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## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE PURITAN CONFESSIONS

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From the Marxism of Christopher Hill to the Anglicanism of J. I. Packer, puritan studies have been the victim of confessional bias. Since the rediscovery of the puritan literary corpus in the mid-twentieth century, historical and theological scholars have regularly culled source documents for confirmation of their own theological predispositions.<sup>1</sup> In this struggle between objectivity and appropriation, perceptions of puritan eschatology have become a critical focus of discussion – especially in the rush to own the *gravitas* conferred by the most influential of the puritan credal statements, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). In his study of puritan eschatology, Bryan W. Ball noted that the reference to the *parousia* of Jesus Christ in this ‘ultimate official pronouncement of Puritan dogma’ indicates ‘the measure of its respectability’ in seventeenth-century orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> But others have sought to go beyond this, and, in a series of competing claims, historical theologians from backgrounds as diverse as Calvinism and Seventh-day Adventism have attempted to articulate the meaning of WCF 33:1-3. R. G. Clouse, arguing that the confession is ‘clearly’ amillennial, found ‘no suggestion of a period of latter-day glory or of a millennium connected with the conversion of the Jews’.<sup>3</sup> LeRoy Froom has viewed the confession as ‘the strongest premillennialist symbol of Protestantism’.<sup>4</sup> James de Jong has argued that ‘Westminster’s formulation must be seen as a deliberate choice of mild, unsystemized,

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<sup>1</sup> John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 5-15.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> R.G. Clouse, ‘The Rebirth of Millenarianism’, in Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, The Millennium, and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> L.E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, 1948), ii.553.

postmillennial expectations.<sup>5</sup> As this debate illustrates, in spite of all that has been written about puritan eschatology – and the literature is, by now, extensive – it is still a subject fogged by obscurity.<sup>6</sup>

In part this confusion is due to the often a-historical nature of theological discussions of ‘the Puritan movement’ and the confessions it produced. Popular-level evangelicalism often presents the movement as homogeneous, assuming an essential identity, for example, in ‘the puritan view’ of family, work, church, or state. Packer thus eulogizes ‘God’s giants’:

The Puritans ... were great souls serving a great God. In them clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal-orientated and methodical, they were great believers, great hoppers, great doers, and great sufferers.<sup>7</sup>

But of which puritans is he speaking? One is tempted to imagine that Packer, like so many other writers on puritan themes, has cast his subjects in his own image.

As the debate about the meaning of the term ‘puritan’ suggests, therefore, there is little scholarly consensus in understanding what the movement actually was. It is difficult to be more specific than to suggest that the movement represented a broad spectrum of protestant ecclesiastical discontent and a call for further reformation over a wide range of issues in the early modern period.<sup>8</sup> It would be surprising indeed if such a broad movement produced any substantial degree of ideological concurrence.

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<sup>5</sup> James de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions* (Kampen, 1970), p. 38, n. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Along with texts cited in previous footnotes, important studies of puritan eschatology include William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-60* (London, 1969) and Richard Baxter and the Millennium: *Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution* (London, 1979); B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth Century Millenarianism* (London, 1972); Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978); Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford, 1979). The most recent studies include Barry Howson, ‘Eschatology in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 70 (1998), 325-50, and Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology, 1550-1682* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> J. I. Packer, *Among God’s Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Eastbourne, 1991), p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), pp. 15-16.

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At a more scholarly level, conservative theologians perpetuate a milder form of the same kind of a-historical analysis when they cite the Westminster Confession as a document charged with transcendent meaning, the first port of call in the storm of theological debate. Their approach often shows little sense of the context out of which the Confession emerged or the fact that it was deliberately designed as a generally acceptable compromise between parties convinced of various – and often mutually incompatible – systems. The documents of the Westminster Assembly could never have been dispassionate attempts to delineate objective truth when the disproportionate influence of the Scottish Commissioners' theology was more than partly due to the English Parliament's need to win the support of their Presbyterian army.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps to signal their temporizing ambitions, the divines themselves disclaimed any notion of credal finality (WCF 31:4) and were reluctant to provide their conclusions with scriptural proofs when the English Parliament insisted that they should.<sup>10</sup> Many modern readings of the Confession, however, overlook these historical complexities. This lack of historical sensitivity and anachronistic application of contemporary intellectual paradigms cannot fail to be misleading.<sup>11</sup> The disagreement between Clouse, Froom and de Jong is symptomatic of a wider and contemporary problem.

As a consequence, although their insights are often powerful and compelling, the interpretative frameworks in which Clouse, Froom and de Jong operate cripple the validity of their conclusions. Each of these scholars misrepresents the confession's eschatology because they each underestimate the extent to which puritan readings of Revelation defy and transcend the contemporary concepts of pre-, post- or amillennialism. These three positions, largely constructed by more recent eschatological enquiry, cannot be used as a heuristic tool to explicate puritan texts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (Edinburgh, 1985), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (1985), p. 518.

<sup>11</sup> Aspects of this problem have also been manifest in the recent debate about the proper interpretation of the 'six days' of creation among conservative Presbyterians in the USA. For responses to this context, see Robert Letham, "'In the space of six days': The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly", *WTJ* 61 (1999), pp. 149-74, and William S. Barker, 'The Westminster Assembly on the Days of Creation: A Reply to David W. Hall', *WTJ* 62 (2000), pp. 113-20.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'eschatology' itself is a nineteenth-century invention. Alan E. Lewis, 'Eschatology', in Donald M. McKim (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 122-4.

Their inutility is registered by the fact that their most basic presupposition – that Revelation 20:1-7 refers to only one period of a thousand years – was not shared by every puritan who wrote on the passage. Thomas Brightman, one of the most influential of the puritan expositors of Revelation, argued instead that the thousand years of Satan's captivity (Rev. 20:2-3) and the thousand years of the reign of the saints (Rev. 20:4-6) referred to two historically distinct but contiguous periods of time stretching from the years 300 to 1300, and 1300 to 2300, respectively.<sup>13</sup> A-, pre- and postmillennial paradigms, however useful they may be for current debate, ought to be abandoned as keys to explaining the puritan apocalypse. Puritan eschatology is much less precise, much more ambiguous, than contemporary terminology allows.

This revision of methodology and terminology, however, calls also for a revision of privileged texts. The variety of puritan readings of eschatology requires a new canon of source documents to balance the individualistic focus promoted by previous scholarship in this area. Ideas of puritan eschatology have too often been extrapolated from the writings of theologians deemed representative by modern historians, while the type of puritan deemed representative has largely been determined by the (often unconscious) presuppositions which historians bring to the text (and consequently leave undefined).<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically, and perhaps in an earnest attempt to avoid the difficulties of the Clouse–Froom–de Jong debate, studies of puritanism often ignore the documents which were self-consciously created as defining the acceptable boundaries of the movement's constituent subgroups – the jointly-prepared, deliberately debated statements of denominational faith. It is at this point that the system of compromise upon which the confessions were founded becomes their most useful asset. When properly historicized, the puritan confessions are seen to express the negotiated centres of the movement as a whole.

Thus historians are well placed to study the puritan confessions. There is plenty of material; the very existence of the movement depended upon their careful articulation of the distinctives that made up their ecclesiastical manifesto. The publication of their conclusions, often supplied with detailed biblical proofs, acted as an invitation to contrast and compare each text with those other documents published with the same purpose, and

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<sup>13</sup> Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), pp. 42-3.

<sup>14</sup> Note the reception given to Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh, 1971). Murray's excellent study is often cited by conservative postmillennialists to support the notion that 'the puritans' were postmillennialists.

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called upon the reader to realign their denominational loyalties in accordance with the results of this enquiry.

Of course, there are distinct advantages, as well as limitations, in this 'survey of confessions' approach. Perhaps the most major difficulty is, paradoxically, that it underplays the importance of eschatology. The puritan end-of-the-worldview encompassed themes as diverse as epistemology, church government, foreign policy, and individual piety. In the confessions, eschatology is reduced to a two-dimensional subject of academic enquiry.

Nevertheless, the study of the confessions does illustrate the extent to which an interest in eschatology was not the monopoly of the poor and dispossessed. Instead, it was part of the essential cultural and ecclesiastical capital of the age, invested in the very fabric of the reform the movement was demanding. The publication of puritan creeds, doctrinal articles and confessions of faith offers an unparalleled opportunity to position the constituent groupings of the movement as collective entities in terms which their members would themselves recognize as authentic. It is surprising, therefore, that despite all the secondary literature in the area, the eschatology of the puritan confessions has never been examined. This article offers a contribution to that end.

The continuing debate about 'Calvin and the Calvinists' is pushing the acceptable boundaries of puritan studies deep into the sixteenth century.<sup>15</sup> A number of recent studies have located the origins of seventeenth-century debates in a reformation context. But this movement of relocating crucial centres of discussion has not been balanced across the theological loci. While perceived discontinuities in soteriology continue to generate scholarly discussion across the chronological contexts, secondary treatments of early reformation eschatology are less numerous than those concentrating on its seventeenth-century variant.

Curiously, contemporary lack of interest in the subject is almost inversely proportional to the appeal it exercised in the sixteenth century. Those studies of Luther and Calvin which have been undertaken have illustrated the extent to which 'the Reformation was spawned in and

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<sup>15</sup> For representative positions in the 'Calvin and the Calvinists' debate see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1981), and Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh, 1982). More recent assessments can be found in Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Formation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 6, 64; and Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark, 'Introduction', in Trueman and Clark (eds), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, 1999), pp. xiii-xix.

nurtured by an atmosphere of intense hopes and fears about impending universal upheaval, disaster, transformation, judgement, and the end of the world'.<sup>16</sup> Varieties of eschatology – at both popular and scholarly levels – were therefore both a cause and a consequence of the factors driving reformation. The lingering medieval worldview attached transcendental importance to the appearance of Halley's comet in 1531;<sup>17</sup> descriptions of the new world were often couched in the language of eschatological hope, such as the anti-Islamic millenarianism of Christopher Columbus;<sup>18</sup> and reformation rhetoric developed metaphors already employed to describe the cosmic battle of good against evil.

Despite this medieval impulse, the eschatology of the reformation movement also developed in startling discontinuity with the past. This is the most obvious factor about the reformation's credal statements on eschatology. Given the confusion of the Clouse-Froom-de Jong debate, it is rather ironic that one of the most important areas in the reformation's intellectual advance was its simplification of eschatology. Under the influence of Augustine, medieval Catholicism had abandoned the chiliasm of the Church Fathers and, in course of time, implicitly challenged the definition of eschatology as a discussion of the 'four last things' by developing an elaborate complex of spiritual destinations alongside the more traditional termini of death, judgement, heaven and hell.<sup>19</sup> With historic Christendom, it argued that those who died in the guilt of mortal sin were damned. With more novelty, it contended that those whose guilt was merely venial were instead ushered into purgatory, where their souls

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<sup>16</sup> Robin B. Barnes, 'Apocalypticism', in Hans J. Hillerbrand (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation* (Oxford, 1996), iii.63; H. Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (London, 1955); T. F. Torrance, 'The Eschatology of the Reformation', *Eschatology: Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* 2 (1953), 36-62. For a recent study of reformation eschatology, as well as an up-to-date bibliography, see Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Robin B. Barnes, 'Apocalypticism', in Hans J. Hillerbrand (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1996), iii.65.

<sup>18</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus* (Oxford, 1991), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Scanlon, 'Eschatology', in Allan D. Fitzgerald (gen. ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 316-18; Brian E. Daley, 'Chiliasm', in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1997), i.238-41; B.E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: Eschatology in the Patristic Age* (Cambridge, 1991).

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were cleansed in preparation for the beatific vision. There were various minor modifications to this scheme. In the Old Testament dispensation, for example, the souls of believers who died without guilt could not enter directly into glory. Before the death of Christ, both those who died without guilt and those who had passed through the purification of purgatory waited in *limbus patrum* for Christ's 'harrowing of hell' and his 'leading captivity captive'. Although *limbus patrum* was now empty, the Church continued to posit a third – and eternal – destination alongside heaven and hell. This *limbus infantum* held the souls of un-baptized children and others who died in the state of original sin but without grievous personal guilt. There they remained eternally, in perfect natural happiness, but without ever enjoying the beatific vision.<sup>20</sup> With the reformation, however, protestants began to abandon these accretions to the biblical faith.

In this as in many other areas of reformation debate, protestant leaders developed their thinking in response to both the monolithic hostility of Roman Catholicism and the frenetic instability of the Anabaptists. As the reform movement progressed across Europe, a series of protestant confessions reiterated the ban on millenarianism first imposed by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD – and consequently indicated the continuing appeal such ideas possessed.<sup>21</sup> The takeover of Münster by millenarian Anabaptists in 1534 and 1535 graphically illustrated the social and political dangers of unfettered apocalypticism.<sup>22</sup> A series of charismatic preachers introduced compulsory (re-)baptism, the burning of books, and polygamy. Protestant leaders reacted so vigorously to the danger of radical millenarianism that, for a time, it seemed to many Catholic scholars, a rejection of the canonicity of Revelation seemed to hallmark the reformation movement.<sup>23</sup> Zwingli denied that John's visions were in any way canonical; Luther's initial hostility to their contents was only slowly overcome.<sup>24</sup> But as reformers developed their readings of Scripture and

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<sup>20</sup> P. J. Toner, 'Limbo', in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1910; rpr. New York, 1913), ix.256-9; 'limbo', in Richard P. McBrien, *The HarperCollins Encyclopaedia of Catholicism* (New York, 1995), p. 771.

<sup>21</sup> The classic study of medieval millenarian movements is still Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957; rpr. London, 1962).

<sup>22</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957; rpr. 1962), pp. 278-306. Cf. Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Irena Backus, 'The Church Fathers and the Canonicity of the Apocalypse in the Sixteenth Century: Erasmus, Frans Titelmans, and Theodore Beza', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998), p. 662.

<sup>24</sup> Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain* (1979), p. 9.



providence, the rhetorical possibilities which apocalyptic tropes afforded seemed to eclipse the initial hesitancy about how best to read – or even whether to read – Revelation. William Perkins was perhaps unique among British expositors in defending the canonicity of Revelation in a preface to his *Godly and Learned Exposition of the three first Chapters in the Revelation* (1595), an eschatologically driven jeremiad over the Laodicean state of English Christianity.<sup>25</sup> His defence illustrated the compelling utility of biblical apocalyptic in the campaign to promote the puritan cause. Why should reformers ignore biblical apocalyptic when it so clearly described England's 'signs of the times' and the fall of an influential religious empire based in a city with seven hills?

This revival of interest in biblical eschatology was also accompanied by a growing enthusiasm for the apocalyptic teaching of various non-canonical sources. Not all puritans shared these esoteric interests; and the fears of those who did not suggest the interests of those who did. Readers of Thomas Hayne's *Christs Kingdom on Earth* (1645) were warned off the 'senseless' teaching of 'Rabbi Elias', who argued that the world would last only for six thousand years.<sup>26</sup> Others, like Thomas Hall in *A Confutation of the Millenarian Opinion* (1657), exposed the excessive credulity of some towards the eschatologies of Jewish Targums and Talmuds, Sibylline Oracles, the Koran, and astronomy.<sup>27</sup> Perkins' *A Fruitfull Dialogue Concerning the Ende of the World* (1587) imagined a discussion in which the credulous Worldling sources 'olde prophecies of this yeare found in olde stone walls' and other 'Anabaptisticall revelations' in support of his apocalyptic fears.<sup>28</sup> The very fact that Perkins felt the need to refute these kinds of arguments demonstrates something of the impact he felt they were having among his contemporaries.

Such sources enjoyed an international respectability. While lists of English publications from the 1650s demonstrate the popularity of texts attributed to Nostradamus, the Scottish expositor John Napier – now better known for the system of logarithms his millenarian exegesis developed – included the Sybilline oracles in the appendix of *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation* (1593). His writings exercised some influence in the

<sup>25</sup> William Perkins, *Works* (1616-8), iii.207-8.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hayne, *Christs Kingdom on Earth* (1645), pp. 61-2. For Elias, see Saul Leeman, 'Was Bishop Ussher's Chronology influenced by a Midrash?', *Semeia* 8 (1977), 127-30.

<sup>27</sup> A. R. Dallison, 'Contemporary Criticism of Millenarianism', in Toon (ed.), *Puritans, The Millennium, and the Future of Israel* (1970), p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Perkins, *Works* (1616-18), iii.467.

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French Reformed Church, which would itself debate millenarianism throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, as a German delegate to the Synod of Dort, Johann Heinrich Alsted's Reformed credentials were never in doubt; but he managed to combine his millenarian enthusiasms with a fascination for the occult, while repeated citations of his work illustrate the pervasive influence he exercised on the development of puritan eschatology within the three kingdoms.<sup>30</sup>

Against the complexities of these trends, the puritan confessions of faith evidence the movement's eschatology at its most guarded, operating most closely within the controls of Scripture. However popular religion developed at ground level or in the scholar's attic, it was vital for the movement's leaders to express their doctrines in terms buttressed by careful (if not convincing) biblical exegesis. In a study of their reception of biblical apocalyptic texts, the puritan confessions offer an unparalleled insight into a complex exegetical tradition.

But, as we have noted, the study of puritan eschatology co-exists ambiguously with the findings of the 'Calvin and the Calvinists' debate on the broader plane of intellectual history. Richard Muller has comprehensively answered R. T. Kendall's allegation that a basic discontinuity should be posited between the soteriology of Calvin and the Calvinists, largely by deconstructing the implied dichotomy.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the charge of discontinuity can be brought against the eschatology of Calvin and the 'Calvinists'. Eschatology was one of the few theological loci where such divergence was tolerated in early modern Reformed dogmatics. Nevertheless, as official statements, the puritan confessions illustrate the extent to which protestants in the three kingdoms proved reluctant to move beyond Calvin's caution. Louis Berkhof has claimed that amillennialism 'is the only view that is either expressed or implied in the great historical Confessions of the Church, and has always been the prevalent view in Reformed circles'.<sup>32</sup> Qualifying his a-historical terminology, we can nevertheless test his assertion. To the extent that puritanism's official formulae diverge from a nervous reluctance even to consider the meaning of Revelation 20:1-7 or the existence of a distinctive

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<sup>29</sup> Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650: Urban Society, Religion and Politics on the French Atlantic Frontier* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 131, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted, 1588-1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Oxford, 2000), *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 11-17.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1939; rpr. Edinburgh, 1958), p. 708.

future period of blessing, we can posit a discrepancy between the reformation and its seventeenth-century descendants, between Calvin and the Calvinists.

#### THE SCOTS CONFESSION (1560)<sup>33</sup>

The first of the British puritans were acutely aware of their debt to Calvin. Fleeing from the persecution of Mary in the 1550s, Geneva offered the tired refugees a haven of both physical reprieve and theological stimulation. With British refugees in other safe cities across the Continent, the Genevan exiles developed a distinctive worldview, which they advanced through the publication of a wide variety of texts – from historical studies to biblical commentaries and drama. Their potential for radicalism was nevertheless tempered by the conservatism of the protestant authorities who had given them shelter. The exiles' development of resistance theory and revolutionary apocalyptic was governed by conclusions like those reached by the Augsburg Confession (1530), drafted by Calvin's friend Melancthon and published with the approval of Luther. It had explicitly condemned those 'Anabaptists' who 'scatter Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdoms of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed'.<sup>34</sup> The exigencies of their situation meant that even with all their interest in apocalyptic, the exiles never turned to millenarianism.<sup>35</sup>

In part this is surprising. Before his participation in the exile, John Knox had already demonstrated an interest in radical eschatology. His first sermon had exegeted the apocalyptic historiography of Daniel 7:24-25, charging history with providential meaning.<sup>36</sup> His concerns paralleled the exiles' starkly apocalyptic literary project, intended, apparently, to combat native apathy by disseminating pro-puritan propaganda in belligerently apocalyptic tropes.<sup>37</sup> In *The Image of Both Churches* (1547), John Bale had

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<sup>33</sup> A Latin text of the Scots Confession can be found in Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (London, 1877), pp. 437-79.

<sup>34</sup> Schaff (ed.), *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse* (2000), *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> Geddes MacGregor, *The Thundering Scot: A Portrait of John Knox* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Jane E. A. Dawson, 'The Apocalyptic Thinking of the Marian Exiles', in Michael Wilks (ed.), *Prophecy and Eschatology: Studies in Church History, Subsidia 10* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 75-91. Idem, 'Trumpeting Resistance: Christopher Goodman and John Knox', in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *John*

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exegeted Revelation to find a history of the true church of God in constant warfare with the 'devil's chapel'. Ten years later, in 1557, the apocalyptic momentum had visibly increased: John Olde authored a *Short Description of Antichrist*, Bartholomew Traheron published his lectures on Revelation 4, and Robert Pownall's *Admonition to the Towne of Callys* warned the English outpost of impending divine judgement. The preface to the first edition of the Geneva Bible (1560) described the exiles as a remnant that 'love the comming of Christ Jesus our Lord'.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, when Knox, together with other leaders of the Scottish Reformation, came to agree upon a statement of their common doctrine, the apocalyptic themes which elsewhere dominated his thinking were clearly underplayed. The Scots Confession, adopted by the Scottish Parliament on 17 August 1560 as 'hailsome and sound doctrine groundit vponne the infallibill trewth of Godis word', seems, at first glance, to continue Calvin's apparent neglect of apocalyptic.<sup>39</sup> Knox, after all, wrote not as a 'speculative theologian which desires to give you courage, but even your Brother in affliction'.<sup>40</sup> The confession reflects this pastoral concern.

Thus the articles of the confession follow the redemptive-historical chronology outlined in Scripture, and expound the work of Christ as the teleology of creation and redemption before moving on to the work of the Spirit, the Christian life, and the sacraments. Eschatological interests are limited to the ninth article, 'Of the Ascension', which deals with Christ's session, present glory, and coming judgement:

To the Execution [of judgement] we certainlie beleve, that the same our Lord JESUS sall visiblie returne, as that hee was sene to ascend. And then we firmly beleve, that the time of refreshing and restituioun of all things sall cum, in samekle that thir, that fra the beginning have suffered violence, injurie, and wrang, for richteousness sake, sal inherit that blessed immortalitie promised fra the beginning.

There follows an application of the doctrine:

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*Knox and the British Reformations*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 131-53.

<sup>38</sup> The Geneva Bible (1560), sig. iiiv.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in G. D. Henderson (ed.), *Scots Confession, 1560* (Edinburgh, 1937), p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> John Knox, *Works* (ed. David Laing, Edinburgh, 1846-64), iii.10.

The remembrance of quhilk day, and of the Judgement to be executed in the same, is not onelie to us ane brydle, whereby our carnal lustes are refrained, bot alsua sik inestimable comfort, that neither may the threatning of worldly Princes, nether zit [yet] the feare of temporal death and present danger, move us to renounce and forsake that blessed societie, quhilk we the members have with our Head and onelie Mediator CHRIST JESUS<sup>41</sup>

Despite Knox's fearsome reputation, the eschatology of the Scots Confession was a recipe for the martyrs' endurance, not a programme for a revolution of the saints.

We should thus be careful of descriptions of Knox's eschatology. From his first sermon, he himself seems to have preferred the apocalyptic mode, which influences even his *History of the Reformation* (1586).<sup>42</sup> But there is no evidence of millenarianism. Quite the opposite appears to be the case. As part of the pan-Calvinist international, the Scottish Reformed Church was also to adopt the second Helvetic Confession in 1566 alongside the Reformed churches of Hungary, Poland and Geneva. The importance of this document is that it was deeply hostile to the type of millenarian extremism displayed at Münster, roundly condemning the 'Jewish dreams, that before the Day of Judgment there shall be a golden world in the earth; and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot'.<sup>43</sup> The eschatology of the Scots Confession – by contrast rather muted, even in the heresies it condemns – illustrates the extent to which sixteenth-century denunciations of millenarianism were necessary only on the Continent. Knox did not need to follow Calvin that far.

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<sup>41</sup> Schaff (ed.), *Creeeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), pp. 449-50; Henderson (ed.), *Scots Confession, 1560* (1937), pp. 57-9.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Edington, 'John Knox and the Castileans: A Crucible of Reforming Opinion?', in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, 1998), p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Hall (ed.), *Harmony of the Protestant Confessions* (1842), p. 88. 'Damnamus præterea Judaica somnia, quod ante judicii diem aureum in terries sit futurum seculum, et pii regna mundi occupaturi, oppressis suis hostibus impiis', Schaff (ed.), *Creeeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), p. 257.

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE PURITAN CONFESSIONS

### THE IRISH ARTICLES (1615)<sup>44</sup>

As their situation developed, and Antichrist's influence was recognized within the ritualism still being tolerated in the established churches, English and Irish puritans could not but be dissatisfied with the limitations of their state-church's creed. Their stripped-down Thirty-nine Articles (1562) seemed to pale in comparison with models like the Scots Confession. But there was little momentum for change. The hotter sort of Elizabethan protestants produced the Lambeth Articles (1595) as a manifesto of their hopes, but in 1604 James refused to include them as part of the foundational documents of the Church of England.<sup>45</sup>

Although the Lambeth Articles were unsuccessful in influencing the official structures of the Church of England, they did gain credal status in Ireland, where the Irish church's convocation included them in its Irish Articles (1615). These comprehensive statements – 104 in comparison to the English articles' 39 – were the position paper of a church which was struggling to balance acceptability to refugee nonconformists with loyalty to the English establishment. Their commitment to Calvinistic soteriology, witnessing the beginnings of covenant theology, together with their refusal to outline any system of *jure divino* church government, created a broad church structure attractive to the puritan ministers expelled from the churches of England and Scotland. As the articles demonstrate, the protestant community of early modern Ireland was not slow to adapt pragmatically the contours of existing reformed thought. Existing as a tiny minority in a land dominated by traditional loyalties to Rome, though nevertheless organising themselves as a state church and enjoying governmental support, the Irish Reformed were compelled to negotiate with their inheritance as they attempted to bring protestant thought to bear on their very different situation.<sup>46</sup> They were influenced by both Geneva and Canterbury. Composed under the shadow of the Thirty-nine Articles, the Irish Articles' silences are almost as illuminating as its explicit statements. Exercising profound influence throughout the course of the seventeenth century, the Irish Articles' contouring of protestant orthodoxy would provide a basic pattern for subsequent puritan confessions to follow.

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<sup>44</sup> A text of the Irish Articles can be found in Schaff (ed.), *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), pp. 526-44.

<sup>45</sup> A text of the Lambeth Articles can be found in Schaff (ed.), *Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), pp. 523-5.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590-1641* (Dublin, 1997), *passim*.

The composition of the articles was dominated by the leading theologian of the Irish church – the future archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656).<sup>47</sup> Like Knox, Ussher was fascinated by history, chronology and eschatology. In his DD oration at Trinity College Dublin in 1613, he chose as his subjects the ‘seventy weeks’ of Daniel 9, a passage whose eschato-chronological importance was unsurpassed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as the disputed Revelation 20.<sup>48</sup> In the same year, in his first published text, *Gravissimae Quaestiones de Christianarum Ecclesiarum Successione et Statu* (1613), Ussher had cautiously suggested the possibility of a second millennium, ‘de nova ligatione Satanæ per Evangelii restaurationem sub medium secundi millenarii ... fieri coepta’.<sup>49</sup> With changing circumstances at court making the articulation of radical ideas imprudent, Ussher never published that part of his history which its contents pages promised most controversial.

Instead, in composing the articles, Ussher remained on safe ground, with standard Reformed teaching on individual eschatology. Judgement is taken in under the work of Christ, where ‘he will return to judge all men at the last day’ (IA 30):

101. After this life is ended, the souls of God’s children be presently received into heaven, there to enjoy unspeakable comforts; the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, there to endure endless torments.

103. At the end of this world, the Lord Jesus shall come in the clouds with the glory of his Father: at which time, by the almighty power of God, the living shall be changed, and the dead shall be raised; and all shall appear both in body and soul before his judgment-seat, to receive according to that which they have done in their bodies, whether good or evil.

104. When the last judgment is finished, Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to his Father, and God shall be all in all.

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<sup>47</sup> On Ussher, see R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff, 1967); Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth-Century Essays* (London, 1987), pp. 120-64. On Ussher and the Irish Articles, see Amanda L. Capern, ‘The Caroline Church: James Ussher and the Irish Dimension’, *Historical Journal* 39 (1996), 57-85.

<sup>48</sup> James Ussher, *The Whole Works of James Ussher* (ed. C. R. Erlington and J. R. Todd, Dublin, 1847-64), i.33, 321; cf. xv.108.

<sup>49</sup> Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), pp. 84-91; Ussher, *Works* (1847-64), ii, xi.

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE PURITAN CONFESSIONS

In general eschatology the articles offered the standard condemnation of Roman Catholicism:

102. The doctrine of the Church of Rome concerning limbus patrum, limbus puerorum, purgatory, prayer for the dead, pardons, adorations of images and relics, and also invocations of saints, is vainly invented without all warrant of holy scripture, yea, and is contrary to the same.

The inclusion of this article illustrated the dangers facing the tiny remnant of Ireland's protestants, and understates the extent to which Ussher's life of study was grounded upon his enduring antipathy to Roman Catholicism: 'Rome (whose faith was once renowned throughout all the world) [had] become "Babylon the mother of whoredoms and abominations of the earth".' Indeed, his reading of Revelation convinced him that her further reformation was impossible: 'Rome is not to cease from being Babylon, till her last destruction shall come upon her; and that unto her last gasp she is to continue in her spiritual fornications, alluring all nations unto her superstition and idolatry.'<sup>50</sup> It was perhaps this radicalism which underlay the most important credal innovation in the Irish Articles – their insistence that the Pope was the 'man of sin, foretold in the holy scriptures, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and abolish with the brightness of his coming' (IA 80). For the first time, the protestant conviction that the Pope was Antichrist had gained credal status.

This identification, however, did not gain universal approval. It would be debated at the Synod of Dort (1618-19), where Ussher's friend and correspondent Samuel Ward was one of the British delegation, which argued in favour of the Pope being described as 'an antichrist' rather than as 'the antichrist'.<sup>51</sup> Ussher himself would later lament his foregrounding of the Antichrist trope. By the mid-seventeenth century, he had cause to complain that nothing was 'so familiar now a days, as to father upon Antichrist, whatsoever in church matters we do not find to suite with our own humours'.<sup>52</sup> But Ussher perhaps never realized the extent to which the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1640s had been created by the Calvinistic and apocalyptic theology harnessed by his own Irish Articles.

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<sup>50</sup> Ussher, *Works* (1847-64), xii.542-3.

<sup>51</sup> M.W. Dewar, 'The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort: Assembling and Assembled; Returning and Returned', *IBS* 13 (1991), p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Ussher, *Works* (1847-64), vii.45.



THE FIRST LONDON CONFESSION (1644)<sup>53</sup>

Ussher's reluctance to commit himself publicly to an innovative eschatology was necessarily prudent given the changing climate of the Stuart court. James VI, who had published a commentary on Revelation 20 in 1588, turned from his ebullient Presbyterianism after his removal to the English throne in 1603.<sup>54</sup> With the support of his prelates, he pursued policies advancing the uniformity of the churches throughout the three kingdoms – a policy which seemed to justify his burning of two millenarian Anabaptists in 1612.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the period of Laud's supremacy, from his appointment as Bishop of London in 1628 to his imprisonment in 1641, Baptist groups remained largely underground. After the recalling of the Long Parliament in 1640, however, radical groups could once more raise their heads. The Long Parliament unleashed its programme of deliberate apocalyptic provocation, publishing translations of Joseph Mede and Thomas Brightman, as well as new editions of John Foxe, John Cotton, and other writers banned under the Laudian regime. With the older models of the reformation's Augustinian apocalyptic being thus increasingly challenged, the staple elements of the older Marian exile ideology broke down completely in the free market of ideas created by the collapse of state censorship in the 1640s. As the three kingdoms entered the vortex of revolution, the Augustinian theology and Constantinian church-state settlement hanging over from the reformation were finally swept away.

Baptist rhetoric was all the while developing in a robustly eschatological tenor. John Smyth's *The Character of the Beast* (1609) had condemned the baptism of infants in a series of allusions to Revelation. By the 1640s, however, it was evident that for some Baptists the influence of Antichrist had pervaded far beyond Rome, far beyond the prelates, even into the puritan brotherhood. Christopher Blackwood's *The Storming of Antichrist in his two last and strongest Garrisons, of Compulsion of Conscience and Infants Baptism* (1644) argued that even the Presbyterian and Independent divines meeting at Westminster were under his nefarious

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<sup>53</sup> The text for this confession is taken from *The First London Confession of Faith* (Rochester, NY, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> For a recent study of James' intellectual interests, see W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Hill, *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1990), p. 256

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influence. The 1644 confession refused to claim that the Pope was Antichrist.

It was with some caution, therefore, that English Baptists emerged from the puritan underground. Their very survival depended upon their ability to distinguish themselves from the destabilizing forces that had wreaked such havoc at Münster. Among their puritan brethren, distrust and suspicion could be overcome only by a careful articulation of the Calvinistic faith they shared. Rumours of their Arminianism were due to an inability to differentiate them from the General Baptists; rumours of their immorality, in the repeated stories of naked baptisms, were simply untrue.<sup>56</sup> Thus the leadership of the English Baptists – based mostly in London – met to articulate the respectability and orthodoxy of their common faith in 1644.

Their confession, which was republished with minor additions in 1646, was prepared mostly by John Spilsbury, William Kiffin and Samuel Richardson.<sup>57</sup> Against the lingering shadow of Münster, the *Confession of Faith of Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (but unjustly) called Anabaptists* (1644) affirmed the right of private property (1644 31) and advocated obedience to civil authorities whose divine institution it recognized (1644 48).<sup>58</sup> Doctrinally, it affirmed the common Calvinism of puritan dissent and rejected the Pelagianism which seemed to characterize the General Baptists.

The most important aspect of the confession, however, was its presentation as an eschatological document. Its title's description of seven subscribing churches was an historical accident which provided for future rhetorical investment. In Revelation 2-3, the ascended Christ addressed seven churches in Asia Minor. Puritan and Reformed writers had repeatedly taken the state of each of the seven churches as a paradigm for periods of church history as a whole, or for the universal church. Nor were the Baptist churches ignorant of this; as one historian has noted, 'If at first the coincidence was accidental, it was soon remarked upon, and the churches accepted the hint, so that they began to speak of themselves as the Seven.... The peculiar retention of the number Seven, hints at a prediction [sic] for allegory and mysticism, if not for the warlike Fifth-Monarchy

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<sup>56</sup> Barrie White, 'The Origins and Convictions of the First Calvinistic Baptists', *Baptist History and Heritage* 25 (1990), 39-47.

<sup>57</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds, 1996), p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Darlington, 1989), p. 427.

doctrines outright.<sup>59</sup> This should be contested. Some Fifth Monarchists urged violent revolution as a necessary means to establish the political expression of the millennial kingdom for which the group longed.<sup>60</sup> But the Baptist confession is markedly different. The confession did not allow a civil role for the moral law; the only subversion it allowed was passive resistance (1644 48); and it made no identification of its enemy. The Antichrist is never mentioned, presumably because they thought his seat of influence much nearer than the Vatican.

Nevertheless, the confession retained strong links to the Reformed tradition. Its structure advanced on Calvin's three-fold division of the work of Christ into the offices of prophet, priest and king. Like the Scots Confession, the Baptists linked Christ's kingly office to his future rule (1644 19-20): 'This his kingly power shall be more fully manifested when He shall come in glory to reign among his saints, and when He shall put down all rule and authority under His feet' (1644 20). The scriptural proofs which the confession cited in this article included 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28, Hebrews 9:28, 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, John 17:21, 26 – but, significantly, no reference was made to Revelation 20. With similar caution, the resurrection was dealt with in a general way, again without reference to the first or second resurrections which Revelation 20 put at either end of the millennium (1644 52). Its statements ended with the prayer, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.'<sup>61</sup> Its mood was definitely apocalyptic – but any reference to the political millenarianism of the Fifth Monarchists is clearly overstated.

#### THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION (1647)<sup>62</sup>

At the same time as Spilsbury, Kiffin, and Richardson were working on their confession, a much larger assembly of divines was also meeting in London to produce a statement of faith and associated documents designed to ensure the uniformity of the church throughout the three kingdoms in

<sup>59</sup> W. T. Whitley, 'The Seven Churches of London', *The Review and Expositor* 7:3 (1910), p. 384, 405.

<sup>60</sup> The best study of the Fifth Monarchy movement is B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism* (London, 1972).

<sup>61</sup> *The First London Confession of Faith* (1981), p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> The text of the Westminster Confession can be found in *The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large, together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge* ([Edinburgh] Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967).

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE PURITAN CONFESSIONS

accordance with 'the word of God and the best reformed churches'. First called in 1643, and publishing its confession only in 1647, the Westminster Assembly continued mainstream puritanism's interest in eschatological study and undertook its work in a self-consciously millenarian atmosphere.<sup>63</sup> Its divines were acutely aware of the Baptist confession, and specifically wanted to redress its theological system.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, despite their movement far beyond the relative conservatism of the 1644 Baptist confession, the Westminster divines' careful, deliberate exposition of biblical apocalyptic must be seen as contrasting with the more radical mood among many of its delegates and within the puritan brotherhood more generally. One of its most prominent delegates, Thomas Goodwin, had already published *An Exposition of the Revelation* (1639) as an articulate defence of Independent ecclesiology, suggesting several dates for important apocalyptic events.<sup>65</sup> On the other side of the ecclesiological divide, George Gillespie, the youngest and most vocal of the Scottish Commissioners, announced in a sermon to Parliament in March 1644 that biblical chronology proved that the building of Ezekiel's millennial temple had begun the year before, in 1643.<sup>66</sup> As in many other areas of their deliberation, however, the divines recognized some merit in advancing a system of biblical theology capable of sustaining several rather different readings – a necessary compromise if the confession was, after all, to sustain a broad national church.

Drawn up with 'an eye on the Irish Articles', the Westminster Confession was a statement of puritan theology in its maturity.<sup>67</sup> Couched and nuanced as the consequence of extended debate, its negotiations took longer than those of other documents that the Assembly produced. Several items produced in the interim displayed an evolution of thought even within the narrow chronological confines of the Assembly's meetings. *The*

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<sup>63</sup> Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), pp. 101-26.

<sup>64</sup> S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia, Presbyterian, 1943), p. 103.

<sup>65</sup> This text is reprinted as Thomas Goodwin, 'An Exposition of the Revelation', in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861-66; rpt. Eureka, CA, 1996), vol. iii, pp. 1-226.

<sup>66</sup> George Gillespie, 'A Sermon Preached... March 27, 1644', in *The Works of George Gillespie: The Presbyterian's Armoury* (ed. W. M. Hetherington) (Edinburgh, 1846), i.23.

<sup>67</sup> Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Kentucky, 1998), p. 26. Cf. A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures* (1890; rpt. Edinburgh, 1976), p. 165.

*Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, which was published in 1644, exhibited the optimistic influence of the Scottish Commissioners and the English Independents, who had worked together on its completion.<sup>68</sup> It instructed parish ministers to pray for

the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord; for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of the antichristian faction, and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk; for the blessings of God upon the reformed churches, especially upon the churches and kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland, now more strictly and religiously united in the Solemn National League and Covenant.<sup>69</sup>

The Confession itself was more guarded. Like the Scots Confession, Irish Articles and the 1644 Baptist confession, it did not refer to the conversion of the Jews, or the hoped-for deliverance from Islamic and Roman Catholic hostility. But neither did it restrict eschatological themes to the discussion of Christ's kingly office, as previous English and Scottish puritan confessions had. Instead, as in the Irish Articles, eschatology was given a separate discussion; form was matching content, locating the discussion at the end of the confession, in chapters 32-33. There the divines advanced a conservative Augustinian reading of eschatology, locating 'the last day' as the single day for judgement (WCF 32:2, 33:1) and guarding against any attempt to fix dates:

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so He will have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen. (WCF 33:3)

With this prayer, echoing the finale of the Baptist confession three years before, the Confession concluded.

In the later documents these pietistic and soteriological emphases were expanded upon. The Larger Catechism (1648) expounded individual eschatology – death, the intermediate state and the resurrection – under its

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<sup>68</sup> Murray, *Puritan Hope* (1971), p. 44.

<sup>69</sup> 'The Directory for the Publick Worship of God', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1967), p. 377.

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE PURITAN CONFESSIONS

section on communion with Christ (LC 84-90). The Assembly's most vibrant statement of general eschatology was expounded in the section outlining the Lord's Prayer:

In the second petition, (which is, *Thy kingdom come*.) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends. (LC 191)

In its most extensive treatment of the topic to this point, eschatology is linked to the Assembly's wider project, involving world evangelism and a last-days revival, proper ecclesiology, the theonomic rule of the 'godly prince', and the eternal reign of the saints.<sup>70</sup> It was an ebullient statement of the Assembly's comprehensive programme for reform and a marked advance upon earlier confessional statements.

### THE SAVOY CONFESSION (1658)<sup>71</sup>

For many of its delegates, however, the documents produced by the Westminster Assembly were insufficiently exact. The publication of *An Apologeticall Narration* (1644) by the 'Dissenting Brethren' – leaders of the Independent faction at Westminster – indicated that all was not well in the citadel of English puritanism. The Independents believed that the Westminster confession could be more closely refined.

After two decades of Dutch exile and Anglican expulsion, and with a heady rise to dizzying influence during the Commonwealth period, the Independent divines were rapidly radicalized. The success of their polemic was also vigorously advancing. By the 1650s they had become the leading English denomination; in East Anglia, some thirty new congregations had

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<sup>70</sup> Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), pp. 101-26.

<sup>71</sup> A text of the Savoy Confession can be found in Schaff (ed.), *Creeeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (1877), pp. 707-29.

been established between 1650 and 1658.<sup>72</sup> But when they met in convocation in 1658, they were sensing the gradual eclipse of their power. John Owen, their leading divine, had been Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford for five years when the Chancellor, Richard Cromwell, replaced him with the Presbyterian John Conant in 1657. Despite his sympathy for their distinctives, Oliver Cromwell himself was hoping to achieve the union of Presbyterians and Independents.<sup>73</sup> As in Ireland, so in England, the Independents were losing ground.<sup>74</sup>

Their tradition had, however, tended to be more radical than that of the Presbyterians. The first use of the expression 'the Congregational way', for example, was made in the epistle to the reader prefacing *A Glimpse of Sions Glory* (1641), a radically millenarian sermon published anonymously but attributed, in its own day and since, to Thomas Goodwin.<sup>75</sup> Goodwin had preached the sermon while in Dutch exile alongside William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes, Philip Nye and Sidrach Simpson, all of whom were later Westminster delegates and signatories of *An Apologetical Narration*.<sup>76</sup> At the Westminster Assembly they opposed both Episcopalianism and Separatism, arguing instead for the inclusion of independent churches within a comprehensive state church. All were vibrantly millenarian. Anthony Dallison's study of Goodwin's sermons before 1658 has emphasized that 'the subject of the latter-day glory was not a mere speculative theory but a doctrine which supplied the churches of the Congregational way with a powerful motive for reformation and a glorious hope for the future'.<sup>77</sup>

While in exile in Holland, Goodwin had preached the sermons which were published as *An Exposition of the Revelation* (1639).<sup>78</sup> One of these

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<sup>72</sup> A. G. Matthews, 'Introduction', in A. G. Matthews (ed.), *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658* (London, 1959), p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints* (Oxford, 1957), p. 8, n. 4. The sermon is reprinted in Goodwin, *Works* (1861-66), xii.61-79. For the authorship debate, see Gribben, *Puritan Millennium* (2000), p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 99-100.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Dallison, 'The Latter-day Glory in the Thought of Thomas Goodwin', *Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (1986), p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Dallison, 'The Latter-day Glory in the Thought of Thomas Goodwin' (1986), pp. 53-68. Cf. the comments on Goodwin in Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and some Contemporaries* (1984; rpr. London, 1994), pp. 172-7.

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sermons was pirated and published as *A Sermon on the Fifth Monarchy, proving by invincible arguments that the saints shall have a Kingdom here on earth which is yet to come* (1654). One year later, several of Goodwin's sermons on Ephesians were pirated and published as *The World to Come; or, the Kingdom of Christ Asserted in two expository lectures on Eph. i. 21, 22* (1655). Both of these editions seem to have been published to further the cause of the radical and often amorphous Fifth Monarchist group.<sup>79</sup> John Owen, too, was an apocalyptic enthusiast.<sup>80</sup> His sermons to Parliament were bald statements warning of 'the shaking and translating of heaven and earth'. His increasing political radicalism co-existed uneasily with Goodwin's belief that Cromwell should take the throne.

Despite these tensions, when the leaders of the Independent churches met to forge a theological alliance at the end of the Commonwealth, they found their job much easier thanks to the efforts some of them had already made as part of the Westminster Assembly. Sessions of the Savoy Conference lasted from 29 September to 12 October 1658.<sup>81</sup> The end product of the discussion was a revision of the Westminster Confession, carried out by Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, William Greenhill, Joseph Caryl (all of whom had attended the Westminster Assembly) and John Owen.<sup>82</sup> The committee's conclusions were read every morning to the 120 delegates to synod, debated, and then adopted.<sup>83</sup> It was designed as a common front against the perception of weakness and division: Owen led the delegation that presented the Savoy Declaration to Richard Cromwell in October 1658.<sup>84</sup>

The Savoy Confession largely reiterates the Westminster Confession's pronouncements on the intermediate state and the last judgement (Savoy 31-32, WCF 32-33). Its most innovative eschatological statements are included in chapter 26, 'Of the Church'. Here, evidencing their distinctive patterns of ecclesiology, the Savoy divines expansively modified the Westminster Confession's formulae. They affirmed only the first paragraph

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<sup>79</sup> The best discussion of this movement is found in B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism* (London, 1972).

<sup>80</sup> For Owen's eschatology, see Watts, *The Dissenters* (1978), pp. 134-42. Cf. Hill, *The Experience of Defeat* (1984; rpr. 1994), pp. 164-72. The most recent biography of Owen is Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, 1971).

<sup>81</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 22.

<sup>82</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 34.

<sup>83</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), pp. 34, 22.

<sup>84</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 11.



of WCF 25, replacing subsequent paragraphs with a definition of the church which excluded baptized children from church membership and denied that the authority for the administration of ordinances or church government was given to the universal church, instead locating the foci of church authority in the local congregation (Savoy 26:2, contra WCF 25:2-3). Savoy 26 was also the closest the puritan confessions came to outright millennialism:

IV. There is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be Head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God, whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

V. As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own Glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the later days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken, the Churches of Christ being enlarged [sic], and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition then [sic] they have enjoyed.

Although the confession refuses to treat of Revelation 20:1-7 – it avoids offering any Scriptural proofs whatsoever – it clearly posits a period of earthly blessing after the return of Christ. This is not to say, however, that it is premillennial: it does not assert a millennial reign of Christ upon earth, and could allude to Goodwin's belief that the millennium would be inaugurated by Christ without his presence on earth throughout its duration.<sup>85</sup> In an addition to WCF 25:6, the Savoy states that Antichrist will be destroyed at the second coming (Savoy 26:4), thereby linking ecclesiology to their eschatological hopes. Those Independents who were eschatologically minded did not hesitate to claim that the millennium would bring true church government.<sup>86</sup> The 'later days' (Savoy 26:5) will see the conversion of the Jews, the expansion of biblical churches, and the benefits of progressive revelation leading to increasing knowledge, grace and glory. Historians would be glad to know which scriptural texts the

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<sup>85</sup> Dallison, 'The Latter-day Glory in the Thought of Thomas Goodwin' (1986), p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> Dallison, 'The Latter-day Glory in the Thought of Thomas Goodwin' (1986), p. 59.

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Savoy divines were thinking of when they referred to 'his promise' as the basis for these hopes (Savoy 26:5). This silence notwithstanding, the Savoy Confession was the most closely millenarian of the puritan confessions.

### THE SECOND BAPTIST CONFESSION (1677/1689)<sup>87</sup>

Part of the difficulty facing the Independents was the increasing influence of the Baptists at both popular level and in the state administration. Through the period of Parliament's ascendancy, the Baptist cause was rapidly expanding. By the late 1650s they had grown from seven churches in London to around 130 in England, Wales and Ireland.<sup>88</sup> By 1660, there were around 220 Baptist churches in existence, 130 of which were Calvinistic. But not many of these churches had entered Cromwell's national church. In 1662, only 19 Baptist ministers were ejected from the state church.<sup>89</sup> They had proved themselves more independent than the Independents.

Despite their separatism, the Restoration's clampdown on dissent encouraged Baptist leaders to demonstrate the essential unity of the nonconformists. By the 1670s, the 1644 confession was clearly out-of-step with the developing form and content of dissenting Calvinism. Covenant theology had developed through its refinements in the Westminster and Savoy confessions. Similarly, the 1644 confession's advocacy of 'closed' communion – the idea that the benefits of church membership were open only to candidates who had been immersed as believers – was clearly out-of-step with the increasingly ecumenical spirit of co-operation among dissenters.<sup>90</sup> A new confession of faith would articulate Baptist-Independent ecclesiology more carefully, while taking account of the theological developments of the previous 30 years. Thus Baptist leaders turned to the Savoy confession as a basic model for Baptist faith. This revision of the Savoy was carried out in 1677, largely by William Collins, although signatories included the prominent leaders Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin and Benjamin Keach. This 'most influential and important of all Baptist Confessions'<sup>91</sup> was reaffirmed by English Baptist leaders in 1689 and

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<sup>87</sup> A text of the 1677/1689 Baptist Confession can be found in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago, [1959]).

<sup>88</sup> Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach* (1996), p. 40.

<sup>89</sup> Watts, *The Dissenters* (1978), p. 160.

<sup>90</sup> Matthews, 'Introduction' (1959), p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 219.

adopted by American Baptists in 1742 as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.

With all the sources at their disposal – the 1644, Westminster and Savoy confessions – it is interesting to note that on no occasion do the 1677 revisers privilege the statements of Westminster above those of the Savoy.<sup>92</sup> The revised confession was composed of 160 paragraphs. Of this total, 146 are derived from the Savoy confession, eight from the 1644 confession, and only six appear to be original.<sup>93</sup> Retaining Calvinism, the revisers refined Westminster's covenant theology;<sup>94</sup> rejected the Presbyterian government of the Scottish church (1677/1689 26:7); supported lay-preaching, with due qualifications (1677/1689 26:11); and, in contrast to the 1644 and Westminster confessions, no longer demanded that every church member had to be baptized (1677/1689 26:6), or even that baptism was necessary before the individual could participate in communion (1677/1689 30).<sup>95</sup> The 1677/1689 confession demonstrates the distance that Baptists had travelled on the road from their Anabaptist reputation – no one now could doubt their status as a fully-fledged puritan denomination.

Like the other confessions, it was composed amid millennial excitement and disappointment. The radically millenarian Fifth Monarchists had always drawn the support of Baptists and were still suspected of fomenting rebellion one decade after the failure of Venner's London rising in 1661.<sup>96</sup> Leading Baptists, like John Bunyan, joined leading Independents, like Thomas Brooks and Thomas Goodwin, in distancing themselves from his Fifth Monarchism.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, these radical hopes were maintained after the Restoration. In 1688, Baptist leader Hanserd Knollys (who had signed the 1644 confession) was expecting the

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<sup>92</sup> Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (1989), p. 428.

<sup>93</sup> Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (1989), p. 429.

<sup>94</sup> Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (1989), p. 429.

<sup>95</sup> Whitley, 'The Seven Churches of London' (1910), p. 390.

<sup>96</sup> B. R. White, 'John Pendarves, the Calvinistic Baptists and the Fifth Monarchy', *Baptist Quarterly* 25 (1974), 251-69.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (ed. A. B. Grosart) (1861-67; rpr. Edinburgh, 1980), i, xxxii; Greaves, 'Conscience, Liberty and the Spirit: Bunyan and Nonconformity', in N. H. Keeble, *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford, 1988), p. 28; Edward Rogers, *Some Account of the Life and Opinions of a Fifth Monarchy Man: Chiefly extracted from the writings of John Rogers, Preacher* (London, 1867), p. 327.

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imminent commencement of the millennium.<sup>98</sup> Benjamin Keach, another Baptist leader, viewed the Glorious Revolution in vibrantly eschatological terms.<sup>99</sup> One year later, William and Mary's introduction of religious freedom was the context in which the confession was adopted by 'messengers' from 107 churches in the first general assembly of the Particular Baptists of England, in 1689.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the 1677/1689 confession evidences a retreat from the heady apocalypticism of the Savoy divines. They simply omitted Savoy 26:5 from their discussion of the church. Again ignoring Revelation 20, their erstwhile millennial hope was being replaced by an increasing concentration upon ecclesiology. It does not take any explicit position on the millennium, but its position can be inferred from its identification of one day of judgement, not two separated by one thousand years. A thousand-year reign was implicitly denied.

The second Baptist confession's emphatic statement of a single judgement (1677/1689 32:1) echoes the Westminster/Savoy repudiation of date-setting: 'he will have the date of that day kept unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and always be watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come' (1677/1689 32:3). But its caution did not preclude its ending on the 1644/Westminster/Savoy's final note of joyful hope: 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!' (1677/1689 32:3).

### CONCLUSION

For a movement of ecclesiastical radicalism, the eschatology of the puritan confessions of faith is remarkably conservative. Revealing the gradual rise and fall of the movement's eschatological priorities, Richard Sibbes' remark that 'we are fallen into the latter end of the world' seemed again and again to signal the sense of imminence upon which the hopes of the movement were grounded and also the caution which guarded against the inclusion of such hopes within the movement's confessional documents.<sup>101</sup> Puritans seemed able to distinguish between that understanding of prophecy which was of 'private origin' and the more cautious expression of hope which was appropriate to collective statements of faith. Despite the number of detailed expositions of the subject, puritan eschatology never

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<sup>98</sup> Howson, 'Eschatology in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England' (1998), p. 331.

<sup>99</sup> Kenneth G. C. Newport, 'Benjamin Keach, William of Orange and the Book of Revelation: A Study in English Prophetical Exegesis', *Baptist Quarterly* 36 (1995-96), 43-51.

<sup>100</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* ([1959]), pp. 235-8.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Sibbes, *Works* (ed. A. B. Grosart) (Edinburgh, 1862-64), iv.43.

attained the finality afforded to the movement's statements of soteriology or even ecclesiology. Puritan confessions repeatedly refuse to endorse the radical eschatologies defended in the individual writings of some of the very theologians who composed them.

But the confessions were conservative also in their method. Despite the popularity and respectability of interest in non-canonical sources, the writers of the puritan confessions sought to remove the influence of pagan apocalyptic and replace it with data more firmly derived from Scripture. The puritan confessions can be judged successful by the extent to which subsequent generations of believers and unbelievers alike have looked to the Bible alone as sufficient in defining the Christian's blessed hope.

This repudiation of non-canonical sources is also illustrated in the extent to which puritan theology did not regard Calvin – or, indeed, any other expositor – as an infallible touchstone. Believing themselves to be at the end of history, when 'knowledge shall increase', puritan theologians advanced on the basis of progressive revelation to proffer readings of Revelation often unlike any maintained before. Sharing Calvin's rejection of the medieval past, puritan expositors showed themselves more open to rehabilitating the patristic millenarian tradition – but, remarkably, never in their confessions. To that extent, historians can posit a dichotomy between Calvin and the Calvinists, if not in the eschatology the confessions contain, then certainly in the mood the confessions represent.

So the confusion between Clouse, Froom and de Jong can be seen to misrepresent the very nature of the debate. With none of the puritan confessions ever citing Revelation 20, it is difficult to see how any of them could be properly described as either pre-, post- or amillennial. They were, nevertheless, all conservative in comparison to what some of their authors would commit themselves to elsewhere.

In a web of intertextuality, the puritan confessions emerged as highly referential developments of a common set of themes. As this survey has illustrated, in their tensions and dissensions the puritan confessions are snapshots of – if not monuments to – the developing puritan theological tradition in its movement of eschatology toward its modern position at the focus of Reformed dogmatics. They may not be amillennial, as Berkhof suggested, but they were certainly nervous about committing themselves to any exposition of Revelation 20 that could at all be definite. The eschatology of the puritan confessions seems as obscure as ever.