberty of conscience. Undoubtedly, the Presbyterians found it difficult to accept the principles of Independency concerning church government. "For under this notion of Independencie, Weavers and Taylors may become Pastors," complained Thomas Coleman. Yet Coleman himself gave evidence of the extent to which Presbyterians and Independents accommodated each other: "The Presbyterian way . . . I embrace

¹⁰⁶Joseph Caryl, *England Plus Ultra* (1645), pp. 24–25.

¹⁰⁷Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journal*, ed., D. Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1841–42), 2: 229.

¹⁰⁸Kirby, "The English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly," p. 422.

¹⁰⁹These arguments are based on an examination of the following Independents divines' sermons from 1646 to 1648; Joseph Caryl, *Joy Out-Joyed* (1646); Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdoms* (1646); Caryl, *England Plus Ultra*; Jeremiah Burroughes, *A Sermon*; Hugh Peter, *Gods Doing, and Mans Duty* (1646); William Bridge, *The Saints Hiding-Place in the Time of Gods Anger* (1647); William Carter, *Light in Darkness* (1648); William Bridge, *England Saved with a Notwithstanding* (1648); and *Christs Coming* (1648).

and love. The Congregational way, and those that practise it, I approve, and honour."¹¹⁰ The differences, therefore, between Presbyterians and Independents concerning church government should not detract from acknowledging their shared notions of a national church and the role of the godly Christian magistrate.

Finally, the adamancy with which the Independents insisted upon the magistrate's rule in religious matters is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the "Whitehall Debates" of 1648–49. In those debates the Council of Officers of the Army discussed the first reservation attached to Article Seven of the "Agreement of the People," namely, "whether the civil magistrate had a power given to him from God (In matters of religion)."¹¹¹ Among the clergy invited to take part in the debates on this issue were Philip Nye, the Independent, and John Goodwin the Separatist. Goodwin answered the question without hesitation: "God hath not invested any power in a civil magistrate in matters of religion." Nye, trying to distinguish between "those things that are truly religious" and "'false' religion," echoed the distinction made in *The Ancient Bounds*:

Whether the magistrate have anything to do (with religion) . . . either the setting up the false God, which is no religion indeed (or of other practices contrary to God's commandments), for my own part I must profess that I do think the magistrate may have something to do in that.

For Nye, as for the other Independent divines, since the magistrate had an "edict from heaven" to be directed toward the goals of the Christian Commonwealth, his power in religious matters could be "lawfully exercised."¹¹²

"The Puritans of the Left," observes A. S. P. Woodhouse, "discovered that you cannot effectually guarantee the liberty of the Saints without guaranteeing the liberty of all men."¹¹³ Independent divines did not share with the sectarians this view concerning liberty for all. During the 1640s, while the Puritans of the left were proclaiming freedom of conscience to be one of the natural rights of man and therefore outside the magistrate's power, the Independent divines, distinguished themselves from the radical sects by insisting that the magistrate should have authority in the religious as well as the civil sphere.

Writing for "the true information of posterity" concerning the Puritan failure during 1640–1660, Richard Baxter, a Puritan divine of the Presbyterian persuasion, lamented that:

God did so wonderfully bless the labours of his *unanimous faithful ministers* that had it not been for the faction of the Prelatists on one side that drew men off, and the factions of the giddy and turbulent sectaries on the other side. . . . England had

¹¹⁰Thomas Coleman, *Hopes Deferred and Dashed* (1645), Preface, 1.

¹¹¹*The Whitehall Debates*, in Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, p. 126. I also used *The Clark Papers*, C. H. Firth, ed., the Camden Society, 2 vols. (London 1891, 1894).

¹¹²*The Whitehall Debates*, pp. 126, 153, 160.

¹¹³Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, p. 81.

been like in a quarter of an age to have become a land of saints and pattern of holiness to all the world, and the unmatched paradise of the earth. Never were such fair opportunities to sanctify a nation lost and trodden as have been in this land of late. Woe to them that were the causes of it.¹¹⁴

Baxter did not include the Independents among "the factions of the giddy and turbulent sectaries" in the 1640s, because he had already been able to make an important distinction between the sectaries and "the moderate Independents"¹¹⁵ or Congregationalists, who, in contrast to the sectaries, had not sought to separate from the Church of England, but rather had endeavored, along with the Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, to reform the Church of England during the 1640s.

During the 1640s, however, the majority of Presbyterian ministers were neither willing nor ready to accept such a distinction between the Independents and the Independency of the sectaries. Especially Presbyterian Scots, who came to assist the Puritans in the task of reforming the Church of England, and the Presbyterian ministers in the city of London, constantly resisted any attempt by the Independents to disassociate their system of church-government from the Independency of the sectaries, and repeatedly blamed the Independents for pursuing religious toleration not only for themselves but for every sect and heresy in the land. The reasons for this resistance and accusation are not hard to find. The fall of Archbishop Laud and the established church had opened a Pandora's Box by allowing the rise of so many sects, heresy, and separation. The menace of the sectaries and separatists bewildered orthodox Puritans. In face of such disturbing developments in the religious life of the nation, Presbyterians closed ranks claiming that any deviation from Presbyterianism would eventually lead, as was already evident, to separation from, and hence to the destruction of, the Church of England as the central organ of religious life in the realm. Presbyterian ministers in London, for example, protested generally "against the toleration of Independency in this church" of England, and in particular declared themselves against "the desires and endeavours of Independents for toleration."¹¹⁶ According to these Presbyterians, "the Independents . . . open a flood-gate" for all kinds of heresy, and the Independents also create a "gulfe, which receives all I know not what to call that all, but they say, That all the silth or corruption of Manners and Doctrine

¹¹⁴Richard Baxter, *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, J. M. L. Thomas and N. H. Keeble, eds. (London, 1974), p. 84.

¹¹⁵Richard Baxter, "A Disswasive from unnecessary Division and Separation, and the Real Concord of the Moderate Independents with the Presbyterians" (1655), in Baxter, *Church Concord* (1691), pp. 53-54.

¹¹⁶"A Letter of the Presbyterian Ministers in the City of London . . . to the Reverend Assembly of Divines," January 1645, in William Assheton, *Toleration Disapproved and Condemned* (1670), p. 62.

emptieth it self-in thither, into that gulfe, as into a Common-shoare."¹¹⁷ Still, as their actions and convictions showed, "the Independents are as zealous against Idolatries and superstitions" as the Presbyterians, and "had rather the Presbytery should prevaile, than the Papists."¹¹⁸

The Presbyterians' denunciation of Independents, along with their attempt to defame them by associating them with sectaries, heresy, and separation, clearly reflected many fears among orthodox Puritans about the state of religion during the early 1640s, but we should not accept these charges against the Independents at face value and without examining the Independents' modes of conviction and conduct. In the past, however, historians have not only accepted the Presbyterians' attack on the Independents as evidence for the latter's leaning toward religious toleration, but they have also tended to ignore the Independent's premises of church government, or Congregationalism, which by its very nature in the given period did not allow for religious toleration. Given the fact that Independents in England and Congregationalists in Puritan New England stood upon common ground concerning the issue of church-polity, a brief examination of Congregationalism in Massachusetts Bay Colony may provide an appropriate context within which to analyze the Independents' view concerning the role of godly magistrate in a Christian commonwealth, and hence facilitate a clearer understanding about the real stand of the Independents on religious toleration.

The cornerstone of Congregationalism was the emphasis upon the independence of each particular church, or congregation, in order to achieve the highest purity of faith and life. The model for this ecclesiastical system was the voluntary gathering of the ancient Christian churches, consisting only of true believers whose churches, though independent of each other, were directly related through the covenant with God. Consequently, Congregationalism stressed that each particular congregation, over which any kind of ecclesiastical power was denied, held the means of salvation, and constituted "the Kingdom of God." Clearly, that system of church-government, under which each congregation was not dependent on a hierarchical ecclesiastical order, and in which ministers were not allowed to interfere in the affairs of other churches but only in their own particular congregation; who, then, was to be charged with maintaining religious conformity and unity?

Paradoxically, by pursuing the spirituality of the church, the Congregationalists left the church bereft of any wordly means to maintain order, unity, and conformity in religious matters. Accordingly, in this ecclesiastical system, the civil magistrate would acquire this central role and responsibility, and this is why Congregationalists stressed the doctrine of the church's dependence upon

¹¹⁷*Inquiries into the causes of our miseries* (1644), p. 11.

¹¹⁸*The Compleate Intelligencer and Resolver*, November 14, 1643, p. 45.

the civil magistrate. "We willingly acknowledge," wrote John Cotton in *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*, to which Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye wrote a long preface, "a power in the civil magistrates, to establish and reform religion, according to the word of God." As magistrates are "nursing fathers and mothers of the church," the church is "subject to the power of the sword in matters which concern civil peace." Civil peace, according to Cotton, includes "the establishment of pure religion, in doctrine, worship, and government, according to the word of God: as also the reformation of all corruptions in any of these."¹¹⁹

Congregationalism put a limitation upon the church's power concerning religious order and uniformity, delegating this decisive role to the magistrates:

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

Furthermore, in the case of a congregation which inclined to different ecclesiastical views and ways, the ministers in Massachusetts left no doubt about the role they expected the magistrates to play:

If any church one or more shall grow schismaticall, rending it self from the communion of other churches, or shall walke incorrigibly or obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, contrary to the rule of the word: in such case, the Magistrate is to put forth his coercive power as the matter shall require.¹²⁰

In the context of the Congregationalists' premises of church government, it is clear why both Independents in England and Congregationalists in New England delegated to the magistrate such a crucial role in maintaining Christian commonwealth in civil and religious spheres. Hence it comes as no surprise that Independents stressed the magistrate's coercive power over religious matters, which during the 1640s comprised the very issue of religious toleration.

When the time came that magistrates saw their primary duty and obligation as fulfilling the will of those who elected them to office rather than fulfilling God's will, the unity between religion and politics began to decline. But all

¹¹⁹John Cotton, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*, pp. 88, 152–56. On Puritanism in New England, see my, "Theocracy in Massachusetts: The Nature and Meaning of the Holy Experiment in the Wilderness," *The Journal of Religious History* 14, no. 2 (December 1986): 138–151, "The Ministers' View of Church and State in Early Massachusetts," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 32, in *Studies in American Civilization*, E. M. Budick, et al, eds., (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 1–25, "Puritan Millennialism and Theocracy in Early Massachusetts," *History of European Ideas* 8, no. 3 (1987): 309–18, "The Gospel of Reformation: The Origins of the Great Puritan Migration," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (October 1986): 584–602, and "The Millennial Quest in the New England Errand Into the Wilderness," *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America, Essays in Honor of Prof. Y. Arieli* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 187–201.

¹²⁰"The Cambridge Platform, 1646–48," in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston, 1960), pp. 236–37.

during the 1640s, for Presbyterians and Independents alike, this very unity of religion and politics, or of church and state, which was indeed the ultimate mark of orthodox Puritans, was so axiomatic that both groups insisted upon the magistrate's power in religious matters and opposed toleration. On the other hand, the sectaries—people such as John Goodwin, Henry Robinson, and William Walwyn—were those who in order to pursue their deep religious belief, came to the radical conclusion, already during the early 1640s, and against the stand of orthodox Puritans, Presbyterians, and Independents, that the civil magistrate had nothing to do within the sphere of religious and spiritual life and, in fact, he posed a grave threat to the liberty of conscience. The sectarians, not the Independents, introduced the issue of religious toleration to the stage of the Puritan Revolution.

Perhaps no one but Roger Williams, who suffered at the hands of orthodox Puritans in both England and New England, is more qualified to pronounce the last word concerning the Independents and toleration. "The Independents," he wrote, "cast down the crown of the Lord Jesus at the feet of the Civil Magistrate," and their aim in England was to "perswade the Mother Old England to imitate her Daughter New England's practice," and to "embrace themselves, both as the States and Peoples Bishops." Williams recognized, then, the essential congruency between Independents in England and Congregationalists in Massachusetts in relation to toleration, and he consistently denounced their view that God had commissioned magistrates to deal with religious matters. "Magistrates have received their power from the people," he boldly asserted, and their power was therefore "without respect to this or that religion."¹²¹ Orthodox Puritans in England would not allow these views to go without notice; consequently, the Commons ordered Williams' books, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, *Queries of Higher Consideration*, and *Cottons Letter Lately Printed*, to be burned in August 1644.

¹²¹Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, pp. 349–51, 355–56.