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ARTICLE

“Inexpressible horror”: The Devil and Baptist Life Writing in Cromwellian Ireland

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Abstract

The Baptist movement in Cromwellian Ireland displayed a number of distinctive features. Adherents of the movement regularly claimed to have heightened spiritual experiences, which in a number of cases included firsthand encounters with the devil. This article observes the political contexts in which these claims were made while analyzing attempts by Baptist leaders to promote a more critical spirituality and counter illegitimate claims to supernatural experience. It argues that these unusual experiences, reflective more of their geographical than their denominational context, were rhetorically enabled, and Baptist leaders would struggle to both sustain and contain claims to spiritual experience.

Keywords: Baptists; Spirituality; Ireland; Exorcism; Theology

In Dublin, sometime in the late 1650s, Jerome Sankey (circa 1620–1685) attempted an exorcism. Sankey had arrived in the city as a soldier in the early part of the decade: the “Act for the better advancement of the gospel and learning in Ireland,” passed by the London Parliament in March 1650, listed Sankey with John Owen, Henry Ireton, and Henry Cromwell in a committee that was tasked to oversee the properties of the archbishop of Dublin and the dean and chapter of St Patrick’s Cathedral.¹ It is not clear how Sankey had come to the attention of Parliament members, but the career that they facilitated was certainly eventful. Sankey was a field officer of some note who in August 1652 received the surrender of Richard Grace, the last Irish commander of any importance to submit to the Parliamentary army.² But Sankey was also a minister who, according to the natural philosopher and Cromwellian administrator Sir William Petty, “ever loved . . . to be heard publicly as a Preacher.”³ Like many of his

¹Crawford Gribben, *God’s Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14, 40, 85.

²Harman Murtagh, “Grace, Richard,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), last modified 25 May 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11181>.

³Sir William Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland, by Letters to and from Dr Petty* (London, 1660), 69–70.

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contemporaries, Sankey joined the controversy against the Baptists until, “upon the very edge of his railing against it,” he was convinced by Thomas Patient (died 1666)—one of the most prominent of the new religious movement’s leaders—that the “faith of his parents” could not “make his infant washing effectual.”⁴ Now identified with the Baptists, Sankey positioned himself at the center of a web of religious and political conspiracy.⁵ It is not clear when he was baptized by Patient or whether in fact he was a member of a Baptist congregation, but it is evident that he did not understand this baptism as representing a binding commitment to his new community. Petty noted that “a little after he turned Anabaptist,” Sankey offended the anti-ceremonial sensibilities of his coreligionists: he “did, to the offence of his Church, appear in Scarlet like a Doctor at Dublin; was busie in the most superstitious Ceremonies (if any such be) performed at the Enstalment of a Chancellor, sticking at nothing that might make him (or at least make him seem) something.”⁶ Indeed, the Baptist community would have further cause for complaint. While Sankey found himself as a trustee of Trinity College Dublin, the governor of Clonmel, and a representative to the Irish council of the Hartlib Circle, he also became embroiled in Dublin’s Presbyterian politics and was nominated as a churchwarden, receiving his knighthood from Richard Cromwell—who was never a friend of the Baptists—in 1658.⁷ Sankey lost many friends as his career advanced, but of all of his spectacular falls from grace, it was his attempts at exorcism that generated his greatest notoriety.

Of course, the account of these attempts at exorcism must be read with caution and as evidence of what Alexandra Walsham has called a “polemical anthropology.”⁸ Sankey’s efforts are recorded in a publication by William Petty—the Cromwellian administrator, natural philosopher, and founder of the Royal Society—which appeared in 1660 as its author was negotiating the dangerous circumstances of the Restoration, all while claims about the supernatural cultures of Cromwellian Ireland, and the revolutionary ideals with which those cultures continued to be associated, became politically contested.⁹ Petty’s work reeked with hostility toward Sankey. His animosity may have been personal—Sankey had attempted to have Petty impeached in Parliament in 1659, and Petty later complained satirically, perhaps in deliberately imprecise Greek, of his “heautontoreumenous [elaborately self-representing] mighty

⁴Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 176; Richard L. Greaves, *God’s Other Children: Protestant Nonconformists and the Emergence of Denominational Churches in Ireland, 1660–1700* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25; and Richard L. Greaves, “Patient, Thomas,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), last modified 3 January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21549>.

⁵Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 88–91.

⁶Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 75–76. While there were no direct links between Particular Baptists and continental Anabaptists, polemicists who attacked the former often associated them with what they assumed were the theological and behavioral excesses of the latter, and especially with the memory of the events of the Anabaptist takeover of Münster in 1534–1535.

⁷Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 14, 40, 85.

⁸Alexandra Walsham, “Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore,” in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, Past and Present Supplements, ed. Stephen A. Smith and Alan Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 186.

⁹For the political contestation of the supernatural cultures of Cromwellian Ireland in Restoration England, see Peter Elmer, *The Miraculous Conformist: Valentine Greatrakes, the Body Politic and the Politics of Healing in Restoration Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Crawford Gribben, “Angels and Demons in Cromwellian and Restoration Ireland: Heresy and the Supernatural,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Autumn 2013).

Magnanimity.”¹⁰ Petty’s resentment toward Sankey may also have been a strategy by which to distance himself from the extravagancies of the revolutionary period, paving the way for what turned out to be his successful rehabilitation under the restored king. Whatever his motivations, Petty reported Sankey’s attempt at exorcism as a “most true story, whereof there are many witnesses, and such who have often refreshed their memories concerning the matter, by the Entertainments they have made to their friends with it.” Petty explained that Sankey had a history of dealings with the supernatural, and that he had “often” heard Sankey describe the “successe . . . he had against the walking Spirit named, Tuggin, between whom and himself, there were great bickering.”¹¹ But this was satire rather than an account of spiritual warfare, and Petty’s story worked to associate Sankey with all manner of religious and gastronomic excess entirely at odds with the prayer and fasting that were traditionally required in cases of exorcism (Matthew 17:21).¹² Sankey had visited “one Mr Wadman, being in a fit of melancholy, reflecting upon the death of his wife,” and “taking notice of some odd expressions, did by and by fancy that the said Wadman was posses’d; that is, (to speak in the language of Sir Hieromes Order) enchanted.” So Sankey attempted the exorcism, and, as the story continued, “would ask Mr Wadman how hee did? who always answered with a sign, All one.” Sankey grew weary of his attempts, concluding that “Wadmans Divel was of that sort which required Fasting aswel as Prayer to expel it: Whereupon, the Spectators observing how plentifully Sir Hierome had eaten and tyled that evening, did easily conceive the cause, why the Divel did not stir.” Sankey later returned, having made the appropriate precautions, but “found the Divel departed: Mr Wadman having been let blood in the mean time.”

Petty, who was something of a freethinker, dismissed Sankey’s claims about this experience as nothing more than the blundering of a man on the make: “Is there any thing more abominable then those that make Religion a Trade, living onely upon their turning and winding with this and tother Church? . . . Do you think there are not such? Not swarmes of such?”¹³ Sankey was among these religiously orientated careerists, Petty feared, and he pointed to the competition between new religious movements to explain the precarious state of the Irish Protestant churches: “I say, that the Melancholy jealous discontented and active Spirits, common to all Sectaries, hath been the reason why those in Ireland, do as well find fault with the administration of the Survey, as the Sacraments; and with the distributing of Land, as well as dividing the Word.”¹⁴ Petty represented Sankey’s exorcisms as illustrating how the new Protestant control of Ireland, made possible by the schemes for ethnic cleansing land

¹⁰Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 100; and Toby Barnard, “Petty, Sir William,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), last modified 3 October 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22069>.

¹¹Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 101–102.

¹²Early modern European contexts for exorcism and demonology have been described in Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004); Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Brian Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013). For strategies to interpret diabolism in early modern England, see Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19–38.

¹³Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 174.

¹⁴Petty, *Reflections upon Some Persons and Things in Ireland*, 93.

distribution that he had facilitated, was being threatened by cantankerous and unpredictable extremists. The gains of the Cromwellian invasion were being threatened by a bizarre consequence of the democratization of puritanism in Ireland's new religious marketplace in a distinctive "cultural performance" of the supernatural.¹⁵

Contributing to the current historiographical reconsideration of the traditional view of the Reformation as a "catalyst" of disenchantment, this article will argue that Petty's conclusion was, in one sense, correct. Sankey's efforts at exorcism did reflect some of the distinctive features of Irish Cromwellian religion, particularly the expectations of spiritual experience that were encouraged but never successfully contained by leaders within the Irish Baptist movement.¹⁶ Like Protestants elsewhere, Irish Baptists created "worlds of wonder" in which the promotion of a distinctive confession did not "precipitate a seismic shift in attitudes towards the intrusion of God and the devil in the earthly realm."¹⁷ It did, however, curate an environment in which satanic interference was, paradoxically, more likely than it was elsewhere or had been before, serving as a helpful reminder of the ways in which the separation of religion and "magic" in this period was geographically as well as confessionally variegated.¹⁸ But the distinctive supernatural culture of Irish Cromwellians did not focus upon witches, as had been the case in England and Scotland in, for example, the previous decade. Drawing upon the official records of the period prior to their destruction in 1922 during the Irish Civil War, St. John D. Seymour recorded only one prosecution for witchcraft, a case in which the defendant was finally acquitted.¹⁹ Instead, Irish Cromwellians became concerned with the devil directly. Insofar as the evidence of print culture attests, there appear to have been proportionally more appearances of the devil in Ireland than in England in the 1650s, and the meaning of these appearances may also have been distinct.²⁰ This fact was observed by contemporaries. In October 1649, while hiding from

¹⁵For a broader survey of this emerging religious marketplace and the claims to unusual spiritual experiences it could sustain, see St. John D. Seymour, *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* (Baltimore: Norman, Remington & Co., 1913), 77–104; Gribben, "Angels and Demons in Cromwellian and Restoration Ireland"; Philip Jenkins, "Infidels, Demons, Witches and Quakers: The Affair of Colonel Bowen," *Fides et Historia* 49, no. 2 (2017); and Levack *The Devil Within*, 29.

¹⁶The fullest account of Irish Baptist life in this period focuses on the social and ecclesiastical history of Irish Baptists rather than their experience of the supernatural. See Kevin Herlihy "The Irish Baptists, 1650–1780" (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1992). On the historiographical debate about the relationship between reformation and disenchantment, see Alexandra Walsham, "The Reformation and the Disenchantment of the World Reassessed," *Historical Journal* 51 (2008).

¹⁷Walsham, "Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain," 200.

¹⁸On the historiographical debate about religion, "magic," disenchantment, and its confessional variety, see Walsham, "Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain"; Robert W. Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World'," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990); Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 155–157; and Walsham, "The Reformation and the Disenchantment of the World Reassessed."

¹⁹St. John D. Seymour, *The Puritans in Ireland, 1647–1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 140.

²⁰For appearances of the devil in mid-seventeenth-century England, see Diane Purkiss, "Desire and its Deformities: Fantasies of Witchcraft in the English Civil War," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997); and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 186–194. For strategies to interpret these occurrences, see Jacqueline Pearson, "Then she asked it, what were its Sisters' Names?: Reading between the Lines in Seventeenth-Century Pamphlets of the Supernatural," *The Seventeenth Century* 28, no. 1 (2013).

Cromwellian forces in the west of Ireland, Ann Lady Fanshawe witnessed a banshee appear at her window. These apparitions were “much more . . . usual” in Ireland than in England, her husband explained, because the devil had greater freedom in that country to exercise his power.²¹ In the very specific circumstances of invasion, ethnic cleansing, and mass death, Irish Cromwellians intensified the “cosmic struggle between the divine and the diabolical” that had already been marked out as a distinctive feature of the Calvinist Reformation.²² Far from contributing to the “disenchantment of the world,” as Keith Thomas might have expected, Irish Cromwellians participated in an efflorescence of its enchantment.²³

In this efflorescence, the unusual spiritual experiences reported by Irish Baptists may have been more distinctive of their geographical than of their denominational circumstances, thus not entirely dissimilar to Sir Richard Fanshawe’s explanation.²⁴ Even John Bunyan’s experience, as he described in *Grace Abounding* (1666)—which led Richard Greaves to analyze his pathology and propose a diagnosis—was not as vivid as that recorded by some Irish Baptists. Bunyan seems to have experienced Satan’s temptations in his conscience and to have heard the voice of God coming through scripture, yet for Irish Baptists, like their fellow travelers in other new religious movements of the period, the voices of supernatural beings were audible and unmediated.²⁵ The heightened spiritual experiences reported by Irish Baptists compared to those claimed by other Irish Cromwellians, but were much less like Baptists elsewhere. But unlike other Protestants, Baptists in Cromwellian Ireland promoted a sacramental system that, their print culture admitted, did not necessarily protect against the “spiritual, moral, social, and material disorder” which, as Robert W. Scribner noted, the devil “represented and occasioned.”²⁶ This article describes several of these cases and considers attempts within this community to promote appropriate accounts while countering illegitimate claims to supernatural experience as people sought to sustain and contain expectations of spiritual experience in Cromwellian Ireland.

I. Spirituality, Spiritual Warfare, and Baptism

Irish Cromwellians believed that they lived in an enchanted world where believers could experience what the Limerick Presbyterian minister Claudius Gilbert described as “the Tragedy of hell let loose.”²⁷ Gilbert’s comment drew upon the intensely supernatural language that had been developed to describe English Protestant perceptions of

²¹Ann, Lady Fanshawe, *The Memoirs of Ann, Lady Fanshawe, wife of the Right Honorable Sir Richard Fanshawe, 1600–72*, ed. H. C. Fanshawe (London: Bodley Head, 1907), 58.

²²Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the World,’” 483.

²³Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971; repr., London: Penguin, 2003).

²⁴The only substantial discussion of Baptist spirituality in early modern Ireland can be found in Kevin Herlihy, “A Gay and Flattering World: Irish Baptist Piety and Perspective, 1650–1780,” in *The Religion of Irish Dissent, 1650–1800*, ed. Kevin Herlihy (Dublin: Four Courts, 1996), 48–67. See also Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616–1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 50; and Michael Haykin, “‘Drawn Nigh unto my Soul’: English Baptist Piety and the Means of Grace in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (2006).

²⁵Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 38–53. Greaves builds on the arguments of John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

²⁶Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the World,’” 479.

²⁷Claudius Gilbert, *The Libertine School’d* (London, 1657), 25.

the Irish. In 1581, the English administrator John Derrick initiated this tradition in his description of the Irish as “monsters,” an observation confirmed by Edmund Spenser’s references to the existence of werewolves and cannibals in Ireland (1598), while survivors of the 1641 rebellion confirmed the existence of cannibals and reported horrific appearances of ghosts at the sites of mass murder.²⁸ In the 1640s, a tradition of writing about the supernatural was consolidated in accounts by survivors of the rebellion and in rumors about sexual aberration on the part of John Atherton, the Protestant bishop of Waterford and Lismore—a combination of violence and sexual predation that may mark the origins of Irish Gothic, and to which contributors to that literary tradition have often returned—even as English royalists claimed that the Parliamentary forces then on the field in Ireland were in the devil’s employ.²⁹ This practice of writing about the supernatural intensified in the 1650s as Cromwellian invaders subjugated Ireland after a brutally effective total war.³⁰

While the experiences of the native Irish may be lost to history, thanks in part to the massive confiscations of land and population movements as well as the destruction of records, the literary artifacts of individuals associated with the invading army suggest that both the winners and losers in this campaign were profoundly affected by their circumstances of loss and displacement. John Owen, who accompanied the invaders as an army chaplain, was horrified during the nine months he spent in Dublin between 1649 and 1650 by “poor parentless children that lie begging, starving, rotting in the streets, and find no relief,” as well as by charismatic preachers who stood in the same streets to proclaim themselves “to be God . . . with detestable pride, atheism, and folly.”³¹ Other ministers observed the effects of this chaos. Members of the open-baptist congregation that met in Christ Church Cathedral, led by John Rogers, were assaulted by demons and heard audible voices from heaven, and noted the effect of Owen’s careful but powerful preaching alongside that of a boy whose declamations and exhortations had made a

²⁸John Derrick, *The Image of Ireland* (London, 1581), sigs. b.i.v., [D.iii.r], E.i.v; Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 64, 66, 100; Deposition of Peter Hill, 29 May 1645, MS 837, fol. 36v, Trinity College Dublin [hereafter TCD]; Deposition of Elizabeth Price, 26 June 1643, MS 836, fols. 101r–105v, TCD; Gribben, “Angels and demons in Cromwellian and Restoration Ireland,” 380; and Andrew Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 71–93. The violence of the period has been described in John Morrill, “Confronting the violence of the Irish reformation,” in *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. Alan Ford and John McCafferty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John Morrill, “The Drogheda Massacre in Cromwellian Context,” in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007); and Mícheál Ó Siochrú, “Propaganda, Rumour and Myth: Oliver Cromwell and the Massacre at Drogheda,” in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007).

²⁹Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Ireland: Horror and the Irish Anglican Imagination in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005); Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 240; and Peter Marshall, *Mother Leakey and the Bishop: A Ghost Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89–125.

³⁰For comparable trends in other contexts, see Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, 10–11, 155–157. Raymond Gillespie describes the culture of the supernatural that was shared by Catholics and Protestants, but records hardly any instances of appearances of the devil, which, this article observes, seem to spike in the 1650s. See Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted People: Belief and Religion in Early Modern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 107–126.

³¹John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh, 1850–1855), 8: 237.

considerable impression in the city.³² The effect of this religious chaos was felt far outside the Irish capital. In Cork, Walter Gostelo discovered an angel at the bottom of his bed in 1652, which commissioned the prophecy he recorded in *Charls Stuart and Oliver Cromwel united* (1655), while in 1655, Henry Bowen, a soldier in Ireland who was being court-martialed for heresy, investigated reports made by his Baptist wife that his own ghost had appeared in his family home in Wales.³³ For many members of the period's new religious movements, as well as political and religious conservatives such as Ann Lady Fanshawe, the Irish wars seemed to encourage expectations of unusual spiritual experiences.

In Cromwellian Ireland, the intense subjectivity of the period's new religious movements combined with expectations of the extraordinary in discussions about Christian initiation. The conquest provided a new context for the long-standing debate among Protestant theologians as to the nature of true spirituality and its relationship to baptism. This debate indicated the extent to which puritan cultures connected spirituality and sacraments, for the quest to define the primitive doctrine of baptism was inevitably related to discussion of the spiritual condition and experiences of its proper candidates. Of course, puritan preachers with widely varying ecclesiastical convictions were strongly conversionistic and agreed that a merely formal commitment to orthodox theology—which they often described as “historical faith”—brought no promise of salvation. Nevertheless, Baptists focused particularly on this issue, for they were compelled to judge the spiritual qualifications of applicants for baptism. At the same time, their ecclesiological ambitions for a pure communion tended not to be satisfied with the assertions of doctrinal orthodoxy and the evidences of moral living that were the constituents of the credible profession of faith required by their principal religious competitors. Richard Lawrence, later a leading figure among Baptists in Ireland, epitomized the concerns of many puritans when he worried about those “who thought, when they had attained to read and say their Catechism, Creed, and the Lords-prayer by heart, they had been Christians good enough, because it was all their Parsons were able to teach them.”³⁴ Doctrinal tests could measure an individual's ability to capture patterns of knowledge, these hotter sorts of puritans argued as they moved ever further from the expectations of the Genevan Reformation, but only an assessment of an individual's spirituality could provide evidence that they were among the elect. This conclusion became problematic: across the theological spectrum, and within their emerging denominational communities, puritans could not agree on how true spirituality should be detected, of what it ought to be composed, nor how it should relate to baptism. Such arguments took the movement further from the Reformed theological tradition from which it had emerged.³⁵ Particular Baptists were among those most concerned with

³²Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 129–150.

³³Gribben, “Angels and Demons in Cromwellian and Restoration Ireland,” 377–392; and Jenkins, “Infidels, Demons, Witches and Quakers,” 1–15.

³⁴Richard Lawrence, *The Wolf Stript of his Sheeps Clothing or the Antichristian Clergy-man Turn'd Right Side Outwards* (London, 1647), sig. A2r.

³⁵For recent discussions of early Baptist apologetics and polemics, see Ted L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603–1649* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006). For a survey of early English Baptist print culture, see Matthew Bingham, “English Baptists and the Struggle for Rheological Authority, 1642–1646,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68, no. 3 (2017); and Matthew Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

the debate about spirituality and its relationship to sacraments. From the beginning of the mid seventeenth-century crisis, the Particular Baptist churches, which gathered many but not all of those Calvinists who held that baptism should be restricted to believers, had been advancing on the basis of a confession of faith first published in three editions in 1644 and reprinted, with minor variations, in 1646, 1651, 1652, and 1653. With its focus on dogmatic axioms, this confession gave little guidance as to the nature of spiritual experience, though later editions did take account of the increasing threat of Quaker recruitment and more carefully delineated their notion of spirituality from that of other religious movements. Editions of the confession published in the 1650s appeared with a substantial appendix entitled “Heart-bleedings for Professors Abominations.” This text, which claimed to have originated “from the same churches” that had published the confession, appears to have been prepared by a number of Baptist leaders including William Kiffin, one of the most influential London preachers, and Thomas Patient, who became a leader of the movement in Ireland. “Heart-bleedings” addressed the changing spiritual environment in which Particular Baptist theology was being refined.³⁶ Its authors noted that some of the more radical enemies of the Particular Baptist cause were now advancing a spirituality that was quite alternative to that of more orthodox divines. These preachers, they complained, were “labouring to beget in the peoples minds, a contempt, and slight esteem of Christ, his Word, and Ordinances,” emphasizing “a God within, and a Christ within, and a Word within,” all characteristic features of the emerging Quaker discourse. The effect of this preaching was that, with “great and swelling words of vanity,” the Quakers could “triumph in a great mystery of meer nothing but emptiness, and confusion, speaking things whereof they know not; and many poor souls knowing such expressions to be Scripture Phrases, do greedily embrace them, without a true, distinct, and clear understanding of the sense of what is spoken, having the persons of those who speak such language in great admiration, as the chief, tender, charitable, knowing, high and spirituall Christians.”³⁷

Yet such rhetoric was deceiving: these ostensibly “high and spirituall Christians,” the authors of “Heart-bleedings” argued, were regularly guilty of “Drunkenesse, Cursing, Swearing, or Whoredome.” They were “violently hurried on through the assistance of the strong imputations, and restlesse suggestions and instigations of the devil, (the judgements of God being also heightened upon them).” The authors of “Heart-bleedings” were concerned that these Quakers were encouraging others to “leave the Holy Word of God, and give heed to the motions of a decietfull heart, and to the dictates of a lying spirit.” Those who followed would then pursue these sins “with greedinesse, and that with such a high hand, as they accompt it their perfection, and the highest pitch of their glory, to give themselves to such abominations.”³⁸ But the Baptist leaders asserted that, for the most part, “those who have faln into such desperat abominations” were not “sometimes Members of our Congregations” as their enemies had charged, for those who had been truly regenerated could not

³⁶Bertha R. White, “Thomas Patient in England and Ireland,” *Journal of the Irish Baptist Historical Society* 2 (1969–1970); and *A Confession of Faith, of the Severall Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists* (third impression corrected, London, 1651), title page.

³⁷“Heart-bleedings for Professors Abominations,” in *A Confession of Faith of the Severall Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists* (Leith, 1653), 14.

³⁸“Heart-bleedings for Professors Abominations,” 17–18.

“turn aside from the voice of the true Shepherd, and to follow strangers, and the cunning slights and devices of the Destroyer that walks up and down as a roaring Lyon, seeking whom he may devour, who hath cast down many wounded, and . . . many strong men.”³⁹ The authors assumed that it was not normally possible for unregenerate people to be admitted into membership of Particular Baptist churches, and therefore members of these churches should not be expected to fall prey to Quaker deceit and the satanic impulses it represented, despite the later claim of Lawrence Clarkson, among others, to have shared fellowship with a group that had left Thomas Patient’s church in London en route to the Ranters.⁴⁰

Baptist leaders defended their movement by arguing that its theology sustained and contained a robust spirituality, which responded to the “voice of the true Shepherd” by emphasizing objective over subjective knowledge claims. Such spirituality was grounded in, and limited by, its dependence upon scripture. Emphasizing this containment of spiritual experience, their confession of faith, like other puritan confessions, included little of the warm, elevated, and devotional language that occasionally marks some other creedal statements of the period: for instance, *A Confession of Faith, of the Holy Separated Church of God* (1645) acknowledged, alongside its doctrinal claims, that “the sweetest thing is Christs name and presence.”⁴¹ This silence as to the nature of true spirituality, or what might be expected of spiritual experience, was to become a structural weakness in the advance of the Particular Baptist movement, as members of the movement articulated claims to spiritual experience that elevated subjective over objective knowledge claims, creating a culture that could sustain but not so easily contain accounts of unusual experiences. For even as their leaders struggled to contain expectations of the unusual, individual members of Baptist congregations debated how true spirituality should be detected, of what it ought to be composed, how it should relate to their distinctive sacramental practice, and whether the dangers of satanic deception were more than a literary trope in a genre of conversion narrative that was becoming ever more contested as evidence of the work of God in an age of rhetorical reproduction.⁴² As in the other new religious movements, Baptist literary culture was struggling to identify the boundaries of figurative language. The democratization of puritanism encouraged a charismatic spirituality as members of the Irish Baptist community worked out their own salvation while resisting the guidance of their leaders. The question with which they struggled was whether and how to distinguish metaphor in accounts of spiritual warfare.

Of course, this is in part an argument from silence, for the general lack of documentary evidence from this period turns many exercises in early modern religious history into species of educated guesswork—particularly so after the destruction of records in the Irish Civil War decimated the records of Cromwellian Ireland. Yet it seems to be the case that Irish Baptists, who in this period shared the leadership and textual culture of Particular Baptist congregations in England, took advantage of this failure to

³⁹“Heart-bleedings for for Professors Abominations,” 22, 25–26.

⁴⁰Lawrence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found* (1660), in John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding, with other Spiritual Autobiographies*, ed. John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 182.

⁴¹*A Confession of Faith, of the Holy Separated Church of God* (London, 1645), n.p.

⁴²Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

define what might be expected in spiritual experience to permit enormous variations within the boundaries of their community.⁴³ In Cromwellian Ireland, Baptist norms appear to have taken on localized forms, which may be distinguished from those promoted in the English movement. The movements were politically distinct, for English Baptists wrote formally to their Irish coreligionists to warn them against their leaders' anti-Cromwellian outbursts. They also contrasted in some ecclesiological convictions, for English Baptists were decidedly concerned by the failure of their Irish brethren to properly distinguish the holders of pastoral office.⁴⁴ Similarly, while the Baptist movement in Ireland appears to have been more consistently Calvinist than its counterpart in England, it was also more experientially variegated. Many of its adherents embraced the spiritual and political possibilities of the revolutionary period and were simultaneously supported by exponents of even more radical religious preferences: for example, the library of Benjamin Worsley, the spiritual entrepreneur whose alchemical experiments led to his supposed discovery of physical immortality, contained work by Thomas Patient.⁴⁵ The Irish Baptist movement was more theologically consistent than the English movement, but it permitted—or at least failed to control—a much broader range of spiritual experience. This became evident in the struggle of Baptist writers to describe their dealings with Satan.

II. Thomas Patient, Spirituality, and Satanic Deception

Spiritual warfare was a significant theme in the writing of Thomas Patient, the most prominent Irish Baptist theorist of conversion, spirituality, and its relation to baptism. In his only publication, dated 1654, he reflected upon the spiritual joys and duties of Christians.⁴⁶ The horrific events within the civil wars of the previous decade had encouraged his conviction that there was only “a small moment of time from the Lord allotted to men in this life, to run that Christian race set before them,” and there was, he felt, no time for delay.⁴⁷ Patient's vision of the godly life was activist and determinedly purposeful, drawing upon the experiences he had recorded in his own conversion narrative. This spiritual biography advanced beyond the generically standardized accounts of conversion that had typified a series of publications in the previous year and perhaps reflected Patient's fear that the new morphology of puritan conversion was rhetorically reproducible.⁴⁸ Patient's account described the beginnings

⁴³Regional variation within the Baptist movement is noted in Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640–1680* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); and Ian Birch, *To Follow the Lamb Wheresoever he Goeth: The Ecclesial Polity of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1640–1660* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

⁴⁴Bertha R. White, “The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644–1660,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966): 222; and Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “The Baptist Western Association, 1653–1658,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11 (1960): 214–215.

⁴⁵Thomas Leng, *Benjamin Worsley (1618–1677): Trade, Interest and the Spirit in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 120.

⁴⁶Greaves, *God's Other Children*, 25; and Crawford Gribben, “Defining the Puritans? The Baptism Debate in Cromwellian Ireland, 1654–56,” *Church History* 73, no. 1 (March 2004).

⁴⁷Thomas Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism, and the Distinction of the Covenants* (London, 1654), sig. A2r–A2v.

⁴⁸These conversion narratives were published in Vavasor Powell's *Spiritual Experiences, of Sundry Beleevers* (London, 1653) and John Rogers's *Ohel or Bethshemesh, A Tabernacle for the Sun* (London, 1653). These accounts were followed by Samuel Petto's “Roses from Sharon,” which was printed as an appendix to *The Voice of the Spirit, or, an Essay towards a Discoverie of the Witnessings of the Spirit*

of his spiritual life, but moved beyond his conversion and his pursuit of assurance of faith to address the means by which he had arrived at specifically Baptist convictions.

Much of this account of spiritual beginnings was conventional enough, for Patient was operating well within the soteriological boundaries of the puritan confessional tradition. Little is known of Patient's background.⁴⁹ He was probably not a university graduate, for his polemical opponents described him as being no more than a glover or tailor.⁵⁰ As to his conversion, he simply explained that "it pleased God to reveal his Son in me, and to work a change in my heart," and that thereafter "the great and weighty thing that God presented to me was, to make my calling and election sure; which I found to be a work filled with many difficulties, considering how far Hypocrites might attain in the profession of godliness, and that they might come to have the counterfeit of all the Grace in the Child of God":

And this the rather appeared more difficult, because I found my own heart so desperately wicked and full of deceit, as Jerem. 17. 9. and also found the wiles, and subtilties of the Devil, to be various, and I constantly under several temptations, and deep desertions when God (though for a little season) withdrew himself, and the light of his countenance from me. At which time, I judged it my onely thing necessary to prove whether CHRIST were in me, and my faith right, as also my sincerity to the Lord. At which time I found but little settled rest or peace, till the Lord had put that great question out of doubt, in giving me a sure and well grounded confidence of my interest in him, till which time, I found little disposition to search narrowly into other truths, which I then thought to be too remote for me to exercise my self in, having received so much spiritual benefit, in communing with God and mine own heart, and searching out the difference betwixt the speaking of Gods Spirit, my own spirit, and the spirit of Satan.⁵¹

Despite Patient's aspiration to have the objective statements of scripture control his subjective appreciation of its truth, it was his unusual spiritual experience that confirmed this emerging theology of baptism.

With his sense of assurance intact, and now more confident in his ability to distinguish spiritual presences, Patient started to search into these "other truths," elevating the objective standards of scripture above his subjective impressions. He began to worry about "the Government of the Lordly Prelates, and the Liturgy in the Church of England, and the mixed Communion in the Parish Assemblies," and so set about examining "all Religion, as well in worship, and the order of Gods house, as I had done in other points." He found it extremely difficult to be "converted from the Church of England," for he had been "well furnished with arguments from Pulpit and Print, and divers able Disputants for the defence of that false way." Nonetheless, "God breaking in by the power of his Spirit with clear Scripture-light subjected my heart to the obedience of the truth, so that I found my heart closing with those truths

(London, 1653). See Gribben, *God's Irishmen*, 55–78; and Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-century Anglophone World*, 121–178.

⁴⁹Most of the available biographical information is summarized in Micah L. Caswell, *Thomas Patient* (Peterborough: H&E Publishing, 2019).

⁵⁰Greaves, "Patient, Thomas."

⁵¹Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. A3r–v.

in the love thereof.”⁵² Patient became an Independent, and moved with many other “godly Christians” to New England “being not convinced of my error and great darkness in sprinkling the carnal seed of Believers,” as he later observed.⁵³ “Finding the danger of receiving Truths by Tradition,” he “resolved to examine that point of Baptism” before formally joining himself to any Independent congregation. He was quite aware of what was at stake:

For if by my search and tryall in that matter, I should come to see grounds swaying my conscience against childrens baptism, that then I should be generally despised, and slighted of all the godly in that Countrie, and not only be frustrated of Communion and Fellowship with them, but must expect to suffer imprisonment, confiscation of goods, and banishment at least, which would be my ruin, not knowing where to go, but in the woods amongst Indians, and wild beasts.⁵⁴

It was perhaps this sense of extremity that pushed him to prayer. “Hereupon I found the special presence of God with me,” Patient explained, “carrying out my heart to the Lord by Faith and earnest Prayer to be instructed and guided” until “at last it pleased the Lord to reveal his mind to me . . . the Lord breaking in with, not onely a clear light in me, as to the matter in question, but three daies one after another, coming into my soul with sealing manifestations of his Love, and that with such Scriptures so pertinent and sutable to my condition.”⁵⁵ Patient found himself alone in the world, not knowing anyone else who had come to doubt the prevailing theology of baptism. Now on the wrong side of the law, he expected there to be “a Warrant . . . issued out to apprehend and bring me before the General Court in New England.” He explained to his readers, however, that this was “no trouble to me, being filled with unspeakable joy, as I walked up and down in the Woods in that Wilderness, about my business.”⁵⁶ A warrant for his arrest was issued on June 23, 1643, but by that date Patient had already fled from the Congregationalists and the satanic deceptions they represented.⁵⁷

Returning to England, Patient soon rose to a position of leadership and influence. He was ordained, a Presbyterian heresiarch complained, “in a House in Bell-Alley in Coleman-Street, by the Saints, forsooth, of that Church, men and women . . . upon tryall of his gifts, by these Saints.”⁵⁸ In London, Patient quickly joined himself to the congregation led by William Kiffin—with whom he was an early associate—and was one of a handful of community leaders to sign the first and second editions of the confession of faith produced by seven Particular Baptist churches in London (1644 and 1646).⁵⁹ In 1645, he was reported as being involved in a miracle cure in Smithfield.⁶⁰ Around the same time, he baptized Lawrence Clarkson.⁶¹ In 1648, Patient was

⁵²Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. A4r.

⁵³Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. A4r–v.

⁵⁴Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. B2v.

⁵⁵Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. B3v–B4r.

⁵⁶Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. B4r.

⁵⁷Greaves, “Patient, Thomas.”

⁵⁸John Gauden, *Hinc illae lachrymae* (London, 1648), 4; and Adrian Johns, “Coleman Street,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2008).

⁵⁹On the history of the London Particular Baptist chapels, see Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southwark*, 4 vols. (London, 1808), 1: 400–454.

⁶⁰Thomas Edwards, *Gangreana* (London, 1646), i. 56, 104.

⁶¹Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found*, 180.

described as “the Taylor in Southwark (who Preaches out of a Window in Bell Alley in Coleman Street),” and his congregation was being spied upon in “Skippons secret listing of Schismatiques in the City” as army leaders sought to clamp down on dissent.⁶² He may have been one of the six preachers selected by Parliament in March 1649 to be sent to Ireland on the remarkable salary of £200.⁶³ On April 15, 1650, most likely before his departure, Patient wrote to Oliver Cromwell, hailing him as “Elect and precious in the sight of god [sic],” and encouraging him to maintain “sweet and Comfortable Communion with god [sic].”⁶⁴

Patient also found time to complete with other London-based Particular Baptist leaders a preface to Daniel King’s *A way to Sion* (1650), which drew closely on the language of the 1644 confession while grimly confronting the threats of a new and hyper spirituality. Again, they invoked the language of spiritual warfare to describe what was at stake in Cromwellian theological debate. “The Devill hath mustered up all his forces of late, to blind and pester the minds of good people, to keep them from the clear knowledg and practice of the way of God,” they complained, persuading people that “there are no Churches in the world, and that persons cannot come to the practice of Ordinances, there being no true Ministry,” and arguing that Christ is “a shadow, and all his Gospel and Ordinances like himself, fleshly and carnall.” “Now none,” they continued, “have beene more painfull then these have been of late, to poison the City, the Countrey, and Armie, so far as they could; Insomuch that it lay upon some of our spirits as a duty, to put out our weake ability for the discovering of these grosse errors and mistakes.”⁶⁵

As an army chaplain, Patient moved to Ireland and began a preaching ministry in Kilkenny, Waterford, and eventually Dublin. In Dublin he was appointed chaplain to John Jones, one of the four Parliamentary Commissioners responsible for the governance of the island, and replaced the much more conservative advocate of extraordinary revelation Samuel Winter as a state preacher.⁶⁶ Promoting a more objective, Bible-centered spirituality and a more consistent ecclesiological agenda than either Winter or the Quakers, Patient established Ireland’s first Baptist meeting house in Swift’s Alley, Dublin, in 1653. Around that time, his arguments in favor of closed communion split the large and well-connected open-communion fellowship led by John Rogers in Christ Church Cathedral, and in the same year, Patient and his followers were stoned by “dissolute people.”⁶⁷ One year later, he published the first substantial defense of the Particular Baptist position, *The Doctrine of Baptism, and the*

⁶²*Mercurius Elencticus*, 19–26 July 1648, 274; and Clement Walker, *Relations and Observations . . . The History of Independency* (London, 1648), 121.

⁶³White, “Thomas Patient”; and Greaves, “Patient, Thomas.”

⁶⁴This letter is transcribed in Larry J. Kreitzer, *William Kiffin and his World: Part 2* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, 2018), 214–216.

⁶⁵Daniel King, “To the reader,” in *A Way to Sion* (London, 1650), n.p.; and King, *A Way to Sion*, “An occasionall word,” n.p. King’s intended readership can be identified by his concern to explain, in a short preface to the main body of his work, the purpose of square brackets, quotation marks, and basic Latin tags such as “i.e.” It was a revealing gesture, indicating the overlap between the early modern boundaries of class, literacy, and orthodox religion.

⁶⁶James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, 3 vols. (London, 1853), 2: 165–168; Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 129–150; and Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson A 208, pages 379, 390, 410, 420, 421, 427, 434, 439, 441, and 453.

⁶⁷Robert Dunlop, “Dublin Baptists from 1650 Onwards,” *Journal of the Irish Baptist Historical Society* 21 (1988–1989): 7; Greaves, “Patient, Thomas”; and Seymour, *The Puritans in Ireland, 1647–1661*, 60.

Distinction of the Covenants (1654), developing arguments that he had found in *A way to Zion*. Patient defended his decision to publish *The Doctrine of Baptism* on the basis that its contents had been especially appreciated by those who had listened to the sermons upon which its text was based. He believed he had finally found a way to distinguish “the speaking of Gods Spirit, my own spirit, and the spirit of Satan,” for as he was only too well aware, the “spirit of Satan” was active among religious enthusiasts.⁶⁸ And yet, he recognized, his conversion to the Baptist cause had been confirmed by an unusual spiritual experience.⁶⁹

Patient’s polemic drew criticism. After failing to hold his own congregation together—its numerical losses were being reported in April 1654—he decided to leave pastoral ministry to take up the role of travelling evangelist for the Baptist cause.⁷⁰ He was still attracting the attention of the leaders of the Irish administration. In September 1655, a correspondent informed Henry Cromwell that Patient had a “great measure of faith and great [expressions],” and by the end of 1656, Patient was courting the new lord deputy.⁷¹ Nevertheless, it was evident that Henry Cromwell’s administration—which was attempting to broaden its social base and its prospects of longevity in part by appealing to more established ecclesiastical networks, which were often Presbyterian in character even if Episcopalian in background—found less that was attractive in Patient’s style of theological polemic.⁷² Edward Warren, the Presbyterian author of the only full-length reply to Patient’s argument, reflected the administration’s increasing conservatism in asserting that the Irish Baptists “preach not conversion, but subversion,” and it is clear that others were beginning to share this view.⁷³ Baptists were challenging the conservative trend in Irish Cromwellian politics and religion at the same time as the psychological, spiritual, and theological consequences of their emphasis upon spiritual warfare were becoming apparent.

III. The Devil and Deborah Huish

Critics of the Baptists had good cause to be worried about the health of the new religious movement, for even as Patient attempted to counsel distressed souls, Irish Baptists were facilitating a culture of celebrity around some of their most tormented adherents. Between 1654 and 1657, Patient was involved in the strange case of Deborah Huish, the daughter of a genteel Devonshire family whose sisters had married two Particular Baptists and leading lights of the Fifth Monarchist movement, William Allen and John Vernon. Huish had even accompanied Vernon on an extended visit to Ireland through which he intended to propagate Baptist beliefs.⁷⁴ Huish’s spiritual troubles had begun fourteen years previously, for when she was in her early teens, she was “cast into deep despair” and found herself subjected to blasphemous

⁶⁸Patient, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, sig. A3r.

⁶⁹“Heart-bleedings for Professors Abominations,” 14.

⁷⁰John Thurloe, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Thomas Birch, 7 vols. (London, 1742), 2: 213, 4: 90–91.

⁷¹William Stane to Henry Cromwell, London, 28 September 1655, in *The Correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655–1659*, ed. Peter Gaunt, Camden fifth series vol. 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67; and Thurloe, *State Papers*, 1: 731.

⁷²Gribben, *God’s Irishmen*, 99–128.

⁷³Edward Warren, *Caleb’s Inheritance in Canaan, by Grace, not Works* (London, 1656), 86.

⁷⁴Rachel Adcock, “Like to an Anatomy Before Us: Deborah Huish’s Spiritual Experiences and the Attempt to Establish the Fifth Monarchy,” *The Seventeenth Century* 26, no. 1 (2013): 46.

thoughts.⁷⁵ She recounted that her sister, who by that time had married John Vernon, “indeavoured to perswade me, these thoughts were not mine, but the Devil’s: this gave me some respite for a little time, but I [was] suddenly assaulted again.”⁷⁶

Huish’s experiences moved from the kinds of mediated communications with spiritual beings that were reported by John Bunyan in the same period to something more vivid and immediate. These assaults escalated after her removal to Ireland in June 1654, when she was “suddenly after assaulted with more and worse blasphemous thoughts then ever before, and then did verily believe I was possessed with the Devil, and did think I talked with him, and hear him say, that God loved to torment and bring misery upon his Creatures.”⁷⁷ These anxieties reflected her belief that she had committed the unforgivable sin: “This put me into unexpressible torments night and day, thinking the Devil would come and fetch me away, and I believed I was certain of it.”⁷⁸ Huish found her new surroundings to be semiotically oppressive: “Almost every thing did affright me; either a cloudy day, the Sun or Moon eclipsed, or the Suns rising red in the a morning, or the wind blowing high: All these I thought were signs of my destruction.”⁷⁹ Like so many other authors of conversion narratives, Huish “wished many times, I had never been born . . . or else had been made the most contemptible Creature in the world, because when they die there is an end of them.”⁸⁰ She was visited by Patient, who warned her of the “great danger of an impenitent state if the Lord should cut the thrid [thread] of my life, that such persons would drop immediately into Hell, the which he endeavoured to demonstrate to me, that I thought he would be the principal witsse against me, of all that had spoke with me.”⁸¹ On a reciprocal visit to “Mistriss Patients house,” where some Baptist women had met to pray for her, Huish “smell’d Brimstone burning, and expected nothing but destruction . . . and I have oft, as I have judged, seen Michaels meeting-house in Dublin, where we met to hear, full of smoak; all which I judged sealed and confirmed my destruction.”⁸²

In another instance, Huish believed she witnessed a sign of the apocalypse when she saw a red sun.⁸³ Leaving her lodgings in William Allen’s house, and hoping for respite elsewhere, Huish “in the night season . . . heard a voice (as I judged) over my head; a great voice, to which I hearkened, and was thereby put into great horrour, thinking it to be the Devil, come to fetch me away.” Her hosts made repeated attempts to disenchant her fears: “I spake to Mistriss Roe,” her new landlady, “who told me it was the people that lay over my head, that talked: But I did not believe her . . . towards morning I heard a ratling of Chains (as I thought) which I judged to be the Devils hasting to fetch me away. . . Mistris Roe . . . told me, it was onely people opening Shop-windows: but that satisfied not me, but I remained still in an inexpressible horrour.”⁸⁴ Huish had so completely appropriated Patient’s emphasis on spiritual warfare that it came to structure her reality.

⁷⁵William Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong* (London, 1658), 1.

⁷⁶Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 2–3.

⁷⁷Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 3.

⁷⁸Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 4.

⁷⁹Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 7.

⁸⁰Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 7–8.

⁸¹Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 8.

⁸²Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 12–13.

⁸³Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 14.

⁸⁴Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, 14–15.

By autumn 1657, after an agonizing three years of spiritual torment, Huish had returned to her family home in Devonshire, found deliverance, and been baptized. Her brothers-in-law worked to promote her conversion narrative, titled *The Captive Taken from the Strong*. William Allen recorded her testimony, which he heard “from her own mouth, at several times, by my self,” and which he invested with his own political goals.⁸⁵ John Vernon’s priorities were pastoral, for he remembered that Huish had appeared to the Irish Baptists as a “fearful spectacle,” and hoped that the narrative of deliverance would “remind many of the poor mourning Saints in Ireland, what they have often heard from her; which may perhaps prove helpful to them, and other dejected souls.”⁸⁶ Huish’s conversion involved “breaking the hands of Satan.” Alluding to Isaiah 49:24, the narrative’s title represented her deliverance as that of prey from the captive. Perhaps as an unintended consequence of Cromwellian theological debate, her reference to the “inexpressible horror” of satanic deception bequeathed central tropes to what would become the Gothic sublime.⁸⁷

Other Irish Baptists were disillusioned by this hyper-spirituality. Lucretia Cooke, wife of Colonel Cooke, a member of the church in Bandon, County Cork, gave up on her Baptist ideals and was expelled from fellowship on the charge of heresy. As a Quaker convert, she confronted her former pastor and burned her books in the town’s market square.⁸⁸ Especially in the early years of the Cromwellian period, the Quaker threat loomed over Baptist advances as the language of polemic highlighted the movements’ similarities even as it constructed their differences. Ted Underwood has argued that throughout this period, “Baptists advocated the Bible as the rule and touchstone while admitting their need for the assistance of the Spirit, whereas Friends [Quakers] advocated the Spirit as their guide but found it necessary to appeal to Scripture.”⁸⁹ Moreover, as Geoffrey Nuttall has shown in *The Holy Spirit in Puritan faith and experience* (1946), it was always dangerous to be on the biblical side of that kind of argument. Like other groups in Cromwellian Ireland, but unlike Baptists elsewhere, Irish Baptists sustained yet struggled to contain claims to extraordinary spiritual experience even as they promoted their confession. They narrated their experience using the trope of spiritual warfare, which harmed some of their members and destabilized the movement as a whole. In addition, Irish Baptists made use of the trope even as interest in the supernatural began to decline and the discourse of demonology was relegated from its status as a branch of natural philosophy to be dismissed as “an irrational ideology.”⁹⁰ While English Baptists followed other European Calvinists into the more sober cultures of enlightenment, their Irish counterparts continued to be fascinated by the extraordinary.⁹¹

⁸⁵William Allen, “To the Christian Reader,” in *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, sig. A2r.

⁸⁶John Vernon, “To every true Mourner,” in William Allen, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, n.p.

⁸⁷Vernon, “To every true Mourner,” n.p.

⁸⁸Kenneth L. Carroll, “Quakerism and the Cromwellian Army in Ireland,” *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 54, no. 3 (1978): 142, quoting A. R. Barclay manuscripts, lxv, Friends’ House Library, London.

⁸⁹Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb’s War*, 32.

⁹⁰Stephen A. Smith, “The Religion of Fools?” in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, Past and Present Supplements, ed. Stephen A. Smith and Alan Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24–30; and Walsham, “Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain,” 197.

⁹¹For a case study of changing supernaturalist paradigms within Dutch Calvinism, and for examples of orthodox methods of disenchantment, see Andrew Fix, *Fallen Angels: Balthasar Bekker, Spirit Belief, and Confessionalism in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999).

IV. Conclusion

Unlike other, more cautious new religious movements of the period—such as the Presbyterians, whose more objective spirituality combined with other geographical and political advantages to create a sustainable dissenting community—the “ideological faltering” of the Irish Baptist movement can be clearly traced in the aftermath of the Restoration and the trend toward theological and political conservatism. By the end of the 1650s, it had become clear that some Irish Baptists, like Richard Lawrence, were promoting conventional puritan theories of spirituality entirely unconnected with the sacrament of baptism.⁹² Others, like Lucretia Cooke, entirely rejected “formal ordinances” like baptism in favor of an ecstatic spirituality that went far beyond conventional puritan spirituality.⁹³ After the Restoration, that emphasis on ecclesiology was again to be developed.⁹⁴ In the 1660s, the movement began the long contraction that, by the early eighteenth century, would see “the residual confidence of the founding members from the Cromwellian period [fade] as quickly as that generation was passing.”⁹⁵ Those Baptists who remained interested in unusual spiritual experiences tended to leave the movement. Thomas Riggs, for example, the son of the founder of the Cork Baptist church, was arrested in Drogheda in 1712 after having become a follower of the controversial mysticism of the French Prophets.⁹⁶ Those who remained within the movement were inevitably affected by its theological decline: Oswald Edwards’s preaching, tinged with Arminianism, Socinianism, and “foul language,” so reduced a major Dublin congregation that “one pew could hold his congregation,” and the lack of tithing members drove the minister to raise finance for a church building project by entering a lottery.⁹⁷ By and large, Irish Baptists were still struggling to balance objective and subjective claims to spiritual experience in the early eighteenth century.

In Cromwellian Ireland, Baptists struggled to link their distinctive sacramental practice to a spirituality they were not able to consistently define and the rhetoric of which they were not able to control. The reasons for their doing so are not clear, but are likely linked to the rhetoric of war, invasion, and denominational contest, in which providential language was juxtaposed with apocalyptic language to emphasize the imminence and threatening potential of evil. Perhaps, in rhetorical terms, Baptists differed from their counterparts in Cromwellian Ireland and England more in degree than in kind: the social and political contexts in which they articulated key theological concepts in the language of spiritual warfare mapped more immediately onto widening ethnic and confessional divisions, with all the effects that confirmation bias will bring.

But their position was unsustainable. Just as their leaders had feared while writing “Heart-bleedings,” many Baptists turned aside “from the voice of the true Shepherd . . . to follow strangers,” falling prey to the “cunning slights and devices of the Destroyer that walks up and down as a roaring Lyon, seeking whom he may devour, who hath cast down many wounded, and . . . many strong men.”⁹⁸ For some of their

⁹²Richard Lawrence, *Gospel-Separation Separated from its Abuses* (London, 1657), passim.

⁹³Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, passim.

⁹⁴James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675–1705* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), passim.

⁹⁵Herlihy, “A Gay and Flattering World,” 48.

⁹⁶Herlihy, “A Gay and Flattering World,” 62.

⁹⁷Kevin Herlihy, “‘The Faithful Remnant’: Irish Baptists, 1650–1750,” in *The Irish Dissenting Tradition, 1650–1750*, ed. Kevin Herlihy (Dublin: Four Courts, 1995), 76; and typescript of the journal of John Cennick, Moravian Church House, Muswell Hill, London, 32.

⁹⁸“Heart-bleedings for Professors Abominations,” 25–26.

members, this reference to spiritual warfare was more than a literary trope expressing the “inexpressible horror” of the anxiety created by Calvinist theories of conversion, theories that were made inescapable by the Baptist aspiration only to admit into church membership the truly regenerate. Thomas Patient elevated objective above subjective foundations for knowledge, emphasizing the priority of scripture and the Baptist confessional tradition even as he admitted that his conversion to the new religious movement was driven by an unusual spiritual experience. Deborah Huish advanced upon Patient’s ideas about the influence of Satan to position herself as an exemplary victim of his wiles, as “prey” that could only be delivered from the captor after the conclusion of her three years in Ireland. And, at the end of the decade, Jerome Sankey’s attempts at exorcism subverted—along with all of its significance as the foundation for the security of the Protestant establishment—the “inexpressible horror” of Huish’s spiritual warfare to position Baptist experientialism as the foil to the careful and mathematical precision of Sir William Petty’s geographical survey. In attempting exorcisms, Sankey may have been doing something unusual from an English Baptist perspective, yet this manifestation of the struggle against Satan was a logical consequence of the rhetoric of Irish Baptist spirituality and the apocalyptic mindset that Irish Baptists shared with others among the invaders. For as Irish Baptists struggled to balance objective and subjective spiritual claims, to sustain and contain expectations of spiritual experience, they became less representative of their coreligionists across the three nations and more representative of the chaos and competition that resulted from the democratization of puritanism in the religious marketplace of Cromwellian Ireland.

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