

‘RESISTING EVIL’

Civil retaliation, non-resistance, and the interpretation of Matthew 5:39a among eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptists*

Introduction

During the first few years of the American War of Independence, John Sutcliff (1752-1814), fresh from his studies at the Bristol Baptist Academy and ministering in a struggling Baptist cause at Shrewsbury, Shropshire, received a number of letters of encouragement and advice from James Turner (d.1780), the pastor of Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.¹ Turner, who was a good twenty-five years older than Sutcliff, seems to have taken the latter under his wing and acted as a kind of spiritual mentor to him. The advice and comments in Turner’s fascinating letters covered a broad range of issues, from infant baptism to the nature of the pastoral office, from detailed descriptions of the annual meetings of the Baptist association to which Cannon Street belonged to observations on the ministry of such Anglican Evangelicals as William Romaine (1714-1795). Given the seriousness of the military conflict that was raging in North America, it is not surprising that there were also some occasional references to this war. For instance, on 7 December 1775, Turner told his young friend that he had been reading a number of pieces written about the conflict, including one by the Methodist leader John Wesley (1703-1791), and another by Caleb Evans (1737-1791), the tutor at the Bristol Baptist Academy. He especially urged Sutcliff to get hold of a pamphlet entitled *Americans Against Liberty* by Ambrose Serle (1742-1812), which Turner personally regarded as ‘unanswerable’, but he was interested to know what Sutcliff thought of it. Turner was quick to add that he would not at all be disappointed if Sutcliff failed to find a copy, for, he said, ‘we have work enough on hand without Politics’. A few months later he admitted that ‘as to politics, they are too great a mystery for my capacity’.² Nevertheless, Turner still took the time to read about and to reflect on the political affairs of the day, for on 13 January 1776 he informed Sutcliff that he had been thinking further about Wesley’s *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*. Turner did not find the Methodist leader’s reflections on the American conflict convincing. ‘He’s a nothing,’ he bluntly told his friend, ‘both in politics & Religion’.³

In claiming that there were more pressing concerns than political reflection and involvement, Turner was echoing the viewpoint of the overwhelming majority of Calvinistic Baptists of his era. True to their seventeenth-century roots, they were conscious that the extension of God’s kingdom did not come through political decree or ‘the authority of the magistrate’.⁴ Nevertheless, Turner’s evident refusal to live

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in ignorance of the political scene was also characteristic of eighteenth-century Baptists. This too was part of their heritage. For instance, *The Second London Confession of Faith*, first issued in 1677 and adopted twelve years later as the doctrinal standard of Calvinistic Baptists in England and Wales, unequivocally affirmed that it was entirely 'lawful for Christians' to be involved in the political affairs of the nation, in particular, 'to Accept, and Execute the Office of a Magistrate'.⁵ By the nature of their office, however, rulers from time to time had to employ coercive power and engage in acts of war, so this affirmation of the possibility of being a Christian magistrate carried a defence of the use of the sword. God himself, *The Second London Confession of Faith* asserted, had armed magistrates 'with the power of the Sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers'. Furthermore, this document declared that Christian magistrates 'may lawfully wage war upon just and necessary occasions'.⁶ In support of this position, the Baptists turned to passages such as Romans 13:4, where the Apostle Paul noted that God had bestowed upon civil authorities the military power necessary to quell resistance to their decrees, and even Luke 3:14, where a group of soldiers was advised by John the Baptist not to abuse the privileges of their occupation, but received no demand to quit their form of employ.

This defence of the fundamental lawfulness of political activity for the Christian was not without definite tensions. In particular, passages from the Sermon on the Mount, not least Jesus' injunction in Matthew 5:39a to 'resist not evil' (KJV), seemed to undercut the very idea of a Christian magistrate. One approach to resolving this problem was to opt for a completely apolitical ethic, as, for instance, John Smyth (ca.1570-1612), the central figure in the emergence of the General (i.e. Arminian) Baptists, did not long before his death. He argued that if a magistrate desired to become a Christian he had to cease to occupy an office that involved flagrant disobedience to some of the commands of Christ given in the Sermon on the Mount. As Timothy George sums up his perspective: 'Refusal of force and authority becomes along with regeneration and baptism the *sine qua non* of admittance to the church. Put otherwise, one had to be either a magistrate or a Christian; no compromising middle position remained.'⁷

It is not surprising that Smyth ended his days in Amsterdam among a Mennonite community which enjoined non-resistance and abstention from every facet of political life upon all its members. As has been noted, the Calvinistic Baptists chose to tread a different path. The following paper examines this choice through the way in which a number of eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist authors interpreted and applied the central imperative of Matthew 5:38-42, namely, Christ's injunction to 'resist not evil' (verse 39a), a verse that has long been a major proof-text for those who have argued in favour of total pacifism and absolute non-resistance.

1. 'We may glory in our loyalty': Joseph Stennett, jun., and John Gill

In 1772, when Robert MacGregor (d.ca.1805), pastor of Woolwich Baptist Church

in Kent, reflected on the relationship that had existed between the Calvinistic Baptists and the British government for much of that century, he declared with some measure of pride that his denomination had been consistently characterized by appreciative support for the government of the land. 'We may glory in our loyalty,' he stated, 'for I never yet heard a single Baptist being concerned in any tumult, rebellion, or civil commotion, against the present royal family'.⁸ The 'present royal family' were the Protestant Hanoverians, who had occupied the throne since George I (r.1714-1727). The most serious threat to their rule during the period surveyed by MacGregor had occurred at the time of the Jacobite uprising in 1745-1746, when Charles Edward Stuart (1720-1788), supported by the French, had landed in Scotland and subsequently invaded England in the hope of regaining the throne for the House of Stuart. His grandfather, James II (r.1685-1688), a confirmed Roman Catholic, had been forced to flee the country in the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689, which placed the Dutch Protestant, William of Orange, on the British throne as William III (r.1688-1702). The Baptists, who had suffered greatly under the Stuarts, were quick to rally to the support of the Hanoverians. On 31 October 1745, for instance, a number of Calvinistic Baptist churches in the city of London and throughout the country held a fast on 'account of the rebellion in Scotland' and prayed for deliverance from the very real possibility of a Stuart victory. Little Wild Street Baptist Church in London even organized its own volunteer militia and used its churchyard as a parade ground.⁹ The thinking that lay behind this support is well seen in a sermon preached by the much-respected pastor of the Little Wild Street congregation, Joseph Stennett, jun., (1692-1758).¹⁰

Entitled *Rabshakeh's Retreat* and preached on 18 December 1745, the sermon noted how Charles Stuart's claim to the British throne rested largely upon the divine right of kingship, a right that his supporters argued was 'hereditary and indefeasible'. As Stennett understood it, this royal prerogative was said to entitle the king 'to the same power over this great nation, as every gentleman in it has over his horses and his dogs; that the people were made for the prince, and not the prince appointed for them; that our kings have an unalienable right to our estates and our labours, to our wives and our children, to our lives and consciences'. Stennett, however, was convinced by 'the dictates of reason and revelation' that there is 'no such indefeasible right in any man'. Government, the Baptist preacher asserted, is based on a contractual arrangement between subjects and their rulers. Just as those subjects who break the 'fundamental laws' of the government 'suffer justly as traitors to their prince,' so 'kings [who] break thro' the fundamental engagements they enter'd into by their coronation oaths, righteously forfeit their dignity and their power'. In Stennett's opinion, Charles Stuart's grandfather, James II, was a good example of a king who had rightly forfeited his 'dignity and power'. Nothing less than a 'lawless tyrant', his brief reign was attended with a series of attempts to dispense with British law and 'to establish popery,' which, Stennett was sure, would have deprived them of 'all the traces of liberty'. The Glorious Revolution, which

had brought the reign of James to a swift conclusion and had begun that of their 'great deliverer William III,' was thus clearly of God and a clear example of the principle that rebellion was permissible in certain circumstances. Any attempt to impose the reign of James' like-minded progeny upon Britain should be met with 'such a struggle as is worthy, in some measure, the descendants of [their] brave ancestors' who had expelled James II.¹¹ According to one report, so stirred were many of the men in the congregation as they listened to this discourse, that they rose from their seats, unsheathed their swords, and pledged to fight to the death to uphold 'a protestant government, against French ambition, and popish tyranny'.¹²

Among Stennett's close friends was John Gill (1697-1771), pastor of the prominent London Baptist cause which met at Goat Yard, Horsleydown, and then later at Carter Lane, Southwark. Gill was a voluminous author, whose writings formed an essential part of the library of most eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist ministers.¹³ Like Stennett, Gill maintained that the respective duties of rulers and ruled arose from a relationship 'founded in consent, agreement, and covenant'. Whatever the primal force that drove men together in this way - be it out of 'mutual fear', as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) had thought, or because human beings were by nature sociable creatures, as Aristotle (384-322 BC) had argued - Gill was persuaded that the government of 'free and well-regulated states' was rooted in an agreement by which rulers consented to govern according to fundamental laws and their subjects agreed to obey 'their lawful commands, and to support their government'.¹⁴ This assertion was certainly not original to either Gill or Stennett. The two London Baptists were in fact drawing upon a tradition that reached back to Huguenot activists, such as Philippe Duplessis-Mornay (1549-1623), and Puritan authors immediately before and during the English Civil Wars, who argued that the political authority which rulers exercise is rooted in the consent of those subject to it. As John Locke (1632-1704), the political philosopher who more than any other acted as the conduit by which these ideas reached the eighteenth century, later summed up this viewpoint: 'Men being by Nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate, and subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own Consent'.¹⁵

With Stennett, Gill also held that there were occasions when rulers, who had been acting unlawfully and pursuing a course of evil, might be lawfully resisted. As he noted in some remarks on Romans 13:2 ('Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God'): 'This [phrase] is not to be understood, as if magistrates were above the laws, and had a lawless power to do as they will without opposition; for they are under the law, and liable to the penalty of it, in case of disobedience, as others; and when they make their own will a law, or exercise a lawless tyrannical power, in defiance of the laws of God, and of the land, to the endangering of the lives, liberties, and properties of subjects, they may be resisted'.¹⁶ Furthermore, such resistance might require violence. Gill shared Stennett's opinion, for example, that the Glorious Revolution was justified and in

full accord with the will of God. It was only right, therefore, to resist with military force any attempt to recapture the throne for the House of Stuart. Some comments that Gill made upon Psalm 25 in early December 1745 reveal the Baptist author's views in this regard. Gill believed that David had composed this psalm during the rebellion of his son Absalom, and thus the enemies of whom David speaks in the opening and closing verses are to be understood as rebellious subjects. Commenting upon Psalm 25:3b ('let them be ashamed which transgress without cause'), Gill likens these rebels whom David had to face to the followers of Charles Stuart, 'a parcel of perfidious treacherous wretches' who have risen up against a 'rightful sovereign King George [II]'. For such, he said, 'we should pray, as David did for his enemies, that they might be ashamed; that they may fail in their attempts and designs, and be brought to deserved punishment'.¹⁷

When Gill came to explain Matthew 5:39a in *An Exposition of the New Testament* (1746-1748), it should occasion no surprise to find him maintaining that the evil of which Jesus spoke in this verse was a specific sort of evil. It was certainly not 'the evil of sin' nor that of 'false doctrines' that Jesus bade his followers not to resist. Nor was it 'the evil one' whom Jesus had in mind, for Satan definitely was to be resisted by the believer with all his or her might. Moreover, given Gill's view about the right that people had to resist an evil, tyrannical government, it was obvious, though Gill did not explicitly say so, that this sort of evil was also excluded from Jesus' injunction. What then did obedience to this command involve? Gill first of all noted that the 'evil' of which Jesus spoke in this text was that which was personally done to a believer by 'an evil man'. Jesus was thus urging his follower not to 'render evil for evil, or repay him in the same way,' and so 'make use of private revenge'. In other words, Jesus' imperative here had to do solely with personal abuse and personal retaliation. He was seeking to impress upon his followers that personal vendettas had no place at all in the Christian life.¹⁸

Similarly, in Gill's comments on Romans 12:17 ('Recompense to no man evil for evil') - a text belonging to a catechetical tradition derived possibly from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 - the London Baptist noted that believers were not to trade 'evil words for evil words, railing for railing; nor evil deeds for evil deeds, one ill turn for another'. The only exception which Gill allowed was 'persons, who under God have an authority to inflict' evil, that is, civil magistrates. What Paul was then forbidding was 'private revenge'.¹⁹

Gill's interpretation of Jesus' command not to resist evil took seriously the fact that it was not the only injunction in the Scriptures to be obeyed. 'It comes in the company of other imperatives,' and as such it could not be regarded as the sole, ethical absolute which informed the lives of believers.²⁰ In particular, Gill's acceptance of the lawfulness of the believer's involvement in the realm of politics, where physical force and retaliation were constant possibilities, meant that Jesus' command in Matthew 5:39a applied only to the way in which the believer personally related to other men and women. Finally, it should be stressed that while Gill

allowed for the possibility of violent resistance to a tyrannical government, it was not a possibility he chose to develop. His lengthiest discussion of the respective duties of magistrates and subjects - in *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1769), a work that his pastoral successor, John Rippon (1750-1836), once described as Gill's 'whole creed'²¹ - was largely taken up with the dynamics of being a loyal subject to the government and not with those of legitimate revolution.²²

2. 'Subjects sin not though they disobey': Caleb Evans

Under the first two Hanoverian sovereigns, George I and his son George II (r.1727-1760), Baptist ministers were almost without exception unequivocal in their praise and support of the government. However, the 1760s to the 1780s witnessed among the Baptists, along with other Dissenters, a growing disenchantment with the governments of George III (r.1760-1820). The principal reason for this disenchantment was undoubtedly the conflict in North America over taxation, political representation, and the sovereignty of the British Parliament. James E. Bradley has pointed out that there was also a more strictly theological reason at work: at the heart of the Calvinistic Baptist experience were deep convictions regarding the biblical necessity of congregational polity and the misguided nature of the concept of a state church.²³ As John Ryland, jun., (1753-1825) stated at the time of his ordination in 1781 to the pastoral oversight of the Baptist cause in Northampton: 'I believe that Jesus Christ the crowned King of Zion is the alone Head of the Church - that neither Kings, Queens, nor Parliaments have any right to determine Controversies about matters of Faith, nor to appoint rites and ceremonies in the Church'.²⁴ Under the press of the events leading up to and surrounding the American Revolution, this traditional Baptist opposition to Anglicanism became overt and outspoken, and further fostered a re-orientation of attitude towards the government.

Representative of this change in attitude was Caleb Evans (1737-1791), a member of the Little Wild Street Church during the final years of Joseph Stennett's pastorate and subsequently tutor and eventually principal at the Bristol Baptist Academy.²⁵ The shape of Evans' political thought is probably best seen in his controversy with John Wesley over the American Revolution, 'the most publicized clerical debate' of the period.²⁶ Near the beginning of the debate, which was sparked by the publication of Wesley's *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (1775), the Methodist leader confessed that he had been reared 'in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance,' that is, the conviction that even if the monarch is guilty of grave offences, a subject must be willing to accept civil penalties for any act of disobedience to his or her monarch. For someone holding to this perspective, both active resistance to one's sovereign and outright rebellion are obviously impermissible²⁷ yet, even though Wesley continued to be devoted to the monarchy to the end of his life, by the time that he uttered these sentiments he had actually come to believe in a monarchy that was subject to definite limitations

and that guaranteed human liberty.²⁸ However, this change of perspective was not readily apparent in his *Calm Address*. There Wesley affirmed that the British government had every right to tax the American colonies, despite the fact that the colonists had no elected representatives in the House of Commons. Driving Wesley was a deep-seated fear of republicanism and the apprehension that a few 'determined enemies to the monarchy' in England were seeking to engineer a revolution in both England and America. Those whom Wesley regarded as duped by the anti-monarchical propaganda of these men needed to know, however, that 'no governments under heaven are so despotic as the republican; no subjects are governed in so arbitrary a manner as those of a commonwealth'.²⁹

The response to this pamphlet was phenomenal. Within a few weeks of its publication forty thousand copies of it had been sold in Great Britain, and within a few months Wesley's seemingly anti-democratic statements had brought down a storm of criticism upon his head.³⁰ Consider, for example, the letter of James Turner already referred to at the beginning of this paper, in which Turner mentioned to John Sutcliff that he had been thinking about the *Calm Address*. Immediately prior to this remark Turner had commented that with regard 'to passive obedience & nonresistance I believe 'em to be abominable to the last degree'. These two remarks were probably meant to go together. In other words, Turner's reading of Wesley's *Calm Address* was that it was a defence of 'passive obedience & nonresistance' and as such he found it 'abominable' to the nth degree.³¹ Turner's fellow Baptist, Caleb Evans, went more public in his critique of Wesley's position. Constrained by what he described as 'conscientious motives and the fear of God',³² the Bristol Baptist published a twenty-four page, duodecimo pamphlet under the pseudonym of 'Americanus' on 7 October 1775. The main thrust of the letter, which went through as many as five editions and was the most widely read of the various replies to the Methodist leader, was that taxation without representation is nothing less than slavery. If Wesley's views on the conflict in North America arose out of a fear of republicanism, Evans wrote with a concern that the overall drift in Wesley's argument was towards a revival of the 'old Jacobite doctrine of hereditary, indefeasible, divine right, and of passive obedience and non-resistance'.³³ Substance was given to Evans' concern by Wesley's frank denial that the origin of political authority was in the citizenry of a nation. To Evans, whose political views had been profoundly shaped by his reading of 'the immortal Locke,' such a denial contradicted his fundamental belief that, under God, 'the people, and the people only, are the source of power'.³⁴

Responding to Evans' attack with a published vindication of Wesley was the latter's key lieutenant, John W. Fletcher (1729-1785), vicar of Madeley in Shropshire. Fletcher sought to uphold Wesley's perspective as thoroughly scriptural, rational, and constitutional, as well as to demonstrate that Evans' views were deficient in all three of these areas. In fact, Fletcher went beyond Wesley to assert that the monarch, 'whether we have a vote for parliament men or not, has

both a right, and a power to dispose, not only of our money, but also of our liberty and life'.³⁵ Reflecting Wesley's fear of republicanism, Fletcher accused Evans of dabbling in 'dangerous politics,' which had a manifest tendency to encourage sedition and to stir up 'groundless discontent'.³⁶

Evans lost no time in replying with a lengthy rebuttal of Fletcher's vindication in which he reviewed the controversy to that point in time, undertook a fresh defence of his argument that 'to be taxed without being represented was the quintessence of slavery,' and sought to show that his beliefs were in full harmony with the Scriptures.³⁷ After having stated that he revered the authority of the 'oracles of truth' above all others, Evans indicated that he was quite prepared to accept Fletcher's position if the latter could demonstrate it from the Word of God. But, the Baptist author confidently affirmed, though he had been accustomed to reading the Bible from early childhood, he had yet to find in it the 'principles of political slavery' that Fletcher so passionately asserted were to be found there. Evans saw nothing in God's Word that commanded him to stand passively by and not to oppose 'tyranny, oppression, and all manner of evil'. For instance, Evans postulated, were he to be stopped by a highwayman with pistol in hand and asked to hand over his money, not an infrequent occurrence on eighteenth-century British roads, if he thought he could effectually resist such a theft, he would. It might be imprudent to resist, but certainly it was never sinful. Again, Evans argued, if the 'Grand Turk,' that is, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, were to invade Great Britain, he would 'cheerfully risk [his] fortune and [his] life' to avoid living in servitude under a Muslim master. Where a person's 'just rights' and 'unalienable privileges' were at stake, physical resistance was not at all sinful. In both of these illustrations resistance was being offered to an unlawful authority, which Evans sought to distinguish from that to a lawful one: 'if a lawful authority, our resistance is sinful in a very high degree; but if it be an unlawful authority our resistance is glorious'.³⁸ As James Murray (1732-1782), an orthodox, Presbyterian contemporary of Evans put it: 'When fools wear crowns, and tyrants' sceptres sway, Then subjects sin not though they disobey.'³⁹

Though Evans did not regard George III as a fool - near the end of his response to Fletcher, he declared that when it came to the king, 'I reverence [him] from my inmost soul as my lawful sovereign'⁴⁰ - he was convinced that civil disobedience, even to the point of violence, need not be sinful.

How did Evans reconcile this reasoning with passages like Matthew 5:39a? While Evans never actually cited this text in his controversy with Wesley and Fletcher, he did quote the Lukan parallel to Matthew 5:39b-40 ('whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also').

There may be cases in which it may be highly prudent to let a man that has taken away our coat unjustly, take our cloak also (Luke 6:29), rather than contend with him. But I believe there have been few if any enthusiasts so

wild as to suppose, that our Lord's advice upon such an occasion was ever intended as an universal rule, and to be understood as binding upon the conscience upon every occasion without exception. Indeed to suppose it unlawful to resist a power acting unlawfully, whenever it is in our power to resist it effectually, is to suppose it **LAWFUL** to countenance and encourage as much as in us lies, what is **UNLAWFUL**.⁴¹

Resistance to an unlawful authority might not always be prudent or even possible, and thus Evans believed that there were definitely certain occasions when Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:39-40 and in its Lukan parallel were meant to be observed literally. But only wild 'enthusiasts,' that is, fanatics, would suppose that Jesus' injunctions were universal rules that admitted of absolutely no exceptions. Otherwise, Evans argued, in not resisting evil and so apparently fulfilling Matthew 5:39, one might actually be furthering the spread of evil and violating other biblical injunctions that committed believers to the doing of good.

The majority of British Baptists appear to have been in general agreement with these views of Evans. At the close of the war John Rippon wrote to James Manning (1739-1791), then president of Rhode Island College (later renamed Brown University), that he knew of only two Baptist pastors in Great Britain who had not favoured 'the side of the Americans in the late dispute. We wept when the thirsty plains drank the blood of your departed heroes, and the shout of a king was amongst us when your well-fought battles were crowned with victory'.⁴² One of these two pastors was undoubtedly the arch-conservative John Martin (1741-1820), pastor of Grafton Street Baptist Church in Soho, London, of whom it was said that 'when he lifted up his feet, he was always careful to put them down again in the same place'.⁴³ Not surprisingly, the response of most Baptists to the American War of Independence confirmed the British establishment in their opinion that Baptists, as well as other Dissenting bodies, were nefarious radicals bent upon the overthrow of the monarchy and the government.⁴⁴ The opening stages of the next major political convulsion of the western world, the French Revolution, only served to provide additional confirmation to the conservative forces in Great Britain that the Baptists and their fellow Dissenters were seriously courting treason.

3. 'Resisting evil': Andrew Fuller

For the first couple of years of the French Revolution, Calvinistic Baptist approval of the events transpiring on the other side of the English Channel was fairly substantial. In East Anglia, for instance, the Norwich Baptist minister, Mark Wilks (d.1819), began his sermon on 14 July 1791 with the provocative words 'Jesus Christ was a Revolutionist' and went on to inform his congregation that the French Revolution 'is of God and that no power exists or can exist, by which it can be overthrown'. That same year, Robert Hall, jun., (1764-1831), at the time pastoring in Cambridge, published *Christianity Consistent with a Love of Freedom*, in which he exulted in the fact that the French 'empire of darkness and of despotism has been

smitten with a stroke which has sounded through the universe'.⁴⁵

With the September massacres of 1792, however, the abolition of the monarchy that same month, and the execution of Louis XVI the following January, this warm appreciation from the Baptist pulpit soon turned to alarm and criticism. When the revolutionary forces in France began to export their ideology by force of arms and war broke out between Britain and her traditional enemy in February 1793, Baptist ministers began to preach messages that were somewhat different from those heard from their pulpits during the American War of Independence. War between Britain and France would last until 1815, and sermons that touched upon the realms of politics preached during this period were frequently centred around the duties of believers to the government and the importance of loyalty.⁴⁶ A good example is a sermon preached in 1803 by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), pastor of Kettering Baptist Church, Northamptonshire, a man well described as 'the soundest and most creatively useful theologian' the English Calvinistic Baptists have ever had.⁴⁷

Not long before the delivery of Fuller's sermon, the treaty of Amiens (27 March 1802), which had secured an uneasy peace in Europe for nearly fourteen months, collapsed as open hostilities resumed between France and Great Britain. Almost immediately Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and his French generals committed themselves to extensive preparations for the invasion of England. Although these preparations would occupy much of Napoleon's energy for the next two years, events were at their most critical during the latter months of 1803, when invasion seemed an imminent certainty. Fuller's sermon, entitled 'Christian Patriotism' and based upon Jeremiah 29:7 ('Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace'), sought to help the members of his congregation determine their duty during this grave national crisis.

The first section of the sermon outlined the historical context in which the prophet Jeremiah spoke these words. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had taken away into captivity a significant number of the nobility of Judah along with their king Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin). Certain false prophets who had also been taken into captivity were encouraging the king and his nobles to expect a speedy return to the land of Palestine. Jeremiah knew differently. Seventy years were to elapse before the return of the captives. Meanwhile, they should accept their lot, put down roots in their new home, and above all seek and pray for the peace of Babylon. If such was God's intent for men and women who were enslaved by the very nation for which they were to pray, then, Fuller asked his congregation, ought not they to seek the good of their native land, a land where they were protected by 'mild and wholesome laws, administered under a paternal prince; a land where civil and religious freedom [were] enjoyed in higher degree than in any other nation under heaven?'⁴⁸

Fuller understood God's command to his ancient people to 'seek the peace' - or 'prosperity', as Fuller translated the Hebrew word *shalom* - of Babylon to be a call

to British Christians of his day to be 'patriots, or lovers of our country'. Such patriotism, the Baptist theologian was at pains to emphasize, was not of the sort that sought the prosperity of Great Britain at 'the expense of the general happiness of mankind'. To those men and women in Fuller's day, for instance, who argued that the prosperity of the British Empire was intrinsically bound up with the shameful institution of slavery, Fuller vehemently replied, 'if my country cannot prosper but at the expense of justice, humanity, and the happiness of mankind, let it be unprosperous!' His ultimate concern was 'to cultivate that patriotism which harmonizes with good-will to men'.⁴⁹

However, what did this sort of patriotism actually involve when the French army was massed at Boulogne, preparing to embark on an invasion of England? In such 'cases of imminent danger' it meant the willingness to risk one's life in the defence of one's nation. Fuller was conscious that there were some in his day, notably the Quakers, who would cite Matthew 5:39a in support of a position of total pacifism. 'Jesus taught his disciples not to resist evil,' Fuller quoted them as saying, 'and when Peter drew his sword, he ordered him to put it up again; saying, 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Matthew 26:52).⁵⁰ To such pacifists, Fuller gave a series of replies. He began by asking his hearers to recall that he had always deprecated war as one of life's 'greatest calamities'. Yet, he stressed, this did not mean that he considered war in every instance to be 'unlawful'. As he once wrote to his close friend, William Carey (1761-1834): 'Bro[the]r Carey hates war; so do I, excepting what is purely defensive'.⁵¹

More specifically, he noted that Christ's command in Matthew 5 to resist not evil informed believers that they should never 'retaliate from a principle of revenge' and that 'if an adversary "smite us on one cheek", we had better "turn to him the other also" [Luke 6:29; Matthew 5:39b], than go about to avenge our own wrongs'. Fuller saw Christ's words as a vivid contrast to the mores of his society. For instance, the lifestyle of the upper class in eighteenth-century Britain was ruled by a code of honour that frequently involved the men in duelling, something that Fuller could only consider as in 'direct opposition to the laws of Christ'. Then, with regard to nations, Fuller understood Matthew 5:39a to mean that countries should 'never engage in war but for [their] own defence; nor for that, till every method of avoiding it had been tried in vain'. When it came to Christians, Christ's injunction further entailed a refusal to respond with force when they were persecuted for the gospel's sake: 'no weapon is admissible in this warfare but truth'. Those Christians who followed this command, while being subjected to persecution, had found that 'the more they have been afflicted, the more they have increased'. On the other hand, those Christian bodies who had acted differently and taken up the sword in their own defence, like the Huguenots in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France, had ultimately perished by it - 'overcome by their enemies, and exterminated'.⁵²

Nonetheless, Fuller, like Gill and Evans, was not convinced that Matthew 5:39a should be taken 'literally and universally'. To do so would be to imply that the

Apostle Paul was wrong to remonstrate with the Philippian magistrates over the illegal beating which he received at their hands (see Acts 16:35-39) and that Christ himself erred when he reprovved the individual who smote him during his trial before Annas [John 18:19-23]. In the case at hand, the defence of Great Britain against unlawful invasion, other texts needed to be taken into account. Romans 13, for example, expressly urged believers to support the state and 'authorized the legal use of the sword' by state magistrates. If it were right for these magistrates to bear the sword against evil-doers within the country, surely, Fuller reasoned, 'it cannot be wrong to use it in repelling invaders from without'. Here Fuller also drew upon the *Second London Confession*, a major text in his Calvinistic Baptist heritage, in which, as has been noted above, the magistrate's use of the sword for national defence had been affirmed. Furthermore, if it were right for the magistrate to use the sword in this way, it was not improper for him to expect help and support from those under his authority, 'for otherwise, his power would be merely nominal, and he would indeed "bear the sword in vain" [Romans 13:4]'. Though Fuller believed that the day in which he was living called for British Christians to be actively involved in repelling a French invasion, he was not about to endorse *carte blanche* every war in which his country engaged. As he declared near the close of his sermon: 'If my country were engaged in an attempt to ruin France, as a nation, it would be a wicked undertaking; and if I were fully convinced of it, I should both hope and pray that they might be disappointed'.⁵³

Fuller discussed the Matthean passage at length in one other text, 'Resisting Evil', part of a series of brief papers on the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:38-42, Fuller here maintained, was directed at the spirit of 'private retaliation and revenge' that had come to prevail among the Jews of Jesus' day. Christ was not forbidding magistrates to resist evil in their capacity as civil servants. Nor was he commanding his followers not to use the lawcourts to secure justice but, when his followers did so, they needed to make sure that they were motivated by a desire for the good of others and not by hunger for revenge. For an example Fuller again turned to John 18, where Christ himself did not literally turn the other cheek at his trial. Instead he remonstrated with the individual who struck him. He did so, Fuller averred, not because he was gripped by a spirit of retaliation, but out 'of justice to his own character'. In other words, Christ was not desirous of doing harm to the man who had struck him; rather, he wanted to see the man treat him with honour and respect. Having established that Christ himself did not literally fulfill his own command, the way was clear for Fuller to argue that Matthew 5:38-42 presented believers with a series of commands in which it was 'the principle, rather than the act, which is inculcated'. For example, if the command in verse 40 to give our 'cloak to him that would sue us and take away our coat' were observed literally, it would ultimately issue in the ruination of our families and an encouragement to the wicked to continue in their evil course of behaviour. For Fuller, the teaching of the text was perverted when it was treated as an unqualified rule. Instead, what

Fuller saw Christ doing in Matthew 5:38-42 was outlining the sort of disposition which ought to characterize the lives of his followers: a willingness to put up with 'injury than engage in litigious contests,' 'to do good to all men, even beyond their requests' - in sum, 'a kind and liberal spirit, ready to do good to the utmost of [one's] power'.⁵⁴

Conclusion

It is evident that Gill, Evans, and Fuller were generally of one opinion when it came to the way in which they understood and applied Matthew 5:39a. While this text forbade personal retaliation, it was not to be regarded as the sole command which the believer had ever to heed when it came to injustice and evil. The text was not meant to provide a universal, ethical blueprint so that involvement in such activities as the state's prosecution of evildoers and the defence of one's homeland against aggression and invasion were automatically ruled out. This interpretation stands squarely in the Reformed tradition, and has been essentially upheld by such twentieth-century Reformed commentators as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, D. A. Carson, and John Piper.⁵⁵ It is, however, a reading of the text that has come in for some heavy criticism in the present century. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for instance, argued that this interpretation set up 'a distinction between person and office [which] is wholly alien to the teaching of Jesus. He says nothing about that. He addresses his disciples as men who have left all to follow him, and the precept of non-violence applies equally to private life and official duty. He is the Lord of all life, and demands undivided allegiance.'⁵⁶

In defence of the Calvinistic Baptist authors who have formed the focus of this paper, it may be said that they were seeking to interpret Matthew 5:39a in the light of the entire New Testament corpus. They took seriously the fact that the imperative in this text was one of many in the canon of Scripture and, as such, this text's exegesis could not be done faithfully without taking into consideration other New Testament passages like Romans 13 and John 18.

Finally, the way in which the authors examined in this article found themselves compelled to relate their exegesis to the political world in which they were living is also noteworthy. Contrary to what Bonhoeffer implied about the Reformed tradition, they did seek to live in the light of the belief that Jesus Christ was 'the Lord of all life'. While late twentieth-century readers of Scripture might question some of the ways in which they did this, the conviction of these Baptists that 'religion is not a matter to be cooped up in a closet, nor yet in a place of worship,' is indeed worthy of emulation.⁵⁷

NOTES

* An earlier version of this paper appeared in Daniel G. Lundy, ed., *The Ethics of Jesus: the Believer as Salt and Light* (Toronto: Gospel Witness Publications,

1994).

1 For studies of Sutcliff's life and ministry, see Kenneth W. H. Howard, 'John Sutcliff of Olney', *BQ* 14, 1952, 304-309; Michael A. G.

- Haykin, "A Habitation of God, Though the Spirit": John Sutcliff (1752-1814) and the revitalization of the Calvinistic Baptists in the late eighteenth century', *BQ* 34 1992, 304-319. For a very brief sketch of Turner's ministry at Cannon Street, see James Hargreaves, *The Life and Memoir of the Late Rev. John Hirst*, Rochdale, 1816, 345.
- 2 Letter to John Sutcliff, 7 December 1775; letter to John Sutcliff, 19 March 1776 [Sutcliff Papers, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford]. Ambrose Serle, a Calvinistic author and naval captain, accompanied the British army in America from 1776 to 1778, and gained a considerable knowledge of American affairs. For a brief sketch of his life and career, see s.v., *Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP 1963-1964, XVII, 1192.
 - 3 Letter to John Sutcliff, 13 January 1776 [Sutcliff Papers].
 - 4 William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792 edn.; repr. Baptist Missionary Society, 1991), 103.
 - 5 *The Second London Confession of Faith* 24.2 [in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev.edn.: Judson Press, Philadelphia, 1969, 284]. The way in which eighteenth-century Baptists were far from being politically quietistic is detailed in James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society*, CUP 1990.
 - 6 *Second London Confession of Faith* 24.1, 2 [in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 284].
 - 7 'Between Pacifism and Coercion: The English Baptist Doctrine of Religious Toleration', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 58, 1984, 36. For Smyth's own words, see his *Propositions and conclusions, concerning true Christian religion, conteyning a confession of faith of certaine English people, liuinge at Amsterdam* 85 [The Works of John Smyth, ed. W. T. Whitley, CUP 1915, II, 748]; *Defence of Ries' Confession*, Article 10 [trans. James Robert Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, Waterloo, Ontario/Scottsdale, Pennsylvania 1991, 182-183].
 - 8 *The Christian Minister's Reasons for Baptizing Believers Only*, London 1772, iv [cited O. C. Robison, 'The Particular Baptists in England, 1760-1820', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1963, 389-390]. Edward C. Starr [*A Baptist Bibliography*, Rochester, New York, 1969, 14:264] wrongly gives MacGregor's dates as 1747-1798. MacGregor was originally a member of Eagle Street Baptist Church, London during the pastorate of Andrew Gifford [L. G. Champion, *Farthing Rushlight: The Story of Andrew Gifford 1700-1784*, 1961, 63]. He began to labour in Woolwich in 1747, and a church was organized a decade or so later. His pastorate of this cause was a lengthy one, lasting until 1805 [John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register*, 1798-1801, 3:20, note; Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 1830, IV, 337, 516-520; W. T. Whitley, *The Baptists of London 1612-1928*, 1928, 132].
 - 9 Henry Spivee, *Colchester Baptist Church - The First 300 Years, 1689-1989* Colchester 1989, 27; Robison, *op.cit.*, 396; Ivimey, *op.cit.*, III, 239, 251-252.
 - 10 On the life and ministry of Joseph Stennett, jun., see Ivimey, *op.cit.*, III, 579-588; B. A. Ramsbottom, *Through Cloud and Sunshine: Four generations of faithful witness - the story of the Stennett family*, Gospel Standard Trust Publications 1982, 8-9.
 - 11 *Rabshakeh's Retreat* 1745, 31-32, 33-34. For a study of sermons preached by English Protestants during the rebellion, see Françoise Deconinck-Brossard, 'The Churches and the '45' in W. J. Shiels, ed., *The Church and War*, Oxford 1983, 253-262.
 - 12 Ivimey, *op.cit.*, III, 251-252.
 - 13 On the life and ministry of Gill, see especially John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. John Gill, D.D.*, 1838 edn., repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1992; Timothy George, 'John Gill' in his and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians*, Nashville, Tennessee, 1990, 77-101; Peter Naylor, *Picking Up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century*, 1992, *passim*.
 - 14 *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1839 edn., repr. Paris, Arkansas, The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1989, 984. It should be noted that Gill has actually misunderstood Aristotle's thinking about the origins of human society. I am indebted to John W. Seaman for drawing this point to my attention.
 - 15 *Two Treatises of Government* II.VIII.95 [ed. Peter Laslett, *John Locke: Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge 1988, 330].

- 16 *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1809 edn; repr. Paris, Arkansas, 1989, II, 553. See also *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 987.
- 17 *Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1810 edn; repr. Paris, Arkansas, 1989, III, 632-633.
- 18 *Exposition of the New Testament*, I, 50.
- 19 *ibid.*, II, 549. See also Gill's commentary on Romans 12:19 [*ibid.*, II, 550]; 1 Peter 3:9 [*ibid.*, III, 559]; Proverbs 20:22 [*Exposition of the Old Testament*, IV, 470]: 'private revenge is not to be taken, but should be left to God, to whom vengeance belongs'; and Proverbs 24:29 [*ibid.*, IV, 497]: 'private revenge itself is sinful'.
- 20 Lewis R. Donelson, "Do Not Resist Evil" and the Question of Biblical Authority', *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 10, No.1, June 1988, 37, 35.
- 21 *Brief Memoir*, 96.
- 22 *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 983-988.
- 23 Bradley, *op.cit.*, 57-59. See also Robison, 'Particular Baptists in England', 401-404.
- 24 'A Confession of Faith delivered by John Ryland junr of Northampton at his Ordination to the Pastoral Care of the Church in College Lane, June 8. 1781' (Ms., Bristol Baptist College Library, Bristol), 18.
- 25 On the life and ministry of Caleb Evans, see especially Norman S. Moon, 'Caleb Evans, Founder of the Bristol Education Society', *BQ* 24, 1971, 175-190; Roger Hayden, 'Evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century British Baptists with particular reference to Bernard Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans and the Bristol Baptist Academy, 1690-1791' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Keele, 1991), 209-240.
- 26 Bradley, *op.cit.*, 127-128.
- 27 Letter to William Legge, the Earl of Dartmouth, 14 June 1775 [*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, ed. John Telford, 1931 edn.; repr. 1960, VI, 156]; Leon O. Hynson, 'Human Liberty as Divine Right: A Study in the Political Maturation of John Wesley', *Journal of Church and State*, 25, No.1, Winter 1983, 57, n.1.
- 28 Hynson, 'Human Liberty as Divine Right', 57-85; Robert Hole, *Pulpits, politics and public order in England 1760-1832*, CUP 1989, 22-24.
- 29 *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* [*The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, 3rd edn, 1830, XI, 86-87]. On Wesley's fear of republicanism, see Allan Raymond, 'I fear God and honour the King': John Wesley and the American Revolution', *Church History*, 45, 1976, 316-328.
- 30 W. M. S. West, 'Methodists and Baptists in Eighteenth Century Bristol', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 44, 1984, 163.
- 31 Letter to John Sutcliffe, 13 January 1776 [Sutcliffe Papers].
- 32 Caleb Evans, Letter to John Sutcliffe, 23 October 1775 [J. R. L. English Ms. 369-371, John Rylands University Library of Manchester].
- 33 *A Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, Occasioned by his Calm Address to the American Colonies*, 1775, 11. Evan mentions the same concern at the end of this letter: *ibid.*, 24. On the publication of Evans' Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, see Frank Baker, 'The Shaping of Wesley's Calm Address', *Methodist History*, 14, 1975-1976, 7. On Evans' response to Wesley, see also Donald H. Kirkham, 'John Wesley's Calm Address: The Response of the Critics', *Methodist History*, 14, 1975-1976, 13-23, *passim*.
- 34 Wesley, *Calm Address*, 90; Evans, Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, 11. For Locke's influence on Evans, see Bradley, *op.cit.*, 133-134. Evans described Locke as 'the immortal Locke' in his Letter to the Rev. John Wesley, 4.
- 35 Cited Claude L. Howe, jun., 'British Evangelical Response to the American Revolution: The Baptists', *Fides et Historia*, 8, 1976, 39. It should be noted that Fletcher was not the only Methodist leader who continued to assert a position that Wesley had outgrown. The lay-preacher, William Mason, for instance, insisted in 1776 that rebellion against the ruling powers was always a sin and if persisted in could only lead to damnation [Hole, *op.cit.*, 24].
- 36 Cited Bradley, *op.cit.*, 158.
- 37 *A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, Bristol 1776. This Reply runs to 103 pages. The phrase cited is from page 30.
- 38 *Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication*, 51-55. See also *Political Sophistry detected, or, Brief Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's late Tract, entitled 'American Patriotism'*, Bristol 1776, 15. As Evans summed up his position in a sermon that he preached a few years after the end of the American War of Independence: 'nothing can warrant resistance to any established government, but an attack upon those principles of liberty, civil or religious, which if once destroyed, must necessarily destroy all liberty, and overturn the very foundations of all free and lawful government. And in such a case

- to resist is not only lawful but highly virtuous and praise-worthy, and will most assuredly be crowned with the approbation of God and of all good men' [*British Freedom Realized*, Bristol, 1788, 25]. For further discussion of Evans' views, see Howe, 'British Evangelical Response to the American Revolution', 37-41; West, 'Methodists and Baptists', 164-165; Hole, *op.cit.*, 28; Bradley, *op.cit.*, 121-192, *passim*.
- 39 *The Fast, A Poem*, 1778 [cited Bradley, *op.cit.*, 155]. On Murray, see Hole, *op.cit.*, 220-222; Bradley, *op.cit.*, 121-192, *passim*.
- 40 *Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication*, 81.
- 41 *ibid.*, 60. In citing the chapter and verse of the Lukan parallel, it is wrongly given as 'Luke vi.23'.
- 42 Cited William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1833. The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, Cambridge 1971, I, 583. See also the remarks of Howe, 'British Evangelical Response to the American Revolution', 35-37.
- 43 This description is that of Andrew Fuller and is cited by A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 1956, 164. On Martin's views, see Howe, 'British Evangelical Response to the American Revolution', 43-44; Robert W. Oliver, 'The Emergence of a Strict and Particular Baptist Community Among the English Calvinistic Baptists 1770-1850' (unpublished PhD thesis, London Bible College, 1986), 90-99. As Bradley has noted [*op.cit.*, 123 and nn. 4, 5], the phenomenon of loyalist Dissenters like Martin has yet to be studied.
- 44 James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* CUP 1993, 200-201.
- 45 Mark Wilks, *The Origin and Stability of the French Revolution*, Norwich 1791, 5-7 [cited Robert Hole, 'English sermons and tracts as media of debate on the French Revolution 1789-99' in Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, CUP 1991, 23-24]; Robert Hall, jun., *Christianity Consistent with a Love of Freedom* [*The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, eds. Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Belcher, New York 1854, II, 37]. For a discussion of Wilks' views on the French Revolution, see C. B. Jewson, 'Norwich Baptists and the French Revolution', *BQ*, 24 1972, 209-215.
- 46 For other examples of such sermons and tracts, see Samuel Pearce, *Motives to Gratitude*, Birmingham 1798; Thomas Blundel, *The Duty of Christians to Civil Government*, Dunstable 1804.
- 47 Underwood, *op.cit.*, 166. On Fuller's life and ministry, see especially the classic study by his close friend, John Ryland, jun., *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 1816. A second edition of this biography appeared in 1818. For a more recent study, see Phil Roberts, 'Andrew Fuller' in George and Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians*, 121-139.
- 48 *Christian Patriotism* [*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, 1845 edn., repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1988, I, 202-203].
- 49 *ibid.*, [Works, I, 203-204].
- 50 *ibid.*, [Works, I, 205]; 'Mr. Bevan's Defence of the Christian Doctrine of the Society of Friends' [Works, III, 759].
- 51 *Christian Patriotism* [Works, I, 205]; Letter to William Carey, 1 March 1811 [Letters of Andrew Fuller, typescript transcript, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford].
- 52 *Christian Patriotism* [Works, I, 205-206].
- 53 *ibid.*, [Works, I, 206-207].
- 54 *Works*, I, 571-573. See also 'Mr. Bevan's Defence' [Works, III, 759].
- 55 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (2nd.edn.; Grand Rapids 1976, I, 271-289; D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7*, Grand Rapids 1978, 49-52; John Piper, 'Love Your Enemies': *Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis. A History of the Tradition and Interpretation of Its Uses*, 1979 edn.; repr. Grand Rapids 1991, 89-91, 98-99.
- 56 *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2nd.edn., New York 1963, 159. On Bonhoeffer's problem in putting his own interpretation into practice, see Donclson, *op.cit.*, 36.
- 57 The quote is from Andrew Fuller, *Paul's Prayer for the Philippians* [Works, I, 360].