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Conversion and Backsliding in Seventeenth-Century England: From Puritan Millenarianism to the Great Plague

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CONVERSION AND BACKSLIDING IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: FROM PURITAN MILLENARIANISM TO THE GREAT PLAGUE

A. Lloyd Moote

> The Witnesses that stood before the God of the earth, and had power to plague the earth; having finished their testimony, the Beast ascends out of the bottomless pit and makes war against them and kill[s] them, and their dead bodies lay in the streets of the great Citty Spirituall *Sodome* and *Egypte*, where our Lord was crucified; and this scripture was fulfilled in me in the year according to account, 1648.

William Dewsbury, *The Discovery of the Great Enmity of the Serpent against the Seed of the Woman...From the Common* Gaol in Northampton. 1655.

The passage is apocalyptic, but the Second Coming here concerns the second birth of a Quaker: "The coming of Christ Jesus, who in the appointed time of the Father appeared to my soule, as the lightnings from the East to the West." As this conversion narrative continues, Dewsbury sees "the abomination that maketh desolate, which is spoken by Daniel the Prophet, standing in the holy place where is ought not; and then I was led by the Spirit into the wildernesse and tempted of the Devil, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Luke 4.1." Then comes his awakening:

> The spirit of life from God entered into the Witnesses and they stood upon their feet. Then great fear fell upon all that saw them; and the Temple of God was opened in Heaven, and I saw in the temple the Ark of the Testament, and there were lightnings, voyces, thunder, earthquakes, and great hail.[1]

Plague was missing from this millenarian *son et lumière*. It was surely a chance omission. Astrological predictions of an *annus mirabilis* routinely included the pestilence among its catastrophic events. Almanacs invariably listed the last great plagues of London in their calendar of remarkable events since the Creation.A bubonic plague epidemic had occurred in the British Isles approximately every fifteen years since the Black Death of 1348. In popular imagination, plague was associated with human sins and divine judgment. God was punishing humankind for collective sins. The just and unjust, godly and reprobate, were carried off without distinction by God's Destroying Angel.

1. First Things

At the end of the sixteenth century there existed in England what I will call a "holy space of conversion."

It was distinguished by intense Bible reading, prayer and meditation, constant soul-searching, and looking for signs of God's providential interventions in personal, communal and national life. Persons who had struggled to obey the Ten Commandments and avoid the seven deadly sins contributed elaborate accounts of their tortuous path to "convincement," and their enormous sense of relief and happiness that followed.

Beyond this protective holy zone lay the conventional world of the "once born" that the converted had left behind. The godly might wish to walk through life as a pilgrim and stranger as earlier Christian saints had, but they still had to live in the world. The Puritan preacher Thomas Taylor made the best of the challenges in his funeral sermon on the life of an early Puritan saint, Mary Gunter. He took as his text a passage in Psalm 39: "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my Fathers." But in his published narrative, *The Pilgrims Profession*, he dwelled on her trials as well as her triumphs: "She kept a Catalogue of her daily slips, and set downe even the naughty thoughts which she observed in her selfe."[2]

On the one hand, energy gained from the assurance of being among God's elect could be channelled into expanding the holy zone. Believers beckoned towards family, friends, neighbors, and strangers with godly lives, godly conversation, godly tracts and godly sermons. On the other hand, engaging the conventional world involved a risk of reverting to the ways one had converted from. Manuals sought to help the converted stay on the straight path. Converts kept diary accounts of a never-ending battle against relapses. The tension between "conversion" and "backsliding" was palpable. The term "backsliding" itself, referring to the risk and the reality of slipping back into old ways, appears in a number of autobiographical works.

When I began my search for relapses and backsliding I found few indexes in secondary literature that came close to these terms. Sin was there, of course, but even it was thinly referenced. It is easier for scholars to be drawn to converts' favorite engagement with the world--witnessing with their

pious acts and godly lives--than plunging into the maelstrom of converts' endless anxieties over falling back into sin. Isn't perfectionism what conversion is all about, with a logical outlet being the targeting of those whose worldly ways they once shared?

There would seem to be some truth in the truism: "no zeal like that of the neophyte." Persecuting Saul converts to Christ on the road to Damascus and becomes the proselytizing St. Paul. Augustine will not tolerate his fellow-Christians' accommodating the ways of pagans, as Peter Brown explored in last year's opening Davis Center presentation. Converts during the later middle ages and early modern times struggle with accommodating versus battling their former co-religionists, as we learned from Elisheva Carlebach and Mercedes Garcia-Arenal at last year's seminar conference on Conversions in Old and New Worlds. Similarly Puritanism in England from Elizabeth's accession in 1558 to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 is quite properly seen as "an amalgamation of contrary impulses...to withdraw from the world and yet reform it too."[3] As Peter Lake concludes in his study of moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan church:

> What was involved in puritanism...was the insistence on the transformative effect of the word on the attitudes and behaviour of all true believers. It was this, applied to the public sphere...that lay behind puritan campaigns for further reformation in church and state and the concomitant attempts to purge the social order of its sins and corruptions.[4]

Yet the subject of backsliding will not go away. It is an obvious complement to the themes of combatting, accommodating and fleeing from old ways. The "converts" of seventeenth-century England are especially inviting exemplars on three grounds. First of all, they operated in a new sacramental world from which the old sacrament of penance had been removed. There could be no comforting of the guilt-ridden penitent by a priest who took confession, administered absolution and assigned a penalty--permitting the relieved individual to go out into the world again, fall into sin yet another time, and come back for another penitential round. Hence the appeal of being committed to an intense version of Christian faith that promised an alternative, namely the assurance of forgiveness that needed no mediator. This saving grace was all the more appealing because relapsing into sinful acts or at least

thoughts was an inevitable result of being the son of Adam or daughter of Eve. A second attraction to studying these seventeenth-century English converts is the sheer volume of autobiographical writings on their spiritual ups and downs.

Thirdly, and most crucially for my argument, the context of these challenges changed dramatically between the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 and the Great Plague of London in 1665. Divorced from the changing fortunes of godly groups, these autobiographical and biographical narratives of the ascent from the abyss and the fear of backsliding look remarkably alike in structure, strategies, and details. But if we place their backslidings in the context of the great religious, political, and cultural alterations of the time, we may be able to see something else at work.[5]

This is a very large and challenging subject. There are enormous difficulties in getting beneath the skin of "self-fashioning" converts and "representations" by their contemporary biographers. Yawning gaps exist in my generalist knowledge of the hundreds of conversion narratives. All-too-inviting traps such as the "Puritan Revolution" would lead us astray from our main concern; I will stay as clear as possible from the social and political agendas of godly people during the 1640s and 1650s--subjects that have found a master in Christopher Hill.[6] My focus will be on what conversion meant to the believers, their self-proclaimed hopes and fears vis-à-vis the conventional world, and how these were affected by changes in that world.

Coming as it did after the failure of the godly to transform the sinful world through revolution, the Great Plague of 1665 was an unusual test of godliness. How the godly responded to this "litmus test" could be a subject in itself. Their plague narratives in letters, diaries, commonplace books, and autobiographies are tantalizingly short but pregnant with meaning on the symbiotic relationship of conversion and backsliding. Less useful for our investigation are the prescriptively oriented plague tracts, public-health orders, and official worship services, as well as detailed parish records on burying the dead and serving the sick and unemployed.

The "hour of one's death" was considered by godly persons a climax of lifelong struggling against sinning. The nature of plague and beliefs about it enormously intensified this battle to die well. Human reactions to the threat of plague could range from courageous succor to hedonist abandonment. The legendary leanings of plaguetime behavior towards "a very barbarous conclusion" are well known, thanks to Thucydides' account in *The History of the Peloponnesian War* on the Plague of Athens in the fifth century before the common era, and the opening passages of *The Decameron* by Boccaccio on the Black Death in the fourteenth century of the common era. We shall see how the godly people in 1665 whom Dorothy Moote and I have discovered in our research on this Great Plague measured up to their own standards.

2. Converting and Backsliding

On the surface, early Reformation England appeared to be infertile ground for anything resembling a religious conversion. The Reformation was largely initiated and hugely shaped by political concerns, and individual religious zeal was generally frowned upon by the secular authorities. Furthermore during the first century of Protestant and Catholic reform movements, England's rulers consistently permitted a single legal confession: national Catholic under Henry VIII; national Protestant under Edward VI and Elizabeth I; international Catholic under Elizabeth's immediate predecessor and older half-sister, Mary. In such an exclusive church environment how would one convert, and to what?

Especially under Elizabeth, whose broad religious settlement comprehended most of the available varieties of religious experience. Catholic recusants could keep their old faith if they were quiet about it and peaceful. The new movement of Puritanism to a considerable degree grew within the bounds of the official Church of England; indeed it has been plausibly argued by such authorities as Patrick Collinson that Calvinism, with its predestinarian benchmark which was at the core of Puritan belief and practice, constituted the mainstream of the Elizabethan settlement.[7] In the Thirty-nine Articles of the Elizabethan Settlement, predestination is referred to as "full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable

comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh."[8]

Yet we must speak of conversions, for conversions there were--an entire wave of them in Elizabeth's last three decades, roughly 1670-1603. It was then that the first sizable generation of Puritan saints experienced God in an intense, personal way that most of their family, friends, and neighbors could scarcely comprehend. I would liken the intensity of their newfound religiosity to the "conversion" phenomenon that John Van Engen described in his Davis Center paper last year among medieval men and women, especially in the early fifteenth century. His English Lollards and followers of the New Devotion in the Low Countries took on a more intense religious life without institutionalizing it.

Something like that happened under Elizabeth I and James I, with few Puritan converts opting for a spiritual life outside the Church of England, hoping instead to move it further in a Calvinist direction. Then came a rush towards "gathered church" settings in reaction to Charles I's turning the Church of England towards free-will and other "Arminian" tendencies. An explosion of separatist movements accompanied the civil wars of the 1640s, and the takeover of church and state by Oliver Cromwell and his fellow-Puritans. Puritanism had many institutional varieties--from Richard Baxter's Presbyterianism to John Milton's Congregationalism and John Bunyan's Baptist persuasion. On the radical fringe were the civil-war and Cromwell-era "sects," mainly George Fox's and Elizabeth Fell's Society of Friends or Quakers, but also Muggletonians, Seekers, Ranters, Familists. A thousand flowers bloomed.

Despite the fissures within the expanding holy space, hopes were high. Many thought sin would be driven from the land; there could be no more backslidings! The Book of Revelation held the key to an imminent destruction of the Beast of the Apocalypse and the Whore of Babylon and their followers. The four empires described in the Book of Daniel--Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome--were in the past or close to it. Victory over King Charles might lead to the fall of the Roman Antichrist, the Pope.

Christ would return as the fifth monarch and reign for a thousand year years, leading to a climactic Last Judgment of the godly and the reprobate.

Sometimes the zealots confused their chronology; judgments overlapped; Daniel and Revelation merged. It mattered little. Bliss it was for true believers to be alive. For this was an extraordinary time. Compare what was happening across the English Channel, where conversion to a more intense Catholicism was relatively subdued and inward-looking among the *dévots* and Jansenists, and later the Quietists led by Jeanne Guyon. Where these French exemplars looked outward, their movements lacked the fire and promise of Puritanism and its offshoots, as I have suggested elsewhere. The Fronde was no Puritan Revolution; Mme. Guyon and her friends stood marginalized in the shadows of the Court of the Sun King.[9]

There was just enough similarity between the two sides of the Channel to perplex Ronald Knox in his remarkable study, *Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion*.[10] We could go on, adding the Illuminati or Alumbrados of early seventeenth-century Spain, the mid-century Spanish mystic, Molinos, and the Dutch enthusiast, Hans de Ries. But England's Golden Age of conversions, without Catholic penance and with the driving force of millenialism, does seem special to me, as a chapter in the history of tension between conversion and backsliding.[11]

Sin! Could these English converts ever get away from it? It is a question that will pursue us to the end of this paper. Conversion itself was rooted in the fear of never escaping from the clutches of Satan. The typical Puritan had been brought up in a Christian environment, with an awareness of the danger to one's immortal soul from sinning and a desire to be freed from its grip. The sinner turns to manuals and sermons, the Bible and suggestions from others. The more he or she tries, the greater the wallowing in sin seems to become (at least by later recollections). Human reason and will are not sufficient to the task; indeed they are counter-productive. God has led the individual to despair as a preparation; there may have been thoughts of suicide. Then in a dramatic moment, or gradually, the

heart takes over from the head. A remark by passersby, a fiery sermon on Damnation and Hell, the example of a family member or friend who had already converted, is a catalyst for seeing the truth.

The future Puritan leader William Perkins, later tradition held, was "profane, reckless and addicted to drink." His awareness of God's saving grace was said to begin with hearing a woman in the street admonish her unruly child with the words: "Hold your tongue, or I will give you to drunken Perkins yonder."[12] For the self-admitted swearer and blasphemer, John Bunyan, conversion was a succession of phases, with several dramatic turning points of awareness. He began with "some outward Reformation, both in my words and life, and did set the Commandments before me...and as I thought did keep them pretty well sometimes, and then would have some comfort." It did not last. In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, first published in 1666, he saw the conversion process as "the work of God upon my own Soul...with castings down, and raisings up; for he woundeth and his hands make whole."[13]

The struggle to advance on one's own ceased--or so it felt. The convert was caught up in the transformative knowledge that God alone saved sinners, irrespective of their sins. It was Luther's justification by faith, Calvin's giving all credit, power, and glory to God. God elected the sinner to eternal salvation; the sinner began the process of sanctification by living out a godly life.

The "conversion" experiences of St. Paul, Augustine and Perkins were especially relevant to these new Puritans, for all three were, in effect, "converted" by God against their will. (That will cause them some soul-searching and questioning when their saving deity unleashes the Destroying Angel during the Great Plague.) Just as, in Karl Morrison's words, "*convert* and *conversion* were part of Augustine's meticulously planned witness to God's supernatural acts of grace, especially towards himself,"[14] these Puritans thought in similar terms. They shied away from speaking of their "conversion," or themselves as converts; the operative word was "convincement." God called them; and they became the "godly," to use a favorite Puritan expression. Thomas Goodwin affirmed: "God took me aside, and

as it were privately said unto me, do you now turn to me, and I will pardon all your sins though never so many, as I forgave and pardoned my servant Paul, and convert you to me."[15] Ignatius Jordan acknowledged that at age fifteen God "did by his grace effectively call and convert him." Margaret Charlton was similarly converted at seventeen or eighteen. Her later husband, Richard Baxter, records her recollection of the event. She had read Isaiah 27: 11, and was so moved that "the doctrine of conversion was received on her heart as the seal of wax." Like so many of the newly converted, she "fell to self-judging, and to frequent prayer, and reading, and serious thoughts of her present state, and her salvation."[16]

Further trials lay ahead, however. Every human was born into sin and until the end of one's days on earth it would always tempt the godly. Furthermore, even if one believed in the doctrine of election, it was difficult for some Puritans to have the assurance that it applied to themselves. There could be false signs. One might be a "hypocrite" or "reprobate" rather than truly elected. Only God knew for certain. Hence "the feverish search for signs of election in one's spiritual and outward life" continued.[17] It is not surprising that William James refers to a "morbid-minded, "sick soul" religious type, quoting extensively from John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.[18] Bunyan was forever on an emotional roller-coaster, with moments of ecstasy alternating with the depths of despair. Eventually he was ready to do without the assurance of grace:

> I am for going on, and venturing my eternal state with Christ, whether I have comfort here or no; if God doth not come in, thought I, I will leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternitie, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; if not, I will venture for thy Name.[19]

Elizabeth Wilkinson after years of fear and searching into her own heart was given evidence by the Lord of "a change wrought in my heart, will and affections, notwithstanding the remainders of sin and corruption, which still encompassed me about." Eleanor Stockton continued to worry "whether I was still in the state of nature or in a lapsed and back-sliding condition."[20]

The Puritans had an elaborate support-system in their fight against backsliding and falling into

despair, with the ultimate reliance being the Bible. Still, predestination could slide into the sin of presuming too much with perhaps a touch of the antinomianism that Puritans accused radicals like the Quakers and Ranters of engaging in. Alternately there was the slippery slope towards self-defeating free will that came from trying too hard and coming up short. William Perkins' formidable if popular "Golden Chain" was a forbidding, almost incomprehensible chart of the unfolding of two sides of double predestination--election and damnation. The circle of "relapse" is far down the right side of the diagram leading to "Death eternell in Hell," linked with everything from "The deceit of sinne" to "Apostasie." Conversely, the "Remission of sinne" comes in the bewildering middle of cross-referencing circles pointing toward "Repentance" and "Life eternell." Little wonder than many Puritan clergy had trouble agreeing with parts of the chart.[21] [See illustration.]

Backsliding posed similar and different problems for converts to more "radical" Protestantism. Quakers, Ranters, Seekers, Familists, et al., exemplified Ernst Troeltsch's "sect type" movements as opposed to "church type" Christianity,[22] by placing individual inspiration above scriptural and institutional authority. They could fall back into sin just as easily as Puritan converts, but they tended to dwell on other dangers to their faith. Considered "enthusiasts" in the literal sense of being full of God, pejoratively drunk with the divine,[23] they were spiritual and social outcasts in the eyes of a wide range of religious and intellectual leaders. The millenarian Cambridge Platonist, Henry Moore published *Enthusiasm Vanquished* in 1659. The Presbyterian Baxter said that the Quakers "acted the Parts of Men in Raptures," the Seekers taught "that our Scripture was uncertain," and the Ranters "set up the Light of Nature, under the name of Christ in Men,"[24] Their spiritual journey had often taken them through a variety of religious persuasions as they moved from the self-examining "experimentalism" of many Puritanism to the indwelling Holy Spirit of the Ranters or Quakers. At each step they could be accused of apostasy. Added to this was the freedom from the sense of sin that this inner light gave them, resulting in charges of immorality.

Jane Turner bore the brunt of both charges as she moved from mainstream self-examining, "experimental" Puritanism to the inner light of Quakerism and part way back, settling into the "free grace" of Baptist Puritanism. Her assurance of salvation without constantly worrying about her behavior seemed presumptuous and slothful to some Puritans; she was surely on the path to pandering to "carnal liberty." From the other end of the conversion spectrum, the Friends took exception to her published remarks that despite their "Angel-like appearance," these former Quaker associates followed their inner spirit even when it clashed with the precepts of Scripture. They struck back: far from moving steadily from Babylon to Sion as she claimed, she had slipped backward as an apostate to her original sinful City.[25]

The Friends came late to the holy space of conversion, Fox making his first converts in 1648. Yet they played a powerful role in the evolution of converting and backsliding during the seventeenth century. Others could fall into sin or apostasy, they believed; their problems were different. Self-examining Puritans, the Quaker Richard Baker declared, could feel "no Freedom from Sin on this side of the Grave." How different it was for these Friends, thanks to the true light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," variously described as "the seed of God," "the righteous principle," "the witness of God in me," and especially "the inner Light." Once they submitted to this light, the historian Owen Watkins writes, "all evil in [oneself] was destroyed and a life free from sin became possible."[26]

If human perfection was attainable for a spirit-filled Friend, James Nayler's behavior was a dramatic example. Nayler's Palm Sunday like passage through the streets of Bristol on a donkey in 1655 to the shouts of "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Israel! Hosanna in the highest!" was a logical acting out of the liberating inner light, though his behavior and justification brought a rebuke from George Fox. What imperfections were left to drag down the convert to this Society of Friends? The answer for the first generation was giving in to the conventions of society that these Quakers found ungodly, inegalitarian, and demeaning--notably taking an oath and paying tithes, removing their hat in deference,

calling the authorities and institutions of state and church anything but so-called judges, so-called priests, and steeple houses.

As the authorities turned on them with prosecution and jail, and the rest of society joined in with derision and persecution, Quakers spoke of their "sufferings" as a badge of courage. We read this term over and over--in letters, tracts, conversations, meetings. The Friends Library in London is full of these sufferings of the seventeenth-century Quakers. A brisk ten-minute walk to Dr. Williams' Library brings us to the very different sounding Puritan anguish of Owen and Mary Stockton over their sins of commission and omission; and the autobiography, tracts and correspondence of Richard Baxter, whose spiritual casuistry (not a pejorative term) grappled with when one could compromise with religious and secular authority.[27]

For the Quaker, it was apostasy to run away from the authorities rather than taking a stand in their presence and being imprisoned. When the Puritan Milton fled from London's plague to a country haven provided by the Quaker Thomas Ellwood, their meeting had to be postponed. Ellwood was witnessing to his sufferings in the local jail! The only two extended confessions of backsliding by early Quakers are instructive. Anthony Tomkins" *Faithful Warning to all Backsliders* (1669), referred to his "reasoning part" that led him to invent excuses for paying tithes to the church. Nayler, in jail after the Bristol incident, wrote of losing the light and being "taken captive under the power of darknessee [through reason] to some things which in themselves had no seeming evil [but] little by little drew out my mind after trifles, vanities." There is not much to go on here. Nayler tantalizingly suggested that others had "fled the Cross." One wonders in what way.[28]

3. Apocalypse Aborted

Helping to sustain the converts in their godly ways were the eschatalogical beliefs and millenarian hopes of the time. John Foxe's immensely popular *Acts and Monuments* or "Book of Martyrs," placed the millennium in the past from Emperor Constantine to around 1300, while inspiring many English subjects

under Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I to take a second look at the books of Daniel and Revelation for prophetic insight into the future.[29] Foxe's successors, mainly Brightman and Mede, pushed the millennial years forward. John Brightman suggested a second millennium unfolding from 1300 to 2300. Joseph Mede, who was Newton's tutor and influenced his later intellectual pursuit of the millennium, dotted the i's and crossed the t's of millennial symbols, times, and events. What was so often associated with turning the world upside down was now "a sober pursuit for the highest minds," the millenium "made respectable," William Lamont assures us.[30] Christopher Hill makes an equally eloquent, complementary case: "It was in a scientific spirit that scholars approached Biblical prophesy. Mathematicians and chornologers... believed in the possibility of establishing a science of prophesy."[31] Whatever the motivation, this was a golden age of prophesying, a remarkable addendum to the prophetic tradition traced in Norman Cohn's classic, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*.[32]

Conversion itself, as we saw in the opening quotation, could be framed as a personal apocalypse and last judgment. But the godly--whether Puritan or Friend--were also driven to bring others into their holy space. They looked forward to a time when the godly would take over the earth. Millenarianism was clearly an inspiration and possibly a driving force behind that goal. While only God could choose and know who were the chosen, the godly might prepare the way for the Second Coming of Christ and Last Judgment by reaching to all and sundry with their own messages of hope. Many sinners were converted on their deathbed or in a prison. Others held back from giving in to saving grace, fearing a relapse. They could be worked on. "The life of a Christian is a hidden life," The Puritan Philip Henry wrote. "Therefore judge not, for without all doubt many whom we now take to be godly shall at the Last Day be found hypocrites and many whom we now condemn as hypocrites shall be found godly."[33]

There was a more personal, partly subconscious reason for merging the expansion of the holy space of conversion with the coming of the millenium. The case is best put by Christopher Durston and

Jacqueline Eales. Not only were Puritans scandalized by the behavior of the world around them; "they believed that the bad example of the ungodly might tempt them into sinning and thus weaken their own sense of assurance of salvation." In the words of William Hunt, "a Puritan who minds his own business is a contradiction in terms.[34]

The pace of conversions quickened and hopes of a godly rule grew with the rapid changes in church and state after Charles I's accession to the English throne in 1625. Puritanism, Patrick Collinson argues persuasively, "was not a thing definable in itself but only one half of a stressed relationship."[35] A generation of parliamentary leaders were converted to an alienated and restive type of Puritanism by the Caroline retreat from predestination to Arminian, high-church advocacy--what some today might call a hi-jacking of their church.[36] Charles I ceased to be the hoped for godly prince, an Emperor of the Last Days in the making.

In the 1630s Oliver Cromwell's conversion, some time in the making, came about as Archbishop Laud was turning out Puritan lecturers from his and other parish communities. "Oh, I lived in and loved darkness, and hated the light. I was the chief, the chief of sinners," he recalled in a letter in 1638. The king's physician, Dr. Mayerne, described him as "extremely melancholy," his country physician added hypochondria. Cromwell surely fitted William James' convert-type, the "sick soul." Cromwell saw his conversion as "the riches of [God's] mercy."

Might there have been a blending of individual conversion and political millenarianism here? Cromwell had been fond of Queen Elizabeth, and three women in his life were called Elizabeth--his mother, wife, and favorite daughter. It is a coincidence that only Christopher Hill could have made full use of. Yet Elizabeth was the hope of John Foxe's work, a second Constantine. Cromwell knew Foxe via his schoolboy teacher, Thomas Beard, whose *Theatre of Gods Judgments* was an update of Foxe, hinting darkly that "the greatest and mightiest of princes are not exempt from punishment for their iniquities." Laud's Godly prince was not Cromwell's. Had he transferred some of his self-loathing onto

the bad prince, agent of Antichrist?[37]

Around the time of Cromwell's conversion, a self-proclaimed Puritan prophet, Arise Evans, went to Whitehall with a message that had come to him from random Bible readings and an appearance by an angel: the king and kingdom were about to be destroyed. He was turned out of his lodgings by an offended landlord, returned home to Wales and confined to his room by his parents who thought he had gone mad. But was he? If so, his madness had a great deal of religious and intellectual company. Charles I was increasingly associated with the papal Antichrist. Millenarian musings on the consequence of a collapse of royal and papal power were on many a tongue. Arise Evans and Oliver Cromwell had much to share when they met for an extended discussion while religious and political changes swirled about their heads.

England was God's Elect Nation with a special place in the divine plan. Of the five kinds of millenarianism identified by Richard Baxter,[38] the literal variety came to the fore. Its appeal lay in associating prophetic passages in the Bible with persons and events in their own day.[39] When the "Puritan Revolution" began in 1640, this kind of millenarianism had a field day. Of the 111 ministers who published three or more works between 1640 and 1653, 77 have been identified with millenarian leanings.[40] There must have far more converting than backsliding in this heady atmosphere. Indeed, the opposite of backsliding was surely in vogue. The Revolution of Saints took aim at sin and sloth. If there ever was a movement that came close to the "reign of virtue" in Crane Brinton's scheme of phases within major revolutions, this was it.[41]

The demolition of the Church of England as it had been known, and the execution of Charles I in 1649, created a void ready made for millenarian interpretations and action. In 1644, Milton had written in *Areopagitica*: "Now once again by all concurres of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men...God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church." He began to think of Jesus as "shortly-expected King." In 1658, the last year of Cromwell's life, John Bunyan was

still hopeful: "The Judgment Day is at Hand."[42] It was the time of the Fifth Monarchists, who sought by agitation to hasten the second coming of King Jesus.

The Puritan vicar of Earls Colne in Essex, Ralph Josselin, whom we will meet again during the Great Plague, began reading millenarian tracts in 1648, when Cromwell and Fairfax completed the Roundhead military triumph over the Royalists, and two sympathetic astrologers, Lilly and Booker, were at the siege of nearby Colchester with Fairfax. Josselin kept up his reading until 1657, the year before Cromwell's death began an unravelling of the Rule of the Saints. One of his sources suggested that Cromwell would conquer the Turks and overthrow the Pope. Only the conversion of the Jews, another key event in the march from Babylon to Sion, was omitted.[43] Josselin marked the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Accession Day on November 17, 1650 with a telling diary entry: "My thoughts [are] much that God was beginning to ruine the kingdome of the earth, and bringing Christs kingdome in, and wee English should bee very instrumentall therein."[44]

This was heady wine for a person whose own congregation could stand some extra encouragement to swell the godly fold. The vicar divides his parishioners into three categories: those who "seldom hear" his preaching; "my sleepy hearers; and "our society." It was also personally uplifting for a village vicar who was forever obsessed with his own sinful thoughts and acts, and unnamed contentions within a large family that by the early Restoration included eight surviving children. "The Lord affect me with the vileness of my nature," he wrote in his journal. "I stick in the mire, Oh Lord pull me out."[45]

Puritans of one persuasion or another who took over parish churches were not alone in their excitement about a godly rule and godly people encompassing the entire land. The varieties of Puritanism were joined in the millenarian quest by the proliferation of Civil War sects and Cromwell-era religious innovation. The Ranters continued to rant and the Seekers to seek, while restless devotees of both movements were attracted to George Fox's Quakers. These Quakers searched for the evils of the

world that represented the Whore of Babylon and Beast of the Apocalypse in Revelation. George Fox had to rebuke a follower, James Milner, for predicting that the end of the world was in sight. Unlike most millenarians, he had the time down to the day: December 1, 1652.

Thanks to the work of William Lamont and Michael McKeon, we know that millenarian beliefs played on a large stage. It was not just "the lunatic fringe of society" that thought of godly rule and last things with the help of the books of Daniel and Revelation, Lamont states convincingly.[46] McKeon's literary-historical work on Dryden's dramatic poem on the year 1666, *Annus Mirabilis*, shows the poet's words and beliefs to be "broadly characteristic of all contemporary groups, royalist, Anglican, Presbyterian, sectarian, republican.[47]

How millenarianism was interpreted during the Puritan period and after the Restoration, however, depended on the perspective of the beholder. Arise Evans, after foretelling the collapse of Charles I's regime sang a different tune when his prophesy of a Caroline collapse came true. Now he hoped the millenium might be ushered in by the king's namesake and heir, Charles I. He clung to this view until it became obvious after the Restoration that Charles II's easy virtue made him completely miscast as a godly prince. Other royalist-Anglican writers of almanacs and religious tracts joined Evans, drawing on prophetic literature going back to the fourth-century Sibylline *Tiburtina*, which introduced the figure of the Emperor of the Last Days.[48]

Most persons of a millenarian persuasion opted for a contrary reading of current events during the turbulent decade of the 1650s. Godly rule, they argued, would more likely be helped along by godly people than a godly prince. Signs in the heavens and scripture were combined, fusing the cyclical view of events imbedded in popular almanacs with the linear Judeo-Christian march from Creation to the Last Judgment. To the old pagan idea of a past Golden Age was added a future one of peace and plenty. Joachim of Fiore's twelfth-century division of history into the three ages of the Father, Son, and the expected Holy Spirit was thrown into the prognosticating. So was the time-honored view of the world

lasting seven thousand years. A Jewish version by Rabbi Elias, featured the final thousand years as a "sabbatical" era. The Hartlib Circle's precursors of the Royal Society (founded in 1662), added to the chiliastic fervor by combining astrology, magic and religion with scientific inquiry into the secrets of God's Creation.[49]

Many signs pointed towards a specific year when a chain of events would begin that would lead to the fall of Antichrist, the second coming and thousand year reign of Christ, and Last Judgment. The most popular dates on the horizon were 1656 and 1666. The Flood was said to have occurred in the year of the world 1656; therefore a great apocalyptic upheaval would come in 1656 A.D. Or 1656 would mark the beginning of a "sabbatical revolution," with the conversion of the Jews coming somewhat later, and towards the end of the century the "wonderful birth of the fifth monarchy." The year 1666 was even more popular, because it included the number of the Beast of the Apocalypse, 666, in Revelation 13: 18.[50] The date also figured prominently in numerological calculations of Hebrew scriptural exegesis. From the Levant, Sabbatai Sevi's second prediction of the arrival of the Messiah (in 1666 this time instead of 1648) touched off a flurry of millenarian pamphlets in England.[51]

The eschatalogical hopes were not realized; the signs began to point in the opposite direction. The unravelling of the political Rule of the Saints began with Oliver Cromwell's death, followed by the miserable failure of his son Richard. Then came the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy and the Anglican church; it was engineered by General Monck, who as Lord General Albemarle would sent millenarian Quakers to the plague-ridden Black Eagle prison ship in 1665. Its destination was not Sion but Jamaica.

Providential warnings and ominous signs in the moral and cultural spheres were an even greater blow to hopes of a millenium. Josselin bewailed his inability to purge his village and parish of pagan customs. Baxter admitted that his efforts to eradicate ungodliness had only split his parish in Kidderminster into two camps--the ungodly and godly. The moral and cultural revolutions of the 1650s, that had aimed at purging the ungodly cycle of life from baptism to burial, the pagan calendar of

celebratory events, and everything from alehouses to adultery, failed long before the political revolution.[52]

In the not-so-wonderful year of 1656, the long-suffering Puritan mayor of Salisbury excoriated the local justices for having failed their God-given calling. "You are posting to the grave every day, you are dwelling upon the borders of eternity," he warned darkly. "How dreadfull will a dieing bed be to a negligent magistrate. What is the reward of a slothful servant? Is it not to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord?" In Norfolk, the parliamentary elections that year turned out the Puritans and elected "common swearers." From Hyde Park to Coventry May Day was back in fashion, where "much sin was committed by wicked meetings with fiddlers, drunkenness, ribaldry and the like."[53]

The wheel of fortune continued to turn as Charles II returned to England from the continent, and Fifth Monarchists led by Thomas Venner failed in a last-ditch attempt to prevent his coronation in 1661. Venner's little band swept through London's streets with a millennialist cry for "King Jesus." He and twelve followers were executed. The Quakers, Baptists, and Independents protested being tarred with the same brush as the Fifth Monarchists to no avail. All the dissenting groups felt the full weight of the Clarendon Code that made even their household worship services illegal. [See illustration.]

What could be salvaged of the holy space of conversion? Clergy who would not conform to the new Prayer Book were ejected from their parish livings; between one and two thousand Puritan clergy were ousted. Municipal councils were similarly purged. Worshipping in non-Anglican "conventicles" was prohibited. In 1665, fears of pro-revolutionary uprisings amid the confusion of the Great Plague caused Parliament to enact a Five-Mile Act; ousted clergy could not come within five miles of places where they had officiated before the Restoration. The holy ground was being taken from under their very feet!

Josselin managed to stay on as a village vicar without using the surplice or prayer book, but with anguish in his soul. Baxter turned down a bishopric and alternated between worshiping at the local

church in Acton, west of London, and attending illicit conventicles. No Quaker that I know of was able to stomach conformity; they suffered mightily. The once hopeful passages in Revelation of the long-suffering remnant of the faithful being rescued amidst cataclysmic events at the end of time seemed irrelevant to the beleaguered ranks of the godly in England after 1660. Apocalypse, I would argue, had not just been delayed, but was aborted. Some other mental framework to make sense of what was happening to the godly and their holy space had to be found.[54]

Of course there were still individuals eager to view future disasters in apocalyptic terms. The London-based Puritan remembrancer, George Wither, who had cast the Great Plague of 1625 in a millenarian mold, alluded to the Second Coming in a autobiographical poem published during the epidemic of 1665.[55] Across London bridge in Southwark, an ejected minister in exile since 1662 from Rye near the English Channel, John Allin, combined astrological forecasting and alchemical search for a cure for diseases with brooding eschatalogical thoughts.[56] Others had an itchy quill pen waiting for the next disaster. Nevertheless millenarian allusions were rare in the dozens of plague tracts that appeared suddenly with the pestilence in 1665.[57] One also looks far and wide before finding eschatalogical leanings in the annual almanacs that appeared between the ejection of dissenting ministers in 1662 and the expected annus mirabilis of 1666.[58]

By and large, the standard projection of the early 1660s was an annus mirabilis without the eschatalogical ending. The stress was on "catastrophes and eminent mutations" that called for immediate repentance:

> Afford thy Gracious Spirit, mighty God
> Teach us to fear thy name and hear thy Rod
>
> Lets humbly to thee turn and flye from sin,
> Which op'd the doore to let thy judgments in:
> Deservedly thy Plagues and furies be
> Let loose to scourge us for our surquedrie.[59]

This shift of focus from millenarian imaginings to periodic testings of faith and morals by life-

threatening acts of God fitted well with another cultural change which had begun centuries before. This phenomenon, Philippe Ariès writes, "consisted of suppressing the eschatalogical time between [one's] death and the end of the world, and of no longer situating the judgment in space at the Second Coming but in the bedchamber, around the death bed." Instead of the drama of the *dies illa*, the "last day" of the world, there was the "hour of death," featuring the *ars moriendi*--the art of dying well.[60]

A large body of literature was available on proper death-bed attitude and behavior. For Puritans and other godly persons, this was a moment when the tension between belief and backsliding reached a second climax, one as intense as during the first one of converting. To be sure, Puritans had taken much away from the ritualizing of dying and burial. However they retained the death-bed scene of asking forgiveness of their creator and fellow-creatures for their sins of omission and commission, and stressed the accompanying last contest with the Devil.[61]

Shorn of eschatalogical hopes, and facing judgment in the here and now without the consolation of the Catholic sacrament of Extreme Unction, the godly folk of the early Restoration revealed a great deal about their struggle with sin and backsliding when the next annus mirabilis arrived. To the surprise of most persons, the year was not 1666, but 1665.

4. Plague and Providence

Instead of the Beast of the Apocalypse, the godly faced the poisoned arrows of God's Destroying Angel. Before the Great Plague of 1665 was over in London, it would claim 20% of greater London's estimated population of close to 500,000. In the rest of the country, another 100,000 would fall victim to the unknown microorganism, *Yersinia pestis*, during 1665 and 1666. What people saw were the body 's well-known signs and symptoms, from the swellings of the lymph nodes called buboes to the dreaded tokens of death, red marks that they said looked like fleabites. Death could come in a matter of days after their appearance. The natural or "second causes" of this "visitation" were associated with poisonous "miasmas" in the soil and air, and "contagion" passed on by dogs, cats, humans and even the

paper on which persons wrote letters to friends. Universally the ultimate "first cause" was said to be God, acting directly or through nature with this killing disease as in other times with a bountiful harvest.

The Visitation of 1665 was more challenging to the godly than previous ones. They were emotionally drained and disheartened by failure to expand the holy space and conquer sin in one quantum leap. What remained of their holy ground was hopelessly fractured by competing holy groups. Sects were backbiting against sects, calling each other Judases, hypocrites, trouble-makers. Arise Evans had thundered in vain: "Backslide Not!" Sin was King, and not only at the notoriously libertine court of Charles II. An astrologer in a philosophical mood opined in 1665: "Saints turn into sinners, sinners saints. The holiest are subject to mutation like others."[62]

"God for our sins is a Terrour to us all," Richard Baxter wrote. "O how is London, the place [that] God hath honoured with his Gospel above all places of the earth, laid low in Horrours, and wasted almost to Desolation, by the wrath of God." Some who took pride in their holiness assumed the poisoned arrows and sword of God's Destroying Angel would miss them. Baxter knew better: "At first the Religious sort had so few dead and became puffed up and boasted of the great difference wh[i]ch God did make. But quickly after, they all fell alike."

How could the faithful remnant of the Lord deal with such a God-given calamity? Baxter tried to explain: "The righteous are...taken away as from greater Evil yet to come." Then he added: "Thousands of the sober, prudent, faithful Servants of the Lord are mourning in secret, and waiting for his Salvation. In Humility and Hope they are staying themselves on God, and expecting what he will do with them."[63]

But in fact deciding how to respond was much more complicated than that. The temptation was great to save oneself and one's family. Religious tracts urged merchants and masters, ministers and magistrates to remain at their posts. London's working people depended on these privileged persons for their spiritual, medical and material sustenance. To flee was not only immoral but futile; God's arrows could find their mark in the country as easily as in the stricken capital.

There was a mass exodus in late June and early July by those who had the resources, including the royal family and most courtiers. Up to 200,000 or two-fifths of the population departed in the end, if the estimate of the day's leading demographer of previous epidemics can be believed.[64] Many of the Anglican clergy were among them, leaving their pulpits open to ejected dissenter ministers. Less known is the flight of some godly brethren, including the Puritan divine, Baxter.

He had moved with his bride west of London to Acton after losing his city parish in 1662. The plague reached the village in late July of 1665. We catch up with Baxter on September 28:

> Leaving most of my family at Acton compassed about with the plague, at the writing of this through the mercy of my dear God and Father in Christ, I am hither to in safety and comfort, in the house of my dear beloved and honoured friend, Mr Richard Hampden of Hampden in Buckinghamshire...whose person and family the Lord preserve, and honour them that honours Him, and be their Everlasting Rest and Portion."[65]

When I read this passage, I could not believe the words. I am just as mystified today. Something is surely missing in the narrative, something that will explain this inversion of the usual pattern of the wife and children leaving, while the male breadwinner stays behind. Had Richard really left Margaret and their servants behind while he sped to a safe and inviting haven? His sympathetic biographer, Frederick J. Powicke, affirms that this was so, while dismissing the charge that this was "a sign of selfish cowardice." There was no backsliding here, Powicke is certain, because Baxter wrote with "frank simplicity," an indication that he "was conscious of nothing wrong in his conduct." This was a man, we are told, whose love "of God and goodness as he conceived them...made him so honest in self examination, so humble in self judgment." Surely Baxter's wife must have insisted on his going, because his delicate health made him more likely to die if he contracted the infection.[66] But why, we wonder, did he go without her? He says nothing; instead he praises his Puritan host, son of a heroic leader of the early fight for Parliament and Puritanism against Charles I. Baxter's behavior was the most perplexing act that Dorothy Moote and I met during the plague. It complicated our reexamination of the often-discussed subject of plague and providence.[67]

Baxter echoed the diarist Samuel Pepys' statement that the plague had made people cruel and insensitive. Pepys never really left London during the Great Plague, and had ample opportunity to observe bodies being left for hours unburied. Baxter fled and cast aspersions on others in the countryside who were fearful of anyone coming to their houses: "How they would shut their Door against their Friends...O how unthankful are we for our quiet Societies, Habitations and Health!" When Baxter returned to Acton after the plague had subsided, he found his family all well, and was struck by the plowed ground of the churchyard (perhaps covering one of the monstrous plague pits that contained hundreds of uncoffined bodies).[68]

The internal debate over fleeing versus staying that is missing in Baxter's account was an open book in the reflections of a dissenter couple in Colchester. Owen and Mary Stockton had set up a clandestine conventicle in town after Owen was ejected from a local pulpit in 1662. Their faith was strong. In a time of grief, Mary Stockton wrote of the "sickness and death of my dear and first borne child which God was pleased to take away about the 19 yeare of her age...a very hopeful child but alwaise under some bodily affliction."[69] The royal soldiers did not intimidate Owen Stockton. "I considered yt Christ took it as an act of love to feed his sheep (John 21.15) and exposed him selfe to death to save me."[70]

Plague was another matter; it carried away between 40% and 50% of the 10,000-12,000 residents of the thriving provincial center. The Stocktons were in a dilemma. Why should they stay in a town which had ousted him from its pulpits and made it virtually impossible to earn a living? There was also the health of the children to be considered. On the other hand, was it right to flee those whom he served clandestinely?

On the surface, their consciences seemed clear. We read in their essay on fleeing all the stock arguments against flight and the scriptural assurances that it is the right thing to do:

> Objection: The pestilence is ye hand of God and is a vayn thing for a man to think he can flee from ye hand of God.

> Answer: If by fleeing from ye hand of God be meant a going to any place where a man should think God should not be able to find him out and follow him with his judgments, this is indeed a vayn thing. For in this sense no man can fly from ye hand of God. Psalm 139: 7,8,9,20.
>
> If by fleeing from Gods hand is meant an endeavouring to avoid the judgments and inflictions which come upon ye places where we live this is not a vayn thing to flee from Gods hand in this sense when wicked men persecute us we are to look upon this as Gods hand. Proverbs 17: 13,14.

As for the objection from Psalm 91 that "we have promises yt God will preserve us from ye Pestilence, therefore there is no need [to] flee," it was answered that God allowed his chosen people to flee from other infectious diseases and famine and the sword, which were also his providential doing. Why not then from the plague as well? Passages were cited or quoted from Jeremiah, Numbers, II Kings, Matthew and Luke.[71]

Yet Owen Stockton was one of those perpetual worriers, who looked for every possible sign from the Lord to guide him to a decision, and afterwards was full of doubts and second-thoughts. He had come to the decision in a proper way. "One evening I was meditating on God's promise yt he made to Jacob when in a flying condition: Genesis 28.15." The message seemed clear: "I am with thee and will keep thee in all places wither thou goest." He turned to Isaiah 26.20-21, just to be sure. The passage read: "Hide thy selfe for a little moment till ye indignation be ovr past." Stockton's mind was made up: "It gave great satisfaction about my removal."[72]

His ordeal was far from over, however. At every stop in the Essex countryside the "signs" from the Lord raised new doubts. One conventicle he found to be a "dry place" with an indifferent congregation. Another was more welcoming, but this triggered remorse about his fleeing from his home congregation. The monthly Fast Day for the stricken in London and the countryside came, and as Stockton conducted the service, he had a feeling that he was not in the proper mood of humiliation. It was a premonition. On leaving the service he learned that a son of his had fallen ill. The following day, Stockton wrote in his journal:

> September 7. My wife and I went over to see and fetch home our child, and after we had been with it about 5 or 6 hours it died about 5 of ye clock in ye afternoon being Thursday. He died very suddenly and quietly and was gone before I could be called in, being about a furlong of[f] from the house.

Owen could not help thinking he had sinned by fleeing from Colchester; God was punishing him by taking away his son. Then a consoling passage of Scripture came to him: "I was comforted in recalling God's dealing with Jacob. Lamentations 3.24.[73]." He knew the passage by heart: "The Lord, I say, is all that I have; therefore I will wait for him patiently."[74]

Faith and courage helped many of the godly to decide to stay on in plague-ridden London. Some did not survive. The rector of Covent Garden parish, Symon Patrick, listed several Anglican clergy who died. The ejected minister of Rye, John Allin, now living across London bridge in Southwark, had his own list of dissenters who died serving their conventicles in London, as did Richard Baxter. Meanwhile less godly Londoners, like the high navy official Samuel Pepys, took the same risks with only conventional religious ballast, and survived. It was very confusing to those who considered themselves the servants of God.

The godly ones who wrote about their experiences provide us with some insight into their physical and spiritual struggles. I stumbled upon the remarkable plague experience of a teenage son of Puritan parents in the lucrative packing trade, Looking back on his life many years later, George Boddington recalled his mother's steadfast faith, which she had instilled in her children, one by one. His father's commitment had been more to public service and private profit. At the Restoration he had happily welcomed Charles II until he discovered he was a "secret papist." The senior George trimmed his sails enough to take high offices in the local parish church. His deathbed scene in 1671 was not a happy one. Young George treated his father's excruciating pain from a kidney stone and stoppage of his water with a garlic concoction washed down with wine. A half-inch stone passed in an hour, but the father scolded George for not saving his life by giving him the medication three months before.

When the plague began in London George senior and Hannah sent their two younger sons and

two daughters to boarding houses north of the city. George junior was a precocious fifteen year old who since the age of eleven had done the bookkeeping for the family's business. He was already firmly converted to a Puritan faith, although it would take thirteen more years before he formally joined "in fellowship with a church that I conceived walked most according to the Apostles." "My father and mother resolving not to remove, they were ernest I should," he explained. He talked them out of it:

> I being willing to resigne my soule to him that had given it, having had in through the abounding Grace of God by the ministry of Mr Nesse preaching from the Epistle of John [chapter and verse left blank] binn convinced and contrition wrote w[hi]ch I hope I may say ended in a sincere convertion.

What especially attracted young George were the Lord's Day services and the Fast Day observances every Wednesday by royal decree as penitential acts to still the Destroying Angel's hand. The lad experienced "abounding consolation" and enjoyed the sermons by the dissenter ministers who had taken over the pulpit at St. Katherine Cree and other nearby Anglican churches. He also went into the countryside every weekend to visit his sisters and brothers. He said he was not disturbed when he saw upwards to sixty bodies being carried to the grave, "haveing had sutable considerations thereon without any amazem[en]t in relation to my owne desolation, looking on the Plauge [sic] to be the Arows of the Almighty and directed by him."

Was there no recollection of backsliding in his remembrances of that frightening time, no suggestion of wavering faith? The truth is, few godly persons who wrote about their plaguetime experiences admitted to having a crisis of faith or guilt over sins of omission or commission. However in the commonplace book of George Boddington we catch one godly person at a moment of wavering.

He had been out to see his siblings on a Friday, and at the Baxters' plague infested village of Acton he encountered his neighbors, the Gardners. They had been turned back by fearful country people from seeing their daughter, who boarded with the Boddington girls. George made it to his destination, shared a meal with his siblings and returned home. He had been richly blessed by God's special providence. The following Wednesday he entered the church where the weekly fast was being

held. What transpired next is remarkable enough to be quoted verbatim:

> Just as the clarke was going to set the Psalme, I being in the Pue w[hi]ch was Mr Gardners he came into it in deep mourning. I sayd to him [I] hoped he and his were all well. He answerd yes but his wiffe was dead of the plague and buryed last nite. On w[hi]ch I was somewhat affrited and was about to goe out, but remembered my selfe and attended all Day dureing the service thereoff (to my great comfort).[75]

The persecuted Quakers faced the greatest pressures to fall back during this epidemic. William Caton had been experiencing the terror of the plague in Holland with his Dutch converts. He hastily wrote to his fellow Quakers in Colchester and London to say he knew they were "tryed and exercised, partly through the Lord's remarkable visitation upon some of ye places where you are, and partly through ye fury of unreasonable men." He tried to assure them that the epidemic was for them not a judgment, but a trial, "spurs of God's mercy and love to provoke you to watchfulness, to obedience and faithfulness to the Almighty."[76]

From outside their sacred space, these Friends looked less afraid of plague than any other godly group. So great was the reputation of their resolve that the royal authorities systematically broke up their meetings and imprisoned their women and men en masse, out of fear they would rise up under cover of the contagion.[77] The young Quaker George Whitehead typified their faith. "I had not the freedom, satisfaction or peace to leave the city or Friends in and about London, in that time of such great calamity," he said. He recalled going to meetings around the city, his night cap ready in case he should be thrown into an infected prison. At their First Day gatherings, these Friends shared stories of their "sufferings," and organized relief for their spiritual sisters and brothers who were sick and dying, the unemployed and those in jail. Donations from country Friends helped. At the Black Eagle, Whitehead found his co-religionists "crowded on board, and the distemper breaking out amongst them." He proceeded to infected households to offer solace, and found himself spiritually uplifted by the courage of the sick inmates "when they were very low in the outward man and...upon their death beds."[78]

Of course there was some backsliding, difficult though it is to detect. Caton hinted at this when

he acknowledged that without the support of God's right hand of righteousness, "many would faint, and fall away, and might through ye temptations of Satan for a little liberty and peace, love and friendship of ye world, be brought to bow to their knees to sacrifice and conform to that w[hi]ch they had renewed and abandoned as dumb Idols, and ye traditions of men." Caton had seen courageous help to the stricken by his Dutch converts, but he had also witnessed others among them "wax cold."[79] This may explain the pains that he went to in stressing the snares of fear and doubt that faced his English sisters and brothers: "I know these things [plague and persecution] are not joyous, but rather grievous and therefore would many be freed from them. But let such learn to say with Christian reality to the Father--Thy Will Be Done." If they were truly "prepared,"he wrote, those taken away "from this present calamity [were] freed from ye hand of Evil to come." Preparation was crucial, for the deathbed encounter could come unexpectedly.

Caton did not see the plague time as a martyrdom (as Rev. Patrick's friend, Elizabeth Gauden feared he was inviting by staying). In fact, it was an opportunity to emulate the Good Samaritan by providing a balm for the body and soul of sinners. "What shall become of your persecutors? What shall become of ye ungodly?" he exclaimed. "It is a good hour for Friends to work in, for now ye witness be sooner and easier reached, in their calamity, and sore affliction, than it could in their fulness and prosperity, in w[hi]ch they were as without God in the world."[80]

At St. Paul's cathedral, the staff informed the absent dean of a "comely congregation" Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday after Wednesday. Rev. Symon Patrick noticed the crowds at his Covent Garden church despite the flight of his peers, gentry and "better tradesmen." Hyperbole aside, there was truth to what Thomas Vincent said of the plague's peak in September when 10,000 died in a week:

> Now there is such vast concourse of people in the parishes churches where these [dissenting] ministers were to be found, that they cannot many times come near he pulpit-doors for the press, but are forced to climb over pews to them. And such a face is now seen in the Assemblies, as seldom seen in London; such eager looks, such open ears, such greedy attention, as if every word would be eaten which dropt from the ministers mouth."[81]

"What dreadful fears do there possess the spirits," Thomas Vincent began, "especially of those whose consciences are full of guilt and have not made their peace with God?"[82] It was the voice of the most inspirational preacher of the Great Plague, who had preached at St. Katherine Cree on that Wednesday when George Boddington almost fled in fear and doubt (and who was later visited by this spiritual protege on his deathbed). Vincent knew how to reach the wavering, the fearful and the sinful who flocked to hear him. In a funeral sermon in September, he drew their attention to the printed weekly bills of mortality, the coffins, the shut-up infected households with their red crosses and "Lord Have Mercy Upon us" posted on their doors. "Sinner: Some of the righteous themselves do fall, and if God spareth not his own people, how can you think of preservation?...He may smite you while you sit in those pews...Hark do you hear the knells which are ringing in every place for your dying friends, and fellow sinners. The next knell may be for you."

Vincent also took direct aim at the doubts of the godly in the pews. "Are the righteous liable to death?" he asked rhetorically, alluding to the mortal nature of humans. "Let none wonder then if some of the righteous fell by the plague." One's days were numbered by God; the difference between the end for the godly and the ungodly was that the chosen ones "are conveyed by Angels into the Heavenly Paradise."[83]

That may have been true, but there was an even more hopeful message in the psalms that needed to be explained to Vincent's listeners. It was the passages in Psalm 91 that the Stocktons had wrestled with in Colchester: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust/ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Vincent's reading was quite different from theirs, for they were trying to justify fleeing the plague, and he was wrestling with the Psalm's apparent message that plague would not touch God's people. His interpretation ranks with the best of twentieth-century deconstruction. "I'm not sure," he said in his funeral oration, "our pestilence is the same as the ancient one." Probably ours is much more gradual and lasting, he continued. Therefore

God's Destroying Angel could not discriminate as easily between the righteous and the wicked, and cover the godly with his wings, as when the plague came swiftly and left soon.

Symon Patrick also struggled with the text. His was a more conventional reading of the psalm than that offered by these Puritans, as one would expect from an Anglican priest. Yet we have to linger a moment with this rector, for we can detect traces of Calvinism in his life and writings. As with other staunch Anglicans such as John and Mary Evelyn for example, and possibly even the pleasure loving Samuel Pepys, the long period of Puritan influence in English culture had left its mark. Patrick was as wedded to providence as the most convinced Puritan, and may have experienced something like a "conversion" as God took him through one crisis after another, from a near-fatal illness as a child to failing to secure a high academic post at Cambridge, leading him to a holy calling as a priest.[84]

When the Great Plague broke out in London, the convalescing Patrick returned from a Midland spa to be with his poorer parishioners who could not flee with their social "betters." To his friend in the country, Mrs Elizabeth Gauden, Patrick's repeated message was: "We are in the hands of God and not of men." "I have had many thoughts of immortality," he informed her as the contagion carried off up to thirty parishioners a week. "I should be at quite a losse were it not for the benefit of the Christian religion."[85] For those shut up in infected houses and others who were fearful and wavering in their faith he printed little homilies and a special prayer. Of the 91st Psalm's promise, he reassured his readers: God will not give us more than we can bear; if we are not saved from the Destroying Angel, it is for a good reason which heaven should not overrule.[86]

Patrick and Vincent had no intention of letting up their call to virtue and repentance when the epidemic subsided. In October, as the death toll went down sharply in London, Patrick preached a sermon on the "remembrance we ought to have of the time of affliction when God restores [our city] to prosperity." Taking his text from Psalm 39, "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath," he asked his congregants "to set down in writing all that they had found observable in that late time of danger, their

thoughts, their promises of vows, their good resolutions, their deliverances."[87] In his fiery tract written after the Great Plague of 1665 and Great Fire of 1666, Vincent listed twenty-five common sins, and admitted to having fallen into sin himself. He urged his readers to compare his descriptions with the lines written in the book of their conscience.[88] [See Vincent's List of London's Sins.]

4. Last Things

> Every blow, from the Great Plague to the renewal of persecution, from personal illness to children's disobedience, was interpreted by dissenters as God working out his purpose. However, although divine providence ruled the world, it no longer seemed to many dissenters that God was about to bring about the rule of the saints on earth. The millenarianism which had been such a feature of puritanism was transmuted into a more introspective, politically passive conviction that only through personal transformation of sinners would the world be remade.
>
> John Spurr, "From Puritanism to Dissent, 1660-1700." (1996)[89]

Historical demographers have reconstructed the family rebuilding and in-migration from the countryside that followed England's early modern plague epidemics, and concluded that stricken towns and cities "recovered" quickly.[90] In things spiritual if not material, this is less plausible. The Great Plague of 1665 was not a bad dream soon forgotten, with a fairy tale ending in which everyone lived happily ever after. The godly tallied up the spiritual credits and debits of this time of personal trial and divine judgment, just as they did their spiritual and material ledger at the end of each calendar year. Often they found themselves wanting.[91]

On the credit side many of them had shown incredible fortitude. Those who survived took this experience with them as they faced new struggles and temptations. Let us be still and quiet in ye Lord," William Caton had said with a touch of the old millenarian zeal, "who will overturne principalityes, thrones and dominions [that] he alone may reign, whose right it is."[92] John Allin, viewing the open plague pit from his rooms, uttered a cry of anguish: "I have no place of retiring neither in the city nor country, none in heaven nor earth to goe unto, but God onely." He continued bravely, "The Lord lodge mee in the bosome of his love and then I shalbee safe what ever betides."[93] Symon Patrick wondered why

God had spared him. It must have been for a purpose, he decided. He would dedicate the rest of his life to helping others in thanksgiving for the providential care that God had given him.[94]

However there was a debit side to some spiritual tallies from the plague. It had not been easy to contemplate death by the hand of one's savior, even with reassurances of divine grace articulated by George Boddington, Symon Patrick and William Caton that spanned the confessional spectrum. Edifying stories in Thomas Vincent's sermons of youths welcoming their end were inspirational, but how many persons could be saintly on their death-bed, in agony and fear and possibly alone as they faced the Devil and God? If a godly person avoided the sickness and the 60% to 80% mortality that it brought, one of the twenty-five sins on Vincent's list might be preying on his or her conscience. For some who had fled, guilt lingered despite scriptural assurances. If it did not haunt Baxter, it probably did Owen Stockton.

The debit side of their ledgers was not the only legacy of this Great Plague that could not be easily balanced by godly folk. They also had to make sense of ungodly persons being drawn to repentance and perhaps conversion in this time of peril and then falling back. Others had been the "hard hearted" sort, resisting any thought of remorse for their sins. "You see how desirous all are of some token for good," Symon Patrick told Elizabeth Gauden, "But the best sign of all, I doubt, is much wanting, and that is the reformation of men's manners, of which I heare little, unlesse that those come to church who did not before."[95] "My soule records thy kindnes with meltings for thy mercy," Ralph Josselin exclaimed. But he could not fathom God's laying low London and Colchester, "yett Colne, sinful Colne spared." "The publique fast [is held] and the calamities [are] great," he wrote, "yet oh how few mind the hand of God that is lifted up, but goe on in their vain wayes."[96]

Like the latter day converts to Mao's Red Book whose "cultural revolution" failed to gain permanency over profane backsliders and sinners, the Rule of the Saints had failed to realize the final triumph promised in the books of Daniel and Revelation. The failure of the Great Plague to change the

hearts of the ungodly had confirmed this failure. Where did that leave the converted and their godly cause? Some of the ungodly thought they knew. Just before it was clear that an epidemic was unfolding in the capital, a Quaker lord had kneeled at Charles II's bedside, and told him that "the end of the world would be this yeare, and therefore desired his Majesty to prepare for it." The profligate monarch responded with an offer of seven years' purchase for the Earl of Pembroke's manor, since he would not need it. The upstaged peer departed amid gales of laughter by the courtiers, muttering that he would die with his own land.[97] Eschatology was going out of style, and not just at court. Had the godly been laughed off the stage of this world, their intense conversions rendered irrelevant, their struggle against backsliding a footnote to history? Or had something else happened that we do not see?

In the last century the influential intellectual historian, Paul Hazard, placed "la crise de la conscience Européenne" between 1680 and 1720. One day, he wrote, everyone talked like Bishop Bossuet; the next day they thought as Voltaire: "It was a Revolution."[98] Bossuet's *Universal History* had stretched from the Creation to the Last Judgment; Voltaire's secular histories started later, and ended earlier. Bossuet's theme of human sin and divine judgment had disappeared. What could have brought about such a dramatic change? We keep searching for new answers.

In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas suggests that belief systems like magic could be fundamentally altered only "from outside the system altogether," and he posits the "mechanical revolution" which replaced providence with the workings of the natural world as the outside challenger.[99] But when religion triumphed over magic, he acknowledges, "it was religion with a difference."[100] Here Thomas stresses a *Deus absconditus*, the Devil "banished to Hell," a "natural theology breaking down the "association between guilt and misfortune."[101] I would add another symbiotic relationship, that between conversion and backsliding. And I would look inside religion as well as outside for insight into what was happening to their relationship.[102]

What happened after the Great Plague of 1665 to the symbiosis of conversion and backsliding

lies beyond the subject of this paper and my limited research. However I would offer the possibility that the Puritans' tension between grace and guilt could not last. With millenarianism aborted in the 1650s and godliness falling short in 1665, a new look had to be taken at sin and perhaps at conversion.

The post-plague godly did not give up the struggle against sin and backsliding. However many of them softened their approach to these inevitable aspects of human living, taking a more meliorist approach with less guilt-ridden zealotry. The Great Plague experience did not cause this, but it had been the ultimate litmus test of a godly perfection that defied reality.[103]

Perhaps something was happening at the other end of this grace-guilt nexus as well. The conversion experience which gave the believer the promise of being saved in spite of her or his sins had not been easy on the godly. Instead of joy and release from worry about salvation that Luther's justification by faith promised, Calvinist predestination had seemed to make the godly feel all the more guilty. Might God be experienced in a less intimidating way at conversion?

Within the medical world, the divine spark of wisdom in humans that Robert Boyle and his devout sister, Lady Katherine Ranelagh, detected was an encouragement to understand diseases and combat them while recognizing they were part of God's world.[104] Within the spiritual realm, there may have been something parallel to this, a softening of the awesome double predestination that placed enormous burdens on the elect and the damned. It would be interesting to look at conversion experiences in the decades after 1665. With assurances of a softer, gentler, more enabling God, the divine spark in the Puritan and Quaker could help them go quietly about the business of making themselves better persons and the world a better place. It was a turning away from a millennialism that George Wither could not join, wedded as he was to the past, but which John Milton embraced.[105] When Thomas Ellwood got out of jail in 1665 and Milton showed him *Paradise Lost*, the Quaker friend remarked: "Thou hast said much here of Paradise Lost; but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?" When the two met some time later, Milton handed Ellwood a copy of *Paradise*

Regained, saying "This is owing to you, for you put it in my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont."[106] That *bête noire* of the Puritans, the Devil, so prominently featured in Milton's greatest work, was tamed in the sequel.

I would like to express my thanks especially to Dorothy Moote, co-researcher and co-author of our work on the Great Plague of London in 1665. The Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis's seminar on "The Varieties of Religious Experience" in 1995-1997, directed by Phyllis Mack, provided us with many stimulating questions on the theme of providence and human action. The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London has also been an invaluable center for research, discussion, support, and encouragement during the past seven years. Steven Pincus made invaluable suggestions on reading for this paper.

1. Quoted in Owen C.Watkins, *The Puritan Experience. Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972), 216-18.

2. Thomas Taylor, *The Pilgrims Profession* (1622), reprinted in *Three Treatises* (1633). Quoted by William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism, Or, the Way to the new Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press...1570-1643* (New York, 1938), 114, 148.

3. John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689* (New York, 1998), 5.

4. Peter Lake, *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan church* (Cambridge, 1982), 182.

5. There is a substantial overview of Puritan and Quaker testimonies by Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience. Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972). William Haller's classic focuses on the writings of Puritan ministers: *The Rise of Puritanism. Or, the Way to the new Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570-1643* (New York, 1938).

6. One of my favorite books by Hill does have something to say on the present theme: *The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York, 1972), notably chs. 6, 8, and 16: "A Nation of Prophets," "Sin and Hell," and "Life Against Death."

7. There is a useful historiographical introduction to Elizabethan religious practice and belief in Margo Todd, ed., *Reformation to Revolution. Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (London, 1995), esp. 2-3. See also the specially commissioned essays, *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds. (New York, 1996). Among the essays in these collections are two relevant and very different contributions by Peter Lake, one on moderate Puritans, and the other concerning a Puritan clergyman who had the tables turned on him as an ungodly, law-breaking condemned criminal facing conversion all over again on the scaffold.

8. Quoted in Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 159.

9. In "The Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe:did they really exist?" reprinted in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Geoffrey Parker and Leslie M. Smith (London, 1978), 151-55, I analyzed Lawrence Stone's masterful essay on the origins of the Puritan Revolution. In his written response to me, Lawrence attributed the difference between the English and French religious experiences to "the socioeconomic variables."

10. Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion With Special Reference to the*

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Oxford, 1950), with chapters on George Fox and English Protestantism, Jansenism, Quietism, and Molinos.

11. The Eucharist was a possible but problematic substitute among Protestant confessions for the absent penitential sacrament. As I write this, my thoughts turn to a brilliant and provocative essay in David Sabean's *Power in the Blood* (Cambridge, 1984): "Communion and community: The refusal to attend the Lord's Supper in the sixteenth century," 37-60. I find the volume in my study. (Miraculously it is not buried among dozens of boxes of books I thought I would not need in my post-teaching life--my prolonged sabbatical.) In Lutheran Germany as in Catholic France, the clergy (and many laypersons, too) encouraged taking the Eucharist, complete with the pre-communion priestly examination and confession. Sabean shows the Eucharist as a battleground within conventional religious structures: The authorities insisted one should go through the communion process as a means to getting rid of sin--and viewed refusal as a sign of sectarianism, superstitious magic, heresy and anabaptism. Several of the local Württembergers insisted that they were too filled with envy, hatred, etc. (over issues which should be settled in the secular courts) to take communion: "The sacrament could not bring a peaceful heart; rather, a peaceful heart was a precondition for taking the sacrament." (p. 42-43, 46). In France, Catholic Jansenists wrote and argued against "frequent communion" in somewhat the same way. English Puritans were divided and ambivalent about the efficacy of the Anglican communion. Tantalizingly, Sabean prefaces his essay with two quotes. The first, from 1 Corinthians 11: 27-30, includes "For anyone who eats and drinks [the bread and wine] without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." The second quote is the well-known English nursery rhyme: "There I met an old man/ Who would not say his prayers./ I took him by the left leg/ And threw him down the stairs."

12. Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 64.

13. On *Grace Abounding*, see Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 101-20.

14. Karl. F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text. The cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville, 1992), ix.

15. See Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 160; Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 85.

16. Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, 11.

17. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 159-60.

18. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; Penguin edn. 1982), Lectures VI and VII, "The Sick Soul," 157-58, 160n. 1.

19. Quoted in Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 101.

20. Quoted by Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 162, 163. On Elizabeth Wilkinson's life see Haller, Rise of Puritanism, 98-99, 111.

21. See Edward Hindson, ed., *Introduction to Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1976). Originally published in Latin, *The Golden Chaine* appeared after 1600 in many English editions separately as well as being part of his collected works. Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, "Bibliographical Notes," 416.

22. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., esp. vol. 1.

23. On the term, see Knox, *Enthusiasm*, ch. 1, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," and ch. 2, "The Corinthians' Letter to St. Paul." I have placed the seventeenth-century "enthusiasts" in a larger religious-cultural context in "The Continuing Reformation and the Quest for Salvation," and "The Religious Frontier: Christian Enthusiasm and pagan Free Thought." A.L. Moote, *The Seventeenth Century: Europe in Ferment* (Lexington, MA, 1970), 70-85.

24. Quoted by Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 132; Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 141, 142.

25. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 165-66; Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 88-91, 221.

26. Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 160.

27. The recent rehabilitation of seventeenth-century "casuistical theology" as a "good thing" is relevant here. See Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England. Essays Presented to G.E. Aylmer*, ed. John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford, 1993), 29-56.

28. Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 170-72.

29. I consulted the 1563, 1610, 1632, and 1641 editions of Foxe in the Huntington Library on the tangential theme of the broadening of sacred space. A.L. Moote, "Profaning the Sacred: Anticlericalism and Regicide in Protestant England and France," *Majestas* (Cologne, 1993), 1: 53-66.

30. William Lamont, *Puritanism and the English Revolution*, vol. 3: *Richard Baxter and the Millenium* (London, 1979), 12-15.

31. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 74.

32. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1957, rev. edn. 1970). See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1970), 128-46, on the shift from "passive" to "active" millenarianism in seventeenth-century England.

33. Quoted by Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 43.

34. Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, "Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700," 26. The quotation is from William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 146.

35. Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (London, 1988), 143.

36. I owe my awareness of this conversion phenomenon to conversations in the mid 1960s with my colleague and specialist on Tudor-Stuart religion at Queens University in Canada, Paul Christianson.

37. On Cromwell, compare William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London, 1963); William Lamont, *Puritanism and the English Revolution*, vol. 2, *Godly Rule: Politics and*

Religion, 1603-1660 (London, 1969), esp. 23-26; and Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman. Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (1970), esp. 26, 39, 46. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints. A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), which Lamont qualifies, is also very relevant.

38. Baxter's typology encompassed "Meerly Literall" ("contrary to reason") "Cabalisticall ("fictitious and presumptuous"), Conjecturall" ("by reasons which seem plausible to each man as prejudice and fancie dispose him"), Rationall ("fetcht from the context of former prophecies"), and "Revelationall" ("by propheticall inspiration or vision"). Lamont, *Baxter and the Millenium*, 66.

39. Capp, *English Almanacs 1500-1800. Astrology and the Popular Press* (Ithaca, NY, 1979), 165. Arise Evans is the perfect example. Baptized Rhys Evans, the young Welshman became "Arise" after a scriptural passage. In London during the 1630s, he became a powerful prophetic voice: "Afore I looked upon the Scripture as a history of things that passed in other countries, pertaining to other persons; but now I looked upon it as a mystery to be opened at this time, belonging also to us." Quoted by Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 75.

40. Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 46-49.

41. See Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1952 rev. edn.), 190.

42. The quotations come, respectively, from Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England. The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 260; and Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 77, 78.

43. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 78.

44. *The Diary of Ralph Josselin*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (Oxford, 1976), 2.

45. See Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 42; Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, 12. The essay in Durston and Eales by Ralph Houlbrooke on "The Puritan Death-bed, c. 1560-1660," 141, quite accurately stresses Josselin's calmness when one of his children died. While they were alive however, the reading of his diary entries by Dorothy Moote and myself suggests much soul-searching--the other side of the Puritan "personal experience."

46. Lamont, *Baxter and the Millenium*, 9, 15.

47. McKeon, *Dryden's Annus Mirabilis*, 152.

48. See Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 150; McKeon, *Dryden's Annus Mirabilis*, 242; Capp, *English Almanacs*, 168, 172; Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millenium*, 30-32. In 1651 Evans published *A Voice from Heaven to the Church of England*, calling for the restoration of Charles II. The next year Evans added *An Echo to the Voice from Heaven*, proclaiming "I am sent before King Charles to prepare a people to receive him, as S. John was sent of old to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus." A year later, Evans was explicit in calling Charles II the coming fifth monarch. A fourth year of millenarian ruminations led him to the final conclusion: God would punish the Dutch with a plague for threatening war, the Jews would be converted under Charles II, and Christ would reign with Charles as his viceroy.

49. Barbara Beigun Kaplan, *"Divulging of Useful Truths in Physick." The Medical Agenda of Robert Boyle* (Baltimore, 1993), 16-17, and 179n. 20 (historiography), touches on the connection between millenarianism and the scientific quest to improve the lot of humankind: 'Hartlib's beliefs for social improvement were couched in terms of millenarian eschatology." Robert Boyle and his sister, Lady Katherine Ranelagh, looked for insight in the Bible as well as the Book of Nature. He saw the "divine spark" in scientists the way the Quakers saw the potentiality for Christ to enter every human. She saw God as a powerful first cause and life force guiding her every move. In 1665 she penned "The Plague of London from the Hand of God," sympathetic to the Puritans who were being persecuted as dissenters after the Restoration. Lady Ranelagh's handwritten treatise is at the Royal Society Library, Boyle papers, 14, fols. 28-42. Robert Boyle's views on plague and faith healing by the "stroker" Valentine Greatrakes in 1665 are revealed in letters to Henry Oldenburg, Royal Society Library, Letter Book Supplement, 1663-1693, 2: 36-55.

50. Capp, *English Almanacs*, 164-175, on "The Apocalypse," is good on description. McKeon, *Dryden's Annus Mirabilis*, is more focused. Cf. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, and his *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1990 rev. ed.).

51. McKeon, *Dryden's Annus Mirabilis*, 206-207.

52. See the summary by Christopher Durston, "Puritan Rule and the Failure of Cultural Revolution, 1645-1660," in Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, 210-33.

53. Durston, "Failure of Cultural Revolution," 222, 223, 232.

54. It used to be thought that millenarianism virtually disappeared after the Restoration in 1660. So thought Christopher Hill, and William Lamont in volume one and two of his trilogy. The same view is to be found in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 144. But in volume three, Lamont changed his views. "What has sometimes been taken to be a diminution of interest in the Apocalypse after the Restoration," he writes, "may simply have been a more effective concealment of interests which had perforce to be driven underground." He cites Newton and features Richard Baxter. Lamont, *Baxter and the Millenium*, 15. But their millenarian interests, while genuine, seem very different from the apocalyptic visions of the 1640s and 1650s. I believe that millenarianism as it had been known was buried along with the demise of the attempt at godly rule.

McKeon makes a case for continued interest in the idea of a year of wonders (both good and bad)--an annus mirabilis through the 1660s, but that is not the same thing as the pursuit of the millenium. It was also largely royalist; and before long, Arise Evans and others had to give up on casting that happy reprobate, Charles II, in the role of a godly prince, especially as viceroy of a returned Christ! See Mckeon, *Dryden's Annus Mirabilis*, chapter 8, "Royalist Prophesy, 231-57.

55. After belaboring his loyalty to crown and church, this longtime dissenter suggests that a Second Coming may "root out all Idolatries...together with the Thrones of all those Kings that are partakers in such worshippings." But earlier in the poem, he writes in a very conventional vein: "This Pestilence, which now is brought in hither/ I am assur'd, proceeds not altogether/From causes merely natural, but comes/to execute God's just deserved Dooms/From his immediate hand; and will therefore/Those medicines need, which must do somewhat more/To cure, or stay it from proceeding on." Playing on medical advice of the time, he suggests "herb grace," "rue," fasting "from things that were offensive in times past," a "wholesome diet," and the best preservative from taking in the infection and other illness,

not getting anxious: "In your hearts endeavour to be quiet." George Wither, *A Memorandum to London being a Soliloque...to Prevent the Sins and Plague Increasing* (London, 1665), 17, 25-26.

56. His letters during the Great Plague make fascinating reading. They are at the East Sussex Record Office in the Frewen collection. Lamont has found millenarian references in the letters of one of Allin's correspondents, Samuel Jeake. Lamont, *Baxter and the Millenium*, 218-20

57. The most explicit statement is in J.V., *Golgotha, or A Looking Glass for London and the suburbs therof, shewing the causes, natures, and efficacy of the present plague and the most hopeful way of healing*. "The pestilence is a sign to prepare for the near approaching kingdom of Christ Monarchical on the Earth," declared the author, citing Psalm 89 and Matthew 24. "I fear much what the Lord may do with me and others of his children, after so long Gentleness, Goodness and Forebearance, [whose name] we have polluted before the Heavens."

58. *The Bloody Almanack for the year 1666* is a rare example. This anonymous work, published while the plague was still raging in 1665, suggested "extraordinary events and alterations that may come to pass upon the stage of the world in this (supposedly wonderful) year." The "murderous" planets Saturn and Jupiter would meet in the same sign as they did six years before "the Nativity of our Blessed Lord and Saviour." "A Famous Monarch [was] to rise from the Island of Great Britain" and bring reformation and peace (by conquest!) throughout the world. Then nation would fight against nation, and "there shall be Famine abd Pestilence and Earthquakes in divers places." Finally would come "the end of the world with this globe of mortality to be made desolate."

59. John Tanner, student in physick and astrology, *Angelicus Britannicus. An Ephemeris for the year 1666 and from the creation of the world 5615* (prediction for February).

60. See Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore, 1974), "The portrayal of the last judgment," and "In the bedchamber of the dying, 29-39. There is also Ariès' magisterial work, *The Hour of Our Death.*

61. Houlbrooke, "The Puritan Death-bed," 122-44.

62. Thomas Trigge, *Calendrium Atrologicum 1665*. see Capp, *English Almanacs*, 148 (quotation), 334-35 (biography).

63. *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of...his Life and Times* (London, 1696), 2: 448 I have used the copy in Dr. Williams' Library which holds the Baxter papers. The editor, Matthew Sylvester, is faithful in these passages to the original narrative ms. On the editing, see Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 121-22.

64. John Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations Made on the Bills of Mortality* (London, 1662 and 1665 edns.)

65. *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 2: 448.

66. Frederick J. Powicke, *The Reverend Richard Baxter Under the Cross (1662-1691)* (London, 1927), 24. I thank Mrs. Barnes at Dr. Williams' Library for bringing this reference to my attention.

67. In 1996 I presented a paper with some preliminary reflections, "God's Destroying Angel and Religious Responses (with some surprises): The Great Plague in London and Colchester 1665-66," at the Rutgers Center of Historical Analysis. In 1997 Dorothy and I continued our probing with a talk at the Center on "Rich and Poor and Religious: Parish and Community During the Great Plague in London and Colchester, 1665-1666."

68. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 3: 1-2.

69. Dr. Williams' Library, ms. 24.8, Mrs. Stockton's Diary. We thank David Harley for telling us of the Stockton manuscripts.

70. Owen Stockton Memoranda Journal, Dr. Wlliams' Library, ms. 24.7, 1, 2.

71. Dr. Williams' Library, ms. 24.9.

72. Dr. Williams' Library, ms. 24.7, 11.

73. Doctor Williams' Library, ms. 24.7, 17-18.

74. Doctor Williams' Library, ms. 24.7.

75. London Guildhall Library ms. 10,823/1. Boddington Family Commonplace Book. The Great Plague story is at fo. 40.

76. William Caton to friends and brethren [in England], Amsterdam 8th of 7th month [September 8, 1665], in A Collection of Letters on Important Subjects written by many of the people called Quakers from the year 1662 to 1777. Essex Record Office, Colchester T/A 424/6/3, microfilm. Originals at the University of Essex.

77. Most of the correspondence, memoirs and records of the Quakers' meetings are at the Friends' Library on Euston Road in London. The burial records at the Public Record Office, RG 6 449, list those who died in prison or the prison ship. The Friends took their dead from all around London to their burial place north of the wall and a newer burial ground south of the Thames in Southwark. It was an extraordinary accomplishment.

78. George Whitehead, *The Christian Progress*, quoted in *Select Series of Biographical Narratives...of Early Members of the Society of Friends*, ed. John Barclay (London, 1841), 51.

79. William Caton to Stephen Crisp, May 19, 1664, Altmere, Netherlands, in *Collection of Letters*.

80. William Caton to friends and brethren, September 8, 1665, in *Collection of Letters*.

81. Thomas Vincent, *Gods Terrible Voice in the City* (London, 1667), 42.

82. Vincent, *Gods Terrible Voice*, 28.

83. "A sermon Preached at the Funeral of Mr. Abraham Janeway Minister of the Gospel, in

Aldermanbury church, 18th day of September 1665," in Vincent, *Gods Terrible Voice*, 219-28.

84. The editor of Patrick's writings noted that his mother and father were very religious, Bible-reading couple. His mother's father had been a minister, and his father had a reputation of being a Puritan. The editor claimed this was not true, citing his use of the Book of Common Prayer well into the Civil Wars. Patrick himself said that he had been opposed to the dissenters in his younger years, but came to see many of them as honest and good Christians. *The Works of Symon Patrick*, ed. Alexander Taylor, 9 vols. (Oxford, 1858), 9: 409-10, 554. One could quote many passages from his weekly letters to Elizabeth Gauden during the Great Plague and much later writings that are Calvinist in tone or inspiration, e.g. near the end of his life as Bishop of Ely in "The Work of the Ministry represented to the clergy of the diocese of Ely," *Works* 8: 555-98, esp. 583.

85. Symon Patrick to Elizabeth Gauden, September 2, 1665. Patrick, *Works*, 9: 573-74.

86. "A Consolatory Discourse persuading to a cheerful trust in God in these times of trouble and danger," in Patrick, *Works*, 3: 655-74. This treatise was written in August and printed in September. "A Brief Account of My Life," 3: 443.

87. Patrick, "Brief Account of My Life," *Works*, 9: 445.

88. Vincent, *Gods Terrible Voice*, 73-148.

89. His essay concludes Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*. See p. 262.

90. The best study is by Roger Schofield, "An Anatomy of an Epidemic: Colyton, November 1645 to November 1646," in *The Plague Reconsidered. A New Look at its Origins and Effects in 16th and 17th Century England* (Matlock, Derbyshire, 1977), 95-126. The monumental work on population in Britain by Anthony Wrigley and Roger Schofield avoids London because its constantly moving population made quantitative analysis impossible. I recall discussing their work with Lawrence Stone over lunch, and Lawrence replying to my doubts: "They are in for a mighty fall," or words to that effect.

91. The regular tallying is a mark of the diaries of both Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, both conforming Anglicans. Had I space to elaborate, I would make a case for John and Mary Evelyn being close to godly persons, as reflected in his diary and their unpublished letters, now being catalogued at the British Library by Dr. Frances Harris, who spoke here last year as the guest of Peter Lake. Even Pepys has faint Puritan touches (coming from his mother?). William Haller has detected them in what he calls "the greatest diary sprung from the Puritan confessional." He adds: "A certain clerk of the Admiralty at the Restoration owed to Puritan tradition something of his impulse to record in 'character' personal matters such as men generally conceal even from themselves." Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 97, 98. Pepys' obsession with drawing up his will at the peak of the plague and his saying that one scarcely knew whether they could live from one day to the next could be construed to have providentialist implications. There were his periodic vows to forswear extra-marital liaisons, etc., etc.

92. William Caton to Stephen Crisp, February 12, 1665. *Collection of Letters*.

93. East Sussex Record Office, FRE 5465, John Allin to Philip Frith, 7 September, 1665.

94. With the plague at its peak, Patrick recalled, "I set myself to consider the great goodness of God to me since this plague [began], and how many dangers I had been in, by people coming to speak to me out of infected houses, and by my going to those houses to give them money." Patrick, *Works*, 9: 443-44. He hid most of the dangers in his letters to Elizabeth Gauden, especially when she was on the point of giving birth. Other Anglican clergy, who had filled in when the incumbents had died or fled, wrote similarly. Francis Thompson, preaching regularly at one of the heaviest hit parishes, St. Giles Cripplegate, was "wonderfully preserved by God in the midst of great danger and mortality." Francis Lewys, who had filled in at St. Botolph Bishopsgate, where the mortality rose sevenfold, wrote to Dean Sancroft, "I do no more then my duty. It is God preserving me (blessed be his name) in these more than dismal tymes of mortality, in ye very valley of the shadow of death to be a surviving miracle of his mercy." Samuel Foster to Dean Sancroft, 22 January, 1665/6; Fran[cis] Lewys to Sancroft, 25 October, 1665. See British Library, Harleian ms. 3785, fos. 37, 81, 96.

95. Symon Patrick to Elizabeth Gauden, September 7, 1665, *Works*, 9: 584.

96. October 4 and 8, 1665. Josselin, *Diary*, 520.

97. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hastings Correspondence, HA 7649, Gervase Jacques to the widowed Countess of Huntingdon and her teenage son, the earl, April 25, 1665.

98. Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680-1715*. I cite the Meridian edition of 1953; the original French version in 1935 included invaluable scholarly notes.

99. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 641-42.

100. See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 640-42. There is a similar approach in Herbert Butterfield's now forgotten thought-provoking *The Origins of Modern Science, 1300-1800* (New York, 1957 pbk. edn.), where he dismisses the Renaissance and Reformation as "merely internal displacements," overshadowed by fundamental scientific changes.

101. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 639-40.

102. Some time ago I followed Hazard's approach in *The European Mind*, combining external influences such as extra-European travel with internal ones like Biblical scholarship in a broader exploration of intellectual-cultural changes. Moote, *The Seventeenth Century*, 414-23.

103. Cf. Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 171: "Gradually the outright demand for immediate perfection, which was such an important matter for the first [Quaker] apologists, becomes less noticeable in the autobiographical records." Thomas's article on "casuistical theology" is also relevant; see note 27 above.

104. Paul Slack has an excellent summation of the providential/supernatural and medical/natural understandings of plague. He tends to see them as opposites, with the latter becoming more and more dominant. However there may have been an internal displacement within the religious approach, since there was a strong connection between religion and medicine, and many ministers were also trained as physicians. Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1990 edn), esp. 36-50.

105. There is a fascinating article by Christopher Hill that I have only had a change to scan at the time of this writing. "George Wither (1558-1667) and John Milton (1608-74)," in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, 1: 133-56. The essay was first published in 1980.

106. Don M. Wolfe, *Milton and his England* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), no. 108.