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The World of Seventeenth-Century English Dissenters: Piety, Theology, Heterodoxy

“An Unlearned Antinomian-Anabaptist”: Richard Baxter on John Bunyan

« Un antinomien-anabaptiste sans éducation » : Richard Baxter à propos de John Bunyan

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Résumés

English Français

As far as is known, Baxter and Bunyan, the two outstanding figures of late seventeenth-century nonconformity, never met, nor, apart from a categorization of Bunyan as an “unlearned Antinomian-Anabaptist”, did either refer to the other in print. That one comment, however, is illuminating: it spans the great ecclesiological and theological fault line of the period, within the established church as well as within nonconformity. Bunyan’s commitment to the autonomy of independent gathered churches was an expression of a convinced Calvinism, intolerant of other theologies. By contrast, Baxter’s commitment to a more inclusive national church was combined with, and articulated through, rationalist and moralistic theological emphases and a liberal disinclination to limit orthodoxy any more than necessary. This contrast was enacted in their responses to *The Design of Christianity* (1671) by the Latitudinarian Edward Fowler. On the one hand it prompted Bunyan’s heated *Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith* (1672) against Fowler’s “Feigned design of Christianity”; on the other, Baxter’s defence of Fowler and his thesis in *How Far Holiness is the Design of Christianity* (1671) against those who (like Bunyan) thought the book had “a scandalous design” to substitute “the meer morality of a Heathen” for the Christian doctrine of justification. This essay explores this profound difference of opinion between Puritanism’s two leading representatives on the nature of Christian faith and duty and their contrasting literary personae, and it speculates that its origins may lie in their Civil War experiences.

Pour autant que l’on sache, Baxter et Bunyan, ces deux grandes figures du non-conformisme de la fin du dix-septième siècle, ne se sont jamais rencontrés. Ils n’ont pas non plus fait allusion l’un à l’autre dans leurs publications, sauf quand Baxter a qualifié Bunyan d’« antinomien-anabaptiste sans éducation ». Ce seul commentaire, cependant, est révélateur : il évoque la grande faille ecclésiologique et théologique de l’époque, au sein de l’Église établie comme au sein des groupes non-conformistes. L’engagement de Bunyan en faveur de l’autonomie des Églises indépendantes réunies était l’expression d’un Calvinisme convaincu, qui ne tolérait pas d’autres théologies. Au

contraire, l'engagement de Baxter en faveur d'une Église nationale plus inclusive s'accordait avec, et s'exprimait à travers, des accents théologiques à la fois rationalistes et moralistes, et une réticence libérale à limiter plus que nécessaire le périmètre de l'orthodoxie. Ce contraste prend corps dans leurs réponses à *The Design of Christianity* (1671) du latitudinaire Edward Fowler. D'une part, Bunyan s'enflamme contre « le prétendu dessein du christianisme » de Fowler dans sa réponse, *Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith* (1672). D'autre part, avec son *How Far Holiness is the Design of Christianity* (1671), Baxter défend Fowler et sa thèse contre ceux qui, comme Bunyan, s'insurgent contre « le dessein scandaleux » du livre, qu'ils accusent de substituer à la doctrine chrétienne de la justification « la simple moralité d'un païen ». Cet article explore cette profonde différence d'opinion au sujet de la nature de la foi et du devoir chrétiens, et l'analyse des *personae* littéraires de ces deux représentants du puritanisme suggère que ce différend prend peut-être sa source dans leurs expériences de la Guerre civile.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés: autobiographie, grâce, Guerre civile, John Bunyan, justification, Richard Baxter, sotériologie

Keywords: autobiography, grace, Civil War, John Bunyan, justification, Richard Baxter, soteriology

Texte intégral

- Richard Baxter and John Bunyan, the two outstanding figures of later seventeenth-century Puritanism and nonconformity, never met. They did, however, have a good deal in common. They were close contemporaries: Bunyan was born in 1628 and Baxter in 1615. They shared the experience of Civil War, Interregnum and Restoration: Bunyan survived into the first months of the reign of James II; Baxter into that of William and Mary; they died in 1688 and 1691 respectively. Both were provincials: Bunyan was from a village a few miles from Bedford while Baxter grew up in rural Shropshire in the West Midlands and conducted his renowned Interregnum pastorate just over the county border at Kidderminster in Worcestershire. Neither proceeded to higher education; the formal education of both ended with their schooling, although Baxter was far more of an autodidact than Bunyan, insistently referencing Patristic and European Reformed and Roman Catholic sources throughout his works, while Bunyan presented himself as an ill-educated and ignorant artisan whose spiritual insights owed nothing to other writers.¹ As committed Puritans, both were victims of the Restoration persecution of nonconformity, more intermittently than Bunyan in the case of Baxter but just as publicly in his trial for seditious libel before Judge Jeffries in 1685 for allegedly reflecting adversely on the bishops of the Church of England in glosses in his *Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685). Above all, during their lifetimes both achieved through their writings national and international renown as the authors of the century's bestselling works of practical, pastoral and evangelistic divinity. Titles such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1682), *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) and *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658) were then, and have ever since continued to be, among the most read texts of early modern English prose.²

Bunyan's soteriological emphasis

- For all their shared life experiences there was, however, a fundamental difference and contrast between these two committed Puritans. It was enacted in their responses to *The Design of Christianity* published in 1671 by Edward Fowler, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, a sequel to his defence of Latitudinarianism in *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England* (1670). That had defended conformist divines against nonconformist charges of time-serving and hypocrisy in their acceptance

of the statutory terms for ministry in the national Church of England and had attacked the impassioned solifidianism of much nonconformist theology, arguing "that the grand design of the Gospel is to make men good: not to intoxicate their brains with notions, or furnish their heads with a systeme of opinions; but to reform mens lives and purifie their natures".³ *The Design* continued this attack on Calvinism and (as Fowler saw it) irrational enthusiasm, insisting, in true Latitudinarian style, that leading a good life is the essence and object of Christianity, and that the better the life led the better the Christian. This appalled Bunyan. In his *Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith* (1672) he condemned Fowler's "Feigned design of Christianity" as an "Heathenish, and Pagan Holiness", and denounced Fowler for arguing "like a Heathen Philosopher", like a Quaker, Socinian or Papist, "not Gospelly", not "Christianly".⁴ At the root of Bunyan's outrage is his conviction that the "*inward, reall righteousness, and Holiness*" that Fowler held was the "*design of the Gospel*", is unattainable by fallen humanity. Though "a man should live to the Law, that is devote himself to the works of the Commandments, the most perfect rule of life", yet would he never attain true gospel righteousness for "all this is nothing else but the old Gentleman in his Holy-day-cloaths; the old Heart, the old Spirit; the Spirit of the man, not the Spirit of Christ". Intrinsic righteousness, Fowler's "inward real Righteousness", "sincere righteousness", is an impossibility.⁵ Even Adam was but a natural man with a "natural shadowish old Covenant" kind of holiness. Fowler is quite wrong to assert that the Gospel enables the recovery of the purity lost in Eden: "the Justification that comes by the imputation of that most glorious Righteousness that alone resideth in the Person of the Lord Jesus" does not recreate Adam's innocence, nor recover what has been lost, an "Adamitish Holiness", "Adamish holiness", but rather recreates fallen humanity anew as the free gift of grace: "Righteousness [is] imputed by God, not wrought by us; Righteousness *given*, not *earned*". Hence, "our effectual believing, is not a procuring cause in the sight of God; or a condition of ours foreseen by God, and the motive that prevaleth with him to forgive our manifold transgressions".⁶

- 3 Bunyan is consequently dismayed by Fowler's insistence on the exemplarity of Christ's life, for two reasons: first, Christ's obedience to the law was perfect, beyond the attainment of fallen humanity; secondly, and more crucially, no matter how conscientiously believers model themselves on him, they cannot earn salvation. When "there is *no* such thing in Man by Nature, as *Liberty of Will*" it is impossible for a person to choose to live a good life; all the works of fallen humanity are "counted Wickedness". Were holiness attainable by human effort, Christ's sacrifice would be superfluous: "What need is there, that the Righteousness of Christ should be *Imputed*, where men are Righteous first?", and if the efficacy of that sacrifice is conditional on human effort, then God's mercy is constrained, which is an impossibility:⁷

thus to *imitate* Christ, is to make of him a Saviour, not by *Sacrifice*, but by *example*: Nay, to speak the whole, this would be to make his *Mediatorship* wholly to center, rather in *prescribing of Rules*, and *exacting* obedience to *Morrals*, then in *giving himself a ransome for Men* [...] Faith in Jesus is [...] absolutely necessary [...] Yea, without Faith in Jesus, whosoever believeth in God is sure to perish, and burn in Hell [...] And to take Jesus in *Morrals* for *example*, is no where *called* believing *in* him; neither is there one promise of eternal life, annexed to such a practice [...] I say, for a Man to confine himself, onely to the life of the Lord Jesus for an example, or to think it enough to make him, in his life, a pattern for us to follow, leaveth us, through our shortness in the end, with the Devil and his Angels, for want of Faith in the Doctrine of Remission of Sins [...] Those that follow Jesus in his Spirit, must first receive that Spirit from Heaven, which Spirit is received, as I have often said, by applying first, by Faith, the Merits of Christ to the Soul, for Life, and Justification with God. The Spirit is *not* received by the *Works* of the Law, but by the *hearing of Faith*.⁸

- 4 When "we are set at liberty" through conversion, good works, the "unseperable Companions, to all them that shall be saved" result. Sanctification, that is to say, follows justification, not the other way around.⁹

- 5 In failing to grasp this, what Fowler preaches is "an Antigospel Holiness, Antigospel Principles, and Antigospel Fundamentals", a "tottering, promiseless, and Gospelless Holiness" such as can be found in Islam.¹⁰ It is the gospel that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan presented as the delusion of Ignorance, confident in his own good intentions and works. He trusts to "his good motions", "his own heart" and that he will be "justified before God [...] through his gracious acceptance of my obedience to his Law", to which Christian roundly retorts that "*mans ways are crooked ways, not good, but perverse*" and that Ignorance's faith is "Fantastical" since it "*maketh not Christ a Justifier of thy person, but of thy actions; and of thy person for thy actions sake, which is false*".¹¹ "Your Book Sir", says Bunyan to Fowler in just the terms of Christian to Ignorance, "is begun in Ignorance, mannaged with Errour, and ended in Blasphemy".¹²

Baxter's soteriological emphasis

- 6 Such absolute insistence on unconditional free grace as the foundation of the *ordo salutis* appalled Baxter quite as much as Fowler's moralism appalled Bunyan. In contrast to Bunyan's animated and vituperative denunciation of *The Design of Christianity*, in his *How Far Holinesse is the Design of Christianity* (1671), Baxter wrote in support of Fowler, whom he judged "a very ingenious sober Conformist".¹³ This drew from Fowler an appreciative letter of gratitude of 29 September 1671 in which he decried the "captious, censorious [...] naughty temper" of those such as the "the unknown impertinent" author of the *Defence*, leading to an exchange of letters in which the two men lamented the censoriousness and "sourness" of ignorant men and agreed that, in Baxter's aphoristic formulation "When all is done, it is the serious Christian who is a Christian indeed".¹⁴ This serious Christian, argues *How Far Holinesse*, is identifiable by his active faith for there are two aspects of holiness: first, devotion to God; and secondly, to "the Impression, Image or Glory of God in his works". Accordingly "it is a real secondary part of our Holiness to Love our neighbour as our selves, for that of God which equally appeareth in him [...] And so the duties of the second Table, are a *secondary Holiness*". Consequently, holiness and moral effort are indeed essential to Christianity: "The sum of Holiness and Morality (which is all one) is, the Love of God as God [...] and the *Love* of man and all things for God appearing in them". Since devotion to God is the key to holiness, however, Baxter is also able to distinguish Christian holiness from mere morality: Classical pagan morality is "but Analogically called either Holiness or Morality, and not in a proper or univocal sense; because the End is left out".¹⁵

It is vain [...] to dream that *Cicero* or *Seneca*, *Augustine* or *Chrysostom*, *Luther* or *Calvin*, are as much Saviours as Christ, so far as their doctrine maketh men holy: For neither Philosophers nor Divines preach any good doctrine, but what Christ as Mediator and Light of the world, did some way or other communicate to them.¹⁶

- 7 "Nothing is more sure in Christianity, than that Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, and to bring home straying prodigals to God [...] and to bring man back to the love and obedience of his Makers [...] And so that Holiness or the love of God, is the end of our Redemption, and our Faith". This is achieved, however, not despite but in conjunction with human agency: "it is Christs work, and subordinately ours, to cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting Holiness in the fear of God". Baxter consequently insists on the need for moral effort. For him, following Christ's example is an essential Christian duty, and he has a marked tendency to talk of justification in terms of conditionality, as a process rather than an event. Indeed, he goes as far as to declare that "It is certain that Justification and Sanctification go on hand in hand together [...] And that it is a notorious errour of such as say that Justification is perfect as soon as it begins (though it is true that all sin is then forgiven)".¹⁷ It is small

wonder that Baxter attracted charges of Romanism, Arminianism and moralism throughout his career.

- 8 With such a conviction, Baxter is as intemperately hostile to antinomians as is Bunyan to moralists: "He knoweth not the hurtful miscarriages of our times, who knoweth not what the mistaken notions about *free grace*, have done against *free grace* it self; and how the Gospel hath been supplanted, by an erroneous crying up the Gospel; and crying down the Law".¹⁸

Those ignorant, self-conceited contentious teachers, that seek the reputation of Orthodox zeal in the things which they never understood, and instead of clear apprehending sound scripture-doctrine, and plain expounding to the Church, do take on trust and for company, false or insignificant confounding notions, and proudly make them the instruments of their furious censures and revilings, and of dividing the Church by raising slanders against those that presume to be wiser than they; and so by backbitings tell their hearers, how erroneous and dangerous this and that mans doctrine is, because they never had the wisdom, study and patience to understand it; such I say are the men that in all ages have been the firebrands in the Church, and zealously promoted Christs Kingdom by dividing it.¹⁹

- 9 In his 1670 *Life of Faith* Baxter names "no less than fifty eight errors on the Antinomian side and their fautors in the point of Justification and Imputation".²⁰ While Bunyan takes Fowler to task for saying that the life of faith is the essence of Christianity, in this text Baxter devotes 600 pages to setting out its centrality and the duties it involves.

Soteriology and self-construction in Bunyan and Baxter

- 10 Bunyan does not mention Baxter in his writings, but, at the end of his life, Baxter did mention Bunyan in the course of arguing that error (unlike heresy) does not negate true Christianity:

If [...] many of these that hold these bad opinions, are men of *sincere Holiness*, then Christianity in them hath reached to its design: Now I find that the most of them that I have known, seem to me to be persons of serious Holiness (notwithstanding their infirmities): They are Zealous towards God; they greatly honour Christ; they avoid known Sin; they live justly and charitably towards men; yea, it is the Piety and Strictness of the lives of many of them, which hath drawn many well-meaning ignorant persons to their Errors. *Bunnian*, an unlearned Antinomian-Anabaptist, wrote against the [...] Book of Dr. *Fowler*, yet (abating his separation) I never heard that *Bunnian* was not an honest godly man. If then he attained the design of Christianity, was he not a Christian?²¹

- 11 This comment spans the great ecclesiological and theological fault line of the period, within the established church as well as within nonconformity.²² Bunyan's Independent commitment to the autonomy of gathered churches was an expression of a convinced Calvinism, intolerant of other theologies. By contrast, Baxter's "Presbyterian" commitment to a more inclusive (or, in contemporary terminology, comprehensive) national church was combined with, and articulated through, rationalist and moralistic theological emphases and a liberal disinclination to limit orthodoxy any more than necessary.²³ Indeed, it is not so much the theological opposition in Baxter's comment that is noteworthy as the qualification: erroneous Bunyan may have been but, "If he attained the design of Christianity, was he not a Christian?"²⁴ There is a strong sense in Baxter that (for all his heated polemical and controversial output) theology and theological differences do not much matter. Since words are elusive and no one can really know what anyone means by a particular formulation, Baxter can declare, rather astonishingly, that "No particular Words in the World are *Essentials* of our Religion"²⁵ and insist that rather than defining

or defending orthodoxy, creeds are the engines of division: they "multiply controversies, and fill the minds of men with scruples, and ensnare their consciences, and engage men in parties against each other to the certain breach of Charity".²⁶ If a man is godly, he has attained the ends of Christianity and that, not his opinions, is what matters.²⁷

12 This distinction in their theology eventuated in two very different authorial personae, evident, for example, in their attitudes to "humane learning". For Bunyan, study, while it may be useful, is, like all human endeavour, irrelevant to Christian faith. His literary model is Paul whose claim to preach "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit" (I Corinthians, 2: 1-5) shaped Bunyan's self-construction as an ill-educated and culturally impoverished writer whose authority lies not in academic distinction but in Biblical guidance and the direct divine inspiration of the Spirit: he "never endeavoured to, nor durst make use of other men's lines" for he "found by experience, that what was taught me by the Word and Spirit of Christ, could be spoken, maintained, and stood to, by the soundest and best established Conscience".²⁸ Unlike "carnal Priests" who "tickle the ears of their hearers with vain Philosophy", he "never went to School to Aristotle or Plato" and "*has not writ at a venture, nor borrowed my Doctrine from Libraries. I depend upon the sayings of no man*"; instead, he offers the reader "a parcel of plain, yet sound, true and home sayings" drawn from "*the Scriptures of Truth, among the true sayings of God*".²⁹ Bunyan has not "fished in other mens Waters, my Bible and Concordance are my only Library in my writings". He does not clutter his margins with "a Cloud of Sentences from the Learned FATHERS" because "I have them not, nor have not read them": "I prefer the BIBLE before them; and having that still with me, I count my self far better furnished than if I had (without it) all the Libraries of the two Universities".³⁰

13 Bunyan was not in fact as ill-educated or poorly-read as he maintained. He always insisted that he never read any books and that he had forgotten the little that he had learned at school, but he certainly did not "loose that little I learned, even almost utterly"; he may have attended grammar school,³¹ and had indeed done a spot of "fishing in other mens Waters", notably in John Foxe's immensely influential martyrology *Actes and Monuments* (1563), in the expository matter in the Geneva Bible (1560), in an English translation of Luther's commentary on Galatians, and in a range of works of practical and controversial English theology.³² None of this, however, can be admitted lest it compromise his direct dependence upon the Spirit.

14 Baxter, however, with his conviction that human nature co-operates with grace, was emphatic about the Christian duty of study. He was an obsessive autodidact. Where Bunyan minimised the extent of his reading, Baxter publicly regretted that he never attended university and in compensation became one of the most learned and widely-read of seventeenth-century divines. He larded his texts with the references to, and citations from, early Christian writings and councils, the Church Fathers, medieval Schoolmen and Reformed theologians. He repeatedly recommended titles to his readers, most notably his answer to the question "*What Books Especially of Theologie should one choose, who for want of money or time, can read but few?*" in his *A Christian Directory* (1673) which arranges many hundred titles in three ranks: "the *Poorest or Smallest Library* that is tolerable"; "The *Poorer* (though not the *poorest*), where a competent addition is made"; and thirdly, "The *Poor mans Library*, which yet addeth somewhat to the former, but cometh short of a Rich and Sumptuous Library".³³

15 The difference in theological conviction and (consequently) intellectual disposition between Bunyan and Baxter shaped their respective autobiographies. *Grace Abounding* reveals almost nothing of Bunyan's biography or the public sphere, of what influenced his development. Its focus is on his inner spiritual struggles and its strength lies in its extraordinary representation of the profoundly disorientating experiences through which Bunyan came to faith and assurance. Throughout this process, Bunyan is always on the receiving end, a prey to diabolical and divine forces. He never actively engages or initiates but reacts; his role is passive: "Now was the battel won, and down I fell, as a Bird that is

shot from the top of a Tree" is a characteristic locution. Animated Biblical texts pursue and assault him. Hebrews 12: 16-17 combats the promise of mercy in 2 Corinthians 12: 9, fighting over him (it seems literally) as he fears he has committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: "they boulted both upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strangely in me". He is by temptation reduced to the helplessness "of a Child, whom some Gypsie hath by force took up under her apron, and is carrying from Friend and Country".³⁴ All these verbs of action have subjects other than Bunyan, enacting the incapacity of the human will to initiate spiritual regeneration.³⁵

- 16 By contrast, Baxter's autobiography, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, exhaustively (even exhaustingly) details what Baxter did – his actions as a parliamentary chaplain, as a pastor during the Interregnum, in the ecclesiastical negotiations of the Restoration, as a nonconformist divine, accounts of his voluminous writings, his unwearied pursuit of church reunion. Where Bunyan is a passive (though suffering) protagonist, Baxter is active through 800 folio pages.³⁶ Most strikingly, the conversion experience that preoccupies Bunyan does not figure at all in the *Reliquiae*. In his youth, Baxter had been distressed for many years that his own experience did not conform to the received Puritan pattern of a sudden transformation, that he "could not distinctly trace the Workings of the Spirit upon my heart in that method which Mr. [Robert] Bolton, Mr. [Thomas] Hooker, Mr. [John] Rogers, and other Divines describe", and that he did not know "the Time of my Conversion, being wrought on by [...] Degrees" but he came subsequently to understand, and to teach, that "According to Gods ordinary way of giving Grace, it cannot be expected that Christians should be able to know the very time of their first receiving or acting true saving Grace, or just when they were Pardoned, Justified, Adopted, and put into a state of Salvation". Rather, "Education is God's ordinary way for the Conveyance of his Grace, and ought no more to be set in opposition to the Spirit, than the preaching of the Word", with the consequence that "God breaketh not all Mens hearts alike".³⁷ The gist of his advice in *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* (1653), is not to look for marks of election nor to analyse spiritual experience too closely, but to focus on living a Christian life. Tellingly, in the *Reliquiae* he rejects intimate disclosure of the "Soul-Experiments which those that urge me to this kind of Writing, do expect", such as preoccupied Bunyan, judging it "somewhat unsavoury" to give "any more particular Account of Heart-Occurrences, and God's Operations on me"; instead, he analyses "what Change God hath made upon my Mind and Heart" since his youth, that is, the developments wrought by experience and study on his thought and understanding.³⁸

Soteriology and the Civil War

- 17 Why the Puritan self should be so differently constructed by the movement's two most eminent representatives is, strictly, unknowable, but their experience of Civil War perhaps offers a clue. Not much is known about Bunyan's two-year military experience in the New Model Army from 1645 to 1647, but Christopher Hill long ago argued that his experience of the theological and political radicalism of the New Model Army would have had a liberating effect.³⁹ Certainly, it was following those months as a conscript that he underwent the prolonged conversion experience that led to his becoming a member of John Gifford's Bedford Church. He very shortly thereafter embarked on his pastoral mission, through preaching and writing, and from the first the most striking feature of his gospel was its stress on liberation, articulated through a Calvinist emphasis on the divine decrees and the unconditional gift of grace through the mystery of predestined election, leading to the circular proposition in the *Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith* that "the Death of Christ was the Forgiveness of Sins effectually obtained for all that shall be saved". The conundrum found its way into *The Pilgrim's Progress* when, in answer to his question whether the road he walked to the Celestial City was safe, Christian receives

from the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains the reply "Safe for those for whom it is to be safe, but transgressors shall fall therein".⁴⁰

- 18 There is no need to speculate in the case of Baxter; he is explicit about the effect on him in what was, arguably, the defining experience of his career. He moved to Kidderminster as lecturer in 1642 but shortly thereafter withdrew in the face of royalist and anti-Puritan hostility, first, for a few months, to Gloucester, and then, for years, to Coventry, where he preached to its Parliamentary garrison there. After the battle of Naseby in 1645, he visited the New Model army at its quarters at nearby Leicester, and was appalled:

We that lived quietly in *Coventry* did keep to our old Principles, and thought all others had done so too [...] We were unfeignedly for King & Parliament: We believed that the War was only to save the Parliament and Kingdom from Papists and Delinquents [...] We took the true happiness of King and people, Church and State, to be our end [...] But when I came to the Army among *Cromwell's* Soldiers, I found a new face of things which I never dreamt of: I heard the plotting Heads very hot upon that which intimated their Intention to subvert both Church and State. Independency and Anabaptistry were most prevalent: Antinomianism and Arminianism were equally distributed [...]

Abundance of the common Troopers, and many of the Officers, I found to be honest, sober, Orthodox Men, and others tractable ready to hear the Truth, and of upright Intentions: But a few proud, self-conceited, hot-headed Sectaries had got into the highest places, and were *Cromwell's* chief Favourites, and by their very heat and activity bore down the rest, or carried them along with them, and were the Soul of the Army [...]

I perceived that they took the King for a Tyrant and an Enemy, and really intended absolutely to master him, or to ruin him [...] They said, What were the Lords of *England*, but *William* the Conquerours Colonels? or the Barons but his Majors? or the Knights but his Captains? They plainly shewed me, that they thought God's Providence would cast the Trust of Religion and the Kingdom upon them as Conquerours [...] They were far from thinking of a moderate Episcopacy, or of any healing way between the Episcopal and the Presbyterians: They most honoured the Separatists, Anabaptists, and Antinomians.⁴¹

- 19 All Baxter's instincts for order and decency, and morality, were outraged. It was, he recalled forty years later, this experience of "*the Army and Sectarian Antinomians (more usually called Libertines) who first called me in the year 1645. and 1646. to study better than I had done the Doctrine of the Covenants and Laws of God, of Redemption and Justification*"⁴² and he spent the rest of his career combating radicalism and antinomianism, resisting the identification of them with Puritanism, from his first book, his *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649), to almost his last, *The Scripture Gospel Defended* (1690). To the sensitive young man Bunyan, however, how heady would have been this antinomian talk of liberty, religious and civil, this scepticism about social hierarchies and corresponding responsiveness to artisans of his class. The Oxford-educated gentleman Fowler, we may conjecture, recalled for him the ceremonialist clerics and social elites that radical parliamentarians had fought against. For Baxter, on the other hand, Bunyan would have recalled the undisciplined hot-headedness of those same radicals that had so dismayed him in 1645. For the one, revolution was filled with potentiality; for the other, with jeopardy for religious and social order. To the contrary shocks of their Civil War experience we may attribute the distinctive, and contrasting, emphases of their theology.

Notes

1 See further below, 12.

2 For biographical details see: Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, London, Nelson, 1965.

3 Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divine of the Church of England*, London, 1670, p. 18.

4 Roger Sharrock (gen. ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, 13 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976-1994, IV, p. 7, 44, 68, 106, 120, 121, 71, 77. Bunyan can put Quakers, Socinians and Papists in the same basket as all (in his view) exalt human ability; he ends his work with citations from Thomas Campion and William Penn to show their congruence with Fowler.

5 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 11, 30, 31, 52, 91-92.

6 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 32, 34, 35, 57, 121, 40.

7 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 56-58, 80, 98, 69.

8 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 118-120.

9 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 64, 81, 115, 120.

10 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 100, 106, 101.

11 John Bunyan *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, p. 144, 145, 147, 146, 147-148. Ignorance not unreasonably objects that Christian's stress on the unmerited gift of grace "would loosen the reins of our lust, and tolerate us to live as we list: For what matter how we live if we may be Justified by Christ's personal righteousness from all, when we believe it?" (*Ibid.* p. 148). Baxter would similarly insist on the antinomian implications of separating justification from sanctification (see below, 16).

12 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 123.

13 R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, London, 1696, Part III, p. 85, §183.

14 N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds.), *A Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*, 2 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, letters 847, 854, 857.

15 R. Baxter, *How Far Holiness is the Design of Christianity*, London, 1671, p. 6, 7, 9.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 15, 21.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

20 R. Baxter, *The Life of Faith*, 2nd edn, London, 1670, p. 20.

21 R. Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel Defended*, London, 1690, part ii: *A Defence of Christ, and Free Grace: Against the Subverters, Commonly Called, Antinomians or Libertines*, p. 49. In the second chapter of this work Baxter enumerates 100 antinomian errors (p. 6-38).

22 For an unrivalled account of the context of, and the theological issues at stake in this debate, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660-1780*, vol. 1: *Whichcote to Wesley*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 24-163. See also Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, and the secondary studies listed in its bibliography.

23 On the extent and vitality of this moderate Puritan position in the later seventeenth century, see: Mark Goldie, *Roger Morrice and the Puritan Whigs*, rev. pbk edn, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2016, esp. p. 226-268; David P. Field, *Rigide Calvinisme in a Softer Dresse: the Moderate Presbyterianism of John Howe*, Edinburgh, Rutherford House, 2004, p. 167-179; J. T. Spivey, "Middle-Way Men, Edmund Calamy and the Crises of Moderate Nonconformity, 1688-1732", Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1986; Roger Thomas, "The Rise of the Reconcilers" in C. F. Bolam *et al.*, *The English Presbyterians*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1968, p. 46-72; John Coffey (ed.), *The Oxford History of Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 1: *The Beginnings to 1689*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

24 Baxter knew Bunyan's doctrine: his *Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* was in Baxter's library (Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "A Transcript of Richard Baxter's Library Catalogue", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 3, 1952, p. 74-100, here p. 88, no. 957 (and cf. p. 90, no. 1028).

25 R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. cit., Book II, p. 298, §51.

26 *Richard Baxter's Catholick Theologie*, London, 1675, sig. c3. See further N. H. Keeble, "Take heed of being too forward in imposing on others': orthodoxy and heresy in the Baxterian tradition" in David Loewenstein and John Marshall (eds), *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 282-305.

27 It is true that for Baxter "godliness" implied adherence to a reformed Protestant orthodoxy, but he was nevertheless insistent that no opinion that did not contradict the Lord's Prayer, the Ten commandments and the ancient Creeds invalidated this. See further the comments on heresy and opinion below, 15.

28 John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 87-88, §285.

29 J. Bunyan, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. cit., I, p. 345; II, p. 16; VII, p. 51.

30 *Ibid.*, VII, p. 9; III, p. 1-2.

31 J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 5, §3; R. L. Greaves, *op. cit.*, p. 4-6.

32 Gordon Campbell, "Fishing in Other Men's Waters': Bunyan and the Theologians" in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 137-151; Greaves, *op. cit.*, p. 603-607.

33 R. Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, London, 1673, Book III, question 174, p. 921-928.

34 J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. cit., p. 43, §140; p. 67, §213; p. 32, §102.

35 On this quality in Bunyan, see Anne Dunan-Page, *Grace Overwhelming: John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress and the Extremes of the Baptist Mind*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2006, *passim*, and Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, *passim*.

36 For an acute and sensitive account of the character of the *Reliquiae*, see Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 233-270.

37 R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. cit., Book I, p. 6-7, §6 (1), (3), (4); R. Baxter, *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience*, London, 1653, p. 136.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 124, §213.

39 Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 45-84.

40 J. Bunyan, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. cit. IV, p. 40; J. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. cit., p. 119. See on this teasing perplexity, Stuart Sim, "Safe for Those for Whom it is to be Safe': Salvation and Damnation in Bunyan's Fiction" in Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds), *John Bunyan and his England, 1628-1688*, London, Hambledon Press, 1988, p. 149-160.

41 R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. cit., Book I, p. 50-51, §73. On the defining effect on Baxter of his experiences in the New Model Army see Tim, Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, esp. p. 87-121, and the same author's *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, esp. p. 33-54.

42 R. Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel Defended*, ed. cit., part i: A Breviate of the Doctrine of Justification, sig. A2.

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Droits d'auteur



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