

ideas that successfully mobilized people -- as if the word meant "to turn citizens into a mob" -- had a dominant religious component. Religion defined membership in a community through belief, tapping into a powerful coalitional psychology. Religious beliefs may be treated as a special form of group fantasies; they are not primarily reality-based and may indeed place a premium on the slightly counterintuitive Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas*, Adherence to an attention-grabbing and otherwise implausible proposition is an effective marker for group membership, since nonmembers are so unlikely to hold the same views. Yet this limited, coalitional rationality came at the expense of a more general epistemic rationality. The numerous communities built around religious credos developed no common ground for resolving disputes of faith. By constructing personal and collective identities grounded in nonnegotiable belief structures, the Protestant dissenters -- chiefly Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers -- reproduced the logic of the institutions that sought to suppress them, whether Anglican or Catholic. The centrality of belief in the formation of individual and collective identities ensured a continuous and lethal conflict. In France, Louis XIV was moving towards a revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which nominally granted religious freedom to Protestants; intolerance was the order of the day. While the dissenters resented their lack of power, the fragmentation of Protestantism into sects militated against effective political action and the collapse of the Commonwealth had eroded their confidence as well as their credibility as a political force. The threat of a common enemy, however, financed by external powers, provided an opportunity for uniting the various oppositional groups into a single political movement. The person who most clearly realized the potential of anti-Catholicism -- in the jargon of the day, "anti-Popery" -- to form a political base was Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury, the de facto leader of the so-called Country party, an informal political faction from a time before political parties. Alarmed by the prospect of a Catholic king modeled on Louis XIV, he championed the story of the Popish Plot to spur Parliament into proposing a bill to exclude the Duke of York from the succession. Charles II reacted in anger, dissolved parliament and called for reelections. The Country party returned with an increased popular mandate. And I will do neither" *Journals of the House of Commons*, 9: Shaftesbury was appointed lord president of the Privy Council; he held daily meetings with Oates and vigorously pursued the allegations Greaves, *Secrets*, 8. Coincidentally, the chief concern of the French King was to keep Protestant England out of his Continental campaigns; domestic trouble was to be encouraged. Discussing the possibility of sponsoring Shaftesbury, the French ambassador wrote in December of , "It would be a very proper means to stir up new embarrassments to the king of England, and Lord Shaftesbury would be still more bold if he found himself secretly supported by your Majesty" *English Historical Documents*, ; he advised a sizable sum would be required. Even James threw himself into the controversy with full force, hoping to use it to discredit all anti-Catholic propaganda; unfortunately, his poorly executed counter-plot of forged letters was revealed, lending strength to the original accusations. On the 17th of November in and again in , on the birthday of Queen Elizabeth, a "solemn mock procession of the Pope, cardinals, Jesuits, fryers, nuns" wound its way through the streets of London. In , the roles were played by people in flesh and blood, led by a crowd of rowdy torchbearers, a bell-ringer with a crosier, a dead man on a horse, a richly robed divine displaying the host on a tray and proclaiming the transubstantiation, and a Black Friar carrying a large crucifix. Dressed up in gray habits, two groups of nuns and tonsured monks followed, muttering prayers as they fingered their their rosaries. A band of colorful trumpet players and drummers preceded a bevy of mitred cardinals, their rich gowns dragging the ground, and several pairs of Jesuits engaged in learned disputes as they walked. Finally, announced by a caller striking a gong and two friars carrying large crosses, on a raised dais with flowing curtains, came the Pope in all his magnificence, with a black devil, horns and whip, at his back, sheltered by a baldachin. In , perhaps with financing from the Catholic Louis XIV, [2] the actors were supplemented by elaborate effigies carried on a dozen large wooden platforms; at the market in Smithfield they were set alight in huge bonfires see fig. These Pope-burning processions, attended by tens of thousands of people, were organized by the Green Ribbon Club, the propaganda arm of what was soon to be called the Whig party. They provided an imaginative enactment of various aspects of the story of the Popish Plot, making visible and palpable what people had only dreaded in the imagination. The desecration of the Catholic icons, vestments, and rituals and the burning of effigies established a new set of associations that were public and shared; united

in the detestation of one symbolic reign, a community of rage and hate was facilitated. The mock solemnity evoked the original power of these symbols even as it denied them validity, thus establishing a conscious resistance to the symbolic language of the enemy. Cold-blooded opportunism recruited the solidarity and peer pressure generated and held in place by the conspiracy theory. The results were murderous; blinded by fear, juries convicted innocent men on fabricated evidence, reaching deep into the Royal household. In the annals of political paranoia, the imagined plot of high-ranking English Catholics to kill Charles II and make way for his brother James appears, finally, as a self-destructive solution to a real problem. The fragmentation of society into a multiplicity of imagined communities based on printed texts created the need for new modes of collective action. The hysteria of the Popish Plot momentarily brought people together against a single common enemy. A psychology of fear and hatred was recruited by crafty politicians and put to effective short-term use, propelling Shaftesbury and the Whigs into political leadership. Over the next few years, however, the excesses of the Popish Plot discredited their cause. Steen, "A Story to Kill For". By the end of , Browning writes, "open opposition to Charles in England had ceased to exist" English Historical Documents, There were real issues; as the years before the revolution of were to demonstrate, James did indeed intend to establish a more powerful monarchy and return England to the Catholic fold. In the intermediate term, however, the lies of the Popish Plot eroded trust and seriously damaged the Whig cause; by January , Shaftesbury had fled the country. A broken man, he died within days of arriving in Amsterdam. Notes [1] Donald Wing comments, "The imprint is false; from the typography, printed in London. The evidence suggests several Whigs were supported by the French King at this period. Bibliography Browning, Andrew ed. English Historical Documents Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Early English Short Title Catalog. Electronic database of works in English Secrets of the Kingdom: Stanford University Press, The Century of Revolution, Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, A Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism. Rutgers University Press, More particularly, from the long prorogation, of November, , ending the 15th. Letters to the King. Edited by Jonathan Swift. Timothy Goodwin and Benjamin Tooke,

2: Religion in Enlightenment England | Reading Religion

Dissent and parliamentary politics in England - A study in the perpetuation and tempering of parliamentarianism
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One finds, as well, a thoughtful balance within these categories. The remainder of the book is organized topically, under the subjects of nature, visions, miracles, spirits, devotion, hymnody, and autobiography. With substantial and beautifully written introductions to each major section and to individual authors, the whole of the volume is contextualized in light of the significant changes in scholarship on English religion in the last thirty years. Clark, who have argued that English Christianity in this period was thriving and that a thoroughgoing secularization was, at the earliest, a 19th-century phenomenon. And while there is ample evidence here of heterodox beliefs, particularly in the later thematic sections of the book, the older, teleological views of Leslie Stephen, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and Gerald Cragg, which celebrated a future that inevitably belonged to progressively attenuated forms of faith, are further discredited. In correcting earlier views, this book clearly illustrates the vitality of a distinctly Christian enlightenment, both with respect to its interpretation and the texts themselves. Lewis is unusually sure-footed with respect to the historical context of each document. Her integration of complex themes over a ninety-year period is extraordinarily well done and captures just the right level of generalization, even for ancillary though important topics such as English Catholicism, the Protestant succession, and the Act of Union. For example, the treatment of Richard Baxter, a difficult author who at times contradicted himself, captures both the depths of his insights and the breadth and influence of his enormous output. The bibliographies for each main section and the individual documents are both extensive and up-to-date, with guidance for students who wish to follow up with the complete texts found in online sources. William Law, whose works were perhaps the most widely re-published of all the authors, sought to reconcile devotion itself as an exercise in reason with the warmth and fervor natural to the genuine love of God. The workings of the invisible world above or below the devout individual also receive attention. The interest in spirits both good and evil actually increased in the period, likely in reaction to the new emphasis on reason. Helpful contrasts as well as comparisons are made. The different mental worlds of the ecstatic visionary Jane Lead and the Freethinker John Toland could hardly be greater, but each are understood better by reference to the other. Throughout the book, Lewis demonstrates a fine grasp of the interactive, subtle play between the new scientific understanding and more traditional religious sensibilities. Accordingly, Thomas Traherne enlists the imagery of new scientific instruments to explain his interior vision of the soul and its progress. Lewis provides a close, insightful reading of the ways in which traditional Christian views accommodated the changing standards of reason and verification, without, in most cases, compromising conviction. Hence, the idiom of Christian expression was clearly changing and adapting, but the substance remained and transcended the challenges of science. In any anthology, of course, choices have to be made, and with the emphasis on practical divinity the political aspects of religion and enlightenment are somewhat subordinated, particularly the themes of toleration and the new value attached to civility in public discourse. Locke was a minimalist in Christian doctrine, but neither a Deist nor a Socinian. And lastly, the debate of the Nonconformists at Salters Hall in was not, at bottom, about whether or not one believed in the Trinity, but about whether subscribing to the doctrine should be required of Dissenting ministers. These few suggestions for further reading do not, however, diminish in the least my high estimation of this book and its importance. About the Reviewer s: Bradley is Geoffrey W.

3: A Note on Protestant Dissent and the Dissenters

Get this from a library! Dissent and parliamentary politics in England, ; a study in the perpetuation and tempering of parliamentarianism. [Douglas R Lacey].

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Fundamental to English Dissent was a willingness to demystify the Christian faith by considering its principles in accordance with human reason alone. As such, Dissent signifies the shift from a reliance upon external authority in moral matters, to the internal authority of the self informed by reason. This shift was in part traditional, and in part inspired by the seventeenth century Newtonian world outlook. For those individuals who followed the tradition laid down by John Locke, the Cambridge Platonists and the later deists, an appeal was made to experience and conscious knowledge of the world of material nature. While the mysteries of Christianity were to be located and expelled, there was a simultaneous effort to preserve the virtues of Christianity while adjusting them to the new rationalistic and scientific temper. It was this confidence in reason that forced the Dissenters to distance themselves from the religious controversy within English Protestantism. They no longer believed in the central idea of Christianity -- man as a weak and wretched creature in a doleful world, in dire need of being saved and solaced by the belief in a better world to come. The Dissenters faced a crisis. How could one come to terms with Christian faith in a world become increasingly secularized? This question was part of the broader movement of liberalism within Christian culture which succeeded in eliminating the prophetic, other-worldly element in Christianity and adapting religion to the purposes of an otherwise optimistic secularism. For the Dissenter, Christ was the sole head of the Church and Scripture was the only rule of faith and practice. Faith was left to the individual to encounter in his own way and by the power of reason invested in his own private judgment. The Dissenters thus objected to the Creeds as well as the offices of the Church of England. They were, on the whole, utilitarian calculators who made moralistic arguments on the relative merits of the Christian faith. The only true criterion of religion, they found, was its ability to produce virtue, as virtue was necessary for society. Yet this society was not about to accept them upon an equitable basis. The Dissenters were throughout the eighteenth century denied specific civil and political rights as were Roman Catholics and Jews. Whereas the Anglican Church was comfortable with eighteenth century political stability, the Dissenters protested. The Dissenters had hardened their hearts against a state that had rejected them. Deeply and firmly established in the society of England, they formed a great, permanent undercurrent of dissatisfied criticism of the state of England. Their social and political aims can be briefly stated as follows: They also fought to win toleration for both Roman Catholics and Jews because it was their desire to place all men upon an equal footing. The Dissenters were imbued with the recent scientific discoveries of Newton as well as a spirit of scientific inquiry. This predisposition to inquiry flowed quite naturally from their desire to demystify Christianity through human reason. They devoted a great deal of time, energy and money to the spread of education amongst all their members. The heterodox views of the Dissenters, and the political radicalism that frequently accompanied them, were nurtured in these Dissenting academies. Being business oriented, energetic and God-fearing yet worldly people, they sought to improve their condition morally as well as intellectually. They held a belief in human progress and were not afraid of social change. They were from the solid middle ranks of English society, usually from the cities and the great towns. According to Isaac Kramnick, "they were the secular prophets, the vanguard, of a new social order and played the decisive role in transforming England into the first bourgeois civilization. Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative, New York, p. The curricula at the Dissenting academies included the study of science, English literature and belles lettres, modern languages, history, political theory and economics. In this manner, they maintained a "cultural unity" at home while they "kept in close touch with the development of knowledge and thought abroad, with the result that much which was neglected at Cambridge, and which never reached Oxford, had a sympathetic reception in the dissenting academies. The efforts of the Rational Dissenters helped to clear the minds of their own followers and aided in efforts to form a habit of political discussion, inquiry and criticism. It was during the reign of George III that the political radicalism of the Dissenters assumed a more active role in the affairs of national politics. Up to they had, in general, been acquiescent in political

affairs. But from then on their increasing awareness of their unequal status became unbearable. Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*: This was partly due to a changing economic situation in which the Dissenters prospered and a growing alienation from both the Hanoverian dynasty and the system of government of George III. They joined forces in the Wilkite agitation of and attempted to abolish compulsory subscription to the Articles of Religion in the s. They also championed the cause of the American colonists in their bid for independence. If toleration had failed, perhaps participation might succeed. By the Corporation Act of , no one could enter a civic or municipal office unless he had taken the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. Under the Test Act of , all who held offices under the Crown were required to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, sign a declaration repudiating the doctrine of transubstantiation and to receive the sacrament according to the Church of England. Others fought for the repeal of the Acts on the grounds of political equality and civic freedom until , when their concerns became decidedly different. To be sure, the Rational Dissenters became increasingly political by the time the French Revolution broke out in . Price even went so far as to send a message of congratulation to the French National Assembly. The Dissenters, frustrated by their failures to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and their abortive pleas for civic equality, renewed their support for parliamentary reform and responded to the new challenge of "Church and King" clubs by organizing new radical societies. These societies were open to all working men and their objectives were exclusively political. There is no doubt that events in the American colonies in the s as well as developments across the English Channel in the early s played a major role in stimulating the movement for parliamentary reform. What we must keep in mind, is that political discourse in England was conditioned by series of complex forces, rational Dissent being one of the most potent.

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7: English The 18th-Century English Novel

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