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EDITED BY
SCOTT MANDELBROTE & MICHAEL LEDGER-LOMAS

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Preface

This new study of Dissent and the Bible results from the work of the Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, established in September 2004 as a collaboration between the School of English and Drama, Queen Mary, University of London, and Dr Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London. The objectives of the Centre are to promote the use of the Library's unique holdings of puritan, Protestant Nonconformist, and Dissenting books and manuscripts; to encourage research into and dissemination of these resources; and to increase knowledge and understanding of the importance of puritanism and Protestant Dissent to English society and literature from the sixteenth century to the present.

The Centre has developed an extensive programme of conferences, seminars, workshops, and publications to support these aims. The annual one-day conferences have led to several volumes of essays. To date four have been published by Oxford University Press: *Joseph Priestley, Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian* (2008), and *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales* (2011), both edited by Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes; *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790–1865*, edited by Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (2011); and now *Dissent and the Bible in Britain,* c.*1650–1950*. A further volume has been published by Cambridge University Press: *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740–1830*, edited by Felicity James and Ian Inkster (2011). The Centre has published the following editions and studies online on its website <www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/>: *The Letters of Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey 1769–1794*, edited by Simon Mills (2007); *A Bibliography of the Writings of William Hazlitt 1737–1820* (2009) and *New College, Hackney (1786–96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources* (2011), both by Stephen Burley; *Dissenting Education and the Legacy of John Jennings* c.*1720*–c.*1729*, by Tessa Whitehouse (2010); and *A Biographical Dictionary of Tutors at the Dissenters' Private Academies, 1660–1720*, by Mark Burden (2013).

The Centre has also published three online databases: the Surman Index Online (2009); Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia, and Dissenting Academies Online: Virtual Library System (2011). The last two are an outcome of the Dissenting Academies Project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The other main outcome of the project is the multi-authored *History of the Dissenting Academies in the British Isles, 1660–1860*, edited by Rivers and Wykes, with Richard Whatmore as associate editor, to be published by Cambridge University Press.

The Centre is also supporting the publication of new editions of *Reliquiae Baxterianae* by Neil Keeble, John Coffey, and Tim Cooper, and the diary and reminiscences of Henry Crabb Robinson by Timothy Whelan and James Vigus, both to be published by Oxford University Press. Other major initiatives are editions of the correspondence of Richard Baxter, and the correspondence between James Wodrow and Samuel Kenrick.

Isabel Rivers
David L. Wykes

The Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies
London

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Introduction*

MICHAEL LEDGER-LOMAS
AND SCOTT MANDELBROTE

What makes a Protestant Dissenter? In *A Sketch of the Several Denominations* (1795), the Baptist John Evans offered the simple test of adherence to three principles: '1. The right of private judgment 2. Liberty of conscience and 3. The perfection of Scripture as a Christian's *only* rule of faith and practice.'[1] In a series of ten chapters, this book explores the attachment of Protestant Dissenters to the third of those 'principles'. Such has been the recent profusion of scholarship on Protestant Nonconformity that it has perhaps been easy to overlook one of its most basic features: from their emergence in the mid-seventeenth century to the time of their relative and then absolute numerical decline in the mid-twentieth century, Protestant Dissenters from the Established Churches of Great Britain and Ireland were united by faith in the 'perfection of Scripture as a Christian's *only* rule of faith and practice'.[2] They considered that not only was their understanding of their relationship between ministry and people closer to the scriptural model of Christ's true Church than that which prevailed in the Established Churches, but also that their ministers were better instructed in the true meaning of the Scriptures. These beliefs not only meant that the Bible was crucial for Dissenters: they meant that Dissenters have played a vital role in the publication and study of the Bible in Britain and in the often fierce controversies about its application to every aspect of daily life.

* The editors would like to thank Simon Goldhill, Jeremy Morris, and Janet Soskice for helpful comments on a draft of this introduction.

[1] John Evans, *A Sketch of the Several Denominations* (London, 1795), cited in Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

[2] Dissenting worship was a growing phenomenon throughout much of our period, despite a period of decline in the early eighteenth century. Between 1680 and 1840, the numbers of active Dissenters perhaps quadrupled, and totalled perhaps a fifth of the population. Individual sects experienced different patterns of growth, however, and some, notably the Quakers, suffered long-term decline from the seventeenth century: see Clive D. Field, 'Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, *c*.1680–*c*.1840', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63 (2012), 693–720.

There was of course nothing inevitable about the centrality of the Bible to Dissent. The Protestant emphasis on interiority might have developed into settled indifference or hostility to the Bible and a preference for inner rather than written revelation. The radical sects of the seventeenth century had gestured in just this direction, and accusations of disregard for and disrespect to the Bible became the stock-in-trade of their critics. John Holland reported of the Ranters that 'one of them said in my hearing that he need not read the Scripture, nor heare Sermons, for the Father, Son, and the Spirit were all three in him'.[3] Thomas Tany ceremonially burned the Bible, attacking 'the dead letters and names that we by reading do so idolize'.[4] The physical violence against the Bible, which shocked Protestant witnesses to the Catholic Irish rebellion of 1641, coloured the attitudes of both the orthodox and their radical critics thereafter.[5] Willingness to burn Bibles, because the Word threatened to imprison the Spirit, characterized the activities of a number of early Quakers, but was increasingly frowned upon as the sect tried to acquire greater respectability.[6] Although incidents persisted into the 1670s, by then the Quaker leadership had formally disowned John Pennyman, who had tried to burn the Bible and other books in public on the Exchange in London. They did so as much to defend themselves against attacks from other radical Protestants as to limit hostility from the established Church of England.[7]

Nor could the claims to unmediated authority made by some sects and their millenarian descendants escape the Bible, modelled as they were on the personages and writings of prophets and apostles. The offence of the Quakers was to claim for their writings the same spiritual authority as others invested in the Bible, with Fox writing epistles just as the apostles had done.[8] The Muggletonians, a tiny sect whose adherents nevertheless persisted into the late twentieth century, believed that their founders, Lodowicke Muggleton (1608–98) and John Reeve (1608–58), were the two witnesses of Revelation (11:3).[9]

[3] Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17; Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 196–250.

[4] [Thomas Totney], *Theauraujohn Tani His Second Part of his Theous-Ori Apokolipikal* (London, 1653), 69; cf. Ariel Hessayon, *'Gold Tried in the Fire': The Prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 191–208.

[5] Brian Mac Cuarta, SJ, ed., *Ulster 1641: Aspects of the Rising* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1993), 4, 116, 155.

[6] For evidence of Quaker sympathizers burning Bibles, see Richard Hubberthorne to George Fox, ?20 March 1657: London, Friends House, Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Ms. vol. 355 (Swarthmore Mss. vol. IV), no. 14.

[7] See the broadsheet denial of Pennyman issued on 10 August 1670 ('Whereas John Pennyman…'); Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655–1725* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14; T. L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[8] Cambers, *Godly Reading*, 18; Nigel Smith, 'Nonconformist Voices and Books', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, *IV: 1557–1695*, ed. John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 426.

[9] William M. Lamont, *Last Witnesses* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 17–22.

Over a century later, Richard Brothers (1757–1824) revived the habit of searching the Scriptures for 'the prophecies which mean myself', claiming that he had received divine knowledge of 'the errors of the Bible . . . and . . . of how to correct them'.[10] The Dissenting children of Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), who had believed herself pregnant with Shiloh (Gen. 49:10) were no different. John ('Zion') Ward (1781–1837) had been a Methodist, a Baptist, and finally a Sandemanian preacher before becoming convinced that he was Shiloh and ultimately God, Christ, and Satan. John White dubbed himself James Jershom Jezreel, a name derived from Exodus 2:22 and Hosea 1:11. Jezreel viewed himself as the sixth trumpeter of Revelation and built a meeting-hall in Gillingham and a twenty-acre centre for the New and Latter House of Israel, presided over his wife Clarissa—or Esther, the Queen of the Hebrews.[11]

Dissenting sects that deviated from the Scriptures in a very different direction did not cast aside their authority either. Thus, the Catholic Apostolic Church, established in the 1830s, developed an ecclesiology of Byzantine complexity and built an imitation Gothic cathedral in Gordon Square, yet claimed the Bible as its rule of faith.[12] Similarly, the 50,000 or so Mormons to be found in England and Wales by the mid-nineteenth century had not necessarily cast aside the Bible. The writings of Joseph Smith (1805–44) were a tribute to the Authorized Version, permeated as they were with its language, while Mormonism was attractive to millenarian Dissenters who had long been looking for the primitive Church of the New Testament.[13] Even the Swedenborgians, a tiny sect with only thirty-six societies by 1850, did not so much reject the Bible as seek to impart to it a complex internal sense.[14]

The chapters in this volume, which discuss very different kinds of Dissenting engagement with the Bible in many different periods, are therefore linked by the premise that it was indispensable to their religious identity. This introduction is designed to trace the contours of that biblical identity over the centuries, setting out the characteristic ways in which Dissenters represented and followed the claims of the Bible. Before doing so however, it would be as well to recognize a major difficulty: was the Dissenting community unified enough or distinct enough from

[10] J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 63; see also Deborah Madden, *The Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers's Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

[11] Gordon Allan, 'Southcottian Sects from 1790 to the Present Day', in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Political Context*, ed. Kenneth Newport and Crawford Gribben (Waco, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 213–36.

[12] Robert Brewster, *The Bible and the Church* (n.p., n.d.); William Tait, *The Bible and the Church* (London, 1883).

[13] Grant Underwood. 'The Religious Milieu of English Mormonism', in *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain*, ed. Richard L. Jensen and Malcom R. Thorp (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), 31–48; Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11–42.

[14] On Swedenborgians, see Peter Lineham, 'Restoring Man's Creative Power: The Theosophy of the Bible Christians of Salford', in *Studies in Church History 19: The Church and Healing*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 207–24.

Church people in its attitudes to warrant discussion of 'Dissent and the Bible'? The hermeneutic freedom of Protestantism means that we must be cautious in proceeding from the claim that the Bible was important to all Dissenters to demonstrating how this was so. As Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, the fictional author of Robert Southey's *Letters from England* (1807) commented, the Scriptures could hardly regulate the fissiparous Protestant community, for they were 'a nose of wax, which every finger and thumb may tweak to the fashion of their own fancy'.[15]

'Dissent' is for our purposes an unhelpful but unavoidable collective noun. Although Dissenters were brought together by shared experiences of deprivation, persecution, and then contested toleration, they remained divided both in theology and particularly ecclesiology, which governed the reading of the Bible from which it was supposedly derived. Many Dissenters looked back favourably on attempts that had been made to remodel the Church of England and its worship during the Civil Wars and Interregnum of the 1640s and 1650s. For some, this was a period of magisterial toleration that allowed sects the oxygen they needed to breathe; for others, it seemed to be an example of magisterial reformation of the Church at work, notably in the activities and publications of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Others looked to even older roots, in the Puritanism that had helped to form separatist communities at the end of the sixteenth century, or in the ideas of the radical Reformation. The tightening of the nozzle of conformity in the 1660s forced all of them to breathe less easily. 'Black Bartholomew Day' saw the ejection of those ministers who refused to take the oaths under the Act of Uniformity from their parishes on 24 August 1662, and subsequent legislation limited freedom of worship and association, particularly the Conventicle Act (1664) and the Five-Mile Act (1665). The political power of Nonconformists was limited by attempts to prevent them holding local and public office by the sacramental tests of the Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Acts of the 1670s. Collectively, these measures pushed together Presbyterian and Congregational 'conformable nonconformists' who wished to bring the Church of England closer to Scripture without themselves having to leave it with those whom they regarded as 'fanatics': radical sectaries (Baptists, Quakers) and independents who claimed that their gathered ecclesiology was modelled on the New Testament.[16] The situation was more complex still in Scotland, where after the Revolution of 1688 Episcopalians replaced Presbyterians as Dissenters and

[15] Robert Southey, *Letters from England by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella: Translated from the Spanish* (1807; 3 vols, London, 1808), 336. As Southey was well aware, this was a familiar topos in debate over the reliability of Scripture, used by Protestants from the earliest days of the Reformation to criticize both Catholic and Jewish attitudes to the text as a rule of faith: see William Tyndale, *An Exposycyon vpon the v.vi.vii. chapters of Mathewe which Thre Chapters are the Keye and the Dore of the Scrypture* ([London, 1536]), lxxxiv.

[16] Neil Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); Mark Goldie, 'Voluntary Anglicans', *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 981.

were joined in time by numerous secessionists from the Church of Scotland. The Revolution, and the legal indulgence of ecclesiological separation that it brought, dashed hopes for the reunion of Protestants, which precipitated crisis among many Dissenting communities.

By the early eighteenth century, then, friends and foes used the term 'Dissenter' in ways that elided distinctions between separatists and Nonconformists. Yet Dissent remained legal and political shorthand for immense diversity. In persevering in their Nonconformity, Dissenters were inevitably pushed towards a shared voluntary religion but remained divided on ecclesiology. Such divisions were further complicated by the emergence of Methodism, and then by other forms of evangelical voluntary religion in the mid- to late eighteenth century. Wesley and his disciples resembled Dissenters in avowing 'their one desire and design to be downright Bible Christians; taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive Church and our own, for their whole and sole rule'.[17] This did not, however, initially entail separation from the Church, or the claim that its theology and ecclesiology were necessarily unscriptural. Once popular hostility had forced Methodists out of the Church, to become a tolerated denomination, the numerous controversies it triggered about scriptural interpretation were largely internal to the movement, and generated further secessions over everything from women preachers to the autonomy of itinerant preachers and the installation of organs in chapels.[18]

The evangelical revival of which Methodism was the most dynamic expression further complicates the search for the Dissenting Bible. Events following the Restoration certainly drove a wedge between Dissenting and conforming relationships to Scripture, with Dissenters remaining more loyal to the dense exposition of the Scriptures as the foundation of public worship and 'family religion'. Yet the fissure may not have been deep or permanent. Dissenters and Anglicans both used catechisms, works which often agreed on the authority of the Scriptures.[19] If Dissenters such as Matthew Henry (1662–1714), Matthew Poole (1624–79), and Philip Doddridge (1702–51) were prominent in compiling the massive commentaries that supported 'family religion', then established clergy often subscribed to their works or commended them.[20] A scriptural 'family religion' allowed Dissenters and Church people alike to cultivate a reformed and evangelical identity outside institutions, and was the seed of the

[17] John Wesley, 'A Short History of Methodism', in *Works: Miscellaneous* (New York, 1835), 246.

[18] See e.g. the bitter disputes surveyed in *Rules of the Societies of the Wesleyan Protestant Methodists, First Established in Leeds, 27th August 1828* (Leeds, 1829); Daniel Isaac, *The Rules of the Protestant Methodists Brought to the Test of Holy Scripture: A Letter Addressed to the Private Members of that Community* (Leeds, 1830).

[19] Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England* c.*1530–1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 196.

[20] Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118–24.

evangelical revival.[21] Family ties both created Dissenting lineages and made it impossible to consider Dissenters as wholly separated from Church people. Wesley's mother Susanna was at once a High Churchwoman and the daughter of a renowned puritan: she instituted the daily reading of Scripture at home and instilled in John the conviction that family religion was 'the grand desideratum among Methodists'.[22] The distribution of Bibles became the dominant expression of the revival's commitment to voluntary religion and iconic of its ecumenical energies. Although Restoration Nonconformists such as Richard Baxter (1615–91) and Lord Wharton had favoured the systematic distribution of Bibles, clerical bodies such as the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge soon took the lead. Yet their work was eventually dwarfed by that of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), whose constitution and commitment to distributing Bibles without note and comment was expressly framed to encourage cooperation across the conformist divide and against which High Churchmen railed in vain.[23]

By the time that the political clout and relative numerical strength of Dissent peaked in the later nineteenth century, most Dissenters were children of the evangelical revival, which had transformed the religious landscape and reinforced the numerical and intellectual decline of conformable 'Old Dissent'. While evangelical Dissenters continued to feel that their denominations were more scriptural in their worship and ecclesiology than the Churches, they felt a larger loyalty to a 'Bible age' and to a Bible-reading nation that was the cynosure of all eyes in the distribution of the Scriptures. Eryn White in Chapter 4 shows how this worked in Wales, where a pride in the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, in William Morgan's Welsh version of the Scriptures (1588), and in the vigour of Welsh Protestantism fused together in a vision of national identity at once patriotic and Dissenting. The ostentatious respect among English and Scottish Dissenters for the Authorized Version was another symptom of the same phenomenon. Whereas radical Dissenters published versions of the Scriptures to enforce doctrinal points, such as those by the Quaker Anthony Purver (1764) or the Arian Edward Harwood (1768), evangelicals fell in with High Churchmen in attacking such potentially seditious individualism in the wake of the French Revolution.[24] Thomas Belsham's

[21] Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity in Late Stuart England', *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 875–96.

[22] John Anthony Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2000), 51.

[23] Scott Mandelbrote, 'The Publishing and Distribution of Religious Books by Voluntary Associations: from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to the British and Foreign Bible Society', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, *V*: *1695–1830*, ed. Michael J. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 613–30.

[24] Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Scott Mandelbrote, 'The Bible and its Readers', in *Books and*

The New Testament, in an Improved Version, upon the Basis of Archbishop Newcome's New Translation (1808) and his *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle Translated, with an Exposition, and Notes* (1822) were condemned as monuments to the linguistic trickery of modern Unitarianism, while decades later, the United Presbyterian William Reid condemned the Plymouth Brethren for adopting John Nelson Darby's translation of the New Testament (1871) on the grounds that 'a party translation of Scripture, can never be regarded with confidence . . . the sect which adopts it, necessarily isolates itself from all other religious bodies'.[25]

Just as evangelicals imagined the introduction of the Bible to darkest Africa or outcast London as a federal enterprise, aggregating the contributions of denominational rivals, so they envisaged the domestic history of biblical study and translation. Thus the Baptist historian George Offor (1787–1864) presented his hero William Tyndale as a man who had scoffed at sectarian pettiness rather than as a proto-Dissenter, while the Scottish Congregationalist William Orme (1787–1830) inscribed Dissenting and conforming translators and martyrs on the same roll of honour in *A Historical Sketch of the Translation and Circulation of the Scriptures* (1815) and *Bibliotheca Biblica* (1823).[26] Orme, the Methodist scholar and collector of polyglot Bibles Adam Clarke (1762–1832), and above all the Quaker Francis Fry (1803–86), took the lead in writing the history of English biblical translation and in putting together collections of early English Bibles. Fry helped to inculcate a remarkable veneration for the Authorized Version and its predecessors among Dissenters as well as Anglicans, and many of his books found a permanent home in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society.[27] The urge to amass a physical collection of Bibles, as well as to facilitate intellectual engagement with the text, lay behind such public acts of Nonconformist piety as the creation of the John Rylands Library in Manchester after 1889.[28] A bizarre consequence of Dissenting respect for the Authorized Version has been the growth, especially among American evangelicals, of a movement willing to grant inspired status to the letter of the King James Bible. It is ironic that one of the most eloquent or at least persistent spokesmen for the unsurpassable authority of the

their Readers in Eighteenth-century England: New Essays, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), 35–78.

[25] William Reid, *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted* (London, 1875), 19.

[26] George Offor, *Memoir of William Tyndale* (London, 1836), 89; William Aird Thomson and William Orme, *A Historical Sketch of the Translation and Circulation of the Scripture: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Perth, 1815); Orme, *Bibliotheca Biblica* (London, 1824).

[27] David J. Hall, 'Francis Fry, a Maker of Chocolate and Bibles', in *The Book Trade and its Customers, 1450–1900*, ed. Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote, and Alison Shell (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1997), 265–77.

[28] D. A. Farnie, *John Rylands of Manchester* (Manchester: John Rylands University of Manchester, 1973).

English Bible in the United Kingdom has been Ian Paisley (1926–), an Ulster Free Presbyterian.[29]

The care to involve Dissenters as members of the Old and New Testament Revision Companies in the 1870s and 1880s was one mark of an increasingly ecumenical attitude to the English Bible. Roman Catholics were excluded from this consensus, because their supposedly unscriptural Church was thought to discourage the reading of the Bible, yet evangelicals also discovered new enemies to the Scriptures within and outside the nation. Among these were Unitarians, whose professed respect for the Bible was voided by their hostility to its evangelical doctrines, German 'neologists' who questioned the genuineness of the Scriptures and even those Anglican Churchmen who nursed a sympathy with both of these parties. This redrawing of battle lines gave evangelical Dissenters an interest in disowning the collaboration between rational Dissenters and Georgian Churchmen over Protestant free inquiry into the Scriptures, one marked for instance by the inclusion of Arian Dissenters in Richard Watson's *Collection of Theological Tracts* (1785), which he published as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge for 'younger clergy'.

It is evident, then, that the 'Dissent' discussed in this volume was no more a monolith than is 'the Bible', but instead of giving up on a sketch of the biblical culture of Dissent, we rather argue that it gains in interest from the cracks and smudges by which it is disfigured. The remainder of our introduction provides a portrait of that culture in four parts. It begins by amplifying the claim that Dissenters believed in Scripture as 'a Christian's *only* rule of faith and practice'. It then traces the fissures opened up by theological and ecclesiological conflict over the interpretation of the Bible. The aim is to show not only that conflict over the meaning of the Scriptures was endemic within Dissent, but also that these conflicts were not confined to its ranks. In fighting their battles, Dissenters were drawn into solidarity with scholars, writers, and activists from outside their own communities: not just members of the Established Churches but foreign Protestants and even Roman Catholics. The third part of the introduction complicates the preoccupation with Dissenting scholarship that marks many of the chapters in our volume. It argues that Dissenters felt that such learning could be a snare as well as an opportunity. There was persistent unease that a learned ministry debarred unlearned persons from expounding Scripture, and that its members might subvert the faith of chapelgoers in the Bible. The last part argues that the very success of Dissenters in overcoming legislative barriers and in boosting their scholars into seats of learning contributed (along with social change) to weaken the distinctive biblical culture explored in the chapters contributed to this volume.

[29] Ian Paisley, *The New English Bible: Version or Perversion?* (Belfast, 1974); *The Authority of Scripture Versus the Confusion of Modern English Translations* (Chelmsford, 1995).

'THE ONLY RULE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP': DISSENTERS AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The origins of Dissent lay in the claim that the Established Churches were false to the primitive Church headed by Christ and founded by his apostles. The separatists of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sought to find in the New Testament a purer form of church polity than existed in the Establishment.[30] The puritans who became independents hardened their claim that the New Testament supplied a blueprint for gathered churches. John Cotton's scriptural defence of congregational independency, *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648), was taken up by John Owen (1616–83), while Thomas Gouge (1665–1700) read 'the holy lives and actions of Gods Children, not only as *matters of History*, but as *patterns of imitation*'.[31] During the Civil War, these claims became associated with radical sectaries such as the Baptists, whose identity was initially shaped by sacramental rather than ecclesiological differences with the Established Church. The General Baptist Thomas Grantham (1634–92) argued in his *Christianismus Primitivus* for the need to defend Christianity against the 'Humane Innovation' and 'Pretended Revelation' of post-biblical times.[32] These claims accommodated much variety. Grantham's General Baptists were unusual in believing that the apostles remained loyal to the Mosaic law and that fidelity to them required believers to practise not just believer's baptism, foot washing and the laying on of hands, but also the use of anointing oils, abstinence from unclean meats (Acts 15), and the keeping of the Sabbath on the seventh day. The 'Seventh Day Men' who descended both from General and Particular Baptists were distinguished by fervent adherence to the Mosaic Law and to keeping the Sabbath on Saturday.[33] While the Quakers were often attacked for setting aside the Scriptures, the burden of their polemic against the Church of England was likewise scriptural: its ministers were 'false prophets', a term derived from the Old Testament, the condemnation of the Pharisees by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy. 'Do they not sit in the same Seats that the Scribes and Pharisees had?' asked one such tract. George Fox (1624–91) began a tract on the evils of the State Church with eight pages of citations from the Scriptures.[34] The biblical primitivism of sectaries such as the Quakers was

[30] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 26, 39.

[31] Underwood, *Primitivism*, 6.

[32] Underwood, *Primitivism*, 11.

[33] Bryan Ball, *The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 71.

[34] Kate Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–6, for quote, 168.

informed by a millenarian eschatology derived from Revelation, in which to recreate the Church of the New Testament was to speed the future coming of Christ.

Their claims did not go unchallenged. High Calvinists such as Owen alleged that the Quakers set the Holy Spirit against the Scriptures, while Presbyterians such as Richard Baxter refused to believe that the Bible offered a pretext for separation. Yet even Baxter wrote in his autobiography that 'could I be satisfied what was the Government in the Days of the Apostles themselves, I should be satisfied what should be the government now'.[35] This literal mode of reading the Scriptures that identified sects with apostles was strengthened by the ejection of Nonconforming ministers in 1662. When Baxter was challenged by the Bishop of London's chaplain to deny that the scriptural sermons delivered and printed by the Bartholomew ministers were an illicit commentary on the times, he admitted that they were, adding that so were 'all those Passages of Scripture which speak of Persecution and the Sufferings of the Godly, but I hoped the Bibles should be licenced for all that'.[36] Whereas Puritan preaching had once been dominated by theocratic and nationalist references to the Old Testament, the Bartholomew sermons set the tone of Nonconformist literature in being dominated by Pauline references, which exhorted a godly remnant to the patient endurance of deprivation and exile.[37] The Restoration persecution of Dissenters strengthened their identification with the Bible. The communal reading of the Bible by extended households dodged the Conventicle Acts, while scattered communities maintained their cohesion through the apostolic device of the epistle.[38]

Drawn together by persecution, these fugitive readers often concurred in finding a millenarian message in the pages of Daniel and Revelation. As the Quaker Thomas Lawson put it, all those who opposed the beast could be counted as 'nonconformists, of what denomination soever, who made Conscience of Non-compliance with the National publick Ministers'.[39] Calvinistic Dissenters stubbornly awaited the earthly reign of Christ, at a time when Restoration Churchmen had begun to equate such a hope with the follies of the Fifth Monarchists. Differences naturally remained, with the Baptist Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691) thinking that the Presbyterians belonged with Episcopalians and the Roman Catholic Church in Babylon. After the invasion of William of Orange in 1688, the divergence between Anglican and Nonconforming prophetic interpretation was evident. Although many

[35] Matthew Sylvester, ed., *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), 62.

[36] David J. Appleby, *Black Bartholomew's Day: Preaching, Polemic and Restoration Nonconformity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 111 and passim.

[37] Keeble, *Literary Culture*, ch. 6.

[38] Cambers and Wolfe, 'Godly Reading', 883.

[39] Warren Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 98.

Nonconformists had seen James II's regime as a means of providing secular toleration, others had worried about the millenarian implications of sharing a platform with Catholics. Following the events of 1688, Nonconformists were among the keenest to interpret the flight of James II as a sign that the 'Regimental and Synagogal Constitution of the Church of England' was under 'Prophetic Censure'.[40]

Millenarian reading of the Scriptures continued throughout the eighteenth century and revived during the era of the French Revolution. Dissenters were loyal to the conviction that the New Testament predicted the apostasy of the Church of Rome and the downfall of Rome and its imitators. The Presbyterian George Benson (1699–1762) influentially defended the identification of the 'man of sin' (2 Thess. 2: 1–12) with the Bishop of Rome.[41] Even the Presbyterians who fought shy of joining George Gordon's Protestant Association shared its belief that the Scriptures condemned Popish Babylon.[42] After the French Revolution, these millenarian convictions took a subversive turn, with many Dissenters convinced that the Revolution portended the downfall not just of Rome but of the anti-Christian tie between Church and State. Such convictions were marked among both New and Old Light Presbyterians in Ireland but infected rational Dissenters on the mainland too. The Unitarian Joseph Priestley's biblicism was nowhere clearer than in his conviction that the restoration of the Jews and the second coming of Christ were imminent.[43] The leading students of prophecy from the ranks of old Dissent, such as the Baptist James Bicheno (d.1831), refused to follow Anglicans at the end of the eighteenth century in identifying Antichrist with revolution.[44]

Having inflamed the scriptural millenarianism of many Dissenters, the revolutionary crisis tamed it. The anti-popery of new Dissent was scriptural but not subversive. John Wesley's widely distributed *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (first published in 1755, but widely available in both Britain and North America in the 1790s) identified the beast with the papacy, but cautioned against 'gross and carnal' views of the millennium, and harped on Pauline injunctions to obey the powers that be. As Michael Ledger-Lomas

[40] Mark Goldie, 'James II and the Dissenters' Revenge: The Commission of Enquiry of 1688', *Historical Research*, 66 (1993), 53–88; Johnston, *Revelation*, 217.

[41] George Benson, *A Dissertation on 2 Thess. II. 1, -----12: In which 'tis Shewn that the Bishop of Rome is the Man of Sin* (London, 1735).

[42] See, for example, Abraham Rees, *The Obligation and Importance of Searching the Scriptures as a Preservative from Popery* (London, 1779).

[43] Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Irish Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chs 2–4; Ian McCalman, 'New Jerusalems: Prophecy, Dissent and Radical Culture in England, 1786–1830', in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-century Britain,* ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 312–35.

[44] On Bicheno, see W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978).

argues in Chapter 8, the liberal Baptists and Congregationalists of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shared the post-millennial optimism of moderate evangelicalism, finding in the abolition of the slave trade, the pursuit of world peace, and eventually of democracy the ongoing temporal realization of Christ's spiritual kingdom. While Priestley and Belsham had denied that Paul's Epistles to the Romans put a ban on revolution, Dissenters read in the New Testament counsels of peace. The Baptist William Carey (1761–1834) was representative in stating that 'the Bible teaches me to act as a peaceful subject under the government which is established'.[45] Among more introverted sects, such scriptural loyalism became quietism. Sandemanians took to heart Matthew 22:21, 'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's'. James Morison (1798–1878) of Perth wrote in 1830, a year of revolution in France, that 'In all that is going forward, I hope the Brethren both in Scotland and England will be found taking no part; but watching and keeping their garments [Rev. 16:15]'.[46]

If the New Testament ceased to be a revolutionary's manual, then Dissenters still maintained that it condemned the Church of England. George Redford's *The Church of England Indefensible from the Holy Scriptures* (1833) typically alleged that Anglican defences of establishment were 'quite powerless against the true Protestant panoply, which is all *scripture proof*'.[47] Redford argued that Anglicans clouded the express commands of the Bible with medieval and patristic references, forgetting that 'one text of Scripture, the authority of one Apostle, outweighs them all'. Yet he also argued that Anglicans emphasized the wrong parts of Scripture: in claiming that a literal reading of the Temple worship furnished precedents for what he regarded as the popish excrescences of the Church of England, they forgot that the New Testament had abrogated the Old, and therefore that the 'whole Jewish economy stands in precisely the same relation to us, as if it had never existed'.[48] The allegation that the constitution of the Church of England was not that of the New Testament supplied the basso continuo of Nonconformist battle hymns until the early twentieth century.

Polemicists such as Redford believed that their congregations dutifully lived out the transparent and authoritative prescriptions of the New Testament, which were ducked or diluted by the Established Church. This introduces a second point that was held in common among many Dissenters: an aspiration to obey in every detail the rules established in Acts and the Epistles for the governance of Christian societies. William Orme's *A Catechism on the*

[45] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, II: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 356, for these quotations.

[46] Quoted in Geoffrey Cantor, *Michael Faraday, Sandemanian and Scientist: A Study of Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 90.

[47] George Redford, *The Church of England Indefensible from the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1833), 25.

[48] Redford, *The Church of England Indefensible*, 42.

Constitution and Ordinances of the Kingdom of Christ (1821) told Scottish Congregationalists that the New Testament contained 'A full account of the doctrines, constitution, ordinances, laws, and prospects of the kingdom of Christ… all Christians are bound to follow the ascertained universal practice of the primitive Churches, acting under the regulation and the eye of the apostles of Christ'.[49] In arguing that Dissenting ecclesiology was no more than a reproduction of the New Testament, Redford and Orme were heirs to a venerable tradition. Separatists had always argued that not only were they obeying Paul's injunction to 'be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers' but also that it was separate, gathered churches that could practise strictly scriptural discipline.[50] The General Baptists had gone further still in their interpretation of Paul, seeking to forbid marriage between those who were not members of the visible Church of Christ.[51] Scriptural endogamy was too obviously a recipe for sexual frustration to be widely practised among Dissenters, but even more dynamic bodies such as the Wesleyan Methodists subjected their members to other forms of scriptural discipline. Wesley's *Complete English Dictionary* (1753) defined 'Methodist' as 'one that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible'.[52] The slow capitulation of the Oxford don Benjamin Ingham (1712–72) to the Wesley brothers was marked not just by his guilt about sugar, butter, baked puddings, and late rising but also by his determination to read three chapters of the Greek Testament a day: in 1734, he resolved that 'God's Holy Word and will shall be my study and delight; whatever he forbids, I'll absolutely avoid; whatever he commands, I'll labour to perform and fulfill'.[53] Wesley commended the New Testament as a life manual to the 'people called Methodists', citing for instance 1 Tim. 2: 9–10 and 1 Pet. 3: 3–4, when he advised them against 'rings, ear-rings, necklaces, lace… coloured waistcoats, shining stockings, glittering or costly buttons or buckles'.[54]

Ministers in the major Dissenting denominations were quick to reassure members both that the gospel had abolished the demanding strictures of the Mosaic Law and that the more irksome practices of apostolic churches were not permanently binding. Orme dismissed foot washing, the community of

[49] William Orme, *A Catechism on the Constitution and Ordinances of the Kingdom of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1817), 1–10.

[50] Samuel Freeman, *The Case of Mixt-communion Friendly Discoursed: Betwixt a Minister and a Nonconforming Parishioner* (London, 1700).

[51] Raymond Edward Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986); Stephen Tory, *Mixt Marriages Vindicated: or, a Discourse of Mixt Marriages by Way of Dialogue between A. and B., etc.* (London, 1680); John Griffith, *The Unlawfulnesse of Mixed Marriages* (London, 1681).

[52] Richard Heitzenrater, ed., *Diary of an Oxford Methodist: Benjamin Ingham, 1733–34*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 21.

[53] Heitzenrater, ed., *Diary*, 166.

[54] John Wesley, 'Advice to the People called Methodists, with Regard to Dress', in Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 14 vols (London, 1829–31), 14: 466–77.

goods or the kiss of peace as temporary accommodations to oriental mores. Sects had found that adopting a literal approach to the Bible cramped their growth or menaced their survival. The Seventh Day Men were almost extinct by 1800.[55] The General Baptists avoided that fate by relaxing their commitment to endogamy. By the early nineteenth century, literal scriptural discipline, and particularly the claim that both apostolic and modern Christians must obey the Mosaic Law, was confined to tiny if robust sects, which used its rigours to repel outsiders. The Southcottian John Wroe (1782–1863), whose devotion to the Mosaic law was such that he had himself publicly circumcised, divided his followers into twelve tribes and required them to follow the Mosaic law, wearing only linen and growing their facial hair.[56] Such demands drove out weaker brethren, who were not prepared to be mocked as 'beardies'. The Sandemanians, descendants of Scottish Covenanters who 'put away' members not prepared to live in literal conformity with the Acts of the Apostles, likewise placed purity over growth. During the lifetime of Michael Faraday (1791–1867), who was perhaps their most famous member, their numbers shrank to around six hundred. The Sandemanians went as far as to forbid any open disagreement in a church, following Paul's injunction 'that ye all speak the same thing' (1 Cor. 1:10). In 1854, the London congregation split from Edinburgh over the question of whether eating game violated the commandment, 'that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled' (Acts 15:29): Faraday's helpful suggestion that they could test dead game for its blood content came to nothing. The Sandemanians made debate on such questions either impossible or destructive by branding it a violation of Scripture. The Londoners found it impossible even to discuss whether the split had been legitimate: either they had rebelled against the Bible in splitting or they would do so if they regretted having done so.[57]

The relaxation of scriptural discipline among mainstream denominations did not always betoken the waning of Puritanism, but often its opposite. Victorian teetotallers had to face the problem that Jesus turned water into wine and had given wine sacramental significance at the Last Supper—with the rambunctious Baptist Charles Spurgeon (1834–92) feeling secure in his enjoyment of wine on both grounds. The growing number of congregations that did use unfermented wine found that the plain pronouncements of Scripture were not enough for them, and relied on Anglo-American temperance commentaries to explain that the wine drunk by the Lord was not wine by any other name.[58]

[55] Ball, *Seventh Day*, conclusion.
[56] Harrison, *Second Coming*, 140–1.
[57] Cantor, *Faraday*, 5, 68, 41.
[58] See e.g. Frederic Richard Lees, Dawson Burns and Lewis Tayler, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (New York, 1870).

While Dissenters could mean very different things by literal obedience to the Scriptures, there was firmer agreement within individual sects that Dissenting worship was more faithful to the Bible than the liturgy of the Established Church. For many, liturgical innovation had been the spark that ignited the engine that had powered Dissenters in their journey away from the Church of England, which itself seemed often to pick up speed in travelling in an opposite direction.[59] In *A Vindication of the Dissenters* (1717), James Peirce (1674–1726) explained that his fellow Presbyterians had broken with the Church because its popish liturgy violated the principle that 'the will of God, discover'd in the Holy Scriptures, is the only rule of religious worship; and that 'tis not lawful for men to devise any new ways of worshiping him, or to receive, and practice any such, when devis'd by other men'.[60] The Church exceeded or perverted the express commands of Scripture, basing its argument for the use of musical instruments in worship or the wearing of sacral garments on Old Testament texts, when 'a man must be blind, who does not see, that . . . all these things are abrogated, together with the law that appointed the worship; unless any of them appear afresh injoin'd by some particular command'.[61] Scriptural fidelity in worship therefore meant obeying the letter of the New Testament, with the Jewish ceremonial detailed in the Old relegated to typological status. Not only was worship to be patterned on the New Testament, but for most Dissenters reading and expounding the Bible was itself a primary form of worship. Psalmody was legitimate because it employed the words of the Bible, whereas outside Methodism hymnody took longer to establish itself in chapels. When the go-ahead Congregationalist Thomas Binney (1798–1874) defended hymnody in *The Service of Song in the House of the Lord: an Oration and an Argument* (1848), he was careful to do so via a dense 'scriptural review', ending with the ejaculation that 'HE WILL REST IN HIS LOVE. HE WILL JOY OVER THEE WITH SINGING!' (Zeph. 3:17).[62]

Dissenters were addicted to sermons because they amplified the impact of Bible reading: they reminded hearers that the words of the Bible were the word of God, triggering their salvation. This was a puritan style of preaching, which after the Restoration became a Dissenting one.[63] If thereafter Dissenting preachers were careful to avoid rabble-rousing, then their sermons were the more scriptural for it. John Rastrick (1650–1727) recalled that in nine years at Spalding he preached on the whole of the Old and New Testament: coming

[59] For example, Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 2 vols (2nd edn, London, 1754), I: 402, 575.

[60] James Peirce, *A Vindication of the Dissenters* (London, 1717), 14.

[61] Peirce, *A Vindication*, 100.

[62] Thomas Binney, *The Service of Song in the House of the Lord: An Oration and an Argument* (London, 1848), vii.

[63] Mary Morrissey, 'Scripture, Style and Persuasion in Seventeenth-Century English Theories of Preaching', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), 702 and passim.

'into a more Scriptural way than I had used before…I studyed more to cite the Prophets and Apostles, than I did before to quote Fathers and Philosophers'.[64] Calvinistic Dissenters such as John Jennings (1687/8–1723), his pupil Philip Doddridge (1702–51) and Isaac Watts (1674–1748) injected evangelical fervour into the learning of Rastrick's generation and championed extempore preaching. Doddridge's *Lectures* (1808) championed 'pathetic' preaching that drew on the 'grand magazine' of the Scriptures: they should always find 'one or two powerful scriptures, and shoot them home;—no arrow is more likely to pierce the heart'. Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Paul were 'of vast service to pathos'.[65]

Old and new Dissent converged in respect for extempore preaching. Methodists such as George Whitefield (1714–70) and John and Charles Wesley courted scandal through the demotic manner in which they applied passages from the New Testament to their own lives—not everyone being impressed by the coincidence that both Jesus and Whitefield were born in inns. In doing so, they created potent 'conversion narratives' that permeated the public sphere and were taken up by other denominations.[66] Bennett and Bogue could write in their early nineteenth-century history of Dissent that its ministers preached the Scriptures 'in an experimental manner…with sacred skill and holy fervour'.[67] Spontaneity was all: Spurgeon often used *faits divers* from the morning newspaper as points of departure for his exegesis of scripture.[68] By the turn of the twentieth century, acceptance of higher criticism in the major denominations complicated the preacher's task without detracting from its significance, which seemed ever more distinctive of Dissenters at a time when Anglican 'sacerdotalism' was perceived to be on the increase. One answer to higher criticism was to claim that preachers shared the gifts of the spirit with prophets and apostles and could use it to pad out what now had to be seen as their rather fragmentary revelations. The Hampstead Congregationalist Robert Forman Horton (1855–1934) protested against the idea that revelation was 'among the other curiosities of that venerable museum which is filled with Biblical Ideas, duly marked, "Visitors are requested not to touch"'.[69] Although the Bible was to be the 'Arx or crowning Areopagus of [the preacher's] mental life', he must not confuse it with the word of God that it undoubtedly contained. His task was to utter that word in much the same way as prophets and apostles had done.[70]

[64] Andrew Cambers, ed., *The Life of John Rastrick, 1650–1727* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[65] Philip Doddridge, *Lectures on Preaching, and the Several Branches of the Ministerial Office* (London, 1833), 39.

[66] Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 78 and passim.

[67] Quoted in White, *Early Romanticism*, 48.

[68] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Bible and the Newspaper* (London, 1878).

[69] Robert Forman Horton, *Verbum Dei: The Yale Lectures on Preaching, 1893* (London, 1893), 45.

[70] Horton, *Verbum Dei*, 118.

The Bible was not just synonymous with public worship but with 'family religion'. David Jones wrote that 'the chief things which *Family-Duties* consist of, are *Reading the Scripture, Praying and Catechizing*'. As Scott Mandelbrote shows in Chapter 1, this was the crucial context for the commentator Matthew Henry, who spoke of creating *A Church in the House* (1704). The anxiety to maintain the practice of scriptural reading was hardly unique to Dissenters, but allowed them to take their own places as loyal contributors to the 'reformation of manners'. This strategy came to fruition in Philip Doddridge's *Family Expositor* (6 vols, 1739–56), which he published 'chiefly to promote *family religion*'. An Independent minister and principal of the Daventry Academy, Doddridge advised young ministers that the basis for public exposition of the Scriptures should be 'free family exposition' in 'an experimental way'. The *Expositor* supported that practice, providing readers with the Authorized Version, a paraphrase, critical notes and fervent 'practical improvements'.[71] The 2,800 people who supported its publication by subscription—a practice pioneered by Nonconformists to support weighty works of biblical criticism—included the Archbishop of Canterbury, bishops and clergy, and fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, alongside Dissenting ministers.[72] The *Family Expositor* went into its eleventh edition in 1821 before being reprinted by the enterprising Thomas Tegg in 1829. The evangelical revival put just as high a premium on the family reading of the Bible, with Dissenters both producing and consuming these books in large quantities, even if few books could match Doddridge's ecumenical impact. The very titles of Spurgeon's *Morning by Morning* (1870) and *Evening by Evening* (1868) captured the rhythm of Dissenting reading. Spurgeon introduced his books with uncharacteristic humility, begging that 'if there be no time to read both our morning portion and the usual chapter, we earnestly entreat that our book may be dispensed with, for it were a sore affliction to us to know that any family read the Word of God less on our account'.[73]

As Spurgeon's comment implies, reading the Bible was not just a religious duty for Dissenters: it *was* religion, a practice to be cultivated at home and urged on others. Their enthusiastic participation in the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) has already been noted, while the works distributed by ecumenical societies such as the Religious Tract Society (RTS) or the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) were often little more than spiky florilegia of biblical verses. It mattered to Dissenters that the BFBS was ecumenical. Its foundation was supposed to be a 'funeral of bigotry', with the distribution of Bibles without note and comment marking their reincorporation into British

[71] Doddridge, *Lectures*, 88.

[72] Isabel Rivers, 'Religious Publishing', in *Cambridge History of the Book, V*, ed. Suarez and Turner, 579–600.

[73] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning: Daily Readings for the Family or the Closet* (1870; London, 1875), vii.

Protestantism on their own, distinctively voluntary terms. Some Dissenters hoped that this would change their own denominations quite as much as the Established Churches. For evangelical Quakers, it demonstrated that they were serious in their commitment to the authority of the Scriptures. The Bible Societies in Ireland catalysed the conversion of many Ulster Presbyterians to conservative evangelicalism. The Secessionists abandoned their preoccupation with a scriptural radicalism and turned instead to quiet cooperation with other evangelicals.

Dissenters gloated over the statistics of the BFBS: it allowed them to feel part of a 'BIBLE AGE' that both extended the reach of English and transcended the limits of language.[74] The Scottish Free Churchman William Arnot (1808–75) judged that the BFBS had outdone the Apostles, who had enjoyed only the temporary gift of foreign languages. In commissioning their translations, the BFBS had dug 'permanent' canals of grace to the heathen: 'polygot Bibles' that fulfilled 'the Pentecostal prophecy'.[75] Dissenting missionaries were indeed often the first to reach new territories, where they produced translations in close collaboration with 'native informants'. Such work facilitated quiet disobedience from the Authorized Version: as the translations were from the original language, they reopened the question of how to translate key terms. In India, the Baptist Missionary Society circulated versions in several Indian languages that favoured 'immersionist' renderings of words for baptism. In 1833, the BFBS told them that it would withhold assistance for their Bengali New Testament unless 'the Greek terms related to baptism be rendered either according to the principles adopted by the translators of the English Authorized Version by a word derived from the original, or by such terms as may be considered unobjectionable by other denominations of Christians comprising the Bible Society'.[76] Baptists thundered against such authoritarianism, but in vain.

WHOSE BIBLE? SCRIPTURE AND CONTROVERSY

The shared conviction among Dissenters that the only true Church was one that obeyed the beliefs and practices of apostolic times made for bitterness and division quite as much as unity. By the time that Protestant Dissent emerged as a legal entity, it was already riven by disputes about how best one could

[74] George Redford, *Holy Scripture Verified: Or, the Divine Authority of the Bible Confirmed* (London, 1837), viii; Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[75] William Arnot, *The Church in the House: A Series of Lessons on the Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1873), 49.

[76] John H. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 56.

be faithful to the message of the New Testament. The 'Lamb's War' fought by Baptists and Quakers in the mid-seventeenth century was an especially acrimonious instance. Quakers believed that the prophetic gifts of the early Church were still theirs and that they could read the Scriptures as evocative of their gifts, George Fox noting that 'the Scriptures is for correction and doctrine, furnishing the man of God in his place'. For Baptists, this was fearful arrogance. John Bunyan asked, 'What Scriptures have you to prove, that Christ is, or was crucified with you, died with you, risen with you, & ascended with you'.[77] Quakers reviled Baptists for confusing the Holy Spirit with the Scriptures. As Thomas Lawson alleged in a debate of 1655, 'Thou art Antichrist, pulling the Crowne from his head, and giving it to the Scripture'. Baptists responded in kind, arguing that those who dismissed the Scriptures as 'ink and paper, and a dead letter, are false apostles and deceitful workers… which the Apostle Paul, Galations 1:8–9 saith, Are accursed'.[78] In reality, most Quaker worship and piety emphasized respect for the Bible and its teachings, and Quaker leaders in the eighteenth century worried as much as other Dissenters about the growth of infidelity in contemporary society.[79] Yet the long-term decline of the Society of Friends may have owed something to its inability to participate in the scriptural and experiential revival that rescued Calvinistic Dissent from the middle of the eighteenth century.

Christian primitivism continued to exercise a divisive pull on Dissenters, and thus on Dissenting reading of the Bible, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[80] As new denominations emerged, and gained in numbers, wealth, and complacency, so fresh wounds opened over respective standards of fidelity to the New Testament. The secessions from Wesleyan Methodism were one marked instance of this, but the most vivid illustration of the pattern was the emergence in the 1820s and 1830s of the Plymouth Brethren, a grouping of congregational sects inspired by John Nelson Darby who favoured a dispensationalist eschatology and were radically opposed to the notion that the Christian ministry constituted a distinct order. The Brethren became an object of irritated fascination to mainstream Dissenting denominations because they challenged their pride in their scriptural church order. William Henry Dorman (1802–78), the Congregational minister of Islington Chapel before becoming a fellow traveller with the Brethren, alleged that he was throwing over the Independents because they had proved false to their belief in the 'sufficiency of the Word of God in all matters of faith and practice'.[81] The pride and

[77] Underwood, *Primitivism*, 52.

[78] Underwood, *Primitivism*, 29.

[79] Arnold Lloyd, *Quaker Social History, 1669–1738* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), 124.

[80] See Nathan Hatch, 'Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum', in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Hatch and Mark Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59–78, for a similar phenomenon in American Protestantism.

[81] William Henry Dorman, *Principles of Truth on the Present State of the Church, Addressed to Christians of all Denominations* (London, 1838), 53.

greed of their ministers had led them to insist on ordination services and on pew rents, even though both were foreign to the New Testament.[82] The danger was that pew renters could use their clout to pressurize their minister in unscriptural fashion, for 'imagine, for a moment, somebody at Corinth telling Paul that if he insisted on the incestuous person being put away, thirty persons would withdraw their subscriptions!'[83]

In confronting the Brethren, Congregationalists and Baptists stared into the mouths of the cannon they had forged in earlier times to batter the Established Church. It was now they who had to claim that it was legitimate to make extrapolations about ecclesiastical order and ministerial office from the bare details of Acts.[84] By the 1860s, some Dissenters realized that attempts to assert a literal identity between the church of the New Testament and their current chapels were futile. Thus the Unitarian theologian John James Tayler (1797–1869) deconstructed the belief of most Nonconformists that 'on all points the sentence of Holy Writ was final and indisputable'.[85] Tracing that belief back to the Civil War, Tayler singled out Baxter as a blessed exception from 'the narrow, pedantic Scripturalism of the Puritan party. He did not confound Christianity with the Bible.'[86] It was a pity that the thought of Baxter's High Calvinist opponent, the Independent John Owen, had 'struck a deeper root, but often borne the fruits of bitterness and malignity'.[87] For Tayler, 'German modes of thought' would unravel this angry scriptural politics. The 'conscientious Scriptural critics' of the eighteenth century had been 'slow to perceive' the diversity within the New Testament on what belief or practice should be. Once challenge its status as a timeless template for congregational independency, and support for 'violent organic change in Church and State' would decrease.[88] In voicing such sentiments, Tayler seemed close to the positions taken by Owen's contemporary opponents from the Church of England, particularly Brian Walton (whose works were kept current by Anglican defenders of the Authorized Version).[89] By contrast, neither Tayler's diffuse enthusiasm for the Germans nor his distaste for disestablishment politics endeared him to evangelical Nonconformists. Nor did the progress of biblical criticism always soften the dissidence of Dissent: Free Churchmen toasted the Anglican scholars Joseph Barber Lightfoot (1828–99) and Edwin Hatch (1835–89) for refuting the claim that apostolic churches had been episcopal.[90] Yet this was a negative conclusion.

[82] Dorman, *Principles of Truth*, 87.

[83] Dorman, *Principles of Truth*, 91.

[84] 'Crotchety Christians', *Eclectic Review*, 1 (1861), 602; 'Some Plain Statements Respecting Christian Ministry', *London Quarterly Review*, 31 (1869), 312.

[85] [John James Tayler], 'Baxter and Owen', *National Review*, 15 (1862), 97.

[86] [Tayler], 'Baxter and Owen', 107.

[87] [Tayler], 'Baxter and Owen', 113–15.

[88] [Tayler], 'Baxter and Owen', 115.

[89] Henry John Todd, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Rev. Brian Walton*, 2 vols (London, 1821).

[90] Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College, Oxford: Its Origin, History, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 248; Robert Forman Horton, *Autobiography* (London, 1917; 1918),

Dissenting polemicists increasingly conceded that readers drew different ecclesiological conclusions from the New Testament, and preferred to concentrate their fire on establishment and the evils it supposedly harboured (insularity, 'sacerdotalism', or sluggishness) rather than on episcopacy.[91]

If disputes about the ecclesiology of the New Testament began acrimoniously, became arid, and ended in doubtful stalemate, the same went for debates about its doctrines. What did it mean to say that a doctrine could or could not be found in the Bible? How could one resolve the tension between the meaning of scriptural language for its original readers and the meaning with which it was invested by theologians? As Ian Shaw notes in Chapter 5, these uncertainties exposed sects such as the high Calvinists to the charge that their theology was an arrant imposition on the Bible, when from their point of view it was a deduction from it. Dissenters arguably did not have a coherent view of Christian history or of the early Church that could regulate arguments about scripture: because the statements of belief that bound many of their chapels, their catechisms, and the Westminster Confession that bound many Dissenters (and that linked them to the Presbyterian establishment in Scotland) were supposed to be no more than plain restatements of Scripture, there was no court of appeal for disputes about how far lawful inferences from its text could go. To stand on *sola Scriptura* was to be vulnerable to those who derived a different meaning from the same texts, especially when they invoked what had come to be seen as the two other foundational principles of Dissent: private judgement and liberty of conscience. John Owen had thought it worthwhile to write a 700-page *Vindiciae Evangelicae, or the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated, and Socinianism Examined* (1655) but in appealing to 'scripture principles' against the Socinians he armed himself with a double-edged sword. Anti-Trinitarian Dissenters—Socinians, who affirmed the simple humanity of Jesus; Arians, who doubted the eternal deity of Christ; and Unitarians, who drew on both of these traditions—laid claim to just such principles.

Dissenting arguments on these matters were not just interminable but often derivative of Anglican thought. The controversies over Arianism among early eighteenth-century Presbyterians and Independents illustrate the point. They centred over the dismissal of James Peirce (1674–1726) and Joseph Hallett (1656–1722) by their Exeter congregations. Peirce's accusers alleged that he was reluctant to preach on the equality of Christ with God, and had removed declarations of glory to God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost from their worship 'as if this

115; Horton, 'The Congregational Church', in *Our Churches and Why We Belong to Them* (London, 1898), 48.

[91] See e.g. the essays in Henry Robert Reynolds, ed., *Ecclesia: Church Problems Considered in a Series of Essays* (London, 1870); James Guinness Rogers, *The Church Systems of England in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1881), 21; Horton, 'The Congregational Church'.