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# Was the English Civil War a War of Religion? The Evidence of Political Propaganda

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GLENN BURGESS

The Royalist divine Edward Symmons had no doubts about what motivated his Parliamentary enemies. As he tells us in the preface to one of his pamphlets, he had good evidence to support his views.

About Easter last, 1644. I did visit in the Prison at *Shrewsbury* some Prisoners, that had been taken at the Castle of *Brampton Bryan*, belonging to *Sir Robert Harley* in *Hereford-shire*: and questioning them about their taking up of Armes against their *Soveraigne*, they answered me, that they took up Armes against *Antichrist*, and *Popery*; for (said they) *'tis prophesied in the Revelation, that the Whore of Babylon shall be destroyed with fire and sword, and what doe you know, but this is the time of her ruine, and that we are all men that must help to pull her downe.*

Symmons did his best to persuade the prisoners that their actions were based on several theological misunderstandings. It was, he said, the work only of kings to pull down the Whore of Babylon, and this would happen in Rome, not in England. The captured soldiers were unmoved:

they told me that *all the true Godly divines in England* (amongst whom they named in speciall M. Marshall[]) *were of their opinion, that Antichrist was here in England as well as at Rome*, and that the *Bishops were Antichrist, and all that did endeavour to support them, were popishly affected, Babilonish and Antichristian too, yea many*

Early versions of this paper were given to the History Department, University of Canterbury, in 1994; to the History Department, University of Hull, in 1995; and to the July 1995 conference of the Centre for Seventeenth-Century Studies, University of Durham. Something close to the final version was given to the Huntington Library Early Modern British History Seminar in May 1998. I am grateful to the audiences on all of these occasions for their discussion and comment. Special thanks is owed to the organizer of the Huntington British Seminar, Barbara Donagan, who allowed me to read the typescript of her forthcoming essay, "Conscience Satisfied: Casuistry and Allegiance in the English Civil War." I owe to that my use of Edward Symmons to open this article.

*professed Papists were in our Armies who (they said) did fight against Christ and Protestant Religion, and therefore they thought they were bound in Conscience to fight against them, and us that took part with them, and in so doing, they did but help God against his Enemies.*<sup>1</sup>

Asked to defend this opinion, the prisoners cited Judges 5:23, *Curse ye Meroz*. They claimed that a parliamentary sermon by Stephen Marshall had taught them the true meaning of this text. Only later did Symmons come across a copy of Marshall's famous parliamentary fast sermon of 23 February 1642, *Meroz Cursed*, and recognize it as the sermon that had inspired the defenders of Brampton Bryan. Marshall had since 1642 preached this sermon up and down the country more than sixty times, and it had no doubt circulated widely in its printed form, too.<sup>2</sup>

Symmons was certain that the rebels who fought their king were inspired by religious zealotry. He is unusual, perhaps, in the charity with which he viewed this, and in his belief that he might be able to persuade his enemies of their error; but he was not alone in seeing religious zeal (sincere or pretended) as the root of the problem. He compared the Parliamentarians to the seditious groups in Jerusalem, about whom Josephus had written, "They pretended in all their rebellion that they fought for the Lords cause, for the Law and Religion of their God."<sup>3</sup> Many other Royalists clearly believed themselves to be facing an enemy whose rebellion flowed from principles primarily religious. John Bramhall explained that unsound Presbyterian ecclesiology was at the heart of Parliamentary politics; rather later, Jasper Mayne identified the problem as one of false prophecy.<sup>4</sup>

Symmons's analysis of the intellectual support of the Parliamentary cause coheres nicely with, and may be said to provide evidence for, two historiograph-

1. Edward Symmons, *Scripture Vindicated, from the Misapprehensions, Misinterpretations and Misapplications of Mr Stephen Marshall*, Thomason E27(12) (Oxford, 1644), preface. For the context, see Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads: The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), chap. 7.
2. Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, England, 1988), 127.
3. Edward Symmons, *A Loyall Subjects Beliefe, Expressed in a Letter to Master Stephen Marshall*, Thomason E103(6) (Oxford, 1643), 83.
4. John Bramhall, *The Serpent Salve; or, A Remedy for the Biting of an Asp* (1643), in Bramhall, *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Bramhall, D.D.*, ed. A. W. H. Lister, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1842–45), 3:289–496, esp. the preface "To the Reader," Jasper Mayne, *A Sermon against False Prophets*, Thomason E371(8) (Oxford, 1647). Another author who, like Symmons, treated with some seriousness the religious zeal that he clearly discerned beneath the Parliamentary cause was Griffith Williams in *Jura Majestatis*, Thomason E14(8) (Oxford, 1644). John Maxwell is another who emphasized the religious basis for the rebellion, though he may have had the Scottish covenanters at the forefront of his mind; see *Sacro-Sancta Regum Majestas*, Thomason E30(22) (London, 1644), 61–64.

ical trends. There is, firstly, the view famously enunciated by John Morrill in the claim that “the English Civil War was not the first European revolution: it was the last of the Wars of Religion.” This view of the Civil War as a war of religion has been shared by a number of other “revisionist” historians.<sup>5</sup> It has drawn upon powerful earlier work by William Lamont. It has been exploited and criticized by a diverse array of historians, pre-, post-, and anti-revisionist.<sup>6</sup> The view of the Civil War as a war of religion involves, variously, the claim that it was only a person’s religious commitments that enable the historian to tell which side he or she would take in 1642; the claim that it was small groups of religious zealots at Westminster and in the provinces that drove the country to civil war; and the claim that only religious opposition to Charles I, and not legal-constitutionalist opposition, displayed a dynamic that drove men to more and more uncompromising positions. For our purposes, the striking fact is that there seems good evidence to support the view that religion was the key determinant of Civil War allegiance,<sup>7</sup> suggesting in turn that it motivated many in their decision to fight for or against the king. In the minds of those who fought it, the Civil War was a religious war.

The second and quite separate historiographical trend has been the view advanced by some scholars interested in Western attitudes to war and peace. This

5. Morrill, “The Religious Context of the English Civil War,” in Morrill, *Nature of the English Revolution* (Harlow, England, 1993), chap. 3, at p. 68. For other general accounts of the Civil War as a “war of religion” see *ibid.*, pt. 1, also chap. 15; Morrill, “Sir William Brereton and England’s Wars of Religion,” *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985): 311–32; Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (London, 1981); Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990), esp. chaps. 3 and 4; Russell, “Issues in the House of Commons, 1621–1629: Predictors of Civil War Allegiance,” *Albion* 23 (1991): 23–39. Also, more broadly, J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1986), 65–66; and Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, 1994).
6. William Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium* (London, 1979); Lamont, “The Puritan Revolution: An Historiographical Essay,” in J. G. A. Pocock et al., eds., *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1993), chap. 4; and David Harris Sacks, “Bristol’s ‘Wars of Religion,’” in R. C. Richardson, ed., *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), chap. 5. Among the critics might be numbered Christopher Hill, *Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, vol. 2 of the *Collected Essays of Christopher Hill* (Brighton, England, 1986), vii–viii; Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke, England, 1991), esp. 114–16; George Bernard, “The Church of England, c. 1529–c. 1642,” *History* 75 (1990): 183–206; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 933ff.; Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625–1641* (Oxford, 1992), 313–18; and I. M. Green, “‘England’s Wars of Religion?’ Religious Conflict and the English Civil Wars,” in J. van den Berg and P. G. Hoftijzer, eds., *Church, Change, and Revolution: Transactions of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch Church History Colloquium (Exeter, 30 August–3 September, 1988)* (Leiden, 1991), 100–21.
7. The point has, for the localities, been confirmed in some detail by Mark Stoyle, *Loyalty and Locality: Popular Allegiance in Devon during the English Civil War* (Exeter, England, 1994).

view holds that the English Puritans were important in developing a theory of religious or holy war that rejected key assumptions of the just war tradition. The ideas of those involved in the "Puritan Revolution" have long had an important role in the general history of ideas about warfare in early modern Europe. Roland Bainton first approached the subject of Puritan ideas about war and revolution in 1942, later incorporating his findings into an important book.<sup>8</sup> Bainton's work formed the basis for Michael Walzer's portrait of the Puritans as the prototype of the modern revolutionary, a portrait in which the relationship between their ideas of holy war ("crusade," in Walzer's terms) and the modern idea of revolutionary war played a crucial role.<sup>9</sup> Walzer's interpretation in its turn has served as a foundation for Stephen Baskerville's examination of the Civil War sermon literature (see his article in this issue). But earlier, in 1975, a fundamental assault on this whole line of interpretation had been mounted by James Turner Johnson.<sup>10</sup> Bainton's central argument was that the Puritans (or some of them) moved away from just war theory and developed instead a theory of holy war; Johnson rejected the sharp division, arguing instead that "Puritan" holy war theory (in fact it was neither exclusively nor universally Puritan, he argued) was not a rejection of but a development *within* the just war tradition. He argued that late medieval just war theory divided into two quite separate, indeed logically irreconcilable, streams ("neither doctrine is compatible with the other").<sup>11</sup> One, which had its origins in the Reformation and culminated in the Puritans and their revolution, was a theory of holy war. This, however, proved a dead end, whereas the other strand eventually evolved into modern international law. This second strand was a secularized theory of war, based on the declaration that religious wars were illegitimate. It began with the Spanish Thomists (especially Vitoria and Suarez), passed through

8. Roland Bainton, "Congregationalism and the Puritan Revolution from the Just War to the Crusade," reprinted in Bainton, *Studies in the Reformation* (London, 1963), chap. 18; and Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-examination* (London, 1961), esp. 136–51.
9. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), esp. chap. 8.
10. James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200–1740* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), esp. chap. 2. See also the less-than-resounding defense of Bainton in Timothy George, "War and Peace in the Puritan Tradition," *Church History* 53 (1984): 492–503. Other important criticisms of Bainton's work include LeRoy Walters, "The Just War and the Crusade: Antitheses or Analogies?" *Monist* 57 (1973): 584–94; David Little, "Some Justifications for Violence in the Puritan Revolution," *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 577–89; and Little, "'Holy War' Appeals and Western Christianity: A Reconsideration of Bainton's Approach," in John Kelsey and James Turner Johnson, eds., *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York, 1991), 121–39.
11. Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 81.

Grotius to Locke, and beyond.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, there are important differences among these scholars, but all of them agree that Puritans (most for Bainton; some for Johnson) were prepared to defend directly the legitimacy of religious war. To that extent, they all help us in thinking about the ways in which the Civil War might have been a war of religion (even if little use of their work has been made by Stuart historians in recent years).

Curiously, though it happily supports these two historiographical developments, Symmons's account of Parliamentary motives finds rather less support in the writings of Stephen Marshall himself, a fact that might be thought in its turn to reflect some doubt back upon the historiography. Although Symmons saw little difference in tendency between Marshall's *Meroz Cursed* (first preached, we should remember, several months before the Civil War), and his defense of the war against the king, *A Plea for Defensive Arms* (1642), the reality is otherwise. Marshall had a markedly bifocal vision of England's war of religion. It is easy enough to see how the defenders of Brampton Bryan could have read his fast sermon *Meroz Cursed* as a call to arms (though we shall come back later to the question of whether they were right to do so). Marshall made it abundantly clear that the people of England, like the people of Meroz, would be cursed if they "came not to the helpe of the Lord against the *Mighty*." One should not side with those "against the Lord or against his Church." Helping God's cause might even require the shedding of blood.<sup>13</sup> Marshall seems here to be concerned entirely with the Church and its business.<sup>14</sup>

When Marshall came the following year to defend the legitimacy of Parliament's actual resistance, he did so on entirely different—and entirely legalistic—grounds. His strategy was, first, to define the question at issue precisely, and then to answer it. The formulation of the question itself almost guaranteed that Marshall would not advance a "holy war" argument:

*Whether a people, especially the representative body of a State, may (after all humble Remonstrances) defend themselves against the unlawfull violence of the Supream Magistrate, or his Instruments, Endeavouring (and that in matters of great moment) to deprive them of their lawfull Liberties.*<sup>15</sup>

12. See *ibid.*, 25, for a diagrammatic summary of the argument.

13. Stephen Marshall, *Meroz Cursed*, Thomason E133(19) (London, 1642), 6–7, 10.

14. See *ibid.*, 26, for a brief comparison between the godly and "common wealths men," which effectively indicates Marshall's own almost exclusive focus on religious issues.

15. Stephen Marshall, *A Plea for Defensive Armes*, Thomason E 102 (10), a different edition; 2d ed. (London, 1643), 3.

It was answered entirely in positive-law terms. There were many different kinds of lawful government in the world, and so there were no *general* rules about the lawfulness of resistance. Instead,

the bounds and limits of the Magistrates lawfull power of commanding, and the subjects necessary obeying, must be found, and taken out of the severall Laws, Customes, and Constitutions of those severall States, and Commonwealths: There are scarce two formes (especially of Regall government, in the world) but they differ one from the other, and that in matters of moment. Now I say, what the power of Magistrates in one Countrey differs from the power of Magistrates in another Countrey, and how the duty of Subjects differ in each, must be found only in the Laws of the respective places.<sup>16</sup>

These sorts of particular legal questions could never be answered in the abstract, so that “whether (for instance in England) Ship-money be the Kings right, and so to be yeilded, or denied . . . must not be determined by any Law, but by the Law of England; go therefore to the Lawes, and learned Lawyers.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, in English law it was clear that Parliament did have the authority to resist the king’s violent aggression.<sup>18</sup> The chief role of religion was generally to bind both magistrates and subjects to conscientious obedience to the law, leaving subjects with a right to armed defense when the king broke the law and ruled tyrannically.<sup>19</sup> To the objection that “the Fathers of the Primitive times knew no defence but *preces & lachrymae* in all their unjust sufferings,” Marshall gave a simple answer:

Their liberties and Religion were not established by Law, and this was the cause, saith *Abbot* Bishop of Salisbury, why the Christians in the Primitive times, before their Religion was established by Law, *caedebantur non caedebant*, would rather be killed then kill: But after the times of *Constantine*, when Religion was established, they shook off the yoke of persecution from the Church, *& caedebant non caedebantur*, they did kill rather then be killed.<sup>20</sup>

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 4.

18. Ibid., for example, 6–8.

19. Ibid., 4–6.

20. Ibid., 20.



Religion could be defended only insofar as it was protected by the law of the land. Marshall's entire case really amounted to an avoidance of holy war argument. His argument was, we might say, constitutional: the two Houses could defend Englishmen's liberties against the king because they had a legal right to do so. There was no right to defend the faith as such. Clearly, Marshall's pamphlet provides us with a striking example of a legal, not of a religious, defense of the legitimacy of the English Civil War. We might have expected such a thing from a lawyer, a Henry Parker or even a William Prynne, but surely not from a leading Puritan divine. Why did Stephen Marshall refrain from defending the cause in a way that his auditors or readers at Brampton Bryan had not?



In fact, Marshall's attitude was far from being an unusual one among the Puritan clergy who defended the two Houses' war against the king. The Puritan clergy, whose motives for resisting the king, we can be sure, were religious, nonetheless refused to defend their actions on religious grounds. It is they who testify most to the power of the doctrine that religious war was un-Christian, for it was they who had most to gain from rejecting it. We find in their defenses of the Parliamentary cause a direct acknowledgment that resistance for religious reasons could not be justified. Jeremiah Burroughes, first critic of the Royalist divine and political writer Henry Ferne, conceded the point fully:

we acknowledge we must not resist for Religion; if the Laws of the Land be against it, we must either suffer, or seek to enjoy our Religion in the uttermost parts of the earth, rather than resist.<sup>21</sup>

The qualification was of course crucial, for as Burroughes had already remarked, "forces may bee raised upon other grounds then the Kings being bent to overthrow Religion."<sup>22</sup> In and for itself, religion could not be defended by force. Burroughes clearly thought that a legal defense of the war against the king *was* possible, but that such a war would involve religion only indirectly.

It was on similar grounds that one of the most famous of Parliamentary resistance theorists—albeit one who fits only uncomfortably into the role—was to criticize the authors of *Scripture and Reason Pleaded for Defensive Armes*. Philip Hunton claimed that those authors "free[d] Christians even in the Apostles time,

21. Jeremiah Burroughes, "A Briefe Answer to Doctor Fernes Booke," 7, appended to Burroughes, *The Glorious Name of God, the Lord of Hosts* (London, 1643).

22. *Ibid.*, 2.



and so under the Romane Emperours, or any other Government from necessity of passive subjection in case of persecution.”<sup>23</sup> They were wrong to do so.

Rather I approve the received Doctrine of the Saints in ancient and moderne times, who could never find this licence in that place of the Apostle [Romans 13]: and doe concurre with Master Burroughs, professing against resistance of authority, though abused. . . . We acknowledge we must not resist for Religion, if the Lawes of the Land be against it.<sup>24</sup>

The alternative meant slighting the ancient martyrs and justifying the actions of contemporary “Papists, Heretickes, and grossest Malefactors.”<sup>25</sup> Like Burroughs, Hunton signaled the fact that the way around this problem was to develop a legalistic defense of resistance.

[T]here is in case of the Parliament now taking up Armes no need of these offensive grounds; Religion being now a part of our Nationall Law, and cannot suffer but the Law must suffer with it.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, Hunton produced instead a purely secular-legal argument. He indicated cases where Parliament’s use of the power of the sword contrary to the king’s command might be justified. There were three such cases: when foreign invasion was imminent, when “the Lawes and Frame of government are secretly undermined, or openly assaulted,” and when “the Fundamentall Rights of either of the three Estates bee invaded by one or both the rest.”<sup>27</sup>

The most interesting of all those who defended Parliament in ways that evaded, but did not reject, the principle that resistance for religion’s sake was unacceptable was Charles Herle. His reply to Ferne showed the polemical benefit that accrued from the subtle and fundamentally constitutional argument that he developed.<sup>28</sup> He was able to discount Ferne’s Jewish and Roman parallels, for those nations were differently constituted from the English. They were “simple and absolute Monarchies,” in which resistance was impermissible. Such an argument also served to brush aside the example of Tertullian:

23. Philip Hunton, *A Treatise of Monarchie* (London, 1643), 63–64.

24. *Ibid.*, 64.

25. *Ibid.*, 66.

26. *Ibid.* Cf. the comments of Edmund Waller cited in the final section of this essay.

27. Hunton, *Treatise*, 67.

28. This characterization of Herle is to be found in Ernest Sirluck’s introduction to *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 2:42–44.

[T]hen the Christians in Tertullians time are objected [by Ferne], as if they were a civill distinct state, from the Romans in which they liv'd, or the Romane other then an absolute Monarchy by consent of the Senat.<sup>29</sup>

He soon made the chief theoretical point with unmistakable clarity:

[W]e are told that the primitive Christians suffered without resistance, and that the Netherlands had greater cause then we to make resistance, a contrary religion was urged on them, whereas we have ours still offered to us; no, we hold not what ever cruelty can be suffered cause enough to make resistance, 'tis not the cause, 'tis the constitution of the government, reserving in its coordination a power of resistance in order to its preservation: otherwise were this an absolute Monarchy, should the King alone, or (as it is) should King and Parliament enjoyne us all to deny Christ and worship the sun, we were (though never so able) not to make any resistance but by suffering; the cause cannot alter the case here, 'tis the constitution must do it.<sup>30</sup>

The English Parliament could resist its king, not for religion's sake, but because the English polity was so constituted as to reserve to it such a power.

William Bridge's works were competent, careful, and often scholarly presentations of the Parliamentary case. The main thrust of his account was unmistakably secular, though notable also for its careful moderation: Bridge was careful to confine his defense of Parliament's actions to a defense of a right of self-preservation.<sup>31</sup> Subjects could take up arms against their king's command only collectively, only for self-preservation rather than "as an act of jurisdiction," and only by ensuring that they resisted the king's commands and not his person.<sup>32</sup> When he came to

29. Charles Herle, *A Fuller Answer to a Treatise Written by Doctor Ferne* (London, 1642), 21, 25.

30. *Ibid.*, 25.

31. For this reason Bridge is a classic illustration of Conrad Russell's point that Parliamentarians in the years 1642–43 thought of defending *self-defense* but not *resistance*: see Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1991), 460–62. (On checking this reference I note that Russell has also succinctly summarized one of the main arguments of this paper: "The dearth of Parliamentary statements claiming that they were fighting for religion must in part be ascribed to their belief and that of their target audience that it was a sin to do so" [p. 462].) Russell's claims have now been challenged in John Sander-son, "Conrad Russell's Ideas," *History of Political Thought* 14 (1993): 85–102.

32. William Bridge, *The Wounded Conscience Cured, the Weak One Strengthened, and the Doubting Satisfied*, Thomason E89(8) (London, 1642/3), 1–2. Cf. "Nature in generall teacheth self-preservation"; Bridge, *The Truth of the Times Vindicated*, Thomason E61(20) (London, 1643), 19.

deal with Ferne's jibe that the Parliamentary arguments were essentially papist, Bridge began by distinguishing the secular from the religious case:

The Papists plead for a power to depose a Prince in case that he turn Heretick, which we do not; for we hold that though a Prince may leave and change his Religion, the Subjects are not thereby excused from their allegiance. . . . The Papist saying, the Church hath a power of preserving its owne safety, and therefore the Pope may depose: we say the Kingdome hath a power to preserve it self.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, the Church did have a right of self-defense provided by the power to excommunicate, but it was not a political power.<sup>34</sup> That was made apparent in Bridge's comment on Ferne's appeal to Tertullian. Ferne asked why it was that, if a state had the power to defend itself, the early Christians felt themselves bound to passivity.

The question is wrong[ly] stated, it should have been made thus, If any state hath such meanes to provide for its safety, what means of safety had the Roman State under the Roman Emperours, when as he doth say, what means of safety had the Christian Religion under the Roman Emperours? Christian Religion, and the State are two different things.

The primitive Christians had no means of self-defense "because the Roman State was not with them." The Christians, "not being the representative body of the Empire," had no political authority.<sup>35</sup> There was, in short,

no more likenesse betweene our condition, and the condition of the primitive Christians, then betweene the condition of private men whom the whole State doth move against, and the condition of people whom the State is with.<sup>36</sup>

Bridge did not say that it was wrong to resist for religious reasons, but he did say that only the state's constituted authority could initiate any acts of resistance. This inevitably led him into a political-legal defense of the Parliamentary case, based on the representative nature of Parliament and its consequent embodiment of the community's right of self-defense.

33. Bridge, *Wounded Conscience Cured*, 32–33.

34. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

35. *Ibid.*, 34.

36. *Ibid.*, 35.

A not dissimilar argument was advanced by Herbert Palmer and the other authors of *Scripture and Reason Pleaded for Defensive Armes*. They were not quite so at ease in their concession to Ferne as Herle had been, nor were they so limited in their concessions as Bridge. At one point, for example, they asserted a right to resist “tyrannous Lawes directly and clearly against GOD, and his true Religion”;<sup>37</sup> but more revealing was their talk of defending “Laws and Liberties, and with them Religion.”<sup>38</sup> Like Herle and Bridge, Palmer and his friends accepted, albeit mostly tacitly, that if they were to defend resistance they could do so only by making it a political right inherent in at least some constituted polities. So, to distinguish their position from the pope’s, they argued that

his Church is not a Civill State, but the good of it is mainly spirituall, and to be preserved by such spirituall meanes, as God hath appointed, who both instituted and constituted it himselfe, and left not to it, the ordering of its owne safety or good. But our case is of a Civill State, whose good is Civill and naturall, and is to be preserved by civill and naturall meanes, and so by Armes in case of danger, even from its owne Prince, bent or seduced to ruine it.<sup>39</sup>

The same argument could be used to get around the example of Tertullian and the early Christians. Here the ministers certainly conceded little, associating themselves at one point with John Goodwin’s attempt to explain away Tertullian’s testimony.<sup>40</sup> But even if Goodwin were wrong, they argued, it mattered little; for Parliament’s case was not damaged even by an admission that the early Christians had no right to resist their persecutors.

[T]he Christians were neither a civill State, (of which the present Reason proceeds) nor neere to the greater Number in The State. They had the Lawes (which is in some Sence the State) against them, and so they ever had beene, and the greater part of the body of the Estate by farre, were opposite, even in Tertullians Time. Though therefore the Church being properly onely a spirituall State, have not of necessity, civill meanes to provide for the advanced Safety of Christians: yet a Civill State, (whether of Heathens

37. Herbert Palmer [et al.], *Scripture and Reason Pleaded for Defensive Armes*, Thomason E247 (22) (London, 1643), 51. This tract was effectively a collective statement by the ministers of London congregations, and was printed by order of the Commons.

38. *Ibid.*, 75.

39. *Ibid.*, 47.

40. *Ibid.*, 50. (I examine Goodwin’s case below.)

or Christians) may have and hath, which is by taking Armes, in case of necessity.<sup>41</sup>

The Church could not defend itself, but the civil state could. Only where religion was established by law, as it was in England, could it be defended by civil means, such as resistance. Essentially, though, religion itself provided no justification of the war.

The conclusion seems clear: whatever the Parliamentary divines were doing, they were not defending *directly* the legitimacy of religious war. The most they would admit is that civil and political activity led by legitimate civil authorities might in some circumstances be tantamount, in practice, to the use of violence to defend the faith.



Notwithstanding this evidence, many Royalist writers insisted on attributing to their opponents, at least implicitly, an argument in defense of holy war. Many of those Parliamentarians from whom we have just heard were, indeed, responding to the very brief remarks of Henry Ferne, who presented the case against religious war and resistance by citing the example of Tertullian and the early Christians.<sup>42</sup> But much the fullest Royalist argument against holy war came from the pen of Henry Hammond.

Hammond's *Of Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate* was published in 1643. George Thomason received his copy on 19 May, and he noted on it that it was a reply to *Anti-Cavalierisme*, John Goodwin's defense of the Parliamentary cause. Hammond's argument was simple in the extreme: because religion is "an act of the soule, which cannot be forced or constrained" and which "needs no outward defence," then it is in all circumstances wrong to protect or advance it by force of arms. Religion simply did not need such weapons:

A man can be as truly religious under all the tyranny and slavery in the world, as in the most triumphant prosperous state. . . . The weakest creeple in the Hospitall may defie the whole Armie of the Philistines in this matter.<sup>43</sup>

41. Ibid., 47.

42. Henry Ferne, *The Resolving of Conscience* (London, 1642), sig C1. Cf. Sirluck, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 2:30. See also Henry Ferne, *A Reply unto Severall Treatises*, Thomason E74(9) (Oxford, 1643), 76ff.

43. Henry Hammond, *Of Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate upon Colour of Religion*, Thomason E102(19) (London, 1643), 3–4.

Hammond maintained three points, of which the illegitimacy of defending religion by arms was the third (though also the one that received the bulk of his attention). First, he accepted that religion could (and should) be defended by all lawful means; second, he further accepted that there were cases in which it was lawful, even for Christians, to take up arms; while, third, he asserted that those cases never included the need to defend the faith.<sup>44</sup> Hitherto, only papists and Turks had believed that religion could propagate itself by violence.<sup>45</sup>

The arguments in favor of this third point were four. We have already heard the first, and overriding, reason: the nature of religion was such that force was not needed, indeed was useless, for its defense. Hammond could, however, also draw upon the example of Christ and the early Christians, on the early history of Protestantism and Protestant doctrine, and on legal and political principles. At the heart of his debate with Goodwin was a difference over the interpretation and credence given to patristic teachings, especially to Tertullian's pacifism, coupled with disagreement about the proper politics of Protestantism. From the beginning, Hammond was careful to distinguish his own position from the Anabaptist view that Christians could never legitimately take up arms.<sup>46</sup> From Christ's example we were to learn that Christians were no longer in the same position as the ancient Jews, and could not therefore use Old Testament precedents for religious war (Luke 9:54). Indeed, those who lived by the sword would die by the sword (Mark 26:51; reinforced by Rev. 13:10). And, most crucially, Christ recognized the legal and divinely bestowed authority of Pilate, and submitted to death effectively at his command (John 19:11). All Christians were bound in conscience to follow that example.<sup>47</sup> The early followers of Christ accepted this duty:

[T]he Christians of that age had strength sufficient either to have resisted or avenged themselves upon their heathen persecuting Governours, but in obedience to the Laws of Christ, chose rather to die then doe so.<sup>48</sup>

Although Hammond cited St. Cyprian's authority, he rested this claim primarily on the testimony of Tertullian.<sup>49</sup> Over and over, Hammond asserted that the early Christians refused to defend themselves, though they had the means of doing so, for the sole reason that they were convinced that nonresistance was required of

44. Ibid., 3. It is worth emphasizing that Hammond condemned the use of violence for *defending* ("maintaining") as well as for propagating religion.

45. Ibid., 5.

46. Ibid., 3.

47. Ibid., 5–7.

48. Ibid., 7.

49. Especially chap. 37 of Tertullian, *Apology*, Loeb ed., trans. T. R. Glover (London, 1931), 166–71.

them by the commands of Christ. He later additionally explained that there was no doctrine more clearly expressed in the apostolic epistles “then that of obedience to Kings.” Christ’s blessings on the peacemaker and on the meek were a blessing on the nonresister.<sup>50</sup>

Nonresistance was also a defining feature of Protestantism. Those like “Junius Brutus” (that is, the author of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*), Bucer, and Buchanan who argued the contrary were no better than “perfect Jesuits in their principles.” For it was undeniable that

the doctrine of Allegiance to Kings, and of their supremacy in all causes, hath alwayes been counted a principall head of difference between the Protestants and the worst of Papists, and a speciall evidence which most men have used, to conclude the Papacy to be . . . the antichrist, is this that the Pope exalteth himself above all that is called God [which includes “the Kings of the earth”].<sup>51</sup>

In short, “one main difference betwixt Romish and English, Popish and Protestant doctrine is that of liberty to Rebell in some cases, particularly in that of Religion.”<sup>52</sup> There were Protestant churches formed in states that were not what Bodin called regal monarchies; and here resistance *might* be legitimate. In most proper monarchies, however, it was not; while even in the case of the less-than-regal monarchies Hammond fell well short of admitting that resistance was permissible.<sup>53</sup> For his final set of arguments Hammond turned more directly to political principles, arguing that it was a general feature of English laws that they “put no man (no Papists I am sure) to death for religion.” Men were executed by law for treason, not for their beliefs. It followed from this that “no war for Religion is accounted a lawfull war,” for any such war must involve the killing of people for religion’s sake.<sup>54</sup>

Evidence to support the understanding of the Parliamentarian cause presented by Symmons and Hammond is not altogether lacking. Joseph Boden, for example, in an intensely apocalyptic sermon before the Kent County Committee in 1644, did express the opinion that it was “lawful” to fight for religion:

50. Hammond, *Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate*, 20–22.

51. *Ibid.*, 23.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 23–24. The major point of the exception was to open the possibility that Lutheran resistance to Emperor Charles V may have been legitimated by the particular constitutional structure of the Holy Roman Empire. This was, of course, an argument actually used by the Lutherans; see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), 2:191–206.

54. Hammond, *Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate*, 24–25.



[T]he people of God have a commission not onely for a defensive, but an offensive Militia, and posture of Warre. I know many have taken great paines, and to good purpose, to prove it lawfull, in the present cause of God, the kingdome, and Parliament to take up and make use of Armes, in the defense of Religion, the Church, and the truths of God therein: but by the light of my Text and Doctrine, I shall make bold to goe one step further, and not onely to preach, but presse the Saints to put on, keepe on, and use manfully weapons of offence against the brats of Babylon.<sup>55</sup>

There are other attempts at holy war argument,<sup>56</sup> but they were frequently half-hearted and never numerous or dominant, not even among the clergy who defended the Parliamentary cause. As we have seen, the most important propaganda tracts of the Puritan clergy denied the legitimacy of holy war.

Even John Goodwin, to whose arguments Hammond had devoted detailed attention, was less forthright than he might have been.<sup>57</sup> Goodwin was in no doubt that the Parliamentary cause embraced both secular and religious goals: its supporters were acting for “the defence of your Lives, your Liberties, your Estates, your houses, your Wives, your Children, your Brethren”; but they were also “to stand up in defence of the true Protestant Religion, for the name and honour of your God, your Ordinances, and . . . for the safe conveyance of that great treasure of the Gospel over unto your posterities that are yet unborne.”<sup>58</sup> The central principle that Goodwin invoked to defend the pursuit of these goals began from the commonplace that obedience to God and his commands always took priority over obedience to the king and his commands. Into an explication of this principle Goodwin insinuated the claim that “we ought not to submit in any thing whereby God may be *dishonoured or disobeyed*,” whence he was able to conclude that no kings had power “to doe any thing which is unjust, or

55. Joseph Boden, *An Alarm Beat Up in Sion, to War against Babylon*, Thomason E10(3) (London, 1644), 15–16, partially quoted in Stephen Baskerville, *Not Peace but a Sword: The Political Theology of the English Revolution* (London, 1993), 234–35 n. 20. In fact, Boden’s own position came to rest as heavily on the authority of Parliament in initiating war as on its religious cause; see *ibid.*, esp. 28–30.
56. The most important examples, other than Goodwin, who will be discussed below, are *Powers to be Resisted: or A Dialogue Arguing the Parliaments Lawfull Resistance of the Powers Now in Armes Against Them*, Thomason E79(15) (London, 1643); and R. W., *The Anatomy of Warre*, Thomason E128(15) (London, 1642).
57. Hammond, *Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate*, 7–11.
58. John Goodwin, *Anti-Cavalierisme, or, Truth Pleading as well the Necessity, as the Lawfulness of this Present War*, Thomason E123(25) (London, 1642), 5; facsimile reprint in William Haller, ed., *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–1647*, 3 vols. (New York, 1979), 2:217–69.

*unrighteous.*” God gave no one, not even kings, the right to sin.<sup>59</sup> Essentially, then, Goodwin imposed upon rulers not only the need to be just but also the need to avoid sin, and this duty could readily be construed as implying the obligation of all kings to follow the true faith. Those who failed in this duty could be judged by their people. They were personally immune from violence—God guaranteed them that—but the king’s agents of injustice or sin could be forcibly resisted, even when the king “be at hand to second his instruments in the execution of such commands.”<sup>60</sup>

At this point a familiar objection is heard: What about the example of Tertullian and the early Christians?

The Christians in the primitive times submitted themselves with patience to those most unjust and cruell commands of the heathen Emperors, when they sent their officers to put them in execution, and to take their lives from them: they never resisted, nor stood upon their guard, but tooke even death it selfe, yea, and many times torments worse than death, patiently. And whereas this might otherwise be sufficiently answered, that they made no resistance, because they were not able, they had no considerable strength to make good any resistance; to take away this answer; They usually cite a place out of one of the Fathers, Tertullian by name [*Apology*, chap. 37], wherein he disclaims this ground of their patience in suffering.<sup>61</sup>

Goodwin certainly took the objection seriously. His extraordinary response covered the next fifteen pages (in a tract of only fifty-one pages). Perhaps, he suggested, Tertullian’s estimate of the strength of the Christians was wrong, and they were simply unable to resist. Then again, Tertullian was soon to become a heretic, and so his judgment was clearly unsound. Tertullian probably wished to exaggerate the patience of the Christians, and the Fathers as a group were not above using such dubious means (that is, lying) to gain credit for their religion with the heathen authorities. All in all, Tertullian’s testimony is of doubtful worth.<sup>62</sup>

Even if Tertullian were right, however, his remarks did not affect the present case. There may, for example, have been pragmatic reasons for refusal to resist—perhaps an unwillingness to draw down the wrath of the heathen authorities

59. *Ibid.*, 9, 16–18 (emphases added).

60. *Ibid.*, 18–22 (the people as judge of the king’s transgression), 11–12 (resistance to the king’s agents but not to his person).

61. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

62. *Ibid.*, 23–25.

upon themselves and their neighbors.<sup>63</sup> But, going beyond that, Goodwin was at this point able to make brief appeal to apocalyptic ideas in defending his case. God may have hidden from the eyes of the primitive Christians their right to resist so that the Antichrist could gain his necessary (though temporary) victories; but nowadays God required his people to wage war on Antichrist: “Antichrist was then to come into the world: as now we know that he is about to be destroyed and cast out of the world.”<sup>64</sup>

This apocalyptic defense of religious war was not, however, what chiefly led Goodwin to distinguish between the situation of Parliament and that of the early Christians. His main point was one by now familiar to us. It enables us to see just how muted the English defenses of religious war really were. What enabled discrimination of the cases was that

having no invitation, countenance or command from any Authoritie, rule, or lawfull power in the Empire to attempt any such thing, their case was farre differing from ours who are invited, countenanced, encouraged, and some waies commanded by as great and as lawful an Authority as this state hath any, to doe what you have been exhorted to doe in opposing the rage and violence of that malignant and blood-thirsty generation who having stollen away the heart of the King, make use of his name to make havock and spoile of your Lawes, Liberties, Estates, Lives, Religion, yea of the Peace, Honour, and safety of the whole Kingdome. It is the expresse command and ordinance of God that inferiour Magistrates and rulers should be obeyed as well as Kings, as we observed formerly out of that of Peter [2 Pet. 2:13–14].<sup>65</sup>

The question at issue was thus simply whether to obey inferior magistrates or the superior magistrate, and Goodwin was in no doubt that when “Laws, Liberties, Estates . . . and Religion” are endangered by the commands of the superior magistrate himself, then one should follow the inferior magistrates into armed resistance.<sup>66</sup> Equally was Goodwin convinced that the early Christians had no such opportunity, for even were they a majority within the empire they lacked public authority on their side. They could not “be called or looked upon as the whole State or body of the Empire, as the Parliamentary Assembly is amongst

63. *Ibid.*, 25–26.

64. *Ibid.*, 30.

65. *Ibid.*, 26.

66. *Ibid.*, 27.

us.”<sup>67</sup> Parliament had an authority that was possessed by no particular group of subjects, however numerous.

The distance between this position and that of Bridge, Palmer, and the rest is quite small. Whereas they denied the legitimacy of any war or resistance for religious reasons, thus prompting the adoption of a more legalistic theory of war, Goodwin accepted that religion could be a legitimate cause for revolt. However, he coupled this with an “inferior magistrates” theory of resistance. Wars of religion could be fought, but only when initiated by secular authorities. There was here no theory of holy war, if we mean by that term a war that did not require secular authorization.<sup>68</sup>



The oddity of the Puritan divines’ position is thrown into relief by two comparisons. First, the fast sermons and other sermons of the 1640s provided many of the *ingredients* necessary for a theory of religious war, ingredients (especially the idea of covenant; but one could add ideas of apocalypse and the attack on idolatry) that had actually been welded into such a theory at other times; and yet the sermons did not develop such a theory.<sup>69</sup> Second, the Scottish covenanters, in marked contrast to the English Puritans, did use a theory of religious war to defend their rebellion against Charles I.

It is not exactly true to say that the rhetoric of religious war was altogether absent from England. Puritan preachers had since the 1620s, if not before, used militaristic imagery to express their sense of the saints’ struggle against the forces

67. *Ibid.*, 28.

68. For discussion of Western ideas concerning the authorization of holy war, see James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park, Pa., 1997), 78–89. By the early modern period it was widely believed by just war theorists that only secular authorities could authorize war, even war for the faith; and this view contributed to the demise of the holy war argument. One might expect that those attempting to revive a theory of holy war in the seventeenth century might reject the reliance on secular authority, especially in a war against an anointed king.

69. The standard work on the fast sermons is John F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism during the English Civil Wars, 1640–1648* (Princeton, N.J., 1969). For the latest survey of these sermons, see Baskerville, *Not Peace but a Sword*—a book that is considerably too Walzerian in its general framework but does provide a good idea of the content of the fast sermons. Perhaps the best guide to the apocalyptic atmosphere of the early 1640s is Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978), chap. 5 (see further discussion below). On the anti-idolatry of the fast sermons, see the discussion in J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620–1670* (New Haven, Conn., 1976), 71–75, and esp. 259–62. A century before, hatred of idolatry had formed the core of much of the resistance theory of the Marian exiles, especially Christopher Goodman (see my account forthcoming from Macmillan, *British Political Thought, 1500–1707*).

of Antichrist in this world.<sup>70</sup> This language was perpetuated in the Civil War years, particularly by the preachers of the fast sermons to the Long Parliament.<sup>71</sup> It is this material that formed much of the basis for Roland Bainton's attribution to the Puritans of a theory of holy war. Yet these sermons were not, as the pamphlets that have been discussed here were, legitimations of the Parliamentary cause. Stressing the theme of divine providence, and its requirement that individuals should conform their consciences to God's wishes (after due examination of themselves and of the signs of God's requirements), the preachers were involved in encouraging the people to a collective act of spiritual humiliation. War was to be waged, but on sin more than on the king. Or, to put matters in the terminology of just war theory, the Puritan language of holy or religious war was not part of an examination of the *jus ad bellum*. The sermons worked on an altogether different plane, as encouragements to a certain kind of spiritual introspection. God may have approved of what men were doing, but it was not his approval that legitimated it. The godly should, no doubt, fight with the belief that God was on their side, but he was on their side *because* their fight was *already* a justifiable one.<sup>72</sup>

At least two things in the language of the fast sermons militate against any simple political reading of them.<sup>73</sup> First, they used the crucial concept of covenant in a primarily spiritual sense. This was spelled out, well before the Civil War, in the first of them, by Cornelius Burges:

Beloved, mistake me not, my meaning extends not to engage you in any *Civill Covenant* and *Bond* for defence of your Municipall Lawes and liberties. No doubt you will be able to find meanes enow (by the blessing of God) to settle those things, in a legall way; especially if you be carefull to Covenant with God. Much lesse is it my

70. This material is well discussed in J. R. Hale, "Incitement to Violence? English Divines on the Theme of War, 1578 to 1631," *Renaissance War Studies* (London, 1983), chap. 18. Hale stresses the way in which spiritual militancy prepared the way for the more political militancy of the 1640s. See also William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism . . . 1520–1643* (New York, 1957), 150 ff., which elaborates on his argument that "the [Puritan] preacher was above all the leader of a crusade and holy war" (p. 143).
71. This comes through strongly in the fast sermon evidence assembled by Baskerville, and nowhere more strongly than in those passages where Baskerville is arguing for a more community-centered content; see, for example, the evidence quoted in *Not Peace but a Sword*, 32–33, 118–30, 187–208.
72. And, for that reason, the preachers could—pace Bainton—be forced back into reliance on traditional just war theory. An example is Charles Herle, *A Payre of Compasses for Church and State. Delivered in a Sermon Preached at St Margarets in Westminster, before the Honorable House of Commons* (London, 1642), 43.
73. Though it contains much of value, Trevor-Roper's famous essay seems to me to find a close linkage between fast sermons and political events only by reading the sermons very much against the grain. See H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament," in Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*, 3d ed. (London, 1984), chap. 6.

purpose to draw you into that late *Ecclesiastical Oath and Covenant* (enjoyed by the late *Canon*) which in my apprehension is little lesse then a Combination and Conspiracy against both King and State. My businesse is, meerly to perswade you into a *Religious Covenant with God*, as himselfe hath prescribed and commanded; and his people, in the best times of the Reformation, have readily admitted.<sup>74</sup>

Closely related to this use of the idea of covenant was the belief that the primary fault for England's troubles lay with the English people. Burges saw the English people backsliding "notwithstanding the pietie and care of our Princes."<sup>75</sup> In another of the very earliest sermons, Edmund Calamy emphasized that England's problems lay not with its rulers: "The people of the Land would not bear a thorow Reformation. . . . [T]he Bulk of our people are wicked, and their hearts are not as yet prepared to the yoke of the Lord."<sup>76</sup>

This conceptual substructure was shared by a great many of the later sermons.<sup>77</sup> A good example of how it functioned to prevent the sermons from becoming exhortations to holy war can found in a sermon of January 1643. John Arrowsmith spent much time telling the Commons of the horrors of war and of how they represented God's vengeance. At only one point did he get at all near to building the basis for holy war argument: "Neither would I be mistaken for one that thinks it unlawfull to take up armes upon a good call in a good cause; as for the just defence of Religion, Laws, & Liberties."<sup>78</sup> The point remained undeveloped. The solution to England's woes lay in a return by the people to the terms of the covenant of grace. War would be ended by an essentially spiritual collective act.<sup>79</sup>

It is against this background, we might add, that Marshall's *Meroz Cursed* of February 1642 should probably be understood. Its language of blood and violence was by no means without precedent in the Puritan sermon literature, but it is doubtful whether we do justice to its author's meaning if we read it as a literal call to arms, whatever the soldiers at Brampton Bryan may have done.

74. Cornelius Burges, *The First Sermon, Preached to the Honourable House of Commons* (London, 1641), 56–57.

75. *Ibid.*, 54.

76. Edmund Calamy, *Englands Looking-Glasse Presented in a Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons* (London, 1642), 56 (emphasis added). See also Stephen Marshall, *Reformation and Desolation: or, A Sermon Tending to the Discovery of the Symptomes of a People to Whom God Will by no Meanes Be Reconciled* (London, 1642), 43–45, for an equally forceful statement of the point.

77. Much of this is brought out by the excellent account in Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, chap. 6.

78. John Arrowsmith, *The Covenant-Avenging Sword Brandished in a Sermon before the Honorable House of Commons* (London, 1643), 9.

79. *Ibid.*, esp. 19–26.



To get a sense of what a theory of holy war could look like, and of what use could be made of ideas contained in the fast sermons, we might turn to the Scottish covenanters. The hesitancy of England's Puritan clergy is thrown into stark relief by a brief consideration of the parallel Scottish debates. Scottish Royalist writings—such as there were of them—did indeed point out that the example of the early church showed the illegitimacy of war or violence used for the defense of religion.<sup>80</sup> They met with a robust response. Indeed, the covenanters were at times more concerned to guard themselves against the opposite charge of being hypocrites who hid their worldly aims behind religious curtains. To the claim that “we do only pretend religion,” they replied that “Religion is the only subject, conscience the motive, and reformation the aime of our designes.”<sup>81</sup> But this was at a time when it was still possible to claim that the means being used to achieve reformation were peaceful ones. Already, though, the crucial note was being sounded. The Scots (and their king) were bound by a covenant with God to defend the true faith.<sup>82</sup> When, the following year, war with England needed justifying, that justification could be provided by appealing to the need to “seek our relief in following the Calling of God . . . and entring by the doore which His providence hath opened unto us.”<sup>83</sup> Divine providence itself had led the Scots into a war “for the glory of God, for the good of the Church, for advancing the Gospell.”<sup>84</sup> But the most direct defense of religious war, even against the sovereign, was made—as already indicated—by appeal to the idea of covenant. Not only did the Scottish National Covenant of 1638 bind all Scots “to defend the true Religion against all persons whosoever,” but Old Testament example showed further that all peoples were so bound. There was an argument

[f]rom the Covenant betwixt the people and God; for the people and Magistrate are joyntly bound in Covenant with God for observing and preserving the Commandements of the first and second Table, as may be seen in the books of Samuel, Kings, and

80. For example, John Corbet, *The Ungirding of the Scottish Armour* (Dublin, 1639), 36–37; [Corbet], *The Epistle Congratulatorie of Lysimachus Nicanor of the Societie of Jesu, To the Covenanters in Scotland*, Thomason E203(7) ([Dublin?], 1640), 6–8; John Maxwell, *Sacro-Sancta Regum Majestas*, Thomason E30(22) (Oxford, 1644), 74 ff.; “Aberdeen Doctors,” *The Generall Demands . . . concerning the Late Covenant in Scotland Together with the Answeres, Replies, and Duplyes* (Aberdeen, 1663), 90–92 (second Duply). Compare also the ideas of William Drummond as outlined in Ian Michael Smart, “Monarchy and Toleration in Drummond of Hawthornden's Works,” *Scotia* 4 (1980): 44–50.
81. *An Information to All Good Christians within the Kingdome of England* (Edinburgh, 1639), 4.
82. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
83. [Alexander Henderson], *The Intentions of the Armie of the Kingdome of Scotland, Declared to Their Bretheren of England* (Amsterdam, 1640), 9–10.
84. [Alexander Henderson], *The Lawfulness of Our Expedition into England Manifested* (Edinburgh, 1640), sigs. A3–A3v. Thomason E1943(15) is a copy of the London edition.



Chronicles: And as the fault of the people would not excuse the Magistrates negligence, so the fault of the King would not excuse the people if they resist not his violence pressing them against the Covenant of God.<sup>85</sup>

This understanding of covenant as a defense for resistance and religious war was crucial to Scottish political thinking. The best biblical prototype for the sort of covenant concept used by the covenanter theorists was probably the account of events at the accession of Joash, king of Judah (2 Kings 11.17); and it is no accident that this formed the text both for John Knox's sermon at the coronation of James VI in 1567 and for Robert Douglas's at the coronation of Charles II in 1651.<sup>86</sup> It was a covenant of exactly that type that lay behind the defense of religious (civil) war advanced in Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*. Rutherford's work, often treated as the most complete summary of *Parliamentarian* resistance theory,<sup>87</sup> is in fact the masterpiece of *covenanter* resistance theory.<sup>88</sup> And its essential Scottishness is revealed no more clearly than by its untroubled defense of religious war: "[T]he people as Gods instruments, bestow the benefit of a Crown on their king, upon condition that he will rule them according to Gods Word."<sup>89</sup> When asked to produce his written covenant, Rutherford pointed to Old Testament texts.<sup>90</sup> Rutherford was in no doubt that the covenant of which he

85. [Alexander Henderson], *Some Speciall Arguments Which Warranted the Scottish Subjects Lawfully to Take Up Armes in Defence of Their Religion and Liberty*, Thomason E239(3) (possibly a different edition from the one quoted), ([London?], 1642), 6, 5.
86. John Knox, *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. W. C. Dickinson, 2 vols. (London, 1949), 1:lxv, 2:216; Robert Douglas, "Coronation Sermon at Scone," in James Kerr, ed., *The Covenants and the Covenanters: Covenants, Sermons, and Documents of the Covenanted Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1895), 349–85. The latter is a particularly full account of the sort of covenanting theory of religious war that I am outlining here. It is very similar indeed to the double-covenant theory of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, which also drew heavily and at crucial points on the same biblical text; see "Junius Brutus," *A Defence of Liberty against Tyrants*, ed. Harold J. Laski (London, 1924), esp. 71–72. This is not to deny, however, that Scottish covenanting ideas owed something also to native traditions of banding, as argued classically in S. A. Burrell, "The Covenant Idea as a Revolutionary Symbol: Scotland, 1596–1637," *Church History* 27 (1958): 338–50; and Burrell, "The Apocalyptic Vision of the Early Covenanters," *Scottish Historical Review* 43 (1964): 1–24. For a broader context, which acts as something of a corrective to Burrell, see also Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI* (Edinburgh, 1979).
87. As, for example, in Allen, *English Political Thought, 1603–1660*, 1:424 and elsewhere; and Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London, 1954), 85.
88. For a brief treatment of it in such a context, see Ian Michael Smart, "The Political Ideas of the Covenanters, 1638–88," *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980): 167–93. This is really the only satisfactory survey of its subject. Since first writing this I have been pleased to see my reading of Rutherford largely confirmed in a fine new study of his thought, John Coffey, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, 1997), chap. 6.
89. Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince*, Thomason E11(5) (London, 1644), 105.
90. *Ibid.*, 106.

talked was a feature of *all* Christian societies, and not a peculiarity confined to the covenanted Scots. As such, covenant served as a general basis for religious civil war:

The King, as a man, is not more obliged to the publick and regall defence of the true Religion, then any other man of the land; but he is made by God and the people King, for the Church and people of Gods sake, that he may defend true Religion, for the behalfe and salvation of all. If therefore he defend not Religion for the salvation of the soules of all in his publick and royall way, it is presumed as undeniable, that the people of God, who by the law of nature are to care for their own soule, are to defend in their way, true Religion, which so nearly concerneth them and their eternall happinesse.<sup>91</sup>

God's word does forbid resistance "for defence of Popery and false Religion," as one might expect, but not for defense of the true faith.<sup>92</sup> In this, as in the rather less satisfactory *Powers to be Resisted*,<sup>93</sup> we find an attempt to defend two crucial points that make up a "pure" theory of religious war: first, that preservation and defense of the true faith were in themselves sufficient to justify violence, war, and resistance; and, second, that this right—indeed, duty—to defend the faith was based on a natural right to preserve their souls held by all individuals. This latter point meant that the authorization of secular magistrates was not necessary to justify religious war, and even that such war could be waged against one's own magistrates.

Not even Rutherford could ignore the example of the primitive church, and in a notably brief chapter he set about replying to the argument that its example proved the illegality of resistance for the sake of religion. In response to those who appealed to Cyprian, Rutherford could say that his words condemned only "seditious tumults"; and the words of Ambrose were said to apply only to pastors, not to ordinary Christian laymen. But, as always, Tertullian's testimony proved more difficult to evade. Rutherford did not shrink from the task, however, bluntly declaring him in error and asserting anyway that "humane testimonies . . . I judge not satisfactory to the conscience."<sup>94</sup> So much for that. Rutherford was not about to enter into the same intricate casuistry that so preoccupied his English coreligionists.

91. Ibid., 100. See also p. 250.

92. Ibid., 319.

93. See n. 56 above.

94. Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 360–72.



Are we to conclude, then, that the English Civil War was not, for those ministers who first defended its legitimacy, primarily a war of religion?

Much evidence would suggest that this was so. Oliver Cromwell himself famously declared in 1644 that

Because some of us are enemies to rapine, and other wickednesses, we are said to be factious, to seek to maintain our opinions in religion by force, which we detest and abhor. I profess I could never satisfy myself of the justness of this War, but from the authority of Parliament to maintain itself in its rights.<sup>95</sup>

Looking back from the vantage of 1647, the historian of the Parliamentary cause, Thomas May, approvingly quoted an anonymous pamphlet as a warning against Parliament's willingness too readily to invoke the cause of religion:

[T]hat frequent naming of Religion, as if it were the onely quarrell, hath caused a great mistake of the question in some. . . . [T]hey wilfully mistake, to abuse the Parliaments Cause, writing whole Volumes in a wrong stated case; as, instead of disputing whether the Parliament of England lawfully assembled, where the King virtually is, may by Armes defend the Religion established by the same power, together with the Lawes and liberties of the Nation, against Delinquents, detaining them with the Kings seduced Person: They make it the question, Whether Subjects, taken in a generall notion, may make Warre against their King for Religions sake?<sup>96</sup>

Where does this leave John Morrill's contention that "it was religious arguments which proved to be the solvents of resistance to resistance theory?"<sup>97</sup> Is it still possible in any way to accept the revisionist perception that it was only the strength of religious commitment that enabled men to throw off in the 1640s the ingrained assumption that their allegiance to the civil magistrate could not be compromised? The evidence actually reveals ministers who were forced to invoke law and civil politics to make a satisfactory case for Parliament, and who were clearly embarrassed by the very idea of holy war.

95. *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Wilbur Cortez Abbott, 4 vols. (reprint, Oxford, 1988), 1:292; also partially quoted in Little, "Some Justifications for Violence," 581.

96. Thomas May, *The History of the Parliament of England* (London, 1647), paginated as 2 vols: 1:117–18.

97. J. S. Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London, 1993), 43.

In fact, the situation is not quite what it seems. It is, for a start, worth remembering Quentin Skinner's valuable distinction between *motives* and *intentions*.<sup>98</sup> Thomas May (quoted above) can be construed as warning Parliamentarians not to let their anti-Catholic motives lead them into misstating the case that justifies their actions. Skinner has shown us that intentions rather than motives are important in understanding the meaning of an author's texts, but the lesson is reversible. In understanding the intentions governing a text we should not assume that we have uncovered an author's motives. In the present case, we know that Parliamentary propaganda was written with the intention of showing the war against the king to be legal. However, given all the evidence now assembled, it is at least plausible to suggest that the *motives* of the Puritan clergy might be construed as the wish to make a legal case for a war that, although they felt it to be religious, they were prevented from defending in those terms because of their acceptance of widespread conventions condemning the use of force for religious purposes. Textual intentions do not constitute evidence of motive, because intentions are shaped by the discursive conventions within which they operate. A religious war had to be fought under color of law, and the evidence that it left behind must be interpreted with that in mind.

A simple example further illustrates the point. At one point, Julian Davies cites Edmund Waller's fusion of legal-constitutional and religious concerns;<sup>99</sup> but Waller in 1641 asserted clearly that "religion ought to be the first thing in our purposes and desires," though it was not necessarily to be dealt with first "in order of time." Issues of taxation, property, and liberty were to be dealt with initially, but they were not necessarily the most important issues.<sup>100</sup> Thus, we must be careful not to accept statements legitimating the Civil War as if they were straightforward declarations of motive. I am not suggesting that we should ignore the content of those statements, only that we need to read them with full awareness of their discursive context. Propaganda and political polemic work, in the end, on their own terms. If you do not understand what those terms are, then you will never grasp their evidential value with any accuracy.

But we can go beyond this. Our search for a "pure" theory of religious war in the English Revolution may have been disappointed, but there is another way of looking at the evidence that helps us to reconsider the more fundamental question of what a religious war was—and, odd though it may seem, even to defend the idea that the Civil War was a religious war against critics of such a view. Even

98. See James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge, 1988), esp. 73–74, 88–89.

99. Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, 316–17.

100. Waller, quoted in Burgess, *Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, 187.

Hammond, whose attack on religious war may have been behind May's warning, seems to point us in this direction. On his opening page he proposes

that it is possible for a man to fight for Religion, and yet not upon colour of Religion, to wit, in case the Religion for which he fights be establishd by the Law of the Land, for then his colour for fighting may be the preservation of Law, which the Magistrate is bound by oath to maintaine, and though he fight for Religion it is under that other colour.<sup>101</sup>

It seems odd that Hammond should begin by telling his opponents how they could ignore his arguments, but he accurately captured a distinctive theory of religious war that was being presented in the early 1640s. It was the theory of a war to defend the civil right of Englishmen to their faith as established by law. Viewed against it, the entire line of thought initiated by Bainton has led us in the wrong direction.

Critics of the war-of-religion interpretations (like "postrevisionists" generally) have been very quick to insist that there is an inherent impropriety in separating religion from politics and other things.<sup>102</sup> The general view that religion and politics were inseparable is one frequently asserted but seldom discussed. One recent example, chosen more or less at random, puts the matter thus: "modern notions of religion, politics, and society represented an undivided domain for most members of the early modern population."<sup>103</sup> That seems to me to be quite wrong. A more sophisticated expression of the same attitude, curiously enough, can be found in David Harris Sacks's *utilization* of the war of religion approach. Basing his argument on the theories of Clifford Geertz, Sacks appears to reach a conclusion suggesting that everything in the seventeenth century was religious; however, his anthropological approach to religion has the paradoxical effect of moving attention away from religious belief and toward seeing religion as a master language for the expression of all sorts of other concerns. In this way, the Civil War would have to be a religious war, because no matter what else it was it could not escape from the dominance of religion.<sup>104</sup> It could have been nothing else.

101. Hammond, *Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate*, 1.

102. In what follows I shall focus my remarks on what is perhaps the best-elaborated critique of the "war of religion" thesis, Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, 313–18. Similar claims are also made, for example, in Green, "'England's Wars of Religion?': "Can one divide these perceptions into watertight compartments as a basis for comparison? How far could the king's critics separate fear of popery or of Laudianism from fear of royal absolutism, since by 1640 king and archbishop were so mutually supportive?" (p. 113).

103. Dan Bever, "Religion, Politics, and Society in Early Modern England: A Problem of Classification," *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994): 315, and *passim*.

104. Sacks, "Bristol's 'Wars of Religion.'"

There is some truth in this, in that theistic assumptions did tend to underlie all else in seventeenth-century thinking. That, however, is not enough to support the sort of claims that are being advanced. All of the pamphlets that we have looked at routinely distinguished religion from other things. To say that God was at the heart of all things is not quite to say that matters of Church and the faith were involved in everything. In short, the problem with the inseparability argument is not that it is false (it is both obviously true in some ways and obviously misleading in others), but that it deflects our attention from asking more important and more precise questions about the ways in which religion was considered to mesh with other things.

Let us ask instead what concept of religious war might be applicable to early modern England (and/or Europe).<sup>105</sup> At least one common answer is clearly not available to us. Konrad Repgen has suggested that a war of religion “was indisputably a case of the *interlinking* of religion *and* politics.” Yet he rightly points out that that does not explain to us “why the label of ‘religion’ is employed as the sole catchword in this description.” His answer is that the term can be applied only when

at least one of the belligerents lays claim to “religion,” a religious law, in order to justify his warfare and to substantiate publicly why his use of military force against a political authority should be a *bellum justum*.<sup>106</sup>

On this definition, the English Civil War was not a war of religion. As we have seen, it was declared legal or legitimate because it was *not* a straightforward defense of religion.

The peculiarity of England’s war of religion may be discerned from the fact that the theories it produced do not correspond to any of ten varieties of holy war idea that can be identified.<sup>107</sup> Thomas May stated Parliament’s case as involving a defense of *legally established* religion, and that—in essence—was the case made by the clerical propagandists early in the first Civil War. It is important that we do not accept without further analysis the argument that, because religion was

105. In addition to its treatment in other work cited, the question has also been well posed in Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, chap. 5, esp. 127–36. Note his brief recognition (p. 135) that for some Christians “we may not propagate religion by war.” Collinson cites the example of Francis Bacon, on whom see also Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 85–95.

106. Konrad Repgen, “What Is a ‘Religious War’?” in E. Kouri and T. Scott, eds. *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe* (London, 1987), 312–13. See also his more general discussion in Repgen, “Kriegslegitimationen in alteuropa: Entwurf einer Historischen Typologie,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 241 (1985): 27–49.

107. Johnson, *Holy War Idea*, 37–42.



not in the seventeenth century a sphere apart from others—it had not been (we might say) Sunday-ized—it is pointless to talk of the Civil War as a distinctively religious war. We need, instead, to ask precise questions about the way in which religion was integrated with other matters in the seventeenth century, and one of the most peculiar of those was identified by the idea of a church established by law. We, perhaps, make little of the fact that the Church of England is established by law, but for a period of time that seemingly empty formula was of vital importance. Its importance, though, lies not in the idea of establishment as we might understand the term (it is clear that the modern idea of an established church could not have been understood in the early seventeenth century).<sup>108</sup> Rather, the phrase “church by law established” indicated the idea that Christianity was part of the laws of England, and possessed by English people as a *civil* right. It is the ancestry of that idea, usually thought to have been current from the late seventeenth century, that we have uncovered.

The phrase “the Church of England by law established” was first employed in Bancroft’s 1604 canons. As one historian has put it, churchmen “were prepared to accept the church as doing a job under conditions laid down by positive law.”<sup>109</sup> By the later seventeenth century this had led to the development of the view that—in Matthew Hale’s words of 1676 (in Taylor’s case)—“Christianity is parcel of the laws of England.”<sup>110</sup> The development of such ideas has been little explored by historians. I would suggest that such exploration is urgently needed, for the Puritan justifications of the Civil War that we have examined all rest on just this way of bringing together law and religion. It was possible to defend religion under color of law if and only if religion could be seen in some way as part of the law. Seen in this light, the defenses of Parliament’s war, with their apparent legal-constitutional thrust, are not at all ways of saying that the struggle was not religious. On the contrary, they are ways of saying that it was. We need to listen

108. See John Neville Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State*, 2d ed. (London, 1914; reprint, 1997), 9–13.

109. J. R. Tanner, ed., *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I, 1603–1625* (Cambridge, 1930), 232 (variations on the phrase appear throughout the canons); Robert E. Rodes Jr., *Lay Authority and Reformation in the English Church: Edward I to the Civil War* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1982), 242. Rodes’s work is an interesting attempt to examine the Church’s history from a legal angle.

110. J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 179–80; W. S. Holdsworth, “The State and Religious Nonconformity: An Historical Retrospect,” *Law Quarterly Review* 36 (1920): 339–58. Exploration of the idea that Christianity was part of the common law has been more thoroughly undertaken by American legal historians. In American courts the doctrine was cited in a decision (in 1927) preventing the Philadelphia A’s from playing baseball on Sundays, and was affirmed in 1955 confirming a conviction for making lewd telephone calls. See Stuart Banner, “When Christianity Was Part of the Common Law,” *Law and History Review* 16 (1998): 27–62; see also Jayson L. Spiegel, “Christianity as Part of the Common Law,” *North Carolina Central Law Journal* 14 (1984): 494–516; and Bradley S. Chilton, “Cliobernetics, Christianity, and the Common Law,” *Law Library Journal* 83 (1991): 355–62.



attentively to our sources. When Philip Hunton said that “Religion . . . [is] now a part of our Nationall Law” he was stating Hale’s point, and stating it considerably earlier than the standard accounts of this doctrine would lead us to expect.<sup>111</sup> And when he said that “we must not resist for Religion, if the Lawes of the Land be against it,” he can therefore be read as saying that we, in England, *may* indeed resist for religion.<sup>112</sup> As Hammond realized, one can fight for religion when that religion “be establisht by the Law of the Land.”<sup>113</sup> Against this background, Jeremiah Burroughes’s concession, “we must not resist for Religion, if the Laws of the Land be against it,” seems to concede very little.<sup>114</sup> Thus, all of those Puritans who seem so tentative and cautious in their defenses of religious war can look rather different if viewed in the right light. If religion is protected by the law of the land, then it can be protected by any means that are available for guarding the integrity of the law. I am not here relying on the lazy argument that everything in the seventeenth century was religious, but on a more precise sense of the ways in which law and religion, two separate things, were deliberately combined in the seventeenth century. It was perhaps the greatest triumph of early Stuart common law politics that it established so powerfully the view that, far from religion supporting law, it was the law that guaranteed to Englishmen the Christian faith. Under such circumstances, what else, save a legally justified struggle, could a war of religion fought in mid-seventeenth-century England be? The constitutional concerns of the Puritan pamphleteers were not an alternative to their religious concerns: they were the means of expressing religious concerns.

Thus, when we understand the structure of the seventeenth-century English intellectual world, we can see that the Civil War left behind it just the sort of evidence that we could reasonably expect a war of religion to leave.

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111. Hunton, *Treatise of Monarchy*, 66 (see above at n. 26).

112. *Ibid.*, 64 (above at n. 24).

113. Hammond, *Resisting the Lawfull Magistrate*, 1 (see above at n. 101).

114. Burroughes, “Briefe Answer,” p. 7 (see above at n. 21).