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Amanda Oh  
aroh@smu.edu

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# The Latitudinarian Influence on Early English Liberalism

Amanda Oh

aroh@mail.smu.edu

Dr. Kathleen A. Wellman<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper takes the unexpected position that early liberal thought developed in transformative events within the Anglican Church during the second half of the seventeenth century. The historical evolution of religion laid the foundation of English political and intellectual philosophy, as supported by works written by the branch of Anglican churchmen known as the Latitudinarians. I will argue that these ministers were foremost in advancing the argument for religious toleration because their religious writings held political consequence. Toleration was the principle value of liberalism in the late seventeenth century because the problem of Dissenters was so pertinent to English religious life. In contrast to the official Anglican Church policy of intolerance of anything that did not conform to the official catechism of the Church, the Latitudinarian ministers-turned-bishops encouraged toleration and accommodation of religious thought in their sermons, ideals they based on their novel understanding of individuality, rationality, and theology. While not Dissenters themselves, the sympathy of these clergymen for Dissenters was evident in their pamphlets, books, and sermons.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the seventeenth century in England saw the flowering of liberal ideals that turned on new beliefs about the individual, government, and religion. At that time the relationship between these cornerstones of society fundamentally shifted. The result was the preeminence of the individual over government and religion, whereas most of Western history since antiquity had seen the manipulation of the individual by the latter two institutions. Liberalism built on the idea that both religion and government were tied to the individual. Respect for the individual entailed respect for religious diversity and governing authority came from the assent of the individual.

This paper takes the unexpected position that early liberal thought developed in transformative events within the Anglican Church during the second half of the seventeenth century. The historical evolution of religion laid the foundation of English political and intellectual philosophy, as supported by works written by the branch of Anglican churchmen known as the Latitudinarians. I will argue that these ministers were foremost in advancing the argument for religious toleration because their religious writings held political consequence. Toleration was the principle value of liberalism in the late seventeenth century because the problem of Dissenters was so pertinent to English religious life. In contrast to the official Anglican Church policy of intolerance of anything that did not conform to the official catechism of the Church, the Latitudinarian ministers-turned-bishops encouraged toleration and accommodation of religious thought in their

sermons, ideals they based on their novel understanding of individuality, rationality, and theology. While not Dissenters themselves, the sympathy of these clergymen for Dissenters was evident in their pamphlets, books, and sermons.

My investigation arises from an interest in how the early English liberal tradition came about in the Revolution of 1688. Without a doubt, it is surprising that the Restoration Church of the 1660s—one that entertained hallmarks of High Church Laudianism and its agenda of intolerance—moved from a position of complete unity with the monarchy to one that disposed of him. Moreover, the Church and Parliament united in favor of choosing a Dutch Calvinist prince with a clear inclination to protect religious liberty in England. What was the cause of this complete change in position of the Church and how did the liberal ideologies that undergirded its justification come about?

In answering this question, I depart from the traditional focus of secondary sources, which in large part point either to the religious conflict between Protestant Puritans and Catholics in the period immediately preceding the English Civil War (1642-1651) or to the political manipulation of William and Mary after the Glorious Revolution in 1688. Howard Weinbrot, for example, contends that the root of liberalism can be understood in the context of free Protestant Parliamentary speech against a Catholic king. According to Weinbrot, Protestants' greatest fear was that the "Catholic rejection of Reformation religious values denoted a rejection of political values," which would lead to persecution and "political slavery," so they responded by producing apocalyptic satires that

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<sup>1</sup> The Dedman Family Distinguished Professor and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor of History in SMU's William P. Clements Department of History.

charged Catholicism and the Catholic monarch as severe threats to the state.<sup>1</sup> For obvious reasons the apocalyptic satirist was decidedly liberal when it came to free speech, as it was necessary for the expression of dissent. Weinbrot's work theorizes that the friction between the Catholic monarch James II and Protestant intellectuals fueled political liberalism, especially with regard to free speech. While I agree that the primary force behind liberalism was religious in nature, ascribing it to the Protestant-Catholic conflict of the mid-1600s and subsequent victory of the Puritan New Model Army misdirects our focus. Weinbrot may have correctly identified the antipathy individual Protestant thinkers expressed towards the king, but he mistakes in seeing them as supporters of religious toleration. It was the exact opposite. A large body of literature supports the antithetical view: the Cromwellian Protectorate was not a defender of religious freedom, but rather a proponent of a uniform English state practicing Puritanism exclusively.<sup>2</sup>

The Act of Toleration in 1688 was the first document institutionalizing freedom of religion in England. It has historically been viewed strictly in light of the political revolution of 1688 which installed William and Mary.<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on the importance of the literature leading up to the Glorious Revolution rather than on the change of rulers as instrumental in developing the Act's revolutionary ideals. Without a doubt, William and Mary were concerned with toleration and religious liberty, but they did not bring these ideas to England. As their thrones were contingent on their acceptance of the English Bill of Rights and the Act of Toleration, the actual contents of these unusual pieces of legislation must have been developed and articulated in England before their arrival.<sup>4</sup> They were not foreign imports despite William and Mary's endorsement. While monarchical succession played a role, it only facilitated the philosophical transformations already evident in the literature within the Anglican Church. Specifically, the arrival of William and Mary brought to the forefront the sect within the clergy that had begun a conversation fostering toleration.

To place this conversation in context, we can examine the Anglican Church in three distinct periods in the seventeenth century. During the first, the Church was characterized by the Caroline Divines, figures such as Archbishop Laud, and a theology fundamentally colored by Catholicism. From the time of Henry VIII's 1534 Act of Supremacy to the English Civil War, Anglicanism reflected Roman Catholicism both in theory and in practice. There was little room for dissent within the Church, as it held a powerful position as the official state faith. By the middle of the seventeenth century, reaction against Catholic influences in Anglicanism exploded in the English Civil War, marking the beginning of the second period. Puritan Parliamentary members took control of the religion of the nation, led by Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army. Radical Puritan fervor led to the execution of Charles I and other quintessentially "popish" enemies like Archbishop Laud, forcing the Church to retreat from the official state power it once enjoyed.

The focus of this paper is the Restoration Church of 1660 through the Glorious Revolution, the third iteration of Anglicanism in the century. We remember the

Restoration Church for its reestablishment of High Church Laudian style by the reinstated monarch. Under the guidance of Edward Hyde, the First Earl of Clarendon, the Church cracked down on nonconformity. It actively sought nonconforming ministers and revoked their ordinations. It cited the heretical teachings of Dissenters and the sinfulness of schism. The greatest threat to the Church was that of disunity coming from Low Church splinter sects, including Baptists, Independents, and Quakers. The Cavalier Parliament acted on behalf of the Church, issuing legislation that institutionalized a uniform worship style and statement of Anglican beliefs. To a large extent this image of the Restoration Church was accurate, as there is evidence that legislation responded to the Church's demand for authority over the sole faith of England. There is merit, however, in pointing out the degree to which this portrayal was more image than reality. Not all of the Church's clergy thoroughly supported the policies it took.

I advance the argument that within the Restoration Church the clergy were not as uniformly opposed to Dissenters as has been conventionally understood. If they had been, then the idea that the Church and Parliament would soon and happily conceive "religious liberty" and ensure of its exercise in welcoming William and Mary, the English Bill of Rights, and the Act of Toleration, is inconceivable. The period between 1660 and 1688 must reveal reasons for this drastic change in the position of the Anglican Church. This study expects internal dissonance within the Church's clergy as an explanation documented by Latitudinarian writing. Even as the Church officially took a rigid position against Dissenters after 1660, this new class of clerics, ministering with the full authority of the Church, took a dramatically different position on the question of Dissenters. The Latitudinarians rejected the Church's insistence on persecuting Dissent and instead called for peaceful accommodation or even complete toleration of Low Church sects.

To clarify a point of terminology, I use the title "bishop" to describe all the Latitudinarian men in my paper since that is what Gilbert Burnet used when writing *The History of His Own Time*. However, these men were appointed to their bishoprics by William III after the Glorious Revolution. Before their appointments they had served as ministers; however, their writings were spread over the course of their service to the Church. Their elevation by William III demonstrates that their ideas became drastically more popular and influential after 1688. The Latitudinarian influence was then organically cultivated and eventually became the dominant religious view by the time the seventeenth century came to a close. The appointment and popularity of John Tillotson, one of the foremost Latitudinarians, to the senior position of the Archbishop of Canterbury offers compelling evidence of this evolution.

The Latitudinarians were a unique breed. Constituting a small minority of churchmen with similar backgrounds, they came from Cambridge, they were younger than most Restoration Age clergy, and they enjoyed a network of peers. Most importantly, they infused their religious preaching with ideas that would permeate the celebrated political documents of the era. These bishops

advocated for attitudes of accommodation for Dissenters, rather than repression, primarily because of their faith in human rationality in religious matters. They also shared similar attitudes. For example, making peace with the Dissenters was preferable to making war against them; cordiality was valued above censure. In response to the threat that James II represented to the stability of Anglicanism, the Latitudinarians wrote too about the purpose and ends of government. Their conclusions on government—notably that monarchical rule is limited, divine right is not a legitimate source of power, and governments are premised on the consent of the people—put them squarely within Western Europe’s political discourse at the turn of the eighteenth century. The Latitudinarians were contemporaries with the most celebrated political philosopher of their day, John Locke, and they expressed ideas about toleration and liberty on the eve of the Glorious Revolution just as he did, yet their name remains largely unacknowledged today. A thorough review of their works not only explains the differences between Anglicanism during the 1660s and that of 1688, it also demonstrates the Restoration Anglican clerics internally produced a treasury of early liberal thought.

## 2. THE ANGLICAN CHURCH DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The strength and uniformity of the Caroline Divines as leaders of the Anglican Church from the early to the middle seventeenth century precluded dissenting factions from forming within the clergy. Under the leadership of men like Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud, Anglicanism clung to a distinctly High Church position. Ritualism, Catholic influence, and a strict adherence to the clerical order characterized the Church during this era. With regard to structure, the Church was stringently hierarchical. Laudian Anglicanism sanctioned uniformity of thought and repression of nonconformers—Presbyterians and Dissenters—with the full authority of the state.

The early Stuart period witnessed Anglican preachers using the pulpit to preach political messages as much as religious ones, an unsurprising result of the inextricable linkage of state and religion during this time.<sup>5</sup> The gravity of enforcing religious doctrine with police authority should not be underestimated. The content of Anglican sermons during the Carolinian Era was deliberately chosen to buttress an existing theological hierarchy, with eminent references to the importance of deference and obedience to political authority.<sup>6</sup> Laud was so fierce in his demand for religious conformity and his contention that religious dissidents were pursuing “seditious activity against the state,” that ordinary Anglicans were “terrified” of him and saw him as a “bogeyman.”<sup>7</sup> They viewed the stranglehold the Anglican Church had over the monarchy as “insidious” and saw Laud’s treatment of anyone who disagreed with the official teachings of the Church—particularly Puritans William Prynne, Henry Burton, and John Bastwick—as “fierce persecution” and part of his schedule of “repressive uniformity.”<sup>8</sup> His ironclad understanding of a singular

Church echoed in his sermon that opened the parliamentary season in 1626. In it he argued that the unity of the state depended on the complete interdependence of crown and Church, implying that an accusation of treason could be brought against individuals who disobeyed the Church.<sup>9</sup> In his sermon, Laud continued in the tradition of James Usser and Isaac Bargrave, two bishops who had previously addressed Parliament in 1621 and 1624 respectively, but while they had focused on the evils of Catholicism, Laud emphasized the treachery of Dissent within the Church as the primary evil. He argued that Puritanism and Low Church sectionalism were the greatest threats to the hierarchy and order of the Church, and moreover that they were threats that extended beyond the religious realm and into the secular one:<sup>10</sup>

The wise ordering of the people in concord and unity is simply the strongest wall of a State: but break unity once, and farewell strength. And therefore disjointed factions in a State when they work upon division are *publica irae divinae incendia*, the public kindlings of God’s anger, and they burn down all before them.<sup>11</sup>

In such an environment noxious to religious freedom, there was little room for Dissenters, or those who formed “disjoined factions,” to resist what essentially became Anglican rule. For Laud, “the honor of the subject” came from obedience to both “King’s command” and “God’s glory,” which were one and the same.<sup>12</sup>

This strict notion of hierarchy and order went hand in hand with an equally strict notion that individuals did not have the moral or intellectual agency to comprehend religious texts for themselves. High Church Anglicanism put little faith in the individual’s reason and ability to discern for himself God’s will. Laud’s own private reflections illustrate this. For example, he called on God to “further me with thy continued help” and “grant that I may perfectly know what things I ought to do” because, “the weakness of man’s nature can do no good thing without thee.”<sup>13</sup> To be sure, the individual was expected to fully rely on God or God’s ordained clergy. As divinely appointed leaders of the Church were the only ones “lawfully called to those Offices,” and thus able to correctly interpret Biblical text, the concept of apostolic succession squarely fit in with its rejection of individual attempts to critique the Church.<sup>14</sup> Laud had a chilling, “poisonous” effect on speech in England.<sup>15</sup> In the words of preacher Hezekiah Woodward, his words caused “churches to shiver.”<sup>16</sup> Such was the hostility of Anglicanism towards Dissenters from the time of the English Reformation until the mid-1600s.

The Puritan reaction to the High Church grip on the religious life of the nation exploded in the form of military takeover and the eruption of civil war. Certainly, the English Civil War knocked the Laudian Church from its pedestal in the public sphere. It vituperously chastised the Church of England for its many parallels with Catholicism. Scholar David Cosmo commented that the Cromwellian period was characterized by “parallel processes of

radicalization, ultimately allowing for bloody regicidal denouement and a constitutional upheaval that would have been unthinkable for most English subjects in 1640.<sup>17</sup> The Interregnum flagrantly rejected established rule of law and resorted to violence as a political tool, especially evident when the Protectorate took aim at moderate Parliamentary Anglicans who disagreed with the regicide of Charles I.<sup>18</sup> While the Instrument of Government, which formally established constitutional rule of the Protectorate in 1653, may have intended to balance liberty of conscience with the framework of a national religion, what resulted was only an equally stringent grip on the religious life of the nation. It called for the “Christian Religion,” as understood and interpreted by a board of religious figureheads approved by the regime known as the Triers, to be the “solid Establishment” and “public profession” of the nation.<sup>19</sup> The “golden reigns of discipline” were to be freely used against dissenters of Cromwell’s apostasy, who accused their oppressors of being the “Antichristian clergy.”<sup>20</sup> Polemic poetry denounced dissenters as individuals who sought to “destroy the rewards of sacred worship, and to snatch away tithes from the vanquished clergy.”<sup>21</sup> Over time it became increasingly obvious that the Protectorate was working to replace the conformity that Laud had championed with an equally strict policy, but with Puritanism as its backbone instead of High Church Anglicanism. During this period Anglicanism was forced into eclipse.

However, when the Church of England returned in 1660, there was little doubt of its restored dominance. The “joyous” restoration of Charles II to the throne of England was accompanied by the restoration of the Church of England to its position as the decided “lawful Authority” over spiritual matters of the country.<sup>22</sup> The Cavalier Parliament, composed of overwhelmingly Episcopalian and royalist members of Parliament, cemented the return of the Church as “the triumph of the Laudians.”<sup>23</sup> Within eighteen months, the newly installed Parliament had embarked on a rigorous legislative program that harkened back to the same level of repression that the Laudian Church had enforced decades before.<sup>24</sup> The Act of Uniformity of 1662 forced out 939 parish ministers from their positions because they refused to adapt to the strict requirements of “unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by” the Book of Common Prayer, complete subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and forswearing “to endeavour any change or alteration of government either in church or state.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the early Restoration Church was marked by “implacable opposition” to Dissenters and clergy who did not conform to the pre-bellum standards of adherence to Church authority and theology.<sup>26</sup> The Test Act of 1673 limited public offices to Anglicans in good standing with the Church. The Clarendon Code, which included the Corporation Act (1661), the Act of Uniformity (1662), the Conventicle Act (1664), and the Five Mile Act (1665), legally prohibited nonconformity. Any individualized form of worship that departed from official ceremonial practice was evidence of “unsubduedness of some Mens spirits,” in the words of Richard Baxter in *Reliquiae Baxterianae*.<sup>27</sup> Just as under Laud, individualism was again considered an extreme danger because uniformity safeguarded the

political stability of the nation. Peace resulted from the “universall agreement of the Publique Worshipp of Almighty God.”<sup>28</sup> For this reason, Parliament sought to enforce Anglicanism in the legislative body through the power of the Test Act. MPs were required to receive the sacrament as prescribed by the Church of England or lose their seats.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to its religious prerogative, the Church also took a staunch position on hereditary monarchy as the only kind of government sanctioned by nature and by God. It was said that God “did always govern His own people by monarchy only,” making Charles II “the father of the people.” Stressing the importance of undisputed divine right and obedience to kingly authority, churchmen informed their congregants that “the bond of subjects... unto his sacred majesty is inviolable” and that the pre-civil war image of a king with “liberty without restraint” was the leadership they sought as they memorialized the atrocity of Charles I’s execution. All the king’s actions were legitimate, and should the king behave as a tyrant, the people were instructed to repent sins to God that might have provoked Him to punish them with such misrule.<sup>30</sup>

The Cavalier Parliament was the active agent of the Church of England, ready to respond against religious sedition and reestablish “the Laudian notion of divine right monarchy.” Members of the episcopacy from the 1640s who had survived the Cromwellian era came back to reclaim their seats.<sup>31</sup> From the outside looking in, there was little doubt that the Restoration returned devotion to the Church as much as devotion to the monarch. The Anglican Church, it largely appeared, was back as if it had never left.

But this assertion must be qualified. Although there is extensive literature that frames the Restoration Church as a return to the status, stability, and a “bulwark against sectarianism,” there were definite signs that the Church was not as uniformly reactionary as it appeared.<sup>32</sup> John Spurr wrote that the heavy hand that prosecuted nonconformers “cannot be taken at face value as evidence of a *religious* commitment.” Enforced religious uniformity relied on the power of the state in the form of legislative action, rather than on the religious authority of Anglican leaders.<sup>33</sup> There may have been a political commitment to uniformity on the part of the Cavalier Parliament (as many of the gentry MPs had a material interest in the tithes of the Church), but religious uniformity was another question.<sup>34</sup> The “belligerent confidence” of the restored Church disintegrated into an “anxious and defensive mood” towards the end of the 1660s. Moreover, enforcement of the Test Act and Clarendon Code depended on the disposition of local Justices of the Peace and magistrates. No measure was as effective as it needed to be, as demonstrated by the continued need to add to the Clarendon Code over a period of four years.<sup>35</sup> Not everyone saw the purpose in “arbitrary and inflexible” rules.<sup>36</sup> One conforming bishop wrote that he saw “no reason” to change his beliefs to conform to the Act of Uniformity, and “notwithstanding [their] persistence in Presbyterian worship,” a number of preachers were permitted to keep their positions in the diocese of Chester.<sup>37</sup> Others conformed to keep their jobs even though they

found nothing in their church that was “sinful or contrary to God’s word.”<sup>38</sup> The clergy had mixed responses to their Church’s conservative backlash against nonconformers. Many neither entirely agreed with the harsh policies nor actively protested them. They simply continued in their capacities, serving the Church of England, but did not contribute to the picture of the Restoration Church as an institution committed to tyranny over religious liberty. The movement of the Church from a position firmly opposed to religious freedom to one of toleration would be driven by the Latitudinarians, a particular subgroup among those clergymen who harbored ambiguous feelings towards the repressive policy of the Church.

Although there were Laudian holdovers in episcopal positions, they were dwindling in number and did not produce as many works or as popular works as those of newly appointed bishops. As these old bishops aged (in 1658 their average age was 73), their visibility and capacity in carrying out the High Church legacy waned, which made it necessary to rely on statues and the personal conviction of provincial clergymen to enforce strict religious code.<sup>39</sup> By the late 1680s, all that was left of the Laudian legacy was a class of “dispirited clergy.”<sup>40</sup>

There were certainly active central church figures like Archbishop Sheldon, who mobilized writers to defend uniformity and disparage Dissent in a series of pamphlets, but it is worth pointing out that the need for such polemics only highlights that the Church was in a defensive state against nonconformers.<sup>41</sup> This defense was also weaker around the edges. The Anglican Cavalier Parliament actively pursued nonconformity, but it depended on Sheldon and his allies in London directing its actions. In the outskirts of the country, the gentry was more relaxed about actively prosecuting violators of the Test Act and the Clarendon Code.<sup>42</sup> For example, clergyman Jon Chandler, despite having only received Presbyterian ordination and employing only “partial use of liturgical worship,” was allowed to retain his incumbency. Some vicars who were removed from office continued to occupy the pulpit or were allowed to minister in hospitals and prisons.<sup>43</sup> The High churchmen often had to request lay magistracy to enforce the Clarendon Code in their localities, as Sheldon had to do by petitioning the governor of Dover Castle to apply the Five Mile Act against “a factious Nonconformist minister.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it was a wonder to Bishop Nicholson of Gloucester in 1666 that there were many “impudent conventicles in every part” of the country and a number who “openly appear[ed] at them.”<sup>45</sup> Apparently, the zeal for punishment of nonconformers insisted upon by the top of the Church’s hierarchy did not motivate local authorities.

In total, the overall character of the Anglican ecclesiastical body following the Restoration was complex. The Church had the power to enforce uniformity through official legislation due to the royal inclination of the Cavalier Parliament, but this power was hardly a material reality as the 1660s progressed and enthusiasm for vicious prosecution faded. Anglicanism officially adopted a strict return to the Laudian tradition and many clergymen supported it because opposing it was not worth jeopardizing their positions. However, the unity of the Restoration church and the authority of its policies were at

best a “façade” and a “public face.”<sup>46</sup> Nowhere was this façade more evident than in Cambridge University. Located in a rural town far from the influence of the central Church, this intellectual pressure cooker began producing Anglican clerics who rivaled the Oxford theological tradition in the 1650s and increasingly influenced Church doctrine in the following decades. The Latitudinarians “neither constituted a theological school or a movement” according to Gary De Krey, but their beliefs clearly rejected the official beliefs of the Anglican Church.<sup>47</sup> J.I. Cope described them as “the central force in the movement toward toleration which came from within the Restoration Church of England.”<sup>48</sup> Moderation, they insisted, should characterize the Church’s relationship with nonconformers.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. THE LATITUDINARIANS

The previous section provides the context from which the Latitudinarian tradition developed; this one more fully explains who they were and what they believed. Most scholars have noted that the Latitudinarians formed a minority voice during the 1660s and 1670s that seems as obscure in the historical records today as it did to their own Anglican colleagues. They were an insignificant group of young ministers whose unorthodox preaching aroused the inquiry of some critics, but their overall devotion to the Church of England precluded any accusation that they were out of line with the Act of Conformity. In no way did they think of themselves as revolutionary. In fact, the term “Latitudinarian” might be one more often employed by historians than any one of the men themselves. They were not Dissenters, but they did not want to prosecute Dissenters either. Their polemical critics used the word “Latitude-men” against them because of their broad understanding of salvation and their failure to reject nonconforming theology as a legitimate means to salvation.

One pertinent issue to the historiography of these clerics is how to place them in a position relative to the Church of England as a whole. To what degree were they aligned, or perceived to be aligned, with the Church? The question is complicated because the Latitudinarians did not define a codified theology or attempt to create a sect of the Church, nor did they constitute a formal membership. Instead, they were an informal circle of clerical colleagues that exchanged ideas, but made no effort to actively announce themselves as protesters of Church policies. Rather, because they were firmly embedded within the Church’s episcopacy—none would label themselves Dissenters—exactly who they were and what they thought sometimes confused their contemporaries. Robert Grove, the Bishop of Chichester wrote in 1676 that there had “been a great deal of talk of late years about a certain sort of Men which they call Latitudinarians” but that despite “all the noise,” he “could never yet learn who they are, or what they hold, or where they dwell.”<sup>50</sup> Ideologically, the Latitudinarians had ideas that contrasted with those prescribed by the High Church leaders of the Restoration, but structurally they fit within the Church leadership with relative similarity to their orthodox peers.

This section treats the development and importance of Latitudinarian writing in influencing Anglican theology. We know that this minority class of clergy existed because their opponents wrote about them

with both curiosity and disgust. We know that they distinguished themselves from Anglican theology because their sermons departed from the theme of scathing intolerance that marked the Church teaching on Dissent. Instead, their literature demonstrates that they brought to the Church new ideas that infused theology with rationality, scientific inquiry, and an amenableness to individual styles of worship.

The Latitudinarians' relative obscurity in the 1660s and 1670s is both understandable and important. Unlike the Dissenters, they made no attempt to leave the Church to make a grandiose statement about the injustice of religious repression. That they were "distinguished" churchmen who remained in ministerial positions throughout the Restoration Church and who were elevated to high bishopric positions after the Revolution was crucial to their influence in the Church.<sup>51</sup> During the days of the Anglican witch hunts in the 1660s, they did not trigger the alarm of higher-ups in the Church (the exception being Tillotson, who only conformed after the passage of the Act of Uniformity).<sup>52</sup> They themselves conformed and "loved the constitution of the Church, and the liturgy, and could well live under them."<sup>53</sup> In spite of their devotion to the Church, however, "they did not think it unlawful to live under another form." This belief put them at odds with the Anglican Church's repugnance of nonconformity. Between 1660 and 1688, their influence grew for a number of reasons, including the replacement of the Laudian holdovers with younger, more liberal fellows, the dissolution of the iron bond between High Church Anglicans (both in the Church and in Parliament) and Charles II, and the growing number of dissenting branches that pleaded for toleration from the Church of England.<sup>54</sup> Eventually John Tillotson would manage to "emerge as an acclaimed Anglican preacher, and, eventually to succeed Sancroft as primate" in the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>55</sup> It was precisely because Latitudinarian ideals were attached to respectable names in the existing clerical class that they *internally* revolutionized the direction of the Church of England. Furthermore, their ideas were pertinent beyond the sphere of religious policy and cultivated concepts of early English liberalism from within a religious context.

In the *History of His Own Time*, Gilbert Burnet provided a list of men whom he considered to be Latitudinarians in the sense that they had "resolutions never to go in to severe methods on the account of religion."<sup>56</sup> This description of laissez-faire attitudes against what High Church Anglicans would call the "ruin" of the church meant that the name "Latitudinarian" was almost exclusively derogatory.<sup>57</sup> Burnet noted himself, John Wilkins, John Tillotson, Edward Stillingfleet, Simon Patrick, Thomas Tenison, and William Lloyd as the "moderate episcopal men" that built the core of Latitudinarian philosophy.<sup>58</sup> They shared some common characteristics that distinguished them from the ideal Episcopalian churchman. For one, they were unique in their allegiance to scientific objectivism, probably derived from their ties to the Cambridge Platonists. They were largely "younger Brethren" (at the time of the Restoration, their average age was less than 27) from Dissenting or Presbyterian families, meaning they had little experience

with the Laudian Church. Based on their shared Low Church family backgrounds they were probably raised in environments hostile to High Church influence. Finally, their age also necessarily informed their life experiences, which in turn influenced their philosophy. They were educated and formed their foundational religious beliefs while witnessing "a period of religious strife unparalleled in English history."<sup>59</sup>

Ironically, the intolerance of the Cromwellian state played a role in the development of religious tolerance in the minds of these young clergymen. Just as the bloody toil of the Thirty Years War led to the granting of religious liberty in the Peace of Westphalia after its combatants "grasped the essential futility of putting the beliefs of the mind to the judgement of the sword," so too would the devastation that the church-state relationship caused during the Interregnum influence Latitudinarian thought. Having personally experienced the Anglican Church and its bishops being forced into hiding because of religious intolerance, the Latitudinarians maintained that peace, civil stability, and toleration were worth far more than the repression of Dissenters by law.<sup>60</sup> To them, religious uniformity did not warrant curbing liberty. As products of a "new intellectual climate," these clerics wanted to put down the arms of religious battles that had plagued the nation since the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>61</sup> Their sentiments were reinforced by communication and friendship among themselves; their familial circles exposed them intimately to Dissenters. Wilkins was a student of a moderate Dissenter with Baptist tendencies. Tillotson was a student of a Puritan at Cambridge and his father-in-law was a Congregationalist. Both Edward Fowler's brother and father were ministers who were removed from their positions during the 1660s because of their Presbyterian ordination. Tillotson had a "close and long friendship" with Wilkins. Burnet described Lloyd as having been "formed by" Wilkins; the latter told Burnet that Lloyd had "the most learning in ready cash of any he knew." Burnet, the youngest of the Latitudinarians described in the *History* (he was only 17 in 1660), remarked on the impression the older tolerant members of the Church made on him: as a young cleric, he "grew well acquainted with Tillotson and Stillingfleet" and "Whitscot and Wilkins were very free with me, and I easily went into the notions of the Latitudinarians."<sup>62</sup>

An examination of the Latitudinarians' written work shows the direction these men believed the Church should take. It is important to remember that their writing came from completely within the folds of Anglicanism, but it was influenced by the events the Latitudinarians had lived through, the people they communicated with, and the education they received. They wrote in large part as a reaction against the consequential policies they saw the Church pursue against Dissenters. While they were certainly not exponents of the dominant religious thought in the Church—after all, they were clerics trained in a rural university far from the center of political-religious life in London—their ideas about reason, toleration, and government echoed in the material events leading up to the Glorious Revolution. It is not difficult to see the seeds of liberal thought as having first been planted in the writings of the Latitudinarians. Their introduction of novel religious

beliefs to the Anglican tradition had far reaching political ramifications.

### I. The Latitudinarians on Reason

Chief among the characteristics that categorically distinguished the Latitudinarian clergy from their classical Anglican peers was their emphasis on reason and empirical analysis. Their critics in contempt degraded them as “proselytes of the authority of Human Reason” who “[esteemed] reason in matters of religion,” and “[made] reason an interpreter of Scripture.”<sup>63</sup> These apparent insults were not far from the truth and the Latitudinarians were not afraid to admit it. In fact, Margaret Jacob wrote their “basic convictions” could be summarized as the belief that “rational argumentation and not faith is the final arbiter of Christian belief and dogma; scientific knowledge and natural philosophy are the most reliable means of explaining creation.”<sup>64</sup> Theology was as much a scientific inquiry into the work of God as it was a set of practices. God’s favor would be revealed, and His power embodied, in the form of the human mind. Latitudinarians emphasized the rationality of God’s human creation. In stark contrast to Laudian prayers exhorting God’s divine guidance, the Latitudinarians took the position that God had provided humans with intellect for a purpose, and that purpose was inquiry into religious truth with reason, an endeavor that undoubtedly required an open mind. Indeed, Thomas Sprat asserted in 1667 that “the universal disposition of this age is bent upon a rational religion” and the Latitudinarians were the greatest exponents of this statement in the seventeenth century.<sup>65</sup> The implication of such a theological disposition towards individual discovery was evident: instead of a top-down approach to moral rectitude, if God and godliness were entities readily discoverable by all humans, the breakdown of institutional barriers between man and God that enforced religious dogma was justified.

Rational religion meant natural religion in the eyes of these clergy, and since natural qualities were ones that could be perceived by anyone, the Latitudinarian outlook on spirituality was decidedly more focused on the role of the individual in giving meaning to his faith. Tillotson wrote that “all reasonings about Divine relations must necessarily be governed by principles of natural religion... that is, by those apprehensions which men naturally have of the divine perfections, and by the clear notions of good and evil which are imprinted upon our natures.” Note that Tillotson’s view emphasized that morality should be universally agreed upon, not arbitrarily decided, because morality is a stamp which is natural to each human being. Moral principles were “common notions” instead of ones that were enforced by a clerical hierarchy.<sup>66</sup> A superior position in the Church hierarchy could not supersede individual inquiry into rightness. Indeed, the emphasis on individual discovery through exercise of human reason was also evident in another one of Tillotson’s sermons, in which he exhorted that

God hath given us Understandings,  
to try and examine things, and the  
light of his Word to direct us in this  
tryal; and if we will judge rashly  
and suffer our selves to be hurried by

Prejudice or Passion, the *Errours of our Judgement* become the *Faults of our Lives*. For God expects from us that we should weigh and consider what we do; and when he hath afforded us light enough to discern betwixt *Good and Evil*.<sup>67</sup>

It was up to the person to exercise the “understanding” that God gave them, instead of relying on clerical staff for all matters of spirituality. In contrast, Laud had previously written that faith was an act where individuals were called to “yield full approbation to that whereof it sees not full proof.” For Laud, the Church had a distinct role in interpreting the word of God in matters where proof of the individual’s interpretation did not exist.<sup>68</sup> Both Tillotson’s sermons here and similar works placed a great emphasis on the capacity for humans to explore religion. Embedded in his discussion on the value of discovery that came from humans’ inner consciousness working with outward senses, Wilkins wrote that the five senses were “the first and highest kind of evidence of which human nature is capable.”

The universality of human reason also allowed one mind to check another. In contrast to “physical certainty” which could be verified by the senses and “mathematical certainty” which could be verified by the human faculties, “moral certainty,” according to Wilkins, was “less simple.”<sup>69</sup> If humans were equally capable of exercising their endowed gifts to discover God, there was hardly any reason for a single person—ordained or not—to claim complete religious rectitude. That moral certainty was “not as great as mathematical and physical” was clear to Stillingfleet too. Moreover, there was danger in allowing one to impose his own religious beliefs on others, as it could be employed maliciously. “Interest,” cautioned Joseph Glanvill, could lead men to assert an understanding of reason that brought “their consciences to their profession.” In other words, a person could use a particular religious interpretation for personal gain.<sup>70</sup> Glanvill, though not a named Latitudinarian of Burnet’s work, was a cleric who contributed to Latitudinarianism through literature that explained the power and limits of human inquiry. A member of the Royal Society, his writing took foremost concern with the impropriety of using the heavy hand of authority to enforce religious principles that relied on “scant and limited” proof. For the same reason that humans were each uniquely capable of discovery, he cautioned against arrogant confidence in matters of “uncertainty” in *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661). The overestimation of the certainty of one’s beliefs was usually a sign of placing undue and misinformed trust in religion, construed as “over-fond reverence to antiquity and authority” because of a reliance on “will and passions.” Dogmatizing about the uncertain in religion, whether it be an opinion or a probability, caused unnecessary quarrels and was in sum “the greatest enemy to what is certain.”<sup>71</sup>

Overall, the Latitudinarian confession that “Faith itself, is an Act of Reason” is evidence that their intellectual epistemology influenced their religious one.<sup>72</sup> Rigid insistence on a single set of religious opinion was not justified for two reasons. For one, it was wrong because the



individual was called by God and equipped by God to use his natural faculties to explore religious truth for himself. It was not only a possibility but one of the “great Duties of Religion, which God mainly requires of us” to “be true to ourselves” and “obey the Dictates of our Minds.” The Latitudinarians placed their faith in the mind, not in external counsel. Religion was something God intended for humans to explore for themselves because “[Jesus] did not place Religion (as some have done since) in . . . profound Mysteries and fine Speculations, but in the plain and honest Practice of the solid and substantial Virtues of a good life,” attainable by all who sought it out.<sup>73</sup> God was the embodiment of perfect truth, so humans, being His creation made in truth, could “be assured that the frame of our understanding is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true.”<sup>74</sup> Second, there were limitations to any individual’s understanding of God’s holy word. The pride that accompanied a definite assertion of understanding was ungodly and was the cause of ungodly sectarianism. Wilkins stressed that the greatest quality of truth was its agreeableness. The truth was the truth because one did not need to dictate it to all others.<sup>75</sup> By this logic, there was little justification in holding a particular religious interpretation as certain truth if it could not be verified or agreed upon by all. The Bible set down few fundamentals of the faith according to Fowler. Beyond that, it was “sufficient for any man’s salvation, that he assent to the truth of the Holy Scriptures” and “carefully endeavor to understand their true meaning, so far as concerns his own duty, and to order his life accordingly.”<sup>76</sup>

## II. The Latitudinarians on the Christian Faith

Rationality and reason not only affected the Latitudinarians’ personal beliefs, they also affected the Latitudinarian outlook on the proper relationship between believers, specifically between the Church and nonconformers. Obviously, their philosophy on the nature of this relationship drew largely on their understanding of the importance of reasoning and its universal applicability. Benjamin Whichcote, a Cambridge Platonist and one of the intellectual forerunners of the Latitudinarians, wrote the following about how faith related to the believer:

“I receive the truth of the Christian religion, in way of illumination, affection, and choice: I myself am taken with it, as understanding it and knowing it; I retain it, as a welcome guest; *it is not forced into me, but I let it in* (emphasis added).”<sup>77</sup>

It was precisely this understanding that religion was something chosen by the individual that inspired the Latitudinarians to refrain from policies that unduly enforced religious doctrine on nonconformers. Burnet asserted that although men may have different interpretations of the same thing, prosecuting one for a different revelation of God’s word was immoral. He illustrated his point by arguing that while “we are sure that a thing cannot be one and three in the same respect” since “our reason assures us of this and we do and must believe

it,” he found that as Christians “we must believe upon the authority of God revealing it that the same thing is both *one* and *three*.”<sup>78</sup> Put simply, diversity of religious thought was not a product of right and wrong dogma, but rather a product of God revealing the same thing differently to different people. Fowler pleaded that the Church should “not magisterially impose upon one another, and be so charitable as to believe well of Dissenters from us that live good lives.”<sup>79</sup> Christianity was not about the specific use of communion tables or the prescribed reading of liturgy, both of which, if found out of order, could be grounds for dismissal from bishopric services. Tillotson believed that “the less the Communion of the Church was clogg’d with disputable Opinions, or Practices, the World would be Happier, Consciences the freer, the Church the Quieter.”<sup>80</sup> To the bishop and many of his colleagues, this peace was the ultimate calling of the Church. Godliness was found less in the “swellings of style” that defined the High Church and more in the substance of Christian character.<sup>81</sup> Some scholars go so far as to argue the Latitudinarians believed that all religions could lead to salvation, but I am skeptical of this since it is almost undisputed within all branches of Christianity, except the Unitarian, that the Christian God alone saves.<sup>82</sup>

In any case, there was a definite transition in the locus of the Christian calling: while Laudianism was concerned with the outward appearance of Anglicanism, which included the “beautifying and adoring of all English churches” and a service that displayed the glory of the Church’s spiritual leaders in sacrilegious awe, the Latitudinarians were partial to the Low Church understanding of Christian duty.<sup>83</sup> They were much less ritualistic and for them a relationship with God was just as much horizontal, pertaining to love between members of the Church, as it was vertical, pertaining to obedience to God. Obedience to God was first and foremost defined by maintaining “virtuous and charitable action” and “justice and charity towards men,” Tillotson preached, not excluding those who disagreed with the Church.<sup>84</sup> Maintaining good interpersonal relationships was central to the Latitudinarian understanding of the good Christian life, in contrast to the High Church Anglican understanding that “goodness” came from conformity to standards. Tillotson wrote that he “had much rather persuade any one to be a good man than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever.”<sup>85</sup>

The Latitudinarian emphasis on peace and harmony within the body of believers is particularly noteworthy because it grew organically from within the clerical class instead of from nonconformers. This emphasis was defined in response to the question of how the Church should maintain its relationship with nonconforming branches. Burnet believed that the Anglican faith called the clergy to hate infighting caused by party or sect and instead called them to mimic Christ in all their interactions with others, “loving one another, as he loved them.”<sup>86</sup> This belief translated into a call for reasonable dealings with nonconformers—comprehension when it was possible and toleration when it was not. Wilkins offered a four part plan describing the Church’s ideal relationship with nonconformers in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*. The plan avoided “[bringing] in any doctrine contrary of that which

is established,” but also ensured “peace” for the nonconformers “as shall be thought most expedient” for them.<sup>87</sup> In this way, the Latitudinarian policy on nonconformity was a vastly different reaction from the one the Cavalier Parliament used to support the Restoration Church. It turned on a different understanding of the central tenets of Christianity. For the Latitudinarians, the works of a good Christian and his ability to extend love and justice to his brothers in Christ were necessary for salvation. Little to no emphasis was put on the necessity of an outward appearance of orthodoxy. To High Church Anglicans however, this appearance was a non-negotiable requirement to be properly considered a member of the Church. Deviations were heretical and anathema to salvation. Working from these two different theological starting points on the nature of salvation, the core of the Christian faith, it is clear why the Latitudinarians disagreed with the official Church stance on nonconformity. The importance of salvation stemming from peace-making could not be reconciled with harsh repression of diversity of religious thought. Toleration would not be a reality under the Restoration Church, but the ideas the Latitudinarians espoused would flower in the Toleration Act of 1688.

### III. *The Latitudinarians on Governmental Power*

What makes the study of Latitudinarians most intriguing is how their theology influenced their idea of normative government power and its boundaries. The “great fissures” that divided the Restoration Church clergy would strongly influence the Revolution of 1688 and early liberal thought on the role of political power. Indeed, many of the Latitudinarian clergy were either involved in the clandestine mission to authorize the entrance of William and Mary to claim the throne or they were involved in the *ex post facto* justification of the change of rulers.<sup>88</sup> To bolster their position, they used religious doctrine to justify their political beliefs. There are strong reasons to believe that the political discourse often attributed to John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government*—in opposition to divine right and in favor of the liberal notion of rulers whose power is intended for the good of the people—sprang from the work of Anglican Latitudinarians in addition to secular philosophy.

Without a doubt, a number of Latitudinarians were active in the political transformation of England in 1688, but they did not base their support for the revolution solely on differences in religious beliefs. This fact is important because it demonstrates that unlike Cromwell and the Puritan Long Parliament, the discussion of revolutionary politics that took place within the Anglican Church was not intended to replace one spiritual tyranny with another. In other words, the 1688 revolution was not hypocritical like the one half a century earlier had been. The Protectorate ostensibly stood for freedom of religion, but it only resulted in changing the prescribed national religion from High Church Anglicanism to Low Church Puritanism. The new order, like the old one, strictly enforced a particular understanding of religion. Unlike for Cromwell, the Latitudinarian justification for the revolution was not in the name of a specific religion, but instead in the name of freedom of religion. Burnet wrote pamphlets fervently denouncing James II, translated William’s

*Declaration of Reasons* justifying his intervention in England, and even prayed that the Lord would put the Prince of Orange and his wife “on the throne.” Even he was inclined to preach “against the lawfulness of subjects rising against the sovereign on account of religion.”<sup>89</sup> The Latitudinarians thus distinguished themselves from the philosophy of Cromwell because they stood for a right to freedom of religion.

For Burnet and his colleagues, the only justification for overthrowing the monarch was political. The underlying principles of their justification can be viewed as challenges not only to the rule of James II, but to all monarchical governments that exercised rule that was not aligned to the good of the people. Their writing clearly questioned the authority of earthly rulers to reign with unchecked and arbitrary power. For example, when Burnet wrote that kings “were exalted for the good of their fellow creatures, in order to raise them to the truest sublimity,” he was pointing to an end and purpose of government. He went on to extrapolate that there were consequences for failing to reach that end, and that boundaries to monarchical rule did exist. Burnet explained that

religion has laws on its side, in a legal government, where the king’s prerogative is shut up within such limits, then as the right of professing that religion *comes to be one of the civil liberties*, so the king by breaking through all the limits of law, assumes an authority which he has not, and by consequence he may be withstood.<sup>90</sup>

The avant garde character of the terminology is striking. With clear reference to the “civil liberty” of the “right of professing religion,” Burnet explained that it is fully appropriate to resist monarchs if they infringe on the political freedom of individuals. Fowler’s writing directly applied this concept to the case of James II. If James II could have been satisfied letting “his people enjoy their religion and laws,” instead of letting himself be swayed by the Catholic view of divine power impressed upon him by the Jesuits and Louis XIV, he “might have reigned happily.”<sup>91</sup> The Stuart monarchy flourished on stability that came from power, a concept that did not sit well with the Latitudinarians. Fowler denounced the king as being far from the benign head of the church. For him, it was “not only lawful but a duty to prevent the dangerous growth of such a monarchy which designs to suppress religion and civil liberties.”<sup>92</sup> Stillingfleet asserted that the king’s flagrant use of power against the “common good” warranted his deposal.<sup>93</sup> Fowler added contract theory to the common good and found that “no oath can bind any longer than the obligation thereof is consistent and reconcilable with the *salus populi*, the welfare of the people which is the sole end of all government.”<sup>94</sup> There was a defined purpose in a monarch’s role and it hinged on the interest of the people. Tillotson was sure that James II could justifiably be overthrown for this reason, as his actions represented a “terrible and imminent danger which threatened our religion and laws.”<sup>95</sup>

What these incredible passages tell us is that the

Latitudinarian thinkers were political writers as well as religious ones, and at the center of their political writing were the topics that we almost exclusively associate with the rapid advancement of political philosophy outside the Church during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Here is evidence that conversations on limited government, the purpose of government being to serve the people, and the concept of justified rebellion were all taking place inside church walls. Latitudinarians applied their distinct religious outlook to the contemplation of events around them. If God was a God of “Good will to us” as human beings, and kings were called to mimic God, then the legitimation of power came from the discrete actions of a king for the benefit of the people, not from a conception of total and unquestioned authoritarianism.<sup>96</sup> The implication was the repudiation of the doctrine of divine right.<sup>97</sup> Divine right was a roadblock to the justification of the ousting of James II, but if the contingency of a king’s rule came from his actions on earth instead of ordination from heaven, then the end of his rule could also be justified by behavior on earth. Stillingfleet specifically addressed the Nonjurors—bishops who refused to take an oath to William and Mary because they still felt bound by their sworn oath to James II—when he wrote that their obligation to the previous king was dissolved “on account of the public good” and because there was a “superior obligation” for the clergymen to serve the men around them above that to serve the king.<sup>98</sup> Since there was no Scriptural foundation that proved the existence of the divine right of kings, there was little reason to cling to it when it opposed the goodness of the community.

Burnet’s written defense of the contract theory of government, the *Enquiry into the Measure of Submission to the Supreme Authority* (1688), was the most extensive disquisition on the topic and anticipated many of Locke’s arguments in the *Second Treatise* published in 1689. Burnet’s work was published eighteen months before Locke’s. It was intended to be pro-William propaganda in the weeks before the invasion. In it he articulated that, in the defense of “religion, lives, and liberty,” it was “lawful and necessary” for subjects to replace their government. If there was a right to property, which in England there certainly was, then there was a corollary “right to preserve it . . . against invasions.” Only by contractual agreement did men entrust the protection of rights to a supreme authority. A king undermining that agreement was the “[subversion of] the whole foundation of the government.” Charles II was undoubtedly doing that by taking measures to Catholicize and nationalize Anglican land. Other divines added that God had called the Church to intercede on behalf of the protection of religious and property rights. Stillingfleet wrote that it “was not enough to be merely contented with Providence,” but rather, the mandate of the Church was one “to be active and useful in our places to promote the common interest.”<sup>99</sup>

As Charles II continued to pursue policies that endangered the Church and thus the welfare of the country, the Latitudinarians found themselves simultaneously threatened by Catholicism on the right and divine authority of the king on the left. It put them in an awkward position. How could they reconcile their oath to uphold the monarch as the head of the Church of England while also fending off

their head’s Catholic tendencies? Their solution was to attack the foundation of monarchical power. This was the cradle of religious privilege. While maintaining their religious convictions to support the head of the Church of England, the Latitudinarians asserted that although the head was the king, the king was only the king under certain stipulations. Having thrown off divine right as the basis of kingly authority, the bishops’ writings asserted that the foundation of a monarch’s power was unquestionably connected to the good of the people. Government existed for the people and for the protection of certain liberties. Thus, the Glorious Revolution was not a treasonous mission to depose of divinely ordained power, but rather an installation of authority that would fulfill the ends of good governance.

#### 4. IMPACT AND CONCLUSION

This paper addresses an important omission in our understanding of the development of liberalism in the Glorious Revolution. The Restoration Church of 1660 was marked by the unwavering bond between church and state and the revival of stark opposition to liberty of expression and religious diversity. At the time, the Church harkened back to Laudian traditions and attempted to reinstate conformity. The Cavalier Parliament’s legislation did an impeccable job at institutionalizing this intent. The official policy of the Church was that Dissent was toxic to the health of the state and the soul. These intolerant positions must be reconciled with the Toleration Act and the Church’s involvement in the Glorious Revolution, because it appears that, in a remarkable turn of events, the church-state duumvirate altogether abandoned its grip on English religious life only twenty-eight years after the Restoration. As this paper argues, Latitudinarian thought was crucial to this change. My assertion that this development was driven by the work of churchmen writing from within the Anglican tradition is significant because it examines political history with a religious lens. This perspective provides a more complete explanation of events in seventeenth century England because political and religious history centered on a single church-state entity. Because the religious and political narratives of Anglicanism and the English Crown were so intertwined, it is hardly surprising that they would affect each other.

After a thorough review of the Latitudinarian beliefs, we can summarize their impact with three points: (1) Latitudinarian thought about government was central to the justification of the Revolution, (2) Latitudinarian thought on the individual, religion, and liberty of conscience informed the Church’s move towards toleration of Dissenters, made explicit in the Toleration Act of 1688, and (3) in a more general sense, the Latitudinarians shaped a literature on the nature of society, state, religion, and the relationship between the three that was contemporary with the development of liberalism through the turn of the eighteenth century. Their interpretation of government was inspired by their precarious situation. It was necessary for them to simultaneously depose of the Catholic influence of Charles II while also maintaining their sacred vows to uphold the Church of England and its head. They resolved this dilemma by making clear that government, even by a monarch, did not rest solely on supposed divine blessing.

They attached limitations and stipulations to government. They dictated that government serve as the guardian of personal rights and facilitator of the public good. If it failed in these ends and acted tyrannically towards its citizens, the removal of government for another one that provided for these ends was entirely warranted. When applied to the Glorious Revolution, these ideas meant that the Latitudinarians welcomed William III on the condition that he uphold the English Bill of Rights and the Act of Toleration.

Furthermore, by emphasizing reason and rationality as endogenous to individuals, the Latitudinarians clearly defended their position on religious toleration. I use the word toleration broadly in this instance to mean that, in general, Latitudinarians opposed the harsh official Anglican policy that disdained nonconformers and denounced them as undoubtedly barred from salvation. Rather, toleration encompassed Dissenters' freedom from the religious demand of the state. Latitudinarians embraced this ideal because they understood one's relationship with God as an intimate matter of personal discovery. This sentiment was institutionalized in the Toleration Act of 1688. The Act opened with the acknowledgement that its purpose was for the "ease to scrupulous consciences in the exercise of religion" and provided that no person should be "prosecuted in any ecclesiastical court for or by any reason of their Nonconforming to the Church of England." The reference to the conscience of the individual clearly echoed the Latitudinarian notion of individual spirituality.

These clerics valued the power of reason in the individual, rationality in religious matters, a contractual understanding of government, and the utility of inquiry and science to reveal truth. In opposition to a top-down theological approach that impinged on personal morality, they exalted conscience as the ultimate interpreter of God's divine light. Their emphasis on the duty of Christians to act as loving brothers and sisters instead of as active policers of the faith made them amenable to toleration and religious diversity. If natural faculties were proof that God intended for faith to be intimately understood, they argued, then individuals were called to respect one another in love.

The Latitudinarian outlook not only held implications for the individual, but also for control over the individual and limits of that control. No discussion on political thought would be complete without including John Locke's treatment of government in the *Second Treatise*, but little emphasis is placed on the development of similar ideas within the religious community. For obvious reasons there was a clerical interest in the justification of the rejection of the head of the Church. While not minimizing the consequence of Locke's work, it is important to note that he wrote in an environment populated by others who sought to justify the deposition of the king. The Latitudinarians succeeded in doing so on grounds not dissimilar to Locke's. His ideas were not entirely novel; they were part of an ongoing discussion. In fact, the philosopher was an interlocutor with Lloyd and Tillotson. After the latter's death, Locke mourned that the result was he had "scarcely anyone whom I can freely consult."<sup>100</sup>

While there is not sufficient evidence to connect the Latitudinarian work with all or even most of the figureheads of the Enlightenment and Scientific

Revolution, there is a case to be made that, remarkably, the Latitudinarians' theology developed in a similar direction to secular seventeenth and eighteenth century revolutions. They applied the Scientific Revolution's focus on objectivity to religion. Since they found that no single religious interpretation could be verified as fact like mathematical or physical matters could be, they concluded it would be wrong to impose religious beliefs on others. Their faith in the individual to determine moral ends for himself aligned with the forthcoming liberal understanding of the individual as a rational creature. Their assertion of the limits of government to interfere with religion was the bedrock for arguments about the separation of church and state and justified rebellion in the interest of the public good. Looking backwards, the philosophy of the Latitudinarians permeated deep into eighteenth century political and social thought. In clear contrast to the repressiveness of Restoration Anglicanism, the Latitudinarians defined their position as the intellectual fathers of toleration, and by extension, proponents of early English liberalism.

## 5. REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Howard Weinbrot, "Apocalyptic Satire, James II and Transubstantiation: Pulpit, Polemics and the Declaration of Indulgence," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 321.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Coward writes in *The Cromwellian Protectorate* that the Protectorate was characterized by "the pursuit of reformation more zealously than ever before... and the replacement of attempts to conciliate unsympathetic and hostile opinion with harsh repression." In contrast to standing for religious liberty, Cromwell led a regime where the central objective was to promote unity in Christian belief, not diversity. In this way, the Protectorate was "as intolerant of the views of others as had been the Laudian bishops in the 1630s." Barry Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>3</sup> John Miller writes that "the Commons concurred in the vote to offer the crown to William and Mary... together with the statement of rights and proposals on the order." John Miller, *The Glorious Revolution* (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Godfrey Davies, 'English political sermons, 1603-40', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3 (1939): 1-22.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Parry, "Bishop William Laud and the parliament of 1626," *Historical Research* 88, no. 240 (2015): 235.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 236; Charles Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 121, 229.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Klemp, "Civil War Politics and the Texts of Archbishop William Laud's Execution Sermon and Prayers," *English Literary Renaissance* 43, no. 2 (2013): 318; Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud*, 116-117.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, VIII, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 130-131.

<sup>10</sup> Glenn Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 116.

<sup>11</sup> William Laud, *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, D.D. Sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, eds. W. Scott and J. Bliss (7 vols, Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1847-1860) I, 66-67.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> William Laud, *The Private Devotions of Dr. William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury and martyr*, ed. Frederic W. Faber (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1838), 5, 18, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Hammond, *A practical catechism* (London: Tho. Newborough, J. Nelson, and Benj. Tooke, 1700), 345.

<sup>15</sup> Klemp, "Civil War Politics," 318.

<sup>16</sup> Hezekiah Woodward, *The Life and Death of William Lawd, Late Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1645), 27.

<sup>17</sup> David Cosmo, "Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War," *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): 820.

<sup>18</sup> David Underdown, *Pride's Purge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 143-172.

<sup>19</sup> Eds. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 3 vols, (London, 1911), II, 821; Marchamont Nedham, *A True State of the Case of the Commonwealth*, (London, 1654), 43; Philip Connell, "Marvell, Milton, and the Protectoral Church Settlement," *The Review of English Studies* 62 no. 256: 565-566. The Triers were responsible for "the approbation of Publique Preachers" and charged with the role of regulating the morality of the state. Such regulation exemplifies the failure of the Cromwellian state to implement the religious freedom they proclaimed to have stood for.

<sup>20</sup> Nedham, *A True State*, 43; Information of Marchamont Nedham, 20 December 1653, The National Archives SP 18/42, fol. 117 as qtd. in Connell, "Marvell," 566.

<sup>21</sup> Payne Fisher, *Inauguratio Olivariana* (London, 1654), 14. The work was originally published in Latin.

<sup>22</sup> N. H. Keeble, *The Restoration*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 109; Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester, (London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence, and J. Dunton, 1696), II, 246, section 101.

<sup>23</sup> Keeble, *The Restoration*, 85; R.S. Bosher, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement: The Influence of Laudians*

1649-62 (London, 1951), 16-18 qtd. in John Miller, *After the Civil Wars*, (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000), 133.

<sup>24</sup> Keeble, *The Restoration*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 43; Act of Uniformity 1662.

<sup>26</sup> Spurr, *The Restoration*, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller discussion on the parts of the Act of Uniformity see Spurr, *The Restoration*, 43; Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II, 243, section 101.

<sup>28</sup> This was the language of the 1559 Elizabethan Act of Uniformity.

<sup>29</sup> *The Journal of the House of the Commons (1660-67)*, VIII, 247.

<sup>30</sup> Gary S. De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution in Britain*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118; Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. J. P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23, 28; John Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666* (London, 1667), line 1141; John Dryden, *Astrea Redux. A Poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of His Sacred Majesty Charles the Second* (1660), line 46, *God and King* (London, 1663), 14-16; John Nalson, *The Common Interest of King and People* (London, 1677), 140, 143; H.W. Randall, "The Rise and Fall of a Martyrology: Sermons on Charles I," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 10 (1947), 151. Note that these sources were found in De Krey's discussion on the Restoration's emphasis on the divine right of kings. This was more than something spearheaded by the Church and official legislation. It was celebrated as an integral part of English culture as demonstrated by the poems listed here.

<sup>31</sup> Spurr, *The Restoration*, 70, 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. The thesis of Spurr's book is that the unity of the Restoration Church was fragile even when it wanted to appear strong. There were hairline fractures that prevented its goal of complete conformity from being attained. Indeed, within the Church itself there were "many differences" that were "disguised rather than healed." John Spurr, *The Restoration*, xiv. Gary S. De Krey agreed, writing that "as had become increasingly apparent by 1667-72, the Anglican Church of the Restoration lacked the means to maintain the uniformity." De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution*, 120-121.

<sup>33</sup> De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution*, 120-121; Spurr, *The Restoration*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Miller explains that in the early seventeenth century some wealthy laymen were given a cut of tithes in their local parishes. Miller, *After the Civil Wars*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution*, 118, 121. Enforcement of the Code was necessarily complicated because it required hawkish commitment on the local level that matched that of Anglican leaders in London. In the outskirts of the city, authorities were at best “indifferent” to this and at worst “active sympathizers with Nonconformity.” Spurr, *The Restoration*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Spurr, *The Restoration*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Ms Rawlinson D 361, folder 18 as qtd. in Spurr, *The Restoration*, 42; John Stoughton, *Church and State Two Hundred Years Ago: A History of Ecclesiastical Affairs in England from 1660 to 1663* (London: Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, 1862), 291.

<sup>38</sup> CUL MS Add. 8499, folders 49-50 as qtd. in Spurr, *The Restoration*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *After the Civil Wars*, 133; Keeble, *The Restoration*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> MS Tanner 30, folder 104, as qtd. in Spurr, *The Restoration*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Samuel Parker’s *A discourse of ecclesiastical politie wherein the authority of the civil magistrate over the consciences of subjects in matters of external religion is asserted* (1671) was intended to revive Protestant hatred of Dissenters.

<sup>42</sup> Spurr, *The Restoration*, 46-55.

<sup>43</sup> John Stoughton, *Church and State*, 290-291.

<sup>44</sup> MS Add. C 308, folder 66 as qtd. in Spurr, *The Restoration*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> MS Add. C 302, folder 71 as qtd. *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 2 of Spurr, *The Restoration*, esp. 104.

<sup>47</sup> De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> J. I. Cope, “The cupri-cosmits: Glanvill on latitudinarian anti-enthusiasm,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 17 (1954), 270.

<sup>49</sup> De Krey, *Restoration and Revolution*, 123.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Grove, *A vindication of the conforming clergy from the unjust asperations of heresie* (London: Printed for Walter Kettilby, 1676), 24.

<sup>51</sup> G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 4. For an extensive discussion on the relationship between William III and the bishops he appointed, see Pincus’s chapter “Revolution in the Church” in *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. The Latitudinarian bishops’ influence in politics and the Church soared after the Revolution and so did the popularity of their ideas. Pincus writes on the

influence John Tillotson had on the new monarchs saying: “William appointed Tillotson clerk of the closet in April 1689, an office that, his biographer Thomas Birch correctly noted, ‘required his frequent attendance near their Majesties’ persons.’ William placed the greatest confidence in Tillotson, designing him for the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury as early as the spring of 1689. The list of Williamite bishops reads like a list of Tillotson’s closest friends.” Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 410.

<sup>52</sup> Jacob M. Blosser, “John Tillotson’s Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 80 no. 2 (2011): 143.

<sup>53</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *A History of My Own Time with Notes by the Earls of Dartmouth and Hardwicke, Speaker Onslow, and Dean Swift*, ed. M.J. Routh (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 6 vols., Oxford: The University Press, 1833) I, 342.

<sup>54</sup> Spurr, *The Restoration*, 89; Chapter 9 “The frustrations of the Cavaliers 1660-64” in Miller *After the Civil Wars*, 161-194; Chapter 2 “Why were Dissenters a Problem?” in George Southcombe & Grant Tapsell, *Restoration Politics, Religion and Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 20-37

<sup>55</sup> John Spurr, “‘Latitudinarianism’ and the Restoration Church,” *The Historical Journal* 31 no. 1 (1988), 73.

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *A Supplement to Burnet’s History of My Own Time*, ed. H.C. Foxcroft (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 467.

<sup>57</sup> MSS Tanner 38, folder 25 as qtd. in John Spurr, *The Restoration*, 177

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *A History of My Own Time*, I, 45-46, 467.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England, (greatly misunderstood) Truly Represented and Defended...in A Free Discourse between two Intimate Friends*, (London: Printed for Lodowick Lloyd, 1670), 12-13; I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 14-15.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon Christenson, “‘Liberty of the exercise of religion’ in the Peace of Westphalia,” *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*, 21 no. 3 (2013): 740.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *The Glorious Revolution*, 64.

<sup>62</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 24; Burnet, *A History of My Own Time*, I, 344, 345; Burnet, *A Supplement*, 463.

<sup>63</sup> John Warly, *The reasoning apostate, or modern latitude-men consider’d* (London, 1677), 48-49.

<sup>64</sup> M.C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976), 34-35.

- <sup>65</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: Printed for J. Martyn, 1667), 374.
- <sup>66</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 50-51; Tillotson, *Works*, III, 224.
- <sup>67</sup> Tillotson, *Works*, III, 206.
- <sup>68</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 98; William Laud, *A Relation of the Conference between William Laud, then Lord Bishop of St. David's, now Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mr. Fisher, the Jesuit* (1639), section 16, qtd. in P.E. More and F.L. Cross, eds., *Anglicanism* (London, 1935), 98.
- <sup>69</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 60, 62-63; John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* ed. John Tillotson (London: Printed by A. Maxwell for T. Basset, H. Brome, R. Chiswell, 1675), 3-5.
- <sup>70</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 63, 65-66; Edward Stillingfleet, *A Rational Account of the Grounds of Protestant Religion: Being a Vindication of the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury's Relation of a Conference, &c.*, in *The Works of the Most Eminent and most Learned Prelate, Dr. Edw. Stillingfleet, Late Lord Bishop of Worcester* (London: Printed by Robert White, 1710) IV, 199; Joseph Glanvill, "Against Confidence in Philosophy," in *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (London: Printed for John Baker, 1676), 25.
- <sup>71</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 66; Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing, Or Confidence in Opinions* (London: Printed for Henry Eversden, 1661), Preface to the Reader.
- <sup>72</sup> Spurr, "Latitudinarianism," 71; Glanvill, "The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion," in *Essays*, 17.
- <sup>73</sup> Jacob M. Blosser, "John Tillotson's Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Pursuit of Happiness," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 80 no. 2 (2011): 149; Tillotson, *Works*, I, 407, 341, II, 222.
- <sup>74</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 68; Tillotson, *Works*, I, 658.
- <sup>75</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 68; Glanvill, "Of Skepticism and Certainty" in *Essays*, 48.
- <sup>76</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 40; Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England, (greatly mis-understood) Truly Represented and Defended... in A Free Discourse between two Intimate Friends*, (London: printed for Lodowick Lloyd, 1670): 316.
- <sup>77</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 100; "Eight Letters of Dr. Anthony Tuckney, and Dr. Benjamin Whichcote... Written in September and October, 1651," in Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* (London, 1753), 47-48.
- <sup>78</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London, 1700), 322.
- <sup>79</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 41; Fowler, *The Principles*, 316.
- <sup>80</sup> Blosser, "John Tillotson," 151; Gilbert Burnet, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Tillotson* (London: H. Hills, 1709), 15.
- <sup>81</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 136; Sprat, *The History*, 113.
- <sup>82</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 5.
- <sup>83</sup> Fuller, CH 536-7 as qtd. in Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.
- <sup>84</sup> Blosser, "John Tillotson," 149-150; Tillotson, *Works*, I, 341, 419.
- <sup>85</sup> Blosser, "John Tillotson," 150; Tillotson, *Works*, 128.
- <sup>86</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 36. Gilbert Burnet, *A modest and free conference betwixt a conformist and a non-conformist about the present distempers of Scotland now in seven dialogues* ([Edinburgh?: s. n.], 1669), 83.
- <sup>87</sup> Richard Baxter, "The Copy of the Lord Keeper's, or Dr. Wilkins' Proposals," in Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 25.
- <sup>88</sup> Pincus, 1688, 414.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 415; Gilbert Burnet, *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission* (London, 1688), 5-6; Gilbert Burnet, *Reflections upon a pamphlet entitled, Some discourse upon Dr. Burnet and Dr. Tillotson* (London, 1696), 43.
- <sup>90</sup> Gilbert Burnet, "Meditations on the Impending Expedition," in Burnet, *A Supplement*, 524.
- <sup>91</sup> Edward Fowler, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of Our Late Most Gracious Queen Mary* (London: Printed for B. Aylmer and J. Wyatt, 1712), 25.
- <sup>92</sup> Edward Fowler, *An answer to the paper delivered by Mr. Ashton at his execution to Sir Francis Child* (London, 1690), 18, 23.
- <sup>93</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 29. Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse Concerning the Unreasonableness of a New Separation, on Account of the Oaths, with an Answer to the History of Passive Obedience, so far as it relates to Them* (1689), in *The Works of the Most Eminent and most Learned Prelate, Dr. Edw. Stillingfleet, Late Lord Bishop of Worcester* (London, 1710) III, 939.

<sup>94</sup> Pincus, *1688*, 417; Edward Fowler, *A Vindication of the Divines of the Church of England* (London: Printed for Brabazon Aylmer, 1689), 13-14.

<sup>95</sup> Pincus, *1688*, 417; John Tillotson, "Sermon Preached 29 May 1693," in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, ed. Ralph Berker (London, 1735), I, 214.

<sup>96</sup> Blosser, "John Tillotson," 162; Tillotson, *Works*, I, 306.

<sup>97</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 125.

<sup>98</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 29; Stillingfleet, *A Discourse*, in *Works*, III, 939.

<sup>99</sup> I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism*, 29-30; Pincus, *1688*, 419; Burnet, *An Enquiry*, 2, 7, 9-10; Burnet, *Reflections upon a pamphlet*, 36-37.

<sup>100</sup> John Locke, Locke to Philippus Von Limborch, 11 December 1694 in *Locke Correspondence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) III, 603, V, 237-238.

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