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**“And Let All the People Say Amen”:  
Priests, Presbyters, and the Arminian Uprising in  
Massachusetts, 1717-1724**

**By**

**Lawrence R. Jannuzzi**

In 1726, Cotton Mather is said to have claimed that he had searched all of New England, but could not find a single Arminian.<sup>1</sup> Mather was referring somewhat overconfidently to Arminians within the orthodox congregations of the colony, but the implicit point was clear: Arminianism in Mather’s New England was something to be looked for, and something to be looked out for.

The prospect of a significant Arminian contingent in the City on the Hill would have sent, and when it came did send, a shudder down Mather’s spine, and down those of all followers of the New England Way. The threat of “High-Church” Anglicanism to the New England social and religious structure was real. John Calvin’s theology had always been recognized as having direct and sweeping ecclesiological implications, and the Congregationalist idea of church structure was an idea of vast political ramifications as well, both in England and America. Arminianism was the enemy on both sides of the Atlantic.

Calvin had written early, and it had always been accepted in New England, that the doctrine of predestination implies that justification is solely to be had through grace, and works are entirely inefficacious for salvation. Grace was God’s free and unearned gift and was not carried by, or achieved through, sacraments (the two he recognized, Baptism and Communion, were “seals” of grace, not objective means of obtaining it).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England*, Studies in American History and Culture, No. 15, ed. Robert Berkhofer (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980), p. 6, citing C.C. Goen, ed. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 4 vols. (New Haven, 1972), IV, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Henry Beveridge, trans. (Edinburgh, 1846), book IV, Chap XIV, p. 300 - IV: XVII: 389.

Scripture became the sole means of revelation, and it spoke directly to the individual human soul.<sup>3</sup>

One of the implications of this position is that clergy served no sacerdotal or sacramental function, and scripture was to be made available to the believer but not interpreted for him -- "priests" became "ministers" because every saved believer, possessing within him or herself the means of grace and of the reception of revelation through scripture, was his own priest.<sup>4</sup> In this view as well, bishops -- that is, bishops as prelates installed over more than a single congregation -- were at best irrelevant. Priests no longer needed to be consecrated to administer sacraments, the apostolic succession was unnecessary, and tradition and the church *magisterium* were no longer valued as sources of divine authority.

In the place of sacraments and tradition, God manifested himself to the individual directly through the scriptures, which were the only legitimate sources of revelation, and therefore the primary source of authority. The scriptures revealed the Law, not only in the sense of doctrine, but also for church polity. As Calvin had said, "Quod non jubet, vetat" (What he does not order, he forbids). And lacking in the scriptures, at least for some of Calvin's followers, was any form of church hierarchy; following such a hierarchy was not only uncalled for, it was a form of idolatry. For Calvin, as he was applied by some congregationalists, every church, that is every congregation, had its own bishop, so that the congregation's minister became for it a "scripture-bishop." Authority, instead, resided with all the people equally and Bishops could claim no right to legislate, either individually or sitting together in councils. Rather, according to Calvin, "the Holy Spirit designed to provide that no one should dream of primacy or domination in regard to the government of the church."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. IV:III: 71.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. IV:VII: 168-169.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Jonathan Dickenson, "The Scripture-Bishop or the Divine Right of Presbyterian Ordination and Government" (Boston, 1732); Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:III:67, IV:X: 197, IV:IV:77, IV:VHI: 168-69, IV:IX: 176-90.

In the early seventeenth century, however, a Dutch theologian named Jacobus Arminius had questioned the strict Calvinist formulation of predestination and doing so, in the eyes of his opponents, had opened the door to the “popish” argument that human action, resulting from free will, plays a part in salvation.<sup>6</sup> The accusation was not entirely fair; Arminius’ criticism had been directed at the narrow and rather technical grounds of “supralapsarian predestination,” which had implied to him that God had created the majority of humans for the sole purpose of damnation. As part of his deliberation, however, Arminius had also voiced the concern that the doctrine of predestination, by stressing unmediated divine revelation to individuals, raised the specter of “antinomianism,” the rejection of all human authority. Indeed, it could be seen as actually anarchistic by removing the incentive for moral behavior and the fear of repercussions for immoral behavior.<sup>7</sup>

Arminius’ name soon made its way across the English Channel, but it did so not primarily as a criticism of predestination, but as a ground for critique of the “dangerous” Congregationalist ecclesiology. It was in this form that it soon came to dominate the Church of England. If bishops and priests were the hallmarks of the unreformed church for some, they were equally the symbols of order and stability to others. Those with theological reservations and more mundane interests alike noted the danger: a contemporary English pamphlet asked, “Yes, he that now saith, why should bishops be? Will next cry out, why Kings? The saints are

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<sup>6</sup> Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius, D.D.*, Bagnall, et al., eds. (Auburn: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853, reprint ed., Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 221. For contemporary reaction to Arminius, see, Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, Tenn., 1971) pp. 66-67, 308.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3 and 10. The classic response to this criticism is that saved persons will “naturally” behave in an orderly fashion, and that human law was still necessary and appropriate for those whose unsaved nature was revealed by disorderly behavior. In the event, as the treatment of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams was to demonstrate, New England Congregationalism was no more disposed to accept unbridled antinomianism than anyone else.

free." A high nobleman was more direct: "They shoot at bishops now, so will they do at the nobility also if they be suffered."<sup>8</sup>

In England by this time, James I occupied the throne and had written strongly in favor of hierarchical social and church structures -- with himself at the apex of both -- based on divine right. James "protestantism" has been debated, but his views on social stability are clear, and mark the point at which his tolerance of those who were coming to be called "puritans" ran out. He recognized that some preferred simple worship and "are persuaded that their bishops smell of a Papal supremacy." But he made it clear that his patience ended at the denial of hierarchical organizations. People in favor of such are "pests in the church..." Congregationalist "parity" for him equated to "rebellion and schism."<sup>9</sup>

Following that lead at the turn of the century, Richard Hooker, in his influential *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, set forth a complete rehabilitation both of "priestcraft" and of the Episcopal office, on both scriptural and historical grounds.<sup>10</sup> As the title of his book implies, Hooker was concerned primarily with the political and social implications of Calvinist doctrine on "ecclesiastical polity;" it was primarily an ecclesiological work and like those of Arminius and James, it's primary focus was on the dangerous antinomian implications of Calvinism "Spiritual Jurisdiction" was the thread Hooker studied in examining Puritan objections to hierarchical church structures, literally bottom-to-top. The church, he argued, was not a collection of colleagues, it is a body with a head; spiritual authority comes "from him which is the head, it hath descended unto us that are the body." It was "power," which Christ hath given to be used over them which are subject unto it..." And "This

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<sup>8</sup> Anon., "A Whip for an Ape," quoted in Christopher Hill, "Archbishop Laud's Place in English History," in *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1990) pp. 57-59.

<sup>9</sup> See, especially, Charles H. McIlwain, ed., "Basilikon Doron" in *The Political Works of James I* (1616, reprint ed. Cambridge, Mass., 1918), pp.7-8, 23-24; for an interpretation of James' relationship with the Arminian "movement" see Nicholas Tyacke, *The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> P. Stanwood, ed., *The Works of Richard Hooker* Folger Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

we boldly therefore set down, as a most infallible truth, that the Church of Christ is at this day lawfully, and so hath been since the first beginning, governed by Bishops, having permanent superiority and ruling power over other ministers of the Word and Sacraments.” The Puritans, he argued, when they sought to deprive bishops of the power to ordain, were engaged in dangerous political thinking; one of their most pernicious errors was to hold “that between a Presbyter and a Bishop the Word of God alloweth not any inequality or difference to be made; that their order, their authority, their power ought to be one....”<sup>11</sup>

By the 1630s, under the leadership of figures such as Archbishop William Laud, “Arminianism” had become, for all practical purposes, the Church of England, at least until the Civil Wars. It found there a new focus on objective grace obtained through external actions. God worked through the church, including sacraments, the externalia of religion such as images, music, and altars, and a uniform prayer book. Through this ceremonial type of religion and most especially through its assumptions that salvation was a social and external, rather than an individual and internal, matter, the Arminians enthroned the Jacobean ideas of church governance, order, stability, and obedience. After Laud, the term “Arminianism” referred not only to a ceremonial style of liturgy, but to a tightly wrapped bundle of theories of social and ecclesiastical order that focuses on bishops and what they saw as the true nature of the clergy, and implicated nothing less than the nature of society, the question of authority and the meaning of the individual. As one observer notes, “The Arminians were not Roman Catholics, but it is not surprising that many people thought they were.”<sup>12</sup>

What King James, Hooker, and Laud borrowed from Arminius, then, was a fear of antinomianism and a belief in the proper role of human agency (but emphatically not of individual freedom) in salvation. What

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2, 5:3-21; 2.2, 5:29-32, Book 7, 3.1, 153:17-20, 3.1, 154:33-155:2, 10.1, 202:15-19. The concept of episcopal authority in conflict with that of the crown was unsettled, but both agreed that those who denied the former threatened the latter as well. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments, English History, 1509-1660* (Oxford, 1971), p. 216; Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England from Cranmer to Hooker, 1534-1603*, (Princeton, 1970), pp. 40-75.

they proposed was an authoritarian form of church hierarchy based on prelates. As Perry Miller noted, Laud had set the tone of the conflict. A follower "wrote Laud in 1630 that he considered predestination was the root of all Puritanism and Puritanism 'the root of all rebellion and disobedient intractableness, and schism and sauciness in the country.'"<sup>13</sup>

In the eyes of those they called "Puritans," Arminians had wrested control of the reformed church in England from the true reformers, instituting a backsliding apostasy only slightly preferable to the Roman papacy. The "dissenters" from this new establishment, who considered themselves the true Church of England, the true "Anglicans," derisively described it as the High Church, as a group of "high flyers."<sup>14</sup> It was precisely this cadre of closet Papists for whom the separatists and non-separating dissenters, such as Mather, awaited fretfully across the sea.<sup>15</sup>

Accepting this contemporary perception that the New World was an island isolated from English religious strife, historians have frequently described the eventual coming of High Church ideas to America as an "invasion," impliedly an "English" as opposed to "American" phenomenon, forcibly imposed on, or insinuated among, the American dissenters from without. These writers condemn the growth of Arminianism as the result of "religious imperialism," an "instrument of ... aggression" from England.<sup>16</sup> Others, more sympathetic to the High Church, argued that it represented a liberal "rationalist" manifestation of the Enlightenment. For these writers, the narrative of Massachusetts history becomes a "dialectic of orthodoxy (or Calvinism), liberalism (or

<sup>13</sup> Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago, 1955), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York, 1971), p. 228.

<sup>16</sup> John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit, 1984), p. 107; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass., Press, 1953), p. 464. Following this line of argument, for example, Carl Bridenbaugh asserts that Anglicanism, that is this Arminian form of Anglicanism, had "to muscle in" on Massachusetts, an action "representing British imperialism in ecclesiastical guise." Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York, 1962), pp. 55-57.

Arminianism) and emerging pluralism.”<sup>17</sup> This dialectical process is described in various ways, but historians have generally agreed on its antitheses, the poles being liberal rationalist Arminianism on the one hand and some form of Massachusetts orthodoxy -- whether seen as rationalist itself or not -- on the other.<sup>18</sup>

A different perspective on the so-called “rationalism” of Arminianism has more recently been expressed by Donald F.M. Gerardi.<sup>19</sup> Looking carefully at the career of one of the early Arminians from Connecticut, Samuel Johnson, Gerardi concludes that while Arminianism stood at odds with Calvinism, even the “neo-Calvinism” arising in the years after the Half-Way Covenant, Arminianism itself offered two paths, “One way was towards the broad ecumenical trends of modern, liberal Protestantism, that combination of latitudinarianism and toleration, rationalism and theological heterodoxy.... But in another direction Arminianism led to the sacramental orthodoxy of High Church Anglicanism”. It was this latter path that Johnson, relying on “Caroline” piety, took in Connecticut, according to Gerardi.<sup>20</sup> Although Johnson saw the relationship between

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<sup>17</sup> A pattern noted by Harlan, *Clergy and the Great Awakening*, p. 6. Perhaps most notably, see Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Colonial Mind* (New York, 1927), pp. 148-162. Conrad Wright speaks of the “rationalizing spirit” of Anglicanism with respect to Unitarianism. *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston, 1955), pp. 9-27. Anglican rationalism was described recently, if stridently, not only as liberal, but inexplicably as a negative reaction to Christianity itself. Ava Chamberlain, “The Theology of Cruelty: A New Look at the Rise of Arminianism in Eighteenth Century New England,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 85:3 (1992) 335-56.

<sup>18</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Cleveland, 1959), pp. 101-126. See also, Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Chicago, 1957), p. 107; cf, Gerald Goodwin, “The Myth of Arminian-Calvinism” *New England Quarterly*, 41 (1968): 213-37. Edmund S. Morgan likewise cites reason as one of the mainstays of New England theology, but one that led to a constant danger of Arminianism. *The Puritan Dilemma: The John Winthrop Story* (1958), pp. 81, 136-137. Patricia Bonami refers to Virginia Anglicanism as the “pinnacle of rational religion”, *Under the cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford, 1986) pp. 87-105.

<sup>19</sup> Donald F.M. Gerardi “Samuel Johnson and the Yale ‘Apostasy’ of 1722: The Challenge of Anglican Sacramentalism to the New England Way,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 47 (1978) 153-75.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162-163.



theology and ecclesiology, Gerardi argues, the latter was not central in Johnson's thought. Rather, Johnson was chiefly concerned with liturgical issues, and specifically with the "High Church" view of the objective efficacy of sacraments as vehicles of grace. Those historians who have found ecclesiological matters to be the core of the Arminian challenge, he says, give the matter "too political a focus" and fail to appreciate that ecclesiology is an "aspect" of sacramentalism as perpetuated in the Caroline church.<sup>21</sup>

The Arminians did come, but not under sails on the eastern horizon, or as a liberal expedition of the Enlightenment. Rather, a look at the first serious inroads of the High Church in Massachusetts suggests that it was accomplished primarily locally, within American institutions and by persons born, educated and living in America, largely without English intervention and entirely without the intervention of the English church and government establishment. At the same time, the terms of the debate closely follow similar arguments being held at the time in England, suggesting that the Atlantic divide was, at least religiously, overstated at the time and has since been exaggerated by historians. Moreover, as Gerardi demonstrates, the battle was engaged not on "rationalist" or other "enlightenment" grounds. The Massachusetts Arminians, like their colleague Johnson, were not after toleration.

But at least insofar as the battle was waged in Massachusetts, it was directly and bluntly aimed at the ecclesiological dispute that had long marked the split between "Puritan" and "Arminian" -- the role of episcopacy and hierarchical church structure. Borrowing from Jacobean political theory at least as much as "Caroline" piety, in its reassertion of sacerdotal clericalism and prelatical hierarchy it was first and foremost an authoritarian, anti-latitude movement, and as such it was concerned primarily not with grace, but with authority, and specifically, the authority of bishops. In Massachusetts at least, "sacramentalism" and ecclesiology proved to be inextricably tangled, but it was the latter which provoked the Arminian uprising, and which appeared the greater threat to the Calvinists. Arminianism, through its challenge to Calvinist ecclesiology, was expressly aimed directly at the heart of New England

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Congregationalism and government, and it was taken by the opposition in exactly this way.

Everyone in Boston therefore understood what was at stake in September of 1722, when the rector of Yale College, Timothy Cutler, closed the college’s commencement ceremony with the words, “And let all the people say, ‘amen.’”<sup>22</sup> The words sound harmless to the modern ear, but they stunned the New England establishment. Although the ideal of purely extemporaneous prayer had faded with time gradually giving way to more formalized “pulpit and prayer-desk oratory,” this was still not what a Calvinist expected in his prayers, much less from his minister.<sup>23</sup> Cutler had led innumerable prayers, first as the minister at Stratford and as Yale’s rector since 1719.<sup>24</sup> So there was no doubt about what he meant now: It was a call for a “common prayer,” to be repeated in unison by all persons in the congregation, the very opposite of the individual spontaneous prayer to be expected of the saints; Cutler was espousing the type of prayer-book piety that high flyers had been trying to impose on Calvinists since at least the mid-1500s, the type of prayer found in the hated *Book of Common Prayer* that it seemed some king or archbishop was always trying to impose upon them.<sup>25</sup>

The next day, the rector along with six colleagues (including Samuel Johnson) took an even more portentous step, confirming to the board of trustees that they had determined their Calvinist ordination to be invalid. The reason was simple and chilling: the ordination had not been performed by a bishop.<sup>26</sup> Soon, Cutler added insult, announcing in Boston that he

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<sup>22</sup> John Davenport and Stephen Buckingham to the Trustees of Yale College, September 25, 1722, in Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *Documentary History of Yale University* (New Haven, 1916), p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> Horton Davies, *The Worship of the American Puritans, 1629-1730* (New York, 1990), p. 19-37.

<sup>24</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972) p. 224.

<sup>25</sup> The issue of “common prayer” had been a classic dispute between the “High Church” and the dissenters since at least the days of Edward VI, and had been debated by Anglicans in New England for years. Middlekauff, *Mathers*, p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> Dexter, *Documentary History*, p. 227.

would be leaving for England to seek Anglican ordination.<sup>27</sup> In 1723, he would return with his new Anglican Holy Orders as a priest and as the pastor of the second Anglican parish in Boston, Christ Church.

Anglicans, chiefly in the form of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, had been conducting "missionary" activities throughout New England for years, but there had been little permanent gain in Massachusetts. The various attempts to introduce royal government left a relatively permanent, but small and ineffectual, Anglican presence.<sup>28</sup> And the occasional missionary had made his way through Connecticut with little appreciable impact.<sup>29</sup> Even without a bishop, however, there were books. By 1722, Yale's library contained, for example, a copy of *A Discourse Concerning Inventions of Man in the Worship of God*, a work from 1694 by the Archbishop of Dublin, who had argued that liturgy was a vehicle of grace.<sup>30</sup>

Timothy Cutler read those books. And when he asked all the people to say "amen" he was placing himself unequivocally on one side of the debate they contained. It has since been called "possibly the most dramatic event in the ecclesiastical history of the American colonies," and within days, the Boston press reported the declaration of the "Seven Ministers": "Some of us," it quoted them saying, "doubt of the validity and the rest are more fully persuaded of the invalidity of the Presbyterian Ordination, in opposition to the Episcopal."<sup>31</sup> The inexhaustible store of Boston polemicists needed no further explanation before marshalling themselves immediately to combat the threat of prelacy. Already by

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<sup>27</sup> *The New England Courant*, October 29 - November 5, 1722, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Middlekauff, *Mathers*, p. 223.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert and Carol Schneider, eds., *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College, His Career and Writings*, (New York, 1929) I: 13.

<sup>30</sup> Gerardi "Samuel Johnson and the Yale 'Apostasy,'" pp. 158-59, 163-167. Gerardi analyzes in detail the books at Yale that influenced his subject. It is not unreasonable to assume that Timothy Cutler, in the same place at the same time, read much the same literature.

<sup>31</sup> *The New England Courant*, October 1 - October 8, 1722, p. 2; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre; Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities and Politics*, (New York, 1962), p. 69.

October 8, one week after the announcement, they were appearing in force in the pages of the Boston press, tying the Apostates to the century of “miseries which England long groaned under.” One, calling himself “Harry Concord,” moaned that “this sort of prelatists have always been for a coalition with the Church of Rome.” Another, “Irenaeus Junior,” decried the apostates, who “far out-go many eminent bishops, who were learned defenders of the Episcopal cause, such as Archbishop Bancroft.... And even Bishop Laud himself....”<sup>32</sup> A third, “Nausawlander”, called the event nothing less than a “revolution” and asked, “what shall those persons do who have been christened, alias couzened, in plain English cheated, by their ministry who had no commission to baptise?”<sup>33</sup> The citizenry of Boston knew precisely what it meant to “turn Episcopal.”

Cutler would later be portrayed as the virtual minion of the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,<sup>34</sup> but significantly, neither the Boston press nor the Yale community itself apparently blamed outside forces for his apostasy. The problem was seen as largely internal. Cutler, indeed, had been born in Massachusetts and educated at Harvard.<sup>35</sup> Even the SPG, which routinely took credit for Anglican advances in America, reported of the Yale Apostates that, until they applied for ordination, “The Society ... knew nothing of Mr. Cutler, or the other gentlemen.”<sup>36</sup>

It is true that others had already complained to Cotton Mather that “Arminian books are cried up in Yale College for eloquence and learning,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., October 8 - October 15, 1722., pp. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., October 22 - October 29, 1722, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Perry Miller, *New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, pp. 464-465. Miller portrays the SPG as continuing “to afford financial aid to Anglican groups – or, worse yet, to any rebels against the regime who pretended to be Anglicans” such as Cutler, showing that “the meaning of the [SPG] assault” was to “subdue New England.”

<sup>35</sup> C.F. Pascoe, “Missionary Roll” in *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900* (London, 1901), p. 853.

<sup>36</sup> David Humphreys, *An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1730; reprint ed., New York, 1969), p. 430.

and Calvinists despised for the contrary,<sup>37</sup> but complaints of that sort had been heard about Yale from its founding and complaining of Arminian books is not the same thing as complaining of “English” or “Royalist” books.<sup>38</sup> And while the SPG had sent a gift of books to Yale as early as 1714,<sup>39</sup> a major source of Yale’s library was Jeremiah Dummer, the agent for the Connecticut colony in England and a benefactor of unimpeachable Congregationalist orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup> Woolverton, for one, sees virtually the entire Yale and Harvard libraries as part of an effort to “enhance the belief that provincials ... should consider themselves ... Englishmen.” To that end, he imagines the “startled eyes” at Yale when “unsuspecting librarians” unpacked a crate of books the SPG provided in 1718. If the librarians at Yale were shocked, they were not deterred from putting those books on the shelves, and the “startled” students had no trouble reading them. Nor did they register any reaction one way or the other at being thus told they were still “Englishmen”. It was Dummer -- located in England, but hardly thought then or now to be an agent of the SPG -- who was apparently considered by some as the source of the Arminian infection at Yale, for he felt constrained indignantly to reject the accusation that he had intentionally loaded the Yale library with Episcopal books. “I understood by letters from Boston,” he wrote a few months after Cutler’s announcement, “that their defection from the religion of their country was owing to the library I had sent over, with this particular slander, that I had filled the library with every book for the church and not one of the other side.... [But] there never was an eminent dissenter and author whose works are not in that collection.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Morgan to Cotton Mather, May 28, 1722, in Dexter, *Documentary History of Yale*, p. 225.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Samuel Sewall to \_\_\_\_\_, September 17, 1701, in *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.*, p. 799.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Johnson, “Historical Remarks Concerning Collegiate School,” November 20, 1717 to June 1719, in Dexter, *Documentary History of Yale*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, pp. 30-31. Jeremy Dummer to Timothy Woodbridge, June 3, 1723 in *ibid.*, p. 241. The esteem for Dummer in Yale circles was reflected in an elegy ten years later:

By Dummer nurs’d as by a Patron’s care,

On another tack, it has been suggested that the SPG’s agent, Bishop George Berkeley, donated the books that “turned” Cutler and the others to Episcopalianism.<sup>42</sup> Yale’s published records, however, do not reflect any gift by Bishop Berkeley before 1730.<sup>43</sup> SPG records reflect gifts from Berkeley to Harvard and other institutions, but not before the 1740s.<sup>44</sup> While it therefore cannot be ruled out that the Yale Apostasy was caused, or at least aided, by a propaganda blitz from the SPG, it appears more likely that the Anglican books were simply one portion of a library assembled by gifts from Anglicans and others. It is significant, in any case, that both Harvard and Yale (before and after the apostasy) had no problem accepting such books into their libraries, which strongly indicates that the donations were not seen by those institutions as the tools of a subversive British or Anglican propaganda effort.

While the separatists may have hoped that the new world would be an island safe from religious contamination, the libraries at Yale and Harvard showed that the quarantine had never been effective. Rather, for decades and probably from the beginning, there had been a lively stream of books and ideas across the Atlantic, and the presence of Arminian books in New Haven, while deplorable, did not imply any sort of “foreign” influences. Cutler and the Yale Apostates did not need to be “turned” by “English” intellectual imperialism. The means of their departure had always been at hand. It seems that Cutler, born, raised,

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Till science grows and grows divinely fair:  
 His opening hand her num’rous wants supplies  
 And next to Heav’n on that her hope relies.

Col. John Hubbard, “The Benefactors of Yale College: A Poetical Attempt” (1733) in *ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>42</sup> The earliest expression of this I have found is E.H. Gillett, ed., “The Speech of Mr. John Checkley, Upon His Trial At Boston in 1724 with an introduction by Rev. E.H. Gillett, D.D. of Harlem N.Y.” (Morrisania, N.Y., 1868), p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Berkeley to Samuel Johnson, March 24, 1730, in Dexter, *Documentary History of Yale*, pp. 284-285; the documentary history does reflect several subsequent gifts, including gifts of books, along with official and unofficial expressions of thanks, so it is not unreasonable to assume that if earlier gifts had been made by Berkeley, they would have been reflected in this collection.

<sup>44</sup> Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.*, p. 775.

educated and employed in New England, came to his Arminian convictions on his own.

Cutler himself sought to allay charges of hypocrisy by claiming that he had held Episcopal beliefs for a number of years before coming to Yale, but that only increased outraged exclamations against this "secret Episcopalian."<sup>45</sup> The trustees, feeling betrayed, responded by immediately passing a resolution that the next university officer who "shall give just ground of suspicion of their being corrupted with Armenian [sic] or prelatical principles or any other of dangerous consequence to the purity and peace of our churches" would be subjected to examination and an imposed loyalty oath.<sup>46</sup>

While the vituperation of Cutler is understandable, the shock and surprise accompanying his apostasy are mysterious. Cutler's claim to have held Episcopal beliefs for years find powerful support in the fact those views had in fact been published. This "secret Episcopalian" was no secret to anyone who looked. The opening salvo had come in 1717, before he left Stratford, in an election sermon entitled "The Firm Union of A People Represented, and Concern for It Urged; Upon All Orders and Degrees of Men."<sup>47</sup> Cutler chose a Psalm on which to base his sermon: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together."<sup>48</sup>

Man, he began, is not meant to be alone, for one who lives alone is either God or a beast, "and man is neither."<sup>49</sup> Cutler thus boldly laid his case firmly on Aristotelian grounds.<sup>50</sup> A call on Aristotle was not simply a display of erudition; Aristotle's postulate that humans "naturally" live in

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<sup>45</sup> John Davenport to Stephen Buckingham September 25, 1722, in Dexter, *Documentary History*, p. 227; Anon. "Relation of the Declaration of Rector Cutler and Others for Episcopacy," October, 1722 (?) in *ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>46</sup> Proceedings of the Trustees, October 17-22, 1722, in *ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy Cutler, *The Firm Union of a People Represented* (New London: 1717), p. i.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; Ps. 122:3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, chap. 2: "Man is by nature a political animal.... He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god."

society, and that only “beasts” or “gods” live individually lent itself easily to the conclusion that authority is a societal (sc.: hierarchical) matter.<sup>51</sup> It was certainly distinct from the Calvinists’ claim that all humans are equal in their direct internal relationship with God. More important for Cutler, as he would go on to demonstrate, Aristotelian political ideas are incompatible with any antinomianist conclusion that human laws were at best merely conventional and at worst actively obstructive of a human’s relationship with God. This particular reference to natural human organization was certainly in the tradition of Hooker’s strong image of the church as a body needing a head. Hooker had echoed this very point in Aristotle when he declared in the “Laws” that “without order there is no public society.”<sup>52</sup> Cutler’s first step was therefore decisively on the path that had been laid out over a century earlier.

It was precisely this avenue that Cutler would take, but before preaching on the social nature of humans, Cutler felt constrained to define his terms and methods; in this, too, Cutler threw down an Arminian gauntlet. The Jerusalem of scripture to which the Psalm referred, he stated, could stand for either a “portion of land in the kingdom of Israel” or a symbol, a “place comprehending the inhabitants of a civil society.” Alternatively, “since the Kingdom of Israel was the only Kingdom where the true God was worshipped, and Jerusalem was the place for the public and solemn convention of his worshippers three times annually, so the word may be a term used to signify the Church of God.... And it may also from thence be typical of the Church of God now....”<sup>53</sup>

This rhetoric must have been as shocking to many in Massachusetts as his corporate prayer would be. Cutler was explicitly espousing the

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<sup>51</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1939), pp. 3-5. The extent to which Puritanism rightly could claim descent from Augustine or was correct in seeing itself as distanced from medieval Aristotelianism exemplified by Thomas Aquinas is, of course, debatable. See, Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, pp. 74, 127. But the point here is the fact of the post-Reformation criticism of Aristotelianism/Thomism. *Ibid.*, p. 74. For example, the reliance of Arminius himself on Augustine is striking. He is virtually the only post-scriptural authority relied upon by name. See, e.g., “Declaration of Sentiments” in *Works*, I:678-685, etc.

<sup>52</sup> Hooker, “Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity” Bk.8, 2.1:33 1: 11.

<sup>53</sup> Cutler, “Firm Union,” pp.3-4.



traditional -- and explicitly anti-Puritan -- tools of biblical exegesis by offering several distinct levels of meaning to be attached to the scripture. First, the word "Jerusalem" could refer to a physical location, its literal meaning. It could also, however, be seen allegorically or tropologically as the symbol of civil society, or as the symbol for the church.<sup>54</sup> The attachment of non-literal meanings to scriptural terms was anathema to the Puritan preacher. It was an exercise in *interpretation*, which by definition was inconsistent with the assumption that scripture was entirely and literally true and the only source of both law and conversion. Even more ominously, however, interpretation involved the intervening ministrations of an interpreter, a traditional priestly function.<sup>55</sup> Puritan preachers were expected to make a text available to the individual seeking conversion, not act as a priest by mediating what God meant to be direct and immediate. As Cutler's sermon continued, the practiced Congregationalist ear would have heard increasingly the discordant note of the "Aristotelian" syllogism, which had been discarded in Congregationalist homiletics, and in fact was regarded as a hallmark of the High Church. Congregations were long accustomed to the so-called "Ramist" form of logic and preaching, centering on the "axiom" rather than the "syllogism." The "triadic" structure of the typical Puritan sermon was to read the text and "open" its plain sense, derive the applicable doctrine and apply that doctrine to daily life. Here, however, was the extended "syllogism" which demonstrated the elusively symbolic, if not actually secret, "true" meaning of scripture. This technique was a strong liturgical shock to the Congregationalist system.

Cutler having placed himself outside Calvinist philosophy, theology, exegesis, and homiletics in less than five pages, it must have been a matter of great trepidation to the contemporary Puritan reader to wonder where

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<sup>54</sup> These categories and the labels attached to them have been often noted and described. They were in use at the time of, and by, St. Augustine and even earlier. For a thorough discussion of Puritan homiletics and exegetics, see Davies, *Worship of the American Puritans*, p. 94. For a discussion of this method as early as the third century, see Gerard E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, 1978).

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Worship of the American Puritans*, p. 94. Davies distinguishes between the four levels of traditional exegesis, rejected by the Puritans, and the three "tenses" -- past, present, future -- necessary for exposition by Puritan preachers. Puritan exegesis allowed for the use of "types" in the sense of parallelisms, but rejected purely symbolic interpretations, whether found in allegory or otherwise.

he would go next. He turned, as Hooker had before him, to what he saw as the crucial feature of spirituality, and the crucial field of Calvinist error, the proper structure of the Church itself. Applying his exegetical method, Cutler postulated that the word “builded” in the Psalm “denotes the unity of the whole and the firm coherence of the parts,” that is, of society and the Church.<sup>56</sup> That unity and coherence in society led “to the happiness of a civil government and society.”<sup>57</sup>

To accomplish this, several things are necessary. First, a competent administration must promote suitable leaders of wisdom and judgment to “appease, allay and cool” the passions of unregulated living.<sup>58</sup> Second, these wise leaders needed good laws. And third -- and most important -- the laws and leaders are to be obeyed with “a humble deference to authority.”<sup>59</sup> Nothing in an appeal to strong civil order would have shocked the Puritan reader, but Cutler went further: His hierarchical view was to be applied both with respect to civil and religious authorities, for it is through a “due regard to religion and virtue” that society arrives at the “natural frame and texture of religion” which is its most “healthful constitution.”<sup>60</sup> Humans pay the highest honor to God through their observance of the “duties of eternal and immutable obligation” of religion.<sup>61</sup> To aid in fulfilling this duty is the “goal of Sacred Orders”, despite the “vile words that are cast about of priest-craft and priest-ridden and an ambitious and designing clergy and the like effusion of men’s corrupt minds and the jealousies of the world...”<sup>62</sup> The clergy has “greater things to mind than.... even the saving men’s souls and the good

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<sup>56</sup> Cutler, “Firm Union,” p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 6. Miller, *The Seventeenth Century*, pp. 121-136; Davies, *Worship of the American Puritans*, p. 82.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-22.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

of the world.... Let us [clergymen] put men in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates...."<sup>63</sup> Cutler's meaning now was clear: Applying Aristotle and traditional biblical exegesis with Scholastic precision, his goal was the defense of a hierarchical church, marked by wise leaders, an obedient constituency, and a clergy consecrated by "sacred orders" to fulfill sacred functions and to foster rightful obedience.

Such a concept was wholly foreign to the Puritan concept of Church structure, and two years later, in a sermon preached in 1719, Cutler made the distinction even more explicit: Obedience to the laws of God as interpreted by a sacerdotal clergy is required of all men in accord with God's inscrutable intentions. And "though every person cannot see into the reason and propriety of them, yet every man's reverence and obedience is challenged towards them...."<sup>64</sup> Reason had its place, but the byword was not reason, nor was it grace or sacraments. It was "reverence and obedience." No man by reason could plumb the depths of God's thoughts, and the only alternative was submission. This native son of Boston had become, long before the apostasy, an identifiable, full-blown authoritarian Arminian. Thus, the Arminian "invasion" had actually been brewing at least as early as 1717, and was being led by an American-born apostate fed by American education. Neither the wounded orthodoxy of New England, nor of Yale or Harvard administrations, nor the heresiarch Cutler himself, nor observers in England, seem to have been conscious of or concerned about any "imperialism" of foreign over American thoughts or institutions. Yet, it cannot be concluded from this that the movement was a peculiarly "American" as opposed to "English" phenomenon, either. For in the decade before Cutler's sermons, his counterparts in England had found themselves in an exactly parallel situation, and Cutler tracked precisely the arguments made by his English high-flyer brethren.

After the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the accession of the Calvinist William and his consort Queen Mary, many members of the Anglican establishment refused to swear their allegiance, and these "nonjurors" formed what would today be termed the "reactionary" wing of

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> Timothy Cutler, "The Depth of Divine Thoughts and the Regards Due to Them" (New London, 1720), p. 21.

Anglicanism. The reinvigorated Calvinists took up the cry of their ancestors and condemned this group for its “popery”, which, countering the high-flyers’ now traditional emphasis on political and social hierarchy, they equated strongly with “slavery.” The high-flyers, meanwhile, began anew to bemoan the “anarchistic” implications of Calvinism. A typical and prominent example of the new high-church Jeremiah was one Henry Sacheverell, who preached a sermon in 1709 entitled, *The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church and State*. Adumbrating Cutler closely, Sacheverell based his argument on the duty of “absolute ... obedience,” which he saw as essential to the survival of both church and state. This position, like Cutler’s, was decidedly not the child of enlightenment rationalism, for the case was built expressly on a rejection of “whosoever presumes to ... explain the Great Credenda of Our Faith in New-fangl’d Terms of Modern Philosophy.” We can see in England in the decade preceding Cutler’s apostasy, then, the same battle being fought on the same grounds as later in the New World. Like Cutler, Sacheverell had equated order with obedience in both church and state, and tied the very survival of church and state to a hierarchical structure. For Sacheverell, as for Cutler, the problem was the “presumption” of trying to “explain” the Great Credenda, rather than obeying it. It is hardly surprising that his opponents responded by accusing him of espousing slavery and popery.

Viewing these parallel arguments on both sides of the Atlantic, one fought by an Englishman who never set foot in America and the other by a homespun Harvard divine, one can see the danger of drawing too bright a line between “English” and “American” religion, at least up to the 1720s. Rather, the categories of “Arminian” and “Puritan” seem to go some distance toward supplanting the categories of “American” and “English” in this dispute.<sup>65</sup>

By 1719, Cutler’s cry in Boston had been taken up by a layman named John Checkley, who had been arousing passionate opposition from such estimable Calvinists as Jonathan Dickenson and Cotton Mather’s nephew, Thomas Walter. By the mid-1720s, Checkley had alienated virtually the entire Calvinist population through a vituperative and

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<sup>65</sup> For a full discussion of Sacheverell in connection with Whig polemics and the brief Tory ascendancy, see Bonani, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, pp. 189-193.

sarcastic style that provoked equally nasty responses.<sup>66</sup> The climax of his career came in 1724, when his steady stream of Arminian writing, combined with his personal unpopularity to cause the Massachusetts government to bring him up on libel charges.<sup>67</sup>

Checkley, like Cutler, had been born in Massachusetts, but unlike Cutler he had been raised in an Episcopal family.<sup>68</sup> After a partial Oxford education, Checkley returned to Boston to take up his cherished lifelong role of thorn in the Congregationalist paw. His first work in that direction appeared between 1715 and 1720 under the worrisome title, "Choice Dialogues between a Godly Minister and an Honest Country-Man Concerning Election and Predestination, Detecting the False Principles of a Certain Man Who Calls Himself a Presbyter of the Church of England."<sup>69</sup> The main thrust of Checkley's tract was, as the title suggests, a frontal attack on predestination, but the tools used also suggest Checkley's future emphasis on church polity as the key to the problem. He roundly condemned predestination, but not primarily on the theological grounds of, for example, a belief in the power of free will or the power of sacraments. Rather, his reason was the one shared by Arminius, James, and Hooker -- predestination leads ultimately to antinomianism: "This... makes men careless," he wrote, "for why should they struggle when there is no remedy and their sentence is already passed, and that irrevocably?"<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Checkley had written the first article in James Franklin's *New England Courant*, August 7 August 15, 1721, p. 1, but by January of 1722, Franklin had distanced himself so far from Checkley that he denied in print that Checkley was even a subscriber, and accusations that Checkley had written for the *Courant* he disingenuously described as an "artifice" by the government to suppress the paper. January 15- January 22, 1722, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *New England Courant*, June 1-June 8, 1724, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> E.H. Gillett, ed., "The Speech of Mr. John Checkley Upon His Trial At Boston In 1724" (Morrisania, N.Y., 1868), p. i.

<sup>69</sup> John Checkley, *Choice Dialogues, etc.* (Boston: 1720). The extant copy of this document was published in 1720, as was the Congregationalist reply (see below); however, Gillett has the original publication date as 1715. "Speech of Mr. John Checkley," p. viii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Laud, he recalled, had foreseen the difficulty; “Holy Martyr Laud ... set himself to stop the infection... [and] we bless his memory.” The Massachusetts Calvinists, according to Checkley, despite protestations that they were not separatists, were nothing but dissenters from the true, original reformation of Henry as rescued by Laud.<sup>71</sup>

Such a missile required an immediate response, and one came from Walter, writing under the name “Zechariah Touchstone.” Walter, who had been a classmate of Checkley, began by quoting Descartes but ended in a series of relatively harmless insults bearing little on the issues.<sup>72</sup> Checkley could not refuse the opportunity to escalate, however, responding to the “dirty and envenomed sting” of his former friend by dismissing him as “an obscene and fuddling Merry-Andrew” and suggesting that Walter had written the “Little-Compton Scourge” after having drunk too much cider.<sup>73</sup> He closed by quoting what he claimed was a letter received from Walter: “Reverend Sir,” the purported letter read, “Do us the pleasure and yourself the honour to walk down to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s and you shall be finely entertained with a kick on the Arse....”<sup>74</sup>

Checkley’s next effort came on the heels of Cutler’s passing through town on the way to England for ordination to the priesthood. In the space

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Walter, *The Little-Compton Scourge: or, The Anti-Couran* (Boston, 1720). The title of this piece, the “Anti-Courant” is intriguing: Checkley had been associated with the *Courant*, which is the apparent source of the reference in the title, and of Walter’s reference to Checkley in the text as “Monsieur Courant” and “Mr. Couranto. “However, Walter’s broadside itself was printed by the *Courant’s* publisher, James Franklin, who two years later repudiated Checkley. In 1723, James Franklin himself would have a run-in with the official Massachusetts censors much like Checkley’s the following year, which would forever cause him to be discussed in the context of anticlericalism rather than Anglicanism Ibid., pp. 338-39. The split between Franklin and Checkley makes Miller’s discussion of Checkley as part of Franklin’s “goat-footed gang” difficult to understand. Ibid., p. 472. John F. Woolverton describes James Franklin’s publishing career as an “Episcopalian Junta,” which is similarly difficult to reconcile with Franklin’s publishing of Walter’s piece. *Colonial Anglicanism* p. 122. Perhaps the key lies in James Franklin’s choice of a pen name: Janus, the Greek figure who can look both ways at once.

<sup>73</sup> *The New England Courant*, August 21-August 28, 172 1, pp. 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

of a few weeks in 1723, Checkley fired both barrels in the direction of anti-episcopacy with his publication of "A Modest Proof of the Order and Government Settled by Christ and his Apostles in the Church," a slightly modified version of a work by P. Barclay,<sup>75</sup> which was followed by a reprint of a Scottish work entitled "A Short and Easy Method with the Deists."<sup>76</sup> To the "Modest Proof," the "publisher" attached a foreword which is clearly the work of Checkley himself; to the appendix, Checkley attached an 80-page addendum entitled "A Discourse Concerning Episcopacy." In both cases, there is no doubt that he had, like Cutler, taken aim on the twin targets of episcopacy and ordination.

"Whosoever justly sustains the character of a minister of the gospel of Christ," Checkley began his preface to the "Modest Proof," must have "besides his internal qualifications an external visible commission delivered to him by those who have power and authority to grant it."<sup>77</sup> In case anyone could have missed the import of this sledgehammer blow, he delivered another: "The ministers of the Church of England, who freely own that the power of ordination was first vested in the Apostles and from them through all ages since in a succession of bishops, from whence they derive their own ordinations, [are] to be acknowledged true ministers of the gospel."<sup>78</sup>

Checkley's opening paragraph not only asserted the necessity and allowability of bishops but expressly concluded that Calvinist ordination was worthless; in fact for Calvinists to call themselves ministers was "criminal presumption and insolence."<sup>79</sup> Clergy were not simply mouthpieces of scripture, or ministers to a society of faithful equals before God. Rather, "words and Sacraments" were to be "duly administered and dispensed" by persons "fully authorized for those holy offices," for "the Priest's lips are to preserve knowledge." There was, therefore, "no approaching before God's Altar without the appointed rites of

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<sup>75</sup> John Checkley, "A Modest Proof, etc." (Boston: Thos. Fleet, 1723).

<sup>76</sup> John Checkley, *A Short and Easy Method with the Deists, etc.* (Windsor, Vt., 1812).

<sup>77</sup> Checkley, *Modest Proof* p. i.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ii.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. ii-iii.

consecration.” This was in keeping with Christ’s prescription, who himself took on the role of “high priest.”<sup>80</sup>

Within these few paragraphs, Checkley extended his attack on predestination to the entire range of Calvinist ecclesiology: The clergy was “consecrated” for holy offices at the “altar,” and charged to “dispense” the sacraments. They could be set apart for this role only by those who were in the chain of the Apostolic Succession, namely bishops. They were, in the fullest sense, not “ministers” or “presbyters,” but “priests.” Behind these statements were the clearly discernable figures of Hooker, James and Laud. They presupposed a hierarchical and corporate structure, not radical individualism and equality. They sprang from a concept of salvation which was neither interior nor subjective, and they required neither reason nor assent, but obedience to authority.

A few weeks later, Checkley made these assumptions explicit. He looked even more specifically at the Episcopal office in his “Discourse Concerning Episcopacy.”<sup>81</sup> Beginning again with the premise that Apostolic succession is necessary, Checkley argued that there is no “parity” of ministers, and that church government, as a matter of authority, is both necessary and ordinary.<sup>82</sup> Growing ever more shrill, Checkley screamed that Calvinist ordinations “in opposition to Episcopacy, are not only invalid, but sacrilege and rebellion against Christ.... They are out of the visible church and have no right to any of the promises in the gospel.”<sup>83</sup> Rather, when the dissenters receive “what they call the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper in their congregations, they receive no sacraments nor are their children baptized any more than if a midwife had done it.”<sup>84</sup> Reaching full volume, Checkley finished: “The Apostles call themselves ambassadors of Christ.... And now every Rag, Tag, and Long-tail call themselves his

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. ii-iv.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Gillett, ed., *The Speech of Mr. John Checkley*, pp. x-xvi. Page citations given hereafter are to Gillett.

<sup>82</sup> Checkley, *Discourse Concerning Episcopacy*, Gillett, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



ambassadors too, by a call from the people. Good God, how has the priesthood been vilified of late!"<sup>85</sup>

These words required more response than a few relatively good-natured barbs about beards and philosophers, and they were not long in coming, ranging from thoughtfully moderated to the slinging of epithets like "little grup writer," "frightened numbskull," and "Mr. Clinker."<sup>86</sup> Checkley was undaunted: Dickenson's reply was a "misshapen production sprang from a disordered brain ... canting from his tub... If Jonathan can't pray better than he pleads... he has a great need of a common prayer book." If Foxcroft was milder, it was only because he was "superior to the others in the art of sophistry." As for Walter, "a scoundrel such as the paradox maker... [is] a compound of bombast and Billingsgate.... He should impose on such as can reason no better than himself."<sup>87</sup>

The opposition knew the thrust of Checkley's attack. Writing as "a son of Martin MarPrelate," a reference to a *nom-de-plume* from the so-called "Bishop's Wars," Walter objected to Checkley's insistence on calling the Calvinists "dissenters." He noted quite sensibly that the Congregationalist church structure had been established in Massachusetts by law, and in fact had never separated from the Church of England. Thus, he argued, the Arminians were the only "dissenters" he could see. Indeed, since what Checkley was urging was no different than popery, the Arminians were, in effect, dissenting from the entire reformation."<sup>88</sup>

The barrage reached its height in 1724, when Checkley was censured by the government for defamation. His speech in his own defense is a

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>86</sup> See, e.g., Jonathan Dickenson, *A Defense of Presbyterian Ordination* (Boston, 1724), p. iii; Thomas Foxcroft, *The Ruling and Ordaining Power of Congregational Bishops or Presbyters Defended* (Boston, 1724), p. 1; Thomas Walter, *An Essay Upon That Paradox, Infallibility May Sometimes Mistake, or a Reply to a Discourse Concerning Episcopacy, etc.* (Boston, 1724), pp. i, 26-27.

<sup>87</sup> John Checkley, *A Defense of a Book Lately Reprinted at Boston Entituled... A Modest Proof... With Some Strictures on J. Dickenson's Defense of Presbyterian Ordination, etc.* (Boston, 1724), postscript pp. 53-65; "Animadversions," pp. 1-9. Woolverton mysteriously refers to Checkley as a "prime example" of Anglican "Free Will, moral responsibility, and quiet reasonableness." *Colonial Anglicanism*, p. 185.

<sup>88</sup> Walter, *An Essay Upon That Paradox...* pp. i, 26-27.

remarkable piece, extending from Roman law to English Literature. In it, he gave a masterful summation of the Arminian world-view drawn against that of the Deists (and, by extension, the anti-prelatical Calvinists), and the most complete description of Checkley’s view of the Enlightenment. And in it, he left little doubt that his chief objection to Calvinism was political.<sup>89</sup>

As if speaking to refute those who thought Arminianism was the cutting edge of Enlightenment rationalism, Checkley started with an attack on Hobbes and Locke and their position as theoreticians of the Puritans: “These men,” he stated, “foolishly dream of an independent State of Nature.” This led them to the mistaken conclusion that “once upon a time (though they never yet could tell when) all Mankind were upon a level, and that there was no such thing as Government in the world.”<sup>90</sup> As “their oracle, Daniel Defoe” wrote, humans are “to be as free as nature first made Man, e’er the base laws of servitude began...”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, John Locke spoke of the “free vote of every individual,” an idea proved by the history of the “Athenian Rabble” to be nothing but anarchy.<sup>92</sup>

This original equality, according to Checkley, had never existed; the enlightenment was an insult to the “God of Order” who “actually instituted a particular form of government,... [and] did not create a number of people all at once, without order and Government, and then leave them to scramble for Property and Dominion.” Even certain approved Congregationalist texts showed that obedience and order, not reason, and especially not reason as used by the Enlightenment, was the

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<sup>89</sup> Gillett, ed., *Speech of Mr. John Checkley* pp. 10-2 1; the speech was first printed in London several years later and was therefore doubtless edited for publication; all the more so is it the fullest reflection of Checkley’s position.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; Checkley is quoting Defoe’s *Veteran Mercenary*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12; At this point, probably about a half-hour into the speech, the text contains a weary complaint from the bench that the judges did not want to hear Greek and Roman history, only to be swamped by a rejoinder replete with references to Coke and Magna Carta.

way to implement the true church government, Rather than reason, Checkley was concerned with "property and dominion."<sup>93</sup>

Checkley was no Enlightenment rationalist, then, at least when it came down to church structure. And for him, as for Cutler, ecclesiology, and specifically the role of priests and bishops, is exactly what it came down to. Predestination led to irresponsibility, and Calvinism, when it rejected priests and bishops, rejected the most important means of social control, giving full head to that moral irresponsibility. The ensuing anarchy threatened not only the church, but also the state -- society itself. It would have done little or no good to point out that the Massachusetts Puritans were among the most order-loving people anywhere. It was the potential that counted.

The trial was the high point in Checkley's career in the spotlight. He was convicted and required to pay a fine of fifty pounds (ironically, perhaps, to the king).<sup>94</sup> But he never went away. He went to England twice after his trial and sought Anglican Ordination, but the Anglicans had little more use for such an unpleasant personality than did the Calvinists; he was denied twice. Finally, he was ordained in his third attempt, in 1738 at the age of fifty-eight. The SPG sent him, appropriately enough, to the original home of the antinomianists, Providence, where he preached Arminianism continuously until his death in 1754.<sup>95</sup>

Two of Cutler's Arminian compatriots in the Yale Apostasy, Johnson and Wetmore, continued the fight in Connecticut and Long Island, respectively, and continued to draw fire from such as Jonathan Dickenson; three returned to the Calvinist fold.<sup>96</sup> Cutler himself remained in Boston

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.*, p. 853.

<sup>96</sup> See, e.g., James Wetmore, *A Letter From a Minister of the Church of England to His Dissenting Parishioners* (New York, 1730); Jonathan Dickenson, *A Sermon Preached at Newark, Entitled The Vanity of Human Institutions in the Worship of God* (New York, 1736); *A Defense of a Sermon Preached at Newark, June 2, 1736, Entitled The Vanity of Human Institutions in the Worship of God* (New York: Zenger, 1737). For Johnson's famous career, see Gerardi "Samuel Johnson and the Yale 'Apostasy.'"

as pastor of Christ Church from 1723 until his death in 1764, remaining constantly as a highly vocal and visible representative of the High Church. Among his continual assaults were objections to the right to hold synods and attempts to gain Episcopalian seats on the board of Harvard Overseers.<sup>97</sup> Predictably, when the Great Awakening swept through Boston, he joined the Calvinist “Old Lights” in condemning revivalism, not so much because revivals were nonrational, but because they were disorderly: “It would be an endless attempt to describe the scene of confusion and disturbance,” he wrote, “the divisions of families, neighbourhoods and towns; the contrariety of husbands and wives; the undutifulness of children and servants.....”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the continuing controversy, repeated attempts to create a North American Bishop were frustrated, first (according to the SPG) by an oxymoronically named “dissenting majority” in Parliament. But after 1776, the problem was one that any Arminian from James I on could have appreciated: No one could be raised to Episcopal office who did not take an oath of allegiance to the king, which, of course, no one in the former colonies was willing to do. Not until 1784 was Samuel Seabury consecrated Bishop of North America, and then only by non-juring Scottish bishops.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the fact that neither of them lived to see a bishop in Boston, Cutler and Checkley changed the face of Massachusetts’ religion forever. High-Church Anglicanism would never again be a religious or political force in America; fifty years later, the Church of England would still represent one of the primary royalist forces in America, remaining more than any other group steadfastly loyal to the king. The real revolution, to them, had begun with Calvin. Against him they had appealed to the “God of Order,” and in 1776 they could look nowhere else.

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<sup>97</sup> Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, p. 129.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Gaustad, *Great Awakening in New England*, p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.*, pp., 743-750.