

Archbishop John Tillotson and the 17th-Century Latitudinarian Defense of Christianity, Part II

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John Tillotson's (1630-1694) unique educational and ecclesiastical experiences, especially within the context of mid-seventeenth-century religious strife, contributed to his particular Latitudinarian theology and praxis that emphasized religious certainty and political stability.¹ In particular, Tillotson's insistence on a rational theology, accomodating ecclesiology, and moral Christianity—especially against the apparent doctrinal speculation of Puritanism and the superstitious traditionalism of Roman Catholicism—will be described to demonstrate the underlying theological and pastoral motivations that contributed to his unique brand of Anglican Latitudinarianism during the Restoration period.

Part one of this essay gave a brief account of the educational and ecclesiastical career that shaped his particular theology and ministry. This second part consists of a description of his contribution to and influence from his Latitudinarian associations especially as it shaped his apologetic defense of the protestant Christian religion against the Church of England's enemies.

Latitudinarian Defender of Christianity

Much of Tillotson's ecclesiastical career was set in the context of religious and political strife and controversy. Whether preaching against the ever-present Roman Catholic menace or writing in disagreement to the stubborn high church Anglicans opposed to ecclesiastical comprehension, Tillotson utilized the pulpit and the press to attack his enemies and buttress his Latitudinarian convictions. Tillotson's insistence on religious certainty and political stability was formed within this crucible of his particular Latitudinarian defense of Christianity. To the Latitudi-

1. See Julius J. Kim, "Archbishop John Tillotson and the 17th-Century Latitudinarian Defense of Christianity, Part I," *Torch Trinity Journal* 11 (2008): 130-146.

narians who had witnessed the harsh realities of religious strife during their youth, “the best instrument for religious peace was the Church of England as by law established, with its episcopal government, its settled liturgy, and its Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion.”² This, they thought, would produce the religious stability and civil order that England so desperately needed after its chaotic past. Consequently, for example, as a group the Latitudinarians were the most prominent anti-Catholic polemicists of their day. Two critical issues that helped shape Tillotson’s Latitudinarian sensibilities were first, his enduring desire for ecclesiastical comprehension and second, his passionate defense of Protestant Christianity against the constant threat posed by Roman Catholicism.

Comprehension and Toleration

As Tillotson rose in the Established Church of England, he became victim to harsh criticism because of his Nonconformist past. When he became the Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, both Jacobites and Nonjurors³ alike attacked him as an “Ecclesiastical Usurper,”⁴ for was he not Father in a Church in which he had never been a son?⁵ These attacks, however, were not leveled at Tillotson alone. Other Latitudinarians like John Wilkins and Edward Fowler, who altered their ecclesiastical allegiances at the Restoration of Charles II, also received the same caustic criticism for their apparent nonchalant attitude toward issues like church government and worship. The ease with which they were able to cross ecclesiastical lines raised much suspicion and bitterness.

But Tillotson, like his father-in-law and mentor Wilkins, did not consider such external matters like church government and worship to be sufficient justification for war and strife or division among Protestants. ⁶ Their conformity to the Established Church seems to have resulted

2. Martin Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, ed. Lila Freedman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 20.

3. The Jacobites were those who continued to support James II’s legitimate kingship. Most went into exile with James in France. The Nonjurors were those who did not support the enthronement of William and Mary in 1689.

4. Anon., *A Letter out of Suffolk to a Friend in London, Giving Some Account of the Last Sickness and Death of Dr. William Sancroft, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1694), 13.

5. Anon., *Happy be Lucky: or, a Catalogue of Books to be Sold by Lottery* (in *Pamphlets from the Year 1694 to 1696*, Lambeth Palace Library).

6. In Wilkins’ funeral sermon, William Lloyd said of Wilkins, “To be vehement, in little and unnecessary things, whether for or against them, he could not but dislike, and as his free manner was, he has often been heard to call it fanaticalness” (*A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the . . . Late Lord Bishop of Chester*, 25-26).

from their conviction that fighting over these issues was unnecessary at best and damaging at worst. There were more important matters that demanded their time and energies. Tillotson's student John Beardmore would write that he (Tillotson),

was looked upon as the head of the Latitudinarians . . . i.e., persons, that had not great liking for the liturgy or ceremonies, or indeed the government of the Church, but yet had attained to such a largeness and freedom of judgment, so that they could conform, tho' without any warmth or affection for these things."⁷

Richard Baxter also seems to have recognized this Latitudinarian principle when he described the former Puritans who conceded to the Act of Uniformity in 1662: "[T]hose called Latitudinarians . . . of Universal Principles, and free; abhorring at first the impositions of these little things, but thinking them not great enough to stick at when imposed."⁸

It came as no surprise when in 1666 and 1668 Tillotson took part in discussions with Nonconformist leaders concerning comprehension, that is, uniting Dissenters with the Church of England. Along with John Wilkins and Edward Stillingfleet, Tillotson engaged in negotiations with the Dissenters Thomas Manton, William Bates, and Richard Baxter. Because of the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which required all clergy to conform to certain standards of the Church of England, many dissenting preachers lost their positions and property.⁹ Tillotson believed that the divisions caused by the Act further weakened the Protestant cause against her true enemies, especially the Roman Catholic Church. Birch noted that for Tillotson, the comprehension of Protestants into the Church of England would not only demonstrate obedience to Jesus' command to be one body, but also strengthen the defense of true Christianity—thereby creating more stability for religion to flourish:

7. John Beardmore, "Some Memorials of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury," in *The Life of the Most Reverend, Dr. John Tillotson, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1753), 390.

8. Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), 386.

9. The new Act required all clergy by August 24, 1662, to declare their commitment to and use everything in the Book of Common Prayer, to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant (the foundational document to English Presbyterianism), to be ordained according to the Church of England, and to subscribe fully to all its *doctrines*. See George Gould, ed., *Documents Relating to the Settlement of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity of 1662* (London: W. Kent, 1862), 386-404. See also Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), 3:23ff, 3:110ff., 3:156-157.

But the Dean's concern for the essence of pure and uncorrupted Christianity was attended with a proportionable moderation of temper and principles with respect to the lesser differences amongst protestants, and especially those of our own country. Hence followed a constant desire in him of a more entire union of them, not only on account of the general advantage of it, but likewise of the particular one of forming a stronger barrier against the perpetual encroachments of the see of Rome.¹⁰

Tillotson would state this sentiment unequivocally in a sermon preached on 3 December 1678 on John 13:34-35. In the preface to the sermon, he hoped that his sermon "may be some way serviceable to the healing of our unhappy Differences, and the restoring of Unity and Charity among Christians, especially those of the Protestant Reform'd (sic) Religion."¹¹ Tillotson made the two-fold argument that union among fellow Protestants was necessary. He drew out the implications of Jesus' commandment that loving one another demonstrated that they were his disciples. He first stated that division over what he considered to be indifferent matters was wrong, and second, division only weakened the Protestant defense against the Roman Catholic threat. He stated rhetorically:

Consider seriously with yourselves; ought not the great matters wherein we are agreed, our union in the Doctrines of the Christian Religion, and in all the necessary Articles of that *Faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, in the same Sacraments, and in all the substantial parts of God's Worship, and in the great Duties and Virtues of the Christian Life, to be of greater force to unite us, than difference in doubtful Opinions, and in little Rites and Circumstances of Worship to divide and break us?

Are not the things, about which we differ, in their nature *indifferent*? That is, things about which there ought to be no difference among wise Men? . . . Shall we take one another by *the throat for a hundred pence*, when our common Adversary stands ready to clap upon us an Action of *ten thousand talents*? Can we in good earnest be contented that rather than the *Surplice* should not be thrown out, *Popery* should come in; and rather than receive the Sacrament in the humble, but indifferent, Posture of *kneeling*, to swallow the Camel of *Transubstantiation*, and *adore* the Elements of Bread and Wine for our God and Saviour? And rather than to submit to

10. Thomas Birch, "Life of Tillotson," in *The Works of Dr. John Tillotson*, ed. T. Birch (London: J. Dove, 1820), 1:xxviii.

11. John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. T. Birch (London, 1752), 1:168.

a *Set Form* of Prayer, to have the Service of God performed in an *unknown Tongue*?¹²

Tillotson believed that the only antidote to the ever-expanding poison of popery was a national church that was united in all her parts. A church divided into a myriad of little sects and congregations would never stand against the unified assault that the Roman Catholic Church orchestrated and discharged. Unfortunately, Tillotson's efforts were attacked by many high-church Anglicans as a lack of true zeal in the cause of the Church. Nevertheless, as his biographer wrote, Tillotson "would neither depart from his moderation, nor take pains to cover himself from so false an imputation."¹³

One historian has accurately noted that the history of the efforts toward comprehension during the Restoration was "not comprehension or indulgence but coercion or toleration."¹⁴ From the Worcester House conference in 1660, to the meetings in 1668 and 1680, proposals were drawn up to bring about some measure of union among Protestant groups. Problems arose, unfortunately, in most of the debates concerning comprehension or indulgence because both sides wanted to secure as much and concede as little as circumstances and bargaining would allow.¹⁵ Men from the two largest parties, the Presbyterians and the restored Churchmen, longed to see a single established Church that tolerated all Protestant parties (comprehension) and not toleration for all groups outside the established Church (indulgence).

Wilkins and Tillotson, representing the moderate Anglicans, and Bates and Baxter, representing the Presbyterians, believed that mutual toleration over indifferent issues such as liturgy and church government would provide the strong union that would help defend true Christianity against her enemy, the Roman Catholic Church. In the face of this Popish menace, what was needed was unity, not endless separations and divisions. Thus, they proposed comprehension for the Presbyterians and a measure of indulgence for other Protestant groups, like the Independents, Baptists, and Quakers. Unfortunately, Independents like John Owen did not believe that these proposals would provide true liberty of worship and emotional parliamentarians could not see the benefits of

12. Tillotson, *Works* (1752), 1:174.

13. Birch, *Life* (1820), I:xxi.

14. Roger Thomas, "Comprehension and Indulgence," in *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962*, ed. Geoffrey Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (London: SPCK, 1962), 191. See also, Ole Peter Grell, J. Israel, and N. Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

15. See Thomas ("Comprehension and Indulgence," 191-253) for more on these efforts.

the comprehension. In a letter dated 7 March 1681, Tillotson wrote to his friend Robert Nelson concerning a bill that was offered to parliament concerning comprehension:

[T]here was little progress made the last parliament towards a reconciliation of dissenters. Two bills were brought into the House of Commons to that purpose; the one called a Bill of Indulgence, to mitigate the severity of the laws towards those who could not come into the national constitution; the other, of Union, by which the new subscriptions were to be taken away, and the ceremonies left indifferent. I never saw the bills, but this was the substance of them; which, so far as I can learn, please neither side. The bishops thought this too much, and the dissenters too little. I have no great hopes of any good issue of this matter, till the minds of men become more calm.¹⁶

With the Duke of York's elevation to the throne in 1685, the suspicion that the proposals of indulgence would also allow Roman Catholics to sneak in uninvited grew to alarming levels. Spurred on by the growing unanimity among all Protestant groups against the deviously Roman Catholic James II, Tillotson and other like-minded Latitudinarians attempted to reintroduce the idea of comprehension. Armed with new proposals concerning liturgy, subscription, and ordination requirements, the Latitudinarians attempted to gather support from both the clergy and members of parliament. But the momentary accord in the face of the Popish danger was disbanding. With the arrival of William of Orange in 1688, this unified group was dividing into old party lines, and the hopes of comprehension were diminished.¹⁷

In the summer of 1688, Archbishop Sancroft presented to his bishops some measures to help bring about union with the Dissenters. This was followed up with the Prince of Orange's own Declaration of October 1688 that he intended to make laws that would establish good relations between the Church of England and the Dissenters. In an address to some dissenting ministers, William assured them that he would endeavor to promote "a firm union among protestants."¹⁸ This ultimately led to the ratification of the Act of Toleration on 24 May 1689 under the title, "An Act for exempting their Majesties' Protestant Subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the Penalties of certain Laws." This act excused Dissenters from all penalties from going to their own separate meetings and not coming to the established Church. This was nothing more than a recapitulation of the earlier proposal of indulgence for Protestants unable to subscribe to the idea of comprehension.

16. Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:lviii.

17. Tillotson, *Works* (1752), 1:241-242.

18. Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:cxi-cxii.

Since the earlier proposals of indulgence met with favor, with the King's blessing, Latitudinarians like Tillotson and Stillingfleet attempted to reintroduce the idea of comprehension for those Protestants willing to unite with the established Church.¹⁹ As such, Tillotson drew up a plan entitled "Concessions, which will probably be made by the church of England for the union of protestants, which I sent to the Earl of Portland by Dr. Stillingfleet, Sept. 13, 1689."²⁰

Though at first many objected that too many concessions were being offered to the Presbyterians, Tillotson's efforts, unfortunately, were ultimately dashed by political intrigue. The Jacobites began to spread rumors about the church's demise due to bad unions. As a result, the universities began to denounce the plan and all those who promoted it. Furthermore, supporters of the plan attempted to place Tillotson as prolocutor of the lower house to aid in its progress. In the end, someone else was chosen due to the plotting of the Earls of Clarendon and Rochester who did not approve of the plan. Finally, opposition to Tillotson's plan was furthered by the secret efforts of the Bishop of London, who continued to harbor bitterness and jealousy at being passed up for the archbishopric that went to Tillotson.²¹

Thus, differences among the Dissenters as well as political maneuvering only yielded the Toleration Act of 1689. Though comprehension would never be spoken of again, Tillotson never surrendered his desire for a national church composed of all Protestants. In a letter to Frederick Spanheim (Professor of Divinity at Leyden) in 1691, Tillotson wrote that he had read his discourse concerning peace and union between the Church of England and the Protestant Dissenters with great satisfaction.²² Concerning the comprehension talks, Tillotson wrote,

As affairs now stand in England, I think nothing of this kind should be attempted for the present; but that we ought to wait till the times grow more disposed to peace; a period which, if our brave King shall, through

19. See Birch (*Life* [1820], 1:cxxvii-cxxix) for all the list of proposals introduced by the commission overseeing the plan of comprehension. See also Edmund Calamy, *An Abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History of His Life and Times* (London: John Lawrence, 1713), 1:452-455.

20. See Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:cxx-cxxi, for the plan.

21. Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:cxxx-cxxxiii.

22. British Library, MS, Add. 4235, ff. 36-38.

the Divine assistance, meet with the success wished for by all good men,
I presage is not far distant.²³

In sum, though ardently opposed by zealous Anglicans within the House of Commons and the established Church, Tillotson continued discussing with Baxter and others the hope of creating unity among their representative Protestant groups. Tillotson believed that a united front was needed against Rome and unlike many of his Anglican colleagues, did not possess any of their persecuting zeal against the Dissenters. In this way, the great Church of England would not only present a united front against the popish menace, but also exemplify a stable and certain institution where moderation and morality reigned supreme. Unfortunately, these attempts by Tillotson only yielded antagonism and disparagement from many Churchmen—especially after he received the highest position of that Church. Tillotson's life-long desire for stability emerged not only in his desire for comprehension, but in also in his indefatigable defense against the Roman Catholic menace. This life-long struggle against popery would be particularly formative in his thought and life.

The Roman Catholic Menace

Though more than a hundred years had passed since the reign of Mary, who attempted to return England's religion back to orthodox Papal Catholicism, many of England's laity still seemed to possess a negative disposition towards Roman Catholicism. Many still remembered several of the fanatical attempts to undermine English religion and society: The Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when Guy Fawkes allegedly attempted to blow up the Parliament, the King, and Lords, in order to raise a new monarch to return England to its Catholic past; and the Popish Plot of 1678, which supposedly was an attempt by Jesuits to assassinate Charles II and re-establish Roman Catholicism by replacing him with his brother, the Duke of York, who would eventually become King James II. Whether or not these plots were historically accurate or judicially fair, the public perception of the religion of Rome was one of distrust and dislike. This suspicion was further enhanced by the polemic persuasiveness of the Latitudinarians who denounced popery with uninhibited contempt. One historian considered anti-Romanism to be the prominent characteristic of this group:

The men most conspicuous in the reign of Charles II for their writings, and for their argumentative eloquence in the pulpit, were of the class who

23. British Library, MS, Add. 4235, ff. 36-38.

had been denominated Latitudinarian divines; . . . they were powerful and unequivocal supporters of the protestant cause against Rome. They made none of the dangerous concessions which had shaken the faith of the duke and duchess of York; they regretted the disuse of no superstitious ceremony; they denied not the one essential characteristic of the Reformation, the right of private judgment; they avoided the mysterious jargon of a real presence in the Lord's Supper.²⁴

Tillotson was a significant part of the Latitudinarian defense against the Roman Catholic menace.

Many of Tillotson's sermons and writings were prompted by the Roman controversies brewing in his day. With the publishing of the Roman Catholic tract *Sure-Footing* in 1666 by John Sergeant to the accession of the Duke of York as King James II in 1685, Tillotson utilized much of his energies to attack the superstitious and dangerous elements of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. In doing so, he advanced and promoted the Latitudinarian insistence that Anglican Christianity was a rational religion that was morally beneficial to society. An analysis of his primary anti-Catholic writing suggests that his emphasis on "reason" and "sense" stemmed from a desire not only to counter the perilous principles emanating from Roman Catholicism but also to provide a secure base for Anglicanism—a foundation that had as its twin supports religious certainty and political stability. To accomplish these goals, Tillotson utilized an empirical argument to attack what he believed was an untenable belief system that the Roman Catholic Church was endorsing. Thus, much of his polemic against Rome can be seen as an attempt to stabilize the Anglican tradition from the storms of changes that ravaged his Church and his world. Tillotson's *Discourse against Transubstantiation* provides an illuminating window to his thought.

The Discourse against Transubstantiation

Before the royal court as well as before his city congregation, Tillotson denounced the danger of Popery. As a famous preacher in London, Tillotson was often invited to preach before the royal court. Eventually in 1668 King Charles II made him one of his chaplains. On one occasion he provoked the anger of the King's brother, the Duke of York, who forbade him to publish his sermon entitled, "The Hazard of Being Saved in the Church of Rome."²⁵ Tillotson considered Romanism destructive of all religion because it sapped the very foundation of true faith, the

24. Henry Hallam, *The Constitutional History of England: From the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II* (London: John Murray, 1867), 3:56.

25. In *Works* (1820), 2:37-60.

evidence of reason and of the senses. Furthermore, it seemed to provide the justification for zealous and fanatical acts against the government and laity. With the accession of the Duke of York as King James II in 1685, the threat against the Protestant religion became more evident and threatening.

Though he had preached sermons against the hazards of Rome and wrote a polemical treatise against a Roman Catholic work during the Rule of Faith controversy, his most popular work was the *Discourse against Transubstantiation*, which was published in 1683 and promptly translated into French. Though Tillotson preached passive obedience to the Roman Catholic King James II, he admonished his hearers to remain true to the Protestant faith.²⁶ Tillotson begins the *Discourse* with this observation: "I cannot but observe, what an unreasonable task we are put upon, by the bold confidence of our adversaries, to dispute a matter of sense; which is one of those things about which Aristotle hath long since pronounced there ought to be no dispute."²⁷ This quote is telling in two ways: (1) He notes the unreasonableness of the Roman Catholic doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper. This is a theme that will pervade his argument against transubstantiation. Tillotson will utilize not only Scriptural arguments but will also appeal to the authority of "reason." (2) In appealing to the "sense" (and interestingly, to Aristotle), Tillotson will use an empirical methodology in his polemic against this Roman Catholic doctrine.

In his common-sense approach Tillotson states: "The business of transubstantiation is not a controversy of Scripture against Scripture, or of reason against reason, but of downright impudence against the plain meaning of Scripture, and all the sense and reason of mankind."²⁸ Tillotson states that our sense perceptions provide unassailable certainty:

So transubstantiation, if it be true at all, it is all truth, and nothing else is true; for it cannot be true unless our senses, and the senses of all mankind, be deceived about their proper objects; and if this be true and cer-

26. Tillotson aided many of the French Protestant ministers who had fled to England after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. See Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:xxii-xxiii, xxviii, lxxxv-lxxxviii; and Irène Simon, *Three Restoration Divines: Barrow, South, Tillotson* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1967-76), 2:277-279.

27. Tillotson, *Works* (1752), 2:229.

28. Tillotson, *Works* (1752), 2:229.

tain, then nothing else can be so: for if we be not certain of what we see, we can be certain of nothing.²⁹

Tillotson was convinced that true religion withstands the tests provided by the senses and by reason. In this way, true religion achieved the rational certainty and the civil stability that was essential to its very existence. The Roman Catholic position on transubstantiation was evidence that their version of religion was false and dangerous. To accomplish this, Tillotson divided the discourse into two parts: (1) a description of the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation with some arguments against it; and (2) further objections against the doctrine.

Tillotson challenged the five grounds they utilized to support their view: (1) The authority of Scripture found in Jesus' words "This is my body"; (2) The perpetual belief in church history as they understood "This is my body"; (3) The authority of the present church to create new doctrines; (4) The absolute necessity of a change due for peoples' benefit; and (5) To magnify the power of the priest in being able to work so great a miracle.³⁰

First, Tillotson argued that there is no necessity in understanding Jesus' words in a literal way because figurative language abounds in Scripture. Tillotson said, "It is the very nature of a sacrament to represent and exhibit some invisible grace and benefit by an outward sign and figure."³¹ And, "In the institution of this very sacrament our Saviour useth figurative expressions, and several words which cannot be taken strictly and literally."³² Furthermore, reason teaches us against taking the words "this is my body" in a literal way. Jesus himself used figurative language concerning himself—the door and the true vine. As such, "this is my body" should be understood figuratively as well. Tillotson offered how the phrase ought to be understood: "This bread signifies my body, this cup signifies my blood; and this which you see me now do, do ye hereafter for a memorial of me."³³

Second, against the ground that transubstantiation was the perpetual belief in church history, Tillotson submitted that the facts of history did not support the Roman Catholic argument as they contended. The evidence from the church fathers made it abundantly clear that transubstantiation was not a doctrine supported by many early leaders of the Church. It appeared, furthermore, that the Roman Church apparently had created the doctrine during the Middle Ages.

29. Tillotson, *Works* (1752), 2:229.

30. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 2:409.

31. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 410.

32. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 410.

33. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 413.

Third, Tillotson argued that the ability to create new doctrines for the Church was an innovation largely under the rules of both the Council under Pope Gregory VII and the Lateran Council under Pope Innocent III. As such, Christians are not obliged to follow it since it does not conform to the Savior's teaching. Furthermore, it is plainly unreasonable. After all, the ability to change and create doctrine would make Christianity very uncertain and unstable.

Fourth, against the contention that change in the elements is absolutely necessary for the peoples' benefit, Tillotson, using the water of baptism as an analogy, argued that the blessing of the sacrament occurs without the elements substantially changing in their nature. The water of baptism does not change and yet the people of God receive the washing away of sin and spiritual regeneration. In the same way, the elements in the Lord's Supper must not necessarily change for blessing to be imparted and received.

Lastly, the claim that the doctrine of transubstantiation was necessary in order to magnify the power of the priest since he was doing such a great miracle, Tillotson argued was untenable since the priest was not doing a *miracle*. To him, two things were necessary for something to be a miracle: "that there be a supernatural effect wrought, and that this effect be evident to sense."³⁴ For lack of these conditions then, transubstantiation cannot be a *miracle*. Yes, it may be considered *supernatural*, but it is no *sign* or *miracle*. After all, to our senses the bread after consecration continues to look like, smell like, feel like, and taste like bread.³⁵

Tillotson did not attempt to argue against the metaphysical theory of substance and accidents by which the Roman Catholic doctrine established itself. Rather, he focused on an empiricist epistemology from which transubstantiation appeared untenable. The main principle from which he developed his objections was simple but full of meaning, "if we be not certain of what we see, we can be certain of nothing."³⁶ The cost of dismissing this principle was a high one—nothing in life can be certain. The problem of the doctrine of transubstantiation for Tillotson was that it destabilized the trustworthiness of the senses. If we are to

34. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 240-241.

35. Tillotson was evidently unaware that his argument about evidence could be used against all Christian mysteries. In fact, his argument concerning the different kinds of evidence being balanced against each other (see Tillotson, *Works* [1752], 1:96) is precisely that used by David Hume in his Essay "Of Miracles" to show that the Christian religion can only rest on faith because it has no basis in reasonable evidence (Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [first pub. 1748 as *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*], ed. Selby-Bigge and Nidditch [1975], section 10).

36. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 229.

bypass what our senses of sight, touch, taste, and smell demonstrate to us in the context of this sacrament, how can we trust them in other contexts? And while Tillotson conceded the fact that perceptual error of the senses is possible, he suggested that “no Faculty deceives us so little and so seldom.”³⁷ Even when our senses deceive us, however, “that Error is not to be corrected without the help of our senses.”³⁸ The only other option then, would be utter skepticism. Anyone who accepts the Roman Catholic view then, was committed necessarily to a general skepticism about the senses—leading ultimately to uncertainty in religion and then instability in society.

Personal Events and Popery

Tillotson’s defense of the Christian religion against Roman Catholicism not only involved the academic print world, but also personal and political events. He desperately feared the growing impact a number of Roman Catholic apologists were having against weak-minded Protestants. Many of these defenders of Rome were utilizing skeptical arguments to convince men that since no truth was absolutely certain, one needed the infallibility of the Pope and the Roman Church to provide assurance. At Tillotson’s funeral, Birch stated:

When he saw that popery was at the root of the growing contempt of religion, and that the design seemed to be laid, to make men first atheist, that they might be the more easily made papists, and that many did not stick to own, that no certainty could be had of the Christian faith, unless upon the basis of the infallibility of the church; this gave him a deep and just indignation. It was such a betraying of the cause of God, rather than not to gain their own, that in this the foundation was laid of his great zeal against popery. . . . He thought, that the idolatry and superstition of the church of Rome enervated true piety and morality; and that its cruelty was such a contradiction to the meekness of Christ, and that love and charity, which our Lord made the character and distinction of his disciples and followers, that he resolved to sacrifice every thing, except a good conscience, in a cause, for which he had determined, if it should come to extremities, to become a sacrifice himself.³⁹

Tillotson had witnessed first-hand the power of these sinister agents of the Pope when both friends were being swayed into Catholicism and events in England and France changed for the worse.

37. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 243.

38. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 243.

39. Gilbert Burnet, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Most Reverend Father in God John by the Divine Providence, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate*

Two particular instances show the depth of Tillotson's emotional involvement with this apparent crisis. In a letter dated October 23, 1679, Tillotson attempted to convince Charles, the Earl of Shrewsbury, to abandon the Roman religion for Protestantism:

To speak plainly, I have been told, that your Lordship is of late fallen into a conversation dangerous both to your reputation and virtue, two of the tenderest and dearest things in the world. . . . I earnestly beseech your Lordship to consider, besides the high provocation of Almighty God, and the hazard of your soul, whenever you engage in a bad course, what a blemish you will bring upon a fair and unspotted reputation; what uneasiness and trouble you will create to yourself, from the severe reflections of a guilty conscience; and how great a violence you will offer to your good principles, your nature, and your education, and to a mind the best made for virtuous and worthy things.

And do not imagine you can stop when you please; experience shews us the contrary. . . . I hope in God no temptation has yet prevailed on your Lordship. . . . If it has, as you love your soul, let it not proceed to habit. The retreat is yet easy and open, but will every day become more difficult and obstructed. God is so merciful, that, upon your repentance and resolution of amendment, he is not only ready to forgive what is past, but to assist us by his grace to do better for the future.⁴⁰

Several months later, on July 6, 1680, his friend John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, died after an act of repentance. This eleventh-hour change of heart back to Protestantism so moved Tillotson, he wrote the following in his commonplace book (diary):

The omnipotency of God's grace can easily change any man, by letting in light into his mind, and pouring in strong convictions into his conscience. The greatest and most obstinate minds, he that made them, how easily can he turn them, even the hearts of kings as the rivers of water, which follow the channel that is made for them!

A false religion, if a man be sincere in it, will bear up a man's spirits against torments and death, because every man's conscience is a kind of god to him; and the strongest opiates in the world are enthusiasm and popery. These may lock up men's senses beyond the power of truth to

and Metropolitan of all England (London, 1694), 15-16.

40. Letter, Tillotson to the Charles, Earl of Shrewsbury, 23 October 1679, British Library, MS Add. 32084, f. 8-9; also in Birch, "Life of the Author," in *Works of John Tillotson* (London, 1820), 1:xxxviii-xl.

awaken them; as we see in the murderers of our late sovereign, and in our present Romish conspirators.⁴¹

While troubled with the twin dangers of unbridled Puritanism and Romanism, Tillotson still held on to the hope that God could still transform men's minds with reason and still impact men's consciences with morality.

Another occasion furthered Tillotson's distress over the effects of unrestrained popery. In October 1685, the King of France repealed the Edict of Nantes, which had previously provided religious toleration to Protestants living in that Roman Catholic-dominated country. As a result, though the Huguenots had come to England prior to 1685, streams of refugees poured into England to escape persecution and exist in freedom. This not only fueled Tillotson's growing disdain of the Roman Catholic religion, but it also provided an opportunity to showcase the Latitudinarian ideals of moderation in religious issues and charity in moral matters. His zeal for moderation and compassion is shown in his answer to Dr. Beveridge, one of his associates at Canterbury Cathedral, where Tillotson was currently serving as Dean. Beveridge, because of his aloofness toward foreign protestants and his penchant to keep to the rules and forms of the church, objected to Tillotson's reading of one of the King's reports in order to collect money for the French refugees. Beveridge challenged the Dean by stating that reading the brief was contract to the rubric, or, the established custom or rule of the church. In response, Tillotson's reply was short and significant, "Doctor, doctor, charity is above rubrics."⁴² Tillotson's fears of the Roman religion reached a climax, however, when the Duke of York ascended the throne as King James II in 1685.

James II and the Glorious Revolution

To the Latitudinarians, Romanism not only represented the worst in superstitious and idolatrous religion but it also was an immoral political conspiracy devoted to eradicating Protestantism by any means. Thus, they were persistent in their efforts to show the dangerous nature and extent of the Roman Catholic threat—in both religious and political spheres. Thomas Tenison's 1683 appraisal of the Roman menace was representative of the Latitudinarian perspective:

The Romanists are a mighty body of men . . . all united into one common polity, and grafted into the one stock of Papal headship. They are

41. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 690, f. 33.

42. Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:lxxxviii.

favoured in the many places by great men; they have variety of learning; they pretend to great antiquity, to miracles, to martyrs without number, to extraordinary charity and mortification; they have the nerves of worldly power, that is, banks of money, and a large revenue: They have a scheme of policy always in readiness; there a great numbers of emissaries posted in all places for the conveying of intelligence, and the gaining of proselytes; they take upon them all shapes, and are bred to all the worldly arts of insinuation.⁴³

It is not difficult to surmise, then, the suspicious reaction they had to James' accession to the throne.

As far as the Latitudinarians could tell, James II seemed to have an intentional strategy of putting an end to the established system of the English Church and State in order to re-establish Roman Catholicism in England. After all, he had not only removed the penalties of the Test Act—thereby allowing Roman Catholics into the army, the Church, and the universities—but also allowed the Jesuit Father Petre to the Privy Council, illegally opening diplomatic relations with Rome. Furthermore, he aroused even more suspicion when he failed to disband his standing army after the defeat of Monmouth.⁴⁴ All of these actions seemed to indicate to the Anglican clergy that James could not be trusted. Ironically, however, they had just denounced the rebellions of Argyle and Monmouth and declared the duty of all Englishmen to uphold the divine right of the monarchy and passive obedience to the King.

Caught in this dilemma, the Anglican clergy were left with only two choices: passively submit to the “popish tyranny and arbitrary power” of the King, or resist the King in order to protect both the Church of England and the rights of every Englishman to the Protestant religion as established.⁴⁵ The Latitudinarians did not hesitate; they chose the latter. Anti-Roman sermons began to resound from the pulpits and the presses all over London. This so infuriated James that he attempted to reissue Charles II's 1662 injunctions against seditious preaching.⁴⁶ But as Bishop Compton of London explained, he was unsuccessful in his attempt to suppress the mounting anti-Roman sentiment:

43. Thomas Tenison, *An Argument for Union, Taken from the True Interest of those Dissenters in England, who Profes, and call themselves Protestants* (London, 1683), 19.

44. John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 87-89. See also Griffin, *Latitudinarians*, 26-27.

45. Griffin, *Latitudinarians*, 27.

46. Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 89.

A modest latitude must be allowed in this point, whilst we are permitted to assert our own religion: because many of our doctrines do necessarily engage us to it. Besides that at present the behaviour of the Romish priests in many places constrains our ministers to say more in this particular for the settling of men's minds, than otherwise they would do.⁴⁷

James II began to consolidate his power by exerting pressure against the Anglican clergy who would not submit to his decisions. Bishop Compton, for example, was removed from his ecclesiastical office and privileges after an effective, albeit illegitimate trial. The King also dissolved Parliament and began to strategically appoint Roman Catholics in central and local government so that when the next Parliament met, opposition to some of his new laws protecting Roman Catholics could be overcome.⁴⁸

On April 4, 1687, James issued his first Declaration of Indulgence, which not only removed all penal laws enforced by the Church, but also ordered that the oaths required of office-holders no longer be required—thereby providing Roman Catholics with less obstacles in holding key leadership positions. While this concerned the Anglican clergy, the final straw that united the Anglican clergy in resistance to James emerged when the King demanded that his second Declaration of Indulgence be read on May 20 and 27, 1688, in all London pulpits and on June 3 and 10 in the rest of the country. James' growing confidence over his supposed support was shattered when after several meetings among the lower clergy in London, Archbishop Sancroft drew up the famous petition of the Nine Bishops. Though at first it appeared that the Bishops and lower clergy would submit to the order of the King, the Latitudinarian clergy, especially Fowler, Patrick, Stillingfleet, Tenison, and Tillotson, passionately persuaded the group to their position.⁴⁹ The Church had taken her stand against the King.

By the summer of 1688, it became clear that the Prince of Orange, William III, intended to come and deliver England from the Roman Catholic threat. Married to a princess of England, William had already been in contact with several clergy members of the Anti-Catholic coalition. For example, in a letter dated 7 August 1688, Tenison told Patrick to get his valuables out of London since “the Prince of Orange intended to come over with an army to our relief from the danger in which we were.”⁵⁰ Also, by this time Burnet had already settled in the Hague as

47. British Library, MS Tanner 31, f. 268; quoted in Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 89.

48. Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 90.

49. Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 93-95; see also Griffin, *Latitudinarians*, 27.

50. The account of this episode is found in Simon Patrick's, “Autobiog-

one of William's chaplains. He had left England in 1685 on William's invitation and could not return since James had placed him under the charge of high treason in 1687. When William landed at Torbay on 5 November 1688, Burnet was on the ship. The revolution had begun.

Events unfolded quickly and, to the surprise of many, without any bloodshed. Prior to William's arrival, James tried desperately to seize the last bit of control that was slipping through his fingers. During the month of September, James met with several leaders to discuss some form of compromise. Unfortunately, it was too little too late. James' constant rebuffs left both the clergy and leaders of government without many options. By the time William arrived in November, nothing could be done to rescue this monarch. Though he sent some representatives to work out a truce with William on 27 November, James fled for his own safety on 11 December to the countryside. With his wife and son already in France by now, James was finally allowed to leave England to join his family on 22 December. A month later, the Convention Parliament met and soon placed the crown on William and Mary, declaring that James' flight constituted abdication.⁵¹

January 31, 1689, was declared a day of public thanksgiving for England's deliverance. Tillotson, Patrick, and Burnet gave the first three sermons of thanksgiving for William's arrival on 5 November 1688.⁵² Tillotson's sermon is particularly instructive in our understanding of his Latitudinarian sensibilities. First, he argued that when political and religious leaders ignorantly countenanced the growth of the Roman Catholic menace during the Restoration period, God sent judgment upon London in the form of plague and fire.⁵³ Furthermore, Tillotson submitted some general reasons why God had judged them to the extent of allowing a Roman Catholic to become head of the nation and of the Church of England:

Our horrible contempt of religion on the one hand by our infidelity and profaneness, and our shameful abuse of it on the other, by our gross hy-

raphy," in *The Works of Symon Patrick, including His Autobiography*, ed. A. Napier (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1858), 9:509-12.

51. See Spurr, *Restoration Church*, 95-100; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 26-28.

52. Tillotson preached at Lincoln's Inn, Patrick at St. Paul's, and Burnet before the House of Commons.

53. Tillotson, "A Thanksgiving Sermon for our Deliverance by the Prince of Orange," in *Works* (1820), 3:2-28.

pocrisy, and sheltering great wickedness and immoralities under the cloak and profession of religion.

And then great dissensions and divisions, great uncharitableness and bitterness of spirit among those of the same religion; so that almost from the beginning of our happy Reformation the enemy had sown these tares; and by the unwearied malice and arts of the church of Rome the seeds of dissension were scattered very early amongst us; and a sour humour had been fermenting in the body of the nation, both upon account of religion and civil interests, for a long time before things broke out into a civil war.

And more particularly yet: that which is called the great trespass here in the text, their “joining in affinity with the people of these abominations,” by whom they had been detained in long captivity.⁵⁴

Several of the themes that would occupy the efforts of Tillotson for many years are found in these statements. Not only do you hear Tillotson’s defense against all aberrations of the Christian faith, be it superstitious and tendentious Roman Catholicism or immoral and irreligious atheism, but you also sense the yearning for moderation and toleration within Protestant ecclesiastical affairs. It is the latter that would cause more distress to Tillotson in the ensuing months of William and Mary’s enthronement.

The choice of William over James proved to be more complicated to the Anglican clergymen who were all generally united against the Roman menace. Ironically, prior to these tumultuous events, they had uniformly advocated the theory of the divine right of kings and urged passive obedience to the king. After all, after the chaos of the puritan commonwealth, divine right theory seemed to provide the most stable protection against both enthusiasm and popery. The theory seemed to work well during the reign of Charles II, but with James II on the throne, their paradigm of the church-state relationship either needed to be passively obeyed or they needed to be modified. Thus, while the Anglican clergy were largely united in their stance against the decisions made by James II, many felt that removing James was not appropriate. Archbishop Sancroft, for example, did join hands with the Latitudinarians in defiance of James’ Declarations, however, he did not support the decision to remove James from the throne and replace him with William and Mary.

On the other hand, most, if not all, of the Latitudinarians modified their concept of divine right monarchy to justify their support of the revolution. While Lloyd had argued that William was legitimately the king by right of conquest, Stillingfleet defended the revolution on what

54. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 3:18.

he called the “common good” argument, which was, he said, the fundamental basis of all political and societal obligations.⁵⁵ James’ actions against the common good freed his subjects from his authority. Burnet, on the other hand, justified the revolution by appealing to the contract theory of government.⁵⁶ The law of nature assured men the right of life, liberty, and property. By contract, men assigned the protection of these rights to the ruler of the nation. Obedience was based upon the mutual contract between rulers and those ruled. The free practice of one’s religion was part of the natural right of property if the law of the land so provided. According to Burnet, James II had tried to subvert the laws of the land—the same laws that authorized his right to rule. As such, he forfeited his right to rule. Resisting him as king, consequently was not a violation of the doctrine of passive obedience since resisting him was actually preserving the law against a law-breaking ruler.

So for the Latitudinarians like Tillotson, the bloodless Glorious Revolution was a miraculous intervention of God on behalf of the good people of England. After all, Tillotson would preach, were the English not, “next to the Jewish nation . . . a people highly favoured by God above all the nations of the earth”?⁵⁷ He would continue: “The providence of God very visibly appeared in our late deliverance; in such a manner, as I know not whether he ever did for any other nation, excepting the people of Israel.”⁵⁸ Aside from these public statements, Tillotson wrote the following in his private commonplace book: “I look at the King and Queen as two angels in human shape sent down to us to pluck a whole nation out of Sodom that we may not be destroyed.”⁵⁹ Such statements show how his Latitudinarian defense of Christianity was part of God’s divine purpose and plans. He also argued, however, that such a miraculous event should motivate the people of England not to fall into the same errors of the past. He stated,

Let us use this great deliverance which God hath given us . . . not by using them as they would have done us, . . . but with great moderation and

55. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 28-29.

56. Written prior to Locke’s *Treatise on Civil Government*, Burnet’s *Enquiry into the Measure of Submission to the Supreme Authority* (1688) anticipated many of his arguments.

57. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 3:141.

58. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 3:141.

59. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 690.

clemency, making as few examples of severity as will be consistent with our future security from the like attempts upon our religion and laws.⁶⁰

Furthermore, “And let us endeavor, for once, to be so wise, as not to forfeit the fruits of this deliverance, and to hinder ourselves of the benefit and advantage of it, by breaches and divisions among ourselves.”⁶¹ Such sentiments are indicative of both his passionate zeal in defeating the Roman menace as well as his lifelong desire in securing religious moderation and tolerance among his Protestant brethren. It becomes clear, then, that these particular controversies with Roman doctrine and practice further reinforced his rational theology, accommodating ecclesiology, and moral Christianity.

Conclusion

From the training he received in Cambridge, to his elevation to the see in Canterbury, his unique life experiences yielded the development of the first and foremost ecclesiastical statesman in the new school of Anglicans after the Puritan “experiment.” Leader of the group that came to be known as the Latitudinarians, John Tillotson insisted on a rational theology, an accommodating ecclesiology, and a moral Christianity so that his brand of Latitudinarian Anglicanism would produce a church and nation that was stable and robust.

He numbered among his friends the mathematician Isaac Barrow, the philanthropic Unitarian Thomas Firmin, Presbyterian leaders Richard Baxter and William Bates, the Quaker William Penn, and the Calvinist William of Orange. That he had so many friends is not surprising—he is described by John Beardsmore, one of his former pupils at Cambridge thus:

He was one of a very sweet nature, friendly and obliging, and ready to serve his friends any way that he could by his interest and authority, when they applied to him; and this he did freely and generously, without any oblique designs to serve himself. He was very affable and conversible, not sour or sullen, not proud or haughty, not addicted to any thing of moroseness, affected gravity, or to keep at a great distance from those that were much his inferiors; but open and free, gentle and easy, pleasant and amiable, to those especially that he was acquainted with, or that he looked upon as honest and good.⁶²

60. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 3:25.

61. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 3:26.

62. Birch, *Life* (1820), 1:cclxxiv.

In an age of much discord and persecution, this mild and moderate churchman devoted a lifetime preaching a reasonable Christianity, working toward union with Protestants, and defending the established Church against the threat of Roman Catholicism. Though he was willing to compromise on many points of doctrine for the sake of peace and unity, there were certain points that could not be conceded without the very foundations of Christianity being destroyed.⁶³ John Tillotson exemplified the doctrines and spirit of Latitudinarianism during the Restoration period.

63. In 1694, Tillotson was seized with a sudden illness and died on November 22.

