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**Infidelity and Infection: The Biblical Nexus of False Religion and  
Contagious Heterodoxy in Burton, Milton, Swift and Defoe**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Glasgow  
by John Bruce  
in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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This thesis undertakes an architectonically arranged analysis of a particularly prevalent and powerful rhetorical figure in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English religious literature, the metaphor linking false religion with pestilential infection. Heterodoxy is considered by authors representing diverse doctrinal backgrounds in this theologically turbulent period, to be tantamount to deadly contagion, underscoring the severity of its perceived threat to a given orthodoxy. Under this scheme, both physical plague outbreaks—the threat of which is very real in the period covered in this study (1621-1722)—and heretical disseminations, threaten to reach epidemic proportions. Especially striking is the widespread incidence of this figurative phenomenon, which is called into polemical service by such diverse disputants as the staunch Presbyterian Thomas Edwards at one extreme, and the High Church Anglican Jonathan Swift at the other.

It is in fact Swift's categorization of the Presbyterian denomination as the "Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*" in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), which launched this inquiry into an extensive corpus of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts rooted in religious controversy. Just as Swift does in so many ways, this investigation radiates principally backward and into the seventeenth century proper. To a lesser extent, it also looks forward into the eighteenth century by tracing examples of this recurring metaphor in Swift's later work as well as in Daniel Defoe. Detailed analysis of the individual seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts is prefaced by an introductory chapter which surveys biblical precedents for this particular metaphorical application. The translation quoted is normally the Authorized Version of 1611, but in cases where additional light may be shed on particularly relevant biblical passages, other translations—including those of the twentieth century—are brought into play. Commentaries consulted

have mostly been those of the twentieth century since these, especially the *Anchor Bible Commentary*, not only present the findings of modern biblical scholarship but give entries into earlier exegesis.

Finding the epitome of the seventeenth-century writer concerned with infectious religious influence in Robert Burton, the second chapter, devoted to Anglican polemicists, begins with the anatomist of melancholy. While Burton is not the first figure in English literature to yoke malevolent preaching with pestilential catastrophe, his fusion is most instructive for setting the tone of doctrinal antagonism in the century to follow. Fervid supporters of monarchy and the Church of England such as John Cleveland and Samuel Butler, as well as Anglican priests Meric Casaubon, Henry More and Samuel Parker, demonstrate that episcopalians of diverse backgrounds share common ground in employing this specific figurative weapon.<sup>1</sup> Despite modest professions of inadequacy, Burton the Anglican priest clearly casts himself in the role of physician in his copious treatise in which he repeatedly makes use of this irreligion-infection analogy. (While this is not at all surprising, it is curious that the metaphor does not surface where we might expect it to, in the writings of the physician, Sir Thomas Browne. Neither *Religio Medici* (1642), where Browne articulates his own position, nor *Pseudosoxia Epidemica* (1646), which has such a promising title, deploys such an analogy.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "Anglican" and "Puritan" are used throughout this study with a certain degree of fluidity, acknowledging the fact that they do not refer to groups and beliefs which can always be precisely delimited. Nonetheless, the classifications remain useful as doctrinal designations in the theologically agitated century under consideration. These labels affixed to the various authors discussed in the course of this thesis follow the lines of those set forth by H.R. McAdoo, who in his expansive study of Anglicanism describes an "Anglican-Puritan tension" as a defining "historical situation" for Anglican theology in the seventeenth century. (*The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1965), p. 1.

In the third chapter the focus shifts to a Puritan whose own theological affiliations mutated constantly: Milton begins life as a nominal Anglican and is nursed in Presbyterianism, which he later rejects on much the same grounds that he abhorred the Established Church, in favour of ultimately independent beliefs. Throughout his career, Milton deftly wields the same irreligion-infection analogy as does Swift, Anglican divine and ideological antagonist of the poet, in the following generation. Hence the following fourth chapter is devoted to Burton's doctrinal descendant Swift, who, like Milton, continually brings to bear an association between perceived false religion and contagion. Interestingly enough, both Milton and Swift, the two authors discussed in greater detail than any of the others, attack Presbyterianism—albeit differently—through this infection analogy. So there is a certain symmetry in concluding this study with a fifth chapter devoted to three distinct but also nominal Presbyterians: Edwards, Thomas Vincent and Defoe, all of whom in varying degrees acknowledge the infectious nature of Puritan extremism, in many ways mimicking the rhetorical sallies of the Anglican apologists who would just as readily find fault with the Presbyterians for their perceived Calvinistic zeal.

*Idolatrous Influence and Punitive Pestilence: False Religion and  
the Infection Metaphor of Biblical Literature*

Foreshadowing a metaphorical phenomenon that is identified in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literature, biblical texts abound with linkages between false religion and infection, elements intricately bound together in filigreed fashion. Although the lacework uniting these analogical associates is sometimes obscurely woven into scripture as well as the works of theologically diverse English authors following in this biblical tradition, false religion and contagion are nonetheless tightly interwoven, thereby providing a powerfully charged rhetorical device applied consistently to denigrate opponents in the doctrinal controversies raging in the century between the first edition of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621 and Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* published in 1722. Whereas biblical narratives principally involve physical contagion as the supreme punishment for spiritual deviation, doctrinal dissent is characterized in a diverse body of English literature in this century of doctrinal turmoil and severe plague epidemics, as an infectious menace, a metaphorical phenomenon applied most frequently, but not exclusively, to extreme Puritanism.

When authors as theologically opposed as Burton and Milton at the earlier end of the period under consideration, and Swift and Defoe at the other, apply this plague metaphor to aspects of perceived false religion, they do so with a vast array of biblical antecedents upon which to draw. Examination of these texts supports the notion that the intersection of heresy and contagion is deeply rooted in a figurative foundation that provides Milton, Bunyan, Swift, Defoe, and a number of Anglican and Presbyterian apologists, with a springboard from

which to launch assaults upon a given unorthodoxy. Toward a recognition of the basis for this literary phenomenon—which mutates considerably from the Old Testament prescription of punitive pestilence as a consequence of idolatry, to the notion of false teaching as an epidemiological force in New Testament writings—Ronald Clements argues that “threats of disease and violent oppression formed traditional pictures of the fate of persons who offended a deity and thus fell under his curse.”<sup>1</sup>

Although the perception of plague as heavenly sanctioned castigation surfaces throughout the seventeenth century and lingers into the eighteenth, a related but palpably distinct tendency to connote false religion as contagion pervades the religious literature of this period when it becomes especially apt for its severity and applicability in rhetorical venues during a century of repeated deadly plague epidemics. Milton variously describes Catholicism, Anglicanism and even Presbyterianism, as infectious hazards; and his fellow nonconformist Bunyan is labelled “a pestilent fellow”—just as was St Paul—by those charging him with preaching without authority and not attending the established church. Swift harbours a genuine dread of Presbyterians (and to a lesser extent Catholics) as much as any infectious disease, and his contemporary antagonist Defoe can just as easily mimic a High Church priest calling for eradication of contagious dissenters as emphasize shortcomings of the Anglican clergy, whom he portrays as fleeing plague-stricken London *en masse* to the delight of nonconformist ministers who filled the ensuing vacuum. In applying the infection metaphor to aspects of contemporary religious contention, these

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 34-35.

authors in particular draw heavily upon the tradition of yoking contagion (both physical and spiritual) and anathematized religion, a nexus that infuses the Hebrew as well as the gospel writings. In addition to adopting this figurative foundation from biblical narrative, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English authors resonate the tremors felt by having to endure contemporary outbreaks of plague, or just as fitfully, the continual threat of a new epidemic of deadly pestilence.

False religion—always a threat to Yahwism via lustful inducement to idol worship—is acknowledged in the Old Testament as having contagious appeal, but this is overshadowed by the forceful, episodic interdiction that those who are tempted to commit spiritual infidelity will be stricken with physical, pestilential castigation. New Testament plague passages tend to accentuate spiritual (and often paradoxically benevolent) infection rather than repeatedly herald the portent of physical affliction for infidels—except in the return of punitive infection in Revelation. Paul and St Luke display an awareness of the mechanics behind the spread of false religion within Christianity, and the menace of misdirected zeal and enthusiasm. More so in the Old Testament, however, affliction by plague is a recurring theme given its status as a necessary adjunct divinely employed either to promote religion or inhibit infidelity; wayward Israelites as well as their spiritually influential enemies are periodically punished via pestilence, all with an end to purifying the faith.

The close relationship between biblical representations of infectious irreligion and instances of the same figurative phenomenon in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literature is perhaps best exemplified in the curiously parallel judicial proceedings of Paul after his arrest for what is deemed

contagious proselytizing and of Bunyan after his arrest on 12 November 1660 for similarly “infectious” preaching. Evidence of this intertextual influence may be found in the ostensibly powerful attack made against Bunyan by one of the magistrates charging him with preaching without licence to unlawful congregations and not attending Anglican services. Bunyan’s second wife Elizabeth, who was in attendance at the August 1661 court hearing of her husband’s case, recorded the dialogue between the assembled judges and herself. One of the local justices hearing Bunyan’s case, Sir Henry Chester, used terminology against Bunyan that is identical to that used by Tertullus against St Paul during the apostle’s arraignment before Felix: “My Lord, . . . He is a pestilent fellow, there is not such a fellow in the country again.”<sup>2</sup> Ironically, Chester unwittingly places the leader of the Bedford congregation in highly esteemed company by having an allusion made on his behalf to one of the founders of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Chester’s utterance, combined with the derivative passage from Acts 24. 5, left a lasting impression on Bunyan.<sup>4</sup> To begin with, Chester’s statement left a sufficient impression on Bunyan’s wife to allow its later transcription by Bunyan, who indicates in *A Relation of My Imprisonment*, first published in

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<sup>2</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. by Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 127. Chester is described by Christopher Hill as “Bunyan’s particular enemy,” one of four out of “the five JPs who sent Bunyan to jail” who also was admitted as a burgess of the Bedford corporation in 1661 (*A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 256-57.

<sup>3</sup> Bunyan’s wife also records that Chester also said Bunyan “was a hot spirited fellow (or words to that purpose)” (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

<sup>4</sup> James F. Forrest claims in his edition of *The Holy War* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), that “pestilent fellow” was “a term of abuse popular in the seventeenth century,” but he cites no other usages (p. 136). The term was certainly popular with Bunyan.

1765, that he “took from her own Mouth” the conversations thus recorded.<sup>5</sup> This particular phrase also makes its way into Part I of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) and *The Holy War* (1682), but with different connotations in each of the texts. A clear parallel with Bunyan’s own case is drawn at the trial of Christian and Faithful at Vanity Fair in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, wherein the two are deemed in their indictment “enemies to, and disturbers of their Trade,” charged with making “Commotions and Divisions in the Town” and converting others “to their own most dangerous Opinions, in contempt of the Law of their Prince.”<sup>6</sup> Such a designation would apply equally to Bunyan and to Paul, whose identity Bunyan sought to realize in his own ministry: “[Bunyan] recognized with delight his identity with Paul; and in the record of his own sensations, gifts, and acts, which a miraculous influence immediately compelled him to compose and publish, he piously imitated the history of his celebrated predecessor.”<sup>7</sup>

After Faithful attempts to offer his defence, Envy, Superstition and Pickthank testify against him. Superstition’s statement against Faithful follows closely that of Chester against Bunyan:

My Lord, I have no great acquaintance with this man, nor do I desire to have further knowledge of him; However this I know, that he is a very pestilent fellow, from some discourse that the other day I had with him in this *Town*; for then talking with him, I

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<sup>5</sup> *Grace Abounding*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> *The Pilgrim’s Progress from this World to That which is to Come*, ed. by James Blanton Wharey and Roger Sharrock, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960; Repr. 1967), pp. 92-93.

<sup>7</sup> William York Tindall, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934; Repr. 1964), p. 23.



heard him say, That our Religion was naught, and such by which a man could by no means please God. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Bunyan here describes not only Superstition's (and Chester's) opinion of Faithful (and Bunyan); such designations are made, for example, by the Presbyterian Thomas Edwards against sectarians in *Gangraena* (1646) and by Swift against Presbyterians in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704).

Having now had the term used (happily, to be sure) against himself and having placed the same language in the mouth of Superstition to label Faithful "a very pestilent fellow," Bunyan, certainly not without amusing himself, finally turns the tables on Chester with supreme irony. Atheism, one of the aldermen/burgesses of Diabolus called to trial after the recovery of Mansoul, is branded with the same designation—in strikingly similar language to the passage in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by one of the sworn witnesses Mr. Know-all. However, in this case, the term is not applied with any intentional or accidental glorification: "Yes, my Lord, we know him, his name is *Atheism*, he has been a very pestilent fellow for many years in the miserable Town of *Mansoul*."<sup>9</sup> From Bunyan's point of view, no one is more deserving of being identified under an opprobrious connotation of the expression than Chester himself. Chester, who supported Parliament before the Restoration only to be appointed alderman and serve the interests of Charles II,<sup>10</sup> is in a sense reborn in the character of Atheism—now the truly "pestilent fellow." The contagious threat posed by the likes of Atheism is evident in the sentence passed by Mr. Zeal-for-God against

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy War, made by Shaddai upon Diabolus. For the Regaining of the Metropolis of the World. Or, the Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul*, ed. by Roger Sharrock and James F. Forrest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 120.

the Diabolonians: “. . . *Cut them off, they have been the plague, and have sought the destruction of Mansoul.*”<sup>11</sup>

Turning to Luke’s parallel account in Acts, Paul is accused by Tertullus, the professional advocate under hire by the Sanhedrin, of spreading religious insurrection by preaching among the general population much as did Bunyan:

For we have found this man *a pestilent fellow*; and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. (Acts 24. 5-6)

F.F. Bruce translates the same phrase in Acts 24. 5 more forcefully with regard to comparing Paul’s proselytization activity and infection: “we have found this fellow a perfect plague.”<sup>12</sup> Significantly, Tertullus’s categorization of Paul as pestilential resonates from (if it is not directly influenced by) Claudius’s letter to the Alexandrians (A.D. 41), in which the Roman emperor declares that Jews are “fomenters of a general plague infecting the whole world.”<sup>13</sup> Such a striking parallel of phrase is clearly intentional: “The similarity is deliberate. It is evident that the narrative of Acts is using contemporary language. The charge [yoking Paul with plague] was precisely the one to bring against a Jew during the

<sup>10</sup> Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People*, p. 256.

<sup>11</sup> *The Holy War*, ed. by Sharrock and Forrest, p. 132. After the sentence against the Diabolonians is pronounced, Bunyan similarly summarizes their punishment: “So they crucified the *Diabolonians* that had been a plague, a grief, and an offence to the Town of *Mansoul*” (p. 135), yet another instance of a fusion of irreligion and infection.

<sup>12</sup> *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969, repr. 1971), p. 294.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973; repr. 1995), p. 135.

Principiate of Claudius or during the early years of Nero.”<sup>14</sup> This specific analogy was not uncommon in the period, according to Bruce, who notes that the Greek term used here, which literally means “plague” or “pest,” was “a common term of abuse.”<sup>15</sup> The same term also may be translated “trouble maker” or “nuisance” in addition to having the literal renderings.<sup>16</sup>

Thus when Claudius likens Jews to plague, the Roman emperor unquestionably fuses contagion and false religion—but having taken this further, some scholars have argued that this conflation may in fact refer specifically to insurgent Jewish Christianity: “. . . [C]onfirmatory evidence [of this possibility] has been sought by linking the emperor’s severe words [bracketing together Christian Jews and contagion] with the language used by Tertullus when he was conducting the Sanhedrin’s prosecution of Paul before Felix.”<sup>17</sup> Given these circumstances, it seems evident that Tertullus—by dramatically yet tersely linking Paul with pestilence—hopes to generate an inflammatory reaction in Felix: “The accusations of Tertullus, for instance, make no reference to any points of Jewish law (though these were no doubt handled in the accusations made by the Jews afterwards), but concentrate on what would alarm the procurator.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, in also accusing Paul of seeking “to profane the temple,” Tertullus underscores the pestilential threat of the renegade ministry if “profane” is taken in the sense of “pollute.” Taken together,

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<sup>14</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 422.

<sup>16</sup> Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce, *New Testament History*, p. 294.

<sup>18</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts in the Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 226.

these expressions become powerful rhetorical inducements for Felix to act accordingly by somehow placing the infectious threat under quarantine—even though the Romans would not be greatly concerned with seeking prosecution for such a particularly Jewish offence.

Unwittingly speaking to the severity of linking irreligion with infection in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, G. Campbell Morgan describes the designation of Paul as “a pestilent fellow” in Acts as “in itself . . . a very serious charge,” adding that “the translation hardly carries the offensiveness of the description.”<sup>19</sup> Something of the gravity of this designation in the Authorized Version does, however, emerge not only in this particular phrase used pointedly by (and against) Bunyan, but also in general in the widespread employment of this metaphor by such divergent authors as Burton, Cleveland, Casaubon, Henry More, Butler, Milton, Thomas Edwards, Swift and Defoe. Because of the figurative appropriateness of biblical material containing the false religion-infection metaphor, these writers—either directly or indirectly—vivify this analogy in the theologically turbulent period from 1621 to 1722. Such varied adaptation of biblical material is not surprising considering that the Bible was of paramount importance among those in literate circles in the seventeenth century, as noted by Christopher Hill: “The Bible was central to the whole of the life of the society: we ignore it at our peril.”<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, biblical plague narratives, especially as rendered in the Authorized Version (which itself may be considered from one point of view to be a work of seventeenth-century English literature), can be applied directly to

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<sup>19</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), pp. 502-03.

contemporary plague outbreaks whether the infectious diseases described in the Bible were bubonic plague or not. For the authors throughout the 100-year scope of this study, although Burton may have relied to a greater degree on the Geneva Bible for an English version, the Authorized Version came to life in identifying parallel interaction between irreligion and infection in the seventeenth century: "More so than any other seventeenth-century disease, the plague recalled biblical warnings of divine punishment," observes Raymond A. Anselment.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, Anselment contends that "[s]eventeenth-century Englishmen understood their own suffering in terms of the pestilence the Lord threatens to bring among the disobedient and sinful" in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, both of which chapters are discussed in greater detail below.<sup>22</sup> "The plagues of the Israelites in Numbers, the Egyptians in Exodus, and particularly David's subjects in Samuel were often cited as Old Testament parallels," and Anselment also points to the powerful relevance of the role of plague as punishment for infidelity in Revelation.<sup>23</sup>

Abundant citation of pestilence by the authors of all five books of the Pentateuch indicates that infection (more so physically than spiritually), informs substantially the narratives at the core of the Hebrew scriptures. Writers of the "historical" books Joshua, I Samuel, II Samuel, II Kings and I Chronicles, imply that false religion and contagion are fundamentally affiliated. Eighth-century prophets Isaiah and Amos further demonstrate a decided correlation between

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<sup>20</sup> *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (Harmondsworth: The Penguin Press, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *The Realms of Apollo: Literature and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

physical and spiritual disease, and Jeremiah and Ezekiel warn more than a century later that physical, pestilential death is the reward of idolatry, a manifestation of spiritual infection. Habakkuk and Zechariah all also variously employ infection metaphor in prophecies addressing theological concerns. Although this by no means represents a complete catalogue of instances of pestilence in the Bible, biblical plague passages cited herein warrant consideration specifically for their profound pertinence toward an illustration of the dynamics shared by false religion and contagion.

God's supervisory role in engineering plague outbreaks to punish Pharaoh in Exodus when Yahweh employs blessed, faithful followers as agents in the transmission of pestilence. Sarah (as in Genesis 12. 17-20), Moses, and Aaron all play parts in afflicting intransigent infidels with divinely directed pestilence. These chosen few assume the roles of punishers, conduits of contagion—both physical and spiritual—when viewed from the perspective of the Egyptian targets of God's condemnations. From the plagues of Egypt germinate punitive afflictions that repeatedly surface throughout the Bible in various manifestations, most notably in Revelation but also in the writings of the Hebrew prophets and Christian missionaries. Plague is an indispensable affiliate of religion, both in the Exodus plague passages as well as in other biblical narratives involving pestilential outbreaks:

Egypt rebelled against these divine signs to demonstrate its hardening of the heart. . . It was only when Israel was the victim of the conquests and the arrogance of the nations that the theme

of the plagues was resumed as a type of punishment for the heathens.<sup>24</sup>

With the advent of Christianity, however, such overt and direct castigation becomes impossible: "In the universalism of the Church, this notion of the punishment of the Gentiles could not be upheld, but the theme of the plagues was retained as the expression of the punishment of any opposition to the future Kingdom."<sup>25</sup> Plague not only plays a role in the apocalyptic judgements as impending physical punishment, but contagion—both physical and spiritual—explains the dynamics of religious forces contrary to the incipient Christian movement which, ironically, must rely on an "epidemiological" dissemination of faith which will guarantee to believers prophylactic protection from ultimate annihilation (Revelation 6. 7-22. 19), a process that has as its model Pharaoh's tenfold tribulation engineered (directly and indirectly) by Yahweh.

By the time that Moses and Aaron plague Pharaoh and his subjects with pestilential punishment (Exodus 7. 8-13. 16), God has already foretold the defeat of the Egyptians. God tells Moses that it will take "a mighty hand" to convince the king of Egypt to give the Israelites three days of liberty in the wilderness (Exodus 3. 19). When God tells Moses, "... I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go" (Exodus 3. 20), he proclaims that the Egyptians will be literally smitten (with contagion among other afflictions), given the seventeenth-century

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<sup>24</sup> Theirry Maertens, *Bible Themes: A Source Book*, II (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1964), p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 175.

etymological overlap between “plague” and “smite.”<sup>26</sup> In a close parallel to the plight of Milton’s Satan, Pharaoh is doomed not only to destruction by God’s overruling omnipotence, but as well (to some extent) through Pharaoh’s free will. Each decision Pharaoh makes to refuse the three-day pass for the Israelites to sacrifice to Yahweh in the wilderness, brings him closer to his predestined ruin, just as Satan, convinced that he is acting independently of God’s plan, opts for the corruption of Adam and Eve and thereby guarantees his own destruction.

Well in advance of the confrontation between the divinely sanctioned miracles of Moses and Aaron, and the ineffectual sorcery of Pharaoh’s wizards, God foretells the mortal punishment that will be inflicted upon the Egyptians and details the means by which he will appear to give Pharaoh free rein in causing his own defeat. God himself will engender stubbornness in the heart of the Egyptian monarch:

And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, *even* my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, *even* thy firstborn. (Exodus 4. 21-23)

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<sup>26</sup> The primary definition of the English “plague” derives from the Latin *plaga*, which in turn means “stroke,” “blow,” or “wound.” The Latin *plaga* in turn is derived directly from the Doric Greek *plaga*, which also translates as “stroke” or “blow,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.



Thus God reveals that he will guarantee that Pharaoh will delude himself into believing that he determines his own fate.

Naturally suspicious of an Israelite ruse to flee his tyrannical rule, Pharaoh, worshipped as a deity himself by the Egyptians, refuses the request of Moses and Aaron on the basis that he did not recognize “the LORD God of Israel” (Exodus 5. 1). Attempting further to gain a favourable response, Moses and Aaron flash the threat of pestilential scourge in front of the Pharaoh—not, however, necessarily identifying the monarch as the intended victim.

Foreshadowing Pharaoh’s coming afflictions, Moses and Aaron tell him that they must be permitted to perform the sacrifice in the desert, “. . . lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword” (Exodus 5. 3). Their words of warning prove valid: the use of the non-specific but collective pronoun “us” in referring to potential plague victims could refer to the Israelites, but it instead may point to the Egyptians themselves. Yahweh’s ultimate superintendence of the fatally infective chain of events is further demonstrated with the withholding of a vitally crucial detail: Pharaoh, specifically, is the intended sufferer, but he is not explicitly told so, by design.

As Yahweh has decreed, Pharaoh makes the fatal error of dismissing the Israelites’ claim of their deity’s ability to smite with plague. From historical experience, Pharaoh should have known of God’s (and Sarah’s) plague of one of his ancestors (Genesis 12. 17-20), and he should have chosen to learn a lesson from the past. Instead, Pharaoh responds by sending the Israelites back to slave labour made even more unbearable with an intentional hardening—much as his own heart will be stiffened—of working conditions (Exodus 5. 4). Beset with pleas from Moses and Aaron for permission to feast in the wilderness, Pharaoh

seems to have had ample opportunity for averting the impending divine affliction. With each request for leave to honour Yahweh, Pharaoh—deified himself but not an expert in foreign theology—disdainfully professes to have no knowledge of God, yet God's demonstration of his potency makes himself known to Pharaoh (more so than Pharaoh would have preferred), by causing the Egyptian ruler's demise.

Pharaoh's religion rivals Yahweh's and threatens via influence the stability of the Hebrew sect's religious body much as a physical contagion would infect or taint any other inviolate entity. Pestilential punishment plays a pivotal role in this battle of beliefs and their respective capacities for being infectious themselves; in a sense, plague of a physical nature is employed to quash a potential contagion of unbelief. This circle of punishment by plague is especially vicious because Yahweh on the one hand demands that the Hebrew captives be given liberty and on the other ensures that Pharaoh becomes more obdurate and stubborn in his successive refusals. Milton's God permits Satan to extricate himself from the burning lake, leaving him "at large to his own dark designs," which in the long term will "bring forth/Infinite goodness" (I. 209-20).

When the plague of boils afflicts especially Pharaoh's magicians, infectious rivals themselves of Yahweh's followers, the Egyptians are infected unwillingly by the privileged religion. In this, one of the recurrent models of plague representation in the Old Testament, followers of false idols or gods are afflicted with contagion. Often the supreme and mortal condemnation is assigned by God to display vividly the full impact of his retributive capability. Although "the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians" (Exodus 9. 11), the

reason for the sorcerers' withdrawal is not entirely clear. One explanation is that the vanquished magicians undergo so much suffering that they are rendered powerless. Much of Yahweh's efficacy lies in his ability to target selected individuals with infectious punishment, and his potency derives from selectively dispensing the capacity to see his "signs and wonders" as indisputable evidence of his supremacy. Not having such a divinely sent blessing proves fatal for Pharaoh: "Thus God himself withheld from Pharaoh the ability to recognize the divine meaning of these plagues, so that in the end that meaning might be given with absolute plainness for all to see."<sup>27</sup> With the removal of the sorcerers, the Israelites are assured of an aseptic environment on a physical level, but perhaps as well in a spiritual sense. With the excision of Pharaoh's priests, the chance for falling under the spell of their misguided belief is eliminated. This same notion of developing insulation against the infection of foreign religion surfaces explicitly in Paul's letters in the New Testament, wherein one must keep a distance from false prophets or idolaters to avoid the temptation to yield to their doctrinal influence.

Infectious affliction continually hangs over the heads of the Israelites as an ever-present threat of punishment for, among other transgressions, numbering the population—the presumptuous equivalent of "usurping God's authority by seeking . . . comprehensive knowledge."<sup>28</sup> Deviating from common practice, Yahweh sanctions a census by issuing an edict to Moses that he register the population *and* solicit a ransom payment from each of the adult Israelites, so "that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them"

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald E. Clements, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 41.

(Exodus 30. 12). Normally, as in I Chronicles 21 and II Samuel 24, numbering the population is prohibited on penalty of infliction of death by pestilence.

Prophylactic protection from infectious castigation is in the Exodus episode both ensured and in a literal sense insured by payment of a form of tax.

Idolatry, a more pronounced strain of faithlessness than seeking forbidden knowledge, is often depicted as an evil just as infectious as a physical plague epidemic, and it invariably has comparably lethal consequences in Old Testament scripture, such as when Yahweh informs Moses while on the mountain at Sinai that his fellow Israelites at its base "have corrupted *themselves*" (Exodus 32. 7) by revering, under the direction of Aaron, a golden calf recast from jewellery. Whether the capricious calf-worshippers are fatally infected by plague or some lesser affliction, is unclear from the structure of the narrative, but what is apparent is that those who backslide into calf worshipping are literally punished with their religion: Moses reduces the statue to powder, mixes it with water, and forces the unfaithful to "*drink of it*" (Exodus 32. 20). By this means, "the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made" (Exodus 32. 35).

The other two golden calves of the Bible, those commissioned at Dan and Bethel by the idolatrous king Jeroboam I, also are intended, as is the golden calf of Exodus 32, to be metonymical manifestations of apostasy, and to foretell of the inevitably ensuing destruction. Ironically, "Aaron's and Jeroboam's calves are symbols of Yahweh,"<sup>29</sup> and it is just such attempted reverence that demands

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>29</sup> William H. Propp, "Golden Calf," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 257.

purifying retribution, literally through plague in Exodus and figuratively through the excision of the idolatrous altar at Bethel (I Kings 13. 5), a sign of Jeroboam's eventual demise (I Kings 14). Just as casting one of Israel's matriarchs Sarah as somehow corrupted raises questions, so does portraying Aaron, the first chief priest, as inclined to idolatry: "The important question of Aaron's role in the episode of the golden calf. . . is problematic. The incident is almost certainly told with the sanctuaries in mind established by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan in the northern kingdom of Israel."<sup>30</sup>

Joining many other Bible scholars, Aelred Cody observes that Aaron's involvement in the worship of the golden calf is meant to evoke responses to Jeroboam's idolatry although the latter follows the former historically.<sup>31</sup> The Exodus golden calf narrative is also linked by Otto Eissfeldt with that of I Kings, wherein condemnation of Israel's Jeroboam I comes from the south, via "a man of God out of Judah" (I Kings 13. 1).<sup>32</sup> Both narratives have prophetic elements: in Exodus 32. 34, Yahweh threatens idolaters in the context of the golden calf worship episode to "visit their sin upon them," a characteristic which Eissfeldt identifies as evidence that both narratives can be attributed to the same source.<sup>33</sup> In either case, Israel's defeat at the hands of the Assyrians who captured Samaria is anticipated in both golden calf narratives, making the literal

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<sup>30</sup> Aelred Cody, "Aaron," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. by Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 204.

<sup>33</sup> "The only question," Eissfeldt states, "is whether the E narrative of [Exodus 32] which ends with this terrible threat [Exodus 32.34] was written before or after the disaster of 721; i.e., whether it is a real threat like the words of Amos [8.2] . . . or whether it is a *vaticinium ex eventu* which is designed to make the disaster which has already taken place intelligible in retrospect and to explain it in terms of the worship of the calf-image" (pp. 202-03).

plague of Exodus 32 related to the conquest affliction of II Kings 15. 13-31, also further foreshadowed possibly in the language of the prophecy made against Jeroboam I: "For the LORD shall smite Israel" (I Kings 14. 15). Use of this verb, which has affinity with "plague," further supports the argument, at least within the Authorized Version, of a contagious connection between the narratives.

False religion, represented by the golden calf, infected its believers, and plague and religion are again interwoven one with another. At the height of another religious conflict of a much later period, William Tyndale, in the marginalia of his Old Testament translation of *circa* 1530, takes advantage of the wording of the above verse to target Catholicism, for him the corrupt, infectious religion, as quoted by F.F. Bruce: "Against Exodus 32:35, where we read of the pestilence that broke out among the Israelites after their worship of the golden calf, he remarks: "The Pope's bull slayeth more than Aaron's calf."<sup>34</sup> As much as Tyndale lashed out at Catholicism, he and other followers of Lutheranism were vilified, especially by St Thomas More, who equated Protestantism to deadly contagion in the title page of his *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1531), in which he "treatyd dyuers maters, as of the veneracyon & worshyp of ymagys & relyques, prayng to sayntis and goynge on pylgrymage. Wyth many other thyngys touchyng the pestylent secte of Luther & Tyndale, by the tone bygone in Saxony & by the tother laboryd to be brought in to England."<sup>35</sup> More is a Catholic apologist especially in the sense of being defender of the faith, here mustering a spiritual quarantine from the theological threat.

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *History of the Bible in English*, 3rd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, ed. by Thomas M.C. Lawler and others, VI (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 3.

Yahweh repeatedly threatens to punish idolaters by afflicting them with deadly physical infection, which paradoxically serves to eliminate the spiritual contagion of infidelity, a process reinforced in Leviticus as well:

And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of *my* covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. (Leviticus 26. 23-25)

If the Israelites deviate from the true religion by breaking the agreement to follow Yahweh's laws, infectious decimation is the inevitable consequence.<sup>36</sup> Avoidance of pestilential punishment in Numbers 8 echoes Exodus 12 in that plague and the firstborn are again involved, but with a reversal: whereas the firstborn in Exodus are marked for death by pestilence, God designates the Levites in Numbers—in lieu of the chosen firstborn—to be his sanctified, exalted members of the priesthood. They in a sense are insurance against the threat of epidemic punishment:

And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague

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<sup>36</sup> Something of a parallel situation may be seen in Bunyan's *The Holy War*. After Prince Emmanuel warns Mansoul that additional ministers are needed to "publicly Preach to the Corporation both good and wholesome Doctrine,"

among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come  
nigh unto the sanctuary. (Numbers 8. 19)

Religion, metonymically represented by the sanctuary, is protected in prophylactic fashion from contamination, whether physical or spiritual. The Levites provide another level of protection against infection of the Yahwist religion, guarding against a recrudescence of worship of the rival Canaanite deities.

Control measures against apostasy of another sort are taken when Yahweh quashes a spell of potentially disruptive prophesying—a particularly contagious activity throughout history—by bringing a plague among the ravenous Israelites who had been wandering with only manna for sustenance (Numbers 11). When Eldad and Medad begin foretelling the future rather than attending the gathering of the elders around the tabernacle, Moses is unfazed, wishing that all were as zealous as the pair of prophets (Numbers 11. 26-29). However, Yahweh ushers in a wind (*ruah*) which brings with it flocks of quail in answer to the complaints of the famished followers of Moses (Numbers 11. 31). As the Israelites feast on the fowl, “the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague” (Numbers 11. 33).<sup>37</sup> Such prophesying, while it may not directly cause God’s wrath (soothsaying here was seen as a gift bestowed upon the two elders), “probably

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wandering thoughts and backsliding lead to “a great sickness in the Town of *Mansoul*; and most of the inhabitants were greatly afflicted” (pp. 145, 158).

<sup>37</sup> Clearly God’s infliction of pestilence can be regarded as a judgement for an offence, but whether those gorging themselves are penalized for the prophesying of Eldad and Medad, or the murmuring of the masses, is not evident.



shows Canaanite influence,<sup>38</sup> a force potentially infectious and hazardous to Yahwism. Notably, James S. Ackerman herein recognizes a connection between prophecy and contagion: "Just as YHWH has plagued the people with quails through the *ruah*, so also the *ruah* brings the incapacitating plague of ecstatic prophecy."<sup>39</sup> Again a literal plague follows upon a figurative contaminatory threat to the sanctioned faith.

Similarly, death by pestilence is the promised result of lack of faith in Yahweh for the disgruntled Israelites who doubt his ability to deliver Canaan into their possession. Despite impassioned declarations by Caleb and Joshua that the domain apportioned by God "is an exceeding good land" (Numbers 14. 6-9), scepticism of their mission among the tribes spreads as if by contagion. Unhappy with this irresolution of the exiles, Yahweh announces that he will extirpate the faithless followers (Numbers 14. 11-12). Caleb and Joshua (and their descendants), however, are spared the fatal affliction and willed the stipulated territory for their steadfast faith in God's providence (Numbers 14. 24-30). Appropriately, Yahweh singles out and passes execution upon those scouts who brought back with them the disease of dissension over the prospect of securing the promised land: "And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD" (Numbers 14. 36-37). Those who

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<sup>38</sup> Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962; repr. 1973), p. 178 n.

<sup>39</sup> "Numbers," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (London: Collins, 1987), p. 81.

spread doctrinal distemper on one hand are excised by literal pestilence on the other.

Paralleling the plight of Milton's Satan and his factious band, Korah and his relations are exterminated for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16. 1-33). Those innocent of the rebellious murmurings are warned beforehand to remove themselves from the vicinity of the tents of Korah and fellow conspirators Dathan and Abiram. Moses again proclaims that such dissension poses an infectious threat to the congregation: "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of their's, lest ye be consumed in all their sins" (Numbers 16. 26). Presently those guilty of the offence and their families are buried alive (Numbers 16. 30-33), and subsequently the narrative development intensifies at a remarkable pace: in the span of some 15 verses, 250 of Korah's tribe are incinerated when "there came out a fire from the LORD" (Numbers 16. 35).<sup>40</sup> The next day, hordes in the remaining camp again murmur against Moses and Aaron, prompting a vision of Yahweh in the form of a cloud (Numbers 16. 41-42). God warns the brothers to stand clear of the congregation, whereupon Moses announces to Aaron that "the plague is begun" (Numbers 16. 45-46). Aaron boldly carries a burning censer through the crowd of infected Israelites already suffering the plague's effects, in order to make "atonement for the people" (Numbers 16. 47). Aaron's intervention as deputy of Moses (and thereby of God), establishes a *cordon sanitaire* between the dead and the living, stays the plague, and halts further death from the disease—but not before it claims 14,700 victims of the assembly (Numbers 16. 48-49). Significantly, Aaron,

who is acting as Yahweh's authorized agent, halts the plague as suddenly as it was begun (Numbers 16. 50).

Marriage unions—specifically those involving infidel wives—cause deadly plagues among erstwhile followers of Yahweh, whose eminence is threatened by seductive female Baal worshippers from surrounding Moab and Midian who lead Israelite men while still en route to Canaan to “commit whoredom” with them (Numbers 25. 1). It is at this stage of the journey that the Israelites undergo their first exposure to the Canaanite faith—through sexual activity which ostensibly contributed to maintaining fertility of the soil :

Sacred prostitution was . . . part of normal Canaanite worship.

This was later to prove a major threat to the integrity of Israel's allegiance to YHWH, but here it would seem that the Israelites first encountered the sensuous and demoralising practices of

Canaanite religion before actually setting foot on Canaanite soil.<sup>41</sup>

Worse than simply involving themselves in sexual liaisons with the Moabite women, the Israelite men allow themselves to be lured into the worship of their rival idols, and consequently, “Israel [joins] himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD [is] kindled against Israel” (Numbers 25. 2-3).

Because the Moabite women seem to be drawing God's followers elsewhere, drastic measures must be taken to check the dissolution and possible demise of Israel's religion. Toward that end, Moses commands the execution of “every one of his men that were joined unto Baal-peor” (Numbers 25. 5). William

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<sup>40</sup> This passage is handily applied by the Presbyterian minister Thomas Vincent in *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667) to the 1665 plague and the 1666 fire in London.

Neil's assessment of this severe remedy supports the proposition that monotheism was in danger of being fatally corrupted: "The violence of Moses' reaction is a measure of his horror at this perilous development," which would have been "the first step to the Israelites' faith becoming indistinguishable in all other respects from the polytheism that surrounded them."<sup>42</sup>

Given that the Israelite congregation is especially vulnerable to outside influence (as in Numbers 16 discussed above), Moses's rage seems justified after witnessing the disloyal Israelite Zimri bring "unto his brethren a Midianitish woman [Cozbi] in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel" (Numbers 25. 6). Not only is sexual involvement with Moabite women forbidden, but Zimri's marriage to an equally foreign Midianite woman is equally heinous in the eyes of Yahweh—if not more so. In carrying on a tradition begun by his grandfather Aaron, Phinehas interrupts another plague—this one more deadly than that of Numbers 16)—when he slays Zimri and wife Cozbi, daughter of a Midianite prince. Phinehas zealously transfixes the couple by running them through with a javelin (Numbers 25. 7-8), effecting a curtailment of any further contamination of the faithful population, and the cessation of the plague that killed 24,000 among the "children of Israel" (Numbers 25. 8-11). Joshua reinforces the association between irreligion and pestilence by referring to this outbreak of apostasy as "the iniquity of Peor" for which "there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD" (Joshua 22. 17).

Moses clearly blames the Midianite women for causing the plague outbreak just as the writer of Numbers 25. 16-18 directs the blame for all of

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<sup>41</sup> William Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 128.

what transpires in Numbers 25. 1-15 on the Midianites and none on the Moabites of Numbers 25. 1-5:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them: For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake. (Numbers 25. 16-18)

In fact, this passage, deemed "a late editorial note,"<sup>43</sup> foreshadows Numbers 31, wherein Moses, under command from Yahweh, issues orders to destroy the Midianites (Numbers 31. 2-3). However, initially the Israelites execute only the men and spare the women and children (Numbers 31. 7).

Not having yet learned to follow the letter of the law and thereby benefit from Yahweh's protection, the Israelites relapse into disobedience in the form of sympathy for female survivors and their dependants—and they suffer the consequences. This unwarranted benevolence prompts an outburst of wrath on the part of Moses, directed at the Israelite captains:

And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD (Numbers 31. 15-16).

Baalism, as Ackerman observes, has the potential to spread, as would an infectious disease, from the foreign remnant to the Israelites: "... Moses is

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

angry that the women and children have been spared, fearing that Baal Peor will break out again.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Moses orders the tribal leaders to “kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him” (Numbers 31. 17), sparing the “uncontaminated” Midianite women—the virgins.

Presumably such “leniency” is granted for spurring needed population growth, but its motivation could more than anything else derive from the sexual demands of the Israelite men. In any event, protection of the established religion again is sustained via prophylaxis against a potentially harmful influence within it—in this case the rumblings of the tribes of Reuben and Gad (and part of the tribe of Manasseh), against settling land west of the Jordan River. Such infectious dissension, which would result in diminished military power through a reduction in the ranks, threatens to spread by word of mouth. When the members of the two tribes seek priestly approval for immediate settlement, Moses admonishes them for their rebellious inclinations (Numbers 32. 2-15). Intertextuality serves Moses to remind the tribal leaders that such dissonance has already prompted Yahweh into invoking pestilential punishment (Numbers 14. 1-10).

Establishing a direct link between the worship of false gods and physical infection, Yahweh promises freedom from affliction for his people, and concomitant suffering for infidels via physical infection—if his conditions are met: “And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them

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<sup>43</sup> John Sturdy, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Numbers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 185.

upon all *them* that hate thee” (Deuteronomy 7. 15). Anthony Phillips describes the stipulatory nature of Yahweh’s contractual disease-control agreement:

“While God would not allow his people to contract the vile diseases of Egypt, their immunity remained conditional on their giving him their life allegiance”<sup>45</sup>

In the same series of commands, Yahweh dictates that false prophets who espouse the worship of “other gods, which thou has not known” (Deuteronomy 13. 2), must be summarily executed to prevent contamination of the minds of the dutiful followers: “You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul” (Deuteronomy 13. 3).

In invoking a preventive measure that rings of quarantine from physical infection, God demands extermination of the source of the contagion:

And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

(Deuteronomy 13. 5)

Execution of the false prophet is required even if this infectious seducer is one’s brother, son, daughter, or wife, each of whom has the potential to foreshadow the rebellious tempter typified by Milton’s Satan and “entice thee secretly,

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<sup>44</sup> “Numbers,” in the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 89.

saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou has not known, thou, nor thy fathers" (Deuteronomy 13. 6). Phillips notes that such a drastic measure punishes the wicked violator: "Only through the death of the offender could the community cleanse itself from the pollution of his act. Thus the execution acted as a means of propitiating God"<sup>46</sup>—or Apollo as in the case of the Sophocles tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, wherein punishments suggested for Oedipus—the infectious agent of Thebes—are death or exile. In Deuteronomy, the extreme measure of killing the spiritual offender eliminates the source of the physical infection.

Yahweh promises both blessings for followers of his moral laws and curses for those who fall astray from his edicts. Given that "for the deuteronomists the first commandment guaranteeing Israel's exclusive allegiance to her God had virtually become the sole criterion of covenant obedience,"<sup>47</sup> it is not surprising that apostasy should bring catastrophic pestilence, one of the principal curses: "The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it" (Deuteronomy 28. 21). In this case, plague paradoxically serves as its own vehicle for quarantine; unbelievers are banished permanently through extermination, and none lives to "infect" other potential backsliders. Heightening the severity of his condemnation of apostasy, Yahweh (through Moses) not only promises punishment through the affliction of "plagues wonderful. . . even great plagues, and of long continuance" (Deuteronomy 28.

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<sup>45</sup> *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Deuteronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.



59), but he also implements a *lex talionis* by infecting dissenters with that very strain of pestilence with which he doomed the Israelites' original antagonists: "Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee" (Deuteronomy 28. 60).

By way of admonition, Yahweh reminds post-exilic Israel that he has condemned the earlier generation of idolaters as well as their descendants to "the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it" (Deuteronomy 29. 22). In this instance, "plagues of that land" can be equated with the aberrant systems of belief manifested in those individuals who personify proscribed religions, and again Yahweh claims for himself the power to assign outbreaks of pestilence at will. Expulsion much in the manner of protective quarantine is stipulated for carriers of the deadly contagion of apostasy: "And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as *it is this day*" (Deuteronomy 29. 28).

Just as powerfully linking plague and religion as when physical infection springs from worship of the golden calf in Exodus, the ark of the covenant, regarded heretically by the Philistines in 1 Samuel as an Israelite idol, leaves deadly infection in its wake wherever it is carried. When the Philistines gain possession of the wooden chest after defeating the Israelites (I Samuel 4. 10), plague breaks out among them, prompting an equation of the ark with Yahweh. Previously, the Israelites had led themselves astray by worshipping the ark—described by Neil as "a sacred talisman"<sup>48</sup>—rather than the LORD. Nonetheless, giving the wooden chest undue reverence proves to be a far more

mortal mistake for the inhabitants of Philistia when they are “plagued” with Yahwism. Much in the same way that Pharaoh’s sorcery is bested by Yahweh’s thaumaturgy in Egypt, Dagon, the male corn god of the Philistines, is vanquished by the more pestilentially powerful Israelite deity.

After the Philistines bring the ark into the temple of Dagon at Ashdod, Dagon collapses and crumbles on the ground twice in as many days, signifying his defeat (I Samuel 5. 3-4). Infection—most likely bubonic plague—simultaneously spreads in Ashdod and environs after the introduction of the representation of the “foreign” Yahweh:

But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, *even* Ashdod and the coasts thereof. And when the men of Ashdod saw that *it was* so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god. (I Samuel 5. 6-7)

The same pattern of punishment by plague follows wherever the ark is shifted, adding to the argument that the disorder described is bubonic plague: “. . . the rapid spread of the disease through Philistia and later into the Judaeen area would fit this well.”<sup>48</sup> Upon sending the ark to Gath, plague attacks the residents of that city (I Samuel 5. 9), and after its transfer to Ekron, those Philistines decide to return it to Israel after suffering contagious affliction themselves (I Samuel 5. 10). Although “the overthrow of the alien god” and “the

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<sup>48</sup> Harper’s Bible Commentary, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The First Book of Samuel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 56.

plaguing of the Philistines with disease" are "two separate elements,"<sup>50</sup> Dagon's demise and Philistia's plagues are nonetheless different manifestations of the same phenomenon.

Further underscoring a connection between plague and religion, the Philistines craft gold tumours (or boils) to accompany the ark on its return voyage, a "trespass-offering" to appease Yahweh (I Samuel 6. 17). In this course of action, the Philistines ironically designate plague as an entity deserving of worship in the forms of the golden images—"infectious" idols that conceivably could be worshipped as any other god. Neil, in his description of the use of the golden swellings, labels the activity "imitative magic supposed to neutralise the plague."<sup>51</sup> With the return of the ark to the Israelites at Kirjath-jearim, they realize that "its loss and their defeat were due to their pagan practices."<sup>52</sup> Being guilty of nothing more flagitious than displaying worshipful sentiments toward the ark—only a symbol of Yahweh and much less malignant than any made of a rival deity—the Israelites avoid the death sentence, and are rehabilitated in having witnessed plague outbreaks among their enemies for the same crime. Yahweh's followers see firsthand that the infidels are infected, literally, with (and by) false religion.

Lack of faith in Yahweh, manifested in David's sinful desire to number the residents of Israel, results in the swift dispatch of 70,000 citizens in a divinely directed plague epidemic. In keeping with other disciplinary actions, Yahweh paradoxically provides the impetus for the commission of the sin *and* its concomitant judgement: "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 167.

Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah” (II Samuel 24. 1). Ironically, the number of victims is as specific as the original census: 800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah (II Samuel 24. 2). Although David repents of his presumptuous polling before Yahweh inflicts punishment, the chain of events leading to the punitive pestilence outbreak is set in motion as soon as David’s seer Gad informs the king that he only has three choices: famine, war or pestilence (II Samuel 24. 10-13).

Opting for three days of plague instead of famine or war, David chooses to surrender himself to a higher authority regardless of the consequences (II Samuel 24. 14). Such concession signifies restored faith on the part of David, yet the sentence is implemented swiftly and surely anyway (II Samuel 24. 15). When the death toll of 70,000 is reached, God stays the hand of his murderous evil angel (a *mal’ak*) stationed at the Jebusite’s threshing floor and abates the plague (II Samuel 24. 15-16). Another fusion between infection and irreligion is established in the aftermath: David is ordered to erect an altar to Yahweh at the source of the angel’s destruction, the threshing floor, and once it is, plague is providentially eliminated and seemingly worshipped in its own right (II Samuel 24. 18-25). The locus of the deadly infection is transformed into a hallowed centre of worship.<sup>53</sup>

The revisionist account ascribed by some scholars to Ezra in I Chronicles of the plague sent to punish David’s census-taking differs in that Satan himself “stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel” (I Chronicles 21.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>53</sup> Ackroyd perceptively describes this paradox: “The story of the threshing floor is linked then to another disaster, a ‘plague’, and it is only with the offering of worship on the designated site that this is withdrawn,” in *The Cambridge Bible*

1), a modification from II Samuel 24. 1 mentioned above in which Yahweh provokes David to count heads in Israel and Judah. R.J. Coggins explains that the author of I Chronicles "felt able to modify a part of the text of his source which presented unacceptable modes of speaking about Israel's past," and "was aware of the obvious theological difficulties presented by such a statement and modified it."<sup>54</sup>

False religion is associated with contagion throughout Psalms, such as when one author describes a self-imposed *cordon sanitaire* erected to fend off potentially infectious idolatry: "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked" (Psalm 26. 4-5). Such spiritual separatism has a physical application such as when the threat of biological contagion, in this case presumably that of leprosy, is acknowledged: "My loved ones stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off" (Psalm 38. 11). Although the former passage describes voluntary doctrinal prophylaxis, the latter depicts the emotional torment endured when obligated to submit to physical quarantine for the safety of others. Even easing the suffering of others can ironically render the comforter stricken with deadly infection: "An evil disease . . . cleaveth fast unto him" (Psalm 41. 8). The New English Bible translates "evil disease" as "an evil spell," but J.W. Rogerson and J.W. McKay translate the Hebrew expression

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*Commentary on the New English Bible: The Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 236.

<sup>54</sup> *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The First and Second Books of the Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 107.

as “a thing (or word) of Belial,”<sup>55</sup> an expression often used in the Old Testament “to characterize the wicked or worthless, such as idolaters . . . ”<sup>56</sup>

Religious prophylaxis (literally) informs Psalm 91, which is cited by the narrator of Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* in support of his providential decision not to flee plague-stricken London: “. . . the LORD. . . is my refuge and my fortress” (Psalms 91. 2), and such a sanctuary is secure quarantine from “the snare of the fowler, *and* from the noisome pestilence” of the following verse (Psalm 91. 3). Trust and faith in Yahweh (accompanied by an implicit rejection of false gods), translate into deliverance from the threat of plague, yoking adherence to the sanctioned religion and quarantine from physical contagion and the figurative infection of rival beliefs: “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day; *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday. (Psalm 91. 5-6). Given that this plague that invisibly spreads has been identified as “demonic or magical forces in whose power Israelites believed,”<sup>57</sup> pestilence is again fused with spiritual waywardness. The message that quarantine against infectious influence is guaranteed is reinforced: “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (Psalm 91. 10-11). Just such afflictions as mentioned in these verses are swiftly visited upon backsliders as punishment for the worship of false gods, again coupling pestilence and apostasy. A shield from infection is guaranteed when Defoe’s narrator H.F. is

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<sup>55</sup> *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Psalms 1-50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 198.

<sup>56</sup> Michael D. Coogan, “Belial,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 77.

assured of "the Goodness and Protection of the Almighty . . ." <sup>58</sup> Whereas angels of the LORD can lay waste to a population by inflicting plague (I Chronicles 21. 12), virtuous angels can ensure insulation from epidemic danger.

The propitious plagues of Egypt are recounted in Psalm 105, a catalogue of Yahweh's wondrous works along the Nile: "Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgements of his mouth" (Psalm 105. 5), serves as a reminder of " . . . God's power, especially in events such as the plagues . . ." <sup>59</sup> The destructive horror of pestilence is more dynamically described in Psalm 106, a list of Israel's failures that result from disobedience of God's laws. Whereas Psalm 105 is "an account of the history of Israel in which all the stress is placed on God's faithfulness to his people," Psalm 106 is "the history . . . presented to show the people's unfaithfulness to God." <sup>60</sup> Indirectly, this lyric serves to illustrate the pervasiveness of plague as punishment for religious misdeeds: at least three of the seven specified sins in the chapter involve the outbreak of pestilence. Reference is made to unbelief and murmuring at the Red Sea after Yahweh's display of plagues freed the Israelites (Psalms 106. 6-12; Exodus 12, 14); the worship of the golden calf, the idol whose worship is contiguous with contagion (Psalms 106. 19-23; Exodus 32); and participation in Moabite worship that leads to an outbreak of plague (Psalm 106. 28-31; Numbers 25).

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<sup>57</sup> Rogerson and McKay, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: Psalms 101-150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 205.

<sup>58</sup> *A Journal of the Plague Year*, ed. by Louis Landa (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 101-150*, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Throughout the books of the Hebrew prophets, false prognostication begs comparison with pestilence. When prophetic words pass from a prophet to his listeners, his message has the potential to spread epidemiologically. False prophets lure believers outside of the bounds of protective orthodoxy; on the other hand, true prophets seek to prevent malleable followers from straying from their proper course. Conversely, rightful prophetic denunciation of opulence and complacency threatens the superficially faithful establishment as would a malevolent contagion, and while material success traditionally signals God's favour, the prophet views concomitant disbelief and snobbery as contagions which, if sufficiently diffused, will leave God no alternative other than to seek the extinction of their agents. Often, paradoxically, God achieves prophylactic protection by inflicting pestilential punishment on hypocritical Israelites who follow the letter—but not the spirit—of ritual and ceremony.

Naturally, materially fortunate Israelites would have difficulty accepting a destabilizing revelation from prophets who may be seen as the equivalent of Puritanical zealots. In this sense, the soothsaying of Amos creates a binary opposition between himself and the assiduously fastidious Yahweh worshippers among the upper class in Israel who revel in material success and bypass social conscience. While Amos calls for adherence to traditional Yahweh worship to the exclusion of any trace of Canaanite influence in Israel, Hosea seems to allow for an incorporation of some elements of Baal worship—clearly, however, barring any trace of debased sexual fertility rituals.<sup>61</sup> In the first three chapters of Hosea, the prophet relates ordeals he has suffered because of his adulterous



wife and family, and whether this prologue is literal or figurative or some combination of the two, it points to the key argument that the first of the minor prophets makes against idolatry in the rest of the book.

For Hosea, sexual abandon countenanced in the guise of fertility rituals integral to Baalism, is infidelity in the eyes of Yahweh: "This rival religion provided sexual activity as part of its ritual . . . at once literal and spiritual adultery."<sup>62</sup> Once again, the penalty to pay for such apostasy and any other form of spiritual disobedience, is infliction of pestilence, characteristically serving to eliminate waywardness at its source, such as when Hosea intimates that Yahweh and deadly contagion become indistinguishably unified:

. . . O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy  
destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. Though he  
[Ephraim-Israel] be fruitful among *his* brethren, an east wind [the  
"pestilential" *ruah*] shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come  
up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his  
fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all  
pleasant vessels. (Hosea 13. 14-16)

Deadly infection, Yahweh's cleansing castigation sweeping imperceptibly into Israel, emanates directly from the LORD to purge Israel of its deviant worshippers: "God is summoning up the plagues of death to punish his recalcitrant people. Death, for Hosea, is not an independent power, opposed to

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<sup>61</sup> Henry McKeating, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Books of Amos, Hosea and Micah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 72-73.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Andersen, "Hosea, The Book of," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 290.

the good God, as he was for the Canaanites, but a mere weapon in God's hand."<sup>63</sup>

The social maladies of oppression of the poor, display of dissolution, and Pharisaical observance of ritual and ceremony, all of which infect the upper-class Samarian women of prosperous Israel, inflame Amos, who compares them to grazing cattle (Amos 4. 1). In seeking to implement a protective quarantine against such ills, Amos announces Yahweh's intent to inflict a death sentence on them for their bovine acceptance of the status quo (Amos 4. 2). In so doing, Amos sets himself apart from preceding prophets by attacking an established religion that is not idolatrous; in fact, Amos's sarcastic indictment is that Samaritans are too zealously anti-idolatrous—a malignant tendency that Amos deems just as pernicious or even more so than heathenism: "Come to Beth-el, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, *and* your tithes after three years" (Amos 4. 4).

Hypocritical disciples of Yahweh, by ostentatiously performing (in the dramatic sense) obligatory rites, spread—not always maliciously—a vacuous system of worship that, ironically, they consider efficacious: "Amos is not concerned with idolatry, with the worship of the other gods of the Palestinian pantheon, but with the perverted worship of YHWH, through which the Israelites thought that they had safeguarded themselves from all calamity."<sup>64</sup> Speaking on behalf of Yahweh, Amos recounts a sevenfold litany of punishments that will befall Israel, general afflictions of an aggregate nature but some—including pestilence—of sufficiently recent historical experience for the

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<sup>63</sup> McKeating, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup> Neil, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

message to have heightened potency (Amos 4. 6-11).<sup>65</sup> Overall, the catalogue of castigation serves as a preventive measure:

Amos is setting out plainly his doctrine of discipline. The object of punishment is in the first place remedial. It is meant to turn men back to God, to compel good behaviour. But if men refuse to repent, God has no other expedient to resort to but total destruction.<sup>66</sup>

Amos's zeal for austerity in the face of opulence foreshadows not only in the literal sense; his contempt for the overscrupulous observances of the wealthy Israelites parallels that of seventeenth-century Puritans in England (especially Milton in his last prose work *Of True Religion*), who charge that Catholicism (and to a lesser extent Anglicanism), are contagions overrun with vapid ceremonial display.

Amos specifically targets affluent women of Samaria for rebuke (Amos 4), but he elsewhere indicts male and female members of the self-indulgent plutocracy: "Woe to them *that are* at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, *which are* named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (Amos 6. 1). The prophet condemns the Israelite aristocracy's decadent lifestyle (Amos 6. 3-6), not the nation of Israel,<sup>67</sup> and this infection of complaisance will confine the offenders within city walls until a secondary

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<sup>65</sup> In establishing the connection between infection and irreligion, Anglican clergyman Robert Burton paraphrases Amos 4. 10 in explaining why "mankind [is] generally tormented with epidemical maladies": "Pestilence [the LORD] hath sent, but they have not turned to him," in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1932; repr. 1961), I, 131, 132.

<sup>66</sup> McKeating, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

plague—the physical one—exterminates them: “I will deliver up the city with all that is therein” (Amos 6. 8). Henry McKeating notes that “deliver up” (“abandon” in the New English Bible), can also be translated as “shut up,” “enclose” or “imprison,” adding that “[t]his is exactly what would happen to a plague-stricken city. It would be isolated and ostracized until the plague had burnt itself out.”<sup>68</sup> Ironically, that which the pedigreed pietists joyously thought to be protection from ruination—their ardent but vacuous worship—precipitates their annihilation.

Although Isaiah does not specifically herald any onset of pestilence as divine punishment, in forecasting doom for the dominating Assyrians under Sennacherib (Isaiah 33), he obliquely foretells of the plague that eventually will consume the potential invaders of Judah through divine providence. Israel had already fallen due to a resurgence of apostasy and Judah is the next target of Assyria, but Isaiah predicts that the invading force will be decimated first: “. . . [W]hen thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; *and* when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee” (Isaiah 33. 1). King Hezekiah, desperately in need of assurance from Isaiah that the southern kingdom would be spared decimation at the hands of the invading Assyrians, reasons rightly and promises implementation of needed reforms. An optimally timed and deadly infection among Sennacherib’s forces ensues: “Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses” (Isaiah 37. 36; II Kings 19. 32-35). As a result of Yahweh’s providentially swift and widespread plague of the

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

invading infidels, Sennacherib defers to the potency of Yahweh and retreats homeward (Isaiah 37. 37). In eradicating the Assyrian army, God again employs an “angel of the LORD” that serves as a cooperative agent of divine castigation that forcefully exhibits Yahweh’s spiritual superiority.

Latter-day awareness of this metaphorical bond between irreligion and contagion is not limited to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in English literature. In his 1815 poem “The Destruction of Semnacherib,” Byron sculpts material from II Kings 19. 15-36 to reinforce the analogical alloy of pestilence and idolatry identifiable in the Old Testament passage. In both the biblical and poetic renderings, the Assyrian troops encamped outside the physical (and spiritual) walls of Jerusalem constitute an infectious force threatening to eradicate Yahwism. Miraculously forestalling the religious infection, God delivers through his agent of visitation an outbreak of physical pestilence among the enemy. Designated in the Authorized Version as “the angel of the LORD” (II Kings 19 .35), Byron identifies the divine messenger instead as “the Angel of Death” (10). Elsewhere in the poem Byron closely follows the biblical source, even when he deviates substantially from its language. The angel of the Authorized Version “went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians . . . ” (II Kings 19.35), and Byron’s angel “spread his wings on the blast, / And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass’d . . . ” (9-10).

Straying further from correspondence to the II Kings 19 pericope, Byron in the final stanza presents his impression of the plague’s aftermath, further highlighting the link between infection and irreligion in the wake of the theological showdown: “And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail, / And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal; / And the might of the Gentile,

unsmote by the sword, / Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!" (21-24). Neither of the images in the first couplet— the clamorously mourning Assyrian women left husbandless because of their deity's inferiority to Yahweh and the thaumaturgic destruction of effigies of Baal in Assyrian shrines—derives from II Kings. Nevertheless, Byron's image of the vanquished icons finds a parallel in I Samuel 5. 3-4. Yahweh's superior spiritual force results in the physical destruction of Dagon, the corn god of the Philistines, who likewise are physically plagued by the Israelite deity's presence in the form of the ark of the covenant. To clearly point to the crowning paradox of the poem, Byron describes the abundantly armed but lifeless and ultimately powerless soldiers as "unsmote by the sword," an antithetical borrowing from "smote" of the Authorized Version.

Following the reign of Hezekiah, who had distinguished himself for abolishing idolatry in Judah, his successors Manasseh and Amon tolerate a recrudescence of idolatrous worship. This new heretical outbreak is not quashed until Josiah's sanitization campaign begun after his discovery of "the book of the law," thought to be a part of Deuteronomy, to destroy any evidence of the worship of alien deities:

With astonishment and dismay, he recognized that, according to this book, the nation was and long had been in gross disobedience of the cultic laws and that a sweeping religious reform was needed

to purge Judah of its apostasy. This he proceeded to carry out with great zeal.<sup>69</sup>

Jeremiah's later denunciation of the erroneously optimistic Hananiah as a false prophet matches the level of enthusiasm with which the late king had sought to extirpate heathenism. Hananiah, considered "a representative of the Jerusalem religious establishment,"<sup>70</sup> bears the unquestionably more palatable (but in the end faulty) message that the Babylonian captivity would end and that prosperity would return to Judah. Jeremiah in turn aligns himself with prophets who had traditionally foretold disaster, including deadly epidemics.

Although Jeremiah in a strict sense fallaciously appeals to tradition, time proves the accuracy of his prophecy. According to Jeremiah's view, the extent to which a given prophet espouses cataclysm determines his verity, and plague (among other afflictions) becomes a vehicle for identifying Yahweh's genuine communication, again melding contagion and irreligion:

The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, *then* shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him. (Jeremiah 28. 8-9)

Hananiah, just as he wrongly removes the symbolic yoke from the neck of Jeremiah, mistakenly heralds freedom, liberty which also ironically would

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<sup>69</sup> John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 97.

promote (from Jeremiah's perspective) an atmosphere conducive to a reversion to idolatry. Just as Josiah's religious reforms are more far-reaching than those of his predecessor Hezekiah (also a bitter foe of the infectious cults), Jeremiah's vituperative foretelling of Hananiah's death (Jeremiah 28. 16-17), affirms the eventual eradication of false prophecy (metonymically represented by the false prophet) from Judah. However, as John Bright notes, "There is no reason whatever to doubt that Hananiah borne down—we may suppose—by this awful curse, actually did die as [verse] 17 states."<sup>71</sup> Therefore, war, and starvation and plague must remain menacingly pendent to bolster the barricade against influential apostasy.

Jeremiah emphasizes that continuous and unwavering faith in Yahweh's providence—tantamount to the rejection of idolatrous worship—is unquestionably the best prescription for warding off physical plague. Communicating through Jeremiah, Yahweh warns "the remnant of Judah" (Jeremiah 42. 15), not to flee to possible security in Egypt to avoid the certain (but ephemeral, ordained so by God), tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar: "So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them" (Jeremiah 42. 17). Jeremiah's final caution to the Jews in Egypt underscores Yahweh's prohibition of contagious spiritual idolatry by promising infectious physical destruction (Jeremiah 44). God, again acting with Jeremiah's agency, cites desolation in

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Davidson, "Jeremiah, The Book of," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 347.

<sup>71</sup> *The Anchor Bible: Jeremiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. 203.



Jerusalem and the rest of Judah as proof of his power summarily to exact revenge upon idolaters:

For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. So that none of the remnant of Judah, which are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall escape or remain, that they should return into the land of Judah, to the which they have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return but such as shall escape. (Jeremiah 44. 13-14)

Jeremiah tautologically implies that only those who free themselves from the certain and infectious influence of the incense-burners can return—not only geographically to Judah, but spiritually to Yahweh as well.

Nonetheless, the transplanted Judaeans defiantly discount Jeremiah's caveat and point to empirical data which seems to contradict Jeremiah's profession of God's potency. Their woes, they say, began only *after* worship of the Assyro-Babylonian goddess Ishtar had ceased, in their minds proof of her superiority:

As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for *then* had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. (Jeremiah 44. 16-17)

Jeremiah answers that the idolatry itself caused the desolation—only after Yahweh's toleration of the practice reached a breaking point.

Yahweh's providence is shown in the fact that the remaining subjects of the southern kingdom are exiled from their homeland and that it lies in ruin (Jeremiah 44. 22-23). Only after most of the exiles in Egypt are "consumed by the sword and by the famine" (and presumably by pestilence, the other calamity of the formulaic triad), can the loyal and infection-free refugees return to Judah (Jeremiah 44. 27). Yahweh, Jeremiah proclaims, will instead favour those who freely chose to endure bondage and went to Babylon. No concrete explanation, however, is given for God's providence in allowing some Judaeans in Egypt to escape; if, however, none lives, none would return to perpetuate the account of Yahweh's supremacy. Punishment thus must not be universal because some must endure to recount the terror experienced by those who are punished. Paradoxically, by leaving a remainder, God makes himself stronger by using something less than the most extreme deadly force that he is capable of employing.

With his metaphors, signs, and parables, Ezekiel employs figurative language more than any other prophet to illustrate the seriousness of his warnings,<sup>72</sup> and he explicitly links idolatry and pestilence in his vision of Yahweh's impending punishment of Israel for a recrudescence of Baal worship. Plague (combined with famine) is one of three of God's afflictions promised by Ezekiel in return for the pollution of Yahweh's religion by inconstant Israelites tempted into the worship of rival deities. While in exile in Babylon, Ezekiel has a

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<sup>72</sup> Neil, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

dream vision of infidelity brazenly committed in Jerusalem which indicates his anxiety over the continually malignant influence of heathenism.

One of the “greater abominations” of infidelity revealed to Ezekiel, “women weeping for Tammuz” and profaning the temple (Ezekiel 8. 13-14), provides the basis for Milton’s ornate condemnation of contagious idolatry in *Paradise Lost*:

*Thammuz* came next behind,  
Whose annual wound in *Lebanon* allur’d  
The *Syrian* Damsels to lament his fate  
In amorous ditties all a Summer’s day,  
While smooth *Adonis* from his native Rock  
Ran purple to the Sea, suppos’d with blood  
Of *Thammuz* yearly wounded: the Love-tale  
Infected *Sion*’s daughters with like heat,  
Whose wanton passions in the sacred Porch  
*Ezekiel* saw, when by the Vision led  
His eye survey’d the dark Idolatries  
Of alienated *Judah*. (I, 446-57)

Milton’s establishment of a connection between false religion and contagion is only one indication of the extent to which he favoured this metaphorical pairing. Its presence is especially significant in this case given that the passage of Ezekiel upon which Milton draws does not specifically designate the idolatrous activity as infectious—only when paganism stands as a threat side-by-side with Yahwism. On their own ground, the pagan women enchanted by the beautiful and quasi-Spenserian “amorous ditties all a Summer’s day,” are seen in a positive light. The

parallel elements, however, mutate into base, loathsome images once Israelites are subject to the idolatrous influence; “allur’d” becomes “Infected.”

Just as the unfaithful taint God’s temple (and thereby the congregation) by invading its boundaries, Yahweh paradoxically moves to purify it by infecting with disease those who have metaphorically infected his church with idolatry:

Wherefore, *as* I live, saith the LORD GOD; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish *thee*; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee . . . (Ezekiel 5. 11-12)

Yahweh, according to Ezekiel, lets actions speak louder than words when he acknowledges that he will have “spoken *it* in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them” (Ezekiel 5. 13).

Ezekiel’s triad of prophecies in Chapter 6 all point to disastrous pestilential consequence following pestilentially idolatrous worship. Yahweh promises through the prophet that broken icons will be returned for a broken heart: “. . . your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain *men* before your idols” (Ezekiel 6. 4). God recoils at the prospect of losing the pure piety of his followers, and in return for having to brook the emotional turmoil of being “broken with [the backsliding Israelites’] whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols . . .” (Ezekiel 6. 9). Again as a direct consequence, Yahweh furiously demonstrates that he has “not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them” (Ezekiel 6. 10), and plague—accompanied again with war and

famine—is that which paradoxically ensures sanitation of the Hebrew faith: “. . . .  
 Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the  
 sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence” (Ezekiel 6. 11). Deadly contagion,  
 significantly, is the most virulent of the threefold scourges: “He that is far off  
 shall die of the pestilence,” with the sword and famine consuming those at close  
 range (Ezekiel 6. 12).

This formula shifts, however, in Ezekiel 7.15, in which pestilence and  
 famine kill within the city and the sword kills those “in the field” or country.  
 Such drastic quarantine measures as these, however, must not be fully taken; if  
 they are, Yahweh’s supremacy will, paradoxically, diminish accordingly as those  
 who know of his existence are exterminated: “But I will leave a few men of  
 them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may  
 declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come . . . .”  
 (Ezekiel 12. 16). Ironically, the spread of abominations—but in this case only  
*relation* of them—is encouraged: “This prophecy has a quite different tone,  
 emphasizing the function of a small surviving group in making known to the  
 nations the reason for God’s judgement.”<sup>73</sup> By allowing for the existence of a  
 seminal colony of righteous Israelites, Yahweh preserves the opportunity to  
 further demonstrate his punitive predominance in dispensing outbreaks of  
 pestilence should any morally upright citizens stray from the orthodoxy. In such  
 situations, plague becomes one of “four sore judgements” to be meted out  
 against Jerusalem: “the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and  
 pestilence” (Ezekiel 14. 21). Pestilence is one of the punishments delivered for

“work[ing] abominations” such as “lift[ing] your eyes up to idols” (Ezekiel 33. 25-27).

Israel had once before experienced the infectious abomination of Ashtoreth worship emanating from the Phoenician city of Sidon (II Kings 23. 13). The forceful cessation of such faithless veneration promised with the assigned affliction of a plague epidemic in Sidon further reveals the symbiotic conjunction of irreligion and infection: “. . . Thus saith the LORD GOD; Behold, I *am* against thee, O [S]idon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her” (Ezekiel 28. 22). Yahweh’s religion will be fortified with the pestilential excision of the unfaithful in Sidon: “For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD” (Ezekiel 28. 23). Yahweh values his punitive potency highly, more clearly seen in the New English Bible translation of Ezekiel 28. 22: “. . . Men will know that I am the LORD when I execute judgement upon her and thereby prove my holiness.”<sup>74</sup> Yahweh finally indicates through his spokesman Ezekiel that he intends to invoke “pestilence and . . . blood” (Ezekiel 38. 22) against Gog, the unidentifiable individual or collective opponent of God.<sup>75</sup> By yet again assigning a plague outbreak, Yahweh expects to “magnify” and “sanctify” himself (Ezekiel 38. 23). Pestilence, in this sense, is the backbone of the Hebrew faith.

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<sup>73</sup> Keith W. Carley, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Habakkuk, who presents “the most extensive theophany . . . to be found in the Hebrew Bible” of the warrior-figure Yahweh,<sup>76</sup> ambiguously envisions pestilence either emanating or retreating from God (Habakkuk 3. 3-5).

Paradoxically, the vividly anthropomorphic description of Yahweh prohibits any clear determination of the nature of the relationship between Yahweh and contagion, and the extent to which (if at all), the two are distinct from one another:

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran.

Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And *his* brightness was as the light; he had horns *coming* out of his hand: and there *was* the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

(Habakkuk 3. 3-5)

The inclusion of “pestilence” among the cluster of three verses of doxological praise of Yahweh’s attributes inclines to casting it as a cooperative manifestation of God rather than an adversary constantly retreating as he advances. At the very least, “pestilence” and “burning coals” (translated as “plague” in the New English Bible), interact with Yahweh—whether it be symbiotically or antagonistically—with John D.W. Watts leaning toward the latter interpretation: “*Pestilence* and *plague* appear almost like demonic figures that move *before him* and *behind* (literally ‘at his feet’). It is unlikely that these are his attendants. Wherever he goes these move away like small animals or insects which scatter

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<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Habakkuk, The Book of,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 266.

at a man's approach."<sup>77</sup> However, the "hiding [place] of his power" at the close of Habakkuk 3.4 may imply that the obscured force of the opening of Habakkuk 3.5 refers to contagion, which in this scheme would serve as Yahweh's subordinate. English poet Michael Drayton's rendering of Habakkuk 3 in "A Song of the Faithful" (1590), supports such a relationship: "His shining was more clearer than the light; / And from his hands a fulness did proceed, / Which did contain His wrath and power indeed; / Consuming plagues and fire were in His sight" (9-12).<sup>78</sup>

Zechariah warns that potentially contagious infidels will be levelled—appropriately, via contagion. Not only are backsliding Israelites targeted for infectious punishment; Judaeen apostates as well as "every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem" will be afflicted for failing "to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14. 16). Viewed from another perspective, participation in the autumnal harvest pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem guards against drought (Zechariah 14. 17), and specifically for the Gentiles, observance of the annual religious expedition amounts to protection against the "the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14. 18). Implied in the invitation to embrace Yahwism

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<sup>77</sup> *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 147.

<sup>78</sup> The ejected Presbyterian minister Vincent, in applying this passage to the 1665 London plague epidemic, also suggests such a relationship: "... [T]he pestilence hath gone before him, and burning coals at his feet; ... the Lord drove London asunder, scattered the inhabitants, and made the stately buildings to bow and fall, whose rearings up none can remember; ... the tents of London have been in affliction, and the curtains of the city have trembled" (*God's*



is a concomitant disavowal of their own deities.<sup>79</sup> The walls of the temple, a metonymical representation of Yahweh, protect against infection resulting from the spiritual disease of apostasy.

Irreligious influence, the other side of the theological coin, manifests itself in the insidious infections of paganism or Pharisaism, for example. Contagion—literal in the Old Testament or figurative in its New Testament manifestations—provides an antagonist and thereby a *raison d'être* of religion, and in itself, paradoxically, is ultimately healthful, an exemplary proof of *felix culpa*. God's pestilential punishment of potentially infectious irreligionists in the Old Testament gives way to an awareness of the potentially infectious influence of rival dogmatic interlocutors. Ironically, the conflicts and tribulations faced by the earliest Christians (such as ensuring that the salubrious gospel is disseminated rather than the hazardous beliefs of heathens, hypocrites and backsliders), enable them both to concretely identify their mission and galvanize support for the movement in its ascendancy. Such antagonism—often described figuratively in terms of infection—is fundamental to the propagation of Christianity and a continued protective quarantine of its tenets.

As emissaries of benevolence, the evangelists find that it is effective to appropriate certain figuratively poignant aspects of contagion to more handily illustrate the dynamics of religious conversion—both when proselytization succeeds and when it is suspected of having failed. In this respect, conditions in

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*Terrible Voice in the City*, 1667, London: James Nisbet, 1831; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, repr. 1997), pp. 175-76.

<sup>79</sup> Rex Mason, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 132.

pagan communities were ideal for reception of a doctrine that promised defensive protection from invasive idolatry:

The older forms of religion, such as the worship of the Olympian gods, had by this time become just a respectable convention, to which lip-service was paid. People of the first century A.D. were obsessed with fear of the world around them. They felt surrounded by hostile forces and demons, bringing with them misfortunes and diseases.<sup>80</sup>

Divine retribution is overshadowed by the emphasis on the importance of Christians and especially Gentiles avoiding evil and its concomitant damnation and destruction; Paul's missives stress the paramount importance of the avoidance of evil, an entity potentially both infectious and deadly: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Corinthians 15. 33).

In denouncing infectious pagan regression into the worship of idolatrous icons, Paul parallels Psalm 106. 20—and thereby the golden calf episode of Exodus 32—and demonstrates that the irreligion-contagion nexus transcends the Old Testament. Christian-era heathens who "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image make like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" prompt God to discard such faithless recidivists (Romans 1.23). Subject to the same fate as idolaters of Hebrew scripture, these backsliders are left unprotected and subject to deadly spiritual infection from which there is no remission or cure: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour

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<sup>80</sup> G.H.P. Thompson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 118.

their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1. 24). In order to ensure an aseptic environment for Christianity, those espousing irreverence must be eliminated so as to curtail the increase of iniquity that might spread further if left unchecked: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud boasters, inventors of evil things . . . are worthy of death . . ." (Romans 1. 29-32).

Prophylactic protection, however, remains available: knowledge of God's inner workings can prevent a fatal demise on Judgement Day, which is Paul's temporal focus rather than the immediate future. Swift, tangible and overt punishment (such as that dispensed mercilessly and frequently by Yahweh), is not so much Paul's concern; more terrifying for its supreme ineffability is deferred punishment, that which will be assigned after the overpowering maelstrom of accumulated sin has guaranteed the destruction of unenlightened sinners who fail to acknowledge God's ascendancy and obtain unqualified grace, the benevolent equivalent of protective quarantine. More so than the writings of any other New Testament author, Paul's dispatches demonstrate a reliance on an implicit infection metaphor involving questions of religious heterodoxy, a perception that would not be foreign to the chief apostle who received rabbinical tutoring of the Hebrew canon and developed, as a Roman citizen and speaker of Greek, an elemental understanding of at least the fundamentals of historical background of Greek and Roman religion.

Much of Paul's writings—especially those that directly or indirectly pair religion and contagion—reflect his initial religious indoctrination as a youth into the largely exclusionist, prophylactic sect of the Pharisees. Even the origin of the

name of the law-based order may reflect sensitivity to infectious dissent.

Significantly, the Hebrew root of the word “can mean to separate; this may indicate that they were seen as sectarians . . . or that they sought holiness by the avoidance of what was unclean.”<sup>81</sup> Another scholar’s speculation echoes that of John Riches: “The name, *Pharisees*, seems to have been interpreted to mean ‘the separated ones’, indicating their desire to be separate from contamination and sin.”<sup>82</sup> Thus paradoxically for Paul, not only would exposure to protective adherence to laws and regulations influence Paul’s *modus operandi*; additionally, a keen sensitivity to the art of evangelization may have developed from witnessing such activity undertaken on the part of the Pharisees: “It was, as even the Gospel of Matthew tells us [Matthew 23. 15], the Pharisees who were the missionaries, the proselytisers of the Jewish world.”<sup>83</sup> Such a superficially contradictory foundation may in part explain Paul’s double-edged application of the mechanism of contagion in his letters, more so than is evident in the writings of the other apostles. Throughout his missives (especially in I and II Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians and Colossians), Paul emphasizes that preaching of any persuasion is epidemiologically influential: evangelical “contagion” spreads literally by word of mouth, and metaphorically via infection.

Understandably prominent against the background of Paul’s apocalyptic vision, the his urgent and recurring exhortation to inhibit the transfer of

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<sup>81</sup> John Riches, “Pharisees,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 588.

<sup>82</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Gospel According to Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> A.N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 38.

hazardous irreligion and simultaneously promote the transmission of exclusively gainful gospel, appears repeatedly in his effusions to his congregations:

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4. 29-32)

The Authorized Version's "corrupt communication" of 1611 follows the Rheims New Testament rendering of 1582, "evil speech."<sup>84</sup> Notable among modern translations of the same root term is "foul talk" of the Anchor Bible, wherein Markus Barth observes that in using such an expression, Paul clearly equates proscribed spiritual influence with infectious corruption: "The adjective 'foul' can designate anything that is rotten, putrid, filthy, and therefore, unsound or bad."<sup>85</sup> Significantly, Paul's employment of this contamination analogue has little precedent elsewhere: "Paul's metaphoric application of the term to a certain sort of talk or voice has scarcely any parallels in Greek writings."<sup>86</sup> Just as pivotal as avoidance of "foul or polluting language," the permutation of the Amplified Bible,<sup>87</sup> is the conscious endeavour to diffuse grace, that which in a sense

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<sup>84</sup> John R. Kohlenberger, ed., *The Precise Parallel New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1054.

<sup>85</sup> *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians 4-6* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 518.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 518.

<sup>87</sup> *The Precise Parallel New Testament*, p. 1054.

amounts to anti-infection. The Authorized Version's "minister" carries connotations of rendering medical assistance to the physically afflicted.

If it is given that Paul's first experience with religion was one within the strictly sanitized sect of the Pharisees, the young apostle would have imbibed the accumulated uneasiness resulting from continuous threats posed to Judaism by Greeks, Seleucids and Romans who successively invaded Jerusalem. Such visitations forced Jews then (and for the next 2,000 years) to adopt a fortress mentality with the hope of repulsing the potentially influential and deadly onslaughts:

We see the Jews as a people who have been subjected to genocide in the twentieth century, persecuted in the name of Christ for twenty centuries in between and defeated by the Romans in a glorious but calamitous patriotic war in AD 70. Judaism has very understandably been embattled for two millennia; for without a stockade built around itself, it would not have been able, so heroically, to survive.<sup>88</sup>

Thus Paul would understandably employ contagion comparisons to describe any false religion from which he exhorts his converts to repel themselves by establishing a spiritual quarantine, which itself must spread to be an effective anti-infection.

The same motivation that prompts Plato to banish poets from his idyllic society impels Paul to call for the erection of prophylactic barriers to idolaters and sexual deviates, both of whom threaten to taint religious orthodoxy among those in the Christian community: "But now I have written unto you not to keep

company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat" (I Corinthians 5. 11). Neil, in referring to Paul's announcement that the apostle has heard reports of a case of scandalous incestual immorality committed by a professed Christian (I Corinthians 5. 1), recognizes elements of a contagion metaphor suffusing the ensuing message regarding incest (and presumably idolatry): "One case of corruption of this kind can poison the whole community."<sup>89</sup>

The potential for spiritual infection to spread among Christians especially disturbs Paul, who exhorts the Corinthians to "Purge out therefore the old leaven" of their pagan past (I Corinthians 5. 7). One consequence of succumbing to idolatry—one of a catalogue of 10 types of sins named by Paul) is banishment from "the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6. 9-10), something which in relation to this strain of iniquity is a tautology. Yet baptism, even for reformed sinners, provides protective quarantine as well as guaranteed admittance to God's disinfected domain for former pagans: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the LORD Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6. 11). The Amplified Bible, which provides alternative translations of certain words, interprets "sanctified" as "consecrated (set apart, hallowed)" (I Corinthians 6. 11), words which are evincive of the prophylactic advantage enjoyed by Christians.

While carnal knowledge begets its own moral hazards, knowledge involving flesh of another sort—animal meat consecrated to idols during pagan

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<sup>88</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>89</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 457.

ceremonies—either afflicts spiritually the fastidious neophyte who takes most seriously the Jewish-Christian prohibition against its consumption, or protects the seasoned and carefree Christian carnivore who knows that idols have no significance or potency:

Among the Christians there were some with a robust conscience who knew that the meat was neither better nor worse for its association with the pagan deity, and were quite happy to eat it; others were not so happy about it, and felt that somehow the meat had become “infected” by its idolatrous association.<sup>90</sup>

Although such an infection—one significantly ensuing from a “divine” pagan ceremony—is cerebral and intangible, it is nonetheless bonded to idolatry just as much as is the physical plague caused by the ingestion of the charred remains of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Underlying Paul’s concern about the influence of liberal ingestion of “idolatrous” flesh is the apprehension that impressionable proselytes might return to paganism because of a reawakened perception of an idol’s potency or legitimacy, and thereby diminish Christianity and at the same time embolden the plague of infidelity.

Employing intertextuality to add potency to his message regarding the dangers of idolatry, Paul impels the Corinthians to remember that Yahweh punished wayward Israelites in the wilderness with a plague in which 23,000 died in one day (I Corinthians 10. 8; Numbers 25. 9 records 24,000 deaths), reminding them that God still has the potential for inflicting physical punishment—even though such retribution seems unlikely to occur against the

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<sup>90</sup> Bruce, *Paul and His Converts: Thessalonians and Corinthians* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 51.



backdrop of first-century Christianity's tenets of mercy and forgiveness. Just as the "contagions" of idolatry and fornication destabilized impressionable Israelites, Paul fears that such evils can wreak infectious havoc on the harmony of the Corinthian congregation: "Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand" (I Corinthians 10. 7-8). In recasting virtually verbatim in I Corinthians 10. 7 part of Exodus 32. 6 (" . . . the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play"), Paul acknowledges the ever-present danger of infectious idolatry such as that bestowed upon the golden calf at Horeb. Having confirmed that circumstances in Corinth were of an equally urgent nature, Paul again selectively adapts a Torah plague pericope to convey his message that protective vigilance of the first order must be summoned continually to defend against the alluring yet inevitably fatal veneration of false gods.

To influentially convert those still worshipping false gods requires a display of restrained preaching in congregation gatherings rather than ecstatic speaking in unknown languages (even though they very well may be inspired by the Holy Spirit). With an eye to bolstering the numbers of the spreading faith, Paul counsels the Corinthians that discussion of inspired testimony and interpretation of prophecy more effectively achieve evangelization through the influence of reserve than does rampant glossolalia, which would by its negative example isolate Christians, who would thus be considered by pagans to be a sect of monotheistic fanatics:

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place,  
and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are*

unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

(I Corinthians 14. 23-25)

If orchestrated properly, “sanitized” preaching (prophesying) portends a swelling of the congregation: “It may also have the effect of converting some non-Christian visitor.”<sup>91</sup> A dignified and orderly service ensures that the faith will prosper and thereby advance itself further as worshippers and converts interact with others in their communities. Concomitantly, curtailing the spread of ecstatic utterance within the church contributes to the overall aim of inducement to conversion.

Although Paul’s highly charged denunciation of the impostor evangelists who are complicating his mission to spread the burgeoning faith, implies pejorative overtones of infection, the same (conversely, of course), could be said, from the perspective of those competing spurious apostles about Paul’s propensity to proselytize Gentiles through his influence—even though he claims himself to be “rude in speech, yet not in knowledge” and perceived as devalued because he seeks no financial contributions (II Corinthians 11. 6-7). Seen from the perspective of his rival missionaries, Paul’s “infectious” influence yields greater potency because of its divine sanction: “As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia” (II Corinthians

11. 10). Here Paul proclaims that any prophylactic resistance to his evangelism will be ineffective. This notion may be more clearly identified in modern translations of the verse, including the Amplified Bible: "... this my boast [of independence] shall not be debarred (silenced or checked) in the regions of Achaia."<sup>92</sup> Such evangelical potency on the part of Paul is demonstrated elsewhere when Luke records that even when under house arrest, admittedly a loose net, the apostle to the Gentiles cannot be prevented from generating a wholesale spread of the gospel. Although technically confined, Paul nonetheless providentially continues "[p]reaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28. 31), much as Bunyan's sermonizing continued emerging from behind the walls of the Bedford jail during his incarceration. The final verse of Acts, which is rendered "quite openly and without hindrance" in the New English Bible,<sup>93</sup> in effect communicates an unlimited potential for the open-ended faith to perennially expand.

Paul's paradoxical position with regard to the spread of religion is further evinced when he relates that his own conversion results from a blinding audience with Jesus while travelling to Damascus (Acts 22. 6-8), on a journey being made specifically to help eradicate the doctrinal contagion being propagated by Christ's earliest missionaries in Jerusalem and the Diaspora. Such is what the insurgent movement had become for Rome and the empire's

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<sup>91</sup> Margaret E. Thrall, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 97.

<sup>92</sup> *The Precise Parallel New Testament*, p. 994.

hand-picked Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 22. 5). Paul's zealous containment of incipient Christianity in Jerusalem before his conversion, ironically boosts the sect to which he later will become devoted: "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them to prison*" (Acts 8. 3). Paul's action forces the dispersion of early Jerusalem Christians throughout Palestine, enabling a further spread of the doctrine: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8. 4). Steeped in a Pharisaic education, Paul as the zealous persecutor of the Christian Jewish sect enthusiastically undertakes this mission under hire by the Sanhedrin to halt the replication of the new faith by detaining followers of Jesus and returning them to Jerusalem for detention: "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Galatians 1. 13; Acts 22. 4). Such pronouncements clearly demonstrate that Paul is keenly aware of the importance of curtailing the spread of anathematized worship: "He recalls how before his conversion to Christianity no one had been a more fervent upholder of Jewish tradition than he had been, and no one had worked harder to wipe out the new Christian heresy."<sup>94</sup>

Additional irony derives from the fact that Galatians finds Paul again in an adversarial position with the Christian movement, but from another extreme—a stance that now pits him against pagans as well as Jews. Paul writes this missive to counter allegations broadcast in Galatia by Christians adhering to

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. by J.W. Packer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 220.

certain aspects of Judaism (the same sectarians whom he had earlier antagonized), that Paul had not remained a faithful Jew and therefore should not be considered worthy of evangelical status:

They were inclined to pay heed to certain teachers who urged them to add to their faith in Christ some distinctive features of Judaism, particularly circumcision. These teachers also endeavored to diminish Paul's authority by insisting that he was indebted to the Jerusalem church leaders for his apostolic commission and had no right to deviate from Jerusalem practice.<sup>95</sup>

Arguing that observance of law and rituals will not match adopting faith for fending off infectious threats, Paul intimates that the "foolish Galatians" must have been "bewitched" (in a sense infected) into believing the opposite because of contact with Jewish-Christian zealots who must have hypnotized the parishioners (Galatians 3. 1), many of whom were "recent converts from paganism."<sup>96</sup>

True inspiration, literally something inhaled (as pneumonic plague often was in seventeenth-century England), overshadows that which is artificially infused when Paul Socratically leaves his readers with no choice but to accept that faith supersedes works or practice: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the [Holy] Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith" (Galatians 3. 2). Paul compounds the rhetorical question to drive home his message: "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles

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<sup>94</sup> Neil, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Letter of Paul to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Bruce, "Galatians, The Letter of Paul to the," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 238.

among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law” by following traditional Judaism, “or by the hearing of faith”—Paul’s radical theology (Galatians 3. 5). Viewed from the perspective of Peter’s Jewish school of Christianity, Paul’s may be seen as the foreign counter-agent effecting an epistolary infiltration of the Galatian churches established by the apostle of the Gentiles years earlier but now under the influence of Judaizing teachers whom Paul hopes to reform: “They [followers of Peter] zealously affect you, *but* not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them” (Galatians 4. 17).

Alerting the Galatians to a spiritual contagion in their midst, Paul exclaims that the Christian teachers emphasizing orthodox Judaism (members of “the sect of the Nazarenes”), are isolating the congregation so as to be indoctrinated accordingly, and in the process establishing prophylaxis against Paul’s pronouncement that all followers of Christ are entitled to freedom from the Torah’s restrictions: “Jewish Christians had been brought up to believe that the ritual of the Temple, the practice of circumcision, the avoidance of contaminating paganism and abstention from certain types of food such as pork were all essential to salvation.”<sup>97</sup> Essentially, Paul proposes to the Galatians a double standard with regard to infectious enthusiasm: “But *it is* good to be zealously affected always in *a good thing*, and not only when I am present with you” (Galatians 4. 18). Once Paul instils *his* strain of zealous contagion, he desires that it will take hold and spread further . Such contagious appeal is precisely that which the fervid detractors of Paul, both contemporaries and inheritors of the movement to denounce the missionary to the Gentiles, abhor

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<sup>96</sup> Neil, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, p. 49.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

most passionately: "More extreme critics of the apostle passed into a more fundamental opposition and regarded him as the arch-deceiver and corrupter of the original gospel who had offered deplorable cover for antinomianism and moral anarchy."<sup>98</sup> Thus enthusiasm, so easily either laudatory or condemnable depending upon one's perspective, typifies Paul's paradoxical identity as the chief agent responsible for spreading the gospel.

As should be expected, that which from the Pauline perspective is identified as misdirected zeal is the most noxious contagion of all, although impiety alone is sufficient to warrant elimination—should God so determine. Epidemics of pestilential destruction speedily and devastatingly delivered into history by Yahweh signify collectively the ultimate (and exponentially more catastrophic) sentence to be ultimately passed upon defiant sinners. Physical pain—ostensibly a form of punishment itself—informs Paul's existence, antagonizing as well as paradoxically goading the apostle into passionate declarations. However, such palpable vexation pales in comparison to the ultimate punitive judgement that will without exception excise and thereby render impossible the further spread of contagious wickedness. Those without the protective righteousness afforded exclusively by Christianity, face inevitable decimation. Both Jews, who have failed to live up to God's standards as set forth in the Old Testament, and Gentiles, sinners of another sort but equally blameworthy, will together stand culpable before God at the Last Judgement (Romans 3. 1-20). Paul maintains that in the failure of infidels to embrace

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<sup>98</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Enigma of St Paul* (London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1969), pp. 3-4.

Christianity, doom is spread among others by means of oral influence, threatening to undermine the advances made in broadcasting the gospel:

Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law [the Old Testament] saith, it saith to them who are under the law [Moses' code of law]: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (Romans 3. 13-19)

Paul, employing a sequence of quotations from the Hebrew Bible (Psalms 5. 9, 10. 7, 36. 1 and 140. 3, and Isaiah 59. 7-8), reasons that sealing a sinner's mephitic mouth would prevent the further spread of religious malady, but the Pauline view is that those already infected seem ultimately to stand little chance of obtaining forgiveness for such flagrant irresponsibility. Such is the urgency of Paul's letter to the Romans, correspondence of paramount importance for having to satisfactorily serve as a surrogate for Paul in his absence and further the salubrious dissemination of the gospel among the burgeoning Christian community in Rome.

Paul again emphasizes the importance of shunning agents of evil; close contact with immoral individuals allows for the possibility of spiritual contamination. At the same time, consciously associating only with virtuous persons provides protection against the influence of the baser sort: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Romans 12. 9). Within the overall



context of maintaining proper Christian behaviour—broadly speaking a form of prophylaxis itself—Paul counsels that loving others “without dissimulation” (Romans 12. 9) ensures that wickedness will be shut out: “The loving action will, of course, always be one in which *evil* is avoided and *good* is firmly grasped.”<sup>99</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer goes so far as to suggest that this formula amounts to a dominant guiding precept for Christians as well as Jews: “. . . Paul enunciates the generic principle, that love must govern all, and that Christians must do good and avoid evil.”<sup>100</sup>

Paul’s mission of establishing protective barriers for blossoming Christianity (although at this time it had no such ideological name), necessitates broadcasting his epistolary admonitions in what might be considered a pre-emptive counter-attack. The problem of defending against contagious heathenism is especially serious because such rebellion is invisible and seems to be transmitted through the atmosphere as are malevolent spirits—which here may be seen as metonymical representations of irreligion: “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2. 2). Just as pestilence in seventeenth-century London seemed to be airborne (and in pneumonic cases it was), demons spread paganism while winging through their realm of rebellion. Malevolent influence occasioned by a demonic environment supports the notion of a fusion of irreligion and infection:

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<sup>99</sup> Ernest Best, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 144.

<sup>100</sup> *The Anchor Bible: Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 651-52.

Fitzmyer also notes that the Essenes lodged in one of the Qumran caves a scroll including this precept (p. 653).

... if "spirit" is understood as an apposition to the preceding noun only ("atmosphere," lit. "dominion of the air), it may qualify the air as a substance that is breathed in by man and poisons his thoughts and actions. In this case the devil would be denoted as the ruler who poisons the atmosphere, producing a devastating stench or killing in the manner of the aftereffect of atomic explosions or industrial air pollution.<sup>101</sup>

Given the diversity of Barth's modern applications of the mechanism of evil atmospheric influence, pestilential affliction looms just as largely as a candidate—a popular one—upon which to fully develop the comparison.

Contagious infidelity in this case spreads in the form of carnal desire associated with impure thought that is satisfied, ironically, by close contact with others: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" for which activity God will consider them "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2. 3), a designation of God's that would be more suitably found in the Old Testament.<sup>102</sup> However, Paul next specifies a distinctly New Testament attribute of God, "who is rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2. 4), gracious enough to provide sinners with the divine contact that will supersede the plague of sensuality and yield protective barriers against any further threat of such infection: "Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2. 5-6). This safeguard, a type of *cordon sanitaire*,

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<sup>101</sup> Markus Barth, *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians 1-3* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 215.

automatically follows the conscious decision to renounce infidelity and select faith (Ephesians 2. 7-8). Thus the faithful "are made nigh by the blood of Christ" and protected from one infection by the erosion of a barrier to God's grace that had previously existed: "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*" (Ephesians 2. 13-14).<sup>103</sup>

Unquestionably sensitive to the rhetorical enticements craftily employed by promoters of paganism, Paul warns the Colossians to guard against alluring arguments, in a sense exhorting them to maintain a prophylactic barrier to pestilential persuasion. Paul calls for redoubled awareness of the importance of "the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ . . . lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (Colossians 2. 2-4). The positive connotations of "beguile" and "enticing words" of the Authorized Version—terms perhaps appropriate to describe Paul's providential influence among the Romans during his captivity—find harsher equivalents in the Rheims New Testament: "... that no man may deceive you by loftiness of words" (Colossians 2. 4). As shall be noted in a following chapter, the seventeenth-century equivalent of such an infectious threat is found in Satan's insidious inducements, just as the epitome of spiritual defence against them is typified in the impregnable faith of the lady in Milton's *Comus*.

Just as Christian sermonizing providentially defies barriers to its proliferation, the gospel at times spreads of its own free will. Limitless potential

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<sup>102</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>103</sup> Milton, who fully develops the use of the irreligion-infection analogy throughout his writing career, expounds upon this passage in likewise arguing that the ideally conscientious pastor would no longer mandate that the congregation "be separated in the Church by vails and partitions as laicks and

for dissemination—at least according to one interpretation—is described by Paul, who observes that the worship of false gods in the pagan world has been supernaturally supplanted by “the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven . . .” (Colossians 1. 21-23). Although this claim of such extensive penetration may amount to hyperbole, “Paul may also mean that the news about Jesus Christ has spread even where the Church’s evangelists have not been.”<sup>104</sup> Such divine aid, however, is denied to rival systems of belief. Although false religion is deprived of divine aliment, oral transmission of anti-Christian dogma nonetheless looms largely enough to pose a contagious threat to Christianity. Just as in Romans 3. 13-19 (see above), unrestrained communication can prove dangerously influential, according to James, who delineates irreligion as identifiable through irresponsible speech: “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion *is* vain” (James 1. 26).

Charitable action taken to yield identifiable, palpable benefits—rather than those entered upon for the sake of appearance (those which are disdained by Paul)—constitute a preservative safeguard against spiritual contamination, that which can be considered akin to infection: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1. 27). Uninfected belief, then, consists of “practical kindness . . . and personal

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unclean,” thus allowing for the benevolent influence of pastoral guidance to disseminate unimpeded among the parishioners (*Complete Prose Works*, I, 838).  
<sup>104</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

purity,"<sup>105</sup> the latter of which seems obviously necessary for the achievement of pure religion. Thus this one aspect of Christianity, performing genuine acts of kindness, protects not only those who take action but also those left unprotected for whatever reason, from contamination: "Such works of love will enable [Christians] to keep themselves unspotted by the world and its ugly intrigues," according to Bo Reicke, who also notes that James's espousal of works in this capacity is not contradictory with faith-driven Paulinism, which denounces doers of empty deeds.<sup>106</sup>

After the call to service of the first disciples at the Sea of Galilee, Jesus demonstrates his antidotal potency—both spiritually and physically—to eradicate the ills of his followers. If the preaching process is viewed from an epidemiological perspective, Jesus simultaneously simultaneously spreads the "contagion" of Christianity and dissipates physical infections from afflicted individuals:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of diseases among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. (Matthew 4. 23-24)<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> R.R. Williams, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Letters of John and James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 108.

<sup>106</sup> *The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 25.

<sup>107</sup> Burton, in the preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, cites Matthew 4. 23 to justify his medical disquisition: "A good divine either is or ought to be a good

To the same degree that the blossoming of infectious illness is checked, the spread of Jesus's reputation increases exponentially to the point of generating "great multitudes" of faithful followers from throughout the region (Matthew 4. 25). Ironically, Jesus eradicates physical infection by spreading the message of spiritual salvation in the synagogues, which can be seen as metonymical tenements of Judaism. Whereas infidelity in the Old Testament precedes infectious affliction, the latter is mercifully alleviated in the New Testament by embracing God's kingdom, a reflection of the emphasis on benevolence rather than on punishment, on forgiveness rather than destruction.

Following upon the discussions between Jesus and the adversarial Pharisees involving illness metaphor (Matthew 9. 10-12) and imbedded in Matthew's pericope describing the healing of two blind men, is a passage that exemplifies a recurring epidemiological paradox in what Robert Alter describes as a "type-scene"—a passage following a fixed pattern—that he has identified in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>108</sup> In these formulaic episodes, Jesus either requests or demands that beneficiaries of his healing contact refrain from revealing to others any details of the deeds of disinfection: "And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying See *that* no man know *it*. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country" (Matthew 9. 30-31). Variations of this same "type-scene" occur in Mark 1. 23-28, 1. 41-44, and 3. 11-12, all pointing to an elemental interrelationship between religion and dissemination of doctrine. Ironically, in Matthew's version here (and in those of Mark's as well), the healed men gloriously defy Jesus's injunction (the Amplified

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physician, a spiritual physician at least, as our Saviour calls Himself, and was indeed" (I, 37).

Bible translation points to the fervor with which the men broadcast their message with “blazed and spread,”<sup>109</sup> and by doing so, only further spread the gospel through word of mouth and at the same time heightening Jesus’s popularity to such an extent that the seemingly unstoppable force of the movement in part will lead ultimately to his crucifixion.

All of Jesus’s healing endeavours prepare the way for the curative missions of the apostles, literally the “ones sent forth.” Another such episode immediately precedes Jesus’s instructions to the dozen designees of the missionary movement (Matthew 10. 1-42): “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9. 35). Through his contact with others, Jesus communicates his curative capacity: “Matthew has already spoken of the authority of Jesus . . . in teaching and in work. Here he depicts Jesus transmitting this authority to the disciples.”<sup>110</sup> Although his illness eradication efforts are not wasted, it becomes clear that other agents of healing are desperately needed: “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9. 36). Using an agricultural metaphor, Jesus then concludes that “[t]he harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers *are* few” (Matthew 9. 37). The prayer for additional agents is immediately answered (Matthew 9. 38). Only after such a determination are the twelve apostles instructed and sent forth to disseminate

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<sup>108</sup> *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), pp. 50-51.

<sup>109</sup> *The Precise Parallel New Testament*, p. 48.

<sup>110</sup> W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), p. 117.

the gospel, a move which will exponentially increase the capability to broadcast the gospel and make the “anti-infection infection” even more potent when the urgency of the mission demands such potency: “And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matthew 10. 1).

Although twentieth-century Bible translations indicate that both Mark and Matthew in their accounts of Jesus’s apocalyptic discourse on the Mount of Olives withhold plague from the list of foretold ills facing humanity at the end of time (Matthew 24. 7 and Mark 13. 8), the Rheims New Testament and the Authorized Version both include “pestilences” among Matthew’s list of catastrophes. For seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers of the Bible, Matthew’s account of Jesus’s pronouncements recalls Yahwist condemnation (and metaphorical association) by including the equivalents of plague and false religion in his catalogue of calamities: “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places” (Matthew 24. 7). Significantly enough, plague—just as is each of the other two afflictions—is a means to an ultimate castigatory termination:

All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many (Matthew 24. 8-11).



Matthew's account of the discourse in its seventeenth-century manifestation turns on its head the Old Testament mechanism of plague as the punitive corollary of idolatry; here, false messiahs spread epidemiologically as the ensual of one of the primary stages of affliction: pestilence. Apostasy and infection here have representation as separate but inevitably related entities.

Although Mark—and technically Matthew—omit plague from the array of apocalyptic eventualities (Mark 13. 8), Luke adds both “commotions”—possibly the result of the spread of religious insurrection—and “pestilences” among the disasters in his narrative. Placing infectious disease last perhaps gives it greatest attention in its ultimate placement among the catalogue:

And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then he said unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. (Luke 21. 8-11)

Ironically, it is from the Mount of Olives, the site of Jesus's influential dissemination of predictive prophecy (as cited above), that Jesus is apprehended after praying and being betrayed by Judas (Luke 22. 39-53) and taken before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22. 66-71), actions that viewed jointly may be seen as an effort by Jesus's antagonists to diminish his contagious, and for them noxious, influence.

Setting aside the thorny question of whether Luke's language points to his having a medical background, the third apostle views (and records) events through the lens of a contagion metaphor, most notably in his account of Paul's legal proceeding stemming from charges of openly advocating Jewish unorthodoxy in Caesarea. The weight of modern scholarship now maintains that detailed nineteenth-century vocabulary analyses of Luke's writings—paired with the medical writings of Plato, Xenophon, Herodotus, Hippocrates, Thucydides and others—do not yield any certain determination of the extent to which the writer of Acts and Luke betrays a medical background:

. . . [I]f there is any argument from the cases . . . where Luke uses words in the same technical sense as do the doctors, this argument is more than offset by the many cases . . . in which words that have a special technical meaning among the doctors are used by Luke in an entirely different sense.<sup>111</sup>

Regardless of whether Luke was steeped in medical terminology, the evangelist shares—and may have been influenced by—Paul's perceptiveness with respect to discussing dynamics of religion in biological terms.

Biological overtones inform the arrest, imprisonment and trial of Paul after infuriating a mob of Pharisaical Jews by favouring association with Gentiles. When Paul is unable to offer an effective defence, he is rescued from the bloodthirsty purists by Roman soldiers and—ostensibly for his own

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<sup>111</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *Harvard Theological Studies VI: The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 45. F.F. Bruce, in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 4-6, reinforces Cadbury's skeptical reception of the linguistic analysis of W.K. Hobart in *The Medical Language of St Luke* (Dublin, 1882).

protection—brought before the Judaeen governor Antonius Felix in 52 for an inquiry (Acts 21. 27-23. 35). Prior to his hearing before Felix, Paul is held for five days in King Herod's headquarters (Acts 23. 35-24. 1). Whether or not Luke recognized it as such, Paul's detention serves as imprisonment as well as a prophylactic measure that temporarily inhibits the chief apostle's ministry. Notably, this doctrinal control of Paul is preceded and foreshadowed in Acts by the arrests of the apostles Peter and John by the Sadducees for broadcasting proclamations identifying Jesus as the Messiah: "The teaching of Peter and John was stirring up popular enthusiasm,"<sup>112</sup> a groundswelling that would soon defy control.

Faced with rapidly spreading acceptance of the message of the apostles, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem seek to inhibit the movement's momentum, first by imprisoning the apostolic sources of what for the Temple council was considered doctrinally infectious insurrection:

And as they [Peter and John] spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands upon them, and put *them* in hold unto the next day . . .

(Acts 4. 1-3)

Herein a strong connection may be identified between the incarceration of the missionaries and the interest among the Jewish elite to stifle such successful sermonizing:

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<sup>112</sup> J.W. Packer, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 38.

In this the Sadducees took the initiative since the Temple was within their jurisdiction. They were constitutionally opposed to messianic movements of any kind which might disturb the status quo, but in addition any doctrine of resurrection was against their convictions, and the identification of Jesus with the new Moses was outrageous. They therefore put an end to Peter's sermon and clapped the apostles in the guard room.<sup>113</sup>

From the perspective of the Jewish authorities, the damage had already been done, perhaps irrevocably so, contributing in part to their eventual exasperation with the detainees and their determination to broadcast their news as widely as possible: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand," thus prompting the convocation of the accused before the Temple leaders the following day (Acts 4. 4-6).

Directing attention to God's providential involvement in the proceedings, Luke notes that Peter was "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 4. 8), inspiration that to the priestly arbiters represents the infectious threat. Such episodes of infusion are extraordinary and therefore greatly feared by the Jewish rulers: "The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a believer must be contrasted with special moments of inspiration, such as the present . . ." <sup>114</sup> After pondering the miracle of the healed man before them and the swelling numbers of Christians, the rulers and council members decide on a course of action which when revealed amounts to nothing more than instructing the evangelists to desist from further diffusion of Jesus's messiahship:

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<sup>113</sup> Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 425.

<sup>114</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120.

But that it [Christianity] spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this [Jesus's] name. And they called them [Peter and John], and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4. 17-18).

Such a judgement, according to Johannes Munck, was the best hope for halting the spread of the burgeoning religion: "This to them [the authorities] seemed to be the only way to stop the spread of the story of the healing. So they decided to forbid the apostles to speak in the name of Jesus."<sup>115</sup> However, as Munck notes, the Sanhedrin fail "to forbid their healing in the name of Jesus"<sup>116</sup>—a crucial oversight. Just as Yahweh providentially ensures that the Israelites flee Pharaoh's Egypt to settle in the promised land (Exodus 7. 8-13. 16), God engineers the discharge of the apostles so that dissemination of the Gospel can continue unhindered.

Just such heavenly assurance that the broadcast of apostolic revelations will continue occurs when Peter and the other apostles are miraculously freed from "the common prison" in which they are placed by the Sadducees for defiantly healing, preaching and converting those from Jerusalem and environs (Acts 5.1 2-18). With regard to this healing activity, it is significant that even the ephemeral "shadow of Peter passing by" eradicates illness among the afflicted (Acts 5. 15-16), thus casting the twelve apostles as "anti-plague" agents: that which opposes their influence, by relation, is infectious and evil. Paradoxically but fully understandably, this missionary form of contagion is divinely

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<sup>115</sup> *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 35.

sanctioned as a counter to obstacles against its dissemination, such as imprisonment: "But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them [the apostles] forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life," which they promptly begin achieving early the next morning (Acts 5. 19-21).

Much of the indignation of the Jewish council members could derive from suspicion that not all of the prison guards remained loyally uncontaminated by their apostle prisoners: "The 'angel' who set them free may have been a secret sympathiser among the guards, which would explain the dismayed concern of the Sadducees as to where this insidious doctrine would end."<sup>117</sup> As the spread of the faith among the local population continues, the leaders of the anti-Christian sect become unnerved, especially the high priest: "... Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this [Jesus's] name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5. 28). Here Christianity is viewed as an insurgent belief threatening the Jewish religious order.

Not surprisingly, when considered from this Jewish perspective, the mission of Paul and Silas to establish a following at Thessalonica is seen as the introduction of factious contagion. Striking at the most likely source of potential converts, the missionaries, following their *modus operandi*, begin preaching in the synagogue with identifiable success: "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17. 1-3). Alarmed at the sudden loss of

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>117</sup> Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 426.

faithful Israelites and the conversion of other Thessalonians, a faction of envious Jews “gathered a company and set all the city on an uproar,” hoping to find Paul and Silas at the home of Jason, apparently their host (Acts 17. 5). Upon finding them absent, the gathering of agitated Jews, as might be expected, describe Paul and Silas to a group of magistrates using language resonant of that used in another significant contemporary irreligion-infection metaphor: “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also,” adding that the members of the Christian congregation “do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, *one Jesus*” (Acts 17. 6-7). Significantly, the Greek word rendered “world” in Acts 17. 6 is the same Greek term used earlier by Claudius, who in his letter to the Alexandrians describes Jews as “a general plague throughout the whole world.”<sup>118</sup> Such linguistic resonance indicates a sensitivity on the part of Luke and/or the infuriated Jewish party toward representing religious activity as an epidemiological phenomenon.

In considering the Old Testament, the gospels, and the rest of the New Testament as a three-act drama, William Neil’s categorization of Revelation as the epilogue seems especially justifiable, given that he labels Genesis 1-11 as its prologue. By making this designation, Neil places Sarah’s infection of Pharaoh (Genesis 12), at the opening of his first act of the “divine drama.”<sup>119</sup> Such a categorization draws attention to the metaphorical fusion of irreligion and contagion that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Revelation represents a departure from the mechanics of the dissemination of the gospel and its concomitant salubrious influence, to the distant transcendence of a concern with

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<sup>118</sup> Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 226.

the future in the nonetheless vivid apocalypse of John. Plague once again emerges as a form of punishment to be inflicted for spiritual transgression, bringing full-circle the metaphorical relationship between infidelity and infection.

Punitive scourges of increasing severity continue to emerge in Revelation in various forms (among them pestilence), with the opening of the seven seals and the sounding of the seven trumpets. The angels sounding the trumpets broadcast afflictive infection through the atmosphere with the sixth and penultimate trumpet blast yielding a forceful connection between plague and idolatry: the former is the punishment of the latter, ironically a phenomenon which also spreads as if by contagion. Four angels bolstered by 200 million mounted warriors are released to kill a third of mankind with emissions of fire, smoke and sulphur from the horses' mouths (Revelation 9. 18). When the smoke clears and the "third part of men [have been] killed" by these three afflictions, those remaining include the perpetually contagious idolaters who also happen to be killers, magicians, sexual libertines and thieves:

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9. 18-21)

As is frequently demonstrated in Hebrew scripture, complete eradication of pestilential irreligion would render punitive plague unnecessary, thereby

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<sup>119</sup> *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 537.



altering the dynamics of spiritual influence. Some of the congregation always must remain for the apocalyptic message to maintain its full force of influence, and for the benevolent faith to ultimately spread—as much as is possible—pandemically.

Suspending temporarily the narrative (and contagious) progress of the divine adjudication, the “mighty angel come down from heaven” (Revelation 10. 1) aborts the anticipated disclosure of doom that would accompany the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Significantly, its full force is not determined until the unveiling of the ark of the covenant, which lies safely quarantined within God’s heavenly sanctuary: “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” (Revelation 11. 19). Significantly, the ark itself has already been associated simultaneously with both divinity and infection, especially in its transporting deadly contagion throughout Philistine communities in a demonstration of God’s supremacy (I Samuel 4-6). Here again, the revelation of the ark of the covenant precedes—and may in fact precipitate—the intensified punishments that the spillage of the contents of the seven bowls of wrath upon the world, brings with the return to the main narrative in Revelation 16. According to at least one interpretation, the interrupted seventh trumpet blast generates all of the ensuing inflictions: “There is a sense in which the seventh trumpet extends over the succeeding chapters (12-19) including the outpouring of the seven bowls with their plagues .

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<sup>120</sup> T.F. Glasson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible: The Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 71.

Contagion and irreligion fuse repeatedly in John the Divine's vision, perhaps in no instance as much as by designating "the seven angels having the seven last plagues" (Revelation 15. 1). As noted by J. Massyngberde Ford, the word used here for "plagues" is the same used in the Septuagint to refer to the death of the firstborn in Exodus 11. 1-9.<sup>121</sup> Characterized as mephitic messengers, the angels play a key role in the divine dramatic epilogue, and, paradoxically, at least upon first inspection, plague—just as with the evil angels of the Old Testament—is deified in a religious manifestation. Echoing the metonymical significance of the temple and the ark of the covenant standing for God (Revelation 11.19), the temple containing the "tabernacle of the testimony" opens: "And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues . . . And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials [bowls] full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever" (Revelation 15. 5-7).

Given that God's indignation fills the bowls, something of God inheres in the plagues or is even indistinguishable from the substance driving the ensuing catastrophes commanded by "a great voice" (Revelation 16. 1), the first of which correlates to the plague of boils (Exodus 9. 10-11): "And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and *upon* them which worshipped his image" (Revelation 16. 2). If this non-specific plague of sores—here virtually analogous to false worship—has its origin in the corresponding Exodus plague, it may be provoked by "the ashes from the

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<sup>121</sup> *The Anchor Bible: Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 252.

incense shovels or the contents of the libation bowls,"<sup>122</sup> further establishing an already powerful fusion of idolatry and contagion.

Such a relationship between irreligion and infection is again implied (although not specifically mentioned as elsewhere in Revelation) in the allegorical vision of the destruction of Babylon (Rome), which foreshadows actual pestilential decimation of Rome centuries later that follows (from a Christian perspective) upon the idolatry of enforced emperor worship. Although "Babylon is condemned for her luxury, uncleanness and corrupting influence"<sup>123</sup>—all of which are "contagious" offences begging inevitable pestilential punishment—the foremost malefaction derives from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and in the process the killings of "holy apostles and prophets" who are avenged with the destruction of Babylon (Revelation 18. 20). Unwarranted elimination of the agents of Christianity necessitates the removal of the afflicting Romans. Preceding the annihilation of Babylon is a divine warning that echoes a reference to the ancient Babylon (Jeremiah 51. 45): "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18. 4).

Continued contact with the Roman infidels engenders even greater temptation to succumb to contagious spiritual influence. Recommending a punishment twice as severe as would be assigned under the even exchange of *lex talionis*, the heavenly speaker invokes twofold castigation because of Rome's notoriously noxious misdeeds which seem to threaten an infectious incursion

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>123</sup> Glasson, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

into the empyrean: "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double" (Revelation 18. 5-6). Appropriately enough, the punishment for Rome's paganism involves pestilential affliction:

How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. (Revelation 18. 7-8)

The seemingly expansive scourges that bring about the cataclysmic demise of Rome collapse into "one day" or "one hour," require compounded anguish because of their relatively ephemeral duration.

Significantly, when considered from a biological viewpoint, those who have had contact with Rome (especially those who have profited from their relationships) grieve—as if suffering through a vicarious infection—over the erasure of Rome:

And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. (Revelation 18. 9-10)

In this, the first of three lamentations over the incinerated harlot-city, the connection between apostasy and deadly contagion is evident: "First comes the dirge of the kings of the earth, who in this chapter appear to represent all those in authority who have refused to accept the rule of Yahweh and cooperated in the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem," such as Herod the Great who "introduced Hellenistic and Roman customs, contrary to orthodox Jewish beliefs."<sup>124</sup> Thus consciousness on the part of the world's leaders of the mortal consequence of having infectious contact with idolatrous Rome is apparent. Although maintaining a protective distance might help avoid indirect but immediate and concomitant punishment, the germ of infidelity already blossoms among them.

Fittingly, Revelation ends with perhaps the most forceful image depicting a bond between these two metaphorical elements:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22. 18-19)

Any supplemental soothsaying—which for John would be by definition false prophecy—entails the infliction of additional plagues; in a sense, unsanctioned prophecy and pestilential punishment are one and the same. Just as Oceania's insubordinate citizens in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are prophylactically

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<sup>124</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *The Anchor Bible: Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 304.

excised from a potentially rebellious existence (they become “unpersons”), those who detract from John’s apocalyptic vision are entirely effaced from the earth in what also be seen as a sanitary measure to protect the purity of the faith. Such is, with numerous variations, the solution proposed to inhibit the further spread, especially of Puritanism, in seventeenth-century England and even into the eighteenth century, principally by Anglican apologists, yet as in the case of Milton, the irreligion-infection metaphor is malleable enough for employment in any doctrinal arsenal.

***Contagious Nonconformity: Anglican Apologetics and the Development of  
the Irreligion-Infection Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century English  
Literature***

Coinciding with the exacerbation of increasingly intense religious controversy that swelled in the first quarter of the seventeenth century in England, doctrinal polemicists in rhetorical entanglements throughout the century—either directly or implicitly—consistently employ a distinctively vituperative metaphor linking, in most cases, various manifestations of Puritanism, with biological infection. Anglican apologists, in doing so, not only draw upon biblical narratives involving the nexus between false religion and contagion, but also bear in mind literal pestilential epidemics in applying this figurative denigration. Beginning with Robert Burton and extending through the second half of the century to include John Cleveland, Meric Casaubon, Henry More, Samuel Butler and Samuel Parker, these authors also respond to consistent and widespread contemporary usage of this metaphorical phenomenon. Among the Anglicans in this period, Burton and Swift represent the alpha and omega of the most noteworthy employers of this plague analogy, and both specifically designate Puritanism as an infectious menace—a categorization made especially virulent given the continual threat of deadly plague epidemics.

Burton, whose divine undertaking in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) breaks new ground by treating anathematized religion as infection, incorporates a priestly devotion to preserving the population from epidemic malevolence,

wherein he identifies a parallel to Christ's role as spiritual physician.<sup>1</sup> Feeding off the same dogmatic sustenance, the Cavalier poet Cleveland emphatically denounces Scotland, the fountainhead of Presbyterianism, as "a Nation Epidemicall" in "The Rebell Scot" (1658). Casaubon tentatively connects dissenting enthusiasm with contagious disease in *Treatise concerning Enthusiasme* (1655), and his fellow Anglican More does so with equally submerged allusion in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656).<sup>2</sup> Parker, later a bishop, broaches the subject of infectious irreligion in his anti-Platonist *A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophie* (1667), and Butler provides an immediately contemporary example of this plague analogy in a literary vacuum: in one of his *Characters*, a collection begun in the same year Parker's pamphlet was published yet left unpublished until 1759, the latter labels Calvinism as a pestilential influence. Nonetheless, Butler herein echoes his drinking companion Cleveland's dismissals of the Scottish kirk, and strikingly presages Swift's own characterization of Presbyterians as epidemic enthusiasts:

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<sup>1</sup> *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), I, 22. Michael Heyd sees Burton as "a natural and convenient starting point" for an enquiry into "some of the ways by which the medical and philosophical tradition which linked enthusiasm with melancholy penetrated the vocabulary and contents of religious polemics in the seventeenth century, particularly in England," in "Robert Burton's Sources on Enthusiasm and Melancholy: From a Medical Tradition to Religious Controversy," in *History of European Ideas* 5 (1984), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Canavan finds gradations in the anti-Puritan writings of Burton, Casaubon, More and Swift. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *A Tale of a Tub* "express the Anglican clergyman's rejection of Puritan enthusiasm, while in other works, Meric Casaubon and Henry More, writing with less obvious partisan intentions, warn of the threat of enthusiasm to both liberty and rationality" ("Robert Burton, Jonathan Swift, and the Tradition of Anti-Puritan Invective," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34, 1973), p. 227. It should be recalled that the attacks of Casaubon and More were likely tempered by their having been written and published during the interregnum.



"His [the Presbyterian's] gifts are found to be contagious, and so are shut up, that they may not infect others."<sup>3</sup>

Burton marks the watershed of seventeenth-century development of the irreligion-infection metaphor for, among other reasons, emphasizing the contagious nature of spiritual as well as physical disease to a greater extent than his predecessors.<sup>4</sup> Providing a foundation for Swift's designation of Jack's Presbyterians twice in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) as the "Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*," Burton in *The Anatomy* consistently links widespread infection with religious extremism, especially dissenting enthusiasm. As one would expect, Burton's description of the contagious character of heterodoxy finds its greatest treatment in Section 4 of Partition III, "Religious Melancholy"—the last major subject of the work. However, almost as predictably, the presentation of spiritual deviation as a pestilential hazard also finds its way into the copious satirical preface "Democritus to the Reader" and into all three partitions of the encyclopedic treatment of the disease with a myriad of causes, cures and categories.

Significantly, Burton, who is recognized widely by scholars as the seminal source of one strain of anti-Puritan and anti-Catholic invective in the seventeenth century, declares toward the very end of the preface of the

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<sup>3</sup> "A Silenc'd Presbyterian," in *Samuel Butler: Characters*, ed. by Charles W. Daves (Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), p. 312. John Aubrey records that Cleveland "and Sam Butler, &c. of Grayes Inne, had a Clubb every night" ("Samuel Butler," in *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. by Oliver Lawson Dick, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Clarence M. Webster highlights the innovative nature of Burton's overall denigration of nonconformist extremism in maintaining that the Anglican divine "began the real study of religious enthusiasm" in the third part of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* ("Swift and Some Earlier Satirists of Puritan Enthusiasm," in *PMLA*, 48, 1933), p. 1141.

*Anatomy* that melancholy—one form of which is religious—is a disease widely communicated among the population, implying from the beginning that the malady may have contagious properties:

Being then as it is, a disease so grievous, so common, I know not wherein to doe a more generall service, and spend my time better, then to prescribe means how to prevent and cure so universall a malady, an Epidemicall disease, that so often, so much crucifies the body and minde.<sup>5</sup>

Burton also makes comparisons between doctrinal extremism and physical contagion wherein Catholicism and Puritanism are assailed as infectious systems of belief.<sup>6</sup> Indicative of Burton's metaphorical intentions is the passage in the *Anatomy* for which Burton is credited with the first usage of "epidemicall" or "epidemicall" as it pertains to the prevalence of a given disease:

We had need of some generall visiter in our age, that should reforme what is amis [and perform such Herculean feats as] . . . Cure us of our Epidemicall diseases, *Scorbutum, Plica, morbus Neapolitanus, &c.* End all our idle controversies, cut off our tumultuous desires, inordinate lusts, roote out Atheisme, impiety,

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<sup>5</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 110. J.B. Bamborough holds that in this passage Burton "is quite explicit about his intention in writing about melancholy" (*Ibid.*, I, xxxiii).

<sup>6</sup> Dennis G. Donovan concisely summarizes Burton's antagonistic views toward the doctrinal extremes of seventeenth-century England: "If the Catholic Church was dangerous for its dogmatic insistence upon rites and ceremonies, the separatist sects were just as dangerous for their insistence upon the stripping away of all tradition" ("Robert Burton, Anglican Minister," in *Renaissance Papers*, 1967), p. 38.

heresy, schisme and superstition, which now so crucifie the World

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Burton uses the term elsewhere in translating a statement of St Cyprian (d. 258), and in doing so implies a link between heterodoxy and pestilence: "*Are you shaken with warres, as Cyprian well urgeth to Demetrius, are you molested with dearth and famine, is your health crushed with raging diseases? Is mankinde generally tormented with Epidemicall maladies? 'tis all for your sinnes . . .*"<sup>7</sup> Rosalie L. Colie, incidentally, identifies this first section of *The Anatomy*, from which this quotation derives, as evidence that Burton "was able to make up a fine sermon"<sup>8</sup>—additional indication that the work may be classed with other seventeenth-century polemical tracts in spite of the fact that most critics accept Burton's misleading claim that he is abstaining from homiletic discourse in favour of medical analysis.

Tracing the progress of this irreligion-infection metaphor through the seventeenth century—specifically in the texts of four Anglican priests—supports the conclusions of such modern scholars as Clarence M. Webster, George Williamson, Phillip Harth, Thomas L. Canavan, Michael Heyd and Angus Ross, all of whom have in one way or another convincingly identified Burton's influence on More and Casaubon, and in turn the influence of the latter two on Swift, really the last seventeenth-century Anglican apologist to apply the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 84-85. Although the *OED* credits Burton in this passage with the first usage of "epidemicall" as it relates to disease, the term appears five years earlier in Puritan preacher Thomas Adams' *The Diseases of the Soule: A Discourse Divine, Morall, and Physicall* (1616): "The sickness of this world is epidemical, and hath with the invisible poison of a general pestilence infected it to the heart" (*The Works of Thomas Adams*, 3 vols, I (Edinburgh: J. Nichol, 1861), p. 471.

<sup>8</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 446.

metaphorical device.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, for example, Catholicism is branded by Burton as "*adulta patriæ pestis*," translated by Holbrook Jackson as "a full-grown scourge of their country," a phrase which in the Latin carries connotations of infectious disease.<sup>11</sup> Placing nonconformists in the same contagious category, Burton says that "on the adverse side" of Catholics are "nice and curious Schismaticks in another extreame . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Many of Burton's attacks on the sectarians are implied or require correlative attention to be paid to related passages elsewhere in the text. For example, Burton employs a quotation twice to illustrate the relationship between infidelity and infection; in the first instance, nonconformists are not specifically targeted: "... Epicures, Atheists, Schismatickes, Heretickes; *hi omnes habent imaginationem læsam* [they have all a diseased imagination] . . .

<sup>13</sup> However, Burton in the second instance of this quotation specifically intends

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<sup>10</sup> Angus Ross concisely summarizes scholarship on the integral connections between, specifically, Burton, More and Swift: "... Swift clearly stands in some relationship with Burton, Henry More's *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* lying between them. By his references More specifically acknowledges a debt to Burton," in "*The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Swift," in *Swift and His Contexts*, ed. by John Irwin Fischer, Hermann J. Real and James Woolley (New York: AMS Press, 1989), p. 143. Significantly, all three employ the enthusiasm-infection metaphor in polemic discourse.

<sup>11</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 41; and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1932; repr. 1961), I, 55. Sir William Smith and Sir John Lockwood list the primary definition of *pestis* as "an infectious or contagious disease or sickness," in their *Latin-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh and London: W&R Chambers and John Murray, repr. 1976), p. 539. Significantly, Burton, in reference to war, himself translates "*quæ pestis*" two pages later as "what plague" (I, 57). This suggests a powerful association between Catholicism, Puritanism and infectious disease.

<sup>12</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, I, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 105; the translation of the Latin phrase of Nymannus is that of Jackson, I, 116. As an indication of Burton's facility in identifying a variation of the irreligion-infection metaphor in the Bible, he affixes to this passage a reference to the "men of corrupt minds" (2 Timothy 3. 8), whose "*madnesse shall*

metaphorical application to overzealous Puritans, who, "howsoever they may seeme to be discreet, and men of understanding in other matters, discourse well, *laesam habent imaginationem* [they have a diseased imagination] . . ." <sup>14</sup> Looking ahead to Swift's irrepressible Presbyterian Jack, Burton suggests that the "madnesse and folly" of immoderately inspired Calvinists "breakes out beyond measure," implying a contagious force escaping from protective spiritual quarantine and threatening to infect the untainted faithful. <sup>15</sup> Underscoring this figurative association, Burton exclaims that "sectaries . . . are as many almost as there be diseases." <sup>16</sup>

In his section on the "Cure of Religious Melancholy," Burton employs scripture in suggesting that—excommunication—a form of spiritual quarantine—should be employed as a last resort if counseling fails: "The *medium* is best, and that which *Paul* prescribes" is attempting a cure through "the spirit of meeknesse, by all faire meanes, gentle admonitions . . ." <sup>17</sup> However, " . . . if that will not take place, . . . hee must bee excommunicat, as *Paul* did by *Hymenæus*, delivered over to Satan." <sup>18</sup> Burton further indicates his overriding concern to fulfil his ministerial role in seeking to protect parishioners from the spread of contagious nonconformity by transforming a medical precept

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be evident" (*The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, I, 105), which is Burton's rendering of "folly shall be manifest" of the Authorized Version (2 Timothy 3. 9).

<sup>14</sup> *The Anatomy*, III, 388. The Latin translation is by Jackson, III, 372.

<sup>15</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, III, 388. Burton's Latin paraphrase of this phrase is "*in infinitum erumpit stultitia*," wherein the notion of an outbreak can be understood in epidemiological terms. Additionally, Burton's prognosis for overzealous followers of Puritanism is ultimately insanity: "They are certainly farre gone with melancholy, if not quite mad, . . ." (*Ibid.*, III, 388).

<sup>16</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Jackson, II, 209.

<sup>17</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, III, 394. Burton here paraphrases Galatians 6. 1.

into a spiritual one: "... As *Hyppocrates* said in *Physicke*, I may well say in Divinity, *Quæ ferro non curantur, ignis curat*. For the vulgar, restraints by lawes, mulcts, burne their bookes, forbid their conventicles: for when the cause is taken away, the effect will soon cease."<sup>19</sup> All forms of admonishment should be exhausted in an effort to reclaim wayward zealots: "Now for Prophets, dreamers, and such rude silly fellowes, that through fasting, too much meditation, preciseness, or by Melancholy are distempered, the best meanes to reduce them . . . is to alter their course of life, and with conference, threats, promises, perswasions, to entermixe *Physicke*."<sup>20</sup> Finally, however, Burton allows that confinement—an exigency which would prevent the further spread of irreligious madness—may ultimately be the most effective cure: "We have frequently such prophets and dreamers amongst us, whom we persecute with fire and fagot, I thinke the most compendious cure for some of them at least, had beene in Bedlam."<sup>21</sup>

It is instructive to recall that the *via media* of Burton's Anglicanism encompassed a limited Calvinism, and that he accordingly spares Presbyterians from designation as contagious doctrinaires.<sup>22</sup> It is from this position, one often minimized by critics, that Burton engages in doctrinal controversy (as much as

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 394. Burton here refers to Paul having "delivered" the heretic Hymenæus "unto Satan, that [he] may not blaspheme" (I Timothy 1. 20).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 394-95. Jackson translates the Latin phrase as "what is not cured by the sword is cured by fire" (III, 378).

<sup>20</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, III, 395.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 395.

<sup>22</sup> Burton's "opinions on church government and on ceremonial worship seem to align him with the Laudian conservatives," observes Lawrence Babb in *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1959), p. 90. "Yet doctrinally he stands with the moderate Calvinistic Puritans. His infrequent references to Calvin are all

he contradictorily declaims otherwise), and initiates application of the infection-irreligion metaphor among seventeenth-century Anglicans.<sup>23</sup> Not only is Burton seeking in his guise as physician/psychiatrist to provide fellow melancholiacs with a medical treatise, nor is he only undertaking an epistemological mission to triangulate obscure philosophical problems that defy analysis—ultimately, he is an Anglican priest. While critics have justly focused attention on the predominant themes of medicine and philosophy in the *Anatomy*, Burton's priestly identity, which arguably encompasses the others, has been generally underrepresented.

Downplaying Burton's identity as Anglican minister—one of his roles for which no impersonation was required—comes all too easily. Readers of the *Anatomy* have remarked upon what is considered to be a “[c]onspicuous . . . absence among Burton's references to the clerical profession . . . [of] any expression of his sense of the spiritual dimension of the priesthood.”<sup>24</sup> This orthodox critical representation that Burton minimally entered doctrinal debates is echoed elsewhere: “Although he is doubtless well acquainted with the major Christian controversies, Burton gives scanty attention to disputed theological questions.”<sup>25</sup> These assessments, taken together with Burton's relatively reclusive life of scholarship lived in Oxford libraries, reflect the impression of a

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deferential. He attacks many sects with wrath and ridicule, but never the Presbyterians” (p. 90).

<sup>23</sup> Burton's Anglicanism, so closely allied to Swift's, is best summarized by Babb: “[T]here should be a single, state-sponsored church to provide and enforce such uniformity. The established church would interpret scripture and exercise at least a loose control over the doctrines preached by its ministers. . . . In the lively controversy on the question of ecclesiastical government, Burton stands with the defenders of the existing episcopacy” (p. 83).

<sup>24</sup> Michael O'Connell, *Robert Burton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Babb, *op. cit.* p. 86.

potentially negligent Anglican priest—in part due to his own manipulation of the reader. In subjecting the reader to his intertextual *tour de force*, Burton's manic bibliophily threatens to overshadow his dutiful ministry which began in 1616 five years before the *Anatomy* was first published and continued until his death in 1640 at the age of 62.

Indicative of Burton's authorial direction of the reader is his claim in the satirical preface that the *Anatomy* is principally a medical text: "... I being a Divine, have medled with Physicke . . ." <sup>26</sup> This parson-turned-physician seems to renounce his priestly responsibilities, apparently in an effort to lead readers to believe he is other than a divine and that what he has written is other than a sermon or ecclesiastical treatise—as would have been expected:

There be many other subjects, I do easily grant, both in humanity and divinity, fit to be treated of, of which had I written *ad ostentationem* only, to show myself, I should have rather chosen, and in which I have been more conversant, I could have more willingly luxuriated, and better satisfied myself and others . . . <sup>27</sup>

Additionally, Burton cunningly implies by sleight of hand that the *Anatomy* is a medical—and not a theological—composition: "If this my discourse be over medicinall, or savour too much of humanity, I promise thee, that I will hereafter make thee amends in some Treatise of Divinitie." <sup>28</sup> Taking the generic bait offered by Burton, Lawrence Babb, for example, with arguably sound logic,

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<sup>26</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, I, 20. As much as Burton here affects dismissal of divinity, Colie perceptively observes that Burton is far from intruding upon another discipline: "Since it was a disease of the soul, melancholy belonged quite literally in Burton's professional purlieu, since by his ordination he was charged precisely with the cure of souls" (p. 433).

<sup>27</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 20.



concludes that "no such treatise exists."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, however, such a homiletic treatise does exist: *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps taking a cue from Lucretius in coating a bitter pill with sugar, Burton beguiles the reader into believing that his analysis will be free from prose preaching; unknowingly, however, the reader becomes subject to Burton's polemic religious discourse, which with added irony, is after all, medical in nature: avoidance of religious extremists ensures protection from spiritual contamination.<sup>31</sup> Although prevailing characterizations of Burton underemphasize his ministerial livelihood, he nonetheless covers new territory as an Anglican satirist capable of delivering—as appropriate—sonorous sermons and frenzied jeremiads to warn his co-religionists of the contagious danger posed by irreligion, especially Puritanism and Catholicism. One such cry of alarm is raised against Catholic priests, whose "end is not to propagate the Church, advance, Gods kingdome, seeke his glory or common good, but to enrich

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 13. Ruth A. Fox is also convinced that Burton's denial of pastoral intentions is straightforward: "[H]e rejects divinity *per se* because as he sees it, to have written as a divine would have involved him in self-perpetuating activities restricted in time and place and limited to immediate ends" (*The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in the Anatomy of Melancholy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 242.

<sup>30</sup> Fox is representative of the consensus view that Burton eschews a homiletic purpose: "To have written in controversy would have embroiled him in the great religious disputes of the day without hope of extricating himself" (*Ibid.*, p. 243). Burton, however, clearly does engage in theological disputation.

<sup>31</sup> J.B. Bamborough explains Burton's doctrinal aversion to dissenting fanaticism: " 'Enthusiasm' in the religious sense, leading to prophecy by fanatics, could not be welcome to Burton as a churchman, and he castigates it roundly in the Section on Religious Melancholy . . ." (*The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, p. xxviii).

themselves, to enlarge their territories, to domineer and compel them to stand in awe, to live in subjection to the See of *Rome*.”<sup>32</sup>

True to his calling, Burton fully meets the obligations of the priesthood by producing *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in the spirit of circumspect preaching, and this aspect of Burton’s intention is developed to any considerable degree only by Dennis G. Donovan, who revitalizes in the anatomist the devoted defender of episcopacy and watchful guide to his church members:

Burtonian criticism has, strangely enough, paid too little attention to Burton the divine. Burton the melancholy man, Burton the recluse, Burton the pillager of dusty old tomes, Burton the robust and cheerful pessimist have all been studied at the expense of Burton the compassionate Anglican minister.<sup>33</sup>

Donovan further contends that Burton’s “religious commitment remained always a significant influence in his life and thought; and it is the sincere expression of a sensitive, competent minister which informs the true spirit of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.”<sup>34</sup> Donovan also rightly identifies, using a disease analogy, the section “Religious Melancholy” as “essentially a sermon . . . intended by Burton to be an antidote to the type of preaching prevalent in the seventeenth century,”<sup>35</sup> such as the fearsome and infectious pulpit oratory of

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 351. Colie’s discussion of Burton’s anti-Catholicism suggests that Burton seeks to protect the Anglican communion from “the priests of the Roman church” who are guilty of “the crime of misleading Christians in the worship of God” (p. 449).

<sup>33</sup> “Robert Burton, Anglican Minister,” p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

"those thundering Ministers, a most frequent cause . . . of this malady [religious melancholy]."<sup>36</sup>

Displaying moderation appropriate to his ministerial calling, Burton even magnanimously concedes imperfection among some of his fellow conformist preachers:

Our indiscreet Pastors many of them, come not farre behinde,  
whilest in their ordinary sermons they speake so much of election,  
predestination, reprobation *ab æterno* [from the beginning of the  
world], subtraction of grace, preterition, voluntary permission, &c.  
. . . [and] making every small fault and thing indifferent, an  
irremissible offence, they so rent, teare and wound mens  
consciences, that they are almost mad, and at their wits ends.<sup>37</sup>

Another indication of Burton's ultimately pastoral intentions in preserving the congregation is his outright admission that he does not favour the subject of melancholy "before Divinity, which I doe acknowledge to be the Queene of Professions, and to which all the rest are as Handmaids . . ."<sup>38</sup> Further support for a characterization of the *Anatomy* as a divine discourse is offered by J.B. Bamborough: "It can . . . be considered a religious work, an exercise of Burton's

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<sup>36</sup> *The Anatomy*, III, 415.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 415. The Latin translation is by Jackson, III, 399-400. A.H. Bullen, in the introduction to A.R. Shilleto's edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, employs the irreligion-infection metaphor in glossing this passage: "Burton severely censures those pestilent parsons who make election, predestination, and reprobation the theme of their ordinary sermons, frightening poor harmless people with threats of damnation" (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), I, xxv.

<sup>38</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, I, 20.

profession as a priest. It is part of a priest's duty to console and comfort the distressed . . . <sup>39</sup>

Thus by Burton's own reckoning, the medical initiative displayed in the *Anatomy* is subservient to the overriding demands of divinity—one of which would be responsibly broadcasting his medical and spiritual advice in the manner in which a shepherd tends his vulnerable flock. Typical of Burton's sophisticated self-contradiction employed for rhetorical purposes is his declaration that readers are already overrun with discourses on divinity: " . . . [T]here be so many Bookes in that kinde, so many Commentators, Treatises, Pamphlets, Expositions, Sermons, that whole teemes of Oxen cannot draw them . . . "<sup>40</sup> Ironically, however, Burton's gentle reader is about to be exposed to all of these types of publications simultaneously in the body of the *Anatomy* proper. Having lured the reader into the credulous assumption that none of these species of prose works will be forthcoming in the *Anatomy*'s three partitions, Burton now builds upon the paradox of his denial of pastoral motivation:

I might have haply printed a Sermon at *Pauls-Crosse*, a Sermon in *S<sup>t</sup> Maries Oxon.* a Sermon in *Christ-Church*, or a Sermon before the right Honorable, right Reverend, a Sermon before the right Worshipfull, a Sermon in Latine, in English, a Sermon with a name, a Sermon without, a Sermon, a Sermon, &c..<sup>41</sup>

Burton in fact prints what can be considered a collection of sermons—or even one massive and digressive homily—and in doing so, he propounds precisely that which he has claimed that he could have done (and presumably has not). Yet the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, I, xxxiii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20.

claim is misleading: *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is popularly received and printed widely during his lifetime; it is presented to the “gentle reader” who is worthy of a respectful title; it is written in both Latin and English; it is both a sermon with a name (*The Anatomy*), and one without in the sense that it is not labelled a sermon as such; and its exhortations are repeatedly made.

Adding to this shadow play involving an apparent repudiation of the increasingly common homiletic impulse to publish one’s sermons—a denial which is ironically contradicted with the publication of *The Anatomy*—is Burton’s fallacious appeal to the reader: “. . . I have beene ever as desirous to suppresse my labours in this kinde, as others have beene to presse and publish theirs.”<sup>42</sup> Such efforts, as the reader turning the *Anatomy*’s pages surely knows by now, were not sufficiently made. In fact, Burton’s caustic message regarding the potential hazard of epidemic religious melancholy and madness must be communicated as widely as possible to achieve its greatest success in assisting with spiritual disease control—most notably against infectious radical Puritanism.<sup>43</sup> Implied in Burton’s statement above is a recognition of books themselves having a potentially infectious quality, a representation shared by Milton in *Areopagitica*. The anatomist elsewhere suggests the potentially hazardous contagious influence resulting from reading presumably heretical texts: “Amongst so many thousand Authors you shall scarce finde one by reading of whom you shall be any whit better, but rather much worse, quibus

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> Babb cleverly summarizes Burton’s interest in eradicating the malevolent influence of extreme nonconformity: “The individualistic sectarians threaten the order and regularity of things as they are. Burton advocates suppressive measures which, although they might have seemed mild in the century of the

*inficitur potius, quam perficitur*, by which hee is rather infected then any way perfected."<sup>44</sup> Appropriately enough for Burton's paradoxical communication that most books infect rather than perfect, the two words have the same Latin root, *facere*, "to make." In a world overrun with contagious mental illness—especially that of the religious strain—Burton the churchman proposes to erect against it a prophylactic barrier, homiletic perfection set against universal irreligious infection.<sup>45</sup>

Underpinning his argument for universal melancholic affliction, Burton maintains that "Kingdomes, Provinces, and Politicke Bodies are likewise sensible and subject to this disease [melancholy]."<sup>46</sup> Typically expressing his own ideas by amalgamating the quotations of others,<sup>47</sup> Burton cites an observation by Boterus (Giovanni Botero, 1549-1617) of the parallel between the human body and the body politic wherein both are subject to "*many diseases in a Commonwealth*

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Thirty Years' War, are obviously designed for uncompromising enforcement of conformity" (*Op. cit.*, pp. 83-84).

<sup>44</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Taken to the extreme, Burton's assertion that melancholy is "so universal a malady, an epidemical disease," would render attempts to prevent the infection pointless. Herein Burton, according to Stanley E. Fish, characteristically asserts a general proposition only to focus on a dizzying array of specific claims which in its frenzied fashion seems to argue that Burton's text itself is contaminated: "[H]is assertion of universal madness is unqualified; but the human mind is perfectly capable of assenting to generalities and then finding ways to slip out of them in its reponse to particulars. Burton makes use of this tendency by encouraging it, by allowing the reader to believe momentarily in the discreteness of entities (including himself) which are revealed, upon closer examination, to be infected with the general malady" (*Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 314-15).

<sup>46</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Bergen Evans stresses that Burton "is often writing from his own mind when he is quoting. . . . He expressed himself in other men's words; but it was *himself* that he expressed" (*The Psychiatry of Robert Burton*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), pp. 30-31.

*which doe as diversly happen from severall distempers . . .*<sup>48</sup> Thereafter,

Burton suggests a powerful causal relationship between irreligion and infection:

But the most frequent maladies are such as proceed from themselves; as first when Religion and Gods Service is neglected, innovated or altered, where they doe not feare God, obey their Prince, where Atheisme, Epicurisme, Sacriledge, Simony, &c. And all such impieties are freely committed, that Country cannot prosper.<sup>49</sup>

It is in the face of this seemingly pervasive heterodoxy Burton strives to provide protective guidance to his parishioners in true ministerial fashion—regardless of sparse overt reference to his calling: “Despite the paucity of evidence concerning his clerical activities, Burton’s dedication to helping his unfortunate fellow-men emerges clearly in the *Anatomy*.”<sup>50</sup>

Burton’s benevolent preaching is especially evident when he counsels avoidance of irreligious influence—often manifested in the form of the devil, instigator of physical plague as well as spiritual extremism—and acceptance of the shielding force of controlled Christianity:

If Satan summon thee to answere, send him to Christ; he is thy liberty, thy protector against cruell death, raging sinne, that roaring Lion, he is thy righteousness, thy saviour, and thy life. Though he say, thou art not of the number of the elect, a reprobate, forsaken of God, hold thine owne still, —*hic murus aheneus esto*, let this be as a bulwarke, a brazen wall to defend

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<sup>48</sup> *The Anatomy*, I, 66.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 67.

thee, stay thy selfe in that certainty of faith; let that be thy comfort, Christ will protect thee, vindicate thee, thou art one of his flock, he will triumph over the law, vanquish death, overcome the divell, and destroy hell.<sup>51</sup>

The biblical figure of the spiritual guardian supervising followers as a shepherd watching over the flock finds poignant expression, for example, in Paul's admonition to the Ephesian elders regarding the hazardous influence of infidels, both from within the church and without:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20. 28-30)

Although the infectious nature of unorthodox proselytization is not specified in this or in the other biblical passages involving this metaphor, Spenser in *The Shepheardes Calender* and Milton in *Lycidas*—following in a tradition initiated by various Latin poets— inveigh against irresponsible ministers allowing contagious heresy to spread among the believers.

By typically quoting another author just as if the words were his own, Burton fully participates in the established practice of depicting religious extremism as an influential threat to orthodoxy:

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<sup>50</sup> Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 33.



What are all our *Anabaptists, Brownists, Barrowists, Familists*, but a company of rude, illiterate, capritious, base fellowes? What are most of our Papists, but stupid, ignorant, and blinde bayards? how should they otherwise bee, when as they are brought up and kept still in darknesse? *If their Pastors* [quoting Swiss Protestant minister Ludwig Lavater (1527-1586)] *had done their duties, and instructed their flockes as they ought, in the Principles of Christian Religion, or had not forbidden them the reading of Scriptures, they had not beene as they are.*<sup>52</sup>

In the implication that erroneous pastoral guardianship at either doctrinal antipode breeds further spiritual corruption, Burton indicates that he is clearly aware of the prescription for its prevention: dutiful, responsible sermonizing, which in itself may be considered a prophylactic barrier to heterodoxy. And throughout *The Anatomy*, and especially in "Religious Melancholy," he endeavours to provide such protection against, for example, "that vaine superstition of Idolaters," which Burton equates to "a miserable plague."<sup>53</sup> This affliction is "a meere madnesse," or, in quoting St Augustine, "*Insanus animi morbus*, a furious disease of the soule; *insania omnium insanissima*, a quintessence of madnesse . . ."<sup>54</sup>

Superstition, symptoms of which Burton identifies in Mohammedanism, Judaism, Catholicism and paganism, is worthy of laughter in its "ridiculous and absurd" forms; however, its grave manifestation as a contagious menace

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<sup>51</sup> *The Anatomy*, III, 435. Donovan comments that this passage is typical of "Burton the minister" (*Op. cit.*, p. 39).

<sup>52</sup> *The Anatomy*, III, 357.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 338.

deserves bewailment for its “lamentable and tragic” consequences. In unleashing a concentrated metaphorical assault on these false systems of belief, Burton the minister warns of the danger posed by them by equating them to biological infection:

For it is that great torture, that infernall plague of mortall men, *omnium pestium pestilentissima superstitio*, and able of it selfe alone to stand in opposition to all other plagues, miseries and calamities whatsoever; farre more cruell, more pestiferous, more grievous, more generall, more violent, of a greater extent.<sup>65</sup>

Exceptionally, Burton goes beyond merely establishing a metaphorical equivalency between misguided belief and deadly contagion—herein physical pestilence pales in comparison to epidemic infidelity. Echoing this assessment, Burton later in the section labels superstition as “a most perilous and dangerous error of all others, . . . a pestilent, a troublesome passion that utterly undoeth men.”<sup>66</sup> Part of Burton’s ministerial mission is satisfied simply by making such an alarming designation. In citing Plato to convey his own thoughts, Burton maintains that impiety—another religious malady—is also infectious: “Religion neglected brings plagues to the city, opens a gap to all naughtiness.”<sup>67</sup>

The crystallizing passage with regard to Burton’s overall employment of the irreligion-infection metaphor encompasses all possible doctrinal targets as, either directly or indirectly, epidemiologically perilous. Espousing the orthodox

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 338. Jackson translates the Latin phrase as “superstition, the direst of plagues” (III, 320).

<sup>65</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, III, 347.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 378.

early seventeenth-century notion that devils act as messengers of irreligion (as well as infection), Burton by association suggests that evil spirits spread malevolent beliefs as if by contagion:

[H]ee [the devil] hath severall engines, traps, devices, to batter and enthrall, omitting no opportunities, according to mens severall inclinations, abilities, to circumvent and humour them, to maintaine his superstition, sometimes to stupifie, besot them, sometime againe by oppositions, factions, to sett all at oddes, and in an uproare, sometimes hee infects one man, and makes him a principall agent, sometimes whole Citties, Countries.<sup>58</sup>

Subcategories of these infectious agents span the entire spectrum of irreligious guidance, even to include ministers of his own established church as well as the expected anathemas of Catholicism and Puritanism:

If of meaner sort, by stupidity, Canonically obedience, blind zeale, &c. If of better note, by pride, ambition, popularity, vaine glory. If of the Clergie and more eminent, of better parts then the rest, more learned, eloquent, he puffes them up with a vaine conceit of their owne worth, *scientiâ inflati*, they beginne to swell, and scorne all the world in respect of themselves, and thereupon turne heretickes, schismatickes, broach new doctrines, frame new crotchets, and the like, or else out of too much learning become mad, or out of curiosity they wil search into Gods secrets, and eat

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<sup>57</sup> Trans. by Jackson, III, 328. Burton quotes the phrase in Latin from Book X of *The Laws* of Plato: "Religio neglecta maximam pestem in civitatem infert, omnium scelerum fenestram aperit" (*The Anatomy*, ed. by Jackson, III, 488).

<sup>58</sup> *The Anatomy*, ed. by Faulkner and others, III, 358.

of the forbidden fruit, or out of presumption of their holinesse and good gifts, inspirations, become Prophets, *Enthusiasts*, & what not.<sup>59</sup>

Anticipating Swift's association of infectious dogma with wind in *A Tale of a Tub* (the "Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*") and *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, Burton considers manipulative sermons breathed into parishioners to be the equivalent of pestilential preaching. Swollen with the air of heretical beliefs, members of the congregations themselves become agents of the contagion of separatism.

From Burton onward, the tradition of casting carriers of religious (and often political) nonconformity develops among Anglicans of diverse backgrounds, all uniting, however, in their widespread propensity to classify sectarian movements as pestilential threats. Although not an ordained minister, the Royalist poet Cleveland—"almost certainly the most popular poet of the 1640s"—employs this infection metaphor against the backdrop of the religious and political controversy occasioned by the Civil War.<sup>60</sup> References in his most widely known poem "The Rebell Scot"—and another accepted as Cleveland's, "The Scots Apostasie" (1647)—imply assaults upon Presbyterianism as a

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 358. Webster, who clearly discerns this infection-irreligion in Burton, glosses this passage as follows: "The Puritan is infected 'if of meaner sort by stupidity . . .'" (p. 1142). Contained in this passage is a conscious echo of Festus's statement to Paul in Acts 26. 24: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

<sup>60</sup> Lee A. Jacobus, *John Cleveland* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), p. 9. "The Rebell Scot," according to John M. Berdan, was occasioned by the entrance of the Scottish army into England on 19 January 1644 to engage the troops of King Charles: "To the Royalists there seemed no greater wickedness than this action of the Scots, who were thus at one and the same time both foreign invaders and rebellious subjects" (*Poems of John Cleveland*, New Haven, CT: Yale University

contagious doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Foreshadowing Swift's designation of Scottish Presbyterian settlers in Ireland as agents of contagion in *A Tale of a Tub*, Cleveland in "The Rebell Scot" exclaims that colonization has been tantamount to contamination: "No more let *Ireland* brag, her harmlesse Nation / Fosters no Venome, since the Scots Plantation" (37-38).

Casting the "notable victories for the King against the Presbyterians in Scotland during 1644 and 1645" as Anglican triumphs,<sup>62</sup> Cleveland establishes himself firmly in the convention of yoking dissent with disease. Scotland is "[a] Land that brings in question and suspense / Gods omnipresence, but that CHARLES came thence: / But that *Montrose* and *Crawfords* loyall Band / Atton'd their sins, and christ'ned halfe the Land" (49-52).<sup>63</sup> Given what follows, the armed bands led by James Graham, earl and marquess of Montrose—formerly a Covenanter, who converted to the king's party—may be seen from Cleveland's standpoint as an insurgent counter-infection. On the one hand Cleveland celebrates the fact that not "all the Nation hath these spots" of Scottish Calvinism, language which leaves open an alternate signification of the symptomatic tokens or marks on the skin of bubonic plague victims (53). Additionally, Cleveland is seemingly reassured of an Anglican presence on

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Press, 1903), p. 148. Viewed from an epidemiological perspective, the Scottish forces would be considered antigens of irreligion.

<sup>61</sup> Jacobus observes that Cleveland's "most celebrated satire, and probably his best-known poem, is on the general subject of the Scots" (*Op. cit.*, p. 81).

<sup>62</sup> Brian Morris and Eleanor Withington, eds., *The Poems of John Cleveland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 119.

<sup>63</sup> Ironically, especially given Cleveland's extolling the virtues of Charles's visit to Scotland, Jacobus recalls that the king "not only listened to Scotland's most important preachers, but took part enthusiastically in Presbyterian services himself, finally ratifying into law the acts of the Scottish parliament which established Presbyterianism as the official religion of Scotland" (*Op. cit.*, p. 103).

Scottish soil: "There is a Church, as well as *Kirk* of Scots: / As in a picture, where the squinting paint / Shewes Fiend on this side, and on that side Saint" (54-56).

Owing to the realization that Presbyterianism not only plagues Scotland but also threatens to spread beyond the Tweed and endanger the established church, Cleveland approaches the zenith of his satirical fury in the poem's most quoted lines: "A Land where one may pray with curst intent, / O may they never suffer banishment! / Had *Cain* been *Scot*, God would have chang'd his doome, / Not forc'd him wander, but confin'd him home" (61-64). Such a judgement would simultaneously provide protection for those beyond the disease-control barrier, which would ideally be erected to inhibit the spread of pestilential Calvinism through its agents, adherents to the Scottish faith: "Like Jewes they spread, and as Infection flie, / As if the Divell had Ubiquitie" (65-66). A parallel is here drawn between followers of Judaism and carriers of contagion, and transgression—both legally and geographically—is nonetheless inevitable given the random wandering spirit of zealous Scottish nonconformists: "Hence 'tis, they live at Rovers; and defie / This or that Place, Rags of Geographie. / They're Citizens o' th World; they're all in all, / Scotland's a Nation Epidemicall" (67-70).<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly enough, a key component of the foundation of the argument made by Cleveland's most recent editors for inclusion of "The Scots Apostasie" in Cleveland's canon derives from language in this poem that echoes that in the passage discussed above of "The Rebell Scot," likely written nearly three years earlier than the poem that is less certainly Cleveland's.<sup>65</sup> Likening

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<sup>64</sup> Morris and Withington gloss "at Rovers" as "without definite aim or object" (*Op. cit.*, p. 120).

<sup>65</sup> In addition to identifying certain internal evidence in the passage discussed above, Morris and Withington note that contemporary respondents to "The Scots

the Scottish betrayal of Charles to a contagious rebellion spreading among Presbyterians and Independents in England, Cleveland wishes that the English consequently turn upon the Scottish covenanters and ultimately recognize them as infectious agents worthy of being circumscribed within their national boundaries:

But 'tis reserv'd; and till heaven plague you worse,

Be Objects of an Epidemick curse.

First, may your *Brethren*, to whose viler ends

Your pow'r hath bawded, cease to count you friends;

And prompted by the dictate of their reason,

Reproach the Traytors, though they hug the treason. (31-36)

Paradoxically, calling upon divine intervention for this locally universal affliction in the vein of Hebrew prophets who cast maledictions on idolatrous societies, ultimately yields an environment favourable for renewed propagation of the ordered religious and political orthodoxy.

Ideally, the extended Prebyterian brotherhood in England, seen as being corrupted by the Scottish and therefore somehow less culpable than they, would awaken to the awareness that their northern co-religionists threaten to mortally infect the otherwise untainted population. Echoing the notion of placing a form of quarantine upon the religious and political insurrectionists in "The Rebell Scot," Cleveland longs for the day when immigration restrictions—serving simultaneously as deserved punishment—inhibit the spread of this doctrinal contagion: "And may their Jealousies increase and breed,

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Apostasie," including the anti-Royalist Robin Bostock, attributed the poem to Cleveland: "Their attributions make it probably Cleveland's" (*Ibid.*, pp. xxxv-

/Till they confine your steps beyond the *Tweed* . . . Till forc'd by generall hate  
[which may be understood as a sort of counter-infection], you cease to rome /  
The world, and for a plague go live at home" (37-42). A parting anathema  
pronounced in this passage also yields a reading in which Cleveland equates  
Scotland with a colossal pesthouse ideally suited for confining its heterodox  
inhabitants: "... [M]ay your scabbie Land be all / Translated to a generall  
Hospitall" (45-46).

Although viewing the dynamics of religious enthusiasm as somehow both  
physically and spiritually driven, the Anglican divine Meric Casaubon (1599-  
1671) paves the road another step beyond Burton toward Swift's mechanical  
operation of the spirit in coming as close as was politic toward declaring inspired  
worshippers to be carriers of some sort of communicable disease. At first glance,  
Casaubon's *Treatise concerning Enthusiasme* pales in comparison with many  
other works of theological disputation: although clearly establishing himself in  
the Anglican apologetic tradition, his most severe condemnation of Puritanism  
amounts to singling out Quakers for displaying traits identical to the infectious  
sixteenth-century Spanish sect of illuminati. First, Casaubon places himself in  
the company of Burton and Milton, both of whom see medicine as elemental to  
the ministry, by declaring that religious enthusiasm amounts to physical  
contagion:

I honour and admire a good Physician much more, who can (as  
Gods instrument,) by the knowledge of nature, bring a man to his



right wits again, when he hath lost them: and I tremble . . . when I think that one Mad man is enough to infect a whole Province.<sup>66</sup>

Immediately following this passage, Casaubon contends that the spread of such contagious madness could have been prevented if some sort of anti-zeal measures had been enacted against the Spanish enthusiasts: "I doubt, whether by this there would have been one sober man left in all *Spain*, had not the *Alumbrados*, or *Illuminated Sect*, which also pretended much to Contemplation, and thereby to Ecstasies and mysticall unions, been suppressed in time."<sup>67</sup>

Neatly bringing his associative equation to his preordained solution, Casaubon now covers new ground in the second edition of the *Treatise* by tying dissenting enthusiasm of seventeenth-century England to the infectious followers of the inner light, making a connection which he suspected his colleagues would already have made:

In the former edition, I mentioned these *Almbrados* only by the way, as occasion offered it self. But since that, having heard much of a new generation of men, that are called *Quakers*, and seen also some printed papers against them; where I expected to find somewhat (upon so much affinitie) of these *Alumbrados*, but I did not . . .<sup>68</sup>

Now Casaubon wants no doubt left as to his explicit identification of Quakers as misdirected followers of inspiration which becomes synonymous with infection: "I think it seasonable to let my reader know that those men, so called in *Spain*,

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<sup>66</sup> *A Treatise concerning Enthusiasme*, ed. by Paul J. Korshin (2nd edn, 1656; Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, repr. 1970), p. 173.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

were no other, in most of their Tenets & practises, then these our *Quakers* are now in *England* . . .<sup>69</sup>

To avoid potentially troublesome doctrinal entanglements during the interregnum, Casaubon generally does not otherwise directly identify the inspired sectarians who threaten established religion as nonconformists of contemporary England.<sup>70</sup> Casaubon is careful enough to present rhetorical targets wide enough in scope to permit application to a broad spectrum of Puritan enthusiasts, without having to risk any negative consequences by being dangerously specific: "Though it may not seem that he had anything to lose by a straightforward attack upon enthusiasm . . . since the Commonwealth had deprived him of his church livings, Casaubon is nevertheless circumspect about condemning the enthusiasts."<sup>71</sup> In fact, Casaubon may be more alarmist than he appears to be in claiming that "enthusiastick Divination is no supernaturall thing, but naturall unto man as he is a man, endowed with such & such properties."<sup>72</sup> If enthusiasm originates physically, contact with those afflicted with the disease would pose an infectious threat—even if one were to come into contact with English sectarians of the 1650's. Taking this even further, Casaubon explicitly draws an analogy between anomalous religious behaviour and deadly contagion: "For as in the case of the pestilence incidentall unto men,

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74. Given that Quakers came under attack by Presbyterians and even some sectarians throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, Casaubon's exposition of Quaker enthusiasm would not have affronted members of any hegemony.

<sup>70</sup> Paul J. Korshin notes that "[a]s a piece of Anglican apologetics, the *Treatise* is muted, for Casaubon could not jeopardize his own position by a direct attack. The work might easily have been considered as helpful to and protective of the moderate Puritan position which Cromwell supported" (*Ibid.*, p. xvii).

<sup>71</sup> Korshin, *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

we do not say that it is supernaturall, but naturall unto man to be infected . . . ”<sup>73</sup>

Again, the statement may be applied to contemporary enthusiasts of England—after all, uncontrolled doctrinal errantry for Casaubon was “the disease of the times, reigning in all places. New Sects: new religions: new philosophie: new methods: all new, till all be lost.”<sup>74</sup>

If, as it now seems to be, that dissenting zealots are capable of communicating inspired delusion to others, this process becomes much more catastrophic when those carrying this irreligious infection actively seek to convert others to their misguided theology. Sharing the notion with Burton, Milton and More that reading inflammatory material runs the risk of doctrinal contamination, Casaubon colorfully portrays as irresistibly provocative the writings of Plato, “whom no man (in some principall passages) can read in his own language, without some passion tending to Enthusiasme . . . ”<sup>75</sup> Plato’s precepts are appealing not only to “. . . Heathens onely, but some also that made profession of Christianity,”<sup>76</sup> the latter of whom stand to wreak havoc upon orthodoxy after having come into contact with the philosopher’s most impassioned passages:

And if his Philosophy hath been a great advantage to Christianity, as some ancient Fathers have judged: yet of Christians it hath many Hereticks; and is to this day the common refuge of contemplative men, whether Christians, or others, that have run themselves besides their wits: who also have not wanted Disciples,

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

studious and ambitious to vent and propagate the abortive fruits of  
such depraved phansies, unto others.<sup>77</sup>

Seeking proselytes beyond oneself seems to be symptomatic of having  
contracted the virus of enthusiasm, just as Swift's Jack via an aerial  
transmission of his aptly named Aeolism draws others into his rampant  
nonconformity.<sup>78</sup>

Casaubon conservatively limits any direct reference to sectarians of  
contemporary England (other than Quakers) in his supporting examples;  
necessary references are kept at a safe remove, both chronologically and  
geographically. Discussing the apparent acceptance of an inordinately high  
number of miracles by the mediaeval Welsh ecclesiastic and historian Gerald de  
Barri (c. 1146-c. 1223), Casaubon passes judgement on those of his day who  
would be equally gullible: "It appeareth by the many Miracles wherewith he hath  
stuffed his *Itinerarium*, that he was a man of very easie belief: which was the  
epidemicall disease of those times of Ignorance, when all Piety almost consisted  
in telling and making of Miracles."<sup>79</sup> In the following paragraph, Casaubon  
spotlights German Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, zealots which might  
easily be taken by a seventeenth-century reader in England to double for those  
in their immediate proximity. Nothing, Casaubon declares, is "more strange,  
then what *Germany* hath seen, and any other Countrey may, where

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>78</sup> Casaubon's zealots who "vent and propagate" their beliefs are also for the  
Presbyterian Thomas Edwards agents of contagion: "Heresies and errours,  
spread sooner, further, and more incurably; yea, take and infect them, whom  
corrupt manners could not prevail with; in broaching and maintaining heresies,  
men vent their parts, learning, get a name and fame by them . . ." (*Gangraena:  
Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies  
and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in  
England in these four last years*, London: Ralph Smith, 1646), p. 152.

Anabaptisticall Enthusiasts are tolerated, and from toleration come in time to prevail and rule."<sup>80</sup>

While seemingly satisfied "not [to] make a question of it to dispute it," Casaubon nonetheless raises a cry of alarm over the prospect of influential enthusiasm spreading to epidemic proportions:

... I desire onely to propose it, that learned Naturalists and Physicians may (if they please) consider of it; Whether it be probable or possible, that naturall Ecstasies and Enthusiasms, such as proceed from naturall causes merely, should be contagious: though not contagious in the same manner as the Plague, or the Pox is; yet contagious in their kind.<sup>81</sup>

By comparing the spread of religious extremism most nearly to the spread of infectious disease, Casaubon illuminates his repeated usage elsewhere of this figurative association by now stipulating that "contagion" may legitimately apply to heretical zeal: "I would onely suppose, that all diseases that are contagious, are not contagious in the same manner."<sup>82</sup>

Roaming farther afield in time and space, Casaubon freely yokes enthusiasm and contagion in giving an account of the fourth-century Mesopotamian sectarians, the Messalians—also known as the Euchites—who "were wont to pray themselves into raptures and ecstasies . . ."<sup>83</sup> Inasmuch as Casaubon seems to be reluctant elsewhere to make a direct association between irreligion and infection, here he again does so explicitly:

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<sup>79</sup> *A Treatise concerning Enthusiasme*, p. 132.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

But that I have here to say of them is, that whereas this strange Sect (as most others) began by a few; it did in time so spread and prevail, that whole Monasteries, whole Towns, and almost Countries were infected with it. Neither could any other cure be found, but absolute destruction.<sup>84</sup>

Acutely sensitive to the mechanics of what amounts to an epidemiological transmission of heretical doctrine, Casaubon's apparent endorsement of the most severe remedy to be taken—extermination of the infectious infidels—may be justified in preserving the rest of the population from the deadly contagion of heterodoxy.<sup>85</sup>

In elsewhere attacking as an epidemic menace that which he terms "rhetorical enthusiasm," Casaubon denounces in virtually the same breath the Silesian Reformation theologian Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490-1561) and English fanatic William Hacket (executed in 1591), as notorious practitioners of contagious proselytization via rhetorical manipulation. Schwenckfeld, according to Casaubon, masterfully employed rhetorical techniques to pass himself off as genuinely inspired and steadily enlisted followers who were exposed to his infectious beliefs—a process which might ultimately endanger Christianity: "The ignorance of this advantage of nature, being unhappily mistaken for true

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>85</sup> The motivation of such attacks on enthusiasm throughout this period is offered by Heyd: "Regarding it as a principal threat to the social and political order, the critics of "enthusiasm," from Robert Burton to the eighteenth-century opponents of the French prophets, proceeded to distinguish carefully between true inspiration and a false one, between the natural realm and the truly supernatural," in "The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Towards an Integrative Approach," *The Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981), p. 259.

Christian *Zeal*, hath been the occasion of much mischief in the world, and a great stumbling-block to simple people, to draw them into the contagion of pernicious Heresies."<sup>86</sup> The example given of such spiritual contamination is that of Schwenkfeld, "a notorious arch-Heretick in *Germany*, the father of many Sects; who among other extravagancies, held blasphemous opinions concerning the Scriptures."<sup>87</sup>

Hacket, executed for denying that Queen Elizabeth was the queen of England and for defacing one of her portraits, is worthy of inclusion in Casaubon's gallery of contagious enthusiasts:

But of blasphemous *Hacket*, . . . it is observed by many, that he was so ardent in his devotions, that he would ravish all that heard him: whereof some also he infected with the venome of his opinions, with no other engine, but that very charm of his ardent praying.<sup>88</sup>

Ironically, Casaubon seems to be unwittingly exalting the treasonous zealot in that Casaubon's language displays something of the adoration which Hacket craftily inspired in his followers nearly seventy years before. According to Paul J. Korshin, Casaubon had become something of an expert himself in the mechanics of doctrinal dissent and its concomitant persecution—merited or otherwise:

Casaubon . . . must have been thoroughly acquainted, often through personal experience, with manifestations of enthusiasm, whether in England, or on the Continent, where his more famous

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<sup>86</sup> *A Treatise*, p. 278.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

father suffered no small persecution for his Calvinist beliefs at the hands of the Jesuits and other fanatical Roman Catholics in France.<sup>89</sup>

Thus Casaubon arraigns, in only a thinly veiled fashion, those extreme Calvinists in England who have been propagating intemperate zeal—nonconformists who are kindred in some way to those from whom Casaubon is himself descended: “[T]he *Treatise* . . . was the first effort by an Anglican to attempt a thorough examination of the religious zeal of English Puritanism . . . ,”<sup>90</sup> and in characterizing enthusiasts as agents of infectious irreligion, Casaubon continues this line of discussion for others to follow.

Although the Cambridge Platonist More “might seem an unlikely man to have written what is perhaps the best of the many seventeenth-century attacks on enthusiasm,”<sup>91</sup> his having done so becomes less surprising when it is considered that he had the same apologetic motivation that drove Casaubon in the previous year to define the boundaries of orthodox belief: “Since [More] had only contempt for those dissenting sects that would abandon reason for the easy certitude of ‘inner light,’ he was understandably anxious to dissociate his position from theirs.”<sup>92</sup> Having defended Anglicanism from the innovative threat of atheism in his *An Antidote against Atheism* (1653), More now directs his

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>90</sup> Korshin, *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>91</sup> Michael V. DePorte, ed., *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656, 1662; Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1966), p. i.

<sup>92</sup> DePorte, *Ibid.*, p. i. George Williamson declares that the publication of these two works by Casaubon and More indicates that “hostility toward Enthusiasm then became quite general,” in “The Restoration Revolt Against Enthusiasm,” *Studies in Philology*, 30 (1933), p. 582. Ironically, such a characterization allows for the reaction against enthusiasm as a sort of epidemic phenomenon.



attention to the continually burgeoning peril of enthusiasm, and in doing so, More follows the lead of Burton, Cleveland and Casaubon in treating it as a medical condition:

Wherefore there being that *near alliance and mutuall correspondence* betwixt these two enormous distempers of the Mind, *Atheism* and *Enthusiasme*; I hold it very suitable and convenient, having treated of the former, to adde this brief Discourse of the *Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cure* of this latter Disease.<sup>93</sup>

In keeping with his ministerial obligation to protect the faithful from contagious irreligion, More warns readers to shun writings containing potentially infectious affirmations of enthusiastic madness: "... [A] good man and a true Christian may be easily carried away into an approbation of them without any infection by them (as not minding what they imply or drive at) or yet any defection from the main Principles of Christianity."<sup>94</sup> Here, as noted by Michael V. DePorte, More offers a refinement of the notion of enthusiasm as contagion, by specifying that the assent of a potential convert is required for a full-scale infection to take hold: "... [T]hough the immediate cause of enthusiasm is physiological, a man is still to blame for allowing himself to become melancholy."<sup>95</sup>

As does Casaubon, More finds fault with "that Sect they call *Quakers*, who undoubtedly are the most *Melancholy Sect* that ever was yet in the world,"

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27. DePorte maintains that More contributed to the lasting connection between enthusiasm and madness: "By associating enthusiasm with unrestrained imagination, and depicting the enthusiast as mad, More helped set the pattern for attacks on Dissenters . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. vi).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iv-v.

for representing epileptic fits as divine visitations—yet More also draws the line here with regard to denigrating seventeenth-century English nonconformists. And just as does Casaubon, More relies in part on the sympathetic reader to deduce the applicability of the irreligion-infection metaphor from the textual allusions to foreign enthusiasts of earlier periods. On the one hand, More cites Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) as an atheist and “great boaster of Europe” who subjected the world to his “unbridled Imagination and bold and confident obtrusion of his uncouth and supine inventions.”<sup>96</sup> While More seems to make a concession in admitting that “[t]here is some *affectation of Religion* . . . in his Writings . . .,” he has detected “farre more in his Followers, who conceive themselves taught of God; when I plainly discern, their Brains are merely heated and infected by this strong spirit of *Phantastrie* that breaths in *Paracelsus* his Books.”<sup>97</sup> Again, the written word is potentially as infectious as the spoken word.

Whereas More draws analogies between atheism, enthusiasm and contagion, Samuel Parker does so between Rosicrucianism, enthusiasm and infection in *A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophie*. Praising the various attacks made on the treatises of hermetic philosophy of Thomas Vaughan, the vigorous interlocutor of Parker who had translated the Rosicrucian manifestos in 1653, Parker states that “tis more fitting that these *Pedantick Cheats* [Vaughan and his occultist associates] were chastised by the Publique Rods, in that they directly Poison mens minds, and dispose them to the

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

wildest and most *Enthusiastick Fanaticisme* . . . ”<sup>98</sup> Parker then contends that “there is so much Affinity between *Rosi-Crucianisme* and *Enthusiasme*, that whoever entertains the one, he may upon the same reason embrace the other . . . ,”<sup>99</sup> and this assertion prepares the reader for the conclusion of the syllogism. After establishing that the Rosicrucian order is the equivalent of misguided zeal, Parker forcefully wields the figurative weapon so effectively employed by his predecessors—ironically by using faulty logic: “And what Pestilential Influences the Genius of *Enthusiasme* or opinionative Zeal has upon the Publick Peace, is so evident from Experience, that it needes not be prov’d from Reason.”<sup>100</sup>

Just as Parker is not constrained to having to make an oblique reference to infectious sectarianism, Samuel Butler was also free to analogize directly against extreme Puritanism in drafting his posthumously published characters between 1667 and 1669.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Charles W. Daves identifies in Butler’s *Characters* the fullest development of what he describes as “the controversial or polemic or pamphlet Character,” which developed out of the earlier seventeenth-century models of the Theophrastan character written by Joseph Hall, Sir Thomas Overbury and John Earle.<sup>102</sup> And while it must be mentioned

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<sup>98</sup> *A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophie* (Oxford: Richard Davis, 1666), pp. 75-76.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76. Williamson, in discussing this quotation, recognizes an expansive correlation between enthusiasm and its “Pestilential Influences,” and social (and religious) stability: “As the social consequences of Enthusiasm were felt by all, so an anti-enthusiastic temper and a desire for peace are connected here as they are fifty years later . . . ,” (*Op. cit.*, p. 592).

<sup>101</sup> Charles W. Daves accepts the statement of Robert Thyer, the first publisher of the *Characters* in 1759, that they “had been written largely between 1667 and 1669,” in *Samuel Butler: Characters* (Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Hall’s collection of characters in *Characters of Virtue and Vices* (1608) is followed by the group of Overbury’s first published as an attachment to

that in Ricardo Quintana's estimation Butler's *Hudibras* "remained the classic anti-Puritan statement throughout much of the eighteenth century,"<sup>103</sup> in none of the three parts of the poem does Butler employ the irreligion-infection metaphor as one might expect he would. Out of the dozen or so anti-Puritan characters in Butler's collection of about 200, only that of "A Silenc'd Presbyterian" does involve such an association—and in this depiction may be found the crowning example (prior to Swift's in *A Tale of a Tub*) of the irreligion-infection metaphor as applied to Presbyterians.

To begin with, Butler describes his extreme Calvinist as "pernicious to the government, till his tongue was bound to the peace, and good behaviour . . ." <sup>104</sup> So delimited, the resourceful but corruptive Presbyterian "breaks the king's laws, as he does God's, in private," suggesting that he "makes proselites as coyners do false money, in hugger-mugger."<sup>105</sup> However, as Swift was to discover a generation later, Presbyterians are not secretive enough to remain obscure and impotent: "His gifts are found to be contagious, and so are shut up, that they may not infect others,"<sup>106</sup> but it is just such prohibition which paradoxically makes his brand of Calvinism that much more enticing to potential converts: "His doctrine is a prohibited commodity, and seiz'd upon as unlawful. He finds there is more to be got in dealing in prohibited commodities, than such

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his poem *A Wife* (1614), and by Earle's *Micro-cosmography* (1628). More contemporary influences on Butler may have been the polemic characters of Richard Flecknoe's *Enigmaticall Characters* (1658) and Cleveland's three long characters published in 1645, 1649 and 1654.

<sup>103</sup> "Samuel Butler: A Restoration Figure in a Modern Light," in *English Literary History*, 18 (1951), p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> *Characters*, p. 312.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

as are allow'd, and therefore prefers that way of traffic before all others."<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps Butler's simultaneous attraction and repulsion to Calvinism herein displayed may be considered an additional indication of the extent to which he still considered Presbyterianism to be the greatest threat to Anglicanism as it shared in common a foundation of church government,<sup>108</sup> a disdain shared almost equally by, strangely enough, both Milton and Swift, who both specifically identify Presbyterianism as a pestilential phenomenon to be treated as such.

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>108</sup> Quintana places Butler's "religious position . . . between the extremes of Puritanism and Roman Catholicism" ("Samuel Butler: A Restoration Figure in a Modern Light," in *English Literary History*, 18, 1951, p. 13), and "more particularly, of English Protestantism as expounded by the Anglican rationalists of the post-Restoration" (p. 17).

*Catholicism, Organized Protestantism and Milton's Progressive*

*Application of the Conformity-Contagion Metaphor*

Beginning with Milton's earliest prose works written at Cambridge and ending with his last prose work concerning doctrinal controversy published in the year before his death, the poet and pamphleteer deftly employs the metaphor of infection and contagion in characterizing, ultimately, any established system of Christianity as a hazardous menace threatening to spread with disastrous consequences. Not surprisingly, Catholicism and Anglicanism are dealt severe rhetorical blows throughout Milton's oeuvre, only giving way in their being vehemently branded as pestilential perils, to Presbyterianism, toward which Milton inclined during his antiprelatical phase but which for much of his career posed an epidemic risk to his idealizing and highly individualized Puritanism. A broad metaphorical linkage between irreligion and infection surfaces in one of Milton's academic exercises, Prolusion VII, written during his university career (1625-32). This metaphorical phenomenon is also evident in the masque *Comus* (1634) and powerfully so in his early anticlerical pastoral elegy *Lycidas* (1637). As one would expect, all five of Milton's antiprelatical pamphlets, *Of Reformation* (1641), *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (1641), *Animadversions* (1641), *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642), and *An Apology against a Pamphlet* (1642), abound with vibrant analogies between epidemic and episcopacy. That connection forcefully drawn between plague and prelacy in *Lycidas*—albeit in a pastoral setting—informs the rest of Milton's corpus, especially the early ecclesiastical tracts and *Areopagitica* (1644), his treatise arguing against prior censorship of publications—which in itself may be considered a form of undesirable prophylaxis.

Interwoven with Milton's attacks in *Eikonoklastes* (1649) on King Charles I's posthumous defence of the monarchy considered now to be principally ghost-written by his chaplain John Gauden, is a commentary upon "the infections of Arian and Pelagian Heresies."<sup>1</sup> As the restoration of monarchy and episcopacy loomed on the horizon, Milton continued to employ this metaphor yoking corrupt religion and contagion in works characterized by an increasing gravity—but not by a decline in the utility of this particular similitude: *A Treatise of Civil Power* (1659) and both editions of *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660). Reworking material from St Bede in *The History of Britain* (1670), Milton reinforces an infection metaphor used to describe heretical Pelagianism spreading throughout the realm. Considering Milton's pervasive usage elsewhere of the irreligion-infection metaphor, Satan may be viewed as an infectious agent of apostasy in *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674); and in Milton's final contribution to doctrinal controversy, *Of True Religion, Haeresie, Schism, Toleration* (1673), Catholicism is deemed a judgement tantamount to pestilence, thus bringing him full circle to his initial disparagement of scholasticism made while at Cambridge. Also considering that Milton and his contemporaries were perennially subject to contraction of the deadly plague virus, the frequency and consistency with which he (and others) labelled anathematized doctrine as mortally infectious indicates the extent of his immersion in a seventeenth-century literary phenomenon: the metaphorical onslaught—via the vehicle of contagion—on any given strain of Christianity deemed irreligious from that author's doctrinal perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. by Don M. Wolfe and others, 8 vols, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953-82, III, 507.

Setting the stage for Milton's lifelong antiseptic antipathy toward Catholicism—later to be directed also against Anglicanism and Presbyterianism—was the schism between John Milton, father of the poet, and the poet's Catholic grandfather, Richard Milton, who, ironically, "was elected a churchwarden of the Anglican parish" in 1582, when the elder John Milton was about 20 years old.<sup>2</sup> William Riley Parker observes that such a distinction within the Church of England "brought considerable embarrassment" to Richard Milton, already resentful of the Reformation undertaken in England by King Henry VIII, who was reigning monarch at his birth: "Like countless others who held fast to the only true religion, Richard conformed outwardly to the communion of the heretical Church of England until events combined to force his recusancy."<sup>3</sup> Later in 1582, Richard Milton was excommunicated "and twice in the year 1601 he was fined sixty pounds for three months of non-attendance at his parish church."<sup>4</sup> At some point during his childhood, the father of the poet was, in the effort to conform to the Anglican heterodoxy, "exposed to the Protestant heresy in the parish church" and "eventually . . . poisoned by the hellish attitudes of this new and perverse England."<sup>5</sup> Thus the "renegade Milton"—a term which would become particularly apt for his own individualistic

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<sup>2</sup> William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, rev. edn, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), I, 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4. Significantly, Parker's language supports a view that Milton's father was exposed to Protestantism as one would be to an infectious disease—at least from the standpoint of Richard Milton.



son—came to London, in Parker's words, "having fled Egypt for the Promised Land . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Fulfilment of that future promise identified by Parker manifested itself especially in the birth of the poet in 1608, at a time when Puritanism still maintained a legitimate if not sanctioned presence within the Church of England. Milton was baptized as an Anglican in his parish church, All Hallows in Bread Street, and his "devout, middle-aged parents . . . [g]ratefully . . . dedicated their child to God's ministry."<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of his parents, Milton's anticipated priestly service would only further serve to shelter Protestants like themselves from the malevolent and potentially infectious influence of Roman Catholicism:

They knew that the Lord needed devoted servants; England had been a sinful land since the turn of the century, and the divine anger had been heavy upon them all. Popish idolatry, the sin most offensive in God's eyes, was on the increase; and every place, country and city alike, was horribly defiled.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with such a perceived mission to erect a *cordon sanitaire* against Catholicism, Milton's indoctrination into Christianity was made under the aegis of Richard Stock, the curate of All Hallows, whose "diatribes against Roman Catholicism left their impression" and whose "... Sunday sermons, ...

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 5. Parker also notes that Milton's father, who "was born at a time of plague," journeyed to London to make his fortune "at another time of fearful plague" (*Ibid.*, I, 4-5), thus indicating that physical pestilence not only marked the life of the poet, but also may have considerably influenced his father's.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 6. Milton in *Of True Religion*, his last polemic pamphlet on doctrinal controversy, labels Catholicism as "the worst of superstitions, and the heaviest

triweekly catechisms, [and] . . . ministerial visits to the Milton home all played an important part in making John a normal, God-fearing, Jesuit-hating, Bible-reading Christian."<sup>9</sup> Stock, in Parker's language which glances at the notion of prophylaxis, was "a Puritan, labouring within the Church of England to purify it, seeking to regain an apostolic simplicity of worship and emphasizing the essential inwardness of religious experience, and this view young Milton thoroughly absorbed."<sup>10</sup>

Milton's lifelong animus toward Catholicism, continually linked metaphorically in his prose and poetry with contagion, continued to develop after his admission to Christ's College, Cambridge, in February 1625, in a year in which a recrudescence of plague in London in April instilled uneasiness at Cambridge: "The plague spread; undergraduates like Milton did not know whether to remain in Cambridge or hurry to their homes."<sup>11</sup> The London plague outbreak claimed at least 35,000 lives, and while no cases were reported at Cambridge, university officials cancelled administrative functions for fear of the infection.<sup>12</sup> On 1 August, "all sermons and other public occasions at the University were discontinued," eventualities which would have affected Milton one way or another.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the cessation of Anglican preaching—various manifestations of which would be likened by Milton later to infectious activity—was occasioned by physical pestilence. Mention of this epidemic surfaces in "Elegia Tertia" ("On the Death of the Bishop of Winchester"), in

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of all Gods Judgements," a divine punishment not unlike the afflictions of "Pestilence, Fire, Sword, or Famin, . . ." (*Complete Prose Works*, VIII, 439-40).

<sup>9</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 29.

<sup>12</sup> David Masson, *The Life of John Milton*, I, 153.

which Milton laments the death of Lancelot Andrewes in the autumn of 1626:

"Many sorrows were besetting my spirit, when, lo, suddenly there arose a vision of the baneful destruction which Libitina wrought upon English soil . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Although Parker observes with incisive scepticism that "[w]hen great ones [such as Andrewes and numerous others elegized by Milton] die, poets in search of subjects weep easily," he qualifies this somewhat in concluding that "Milton was [not] unmoved by the ravages of death in 1626."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in referring specifically to the continual threat of pestilence throughout Milton's Cambridge years, Parker adds that "every visit of the plague to London meant a terrible threat to Milton's family."<sup>16</sup>

Taking into account that Milton's university experience was palpably affected by pestilential endangerment and that any plague outbreak held the potential to swiftly deliver mortal punishment, those instances in which Milton employs the infection metaphor against rival doctrines should be taken all the more seriously. References to plague, pestilence, contagion, infection and even corruption, permeate Milton's discourse beginning as early as during his Cambridge studies, although at first only obliquely. The first identifiable usage of such a figurative application occurs in his final academic exercise at Cambridge,

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<sup>13</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Elegia Tertia*, 3, trans. by Merritt Hughes, *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 22. The Latin phrase *funestæ cladis imago* is translated as "a picture of the deadly carnage" by Helen Darbishire, *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958; repr. 1961), p. 583). Hughes notes that "*Libitina*, an ancient Italian goddess of corpses, symbolizes the plague that raged severely in 1625-26 in London" (*Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 22n). Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg translate the phrase as "the phantom of the deadly plague" in *The Oxford Authors: John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 35.

*Oratio pro Arte*. Also known as Prolusion VII, the oration is described by Parker as “a passionate, intensely personal expression of the ardour for learning which characterizes Renaissance humanism at its peak” in which Milton “damns the whole Cambridge system of education.”<sup>17</sup> Although technically an orthodox Anglican at least up until graduating with M.A. honours in 1632,<sup>18</sup> Milton in this culminating speech displays signs of an anti-authoritarian (and inherently anti-Anglican) fervour that would characterize his later tracts.

In the self-aggrandizing attack on vacuous grammar and rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, mathematics and natural science, Milton proposes that “preserving the heavenly vigor of the mind pure and unharmed from all contagion and defilement,”<sup>19</sup> is essential to making the most of one’s educational experience. In Milton’s formula, that which is divine is that which remains free from the

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 109. Thomas N. Corns dissents from the practice of detecting in the academic exercises any ideological bases of Milton’s later polemical arguments in *John Milton: The Prose Works* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> As did all other M.A. graduates, Milton “signed the graduation-book in the presence of the Registrar, thereby subscribing (as he had done before, on receiving the B.A. degree) to the three Articles of Religion enjoined in the thirty-sixth of the ecclesiastical canons of 1603-04. This condition of graduation, a routine matter since about 1624, meant acknowledging the liturgy and doctrines of the Church of England, and the royal supremacy in all matters” (Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 113).

<sup>19</sup> *The Works of John Milton*, ed. by Frank A. Patterson and others, 18 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-38), XII, 275. Bromley Smith, translator of the Columbia edition of Milton’s works, adheres more closely etymologically to the Latin *contagione* (*Ibid.*, p. 274) than does Phyllis B. Tillyard: “. . . keeping the divine vigour of our minds unstained and uncontaminated by any *impurity* or pollution . . .” (*Complete Prose Works*, I, 300); or Merritt Hughes: “keeping the heavenly powers of the mind clean and unstained from all *filth* and pollution . . .” (*Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 627). Considering the atmosphere in which Milton penned this passage, *contagione* would evoke a sharp reaction from his scholarly auditors. This quotation also prefigures the ontological relationship between body and spirit explored in *Comus*.

infectious "primary impulses of the ungovernable age."<sup>20</sup> After vilifying grammar and rhetoric (laden with "despicable quibbles") and logic ("how much foolishness there is in reason!"), Milton fulminates against fallacious metaphysics:

What am I to say of that branch of learning which the Peripatetics call metaphysics? It is not, as the authority of great men would have me believe, an exceedingly rich Art; it is, I say, not an Art at all, but a sinister rock, a Lernian bog of fallacies, devised to cause shipwreck and pestilence.<sup>21</sup>

By invoking the affliction of pestilence, Milton continues his delineation of the catalogue of "wounds of gowned Ignorance"<sup>22</sup> in his frontal assault on scholasticism and thereby upon the orthodoxy of the university curriculum. Milton then denigrates the next subject of study: "[T]his same monkish disease has already infected natural philosophy to a considerable extent"<sup>23</sup> and the "empty little glory of demonstrations infests mathematics."<sup>24</sup> Douglas Bush

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<sup>20</sup> Trans. by Smith, *The Works of John Milton*, XII, 275. Tillyard translates *primos ferocientis ætatis impetus* as the "first impulses of headstrong youth" (*Complete Prose Works*, I, 300). Individuals espousing contagious influence, considered in this perspective, may be seen as irreligionists on a moral plane.

<sup>21</sup> Trans. by Tillyard, *Complete Prose Works*, I, 301. Tillyard's translation follows more closely in terms of etymology the phrase *naufragium & pestem*; others are "shipwreck and destruction" (trans. by Smith, *The Works of John Milton*, XII, 277) and "shipwreck and ruin" (trans. by Hughes, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 627).

<sup>22</sup> Trans. by Smith, *The Works of John Milton*, XII, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Trans. by Tillyard, *Complete Prose Works*, I, 301. Smith's translation of the passage adheres more literally to the Latin: "This same itch of the hoods has also spread widely into natural philosophy" (*The Works of John Milton*, XII, 277). Hughes's translation, as does Tillyard's, links contagious benightedness overtly to Catholicism: "This is the disease for whose spread even into natural philosophy the monks were responsible far and wide" (*Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 627).

<sup>24</sup> Trans. by Smith, *The Works of John Milton*, XII, 277.

suggests that this antagonism to the traditional university curriculum, which was widespread among Puritans of the period, derives from a concern for preventing contamination of the faith : "One motive [of this antipathy], a logical if extreme development of Protestantism, was hostility to theological , scholastic and classical learning as the corrupter of the simple Gospel and the religion of the spirit."<sup>25</sup>

After earning his B.A. in 1629, Milton was in the early stages of his M.A. degree at the university in 1630 when another plague epidemic struck England and this time reached Cambridge, causing the deaths of 347 residents between April 1630 and January 1631.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in April, "the plague spread with fearful rapidity in Cambridge; and during the rest of the year that town seemed to be its favourite encampment."<sup>27</sup> This prompted an exodus of faculty and students, and among them, presumably, was Milton:

Before the end of the same month most of the Colleges were formally broken up, masters, fellows, and students flying from Cambridge as from a doomed place. All University exercises and meetings proper to the Easter term were adjourned to the following session.<sup>28</sup>

Even if Milton were not in Cambridge during the summer months, he would nonetheless have heard enough from others who remained behind throughout the epidemic to leave a lasting impression: "To understand the terror, . . . one must imagine the state of the town during the summer months, when the cases

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<sup>25</sup> *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century: 1600-1660*, 2nd rev edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Masson, *op. cit.*, I, 234.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 233.

were most numerous, the unusually deserted streets, the colleges all locked up, and, most fearful of all, the brown and white tents on the adjacent commons, whither the plague-patients were removed."<sup>29</sup>

Although Parker observes that "Milton's whereabouts during most of the year 1630 are a mystery," he concludes that he wrote several poems during the crisis, among them the Easter poem "The Passion," in which the lament for Christ in the concluding conceit of the unfinished poem might echo grieving over the ravages of the most recent plague epidemic.<sup>30</sup> With the dissipation of the infectious episode toward the end of 1630, Milton may have been among the returning students in November influenced by the dire experience: "Whenever he returned, his discovery of the ravages of the plague in Cambridge must have been sobering. While he had been away, the academic community had known acute distress, and tragedy, and heroism."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps in an antipodally extreme reaction to the morbid calamity of the previous year, Milton sought comic relief in drafting two relentlessly punning poems on the January 1631 death of Thomas Hobson, the university carrier: "On the University Carrier who sickn'd in the time of his vacancy, being forbid to go to *London*, by reason of the Plague"

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 234.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Edward S. Le Comte, in *A Milton Dictionary* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), acknowledges that although "[t]he Crucifixion was not a subject [Milton] ever kindled to," the final conceit of the poem nonetheless outclasses the others in the poem (p. 243): "And I (for grief is easily beguil'd) / Might think th'infection of my sorrows loud / Had got a race of mourners on some pregnant cloud" ("The Passion," 54-56). A.S.P. Woodhouse glosses the lines succinctly: "... [T]he poet's lament had so infected and transformed the cloud's yet unborn offspring that he might be said to have begotten them ..." (*A Variorum Commentary*, II, 161). Milton may have harboured such sympathetic sentiments for victims of the physical infection overshadowing university life that year.

<sup>31</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 85.

and "Another on the Same" (1631).<sup>32</sup> Treating in such a light-hearted manner Hobson's death—presumably occasioned by the inactivity of his enforced retirement ("vacancy") and not directly resulting from infection—may also indicate the impact the plague outbreak had on Milton.

The intensity of emotions such as these—if Milton had felt them and been prompted to write his elegies and epitaphs while at Cambridge—gradually began to be transferred to his increasing intolerance of prelacy. Apart from the Puritanical influence Milton derived from his childhood minister Stock and his Presbyterian tutor and Smectymnuus co-author Thomas Young, he further developed anti-episcopal beliefs while at Cambridge—perhaps even through such an influential medium as the sermon delivered at nearby Trinity church: "The University sermon was preached at the same hour at Great St. Mary's, but at Trinity one could hear eloquent exposition of Calvinistic doctrine by the ablest of Puritan divines, and many students as well as townsfolk attended."<sup>33</sup> Through the latter half of Milton's period of study at Cambridge and his reclusive scholarship at Hammersmith and Horton between 1632 and 1638, his doctrinal sensitization against Anglicanism continued to intensify:

... Milton with every year of his intellectual growth found himself more hostile to the Church of England, in which in his boyhood he had planned to take orders. The strong Puritan influences of his

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<sup>32</sup> Roy Flannagan in *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), astutely suggests that the rampant paronomasia of "Another on the Same" may be seen as a poetic infection: "The poem, like the plague-ridden city of London, may suffer from the contagion of puns that infest it . . ." (p. 63).

<sup>33</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 42.



youth made him inevitably, then, an enemy of the prelates and a citizen zealous for secular as well as religious reformation.<sup>34</sup>

However, Milton's unbounded enthusiasm for tearing down the episcopal infrastructure was, nonetheless, slower to develop than in contemporary dissenting pamphleteers already engaging with the anti-Puritan policies of Archbishop William Laud, such as William Prynne, Henry Burton, John Bastwick and John Lilburne—especially given that Milton was relatively isolated in tranquil Horton.<sup>35</sup>

Just as Milton was steeping himself in the annals of early Christianity during these years of intellectual isolation, the conflicts between Puritans and Episcopalians continued to swell to catastrophic proportion, providing an immediate context for application of the historical material into which he delved so deeply:

His newly acquired knowledge of the past increased his awareness of present corruption in the Church, and roused his ire toward modern prelacy, which imitated the senseless ceremonies of antiquity . . . However busy with his studies at Horton, Milton could not fail to notice a recent aggravation of episcopal tyranny. More and more stringent measures were being taken against nonconformists of all sorts.<sup>36</sup>

Ironically, given that the prelacy would be cast by antagonists throughout the seventeenth century in a pestilential light, Laud's tight-fisted scheme of eliminating the spread of nonconformist activity may be seen as the equivalent

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<sup>34</sup> Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, I, 108.

<sup>35</sup> Wolfe, *Ibid.*, I, 107-08.

of a form of doctrinal *cordon sanitaire* within which orthodoxy would remain pure and uncorrupted by contagious heterodoxy.<sup>37</sup>

It is precisely this view of Anglicanism that Claude Saumaise (Salmasius), classical scholar and prose antagonist of Milton, describes in *Defensio Regia Pro Carolo I*, the 1649 Latin apology for Charles I. Saumaise implies that the retention of bishops after England's Reformation effectively functioned as disease control agents and prevented the further spread of infectious Puritanism. As long as episcopacy maintained its protective doctrinal barrier, "a thousand pestilent sects and heresies" were inhibited from full-scale proliferation—and Saumaise pinpoints Independents, Milton's co-religionists, and Brownists, as the most noxious examples.<sup>38</sup> Although Saumaise's widely distributed publication was "less insidious in its effects in England than the *Eikon Basilike*," the pamphlet "was even more dangerous to the Commonwealth in its international relations."<sup>39</sup> In Milton's 1651 response, *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, he is quick to brand Saumaise as a "tricky turncoat" for having advocated only four years before *Defensio Regia* the abolishment of episcopacy in nations which had eliminated the papacy. To discredit Saumaise, Milton quotes extensively from the French scholar's earlier tract, *Librorum de Primatu*

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<sup>36</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 151.

<sup>37</sup> George Macaulay Trevelyan's analysis of Laud's repression of Puritanism comprehends an epidemiological perspective: "The plan adopted by Laud was to stop up every hole through which Puritan feeling could find vent in the press, the pulpit, the influence of the clergyman, the legal services of the Church, or the illegal worship of conventicles" (*England Under the Stuarts*, p. 139).

<sup>38</sup> *Defensio Regia Pro Carolo I ad Serenissimum Magnae Britannia Regem Carolum II Filium natu majorem, Heredem & Successorem legitimum, Sumptibus Regiis* (1649), p. 4. The Latin original of the phrase is "*mille pestiferæ sectæ & hæreses*."

<sup>39</sup> James Holly Hanford, *A Milton Handbook*, 4th edn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), p. 109.

*Papae* (1645), wherein Saumaise alleges that episcopal church government caused contagious heterodoxy to be communicated epidemiologically:

... from Episcopacy were introduced into the church evils far worse than the schisms which were once feared: the disease which from that source spread through the churches plagued the whole body of the church with a wretched tyranny and even subjugated rulers and monarchs themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Milton takes particular offence and retorts sarcastically:

The very same Episcopacy he now upholds and recommends by use of the identical proofs and reasonings which in that former volume he had thoroughly exposed: bishops are now of course necessary and must by all means be kept, to prevent the burgeoning in England of a thousand pestilent sects and doctrines!<sup>41</sup>

Part of the vehemence with which Milton responds to Salmasius may be attributed to his having been described in pestilential terms by Saumaise—certainly by 1651 Milton had clearly demonstrated proficiency in applying this infection metaphor in condemning Anglicanism and Presbyterianism as contagious doctrines.

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<sup>40</sup> Trans. by Donald C. Mackenzie, in *Complete Prose Works*, IV, 314. Samuel Lee Wolff translates Milton's rendering of Saumaise as follows: "[I]n Episcopacy there was brought into the church an evil much greater than those schisms which used to be feared before: the plague which came out of it into the church struck down the whole body of the church beneath a vile despotism . . .," in *The Works of John Milton*, VII, 25-27.

<sup>41</sup> *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, trans. by Mackenzie, *Complete Prose Works*, IV, 315.

Curiously enough, shades of this metaphorical relationship seem to emerge in *Comus*, the occasional dramatic entertainment Milton drafted while in his first period of "studious retirement" at Hammersmith,<sup>42</sup> a work described paradoxically as a "Puritan masque" steeped in the same nonconformist convictions as *Lycidas*.<sup>43</sup> If, as Arthur E. Barker argues, Milton's abhorrence of Anglicanism becomes crystallized in his depiction of *Comus*, an early manifestation of episcopacy; and in the *Lady*, the virtuous bulwark of Puritanism; Milton makes his first full-blown use of the figurative correspondence between infection and irreligion in the masque: "Episcopacy assumed in his eyes the lineaments of *Comus*; it was the public manifestation of the perversions of carnal sensuality against which he had striven in favour of high seriousness."<sup>44</sup> On the other side of the allegorical figure, "[t]he reformed discipline of the Puritan church similarly assumed the aspect of the virgin *Lady*,

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<sup>42</sup> "Letter to an Unknown Friend," *Complete Prose Works*, I, 319.

<sup>43</sup> Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton's Puritan Masque* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), pp. 1, 6. Flannagan suggests that the germ of the unmistakable anticlericalism seen in *Lycidas*, may be detected in *Comus*: "*Lycidas* is much more of a radical political statement. There is nothing in *Comus* resembling the elegy's bitter allusions to negligent Anglican clergy or to innocent flocks of English parishioners being devoured by subversive Catholic wolves, but it may contain the seeds of Milton's reactions to royal or ecclesiastical prerogative" ("*Comus*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. by Dennis Danielson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma: 1641-1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942; repr. 1976), p. 15. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1938; repr. 1957), declares that Milton's "expression of the Puritan spirit [in *Comus*] owed much, though much that must not be too definitely specified, to the Puritan preachers" and that it is essentially "another Puritan sermon" (pp. 318-19). Haller's designation, according to Barker, is made "with some exaggeration" (*Op. cit.*, p. xxiii).

possessed of transcendent spiritual powers. Its triumph over episcopacy corresponded to the triumph of chastity over lust . . . <sup>45</sup>

Given these identifications, which, however, may arguably be regarded as falling short of full-fledged allegory, Milton presents in the speech of the arguably optimistic Elder Brother the infection metaphor to be employed throughout his ecclesiastical polemic, wherein sin is the pestilential substance threatening to pierce the ideally impenetrable prophylaxis of virtue: "So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity, / That when a soul is found sincerely so, / A thousand liveried Angels lackey her, / Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt . . ." (453-56). Viewed in this fashion, frequent "converse with heav'nly habitants" contributes to the "unpolluted temple of the mind" resulting in the achievement of immortality (459-63). However, episcopal materialism and concupiscence are tantamount to infectious contamination:

[B]ut when lust  
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,  
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,  
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,  
The soul grows clotted by contagion,  
Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose  
The divine property of her first being. (463-69)

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. John Carey and Alastair Fowler note that Milton's usages here of both "Imbodies" and "imbrutes" are the first recorded in these senses (*The Poems of John Milton*, London: Longman, 1968; repr. 1980), p. 200 n. This also prefigures Satan's anguished soliloquy in *Paradise Lost*, IX, 163-66: "That I who erst contended / With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained / Into a beast, and mixed with bestial slime, / This essence to incarnate and imbrute . . ."

Notwithstanding that the overriding argument presented in this passage evokes Socrates's declaration of the immortality of the soul, Milton also suggests—albeit it a differently infectious manner—that spiritual infection derives from physical corruption, further establishing a two-way relationship between incorporeal infidelity and biological contagion.<sup>46</sup> The allegorical figure of Sin in *Paradise Lost*, representative and offspring of Satan's apostatical rebellion, foretells of her intentions to inspire wicked behaviour in mankind to epidemic extremity so that Death will be indefinitely satiated: "... I in Man residing through the Race, / His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect, / And season him thy last and sweetest prey," in an ironical sense Death's "last best gift" (X. 607-09). Herein Milton acknowledges the contaminated nature of language, even to the extent of intentionally provoking in the reader an awareness of significations of words prior to their having become infected. Milton's use of "error" in IV. 239, which ostensibly means "wandering" yet also offers connotations of the Fall, serves as an example of this phenomenon: "Certainly the word is a reminder of the Fall, in that it takes us back to a time when there were no infected words because there were no infected actions."<sup>47</sup> Presumably, infected words are also infectious

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<sup>46</sup> Milton follows Socrates's argument on the immortality of the soul in Plato's *Phaedo* (81) wherein, in the words of Hughes, "noble spirits welcome release from the body and its passions through death" and "the souls of the wicked are dragged back after death to this visible world by their fear of the invisible and by their load of fleshly lusts . . ." (p. 101).

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 110. Stanley Eugene Fish, citing as a prime consideration "the traditional nostalgia for the linguistic purity of Paradise," expands upon Ricks's speculation: "An examination of the verbal texture of the poem against the background of the concerted effort during the century to evolve a truly scientific system of denotation reveals a pattern in the appearance of words like 'error' and shows them to be an important part of the interior drama Milton creates in the reader's mind" (*Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, Berkeley: University of California Press, repr. 1971), p. 94. Such views of man's corrupted

words—especially, as Swift would hold, when they are disseminated during the delivery of heterodox Presbyterian sermons.

Without referring specifically to the potential for episcopacy to spread epidemiologically, Barker rightly identifies the passage in *Comus* as that which most powerfully illustrates—if his allegorical reading be granted—an underlying theme of ecclesiastical conflict: “Milton’s contrast between the degeneration of religion which has resulted from the forces animating the bishops and its purification as designed by the Puritans exactly parallels the Elder Brother’s contrast between the imbruting of the spirit by lust and the spiritualizing of the body by virtue.”<sup>48</sup> A likely analogue for this passage is the Hermit’s healing words to the Squire and Dame to be applied to the spiritual wounds of infamy inflicted by the Blatant Beast in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*:

For from those outward sences, ill affected,  
The seede of all this evill first doth spring,  
Which at the first, before it had infected,  
Mote easie be suppress with little thing;  
But being growen strong it forth doth bring  
Sorrow, and anguish, and impatient paine,  
In th’ inner parts; and lastly, scattering  
Contagious poyson close through every vaine,  
It never rests till it have wrought his finall bane. (VI, vi, 8)

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condition seem to be elaborations of a point made by Sir Philip Sidney: “. . . [O]ur erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching into it” (*An Apology for Poetry*, 1595, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd, London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), p. 101. Significantly, the exalted state results from “the force of a divine breath”—here seen as benevolent spirituality opposing infectious physical influence.

Whereas this passage from Spenser's allegorical epic does not describe the dynamics of the spread of infectious doctrine, the passage from *Comus*—if Barker's thesis be granted—does represent such a scheme in its illumination of a contaminated episcopacy, in the words of A.E. Dyson, "the other side of the picture, the world in which Comus and followers move."<sup>49</sup>

Coinciding with this period of heightened literary activity in which Milton again applies the contagion metaphor to denigrate certain organized systems of belief, are additional plague epidemics, all of which serve to underscore the gravity of his attacks—most immediately that made upon the clergy in *Lycidas*. Plague returned to England in 1636 while Milton was living in Horton, prompting in April "a royal proclamation renewing former sanitary regulations over the kingdom,"<sup>50</sup> prophylactic measures ironically contemporaneous with Laud's "sanitary" restrictions on dissenting proselytization begun with his promotion to the archbishopric in 1633. Although Milton and his family were relieved that Horton remained free of plague throughout 1636, additional outbreaks emanating from London in early 1637 brought the infection to Horton with mortal consequences: "[T]he Plague was at last in . . . the whole Horton neighbourhood. It continued in Horton parish through May, June, July, and

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<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> "The Interpretation of *Comus*," in *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus*, ed. by John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), p. 117. This entire stanza of *The Faerie Queene* generated no commentary in *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. by Edwin Greenlaw and others (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), VI. Significantly, however, Bush identifies in both *The Faerie Queene* and in *Paradise Lost* "a continuous antithesis, direct or indirect, between simplicity, purity, goodness, health, light, life, and love on the one hand, and luxury, corruption, evil, disease, darkness, death, and hate on the other" (*Paradise Lost in Our Time: Some Comments*, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, repr. 1957), p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Masson, *op. cit.*, I, 626.



August 1637, with the effect of doubling in that year the usual annual mortality of the parish.<sup>51</sup> Scott Elledge observes that these incidences of plague epidemic more than likely flavoured Milton's pastoral elegy *Lycidas*:

During 1637 Milton had several unusual reasons for contemplating the mystery of death. The plague which had been virulent in London the year before, reached Horton in the spring of 1637, and the fatal disease that moved invisibly and struck so finally made death part of the milieu in which the poem grew.<sup>52</sup>

And E.M.W. Tillyard notes that a "cause for restlessness . . . was that in 1636 and 1637 the plague had been bad in England. In the latter year it spread to Horton, and a number of people there died of it. This is a fact to be remembered in reading *Lycidas*."<sup>53</sup> Thus against such a backdrop Milton composed his famous attack on the clergy in *Lycidas* wherein a powerful figurative yoke is established between pestilence and the prelacy (a "foul contagion" spreads as clergymen stand watch over their flock) which prefigures its consistent application—with the tenor shifting as required—throughout the corpus of Milton's literary production.

Reading the speech of St Peter in light of Milton's later usage of the plague metaphor in relation to corrupt religion, reinforces the claims of some critics—including Milton himself—that it is, in A.S.P. Woodhouse's language, an "allegorical comment on the contemporary scene and especially on the state of the church" in which "[t]he evils St Peter denounces are those of which the

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 626-27, 638.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>53</sup> *Milton* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930; repr. 1946), p. 80.

Puritans especially complained in the days of Archbishop Laud . . . <sup>54</sup> Taking this further, David Daiches dispels the notion that St Peter's speech is digressive, and just as plague inexplicably silenced benevolent ministers and left irreligious ones to continue spreading apostasy, that infection threatening the principled priests like Lycidas baffles to the point of overall exasperation and frustration:

Not only is the potential poet-priest no more likely to survive than the evil men who do harm to society where the poet-priest would have done good. Granted that the poet must take his chance of survival along with everybody else, is it fair to *society* to cut him off and let the drones and the parasites remain?<sup>55</sup>

Thus the vicious circle pondered by Milton is clearly established: infectious episcopacy disseminated by irreligious clergymen eradicates those who hold the potential to propagate orthodoxy that would ideally overcome the doctrinal opposition.

In considering St Peter's attack on the clergy, Milton scholars have differed in their determinations as to the extent to which Milton had abandoned the Church of England by the time of the poem's composition. Ironically, Milton's decision to abandon a ministerial career, may have been made in order to "preach" to a wider audience through, especially, pamphlet production.<sup>56</sup> J. Martin Evans speculates that in 1637, Milton must have been angst-ridden in choosing poetry over the priesthood even though the poet could consider poetry

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<sup>54</sup> *A Variorum Commentary*, II, 672-73.

<sup>55</sup> *Milton* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1957), p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 153. Parker also speculates that Milton's father, in approving of *Lycidas*, would have been convinced that "poetry was not so worthless after all, and a Christian ministry could indeed be performed without a pulpit" (*Ibid.*, I, 167).

to be "an alternative priesthood."<sup>57</sup> Evans asks pertinent questions that Milton may have asked himself: "Shouldn't some attempt be made to remedy the current condition of the church, to banish false shepherds from the fold and hunt down the wolf in his lair?" and "Instead of writing poems, shouldn't John Milton be ministering to the religious needs of his fellow countrymen?"<sup>58</sup> Milton endeavours to answer these questions. In *The Reason of Church Government* written about five years later, he declares that he was "Church-outed by the Prelats," thus necessitating his renunciation of Anglicanism—especially after "perceaving what tyranny had invaded the Church . . ."<sup>59</sup> Painting Milton as at worst, perhaps, a lapsed Anglican, Thomas N. Corns goes only so far as to offer that *Lycidas* "shows at least a nascent opposition to the ceremonialism of the Caroline Church of England."<sup>60</sup>

Toward the same end, critics reluctant to declare Milton's assault on the clergy in *Lycidas* evidence of rabid Puritanism note that "protests against [ecclesiastical] evils go back well beyond the Reformation, as the eclogues of

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<sup>57</sup> "*Lycidas*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, p. 44. By possibly as early as 1633, when it is supposed that Milton wrote his "Letter to an Unknown Friend," the poet already sensed his "tardie moving" toward ordination, yet in the same epistle laments his "sermon's" verbosity, for doing "that w<sup>ch</sup> I excuse myselfe for not doing [,] preach & not preach" (*Complete Prose Works*, I, 320). Parker, however, rightly urges caution in reading into these words abandonment of the priesthood: "The letter is not an apology for giving up the ministry; it is an apology for what has seemed to a good friend procrastination" (I, 122).

<sup>58</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 823.

<sup>60</sup> *John Milton: The Prose Works*, p. 2. Corns adds, however, that although *Lycidas* is written "in understandably guarded terms"—given that Prynne, Burton and Bastwick were only recently subjected to brutal punishment for confronting Laud's policies of conformity—it is "his first unequivocally Puritan text . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 16).

Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Mantuan attest.<sup>61</sup> However, Corns also notes the tradition among Puritans of smearing Anglicanism by identifying it with Catholicism, one which Milton wholeheartedly embraces:

His own apparent horror of Catholicism appears frequently enough throughout his mature writings, both poetry and prose, but in incorporating it into his attack on the bishops, he follows a strategy almost universally adopted among Puritan writers and one well capable of tainting the episcopalian position.<sup>62</sup>

Of greatest relevance to the passage in *Lycidas* are two eclogues of Petrarch and one of his imitator in a mutated pastoral genre, Mantuan. Both Italian poets—especially Mantuan, who was translated into English at least as early as 1567 by George Turberville—become major influences on Spenser, who in turn with his collection of eclogues in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), looms large as a considerable influence in Milton's reworking of this traditional pastoral theme in *Lycidas*. However, Milton's application of the infection metaphor to clerical corruption in *Lycidas* derives principally from Petrarch and Mantuan, more so than from Spenser in this specific context.

Three of Petrarch's 12 eclogues collectively known as *Bucolicum carmen*, composed between 1346 and 1352, are the most compelling antecedents to Milton's fusion of contagion and clerical corruption in *Lycidas* 108-31. Petrarch's sixth, seventh and ninth eclogues are, in the words of one Petrarch scholar, "violent attacks, in terms of personal allegory, on the corruption of the papal

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<sup>61</sup> Woodhouse, *A Variorum Commentary*, II, 673.

<sup>62</sup> John Milton: *The Prose Works*, pp. 22-23.

court in Avignon under Clement VI<sup>63</sup>—making the Italian poet (who had himself taken minor ecclesiastical orders), a principal influence in this respect on Milton in drafting *Lycidas*. The sixth eclogue, written in 1347, features a dialogue between the former shepherd Pamphilus (St Peter) and the shepherd Mitio (Pope Clement VI), in which Pamphilus in this prose translation inveighs against Mitio's intentional negligence—a pastoral paradox of sorts:

The lambs have met untimely deaths, and the oxen have died of exhaustion. The goats have survived; and the filthy swine—a destructive flock—nourished by riotousness and ease, run unrestrained through the fields. They stunt the sapplings with their nibbling, and already their smell infects the mountains and our peace.<sup>64</sup>

The infectious “smell” is glossed by MacKendrick as papal “infamy” and the “mountains” are allegorized “altars,” indicating a firm connection between the corrupt malignancy of the papal court and the victimized followers exposed to malignant doctrine—or a lack thereof.<sup>65</sup> In another translation of this passage, the “goats and the unclean swine” comprise “that pestilent herd [that] goes straying at random, / . . . their odor infecting / Hillside and heath and spreading to trouble me in my refuge.”<sup>66</sup> Specifically, the “pestilent herd,” according to Thomas G. Bergin, “refers to the College of Cardinals and the eminent prelates,”

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<sup>63</sup> Ernest Hatch Wilkins, “Petrarch’s Seventh Eclogue,” in *Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1955), p. 48.

<sup>64</sup> Trans. by Paul MacKendrick, in *Milton’s “Lycidas”: Edited to Serve as an Introduction to Criticism*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47 n.

<sup>66</sup> *Eclogue VI*, 28-31, trans. by Thomas G. Bergin, in *Petrarch’s Bucolicum Carmen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

revealing a striking precedent in Petrarch above all other pastoral elegists at least in terms of the relevant lines in *Lycidas*.

In his seventh eclogue, a continuation of the sixth and also written in 1347, Petrarch again applies the infection metaphor to express the contagious slackness of reprehensible members of the papal hierarchy. This dialogue features Mitio and Epy (Epicurea), representing the corrupt papal court at Avignon, whom Pamphilus had decried in the previous eclogue as "that foolish and infamous woman, / Bane of too many spouses."<sup>67</sup> Although Epy is herself noxious by nature, she is nonetheless a realist in summarizing for Mitio the pestilential havoc they have jointly wreaked by disseminating their ecclesiastical malaise:

Out of the woolbearing flock that once grazed under your  
guidance  
Death or disease has claimed many; those who by favor of fortune  
Haply survive are now pastured on the other side of the river.  
Strength-draining fevers, violent coughing, and many infections  
Ravage the all but deserted heath . . .<sup>68</sup>

Ironically, the surviving sheep who are just out of range of the malevolent influence of Clement VI and his worldly mistress, would be more secure at a greater distance from their spiritual leaders, according to Epy: "Better for them to move on, lest the unsuspected contagion / Reach them, so far immune, or the

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<sup>67</sup> *Eclogue VI*, 149-50, trans. by Bergin.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-23. See also "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's *Lycidas*," in *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*, ed. by C.A. Patrides (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 44.

plague that slinks through the sheepfolds."<sup>69</sup> If the sheep do not remove themselves, the flock may diminish entirely, leaving the church stripped of worshippers and open to destruction. Milton likewise foretells of the contagious menace posed by the corrupt clergy, not only in *Lycidas* but throughout his antiprelatical pamphlets and beyond.

While the sixth and seventh eclogues make use of infection imagery incidentally in relation to the principal themes of clerical corruption, Petrarch's ninth is informed chiefly by the historical outbreak of physical plague—the Black Death—which entered Italy in 1347 and raged throughout the following year, when the ninth was likely written.<sup>70</sup> Even so, in the dialogue between Philogeus and Theophilus, which likely “was written when the plague was well under way,”<sup>71</sup> a company of avaricious voyagers returning from a quest for riches “before it died spread widely / the lethal contagion.”<sup>72</sup> Edward S. Le Comte perceptively demonstrates that the “verbal resemblance is striking” between Petrarch's “*late contagia fudit*” and Milton's “foul contagion spread” of *Lycidas* 127, discussed below.<sup>73</sup> If one were to read shepherds as priests and the flock as the church membership, Philogeus describes what would be the worst of all possible ecclesiastical epidemics: “Shepherds infect other shepherds and sick / sheep corrupt the healthy . . .”<sup>74</sup>

Also of considerable interest in terms of influence on Milton is Mantuan's ninth eclogue, which adheres closely to the theme established by Petrarch in his

<sup>69</sup> *Eclogue VI*, 25-26, trans. by Bergin.

<sup>70</sup> Bergin, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>72</sup> *Eclogue IX*, trans. by Bergin, 66-67.

<sup>73</sup> “*Lycidas*,” Petrarch, and the Plague,” *Modern Language Notes*, 69 (1954), 402-04 (p. 403).

anticlerical eclogues. The interlocutors of the ninth eclogue, which was drafted in the mid-1480's, are Candidus, a rural shepherd seeking more promising pasture in Rome, and Faustulus, an urban realist seeking to advise the traveller of the dismal state of affairs at the papal seat. After running off a list of evils facing the dwindling herds in Rome, including wolves, foxes and even shepherds slaughtering their own sheep, Faustulus laments the onset of "the year's pestilential season" during which "the entire flock is laid low . . ."<sup>75</sup>

The contagion, implicitly introduced indirectly by careless clergy, now spreads seemingly of its own volition among the flock: "Nor is there a limit to the disease nor an antidote against the poison, but a house takes in death from its neighbor, and the contagion continually assumes greater strength."<sup>76</sup>

Turberville's translation of these lines emphasizes the senseless devastation of the epidemic:

No reason in the plague,  
no Physicke to aslake  
This venome vile, and poysonde filth:  
but house from house doth take  
Infection of the same,  
and drinkes up deadly sore,  
And dayly so contagion of  
this poyson growes to more.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Eclogue IX*, trans. by Bergin, 68.

<sup>75</sup> *Eclogue IX*, trans. by Piepho, 159-60.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, trans. by Piepho, 163-65.

<sup>77</sup> *Eclogue IX*, in *The Eclogues of Mantuan*, ed. by Douglas Bush (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1937), 163-65.



Ironically, the predatory church authorities seem immune from the infection initiated by their irresponsibility: "That foul plague rarely snatches away wild beasts; it always carries off the farm animals useful to man,"<sup>78</sup> which, if carried to the extreme, would entail the eradication of the church and presumably even the corrupt ecclesiastics.

Mantuan's ninth eclogue wielded the greatest influence on Spenser—and thereby on Milton—in its exposé of ecclesiastical misconduct in Rome. A Carmelite monk seeking reform within the church, Mantuan, ironically, was considered a prophetic figure by Protestants seeking seemingly sympathetic arguments against papal authority. However, in a sermon delivered in 1488 attacking corruption in the papal curia in the same manner as in the ninth eclogue, Mantuan concludes "with a prayer advocating spiritual renewal within the Church" and thereby "marks himself off from Protestant reformers who subsequently embraced him as one of their prophets."<sup>79</sup> Both for Spenser and for Milton, Mantuan's ninth eclogue was substantially influential:

[I]t became in its turn a model for Protestant attacks on clerical corruption, notably in Spenser's *July* and *September*. Though he wrote no pastoral elegies, Mantuan gave authority to the steadily widening range of subjects for pastoral verse, and, through Spenser, prepared the way for the so-called digressions in *Lycidas*.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Eclogue IX*, trans. by Piepho, 166-67.

<sup>79</sup> Lee Piepho, ed. and trans., *Adulescentia: The Eclogues of Mantuan* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>80</sup> Woodhouse, *op. cit.*, II, 557.

Thus Mantuan provides a strong link in the chain of influence leading from Petrarch to the Protestant poets Spenser and Milton:

Mantuan was doubtless familiar with Petrarch's attacks on the Papal Court at Avignon in the sixth and seventh eclogues . . . Spenser used "Eclogue IX" as a model for his attack on "Popish prelates" in [*September*] . . . and it supplied a conspicuous precedent for Milton's attack in [*Lycidas*] on corruption within the English clergy.<sup>81</sup>

Tracing the usage of this specific metaphorical phenomenon through these various Latin elegists and their English followers in the Renaissance indicates its applicability in doctrinal controversy.

Although not overtly linking prelatical malfeasance to pestilential catastrophe, Spenser's eclogues *May*, *July* and *September* in *The Shepheardes Calender* to varying degrees contain elements influential on *Lycidas* with regard to attacking clerical corruption, a spiritual phenomenon described in terms of a physical menace. Featured in *May* are, as the mysterious editor "E.K." notes in the opening argument, "*Piers and Palinodie, . . . two formes of pastoures or Ministers, or the protestant and the Catholique.*"<sup>82</sup> Contact ("any felowship"), the argument continues, with neglectful Catholics (or Anglicans) "*is daungerous*

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>82</sup> Much discussion of Spenser's religious views has been occasioned by analysis of *The Shepheardes Calender* and other works, with the poet variously labelled a Catholic, an Anglican or a Puritan as is succinctly summarized by Virgil K. Whitaker in *The Religious Basis of Spenser's Thought* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), pp. 5-8. C.H. Herford sees in *Piers*, regardless of E.K.'s declaration in the argument, "the exponent of Spenser's [Puritan] views" and notes that *Palinode* "represent[s] not so much the Catholics as the orthodox Anglican clergy" (qtd. in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by Charles Grosvenor

to mainteine" as well as to "giue too much credit to their colourable and feyned goodwill."<sup>83</sup> While Palinode, whom Milton refers to in an antiprelatical pamphlet as "that false Shepheard . . . under whom the Poet lively personates our Prelates,"<sup>84</sup> declares that he envies shepherds who have lives of carefree maintenance of their flocks, Piers faults such a negligent attitude:

Those faytours little regarden their charge,  
While they letting their sheepe runne at large,  
Passen their time, that should be sparely spent,  
In lustihede and wanton meryment  
Thilke same bene shepheards for the Devils stedde,  
That playen, while their flockes be vnfedde. (39-44)

While E.K. glosses "faytours" as "vagabonds," Thomas Warton observes that "[t]his word is exactly applied, in our author's sense, . . . namely to the Priests."<sup>85</sup> Paradoxically, those pastors who forsake their priestly obligations fulfil their duties as baneful clergymen of the Devil's party. Piers also glances at the notion that corporeal delight in a pastor begets physical and spiritual pollution: "Ah *Palinodie*, thou art a worldes childe: / Who touches Pitch mought needes be defilde" (73-74).

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Osgood and Henry Gibbons Lotspeich, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), I, 292.

<sup>83</sup> Robert M. Cummings identifies Cantabrigian Edward Kirke (1553-1613) as the most likely person behind the initials in *Spenser: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), p. 35. An argument has also been made in favour of identifying Fulke Greville as the annotator by Paul E. McLane, *Spenser's Shepherdes Calender: A Study in Elizabethan Allegory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), pp. 280-95. As both McLane and Cummings observe, the idea that Spenser was E.K. is no longer widely accepted.

<sup>84</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 722.

<sup>85</sup> Qtd. in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, I, 298. Herford, also qtd. in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, (I, 298), notes the parallel between 44 and *Lycidas* 125.

Language similarly suggestive of clerical contamination runs through *July*, which features Thomalin, a lowland shepherd attacking worldly ministers such as are represented by the goatherd Morrell, as E.K. announces: "*This Æglogue is made in the honour and commendation, of good shepeheardes, and to the shame and dispraise of proude and ambitious Pastours. Such as Morrell is here imagined to bee.*" Thomalin maintains that his "seely sheepe like well belowe" and that "they bene hale enough, I trowe, / and liken theyr abode" (105-08). Transferring to loftier settings, however, may occasion contraction of the temporal (and spiritual) malignancy: "But if they [Thomalin's sheep] with thy Gotes should yede, / they soone myght be corrupted" (109-10). Finally, Hobbinoll's interpretation in *September* of Diggon Davie's account of pastoral maladies brought on by "*abuses . . . and loose living of Popish prelates*" accommodates an interpretation that physical infection results from spiritual misguidance: "Better it were, a little to feyne, / And cleanly couer, that cannot be cured. / Such il, as is forced, mought nedes be endured" (137-39).

Highlighting Milton's metaphorical fusion of contagion and episcopacy is his claim in the headnote to *Lycidas*, which was written several years after the poem at the zenith of the anti-episcopacy campaign, that the elegy "foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy then in their height."<sup>86</sup> Although the close of St Peter's sage and serious oratory (113-31) would fulfil Milton's anachronistic prophecy, the bulk of the speech details the widespread ruin of parishioners subject to the infectious influence of agents disseminating an epidemic of

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<sup>86</sup> *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, p. 120. As Woodhouse notes, the headnote to *Lycidas* partially quoted above was not included in the 1638 edition of the poem; events between this and the 1645 edition precipitated the headnote: "The attack on episcopacy, which began with the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640, induced and permitted Milton to print the epigraph . . ." (p. 637).

corrupted episcopacy, an exigency more compelling than the ultimate parliamentary castigation of bishops, which in the poem anyway, remains in suspense. Rather than suffer the loss of Lycidas, St Peter would have preferred to eradicate avaricious prelates who have, as stealthily as if by biological contagion, contaminated the congregation: "How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain, / Enough of such as for their bellies' sake, / Creep and intrude and climb into the fold?" (113-15). Milton's early representation here of ecclesiastical defilement foreshadows Satan's corruptive irruption into Paradise: "As when a prowling Wolf, / Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey, / Watching where Shepherds pen thir Flocks at eve / In hurdl'd Cotes amid the field secure, / Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the Fold" (*Paradise Lost*, IV. 183-87). Hereafter, irresponsible clergymen seeking worldly gain vitiate hitherto pure believers: "Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold / A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least / That to the faithful Herdman's art belongs! / What recks it them? What need they? They are sped" (*Lycidas*, 119-22). In another parallel to *Paradise Lost*, Satan, (the "Spirit malign" III. 553 and "the Fiend / Who came thir [Adam and Eve's] bane" IV. 166-67), is the arch-predecessor of the contagious prelates against whom St Peter and Milton rail: "So clomb this first grand Thief into God's Fold: / So since into his Church lewd Hirelings climb" (IV. 192-93).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Orgel and Goldberg record that "lewd" has various meanings: "... 'lay or non-clerical', generalized to 'ignorant' and thence to 'wicked, unprincipled' (*The Oxford Authors*, p. 878), the latter of which would be most appropriate in this instance. The passage draws upon the discourse on the Good Shepherd (John 10. 1-21) wherein "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" (John 10. 13).

Delivery of monotonously vacuous and formulaic sermons to the flock of followers amounts to nothing other than dissemination of malignant vapour, often associated in the seventeenth century with pestilence: "And when they [the malignantly negligent priests] list, their lean and flashy songs / Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw" (123-24). Considering both the immediate context and Milton's practice elsewhere, this passage in *Lycidas* supports a reading which attributes to the prelates the spread of the disease of dereliction. Noxious preaching taking the form of infectious miasma on the one hand recapitulates Dante's allegory of wicked shepherds depriving their sheep and thereby afflicting them with draughts devoid of salubrious doctrine, and on the other anticipates Swift's wind-driven "Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*" led by the contagious dissenting zealot Jack in *A Tale of a Tub*: "The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed, / But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw, / Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread" (125-27).<sup>88</sup> Satan, Milton's infectious apostate on another level, re-enters Paradise "as a mist by Night" as Milton declares in the Argument of Book IX, "rose / . . . involv'd in rising Mist" (IX. 74-75) and "wrapt in mist / Of midnight vapor glide[s] obscure" (IX. 158-59). Significantly, one of several seventeenth-century theories of the origin of plague involved miasma, infectious or noxious vapour resulting from certain astronomical phenomena, which emanated from the earth and stealthily

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<sup>88</sup> Woodhouse notes that critics have identified in St Peter's speech in *Lycidas* numerous parallels with Dante, most notably *Paradiso*, XXVII. 19-66 and XXIX. 103-08 (*A Variorum Commentary*, II, 676-77). Most apposite to this discussion is XXIX 103-07 as trans. by Mark Musa, *The Divine Comedy, Volume III: Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986): "Fables like these are shouted right and left, / pouring from pulpits . . . / So the poor sheep, who know no better, come / from pasture fed on air . . ."

contaminated wide areas.<sup>89</sup> Another contemporary theory never explained with any consistency, namely that of contagion, overlaps with the miasmatic theory—but either admits the idea that plague is somehow airborne.<sup>90</sup>

A closely allied pastoral image emphasizing the potentially dire consequences of heretical pestilence communicated to the congregation by infectious agents, is that drawn in *Of Reformation*, Milton's first antiprelatical pamphlet, written about four years later:

Seeing that the Churchmans office is only to teach men the Christian Faith, to exhort all, to encourage the good, to admonish the bad, privately the lesse offender, publickly the scandalous and stubborn; to censure, and separate from the communion of *Christs* flock, the contagious, and incorrigible, to receive with joy, and fatherly compassion the penitent, all this must be don, and more then this is beyond any Church authority.<sup>91</sup>

Ironically, the communicants broadcasting infectious doctrine to other members of the flock of the Church of England in *Lycidas* are the malignant prelates; following the course of action Milton recommends in *Of Reformation* would debar the diseased Anglican priests from further contact with the congregation.

Finding this metaphorical application of infection to corrupt established religion especially appropriate in a pastoral setting, Milton in *Animadversions*, published only two months later, confronts Joseph Hall's defence of a liturgical

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985; repr. 1990), p. 26.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>91</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 575.

episcopacy on grounds that such ritual would protect against any spread of malevolent doctrine:

First lest any thing in generall might be missaid in their publick *Prayers* through ignorance, or want of care, contrary to the faith: and next, lest the Arians, and Pelagians in particular should infect the people by their hymns, and formes of Praier. By the leave of these ancient Fathers, this was no solid prevention of spreadding Hæresy to debarre the Ministers of God the use of their noblest talent, Praier in the Congregation, unlesse they had forbid the use of Sermons, and Lectures too, but such as were ready made to their hands as our Homelies, or else he that was heretically dispos'd, had as fair an opportunity of infecting in his discours, as in his Praier or hymn. As insufficiently, and to say truth, as imprudently did they provide by their contrived Liturgies, lest any thing should be erroneously praid through ignorance, or want of care in the Ministers. For if they were carelesse, and ignorant in their Praiers, certainly they would be more carelesse in their Preaching, and yet more carelesse in watching over their Flock, and what prescription could reach to bound them in both these?<sup>92</sup>

Corns, in glossing this passage, appropriately retains Milton's contagion metaphor.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 685.

<sup>93</sup> "To the charge that the moderate Puritanism now dominant in church and Parliament fosters the sects, Milton replies in *Animadversions* that heterodoxy is not easy to control and that historically episcopalian church government had a poor record of controlling it. Heresy was endemic within the early episcopalian church, and its various councils and edicts, although they give evidence of the



Here again Milton yokes ministerial irresponsibility—manifested either in pastoral negligence or in wilful apostasy—with deadly spiritual contagion. Nearly a decade later, Milton in *Eikonoklastes* repeats his categorization of these same heretical doctrines as contagious afflictions:

If then ancient Churches to remedie the infirmities of prayer, or rather the infections of Arian and Pelagian Heresies, neglecting that ordain'd and promis'd help of the spirit, betook them, almost four hundred yeares after Christ, to Liturgie thir own invention, wee are not to imitate them, nor to distrust God in the removal of that Truant help to our Devotion, which by him never was appointed.<sup>94</sup>

While the question of whether Milton embraced Arianism has generated considerable controversy, these designations of the heresy lend weight to the argument that while Milton was unquestionably unorthodox, he was not, technically speaking, an Arian.<sup>95</sup> Pelagianism is also described in infectious terms in *The History of Britain* (see below).

Drawing heavily upon the tradition of casting ecclesiastical wrongdoing as a plague imperilling the flocks, first made use of in *Lycidas*, Milton in *Animadversions* again seeks to define the ideal role of a clergyman by setting boundaries of acceptable behaviour toward his parishioners:

That soveraigne Lord, who in the discharge of his holy anointment from God the Father, which made him supreame Bishop of our

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extent of the problem, could not control it" (*John Milton: The Prose Works*, p. 29).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 507-08.

<sup>95</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, II, 1057-58.

soules was so humble as to say, Who made me a Judge, or a divider over yee, hath taught us that a Church-mans jurisdiction is no more but to watch over his flock in season, and out of season, to deale by sweet, and efficacious instructions; gentle admonitions, and sometimes rounder reproofs; against negligence, or obstinacy will be requir'd a rousing volie of Pastorly threatnings against a persisting stubbornes or the feare of a reprobate sense, a timely separation from the flock by that interdictive sentence, lest his conversation unprohibited, or unbranded might breath a pestilentiall murrein into the other sheepe.<sup>96</sup>

Thus the burden is placed on the pastor—in both senses of the word—to provide a spiritual *cordon sanitaire*. Otherwise, these careless clergymen become infectious themselves through inaction, this imputation constituting, presumably, one of Milton's "hits . . . on pestilential shepherds" in *Animadversions*.<sup>97</sup>

Strikingly, the parallels to St Peter's speech in *Lycidas* continue in *Animadversions*. Immediately following the famous episode of "grim laughter" in response to Hall's admiration of Anglican clergymen ("Ha, ha, ha."), Milton records Hall's invocation that their eminence in learning "long . . . may . . . flourish."<sup>98</sup> Again equating the episcopacy to an infectious menace, Milton offers his response: "O pestilent imprecation! flourish as it does at this day in the

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<sup>96</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 715-16.

<sup>97</sup> Le Comte, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 726.

Prelates?"<sup>99</sup> In the very next answer, Milton again decries Anglicanism's priestly delinquency:

Forbid him [Hall] rather, Sacred Parliament, to violate the sense of Scripture, and turne that which is spoken of the afflictions of the Church under her pagan enemies to a pargetted concealment of those prelatical crying sins; for from these is profanenesse gone forth into all the land; they have hid their eyes from the Sabbaths of the Lord; they have fed themselves, and not their flocks, with force and cruelty have they ruled over Gods people: They have fed his sheep (contrary to that which Saint *Peter* writes) not of a ready mind, but for filthy lucre, not as examples to the flock, but as being Lords over Gods heritage. . . ."<sup>100</sup>

Setting negative examples before the faithful followers, a consequence of a corrupted episcopacy, would only cause spiritual malignancy to spread even more forcefully among the flocks.

Echoes of the polemical passage in *Lycidas* may also be heard in *The Reason of Church-Government*, wherein Presbyterianism is lauded over Episcopacy, which in its authoritarian intransigence enables the continued broadcast of malevolence through ignorance of spiritual contagion plaguing unwitting parishioners:

[God] . . . in the sweetest and mildest manner of paternal discipline . . . hath committed this other office of preserving in

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 726.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 726-27. Milton refers to I Peter 5.2-3: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for

healthful constitution the inner man, which may be term'd the spirit of the soul, to his spiritual deputy the minister of each Congregation; who being best acquainted with his own flock, hath best reason to know all the secretest diseases likely to be there.<sup>101</sup>

Milton then prescribes the church discipline to be followed to reclaim any particular transgressor—all under the auspices of the minister/physician, who first should seek “to overtake that diffus’d malignance [in the sinner] with some gentle potion of admonishment.”<sup>102</sup> If this proves ineffective, other parishioners are called upon to dissuade the errant brother through various forms of entreaty.<sup>103</sup> Once all other efforts to reform the miscreant fail, the inveterately malignant member of the church community is subject to “the dreadful sponge of excommunication,” which can be seen as a form of protective disinfection, “a rough and vehement cleansing medicin, where the malady is obdurat . . .”<sup>104</sup>

Ideally, however, such exigencies would prove unnecessary; all true Christians would remain hopeful of a resolution seen as the obverse of that presented in the catastrophic pastoral scheme of *Lycidas*:

For if repentance sent from heaven meet this lost wanderer, and draw him out of that steep journey wherein he was hasting towards destruction, to come and reconcile to the Church, if he bring with him his bill of health, and that he is now cleare of infection and of no danger to the other sheep, then with incredible

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filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

<sup>101</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 837.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 846. This prescription loosely follows that of St Paul in Galatians 6. 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 846-47.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 847.

expressions of joy all his brethren receive him, and set before him those perfumed bankets of Christian consolation; with pretious ointments bathing and fomenting the old and now to be forgotten stripes which terror and shame had inflicted; and thus with heavenly solaces they cheere up his humble remorse, till he regain his first health and felicity.<sup>105</sup>

Avoidance of the perilous epidemic hazard ravaging the untended flocks in *Lycidas* depends upon the tireless vigilance of the pastor/minister to detect any pestilential threats from heterodox influence which may be introduced into the body of the church via the agency of one of its members.

Should church authority be subordinated by civil authority in a state mandating worship in an established church, Milton argues in *A Treatise of Civil Power* that catastrophe follows upon forcing "prophane and licentious men" into otherwise orthodox congregations.<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, Milton's acquaintance and post-Restoration apologist Andrew Marvell declares in his prefatory poem to the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost* that the epic poem's magnificence "Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane" (32), capabilities which Milton would expect to find in his ideal minister. Magistrates overreaching their bounds by compelling carriers of contagious infidelity to worship alongside uninfected parishioners would result not only in the destruction of those lost souls, but also in the widespread contraction of virulent false worship among the

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 848. Ralph A. Haug notes the parallel to the clean bill of health issued for ships in support of contemporary quarantine measures against the spread of plague, which is "... a certificate given to a shipmaster or to a traveler in foreign lands (Italy in particular), testifying that no infectious disease is present" (*Ibid.*, I, 848 n.)

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 269.

otherwise untainted church members. On the other hand, excommunication of the irreligious—a drastic prophylactic exigency—should be undertaken only as a last resort after congregational efforts at religious counselling have failed.<sup>107</sup>

Increasingly antagonistic toward civil interference in matters of worship, Milton in the final year of the Commonwealth asks “by what autoritie doth the magistrate judge, or, which is worse, compell in relation to the church . . . if excommunicate, whom the church hath bid go out, in whose name doth the magistrate compell to go in?”<sup>108</sup> Whereas the magistrate’s actions by nature are punitive, even the most exigent of the church’s measures, excommunication, ideally translates ultimately into salvation: “The church indeed hinders none from hearing in her publick congregation, for the doors are open to all: nor excommunicates to destruction, but, as much as in her lies, to a final saving.”<sup>109</sup> More than two decades after first employing the plague metaphor in a pastoral milieu to represent infectious irreligion in *Lycidas*, Milton returns to this figurative *mise en scène* to add weight to his rhetorical impact:

Her [the church’s] meaning therefore must needs bee, that as her driving out brings on no outward penaltie, so no outward force or penaltie of an improper and only a destructive power should drive in again her infectious sheep; therefore sent out because infectious, and not driven in but with the danger not only of the whole and sound, but also of his own utter perishing.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 269.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 269.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 269.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 269.

Assuming that the ministers themselves have safely passed doctrinal quarantine, theirs should be the only determination made regarding the extent of the pestilential hazard posed to the overall assembly by irreligious members, a notion fully in line with St Peter's dictum in *Lycidas*.

Even more dangerous than careless and thereby contagious clergymen in the Church of England, according to Ernest Tuveson, is the threat depicted in *Lycidas* also of "the grim Wolf with privy paw / [that] . . . Daily devours apace, and nothing said . . ." (128-29), widely understood to be taken as Roman Catholicism, which was for Milton something "far worse than [the] corruption [that] had afflicted the church."<sup>111</sup> Tuveson further suggests that the iniquitous "Antichrist . . . infiltrat[ing] the whole of God's people, . . ." involved a "process not unlike the manner in which a virus is said to infiltrate and take over a cell."<sup>112</sup> Additionally, Tuveson observes that "[t]he Reformers feared that, in the remnants of papist ritual and doctrine, there were cancer cells that could grow again to monstrous size. Hence the urgency of 'reformation without tarrying.'"<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Tuveson, in paraphrasing Milton's doctrinal stance, adds that "laxity in discipline" allows for the eventuality that the Pope "will seize control of both church and state."<sup>114</sup> Not only, therefore, is the "foul contagion spread" (lethally hazardous to pure Protestantism), but Catholicism in the form of the stealthy subverting wolf, threatens to insidiously infect and reverse the continuing progress of the Reformation.

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<sup>111</sup> "The Pilot of the Galilean Lake," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27 (1966), p. 452.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453.

As much as the numerous precedents for Milton's revilement of abusive prelates might justify the reluctance of many critics to declare that Milton in November 1637 made an outright and mean-spirited indictment of the clergy, Milton himself, proclaiming prophetic powers retrospectively claimed in the headnote affixed to later editions of the poem left no doubt as to his antiprelatical sentiment—at least as it stood in 1641 or 1642.<sup>115</sup> In line with such a notion, William Haller describes *Lycidas* as "Milton's most perfect expression of faith in his own conception of priesthood and his most memorable polemic against those who had kept him from exercising that priesthood in the English church."<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Parker maintains that Milton "means every word of his condemnation of unworthy pastors" in *Lycidas*.<sup>117</sup> Some critics, such as John Crowe Ransom, have transformed St Peter into "another Puritan zealot, and less than apostolic" in consideration of Milton's invective against the episcopacy.<sup>118</sup> However, M.H. Abrams rightly places such insinuations of Milton's renegade opportunism in perspective: "As for St. Peter's diatribe, Milton inherited the right to introduce rough satire against the clergy into a pastoral from a widespread convention established by Petrarch, who was hardly vulgar, nor a Puritan, nor even a Protestant."<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, James Holly Hanford perceptively records an obverse example of the infectious pastor further indicating a long-standing tradition of this theme: "In a Latin eclogue of the

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<sup>115</sup> Woodhouse comments that "we do not find here the wholesale condemnation of the episcopal system that we meet in Milton's tracts of 1641-2 (at which time, or later, the epigraph to *Lycidas* was no doubt written), and we need not be surprised that St Peter is presented as an ideal bishop rebuking all who are at fault" (*A Variorum Commentary*, II, 674).

<sup>116</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>117</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 162.

<sup>118</sup> "A Poem Nearly Anonymous," in *Milton's Lycidas*, p. 78.



fourth century by Severus Sanctus"—who was himself a prelate embroiled in doctrinal controversy, having been accused of heresy—"Christ is introduced as averting a plague from the cattle of a shepherd who worshipped him."<sup>120</sup>

John Ruskin's famous explication of St Peter's speech in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865)—his provocative analysis of "Blind mouths!" is highly esteemed if not always agreed upon by Milton scholars—bolsters an interpretation that connects contagion and irreligion:

Now, there are two kinds of breath with which the flock may be filled,—God's breath, and man's. The breath of God is health, and life, and peace to them, as the air of heaven is to the flocks on the hills; but man's breath—the word which *he* calls spiritual—is disease and contagion to them, as the fog of the fen.<sup>121</sup>

Ruskin also shrewdly suggests that "the first and last, and fatalest sign" of "all false religious teaching . . . is that 'puffing up,'" an observation equating malevolent preaching to the biological communication of infectious disease in much the manner in which Swift excoriates dissenting enthusiasts in *A Tale of a Tub* and other works.<sup>122</sup> Much of Ruskin's examination of these lines finds its foundation in an etymological discussion admirably straightforward in evincing the relationships between "spirit," "breath" and "wind,"<sup>123</sup> all of which in one way or another are elemental to doctrine or its dissemination, and to biological infection, especially in the seventeenth century when the "precise means of

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<sup>119</sup> "Five Types of *Lycidas*," in *Milton's Lycidas*, p. 217.

<sup>120</sup> "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's *Lycidas*," in *Milton's Lycidas*, p. 43.

<sup>121</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

transmission was unknown."<sup>124</sup> An attempt to explain the contagious nature of plague that is astonishingly contemporary with *Lycidas* is physician Stephen Bradwell's 1636 description of contagion as "that which infecteth another with his own quality by touching it, whether the medium of the touch be corporeal or spiritual or an airy breath."<sup>125</sup> The "spiritual or . . . airy breath" infecting unwitting victims might just as well, in another sense, derive in the sermon delivered by a minister espousing an anathematized doctrine.

Ruskin's further analysis emphasizes the relationship between contagion and false religion in identifying those infused with self-righteousness as "your sectarians of every species, small and great, Catholic or Protestant, of high church or low, in so far as they think themselves exclusively in the right and others wrong . . ."<sup>126</sup> Additionally, those who have come under the irreligious influence are "in every sect . . . the true fog children—clouds, these, without water; bodies, these, of putrescent vapour and skin, without blood or flesh: blown bag-pipes for the fiends to pipe with—corrupt, and corrupting . . ."<sup>127</sup> Obviously, this passage of *Lycidas* struck a chord in Ruskin, even to the point of providing him with the vehicle for explicating one of his principal topics of cultural criticism. Ruskin's notion of a "plague-cloud" or "plague-wind," phenomena fully defined in his later works such as *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884), comprises his apocalyptic vision spurred by physical and spiritual ills of the late nineteenth century, involving, according to Raymond E. Fitch, "the symptoms of a miasmatic, progressive, and apparently final

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<sup>124</sup> Slack, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>125</sup> *Physick for the Sicknesse commonly called the plague* (1636), p. 49, qtd. in Slack, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

infection of the sky, the onset of which he had been studying much of his life."<sup>128</sup> The "plague-cloud," in the words of Fitch, "is merely the outward sign of an inward and spiritual pollution,"<sup>129</sup> indicating Ruskin's sensitivity toward the relationship between contagion and contaminated religion. The etymological explication of the lines in *Lycidas*, provoking in Ruskin a resonant metaphorical concept, "provides him with the opportunity to elaborate on the etymology of 'spirit' in a way that forecasts . . . his 'plague-wind' of the nineteenth century,"<sup>130</sup> one of many echoes well beyond the plague-ridden seventeenth century of the figurative association of plague and apostasy.

Such a metaphorical linkage between contamination and heterodoxy surfaces prominently, as one would expect, in all of five of Milton's antiprelatical pamphlets, even in a suggestive and connotative manner. Speaking of falling into the fatal error of "using our selves to bee guided only by [Episcopal] Testimonies" justifying prelacy, Milton warns in *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* that caution should be exercised in giving such arguments any credence, given that debasement of the true Christianity occurred concomitantly with the overriding degeneration riding in tandem with original sin. A truly enlightened reader of ecclesiastical history will detect such manifest adulteration:

He that thinks it the part of a well learned man, to have read diligently the ancient stories of the Church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the Fathers shall have all judicious men consenting with him; not hereby to controule, and new fangle the

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>128</sup> *The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Scripture, *God* forbid, but to marke how corruption, and *Apostacy*  
crept in by degrees . . . <sup>131</sup>

Milton shrewdly suggests that that in the writing of the church fathers which remained divinely inspired should, appropriately enough, be used as a prophylactic weapon against those using the ancient texts to justify episcopacy: “. . . [W]here ever wee find the remaining sparks of Originall truth, wherewith to stop the mouthes of our adversaries, and to bridle them with their own curb, who willingly passe by that which is Orthodoxall in them, and studiously cull out that which is commentitious, and best for their turnes. . . .”<sup>132</sup>

Supporting his argument in the same pamphlet that false doctrine spread as if by contagion in the early history of the church, Milton—himself not adverse to culling that which happens to be apposite to his demonstration—cites Eusebius in order to cast doubt on the veracity of early accounts of bishops having been divinely ordained. In keeping with his theory of doctrinal degeneration beginning with the apostolic fathers, Milton maintains that “it is most likely that in the Church they which came after these Apostolick men being lesse in merit, but bigger in ambition, strove to invade those priviledges by intrusion and plea of right . . . .”<sup>133</sup> Arguing that all arguments supporting prelatical authority may be called into question because some of the earliest bishops promulgated erroneous theology, Milton cites Eusebius’s report that Irenaeus mistakenly gave legitimacy to the testimony of Papias, the first bishop of Hierapolis. The latter, according to Milton’s interpretation, had “a shallow wit,

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487.

<sup>131</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 650.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 650.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 640.

and not understanding those traditions which he receiv'd, fill'd his writings with many new doctrines, and fabulous conceits."<sup>134</sup> As a result, these heretical precepts spread into the texts of other church fathers as if by contagion:

"[D]ivers Ecclesiasticall men, and *Irenæus* among the rest, while they lookt at his antiquity, became infected with his errors."<sup>135</sup>

These are the further refinements of arguments Milton had already presented in *Of Reformation*, earlier that same year. In a similar fashion, Milton, with rhetorical flourish and powerful parallelism, characterizes the precedents upon which prelatical authority is based, as pestilentially defective:

How little therefore those ancient times make for moderne Bishops  
hath bin plainly discours'd, but let them make for them as much as  
they will, yet why we ought not stand to their arbitrement shall  
now appeare by a threefold corruption which will be found upon  
them. 1. The best times were spreadingly infected. 2. The best  
men of those times foully tainted. 3. The best writings of those  
men dangerously adulterated. These Positions are to be made  
good out of those times witnessing of themselves.<sup>136</sup>

Given that "the governing image of the pamphlet . . . [is] that of the members of the true church as members of the mystical body of Christ" and that "[i]t is in accordance with that image that the metaphors used when the Episcopacy is treated tend to be metaphors of nausea, disease and deformity," Milton's casting of prelacy's provenance as infectious is to be expected.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 641.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 641.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 549.

<sup>137</sup> Don M. Wolfe and William Alfred, *Ibid.*, I, 519 n.

Not only was the behaviour of the earliest bishops (and implicitly those in seventeenth-century England as well) a burgeoning malignancy; Milton maintains further in *Of Reformation* their written records also served to propagate their spiritual malevolence:

Stay but a little, magnanimous Bishops, suppress your aspiring thoughts, for there is nothing wanting but *Constantine* to reigne, and then Tyranny her selfe shall give up all her cittadels into your hands, and count ye thence forward her trustiest agents. Such were these that must be call'd the ancientest, and most virgin times between *Christ* and *Constantine*. Nor was this general contagion in their actions, and not in their writings: who is ignorant of the foul errors, the ridiculous wresting of Scripture, the Heresies, the vanities thick sown through the volumns of *Justin Martyr*, *Clemens*, *Origen*, *Tertullian* and others of eldest time?<sup>138</sup>

Ecclesiastical corruption beginning after the apostolic age was doubly hazardous to the potentially pristine church: not only did these various church fathers taint the incipient system of belief by espousing malignant tyranny, but their treatises also contained, from Milton's point of view, germs of heretical doctrine extensively incorporated into later writings.

Milton elsewhere similarly contends that the contagion of episcopacy lay obscured behind superficial purity in the nascent church, only to proliferate to epidemic magnitude in seventeenth-century England. Turning Hall's invocation

of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, as an esteemed advocate of episcopacy against him, Milton in *Animadversions* links contemporary prelacy to dogmatic pestilence that has spread to iniquitous proportions:

... [Cyprian] indeed succeeded into an Episcopacy that began then to Prelatize, but his personal excellence like an antidote overcame the malignity of that breeding corruption which was then a disease that lay hid for a while under shew of a full, and healthy constitution, as those hydropick humors not discernable at first from a fair and juicy fleshinesse of body, or that unwonted ruddy colour which seems gracefull to a cheek otherwise pale, and yet arises from evil causes, either of some inward obstruction, or inflammation, and might deceav the first Phisicians till they had learnt the sequell, which *Cyprians* dayes did not bring forth, and the Prelatism of Episcopacy which began then to burgeon, and spread, had as yet, especially in famous men a fair, though a false imitation of flourishing.<sup>139</sup>

Rudolf Kirk succinctly glosses this passage: "Milton argues that the Episcopacy which Cyprian had advocated was historically different from the Episcopacy of seventeenth-century England, though the earlier form had had within it the seeds of corruption," adding that "a seemingly healthy glow may sometimes disguise a disease" such as malignant prelacy.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 551-52. Wolfe and Alfred argue that Milton refers to Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-between 211 and 215) rather than Clement of Rome (d. 101?), *Ibid.*, I, 551 n.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 675-76.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 675 n.

Milton in *Animadversions* mangles the language of Hall's *A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance* by characteristically depriving it of its context, both to denigrate Hall and to serve Milton's own polemical purposes. When Hall admonishes the Smectymnuans' inordinate desire for further reformation—"if in time You shall see Wooden Chalice, and Wooden Priests, thanke your selves"<sup>141</sup>—Milton delights in contorting the reference and applying it to a biblical passage, enabling him to designate prelates as pestilential apostates in a forceful analogy between irreligion and infection:

It had beene happy for this land, if your priests had beene but onely wooden, all *England* knowes they have been to this Iland not wood, but wormewood, that have infected the third part of our waters, like that Apostate starre in the Revelation; that many soules have di'd of their bitterness; and if you meane by wooden, illiterate, or contemptible, there was no want of that sort among you, and their number increasing daily, as their lazinesse, their Tavern-hunting, their neglect of all sound literature, and their liking of doltish and monasticall Schoolemen daily increast.<sup>142</sup>

Astonishingly remote from Hall's reference is Milton's allusion to Revelation 8.

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And the third angel sounded, there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters: And the name of the star

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<sup>141</sup> *A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance* (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1641), p. 121.

<sup>142</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, I, 717-18.



is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters, because they were made bitter.

Applying the notion of infectious proselytization to the contemporary doctrinal controversy, Milton declares that Anglican clergymen, having adopted Laud's corrupted religious platform over the previous decade, have subscribed to a banishment and exile of theologically and ethically pure Calvinists and other more extreme Protestants. As a result, Milton suggests that such misguided policy has created a perverse quarantine in which the plague-ridden episcopacy has isolated itself internationally by developing an irrationally antagonistic and hypocritical posture, especially in relation to other Protestant nations:

Now wheras the only remedy, and amends against the depopulation, and thinnesse of a Land within, is the borrow'd strength of firme alliance from without, these Priestly policies of theirs having thus exhausted our domestick forces, have gone the way also to leave us as naked of our firmest, & faithfullest neighbours abroad, by disparaging and alienating from us all Protestant Princes, and Commonwealths, who are not ignorant that our Prelats, and as many as they can infect, account them no better then a sort of sacrilegious, and puritanical Rebels, preferring the *Spaniard* our deadly enemy before them, and set all orthodox writers at nought in comparison of the Jesuits, who are indeed the onely corrupters of youth, and good learning; and I have heard many wise, and learned men in *Italy* say as much.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 585-86.

Milton here not only aligns episcopacy with popery, but in distributing his metaphorical equation he also connects Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism to idolatrous contagion. Jesuits and Laudians become indistinguishably interrelated as evidenced in the royalist machinations undermining not only Milton's truly orthodox Christianity but England as well.<sup>144</sup>

By the time of the publication of *Of Reformation*, Milton still had not become as wholeheartedly opposed to Charles I as he later would; in fact, ironically, Milton paints prelacy as an infectious threat not only to the population at large, but most alarmingly to the monarchy as well:

Their trade being, by the same Alchymy that the *Pope* uses, to extract heaps of *gold*, and *silver* out of the drossie *Bullion* of the Peoples sinnes, and justly fearing that the quick-sighted *Protestants* eye clear'd in great part from the mist of Superstition, may at one time or other looke with a good judgement into these their deceitfull Pedleries, to gaine as many associats of guiltines as they can, and to infect the temporall Magistrate with the like lawlesse thought not sacrilegious extortion, see a while what they doe; they ingage themselves to preach, and perswade an assertion for truth the most false, and to this *Monarchy* the most pernicious and destructive that could bee chosen.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Wolfe and Alfred provide a poignant context for Milton's declamation: "In 1634 Charles had not only approved an alliance with the Dutch against Spain but had considered ways and means of aiding the Spanish cause with English ships. The Puritans resented Laud's order of October 1, 1633, which had attempted to reduce to conformity the English congregations in Holland as well as the services held by English soldiers (*Ibid.*, I, 586 n.).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 592.

In much the same manner that Swift a half-century later would characterize Jack in *A Tale of a Tub* as a contagious dissenting proselytizer, Milton portrays Anglican prelates as mephitic agents of influence seeking to subsume secular government, to the detriment of the royal prerogative—a tenet still held tentatively at this point by Milton.

Such is the essence of Milton's argument in favour of a separation of church and state, which, however, cannot be absolute—even a magistrate acting in his secular capacity does so, ideally, as a Christian concerned for maintaining an antiseptic spirituality, as suggested in *The Reason of Church-Government*:

Thus then the civill Magistrat looking only upon the outward man (I say as a Magistrat, for what he doth further, he doth it as a member of the Church) if he find it in his complexion, skin, or outward temperature the signes and marks, or in his doings the effects of injustice, rapine, lust, cruelty, or the like, sometimes he shuts up as in frenetick, or infectious diseases; or confines within dores, as in every sickly estate. Sometimes he shaves by penalty, or mulct, or els to cool and take down those luxuriant humors which wealth and excesse have caus'd to abound. Otherwhiles he serres, he cauterizes, he scarifies, lets blood, and finally for utmost remedy cuts off.<sup>146</sup>

Pointing to the parallels between the religious and secular responsibilities of the minister and magistrate respectively, Milton maintains that transgressors displaying outward signs of moral or legal infection must be separated from healthy members of society—whether for the sake of punishment of the

offender or for the protection of those who would potentially be influenced by him.

Milton's keen awareness of the utility of this infection-irreligion metaphor is demonstrated throughout *The Reason of Church-Government*. On the one hand, Milton depicts prelacy (not surprisingly) as "a pestiferous contagion to the whole Kingdom, till like that fenborn serpent she be shot to death with the darts of the sun, the pure and powerful beams of Gods word" and "a distill'd quintessence, a pure elixar of mischief, pestilent alike to all . . ." <sup>147</sup> Conversely, Milton is capable of imagining how, from the perspective of Anglican extremists, his own co-religionists comprise an infectious hazard to Anglican purity—only to wholly discount this perceived allegation:

And this I hold to be another considerable reason why the functions of Church-government ought to be free and open to any Christian man though never so laick, if his capacity, his faith, and prudent demeanour commend him. And this the Apostles warrant us to do. But the Prelats object that this will bring profanenesse into the Church, to whom may be reply'd, that none have brought that in more then their own irreligious courses; nor more driven holinesse out of living into livelesse things. For whereas God who hath cleans'd every beast and creeping worme, would not suffer S. *Peter* to call them common or unclean, the Prelat Bishops in their printed orders hung up in Churches have proclaim'd the best of

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 835-36.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 858. The serpent referred to, according to Haug, is "a great serpent which guarded the shrine of Delphi on Parnassus . . . slain by Apollo by his rays . . ." (*Ibid.*, I, 858 n.)

creatures, mankind, so unpurifi'd and contagious, that for him to lay his hat, or his garment upon the Chancell table they have defin'd it no lesse hainous in expresse words then to profane the Table of the Lord.<sup>148</sup>

Milton's manipulation of his source material is especially significant here in his reaction to "A Declaration Concerning some Rites and Ceremonies," one of the Church of England's ecclesiastical canons published in 1640, which holds that indecorous parishioners should be required to display due reverence to the communion table:

And because experience hath shewed us, how irreverent the behaviour of many people is in many places, some leaning, others casting their hats, and some sitting upon, some standing, and others sitting under the Communion Table in time of Divine Service: for the avoiding of these and the like abuses, it is thought meet and convenient by this present Synod, that the said Communion Tables in all Chancells or Chappells, be decently severed with Rails to preserve them from such or worse profanations.<sup>149</sup>

Milton hyperextends the language of the Anglican treatise on divine practice, which does not directly refer to infectious contamination. Declaring irreverent worshippers to be profane falls far short of declaring them contagious, illustrating that not only does Milton denigrate doctrinal opponents by labelling them infectious agents, but he places such denigrations in the mouths of his

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 844-45.

antagonists to characterize their statements by distorting them, as excessively reactionary.

When in the anonymous Anglican pamphlet *A Modest Confutation of a Slanderous and Scurrilous Libell, Entitled, Animadversions* (1642), the author charges that “venemous Atheisme and profanation . . . hath broken out at [Milton’s] lips” and that “Every one that is infected with the Sicknesse” has “the Sores running upon him,”<sup>150</sup> the author foreshadows Swift’s declaration some five decades later that “Knavery and Atheism are Epidemick as the Pox.”<sup>151</sup> In his retort to the author of *A Modest Confutation*, Milton reinforces the point that spiritual contagion is so profoundly dangerous because of its invisibility:

For if the sore be running upon me, in all judgement I have scapt the disease, but he who hath as much infection hid in him, as he hath voluntarily confest, and cannot expell it, because hee is dull, for venomous Atheisme were no treasure to be kept within him else, let him take the part hee hath chosen, which must needs follow, to swell and burst with his owne inward venome.<sup>152</sup>

Affixing the metaphorical vehicle of venereal disease to the tenor of atheism enunciates the arguably versatile and popular analogy between infection and irreligion made recurringly in religious discourse throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth.

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<sup>149</sup> *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiasticall* (London: Robert Barker, 1641), unpag.

<sup>150</sup> Cited in *Complete Prose Works*, I, 896 n.

<sup>151</sup> *Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Herbert Davis. 14 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-68), I, 31.

<sup>152</sup> *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, I, 897.

While it is natural to expect that Swift the consummate preacher draws considerable attention to the contagious nature of dissenting preaching, Milton the priestly poet and pamphleteer, especially in *Areopagitica*, extensively considers the pestilential potential of heterodox publications. Proposing what may be considered a homoeopathic approach to deleterious texts, Milton declares that one needs to know evil to know good:

Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with lesse danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity then by reading all manner of tractats, and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.<sup>163</sup>

In the effort to downplay the traditional orthodox argument that perusing heterodox writings is morally hazardous, Milton discounts the notion that heretical volumes are inherently infectious, taking a cue from Nathaniel Brent's 1620 translation of Paolo Sarpi's *Historie of the Councel of Trent*. Sarpi, the excommunicated Servite theologian, observes that "some godly men made conscience of reading bad bookes, for feare of offending against one of the three points of the Law of God, to avoid the contagion of evill . . . ,"<sup>164</sup> a firm fusion of infection and irreligion.

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 516-17.

<sup>164</sup> Cited in *Complete Prose Works*, II, 517 n. The other two points are "not to expose ones selfe to temptation, without necessitie or profite; and not to spend time vainely" (*Ibid.*, II, 517 n.)

Milton in *Areopagitica* builds upon this metaphorical application by arguing against prior censorship of publications, which may itself be understood here as a form of prophylaxis. If all texts containing references to matters heretical were prohibited, the Bible itself would have to be barred, for it contains representations of what would be considered contagious principles of iniquity:

But of the harm that may result hence three kinds are usually reckon'd. First, is fear'd the infection that may spread; but then all human learning and controversie in religious points must remove out of the world, yea the Bible it selfe; for that oftentimes relates blasphemy not nicely, it describes the carnall sense of wicked men not unelegantly, it brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against providence through all the arguments of *Epicurus*: in other great disputes it answers dubiously and darkly to the common reader . . .<sup>155</sup>

Acknowledging the potential for religious texts to infect readers with heterodoxy just as apostatical preachers are capable of broadcasting irreligion to unwary worshippers, Milton delights in claiming that "we all know the Bible it selfe put by the Papist into the first rank of prohibited books."<sup>156</sup>

Pinpointing yet another paradox, Milton suggests that "[t]he ancientist Fathers must be next remov'd, as *Clement of Alexandria*, and that *Eusebian* book of Evangelick preparation, transmitting our ears through a hoard of heathenish obscenities to receive the Gospel."<sup>157</sup> Additionally, Milton declares that "... *Irenaeus*, *Epiphanius*, *Jerom*, and others discover more heresies then

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 517.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 517.



they well confute,” and that together with all the “heathen Writers of greatest infection . . . both [are] most able, and most diligent to instill the poison they suck, first into the Courts of Princes, acquainting them with the choisest delights, and criticisms of sin.”<sup>158</sup> Thus pestilential heresy, often drawn from multifarious foreign sources by multilingual yet malevolent agents of influence, spreads much more vehemently when the texts themselves are unavailable for consultation, whatever the reason: “By which compendious way all the contagion that foreine books can infuse, will finde a passage to the people farre easier and shorter then an Indian voyage, though it could be sail’d either by the North of *Cataio* Eastward, or of *Canada* Westward . . .”<sup>159</sup>

In completing the extended metaphor connecting heterodoxy and contagion in *Areopagitica*, Milton argues, seemingly paradoxically, that the apostatical influence that can be derived from infectious doctrine is more hazardous to the intellectual minority—and that publications containing contaminatory material must nonetheless be allowed: “But on the other side that infection which is from books of controversie in Religion, is more doubtfull and dangerous to the learned, then to the ignorant; and yet those books must be permitted untoucht by the licencer.”<sup>160</sup> The greatest threat posed by false doctrine—in this case that of Catholicism—is not so much to educated members of society individually, but to the general population for being susceptible to the idolatry promulgated by those with authority and capability to do so:

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 517-18.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 518.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 518-19.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 519. Parker glosses this passage succinctly: “. . . [A]lthough the ignorant are not seduced by foreign or popish books, the learned sometimes are, and the learned may spread the infection” (*Milton*, I, 269).

It will be hard to instance where any ignorant man hath bin ever seduc't by Papisticall book in English, unlesse it were commended and expounded to him by some of that Clergy . . . But of our Priests and Doctors how many have bin corrupted by studying the comments of Jesuits and *Sorbonists*, and how fast they could transfuse that corruption into the people, our experience is both late and sad.<sup>161</sup>

Indicating that Milton was flexible enough to declare any rival doctrine pestilential in nature, the polemicist's metaphorical tenor shifts to Arminianism, the doctrine of general predestination promoted by Dutch Calvinist Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), which was quickly deemed heretical by the Calvinist orthodoxy in the early seventeenth century—and ironically, later embraced by Milton:

It is not forgot, since the acute and distinct *Arminius* was perverted meerly by the perusing of a namelesse discours writt'n at *Delf*, which at first he took in hand to confute. Seeing therefore that those books, & those in great abundance which are likeliest to taint both life and doctrine, cannot be suppress without the fall of learning, and of all ability in disputation, and that these books of either sort are most and soonest catching to the learned, from whom to the common people what ever is hereticall or dissolute may quickly be convey'd, and that evill manners are as perfectly learnt without books a thousand other ways which cannot be

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<sup>161</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, II, 519. Ernest Sirluck notes that "a standard Puritan complaint" was that "the Episcopalian clergy were very susceptible to, and even

stopt, and evill doctrine not with books can propagate, except a  
teacher guide . . . <sup>162</sup>

Thus Milton places the burden on the clergyman to provide a prophylactic filter to parishioners protecting them against infectious heterodoxy “most and soonest catching” among the intellectual divines.

Numerous associations between heterodoxy and infection are made in *The History of Britain* (1670), the drafting of which began possibly as early as 1645—about one year after publication of *Areopagitica*—but possibly as late as 1647, and was completed at an uncertain date; much of the material was written in the 1650’s and possibly revised even into the Restoration.<sup>163</sup> Intending his designation of Pelagianism as infectious to be read as a contemporary commentary on that particular heresy, Milton in *The History of Britain*, implies that denouncers of the doctrine of original sin are contagious proselytizers: “To the heaps of these evils from without [fighting among the Scots, the Picts and the Britons, resulting in famine and civil unrest], were added new divisions within the Church. For *Agricola* the Son of *Severianus* a *Pelagian* Bishop had spread his Doctrine wide among the *Britans* not uninfected before.”<sup>164</sup> Milton may have chosen the wordier construction “not uninfected” rather than the more concise “infected” for two reasons. Corns describes “Milton’s enthusiasm for such compounds,” such as those formed with this negative prefix, and many coinages beginning with “un-” are Milton’s, although “uninfected” is not one of

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promoted, Roman Catholic proselytization” (*Ibid.*, II, 519 n.)

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 519-20.

<sup>163</sup> French Fogle, ed., *Ibid.*, V, xxxix-xliii.

<sup>164</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, V, 135.

them.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, Milton may have been aware that signification 1 of “uninfected” relates to the absence of “sedition, heresy, vice, or the like”—only in its second signification does it relate to freedom from “disease” or “poison.”

As Roman control over Britain waned in the fifth century, theological restraint slackened and the indigenous and revisionist doctrine of British theologian Pelagius—arguably Britain’s first nonconformist—swelled uncontrollably in popularity.<sup>166</sup> Ironically, Pelagianism is reckoned by Milton as a pestilential heresy: “About which time also *Pelagianism* again prevailing by means of some few, the *British* Clergie too weak, it seems, at dispute,” sought the assistance of two French bishops, St Germanus of Auxerre and St Lupus of Troyes in 429, as spiritual fortification against the contagious belief.<sup>167</sup> Germanus would return again to Britain in 447, this time with Severus, bishop of Trèves, on the same mission. Lifting virtually verbatim material from Bede’s eighth-century text, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Milton reinforces the venerable saint’s epidemiological categorization of Pelagianism: “. . . [T]he Pelagian heresy introduced by Agricola, son of Severianus a Pelagian prelate, had seriously infected the faith of the British Church.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Milton’s Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 85-86. The *OED* indicates that the first usage of “uninfected” in this sense is in Robert Le Grys’s 1625 translation of John Barclay’s *Argentis*, line 88.

<sup>166</sup> N.H. Keeble points to the irony of seventeenth-century Puritanism’s opposition to the heresies of Pelagius, who was himself excommunicated by Pope Innocent I: “Pelagius’ heresy was not of a kind to recommend him to later Puritans and nonconformists, who generally, from among the Church Fathers, had the highest regard for the predestinarian theology of his chief controverter, St Augustine of Hippo” (*The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 140.

<sup>168</sup> I, xvii, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price, *A History of the English Church and People*, rev edn (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), p. 58. Milton and Sherley-Price both maintain the specifically epidemiological description of Pelagianism

To offset the insurgent heresy, the imported prelates in the first episode, according to Milton, employed "continual preaching in Churches, in Streets, in Fields, and not without miracles, as is writt'n, confirm'd som, regain'd others, and . . . put to silence thir chief adversaries."<sup>169</sup> Thus the antidote to infectious heterodoxy is preaching against that malignant doctrine, followers of which used the same method of conversion: oral proselytization, that which is so essential to Swift's maintaining a prophylactic barrier against enthusiastic sermonizing. Milton, in his redaction of Bede, discreetly declines to mention that those fighting to preserve orthodoxy were doing so on behalf of Catholicism, as is made explicit by Bede: ". . . [T]he word of God was preached daily not only in the churches, but in streets and fields, so that Catholics everywhere were strengthened and heretics corrected."<sup>170</sup>

After yet another outbreak of Pelagianism nearly two decades later, Germanus and Severus answered the call to inhibit the resurgent heresy, and again successfully fortified orthodoxy by identifying the principal agents of contagious preaching and banishing them from contact with the populace.<sup>171</sup> In discussing the aftermath of the second conflict, Bede does not specifically refer to the Pelagian doctrinists as epidemiologically influential; however, Milton does:

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set forth in Bede: *ANTE paucos sane aduentus eorum annos heresis Pelagiana per Agricolam inlata, Seueriani episcopi Pelagiani filium, fidem Brittaniarum feda peste conmaculauerat*. However, some translators of the passage shy away from such a direct connotation: Bertram Colgrave renders *feda peste* as "foul taint" (*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 55. John Stevens and Lionel C. Jane render the phrase as follows: ". . . [T]he Pelagian heresy, brought over by Agricola, the son of Severianus, a Pelagian bishop, had sadly corrupted the faith of the Britons" (*The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, ed. by Ernest Rhys, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910; repr. 1939), p. 24.

<sup>169</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, V, 135-36.

<sup>170</sup> Trans. by Sherley-Price, I, xvii, p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I, xxi.

"... [T]hose Authors of new disturbance" were sentenced to banishment, and "by consent of all were deliver'd to *German*; who carrying them over with him, dispos'd of them in such place where neither they could infect others, and were themselves under cure of better instruction."<sup>172</sup> Presumably the wayward followers of Pelagius would be allowed to re-enter society-at-large upon passing a period of spiritual quarantine.

A close reading of the two editions of *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (February, April 1660) indicates that the detailed revision of the first edition was made to suggest that the desire to return to Anglicanism among some erstwhile more extreme Protestants is an infectious episode linked to the Royalist fervour increasing in anticipation of the Restoration. In the first edition, Milton warns that "to fall back, or rather to creep back so poorly as it seems the multitude would, to thir once abjur'd and detested thraldom of kingship . . . argues a strange degenerate corruption suddenly spread among us. . ."<sup>173</sup> Material added prior to this same passage in the second edition, points to the return of power-hungry prelates—"bad men who have ill manag'd and abus'd" the Reformation in England—as the principal drawback of "relapsing, to verifie all the bitter predictions of our triumphing enemies, who will now think they wisely discern'd and justly censur'd both us and all our actions as rash, rebellious, hypocritical and impious. . . argues a strange degenerate contagion suddenly spread among us fitted and prepar'd for new slaverie. . ."<sup>174</sup> This clarification that the greatest danger posed by a restoration is the re-establishment of state religion, also indicates that Milton

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<sup>172</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, V, 141.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 356-57.

considered “corruption” and “contagion” roughly synonymous (see below in the discussion of *A Readie and Easie Way*), thus allowing for a potentially epidemiological understanding to be derived from the usage elsewhere by Milton of “corruption.”<sup>175</sup>

Ironically enough, Milton soon finds himself categorized as doctrinally contagious about three years later. Anglican diarist John Evelyn in 1663 describes Milton as a potentially infectious influence, a Puritan extremist who might through family connections spread contagious irreligion to Evelyn’s son, a student of Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips. So anathematized had Milton become among the Restoration hegemonists that Evelyn feared the repercussions of his son’s contact with Phillips, a former student of Milton’s and a possible agent of transmission of the poet’s infectious heterodoxy: “Mr. *Edw: Philips*, came to be my sonns præceptor: This Gent: was Nephew to *Milton* who writ against *Salmasius’s Defensio*, but not at all infected with his principles, & though brought up by him, yet no way taint(e)d.”<sup>176</sup>

When less than two years later the physical plague outbreak in London reached epidemic proportions in April 1665, it is worth considering that Milton may have been dictating *Paradise Lost* to an amanuensis. Revision of the epic masterpiece likely continued in the following month when King Charles II appointed a Privy Council committee “to consider of the best means of

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 422.

<sup>175</sup> For another example of tandem usage see *Of Reformation*, *ibid.*, I, 549, and a discussion of that passage above.

<sup>176</sup> *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by E.S. de Beer (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 456. Parker wryly notes that Phillips at the age of thirty-three “had elaborately achieved political respectability, we gather. At fifty-four Milton still carried the brand of his principles” (*Op. cit.*, I, 596).

preventing the spreading of the infection of the Plague."<sup>177</sup> As Milton presumably neared completion of *Paradise Lost* in the first week of June, officially recorded plague deaths in London more than doubled.<sup>178</sup> Throughout this period, Milton lived less than a mile from Bunhill Fields, one of the largest mass burial sites for plague victims.<sup>179</sup> Although Milton was blind, he would have been impressed deeply by the gravity of the plague outbreak, especially if, as David Masson speculates, "in no neighbourhood in all London can the death-cart, the death-bell, and all the sights and sounds of the plague, have been more familiar and incessant than close to Milton's house."<sup>180</sup>

Milton's means of preservation was, like thousands of other Londoners, evacuation. When the young Quaker Thomas Ellwood visited Milton in Jewin Street in June, the latter "was anxious about the safety of his family and himself" and asked Ellwood to "rent . . . him some house, some temporary refuge, in the neighbourhood of Chalfont St. Peter," resulting in Milton's relocating twenty-three miles from London in Chalfont St Giles.<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, Ellwood and fellow Quaker Isaac Penington, eldest son of the former Lord Mayor of London, were arrested in a doctrinal cleansing operation for attending another Quaker's burial in Amersham.<sup>182</sup> Released from imprisonment as the infection raged unfettered, Ellwood revisited Milton at Chalfont St Giles in

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<sup>177</sup> Walter George Bell, *The Great Plague in London*, rev edn (London: Bracken Books, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 598; Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 11 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970-83), VI, 346-47; and Masson, VI, 488-90.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 490.

<sup>181</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, I, 596-97.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 597.



August, when 20,000 died of plague in London.<sup>183</sup> It was upon this occasion and against such a catastrophic backdrop that Milton presented Ellwood with the manuscript of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>184</sup>

Milton's pervasive usage of the infection-irreligion metaphor throughout his oeuvre informs his representation in *Paradise Lost* of Satan and his fellow tainted angels as infectious agents wilfully and maliciously seeking to disseminate deadly heretical rebellion wherever its introduction may be achieved. Just as plague in seventeenth-century England was contagious and deadly, Satan's influence is infectious and mortal. If it may be granted that Satan's rebellious crew posed an epidemiological threat to the faithful angels in heaven, their banishment to "A Dungeon horrible" (I. 61), may be seen as confinement in a seventeenth-century pesthouse as a disease-control measure. Plague sufferers, who in Milton's time were considered by many to be undergoing divine punishment for sin, were relegated to much the same confinement as Satan and the corrupted angels in hell:

Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd  
For those rebellious, here thir prison ordained  
In utter darkness, and thir portion set  
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n  
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole. (I. 70-74)

Naturally, plague victims would be removed to pesthouses—although not prisons or dungeons—located as far as possible from the pure, untainted populace, here the equivalent of the loyal angels who had not contracted the

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 597.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 597.

contagious disease of disobedience from Satan.<sup>185</sup> Prophylaxis and banishment were standard responses to the threat of physical contagion in the Old Testament, specifically in passages involving reactions to episodes of plague, leprosy and other infectious diseases.

Satan, "th' Apostate Angel," advises "his bold Compeer" Beelzebub (I. 125-27), that their mission is tantamount to spreading an evil gospel. Satan's state of desperation sees him reach a justification to abandon caution and corrupt good at whatever cost—much as would an irresponsible leper—because he has nothing to lose, and something, even if it is perverse, illusory and transitory, to gain:

Fall'n Cherub, to be weak is miserable  
 Doing or Suffering: but of this be sure,  
 To do aught good never will be our task,  
 But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
 As being the contrary to his high will  
 Whom we resist. If then his Providence  
 Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
 Our labor must be to pervert that end,  
 And out of good still to find means of evil. (I. 157-65)

If such an endeavour is considered a continuation of the project of rebellious dissension begun in Heaven, Satan and his infernal apostles will literally "do ill" in morally and spiritually corrupting otherwise untainted beings.

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<sup>185</sup> Clergyman and critic Richard Bentley (1662-1742) determines that a safer distance would be twice as great as Milton's stipulation: "The Distance is much too little, and might have been doubled with ease, As *thrice from Arctic to Antarctic Pole*," in *Milton's Paradise Lost* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1732), p. 5.

Abdiel's profound denunciation of Satan's transmission of evil to his cohorts is represented as an infectious process, and with this particular designation, Satan's contamination of others may be understood as the dissemination of a doctrinal disease:

O alienate from God, O spirit accurst,  
 Forsak'n of all good; I see thy fall  
 Determin'd, and thy hapless crew involv'd  
 In this perfidious fraud, contagion spread  
 Both of thy crime and punishment: henceforth  
 No more be troubl'd how to quit the yoke  
 Of God's *Messiah*; those indulgent Laws  
 Will not be now voutsaf'd, other Decrees  
 Against thee are gone forth without recall. (V. 877-85)

Abdiel's position now, however, may be viewed ironically given that he in a sense now becomes a dissenter himself although for a just cause; Abdiel now serves as an agent of anti-contagion amongst the heavenly host.

Implied in Abdiel's bold declaration is the notion that the infectious sin of rebellion automatically carries with it a corollary punishment. This literally becomes so when Satan's castigation comes to full fruition after his "triumphant" return to his followers in Hell. The fallen angels then contract further infection, this time from Satan upon his return, inadvertently validating Abdiel's prophetic utterance above:

They saw, but other sight instead, a crowd  
 Of ugly Serpents; horror on them fell,  
 And horrid sympathy; for what they saw,

They felt themselves now changing; down thir arms,  
 Down fell both Spear and Shield, down they as fast,  
 And the dire hiss renew'd, and the dire form  
 Catch't by Contagion, like in punishment,  
 As in thir crime. (X. 538-45)

Thus Milton brings full circle his frequently utilized irreligion-infection metaphor, here echoing his contention in *Of True Religion* that Catholicism—and to nearly equivalent degrees Anglicanism and Presbyterianism—are potentially pestilential systems of belief continually threatening to spread epidemiologically and thereby wreak spiritual havoc upon Milton's orthodoxy.

The portent of this catastrophic eventuality prompts the despondent frustration with which Milton, sounding particularly Swiftian, concludes both the first and the second editions of *The Readie and Easie Way*. Yet the additions to the second edition, made when the restoration of Charles II and episcopacy seemed all but certain, reveal the extent of his abhorrence of Anglicanism and its royal support system. In one such inclusion, Milton proclaims that swelling numbers of England's "perverse inhabitants are deaf" to his jeremiads; all too limited is the "abundance of sensible and ingenuous men" named in both editions who would preserve the Commonwealth and doctrinal independency.<sup>186</sup> Declaring in both editions that the efforts to restore monarchy and episcopacy are "ruinous proceedings," right-minded people in the second edition should be "justly and timely fearing to what a precipice of destruction the deluge of this epidemic madness would hurrie us through," proceeding to what in both editions

becomes the "general defection of a misguided and abus'd multitude."<sup>187</sup> Both for Milton and for Swift, seemingly incompatible theological bedfellows, heterodoxy takes the form of contagious derangement, and more than that, each represents the other's doctrinal adherents as epidemiologically hazardous.

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<sup>186</sup> *Complete Prose Works*, VII, 388, 463.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 388, 463.

*Plagued by Enthusiasm: Swift's Fear of Infectious Dissent and His  
Argument against Abolishing Christian Quarantine*

As the passage of time obligingly expands the applicability of Swift's defiantly perpetual challenge to modern scholarship in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), critics in the second half of this century have likewise multiplied the number of its satirical applications. Answering with full force the summons to contest the obscurity of the work, Swift critics have considered the *Tale* from a variety of formal and thematic perspectives, most having reached beyond the openly proclaimed antagonists—Puritanism and Roman Catholicism—to convincingly identify other anathematized Christian doctrines as defined by Swift's frenetic modern persona. Although Swift lashes out at deism, atheism and Catholicism in the *Tale* with varying degrees of concealment or severity, Presbyterianism is Swift's principal target of abuse considering its prominence—not only in *A Tale* and *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* and other early writings, but just as powerfully in some of his later sermons and tracts. Perennially viewing the threat to orthodoxy through an epidemiological lens, Swift follows and transcends the tradition established by fellow Anglican apologists over the previous century.<sup>1</sup> In the course of casting Puritanism in the worst light possible, numerous seventeenth-century antecedents of Swift portray Calvinism as a contagious menace—yet none does so with the severity or intensity of Swift, who throughout his career continues to espouse protective prophylaxis

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<sup>1</sup>Irvin Ehrenpreis, in his discussion of *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, observes that Swift "took sects [specifically nonconformist ones] to be a psychological or biological tendency, representing not the devout conscience of a variant revelation but an instinct for perverseness of every sort" (*Swift: The Man, His Works and the Age*, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962-83), II, 281).

against nonconformist sermonizing. Ironically, however, the veteran divine becomes so preoccupied with maintaining orthodoxy that he slides into dissent: oscillating between preacher and prophet, he zealously delivers jeremiads against zeal. In raging against dissenting enthusiasm, Swift grudgingly acknowledges its horrifyingly contagious appeal, and it ultimately must be envied for that very reason.

Underpinning Swift's obsessive abhorrence of doctrinal nonconformity is a profound appreciation of the power of proselytization, either benign or malignant. The latter applies when Swift, in the guise of the manic modern author of the *Tale*, indirectly and perhaps unintentionally pays reluctant tribute to his congener within the narrative, the crazed dissenting zealot Jack, "whose Adventures will be so extraordinary."<sup>2</sup> More directly and forcefully linking plague and dissenting enthusiasm than any of his predecessors, Swift's author takes pains to identify Jack twice as the founder of the "Epidemick Sect of *Aeolists*": once in Section VI and again in Section XI.<sup>3</sup> In the companion piece *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, Swift carries this association further, declaring that dissenting enthusiasm "has grown . . . Epidemick" through practitioners of "Artifice and *Mechanick Operation*."<sup>4</sup> Yoking Puritanism with pestilential infection indicates that Swift in no way openly admired Presbyterians; rather, he detested them. Unintentional or intentionally veiled praise of dissenting proselytization aside, Swift's disparaging categorizations of extreme Protestantism as infectiously influential magnify the vehemence of his

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<sup>2</sup> *Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Herbert Davis, 14 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-68), I, 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 89, 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 175.

satiric onslaught. Swift consistently suggests connotations of epidemic activity involving the dissemination of dissenting doctrine, such as at the opening of the parable section of the *Tale*.<sup>5</sup> Inclination toward casting religious dissent as contagion can also be identified in Swift's first published work, "Ode to the Athenian Society" (1692),<sup>6</sup> and the characterization of nonconformist apostasy as a pestilential phenomenon continues throughout Swift's career, in such works as *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man* (1711), *A Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders* (1720), the undated sermon *On the Trinity*, and even indirectly in late tracts such as *Queries Relating to the Sacramental Test* (1732) and *The Presbyterian's Plea of Merit* (1733).

Not one to carelessly choose metaphorical applications, Swift deliberately employs plague similitudes throughout crucial sections of *A Tale*—really the seminal work of Swift's in this regard—to underscore his categorical revulsion toward Presbyterianism: "It was clearly intended to express the attitude of a

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 46: "FOR, about this Time it happened a Sect arose, whose Tenents obtained and spread very far, especially in the *Grande Monde*, and among every Body of good Fashion." If the beliefs of this heretical denomination are considered contagious in the physical sense, this epidemic of clothes worshipping is deeply rooted; "obtained," when used in the intransitive form, denotes "prevalent" or "established," according to the *OED*. Although Swift declares that he is here introducing "*an Occasional Satyr upon Dress and Fashion*," he then specifies that members of the expanding sect "worshipped a sort of *Idol*," identified as a tailor incidental to the coats allegory of Section II.

<sup>6</sup> *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), I, 18-20, lines 76, 81, 111, and 139. Interestingly, both "epidemic" and "sect" appear in close proximity in this multifarious poem, but the words are not fused as adjective and noun until the drafting of *A Tale* later in the decade. According to Ehrenpreis, Swift urges "a bookseller and some hack assistants. . . not to mind the 'sect' (the "ill" faction of ll. 72-3) who cry them down" for "reviving learning after the wars of 1688-91" (*Swift*, I, 115). Swift praises the righteous faction for "maintain[ing] orthodox religion in the face of sniping doubters" (*Ibid.*, I, 115). Pat Rogers notes that their antagonists, the "*Surlly Sect*," are "sceptics at large, but especially satirical freethinkers in the line



moderate Churchman.”<sup>7</sup> Fundamental to an understanding of Swift’s lifelong disdain for nonconformity is the fact that he developed the relevant sections of the *Tale* between January 1695 and May 1696 as a neophyte Anglican priest in his bleak Kilroot prebend in Northern Ireland surrounded by concentrated masses of Presbyterians of Scottish origin.<sup>8</sup> That this formative experience of Swift’s—sharpened no less because of an intersecting lifelong loathing for Scotland—is crucial for an appreciation of his literary milieu is supported by Angus Ross and David Woolley: “Swift’s brief service in 1695-6 as a Church of Ireland. . . priest in a predominantly Presbyterian area at Kilroot. . . without doubt sharpened his ecclesiastical and political sensibilities.”<sup>9</sup> And given that Herbert Davis observes that “Swift’s point of view will often be better understood. . . if the *Tale* [and presumably his other works relating to religious conflict] is read with an eye to the actual conditions in Ireland,”<sup>10</sup> a brief survey of the religious climate of Ireland (and specifically the Kilroot prebend territory) is appropriate.

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of Rochester” (*Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 606.

<sup>7</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, I, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Davis observes that although the *Tale* “may have roots which go as far back as [Swift’s] last years at Trinity College, we may be fairly certain that it was at Kilroot that Swift first conceived the plan of a satire on the numerous gross corruptions in religion, which should at the same time justify the position of the Church of England, and show it to be free from the extravagancies of Papists and fanatics alike” (*Ibid.*, I, xv-xvi). Louis Landa allows for “the possibility that a portion of a *Tale of a Tub* was written at Kilroot, and, if not actually there, then while [Swift] was non-resident but still prebendary of Kilroot, with the experience of Ulster Presbyterianism fresh enough to give a dark and bitter tinge to that work” (*Swift and the Church of Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Angus Ross and David Woolley, eds., *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. x.

<sup>10</sup> Davis, *op. cit.*, I, xvi.

Although the periods of ascendancy enjoyed by Puritanism and Catholicism in England had reached effectual termini by the end of the seventeenth century, the threats posed by these rival religions to the Church of Ireland—the Anglican establishment in Ireland—loomed continually.<sup>11</sup> Evidence for Swift's belief that both doctrinal foes remained potent biological hazards is found in *On Brotherly Love*, one of Swift's sermons presumed to have been written much later than the Kilroot period:

THIS Nation of ours hath for an Hundred Years past, been infested by two Enemies, the Papists and Fanaticks, who each, in their Turns, filled it with Blood and Slaughter, and for a Time destroyed both the Church and Government. The Memory of these Events hath put all true Protestants equally upon their Guard against both these Adversaries, who, by Consequence, do equally hate us.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gerald R. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution: 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 165-66.

<sup>12</sup> *Prose Works*, IX, 172. Swift further adds in this passage from the sermon, however, that Calvinism presents the greatest menace: "The Fanaticks revile us, as too nearly approaching to Popery; and the Papists condemn us as bordering too much on Fanaticism. The Papists, GOD be praised, are, by the Wisdom of our Laws, and their own Want of Power, put out of all visible Possibility of hurting us; besides, their Religion is so generally abhorred, that they have no Advocates or Abettors among Protestants to assist them. But the Fanaticks are to be considered in another Light; they have had of late Years the Power, the Luck, or the Cunning, to divide us among ourselves; they have endeavoured to represent all those who have been so bold as to oppose their Errors and Designs under the Character of Persons disaffected to the Government; and they have so far succeeded, that now a Days, if a Clergyman happeneth to preach with any Zeal and Vehemence against the Sin or Danger of Schism, there will not want too many in his Congregation ready enough to censure him as hot and high-flying, an Inflamer of Men's Minds, an Enemy to Moderation, and disloyal to his Prince" (*Ibid.*, IX, 172). The sermon is dated 1 December 1717 (Davis, *Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies*, New York: Oxford University

Only five years before Swift is believed to have begun writing the parable of the three brothers, the Catholic forces of James II were defeated by William's army at the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690. Although English authorities failed to honour the Treaty of Limerick and thereby ensured that Catholics were severely hobbled, estimates of the proportion of Catholics to Protestants in Ireland range from 2 to 1 to 5 to 1 during the period.<sup>13</sup> Appropriately, Swift represents the papist brother Peter as a power-hungry charlatan, one who will remain powerless to convert others through his marginally influential chicanery. Just as the threat of Catholicism wanes in Ireland, Peter fades from the pages of Swift's *Tale*. Such is not the case with Jack, whose omnipresence in the parable sections of the tale accords with his omnipotence as an infectious proselytizer.<sup>14</sup> To the extent that Jack's contagious preaching endeavours threaten to overtake Christendom, the Presbyterian descendants of the Scottish settlers had effected systemic doctrinal penetration into Catholic territory, at least in Ulster, to a far greater degree than the Anglican church had achieved anywhere in Ireland.

The eighteenth-century religious landscape of Swift's homeland is described as tersely as possible by Oliver Ferguson: "Ireland was divided into three bitterly opposed religious factions," two of which came under the category

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Press, 1964), p. 222, an indication that Swift's abhorrence of dissent remained long after publication of *A Tale of a Tub*.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 7 n.

<sup>14</sup> The three brothers are introduced in Section II of *A Tale*. The character of Peter dominates the next installment of the allegory, Section IV, and it is not until Section VI that Martin (here associated with Luther's less drastic break from Rome) and Jack (John Calvin, representing Puritanism) are given names. Martin is only cursorily discussed—the focus is on Jack through to the end of

of Protestants: the dissenters and the members of the established church; the overwhelming majority were the severely penalized Catholics.<sup>15</sup> Not only were Catholics deprived of numerous religious and civil rights by the penal laws in effect during the earliest years of Swift's career, but the Catholic priesthood were subject to exile or execution under regulations seeking, via a form of prohibitive prophylaxis, a curtailment of the vitality and spread of Catholicism in Ireland:

All archbishops, bishops, deans, and vicars-general were ordered to leave the country; any remaining or returning were subject to the penalties of high treason—hanging and quartering. The inferior clergy could celebrate mass only if they were registered with the government. Unregistered priests faced transportation; if they returned to Ireland, they could be hanged.<sup>16</sup>

Although Ferguson notes that these decrees "were probably rarely applied,"<sup>17</sup> the fact that they called for a form of quarantine against the religious majority in Ireland underscores the notion that contagion and any perceived "irreligion" share common methods of "disease control." Although from Swift's perspective the Catholics were harmlessly quartered beyond the pale, the concentrated masses of Presbyterians in his immediate vicinity posed a greater threat, yet they were paradoxically treated with greater leniency—they were, after all, fellow Protestants—as much as Swift would quail at the comparison.

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this section. The Aeolists, Jack's predecessors, are the subject of Section VIII, and Jack is emphasized in the last segment of the parable, Section XI.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Owing to an organized and highly concentrated migration of colonists from Scotland to Northern Ireland throughout the seventeenth century, "the Ulster Presbyterians almost equalled conforming communicants throughout Ireland, and in their stronghold of Londonderry they greatly outnumbered them."<sup>18</sup> By the time Swift assumed control of the Kilroot prebend in 1695, the province of Ulster and "particularly Country Antrim, where Swift's parishes lay" had become nonconformist territory resulting from "a constant influx of Scottish Presbyterians. . . [t]hroughout the reigns of James I and Charles I."<sup>19</sup> Presbyterians in Ulster constituted, in effect, the predominant church, prompting Anglican clergymen, Swift among them, to take "every means to check this threat to their privileged status."<sup>20</sup> Altogether, Kilroot's demographic landscape crystallized for Swift an ancestral predisposition toward viewing Presbyterians in epidemic (and possibly even endemic) terms:

The geographical isolation of the parishes, the meanness of their church buildings and temporalities, the paucity of worshippers, the threatening crowds of the hostile sect, the profound corruption of his own prebendal antecedents—to be undisturbed by such a congeries of evil symptoms would seem a mark not of wisdom but of vice.<sup>21</sup>

Such disquiet is similarly related by Ferguson: "A great many members of the established church disapproved of the dissenters on doctrinal grounds, but the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Louis A. Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Ehrenpreis, *op. cit.*, I, 162.

deeper reason for the church's inveterate hostility to them was fear,"<sup>22</sup> and Swift must be placed among this adverse company. Irvin Ehrenpreis echoes Ferguson's psychological profile in this period of Swift, whose "first parish was Kilroot. . . in a region where the small, if dominant, class of Anglicans like himself was engulfed by a population of Roman Catholics and Presbyterians: he felt lonely and cut off."<sup>23</sup>

Swift's inimical disposition toward dissenting enthusiasm may not have originated at Kilroot, but it certainly was exacerbated in the precise locale where Swift's "ancestral prejudices against the Nonconformists were likely to be confirmed" while enduring a 16-month exposure to vigorous Presbyterian congregations while simultaneously preaching to a dispirited and diminished Anglican audience.<sup>24</sup> Development at this time of Swift's deep-rooted antipathy to nonconformity has been described similarly by Ehrenpreis: "Even if he had not just come from the civilization of Moor Park, even if he were not infused with the highest ethical ideals, even if he did not possess a both hereditary and inculcated repugnance for Puritanism, the circumstances of his entry into the church must have shocked him."<sup>25</sup> Swift also inherits traditional hostility directed toward all dissenters, most of whom had been barred or evicted from their livings after the Restoration. Just five years before Swift's birth, an estimated 2,000 Presbyterian ministers were removed from established

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<sup>22</sup> Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Ehrenpreis, *The Personality of Jonathan Swift* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> A.C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, eds., *A Tale of a Tub, To Which is added The Battle of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. xlvii. Davis likewise comments that Swift, "to satisfy perhaps his ancestral prejudices, he throws out, for the wits of all parties to play with, *A Tale of a Tub*" (*Prose Works*, I, xxii).

churches after the passage of the Act of Uniformity in 1662,<sup>26</sup> and the Five Mile Act of 1665 prohibited nonconformist preachers from coming “within five miles of any corporate town or of any place where he had formerly exercised his calling.”<sup>27</sup> Such statutes aimed at restricting nonconformist preaching—also including the Corporation Act of 1661 and the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670<sup>28</sup>—can be seen as a form of denominational prophylaxis, especially considering that Puritanism had already been associated with pestilence by Anglican apologists—either directly, as in Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) or indirectly, as in Meric Casaubon’s *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1655) and Henry More’s *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1662).

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<sup>25</sup> Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, I, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 527; and Ross and Woolley, p. x. The first Act of Uniformity of 1549 “required that the moderately Protestant Book of Common Prayer. . . should be used in Anglican worship, but imposed only comparatively mild penalties on clergy failing to do so” (J.P. Kenyon, ed., *The Wordsworth Dictionary of British History*, Ware: Wordsworth, 1994, p. 346). The second of 1552 enforced “the use of a new more obviously Protestant prayer book, [and] laid down more severe penalties for nonimplementation as well as fines for nonattendance at church” (*Ibid.*, p. 346). That of 1662 forced employment of a revised prayer book and prompted “nearly two thousand ministers” to choosed ejection over conformity (Cragg, *op. cit.*, p. 8).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> With passage of these four acts known comprehensively as the Clarendon Code, Anglicans sought to curtail the spread of nonconformist preaching in the decade following the Restoration. The first, the Corporation Act “excluded from municipal office those who refused to take communion in the Church of England, to swear the oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and nonresistance, and to reject the Solemn League and Covenant” (Kenyon, p. 93). The Conventicle Act of 1593 “imposed penalties on those who declined to attend Church of England services and attended conventicles” (*Ibid.*, p. 91), and that of 1664 “only forbade conventicles of more than five people who were not members of the same household” (*Ibid.*, p. 91), and it was renewed again in 1670 after expiring two years earlier.

Such is the accumulated baggage of influence Swift carried with him to Kilroot.<sup>29</sup>

However, as noted by Ricardo Quintana, Swift's anti-Puritan invective derives not only from this seventeenth-century tradition, but also from his own siege experience among Presbyterians in northern Ireland: "Swift's intolerance of the dissenters was fundamentally an emotional and intellectual conviction deriving from seventeenth-century writers, but it was greatly strengthened by his long association with the established church in Ireland."<sup>30</sup> It is indicative of the pervasive quality of Presbyterianism in the vicinity of Kilroot, that one Church of Ireland bishop complained prior to Swift's assuming his duties that in Antrim "[s]ome parishes have not ten, some not six, that come to [the Established Church], while the Presbyterian meetings are crowded with thousands covering all the fields."<sup>31</sup> Even Ehrenpreis himself, in describing the endemic incidence of Presbyterianism in the county surrounding Kilroot, employs a plague metaphor to do so: "Even within Antrim, no parishes were

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<sup>29</sup> Ricardo Quintana, while accurately highlighting Swift's indebtedness to the seventeenth-century tradition of holding enthusiasts in contempt, dissents from other commentators in downplaying the role of the masses of Presbyterians surrounding Swift at Kilroot in prompting the priest's depiction of the Aeolists in *A Tale of a Tub*: "It might be supposed that by 1696, when Swift was engaged on *A Tale of a Tub*, religious zeal would have lost much of its power to rouse the satirist. The dissenters of these years, though they stemmed from the zealots of the forties and fifties, had laid inspiration aside for middle-class respectability and industry. It will not do to lay the onus upon the dissenters in Ulster who had surrounded Swift at Kilroot; they, no more than their English brethren, answered to the descriptions in *A Tale of a Tub*" (*The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift*, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, repr. 1965, p. 68). Phillip Harth concludes that it is likely that Swift consulted Burton's *Anatomy*, in *Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of "A Tale of a Tub"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251. This statement of Quintana's seems to contradict that in the previous note.

<sup>31</sup> Landa, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.



more seriously infected than Swift's."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Landa notes that "Kilroot. . . suffered from the inroads of dissent."<sup>33</sup> The dogmatic agon faced by Swift, who paradoxically becomes the dissenter himself in the sense that he represents a potentially infectious incursion himself into orthodox Presbyterianism, is best summarized by Louis Landa: "In view of Swift's lifelong struggle against dissent, it is of special significance that he began his clerical career in parishes with a long history of Presbyterianism."<sup>34</sup>

Thus Swift faced an hopelessly uphill battle to attract a congregation, especially given that dissenting "ministers openly flaunted their power" in the face of "the weakness of the established Church [which] was in sharp contrast to the flourishing condition of the Kirk, which had a well-knit organization and openly held its provincial synods."<sup>35</sup> Shortly before Swift's tenure at Kilroot, Church of Ireland members in one of Swift's parishes were forced to attend Presbyterian services for want of an Anglican priest,<sup>36</sup> a state of affairs which, if protracted, would only drain the Church of Ireland further of any vitality. The plight of Anglicans in the region is succinctly summarized by Ehrenpreis: "Not only was Ulster in general heavily Presbyterian, but Swift's diocese, especially [the county of] Antrim, was still more densely so than the rest of the province."<sup>37</sup> Overriding symbolic irony derives from Swift's appointment as

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<sup>32</sup> Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, I, 160.

<sup>33</sup> Landa, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19. Here Landa adds that "there is a touch of irony in the fact that [Swift's] predecessors in these cures were of [Presbyterian] persuasion."

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20. Landa also notes here that "Belfast, only a few miles from Kilroot, was the very centre of the strength and wealth of Presbyterianism," and that "the established Church did not have, as Swift must have observed, the exclusive position it was presumed to have."

<sup>36</sup> Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, I, 161.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 160.

prebendary of Kilroot: In the Kilroot parish, the smallest of the three within Swift's prebend, "There was no church. . . only a non-functioning ruin."<sup>38</sup> Normally the priest would have a house for his own use in at least one parish, but none existed in any of Swift's parishes. Additional irony derives from the fact that Presbyterians in Ireland had the support of King William—by title the head of the Church of England—and that Irish dissenters were not subject to enforcement of the Act of Uniformity.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the "first Presbyterian minister in Ireland. . . became prebendary of Kilroot in 1619, a position he retained until his refusal to comply with the canons of the Church of England in 1636," and Swift's immediate predecessor was a Presbyterian who turned Anglican at the Restoration.<sup>40</sup>

By taking into account Swift's Sisyphean predicament in this crucial period, reading *A Tale* with a heightened awareness of infection imagery as it applies to misguided belief—for Swift now and forever Scottish Presbyterianism—indicates that when he most wanted to illustrate his utter repugnance of any infidelity toward the established religion, he chose to malign its proponents as pestilentially influential. Without question, Swift arraigns a rogues' gallery of doctrinal offenders in the doggedly bobbing tub which is the *Tale*: Ronald Paulson, while acknowledging Swift's obvious targets of Puritanism and Catholicism, focuses on Swift's adaptation of a classical attack on the Gnostic heresy; Phillip Harth argues that atheists come in for the lion's share of Swift's abuse; and more recently, Kenneth Craven suggests that Toland and the

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 159.

<sup>39</sup> Landa, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

deists face trial as the principal culprits in Swift's hanging court.<sup>41</sup> Supplanting all of these readings, John R. Clark decries trends of "formalism and separatism" in approaching *A Tale*<sup>42</sup> and argues for a unifying intratextual contagion of modern enthusiasm, one which would have the potential to spread to the reader as well:

... [H]ow can one repeatedly refer to this mélange, to these contending dichotomies [folly and knavery] in *A Tale of a Tub*, as constituting a world? Precisely because it is not the Modern alone who is infected with credulity and curiosity, with religion and science, with fancy and logic; everyone is.<sup>43</sup>

Yet to too much undervalue Swift's obvious objective of heaping ridicule upon faiths represented by Jack (and to a much lesser extent Peter) in the *Tale's* parable is to lose sight of Swift's official yet ironically zealous role as Anglican apologist, literally so in the sense of a defender of his faith against historically influential rivals. Pure anathema in this regard would be the Kirk of Scotland, Calvinism blossoming under Swift's Anglican aegis on Irish soil. Such circumstances explain an elemental philosophy of Swift's restated later in his career: "I look upon myself, in the capacity of a clergyman, to be one appointed

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to naming John Toland (1670-1722) as Swift's primary satirical victim, Craven identifies the following contemporaries of Swift as also coming under attack: John Locke (1632-1704); Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of, 1671-1713); Narcissus Marsh, Archbishop of Dublin (1638-1713); and Marsh's "disciple" Peter Browne (16??-1735).

<sup>42</sup> *Form and Frenzy in Swift's Tale of a Tub* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. x.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

by providence for defending a post assigned me, and for gaining over as many enemies as I can."<sup>44</sup>

Diminishing Jack's role as the chief target of Swift's satirical onslaught either by pointing to others more deserving of the title (Harth) or collapsing others under Jack's spacious umbrella (Craven) plays right into Swift's hands. Knowing full well that *A Tale of a Tub* would be picked apart for decades and even centuries to come for hidden or perceived meanings (just as William Wotton signally failed to do), Swift intended that Jack's character should plague critics as much as his proselytes are infected by his spiritual dogma. Although in one instance not referring specifically to Jack, Swift tells us to expect expansive and unfocused interpretations of Jack's puzzling nature. In making the *Tale's* only other reference to any word with the root "epidemic," Swift indicates that among the powerful contagions of fastidiousness and yawning, shapelessness afflicts susceptible individuals, including Jack: [A]s Mankind is now disposed, he receives much greater Advantage by being *Diverted* than *Instructed*; His Epidemical Diseases being *Fastidiousity, Amorphity, and Oscitation*. . . <sup>45</sup>

Elsewhere, in specifically referring to Jack, Patrick Reilly, more so than any other recent critic, has drawn attention to Jack's genuinely infectious essence:

Peter is just a clever mountebank and the papal impostures are simple, straightforward swindles to augment the power and wealth of Rome. Jack, by contrast—it is the measure both of his menace and his fascination—is not amenable to any such easy

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<sup>44</sup> *Prose Works*, IX, 262.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 77.

formula; he is a sincere man who believes in himself and who can communicate this belief to others as if by contagion.<sup>46</sup>

Jack's protean indeterminacy—manifested in his multiple identities—is precisely that which makes him most infectious.

In keeping with Swift's simultaneous loathing of, and fascination with, extreme Protestantism, Swift's modern persona omits—for whatever reason—any indication of the success or failure of Jack's proselytization campaign in the two key passages in which Jack—contagious by nature—has direct contact with other individuals subject to coming under his influence, the first appearing in Section VI just after Jack's separation from Martin over doctrinal differences:

AND now the little Boys in the Streets began to salute him with several Names. Sometimes they would call Him, *Jack the Bald*; sometimes, *Jack with a Lanthorn*; sometimes, *Dutch Jack*; sometimes, *French Hugh*; sometimes, *Tom the Beggar*; and sometimes, *Knocking Jack of the North*. And it was under one, or some, or all of these Appellations (which I leave the Learned Reader to determine) that he hath given Rise to the most Illustrious and Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*, who with honourable Commemoration, do still acknowledge the Renowned *JACK* for their Author and Founder.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Patrick Reilly, *Jonathan Swift: The Brave Desponder* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 66.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 88-89. The multiplicity of names referred to in this passage may echo Mark 5. 9, wherein the possessed man, when asked his name, answers: "My name is Legion: for we are many."

Frederik N. Smith points out that "if we assume that one's name is his most personal possession, then the multiplicity of names here implies a multiplicity of identities" and that "[t]he most obvious explanation for the instability of proper names is that Swift intends to satirize Catholics and Protestants into stereotypes, suggesting that whatever you call them they are all the same."<sup>48</sup> Swift's author at this point in the narrative announces that he is "now advancing to gratify the World with a very particular Account" of Aeolism, yet he of course fails to honour the promise: "A Digression in Praise of Digressions," Section VII, intervenes before the promised exposition of the Aeolists—Jack's followers—in Section VIII.

Whether the greetings of the street youths are genuine or sarcastic, Swift leaves intentionally ambiguous; Swift would realistically expect that Jack would encounter sympathetic as well as hostile individuals throughout his evangelization endeavour. But not only this is left obscure; the author explicitly allows for the possibility that John Knox (*Knocking Jack of the North*) and the Church of Scotland stand symbolically as the source of the pestilential outbreak. Such an association had previously been made only slightly more explicitly than Swift by Royalist poet John Cleveland in "The Rebell Scot" (1658): "Scotland's a Nation Epidemicall."<sup>49</sup> Equally indicative of Swift's intent to leave open the possibility of Jack's outbursts having the effect of converting the masses to Presbyterianism is the famous passage in which Jack preaches *ex tempore* on

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<sup>48</sup> *Language and Reality in Swift's A Tale of a Tub* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), pp. 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> *The Poems of John Cleveland*, ed. by Brian Morris and Eleanor Withington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 31, line 70.

the subject of predestination and unquestionably draws the attention of onlookers:

HE would shut his Eyes as he walked along the Streets, and if he happened to bounce his Head against a Post, or fall into the Kennel (as he seldom missed either to do one or both) he would tell the gibing Prentices, who looked on, that *he submitted with entire Resignation, as to a Trip, or a Blow of Fate, with whom he found, by long Experience, how vain it was either to wrestle or to cuff; and whoever durst undertake to do either, would be sure to come off with a swinging Fall, or a bloody Nose. It was ordained, said he, some few Days before the Creation, that my Nose and this very Post should have a Rencontre; and therefore, Nature thought fit to send us both into the World in the same Age, and to make us Country-men and Fellow-Citizens.*"<sup>50</sup>

This serves as a fine example of Jack's impromptu preaching style designed to maximize the number of religious conversions to Calvinism. This sermon of Jack's continues further, making it the longest unbroken speech by the infectious protagonist of the parable section of *A Tale*. As we would expect, the discourse is commented upon only cursorily by Swift's author at its close: "THIS I have produced, as a Scantling of *Jack's* great Eloquence, and the Force of his Reasoning upon such abstruse Matters."<sup>51</sup> Again, although the comment is clearly intended to be ironical, as always Swift tempts the reader (and possibly himself) into believing that Jack is eloquent and forceful—and therefore much more to be feared for his contaminatory potential.

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<sup>50</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 123.

Returning briefly to the very end of Section VI, just after Jack is identified as the founder of “the most Illustrious and Epidemick Sect of *Æolists*,” Swift’s author again emphasizes Jack’s infectious nature by quoting (inaccurately, probably by design) from Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*: “*Mellæo contingens cuncta Lepore*,” (I touch all with the honeyed charm/grace),<sup>52</sup> altered from “*musæo contingens cuncta lepore*” (I touch all with the Muses’ grace).<sup>53</sup> Significantly, either version includes *contingens*, which is etymologically related to *contagio*, the Latin term for “touching” or “contact” as well as “contagion” or “infection.”<sup>54</sup> The line of Latin verse quoted by Swift derives from a passage in which Lucretius maintains that his strain of Epicureanism is best disseminated to potential converts when cloaked in mellifluous poetry, “since this doctrine commonly seems somewhat harsh to those who have not used it.”<sup>55</sup> Lucretius’s poetic exposition of the noxious belief (among others) that the soul dies with the body, would be as abhorrent a doctrine to a Christian as would be the Calvinist principle of predestination to an orthodox Anglican, thus making it fitting that Swift should by such conspicuous placement of this line from the didactic poem link him with Jack, another whom Swift would identify as one who spreads

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 124.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 89. Guthkelch and Nichol Smith note that “*Mellæo*” is an intentionally wrong spelling of “*Melleo*,” whereby Swift disguises the metrical defect resulting from the alteration (p. 142).

<sup>53</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, I, 934, as translated by W.H.D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, repr. 1992), p. 79. William Ewald argues that the misquotation is likely intentional. In changing the lines, “there may be a reflection on the author in his promising that his description of the *Æolists* will have a honey-like charm rather than the grace of the Muses” (*The Masks of Jonathan Swift*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1954, p. 27).

<sup>54</sup> Sir William Smith and Sir John Lockwood, *Latin-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh and London: W&R Chambers and John Murray, repr. 1976), pp. 153-56.

<sup>55</sup> Lucretius I, ll. 933-34; Rouse, *op. cit.*, p. 79.



vicious dogma in the guise of seductively enthusiastic and zealous discourse. Just as Swift delivers indirect and hesitant praise for the Roman poet in the process of condemning him,<sup>56</sup> Jack also is paradoxically appreciated for his ability to spread rebellious heterodoxy.

Jack is blessed with having the enviable status not only of a fool, but he is also knavishly opportunistic—far from simply being a clown stumbling through muck to provide perverse enjoyment to onlookers. Although part of Jack's appeal derives from sympathetic feelings that might be generated toward his having to endure constant trials and tribulations, Jack also shrewdly assesses his contaminatory potential at each step along the way—even if it occasionally leads him into the gutter. Jack, who impulsively “rent the *main Body* of his *Coat* from Top to Bottom” while zealously stripping remnants of Peter's influence away, pleads with Martin, who has conservatively removed ornamental accretions from his coat, to “*Strip, Tear, Pull, Rent, Flay off all, that we may appear as unlike the Rogue Peter, as it is possible.*”<sup>57</sup> Thus does Jack's infectious proselytization campaign begin by ironically seeking his first converts from among the established church. While Jack's first evangelization effort is fruitless—“*Martin. . . at this time happened to be extremely flegmatick and sedate*” and unwilling to make further alterations—Jack's zeal for gaining

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<sup>56</sup> Swift quotes directly from *De Rerum Natura* repeatedly in *A Tale*: the second epigraph on the title page is from I, 928-31, and citations other than that discussed above are from IV, 526-27 (*Prose Works*, I, 36); VI, 786-7 (*Prose Works*, I, 61); I, 141-2 (*Prose Works*, I, 77); V, 107 (*Prose Works*, I, 95); IV, 1065, and IV, 1048 and 1055 (*Prose Works*, I, 103). Such extensive reference to Lucretius's didactic poem indicate that Swift was impressed with the work even if he detested its doctrine: “Swift claimed to have read Lucretius three times before or during 1696-7” (Ronald Paulson, *Theme and Structure in Swift's "Tale of a Tub,"* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, repr. 1972, p. 99 n.). See also Guthkelch-Nichol Smith, *op. cit.*, p. lvi.

converts only increases.<sup>58</sup> Martin's "Pedantick affected Calmness" and "*Patience* put *Jack* in a *Rage*; but that which most afflicted him was, to observe his Brother's Coat so well reduced into the State of Innocence."<sup>59</sup>

Like a plague victim seeking to infect others to lessen his suffering, Jack "would have been extremely glad to see his Coat in the Condition of *Martin's*, but infinitely gladder to find that of *Martin's* in the same Predicament with his."<sup>60</sup> Shrewdly realizing that "neither of these was likely to come to pass, he thought fit to lend the whole Business another Turn, and to dress up Necessity into a Virtue," indicating the extent of Jack's volatile versatility.<sup>61</sup> After again failing to convince Martin to reform further, Jack suffers a paroxysm leading to "a mortal Breach between these two," and this initiates Jack's unrestrained dissemination of Calvinist doctrine: "Jack went immediately to *New Lodgings*, and in a few Days it was for certain reported, that he had run out of his Wits. In a short time after, he appeared abroad, and confirmed the Report, by falling into the oddest Whimsies that ever a sick Brain conceived."<sup>62</sup> Thus it is in this diseased condition that Jack is left freely roaming the streets, all the while communicating nonconformity. Just such a malevolent infidel as embodied in Jack is vilified by Swift in his sermon *On the Trinity*:

It must be confessed, that by the Weakness and Indiscretion of busy (or at best, of well-meaning) People, as well as by the Malice of those who are Enemies to all Revealed Religion, and are not

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<sup>57</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 87.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 87.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 87-88.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 88.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 88.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 88.

content to possess their own Infidelity in Silence without communicating it to the Disturbance of Mankind; I say, by these Means, it must be confessed, that the Doctrine of the Trinity hath suffered very much, and made Christianity suffer along with it.<sup>63</sup>

Perceiving overtones of infectious intent on the part of the irreligionist maligned by Swift in this passage, Patrick Reilly identifies the reckless unbeliever as an irresponsible agent of epidemic: "[D]isbelief must always be hidden; the sceptic is a moral leper who spares his healthy compatriots by silence, by posing as a sound man. Swift flays the deliberate carriers of contagion. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

With what Swift considered to be fanatical followers of the Scottish national church in Ireland and elsewhere in mind, Swift's addled author begins Section I of *A Tale* with a discourse honouring "three wooden Machines, for the Use of those Orators who desire to talk much without Interruption," the first of which is a "*Pulpit*. . . made of Timber from the *Sylva Caledonia*" [the Scottish forest].<sup>65</sup> Damning with ironical praise, Swift—through his hack writer persona—condemns to the degree that the narrator praises the Presbyterian preaching platform, introduced as "the first of these Oratorial Machines in Place as well as Dignity," taking precedence over the ladder (a small platform adjoining the gallows) and the stage itinerant, the moveable forum for mountebanks.<sup>66</sup> For Swift, all three structures are venues of potentially baneful communication: last speeches of condemned criminals—first worked over by

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 159.

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>65</sup> *Prose Works.*, I, 34-35. Ross and Woolley note that "the austere Calvinist Kirk of Scotland, like many of the 'dissenting' groups in England, emphasized preaching" (p. 207), that process which Swift would most abhor in this principal competitors for boosting his congregation.

Grub Street aficionados—morbidly gorge printing presses, and roving quacks standing atop soapboxes deliver fallacious appeals to unwitting passers-by, but most pernicious are the dissenting ministers spreading zeal as if by contagion to their auditors.

The pulpit—here the metonymy of Presbyterian preaching—“will ever have a mighty Influence on human Ears,” the latter referring to the members of a given conventicle who would be subject to contraction of the infectious doctrine.<sup>67</sup> All three pedestals are interrelated in that the stage itinerant “is the great Seminary of the two former, and its Orators are sometimes preferred to the One, and sometimes to the Other, in proportion to their Deservings, there being a strict and perpetual Intercourse between all three.”<sup>68</sup> Swift’s explanatory footnote regarding the stage itinerant implies that Puritanism is as deadly a terminus for a dissenter as capital punishment is for a criminal awaiting execution. Speakers atop “*the Mountebank’s Stage. . . the Author determines either to the Gallows or a Conventicle.*”<sup>69</sup> Although Swift’s persona in this regard gives precedence to the mountebank’s platform, ultimately any of the three sources of discourse is a potential wellspring of pestilential communication. Swift’s use of the term “influence,” which shares etymological origins with “influenza,” accords with notions presented in one of his undated sermons, *On the Testimony of Conscience*, in which “Men who profess to have no Religion,

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<sup>66</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 35.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 35. Significantly, the word “influence” derives from the Latin *influentia* and is etymologically related to *influenza*, the highly contagious viral infection, a connection which may have occurred to Swift during the drafting process.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 36.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 35.

are full as zealous to bring over Proselytes as any Papist or Fanatick can be" and may "be of Influence or Example to others. . . ." <sup>70</sup>

That Swift continued to consider the preacher's platform to be a potential source of infection is underscored again in a pamphlet written many years later (*A Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately enter'd into Holy Orders*, 1720), prescribing a congregation in a sparsely populated rural area as the best audience for the neophyte clergyman who for a period of time may inadvertently be liable to disseminate heterodox doctrine as if by contagion: "I TAKE it for granted, that you intend to pursue the beaten Track, and are already desirous to be seen in a Pulpit; only I hope you will think it proper to pass your Quarentine among some of the desolate Churches five Miles round this Town, where you may at least learn to *read* and to *speak*, before you venture to expose your Parts in a City-Congregation."<sup>71</sup> Whether overtly or otherwise, Swift seems to echo the provisions of the Five Mile Act of 1665 mentioned above. In Swift's model, the novice minister should be installed without worry before larger numbers of potentially malleable parishioners only after obtaining the equivalent of a certificate of health from experienced auditors that he meets the criteria for orthodoxy:

Not that these [the country worshippers] are better Judges, but because if a Man must needs expose his Folly, it is more safe and discreet to do so, before few Witnesses, and in a scattered Neighbourhood. And you will do well, if you can prevail upon some intimate and judicious Friend to be your constant Hearer, and

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 157.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 64.

allow him with the utmost Freedom to give you Notice of  
 whatever he shall find amiss either in your Voice or Gesture; for  
 want of which early Warning, many Clergymen continue  
 defective, and sometimes ridiculous, to the End of their Lives.<sup>72</sup>

Describing hypothetical priests who fail to obtain proper doctrinal or rhetorical guidance in their pulpit appearances as "defective" seems to call forth a resonating echo of "infective," a word etymologically related by the Latin *facere*, to do or make, an association which Swift would be capable of appreciating. Additional reverberations may be identified in taking "defective" in the sense of abandoning allegiance to a leader, party or religion.<sup>73</sup>

Returning to a consideration of the three venues of discourse presented in the *Tale* in epidemiological terms, the mountebank would pose the greatest challenge to any disease control efforts that might be made against him: the stage itinerant is "erected with much Sagacity" for it is strategically established "[i]n the Open Air, and in Streets where the greatest Resort is," and this would allow for maximum rhetorical influence to occur.<sup>74</sup> Appropriately, Swift's modern author takes pains to argue that speech has physical properties, this deduced from the hack writer's appropriately warped scientific analysis in a passage into which Swift cannot resist inserting a characteristic pun: "Words. . . are also Bodies of much Weight and Gravity, as it is manifest from those deep Impressions they make and leave upon us."<sup>75</sup> Once it is established that speech

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 64.

<sup>73</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 303.\*

<sup>74</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 35-36.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 36. That Swift intrudes here in punning style is established convincingly by Frederik N. Smith: "The pseudoserious argument of course pivots on the ironic pun on "Impressions," which Swift forces us to take in its

is physically communicated just as a biological contagion would be, we can identify an equation between oration and infection, especially with regard to preaching. Significantly, Swift here inserts a passage from Book IV of *De Rerum Natura*, which he translates in an accompanying footnote as follows: “*Tis certain then, that Voice that thus can wound/Is all Material; Body every Sound.*”<sup>76</sup> Swift’s author adds weight to this argument in Section VIII, the exposition of Jack’s sect, the Aeolists, which only further identifies Jack with Presbyterianism.

As is evident from Swift’s basing the sect’s name upon Aeolus, the classical god of the winds, Swift identifies wind as the key element in the nature of Jack’s followers, allowing for multiple satirical attacks to be made against “*All Pretenders to Inspiration whatsoever.*”<sup>77</sup> Playing fast and loose with etymology throughout Section VIII, Swift is able to equate inspiration (literally a breathing in) with dissenting enthusiasm as well as, for example, belching and flatulence. If wind is taken as that element which causes religious conversion, and if it is also considered to be biologically transmitted as would be any number of viruses or bacteria (or atoms in seventeenth-century thinking), we can see that coming under the influence of enthusiastic preaching, for example, results in the contraction of that infection. Certain phrases in the discussion of the Aeolists’

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physical as well as figurative sense” (p. 17). Smith further elucidates the pun: “[Swift] even puns on its double usage in a physical sense: the word means both the mark left by a heavy body or a blow and the characters made by printing from type” (p. 25 n.).

<sup>76</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 36. Rouse translates Book IV, ll. 526-27 as follows: “For we must confess that voice and sound also are bodily, since they can strike upon the sense” (pp. 316-17), making Swift’s translation of *possunt impellere* (“can wound”) intentionally afflictive in its meaning. The first three definitions of *impellere* listed by Smith and Lockwood are “to push, drive, or strike against” (pp. 327-28).

practices hint at epidemiological activity. The belief among the Aeolists—one that Swift would say is erroneous—is that “*Man brings with him into the World a peculiar Portion or Grain of Wind*,”<sup>78</sup> indicating that inspiration is pandemic and congenital. This is clearly contradicted, in fact, by the Aeolists’ next principle that inspiration, “when *blown* up to its Perfection, ought not to be covetously hoarded up, stifled, or hid under a Bushel, but freely communicated to Mankind.”<sup>79</sup> If inspiration were universally spread, its unrestricted transmission would have no consequence.

Closing in upon his notion that Presbyterian preaching spreads infectious dogma, Swift records that “[a]t certain Seasons of the Year, you might behold the Priests among them in vast Numbers, with their *Mouths gaping wide against a Storm*,” receiving that which will then be disseminated among their congregations: “When, by these and the like Performances, they were grown sufficiently replete, they would immediately depart, and disembody for the Publick Good, a plentiful Share of their Acquirements into their Disciples Chaps,” further spreading the contagious system of belief.<sup>80</sup> Swift again draws attention to his link between Presbyterianism and pestilence in the form of Jack by identifying the chief god of the Aeolists, one of “the four *Winds*,” as “the *Almighty-North*,” a clear reference to Scotland.<sup>81</sup> Paradoxically, this Calvinist God is everywhere yet also in one principal location:

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<sup>77</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 95.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 96.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 96.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 96.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 97. Sir Walter Scott observes in his note to this passage that “[t]he more zealous sectaries were the presbyterians of the Scottish discipline” (qtd. in Guthkelch and Nichol Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 154 n.).



This God, tho' endued with Ubiquity, was yet supposed by the profounder *Æolists*, to possess one peculiar Habitation, or (to speak in Form) a *Cælum Empyræm*, wherein he was more intimately present. This was situated in a certain Region, well known to the Antient *Greeks*, by them called, Scotia, or the *Land of Darkness*.<sup>82</sup>

Supremely convenient for Swift is the fact that *scotia* is the Greek term for "darkness" and appears frequently in the New Testament—especially in the sense of "spiritual or moral darkness"—and that *scotia* is also the Latin name of Scotland.<sup>83</sup> Swift here is clearly mocking the extreme Protestant belief in the "inner light" or individual inspiration; he converts Milton's "darkness visible"<sup>84</sup> to, in this case, the equivalent of light invisible, a symbol of what Swift believed was a misguided faith.

Finally, Swift describes the communicative nature of Presbyterianism, and although the site of God's seat may be disputed, all agree that the contagion of Calvinism has its source in Scotland and has spread not only into England but into other regions as well:

And altho' many Controversies have arisen upon that Matter; yet so much is undisputed, that from a Region of the *like*

*Denomination*, the most refined *Æolists* have borrowed their

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 97.

<sup>83</sup> W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), p. 145. Swift would also appreciate the paradoxical nature of the term in its biblical usage: "With the exception of the significance of secrecy. . . , darkness is always used in a bad sense. Moreover the different forms of darkness are so closely allied, being either cause and effect, or else concurrent effects of the same cause, that they cannot always be distinguished" (*Ibid.*, p. 145).

Original, from whence, in every Age, the zealous among their Priesthood, have brought over their choicest *Inspiration*, fetching it with their own Hands, from the Fountain Head, in certain *Bladders*, and displying it among the Sectaries in all Nations, who did, and do, and ever will, daily Gasp and Pant after it.<sup>85</sup>

Keeping in mind that Swift has already linked Jack and the pestilential Aeolists with Presbyterianism, dissemination of the zealous doctrine as described in this passage may also be read with an understanding of biological as well as spiritual contamination, ironically one which is enthusiastically sought after by proselytes. Thus Swift's immediately apparent satirical target, Presbyterianism, is worthy of renewed consideration, especially since he genuinely dreaded the eventuality of a plague outbreak in Britain fifteen years after linking dissenters and infectious disease so profoundly in *A Tale of a Tub*.

In light of evidence that Swift feared physical plague, such pointed designations of extreme Puritanism leave little doubt that he genuinely apprehended the prospect of an uninhibited outbreak of dissenting enthusiasm—a calamity which would threaten the Church of England. Shortly after the publication of the fifth edition of *A Tale of a Tub* in 1710, Swift registers concern over reports—later proven false—of a plague epidemic in Newcastle in a journal entry to Esther Johnson. That Swift did not consider the threat of pestilence to be an insignificant vehicle for his satire is demonstrated in this 8 December 1710 letter to his confidante:

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<sup>84</sup> *Paradise Lost*, I. 63.

<sup>85</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 97-98.

We are terribly afraid of the plague; they say it is at Newcastle. I begged Mr. Harley, for the love of God, to take some care about it, or we are all ruined. There have been orders for all ships from the Baltic to pass their quarantine before they land; but they neglect it. You remember I have been afraid these two years.<sup>86</sup>

Three days later, Swift writes to Stella much more succinctly in announcing that the account is likely groundless: "They say it is a false report about the plague at Newcastle."<sup>87</sup> Swift also refers to the threat of plague—again ultimately deriving from unreliable rumours—in two letters to his intimate correspondent in 1712, further enhancing the notion that Swift did not take the threat of infection—whether physical or spiritual—lightly. On 8 January 1712, Swift writes to Stella: "And have you been plagued with the fear of the plague? never mind those reports; I have heard them five hundred times."<sup>88</sup> Swift's persistent concern over the hazard of pestilence reveals the extent to which—regardless of Jack's tantalizingly comical antics—Swift abhorred nonconformity, and his praise of a Catholic bishop's heroics during the Marseilles plague of 1720 simultaneously indicates that Swift considered Geneva to be a more hazardous source of doctrinal contagion than Rome.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Journal to Stella*, ed. by Harold Williams, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), I, 115. Williams records in a note that the report is false (*Ibid.*, p. 115).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 118.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 459.

<sup>89</sup> Swift, in a 12 May 1735 letter to Pope, applauds the selfless ministrations of Henri François Xavier de Belsunce (1671-1755), Bishop of Marseilles, during the Marseilles plague epidemic of 1720-21: "Pray God reward you for your kind Prayers. You are a good Man, & a good Christian, & I believe your Prayers will do me more good than those of all the Prelates in both Kingdoms, or any Prelates in Europe except the [Bishop] of Mars[e]lles" (*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-65), IV, 335. Basil Hall observes that here Swift "is writing to a Catholic, and

Although in *A Tale of a Tub* Swift clearly stands in the Anglican apologetic tradition established by Richard Hooker, Burton, Casaubon, More, John Eachard and Joseph Glanvill, and in the writings of Ben Jonson, Thomas Edwards and Samuel Butler in developing his mockery of extreme Puritanism, through the vehicle of Jack,<sup>90</sup> Swift may also have had in mind I Corinthians, Colossians, II Timothy and Luke's depictions of St. Paul in Acts when deriving elemental material capable of reflecting Swift's own experience as an embattled priest in Kilroot and substantially informing Jack's paradoxically appealing and menacing representation in *A Tale*. Glancing at just two of Paul's many doctrinal predicaments yields a greater understanding of the paradoxical nature of preaching in the midst of seemingly insurmountable opposition. Luke's depiction of Paul's mostly fruitless proselytization endeavour while in and among the foreign gods of Athens parallels Swift's frustrating mission in Kilroot. Paul is similarly sandwiched between two religious extremes: pagans and Jews who both react with suspicion and repugnance to the tenets of the Christian movement. Heathen opposition coincides with Presbyterian antagonism when crowds of Athenian philosophers describe Paul as a potentially influential

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behind his usual irony about bishops he makes exception for M. de Belsunce who remained to confess and comfort the sick and dying in the great plague at Marseilles in 1720. This was a practical demonstration of true religion that Swift, who usually had little good to say for 'Papists' but who approved them when they showed self-denying pity for others, was always ready to recognize" ("An Inverted Hypocrite": Swift the Churchman,' in *The World of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Brian Vickers, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 44. Pope, incidentally, honours Belsunce in *Essay on Man*: "Why drew Marseille's good bishop purer breath, / When Nature sicken'd, and each gale was death?" (*The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Maynard Mack, III, London: Methuen, 1950), IV, 107-08.

<sup>90</sup> Clarence M. Webster, "Swift and Some Earlier Satirists of Puritan Enthusiasm," *PMLA*, 48 (1933), pp. 1141-52; and Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, I, 210.

promoter of foreign deities. Such spiritual aversion is, however, in this case mutual.

Although Swift realistically expects that zealous Puritans (as typified by Jack in *A Tale*) will influence others with their infectious allure, at the same time he paradoxically and indirectly seems to reverence dissenting ministers—not for their crazed enthusiasm, but for their undeniably successful sermonizing. Paradoxically, Swift later in his career became a dissenter himself from the Whig-controlled Church of England which sought to mend fences with outcast Presbyterians through a repeal of the Sacramental Test Act: “Actually, it is just because his substance was orthodox that his style grew iconoclastic.”<sup>91</sup> Thus as strange as labelling Paul as a dissenter may seem, it may seem less so when considering that Swift himself becomes one inadvertently by remaining staunchly—and substantially—within the High Church camp. Such irony is not lost on Nigel Dennis: “The High Churchman who ridicules the Dissenters does so with an ‘enthusiasm’ that would shock any Presbyterian.”<sup>92</sup> Such is the essence of Swift, a keen fascination and obsession with that which he abhors, finally bleeding over into unintended appreciation. Thus Swift’s designation of Jack as the paradoxically most alluring and most hazardous figure is both involuntary praise and conscious condemnation, and its explanation derives from the author’s lifelong antipathy toward heterodoxy, in whatever form, for Swift, it manifests itself.

This paradoxical flavour permeates Swift’s counter-attack on Whig pamphleteers for denigrating Anglican clergymen as being tantamount to the

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 211.

<sup>92</sup> *Jonathan Swift: A Short Character* (New York: Collier, 1967), p. 44.

Catholic priesthood in an attempt to lure them away from their traditionally conservative political station. The Whigs, in addition to creating "a perpetual Clamour against the Ambition, the implacable Temper, and the Covetousness of the *Priesthood*: Such a Cant of *High-Church*, and *Persecution*, and being *Priest-ridden*; so many Reproaches about *narrow Principles*, or *Terms of Communion*," offer "scandalous Reflections on the Universities, for infecting the Youth of the Nation with arbitrary and *Jacobite Principles*; that it was natural for those, who had the Care of Religion and Education, to apprehend some general Design of altering the Constitution of both."<sup>93</sup> Swift automatically places himself among those superintendents of religion and education, in the process describing what he considers to be groundless charges of corrupting the youth in epidemiological terms; here the source of infection would be Catholic-tainted Anglicans, among whom Swift would be one. In fact, one historian summarizes Swift's view of Whig-sponsored government projectors as one that would characterize them as infectious agents: "The Whigs were regarded as the champions of professional government, and the Tories as the upholders of the ancient constitution. The first favoured the employment of experts in government, the second looked upon them as a virus introduced into the body politic..."<sup>94</sup>

Underscoring the paradoxical essence of Swift's rigid adherence to the established church, John Traugott notes that Swift, in the role of Anglican divine "probes—obsessively—a kind of original sin which he considers to have infected his Church in its very institution by Henry VIII" in Swift's pamphlet

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<sup>93</sup> *Prose Works*, II, 9.

<sup>94</sup> W.A. Speck, *Swift* (New York: Arco, 1970), p. 124.

"Concerning that Universal Hatred, which Prevails Against the Clergy" (1736).<sup>95</sup>

In the fragmentary tract, Swift has strong words for the founder of his own Church of England: "Among all the princes who ever reigned in the world there was never so infernal a beast as Henry the VIII. in every vice of the most odious kind, without any one appearance of virtue: But cruelty, lust, rapine, and atheism, were his peculiar talents."<sup>96</sup> By touching on the notion of original sin in connection with infection and Henry VIII, Traugott inadvertently elicits another link Swift may have perceived between contagion and religion. Such an association has especial significance considering that Article IX of the Thirty-nine Articles, the doctrinal formulas of the Church of England (1563) with which Swift would be intimately familiar, refers to original sin as a congenital contagion: "And this infection of nature [original sin] doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, . . . which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God."<sup>97</sup>

Paul's practice of gaining converts from the Hebrew faith by preaching in synagogues,<sup>98</sup> which itself may be considered an infectious activity from the standpoint of the Roman-Jewish authorities, finds an especially relevant echo when Swift ironically compares atheists and dissenters to the apostle in *Mr. Collins's Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713):

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<sup>95</sup> "A Voyage to Nowhere with Thomas More and Jonathan Swift: *Utopia* and *The Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*," *The Sewanee Review*, 69 (1961), p. 534.

<sup>96</sup> *Prose Works*, XIII, 123.

<sup>97</sup> *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, ed. by Edgar C.S. Gibson (London: Methuen, 1896-97; tenth edn 1928), p. 357.

<sup>98</sup> See Acts 17. 17. Christ also makes a practice of preaching in synagogues: Mark 1. 23-28, Mark 1. 39 and Mark 4. 23-24.

Why should not *William Penn* the Quaker, or any *Anabaptist*, *Papist*, *Muggletonian*, *Jew* or *Sweet Singer*, have liberty to come into *St. Paul's Church*, in the midst of Divine Service, and endeavour to convert first the Aldermen, then the Preacher, and Singing-Men? Or pray, why might not poor *Mr. Whiston*, who denies the Divinity of Christ, be allow'd to come into the Lower House of Convocation, and convert the Clergy? But alas we are over-run with such false Notions, that if *Penn* or *Whiston* should do their Duty, they would be reckoned Fanaticks, and Disturbers of the Holy Synod, although they have as good a Title to it, as *St. Paul* had to go into the Synagogues of the *Jews*; and their Authority is full as Divine as his.<sup>99</sup>

Even by sarcastically placing Paul in the same category as eighteenth-century infidels—something which Swift does again much later in his career—Swift again reveals what might be considered an underlying if not pronounced appreciation of the power of enthusiastic dissent. In *The Presbyterian's Plea of Merit* (1733), Swift suggests that Presbyterians are “Wishing with *St. Paul*, That the whole Kingdom were as they are,” and hopes that Anglicans (ironically the new “nonconformists”) will not suffer abuse under the Presbytery: “But, what Assurance will they please to give, that when their Sect shall become the National Established Worship, they will treat US DISSENTERS as we have

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<sup>99</sup> *Prose Works*, IV, 31. William Whiston, the same age as Swift, was expelled from Cambridge University in 1710 for espousing Arianistic views. With regard to William Penn—ostensibly anathema to Anglicanism—Swift puzzlingly tolerated the Quaker apologist to the extent of dining with him in a Harley affair in 1710 and calling him “My friend Penn” the following year (*Journal to Stella*, I, 45; II, 464-65).



treated them.”<sup>100</sup> Without resorting to a psychoanalysis of Swift’s enthusiasm for enthusiasts, even ironically identifying himself as a hypothetical nonconformist provokes further inquiry into his lifelong animus against them. Similarly arguing ironically from the viewpoint of “*Atheists, Deists, Scepticks and Socinians*” in *Mr. Collins’s Discourse of Free-Thinking*, Swift comes dangerously close to presenting weighty arguments in their favour.<sup>101</sup>

Nonetheless, as Landa observes in glossing this pamphlet in prophylactic terms, “Its only value is to show Swift pondering a matter that he mentions more than once, the need for stronger restraints on those who publish heterodox religious views under the pretence that they are merely exercising their right to freedom of thought.”<sup>102</sup>

In a blatantly literal sense, Swift would not have achieved the literary pinnacle which he did were it not for this *raison d’être*; such a prolonged and unwavering detestation belies an underlying respect for religious nonconformity especially given that he thrived in an atmosphere of political nonconformity.

Gradually distancing himself from Whig supporters of toleration, Swift at first

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<sup>100</sup> *Prose Works*, XII, 276.

<sup>101</sup> In ironically refuting the deist arguments of Anthony Collins (1676-1729) in *Discourse of Free-thinking* (1713) by appearing to support them against the priesthood, Swift acknowledges that those arguments—even if heterodox and repugnant—may carry sufficient force to gain converts: “There is another Thing that mightily spreads *Free Thinking*, which I believe you would hardly guess: The Priests have got a way of late of Writing Books against *Free Thinking*; I mean Treatises in Dialogue, where they introduce *Atheists, Deists, Scepticks and Socinians* offering their several Arguments. Now these *Free Thinkers* are too hard for the Priests themselves in their own Books; and how can it be otherwise? For if the Arguments usually offered by *Atheists*, are fairly represented in these Books, they must needs convert every Body that reads them; because *Atheists, Deists, Scepticks and Socinians*, have certainly better Arguments to maintain their Opinions, than any the Priests can produce to maintain the contrary” (*Ibid.*, IV, 37).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, xx.

indirectly and later openly aligns himself with the Tory devotees of Anglicanism in its purest form, a conspicuous positioning which ensures for Swift the prospect of perennially enabling himself to point a polemic finger at doctrinal dissent—in whichever manifestation it surfaces. Swift brazenly declares that should dissent be tolerated by mainstream Anglican clergy (an eventuality feared by Swift), such irreligion would only reanimate itself in another malevolent strain: “[H]ow can it be imagined that the Body of Dissenting Teachers. . . will not cast about for some new Objections to with-hold their Flocks, and draw in fresh Proselytes by some further Innovations or Refinements?”<sup>103</sup> Not only does Swift imply (with faulty logic but perhaps with intuitive accuracy as well) that new forms of schism inevitably result from toleration; he also takes for granted that the implicit mission of any clergyman is to “remove the Evil of Dissention.”<sup>104</sup> Swift neatly wraps himself in a tautology while at the same time allowing that the disseminators of factious belief may be difficult to identify:

When a *Schism* is once spread in a Nation, there grows, at length, a Dispute which are the Schismaticks. Without entering on the Arguments, used by both Sides among us, to fix the Guilt on each other; it is certain, that in the Sense of the Law, the *Schism* lies on that Side which opposeth it self to the Religion of the State.<sup>105</sup>

After seeming to concede that even his party might be seen as divisive, Swift shuts the door on any such possibility by flatly declaring that any opponent of

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 6.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 6.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 11.

the established faith is inherently a schismatic, one who spreads the contagious menace of dissension among the population at large.

That Swift viewed religious faction as an infectious hazard is unquestionable if a careful reading is made of comments in his unfinished and posthumously published *Remarks upon a Book, intituled, the Rights of the Christian Church* (circa 1708) in response to Matthew Tindal's deist work *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* (1706), which raised alarm among clergymen for its arguments against church government by the priesthood. Ironically, Swift admits that Tindal may have planted the seed in his mind or at least may have influenced Swift to view faction in such a light, indirectly acknowledging the work's impact while damning its reasoning:

I AM now opening the Book which I propose to examine. An Employment, as it is entirely new to me, so it is that to which, of all others, I have naturally the greatest Antipathy. And, indeed, who can dwell upon a tedious Piece of insipid Thinking, and false Reasoning, so long as I am likely to do, without sharing the Infection?<sup>106</sup>

Tindal, in the same work to which Swift makes reference, ironically characterizes state-supported devotion as an antidote to dogmatic dissension, a phenomenon that seems to be appreciated by all concerned for its pestilential potential:

[Queen Anne] . . . assures us from the Throne, there have not been wanting some so very malicious as to suspect her Affections to the Church, and to represent it in great Danger under her

Government; and Prayers have been made from the Pulpit in the Loyal University of *Oxford*, to continue the Throne free from the Contagion of Schism."<sup>107</sup>

In this case, Swift would point the finger at Tindal as an agent of the deistic malignancy spreading uncontrollably. Just as he does in the case of Tindal's pestilential book, Swift in *On the Trinity*, one of his undated sermons, describes the hazardously contagious quality of heterodox publications, again yoking infection and irreligion: "... Since the World abounds with pestilent Books, particularly written against this Doctrine of the Trinity; it is fit to inform you, that the Authors of them proceed wholly upon a Mistake: They would shew how impossible it is that *Three* can be *One*, and *One* can be *Three*; whereas the Scripture saith no such Thing, at least in that manner they would make it: But, only, that there is some kind of Unity and Distinction in the Divine Nature, which Mankind cannot possibly comprehend."<sup>108</sup>

Although Swift makes a seemingly cool and dispassionate acknowledgement that dissent of various strains has become ineradicably

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 73.

<sup>107</sup> *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted, Against the Romish, and all other Priests who claim an Independent Power over it* (London: 1706), p. 283.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 167. Swift in the same sermon also urges the Anglican faithful "to avoid reading those wicked Books written against this Doctrine [the Trinity], as dangerous and pernicious; so I think they may omit the Answers as unnecessary" (*Ibid.*, IX, 168). Echoing this is Swift's denunciation of dissenters in *A Sermon upon the Martyrdom of King Charles I*, which Landa (*Ibid.*, IX, 120-21), "derives partly from the occasion, for which custom sanctioned strong language, but primarily from Swift's hatred of the dissenters, whom he attacks with particular animus at the moment because they were demanding that the January 30th anniversary be abolished." Swift, with sheer violence and without authorial disguise, rails against "the folly and madness of those antient Puritan fanatics: They must needs overturn heaven and earth, violate all the laws of God and man, make their country a field of blood, to propagate whatever wild or wicked opinions came into their heads. . . ." (*Ibid.*, IX, 227).

established, he simultaneously presents a nonetheless determined plea for maintenance of the legal barrier to protect against any further incursions:

Sects, in a State, seem only tolerated, with any Reason, because they are already spread; and because it would not be agreeable with so mild a Government, or so pure a Religion as ours, to use violent Methods against great Numbers of *mistaken* People, while they do not manifestly endanger the Constitution of either. But the greatest Advocates for general Liberty of Conscience, will allow that they ought to be checked in their Beginnings, if they will allow them to be an Evil at all; or, which is the same Thing, if they will only grant, it were better for the Peace of the State, that there should be none.<sup>109</sup>

Characteristically, Swift speaks on behalf of his Whig opponents as well, assuming (too optimistically) that all of his liberal Anglican foes agree that nonconformists should either be prevented from coming into existence (something Swift already acknowledges as having irrevocably occurred) or that they should be eliminated—the latter of which would simultaneously delight Swift for the sake of the established church and for the credit due to himself for the part he played in its defence, and render him despondent for having lost the source of animus which so consistently provided him with the fodder for his brilliant polemic endeavours.

Even as early as in his satirical attack on Dryden for his changeable faith in *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift makes much of the potential for doctrinal dissension to spread uncontrollably. In parodying Dryden's prefatory excesses in Section I of *A*

*Tale*, Swift brilliantly exposes Dryden as one whose infidelity is tantamount to infection:

This [to have made a worthy literary contribution] indeed is more than I can justly expect from a Quill worn to the Pith in the Service of the State, in *Pro's* and *Con's* upon *Popish Plots*, and *Meal-Tubs*, and *Exclusion Bills*, and *Passive Obedience*, and *Addresses of Lives and Fortunes*; and *Prerogative*, and *Property*, and *Liberty of Conscience*, and *Letters to a Friend*: From an Understanding and a Conscience, thread-bare and ragged with perpetual turning; From a Head broken in a hundred places, by the Malignants of the opposite Factions, and from a Body spent with Poxes ill cured, by trusting to Bawds and Surgeons, who, (as it afterwards appeared) were profess'd Enemies to Me and the Government, and revenged their Party's Quarrel upon my Nose and Shins.<sup>110</sup>

Appropriate to a passage full of many echoes of Dryden's style in the "Postscript to the Reader" in *The Works of Virgil* (1697),<sup>111</sup> Swift draws attention to the malignant nature of schismatics, of whom Dryden—born to a family with

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 5-6.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 42. Swift in one of his footnotes makes clear the intended reference to Dryden and others: "*Here the Author seems to personate L'Estrange, Dryden, and some others, who after having past their Lives in Vices, Faction and Falshood, have the Impudence to talk of Merit and Innocence and Sufferings*" (*Ibid.*, I, 42). Although Swift's cousin poet laureate is not the only overt target in this parody, Miriam K. Starkman argues convincingly that he is the essential victim in *Swift's Satire on Learning in A Tale of a Tub* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 133.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Puritan leanings, later an Anglican and finally a Roman Catholic after 1686—would be a prime example.

A *Tale* clearly proceeds with an end to diversion, yet many passages of the work that are intended to yield utility are gravely serious, especially in the characterizations of non-Anglican Christians as well as deists and atheists, as pestilentially dangerous. And although the title page advertises a work “Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind,” the *Tale*, in keeping with Swift’s ironical intentions, falls far short of providing comprehensive amelioration by failing to go beyond casting spotlights on the dynamics of infectious irreligion—a process aptly expressed in the title of the companion piece, *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. Rather than provide a prescription for erection of a *cordon sanitaire* with which to defend the Established Church against the contagions of zeal or superstition, Swift emphasizes the paradoxically comical yet mortal menace of anathematized spiritual influence. Added to this is the overriding irony that by giving such place to Jack by faithfully recounting his fanatical meanderings, Swift exhibits an underlying appreciation of the zealous proselytization that had ensured the endemic establishment of Puritanism in regions surrounding the Church of Ireland priest in the Kilroot prebendary. Swift would like to have Jack’s swelling congregations but would denounce the means used to influence parishioners. Incisively, C.P. Daw observes, however, that Swift, in order to distance himself from potential hypocrisy, can cleverly deny the offence of prideful independence so often faulted in dissenting enthusiasts: “His explicit references to the Bible usually occur when he has temporarily cloaked himself in an adopted identity that screens him from

charges of priestly self-interest in citing Scripture as an authority for his position."<sup>112</sup>

Although the abuses in learning that Swift's author decries may be considered separately from the abuses in religion, the latter often subsume the former.<sup>113</sup> By designating in Section IX the proliferation of nascent religious sects as one of three manifestations of mental illness, Swift connects thematically to the genealogy of the lunatic Aeolists in Section VIII,<sup>114</sup> unifying the seeming disparity of the alternating sections. In presenting an argument unifying the alternating sections of *A Tale*, Paulson observes that "[t]he defender of Swift must accept the fact that, whatever statistics can be produced to the contrary, the religious theme is the crucial one to an understanding of the *Tale*."<sup>115</sup> Although Harth and Miriam Starkman seek to demonstrate unity through the separateness of the alternating sections, recurring allusions to dynamics of religion support an overriding concern for prophylactic protection of the established faith.<sup>116</sup> Taken to extremes, failure to maintain a spiritual

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<sup>112</sup> "Swift's Favorite Books of the Bible," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 43(Summer 1980), 201-12 (p. 201).

<sup>113</sup> Harth argues that the "*New Schemes in Philosophy*" relate principally to atheism, indicating that Swift's greatest concern is preventing malevolent religious or atheistic influence (pp. 85-100). Quintana, in discussing Swift's budding antipathy toward rampant intellectualism while at Moor Park, links the phenomenon with infection: "Pedantry had ceased to be a specific malady; it had become the spirit of malevolent nonsense that everywhere dethroned reason; the elect few, the men of taste, were alone immune from the virus" (*Mind and Art*, p. 13).

<sup>114</sup> Harth, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Paulson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> With the focus of Starkman's study on Swift's satirical correctives directed toward abuses in learning, a convincing argument is made for preeminence of this aspect of Swift's early masterpiece. Nonetheless, Starkman herself concedes that although the bulk of *A Tale* addresses errant erudition of the seventeenth century, those sections dealing with abuses in religion provoked the most vociferous objections: "Wotton, Dennis, and Blackmore, ridiculed in *A Tale of a*



quarantine can cause or result from either military conquest or unrestrained philosophical inquiry, the two forms of madness identified by Swift in addition to propagation of new religions. Madness, in fact, which is associated by Swift with dissenting enthusiasm, has infectious potential:

Swift, who in certain moods was tolerant towards hypocrisy as a force that could be taught to aid virtue, always regarded madness with fascinated horror, saw in madmen the new lepers as the decline of leprosy in modern Europe and the closing of the lazar houses was followed by the opening of places of confinement for the mad. The success of revolutionary Puritanism for him was as if the lazar houses had been thrown open and their inmates set free to infect the nation.<sup>117</sup>

For Swift, Calvinism encompasses other forms of fanatic extremism—whether they be innovations of a political or philosophical nature—rather than the other way about.

Inevitably, the focus in both the parable and the digressions of *A Tale* devolves to considerations of religion, such as in the "Apology," when the author

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*Tub* as exponents of Modern learning, all retaliated by attacking Swift's so-called abuse of religion" (*Op. cit.*, p. xvi). Starkman also opines that *A Tale* "may well have been conceived as principally a religious allegory, a satire on abuses in religion, but it emerged as principally a satire on abuses in Modern learning" (*Ibid.*, p. 130). Additionally, Starkman observes that the two satirical targets bleed over one into the other: "Religion and learning were by no means the discrete realms in the seventeenth century that they are now" (*Ibid.*, p. 6), and "Enthusiasm in religion, it was commonly believed, begot enthusiasm in learning. The new learning was suspected of atheism, even as Nonconformity was feared as potentially subversive of all religion" (*Ibid.*, p. 7). W.A. Speck offers a trenchant explanation for heightened interest in religious affairs of Swift's milieu: "Swift's contemporaries took their religion a good deal more seriously than their learning" (*Op. cit.*, p. 75).

<sup>117</sup> Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

challenges the reader to find “*any one Opinion [that] can be fairly deduced from that Book, which is contrary to Religion or Morality.*”<sup>118</sup> The devotedly unorthodox Anglican apologist, Swift here by implication equates “*Religion*” with the established church, cunningly dismissing Puritanism and Catholicism as inherently “irreligious.” And as Swift tells us himself in *A Project for the Advancement of Religion*, crafty connotations are not necessarily inappropriate; in arguing that Anglican clergymen should use “all honest Arts to make themselves acceptable to the Laity,” he is only following “*St. Paul, who became all Things to all Men, to the Jews a Jew, and a Greek to the Greeks,*” and Christ, who dictates that shrewdness, “that Wisdom of the Serpent,” has its place in boosting church attendance.<sup>119</sup> As is especially evident in Swift’s attacks on the Whigs for seeking greater religious toleration, religion in fact supersedes and determines his political manoeuvring. Carole Fabricant’s assertion that Swift’s political involvement was the principal impetus of his sermonizing and pamphleteering, may be made at the expense of not fully appreciating his self-appointed role as (seemingly at times) the last bastion of Anglican orthodoxy, his critically elemental defence of it on multiple fronts: “It was an inescapably and pervasively *political* landscape that regularly caught Swift’s eye and monopolized his attention.”<sup>120</sup> Were it not for Swift’s doctrinal entrenchment within the established church, his political endeavours would not have manifested themselves as they did; after all, chronologically speaking, Swift was

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<sup>118</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 2. Starkman also grants that aspects of *A Tale of a Tub* involving religion have magnetized readers and critics to a greater degree than those involving learning: “Most of the critique. . . , from Swift’s time to our own, has been devoted primarily to the religious allegory. . . ” (*Op. cit.*, p. xiii).

<sup>119</sup> *Prose Works*, II, 54. See also Matthew 10. 16.

a priest before he was a politician, although the distinction becomes blurred once he becomes heavily involved in political matters in 1708 and beyond.<sup>121</sup>

Nonetheless, for Swift, religion must ultimately take precedence over politics, as is observed by Michael DePorte: "the importance of preserving established religion is [a] persistent. . . theme in Swift's later writings,"<sup>122</sup> not to mention that the earlier writings also revolve principally around matters of religion that may manifest themselves in political arenas.<sup>123</sup> For example, in *A Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test* (1708)—a tract ostensibly political in its orientation—dynamics of religious influence dominates Swift's declaration that Scottish Presbyterians in Ireland constitute a malignant force aligned against the established church.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> J.C. Beckett, *Confrontations: Studies in Irish History* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), p. 119. Beckett's particularly apt term "priest in politics" best describes Swift's identity as it is characterized in this study, although Beckett places Swift somewhere closer to the middle between priest and politician: "He was not the dedicated cleric for whom political life is simply the means of advancing some ecclesiastical interest. He is not, at the other extreme, the politician who is only a cleric, as it were, by accident. . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 119).

<sup>122</sup> "The Road to St. Patrick's: Swift and the Problem of Belief," *Swift Studies*, 8 (1993), p. 13.

<sup>123</sup> In the ostensibly political essay *Contests and Dissentions in Athens and Rome* (1701), discussion devolves to "Reasoners, who employ so much of their Zeal, their Wit, and their Leisure for upholding the Ballance of Power in *Christendom*," who "by their Practices. . . are endeavouring to destroy it at home" (*Prose Works*, I, 200). See also the summary of doctrinal conflicts in contemporary England (*Ibid.*, I, 230-36).

<sup>124</sup> After making a series of *ad hominem* attacks on Scots in general, Swift opines that their brethren in Down and Antrim "soon grow into Wealth from the *smallest Beginnings*, [and] never are rooted out where they once fix, and increase daily by new Supplies," essentially describing the immigrants as an endemic incursion. Swift further attributes to these Presbyterians usage of a form of ethnic cleansing: "Besides, when they are the superior Number in any Tract of Ground, they are not *over patient of Mixture*; but such, whom they cannot *assimilate*, soon find it their Interest to remove." Finally, Swift seems to allude to a contagious mechanism behind the dogmatic conflict: "Add to all this,

Antagonized by the inevitably alluring zeal of dissenting preaching, Swift throughout *A Tale* implies—and in “A Proposal for Correcting. . . the English Tongue” (1712) states directly—that corruptions in the language are tied to the spread of dissenting doctrine: “During the Usurpation, such an Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon prevailed in every Writing, as was not shaken off in many Years after.”<sup>125</sup> Continuing to make use of contagion imagery, Swift in the same passage relates the contamination to political matters, but religion is nonetheless fundamentally involved: “To this succeeded that Licentiousness which entered with the *Restoration*; and from infecting our Religion and Morals, fell to corrupt our Language. . . .”<sup>126</sup> Impassioned discourse is to be shunned in favour of cool reserve, which is akin to the message Paul wishes to convey to the enthusiastic, charismatic worshippers of Corinth.<sup>127</sup> To influentially convert those still worshipping false gods requires a display of restrained preaching in congregation gatherings rather than ecstatic speaking in unknown languages (although they very well may be inspired by the Holy Spirit), just as Swift calls for dignified discourse in disseminating the gospel.

At times throughout his career obviously frustrated at the dwindling attendance at Church of Ireland services on an island inundated with Presbyterians and Catholics, Swift would praise any mechanism by which

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that they bring with them from *Scotland*, a most formidable Notion of our Church, which they look upon, at least, three Degrees worse than *Popery*; and it is natural it should be so, since they come over full fraught with that Spirit which taught them to abolish Episcopacy at home” (*Ibid.*, II, 116).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 10.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 10. Swift also intertwines contagion and religion in “The Epistle Dedicatory, to His Royal Highness Prince Posterity,” in which he describes Time’s breath as “infectious and corrupting,” with Time in a following passage having “usurped the *Priesthood*,” receiving sacrifices intended for the goddess Immortality (*Prose Works*, I, 20).

proselytes could be gained legitimately—that is, without resorting to the theatrics of dissenting ministers, seemingly summarized in the first sentence of Section I of *A Tale*: “WHOEVER hath an Ambition to be heard in a Crowd, must press, squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable Pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain Degree of Altitude above them.”<sup>128</sup> As Herbert Davis observes in discussing this passage, here is yet another “element of irony, which I think Swift was not unaware of, though it was at his own expense. For he also had an ambition, and a very powerful ambition, to be heard. . . .”<sup>129</sup> While Swift “makes fun of those who exalt themselves above the crowd by mounting upon one of those three wooden machines for the use of orators who desire to talk much without interruption, he has nevertheless devised his own Tub to provide a platform for his own special wit and genius.”<sup>130</sup> Curtailing the spread of ecstatic utterance and behaviour within the church would contribute to the overall aim of inducement to conversion, and Paul’s words of wisdom would not be lost on Swift, for whom I Corinthians was a fundamentally influential text.<sup>131</sup> A dignified and orderly service ensures that the faith will prosper and thereby advance itself further as worshippers and converts interact with others in their communities, thus casting I Corinthians as a text which bolsters a defence against dissenting heterodoxy, and “is essentially a tract setting forth, and advocating conformity to, the principles of Christianity as revealed to the

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<sup>127</sup> See I Corinthians 12, 14.

<sup>128</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 33.

<sup>129</sup> *Jonathan Swift*, p. 121.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>131</sup> Daw, *op. cit.*, p. 202: “Like most Christian clergymen, Swift refers to the New Testament more often than to the Old. Within the New Testament, however, remarkable biases emerge: almost half of these allusions and quotations can be traced to Matthew or 1 Corinthians.”

apostles" and it "responds to the early Church's most explicit confrontation with the problem of disunity."<sup>132</sup> Additionally, "There can be little doubt that a man with Swift's facility for exploiting parallels between ancient and modern history. . . would have grasped the correspondences between the Corinthian schismatics and the Dissenters of his own day."<sup>133</sup> As exemplified in both the *Tale* and repeatedly in Paul's letters, prideful self-sufficiency yields dissension and fanaticism: "[Swift] chose to attack the force of individualistic religion as 'zeal' or 'enthusiasm', and to ascribe it to pride."<sup>134</sup>

Just as sensitive as Swift to the rhetorical enticements craftily employed by sophisticated promoters of false doctrine, Paul warns the Colossians to guard against alluring arguments offered by false teachers of a heresy "that had just begun to make inroads into the congregation"<sup>135</sup> and which, ". . . if unchecked. . . would subvert the gospel and bring the Colossians into spiritual bondage."<sup>136</sup> In a sense exhorting them to maintain a prophylactic barrier to pestilential persuasion, Paul calls for redoubled awareness of the importance of "the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ . . . lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (Colossians 2. 2-4). The positive connotations of "beguile" and "enticing words" of the Authorized Version find harsher equivalents in the Rheims New Testament: ". . . that no man may

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>134</sup> Ross and Woolley, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xi.

<sup>135</sup> O'Brien, Peter T., "Colossians, The Letter of Paul to the," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 128. O'Brien glosses Colossians 2. 19 as follows: "Any teachers who lay claim to exalted heavenly visions as a prelude to fresh revelations are puffed up. Worst of all, the arrogance in these private religious experiences comes from not maintaining contact with Christ the head: they are severed from the source of life and unity" (*Ibid.*, p. 129).

deceive you by loftiness of words" (Colossians 2. 4). Significantly, Swift, in *A Sermon upon the Excellency of Christianity*, alludes to this passage of Colossians in advising parishioners to maintain protective barriers against influential dogmatizing: "St. Paul likewise, who was well versed in all the Grecian literature, seems very much to despise their philosophy, as we find in his writings, cautioning the Colossians to beware lest any man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit."<sup>137</sup>

Neither can Swift resist applying the two letters to Timothy to underscore the inevitably contagious appeal of heretical teachings. Whether the letters were written by Paul or one of his disciples, they emphasize enforcement of the Pauline rejection (something akin to a spiritual quarantine), of those who sin by succumbing to apostasy. The source of the infectious danger derives from infidels who seek, by spreading apostasy, to derail the "good soldier of Jesus Christ" from his proper course (II Timothy 3. 2-8). The Authorized Version contains a prophylactic injunction barring exposure to the "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds," in that they are commanded, "from such withdraw thyself" (I Timothy 6. 5). However, this admonition against interaction with insurrectionists, who impersonate the faithful yet spread dissension, appears in most translations of the second letter to Timothy, including that of the Authorized Version: "from such turn away," and the Rheims New Testament: "Now these avoid" (II Timothy 3. 5). In *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, as noted by Charles A. Beaumont, Swift patterns his characterization of

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>137</sup> *Prose Works*, IX, 242. Similarly, Colossians 2. 8 reads: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

enthusiastic preachers seducing impressionable women with the hope of converting them, after II Timothy.<sup>138</sup> Another injunction in the same letter warns of the epidemically exponential increase in spiritual contagion that can be generated by heretical teachers:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. (II Timothy 2. 15-18)

Both the Authorized Version and the Rheims New Testament translate the vehicle of this infection metaphor as “canker,”<sup>139</sup> a word derived from *voyn* of the Greek New Testament, which can also be translated as “spread” or “spreading.”<sup>140</sup> Avoidance of infection—spiritual or physical—seems the most prudent course, either for Anglican ministers fleeing the London plague in 1665 or for Christians subject to apostatical influence from those within their own communities in the first century. Regardless of the authorship of these two letters, they exhibit Paul’s sensitivity to the noxious transmission of heresy and the distinctively providential propagation of the Gospel, which cannot be quarantined: “wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound” (II Timothy 2. 9).

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<sup>138</sup> *Swift's Use of the Bible: A Documentation and a Study in Allusion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965), p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Kohlenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 1162.



In issuing a warning for his own time, Swift compounds his declaration of the two denominational antipodes as epidemically influential when the author in the *Apology* employs the rhetoric of infection to influence the reader: "*Why should any Clergyman of our Church be angry to see the Follies of Fanaticism and Superstition exposed, tho' in the most ridiculous Manner? since that is perhaps the most probable way to cure them, or at least to hinder them from farther spreading.*"<sup>141</sup> In addition to raising the spectres of Puritanism and Catholicism, Swift also denounces atheism and roguery, an ironical implication that broadly directed invectives against English civilization are well received, whereas condemnation of individuals through libel or slander is inexcusable:

Here [in England], you may securely display your utmost  
*Rhetorick* against Mankind, in the Face of the World; tell them,  
*"That all are gone astray; That there is none that doth good, no  
 not one; That we live in the very Dregs of Time; That Knavery and  
 Atheism are Epidemick as the Pox; That Honesty is fled with  
 Astræa; with any other Common places equally new and eloquent,  
 which are furnished by the Splendida bilis.*"<sup>142</sup>

Immediately following this passage, Swift delivers proof that such infectious discourse is highly contagious: "And when you have done, the whole Audience, far from being offended, shall return you thanks as a Deliverer of precious and useful Truths."<sup>143</sup> By pairing in each passage above the dual hazards in this parallel fashion, Swift underscores his intention to characterize doctrinal threats

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<sup>140</sup> Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 121.

<sup>141</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 31. Part of this passage is a direct echo of Romans 3. 10.

<sup>143</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 31.

as biologically invasive; Presbyterianism, Catholicism, atheism and villainy all vie equally for placement as the tenor in the author's (and Swift's) rotating infection metaphor, pinpointing heterodox beliefs as virulent contagions threatening to overrun religious order.<sup>144</sup>

Aware of how abysmally frustrating ineffective preaching can be—although ultimately Swift demonstrates a certain mass appeal in his own sermonizing<sup>145</sup>—he would identify with Paul for having endured such ordeals. Paul's sermonizing failure in causing Eutychus to fall sleep and nearly die as a result of the consequent fall from a window, catches Swift's attention so much so that this incident provides the subject of one of his few surviving sermons, *Upon Sleeping in Church*. Underlying Swift's genuine dismay at having to contend with inattentive parishioners is, perhaps, resentment that he would never allow himself to resort to enthusiastic manipulation of the congregation, such as his Presbyterian counterparts were assured of doing:

I THINK it is obvious to believe, that this Neglect of Preaching  
hath very much occasioned the great Decay of Religion among us.  
To this may be imputed no small Part of that Contempt some Men  
bestow on the Clergy; for whoever talketh without being  
regarded, is sure to be despised. To this we owe in a great

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<sup>144</sup> Although arguments may be made for splitting the satirical targets of atheism and nonconformity, Hall suggests that the two anathemas are, in Swift's mind, interrelated: "It is fundamental for understanding Swift to realize that he saw the generation preceding his birth as containing a religion which meant fanaticism, and politics which meant tyranny; and he saw the irrationality and intolerance of that time as breeding 'atheism' and moral collapse in his own day" (*Op. cit.*, p. 47).

<sup>145</sup> Ehrenpreis cites Dr John Lyon, who "reports that Swift's sermons drew a crowded audience, and that it was 'well known in Dublin' (MS. notes in

Measure, the spreading of Atheism and Infidelity among us; for, Religion, like all other Things, is soonest put out of Countenance by being ridiculed. The Scorn of Preaching might perhaps, have been at first introduced by Men of nice Ears and refined Taste; but it is now become a spreading Evil, through all Degrees, and both Sexes; for, since Sleeping, Talking and Laughing are Qualities sufficient to furnish out a Critick, the meanest and most Ignorant have set up a Title, and succeeded in it, as well as their Betters.<sup>146</sup>

Lack of respect for dignified preaching, equated to "a spreading Evil," places such irreligion in the same category as "spreading Atheism and Infidelity" and epidemic Calvinism and Catholicism, all threats to eradicate the traditional orthodoxy. Swift's designation of doctrinal factions (in this case Puritanism and Catholicism) as physically communicative is in keeping with other seventeenth-century Anglican apologists.<sup>147</sup>

In such a role himself, Swift (through his persona) responds appropriately to criticisms of the 1704 edition made, ironically, by fellow Anglicans.<sup>148</sup> The author of *A Tale* implies that those critics should have targeted publications of the apologists for Geneva and Rome and understood that certain irreverent passages were orthodox attacks on Puritanism and Roman Catholicism, whose defenders are "*heavy, illiterate Scriblers. . . who to*

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Hawkesworth's *Life of Swift*, p. 75) when the preaching came to his turn, every fifth Sunday" (*Personality*, p. 39).

<sup>146</sup> *Prose Works*, IX, 214-15.

<sup>147</sup> Most notable among Anglican opponents of dissenting enthusiasm are, as noted in Chapter 2, Burton, Casaubon, and More.

<sup>148</sup> Treatises written by fellow Anglicans against Swift's *A Tale* include William King's *Remarks on the Tale of a Tub* (1704) and William Wotton's *Observations upon the Tale of a Tub* (1705); See Guthkelch-Nichol Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

*the shame of good Sense as well as Piety, are greedily read, meerly upon the Strength of bold, false, impious Assertions, mixt with unmannerly Reflections upon the Priesthood, and openly intended against all Religion. . .*"<sup>149</sup> In addition to seeking protection from Presbyterians and Papists, Swift's author disgracefully declares he would have also hoped to protect unwitting victims of the malevolent religious persuasion shamefully (for Swift) emanating from fellow members of the Established Church:

*Had the Author's Intentions [to vilify the baneful doctrinal antagonists] met with a more candid Interpretation from some whom out of Respect he forbears to name, he might have been encouraged to an Examination of Books written by some of those Authors above-described, whose Errors, Ignorance, Dullness and Villany, he thinks he could have detected and exposed in such a Manner, that the Persons who are most conceived to be infected by them, would soon lay them aside and be ashamed. . .*<sup>150</sup>

Thus the writings Swift identifies as "*openly intended against all Religions*" are also capable of contaminating readers whose own immunological defences may not be strong enough to realize the mephitic intentions of those authors. Repeatedly the attack on the moderns devolves into an offensive against religious extremism, often indistinguishable from any other target.

Anchoring the predominant levity of the floating tub is Swift's genuine aversion to three sources of epidemically influential systems mentioned in the opening of Section IX, "the Digression concerning Madness": "*The Establishment of New Empires by Conquest: The Advance and Progress of New*

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<sup>149</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 2-3.

*Schemes in Philosophy; and the contriving, as well as the propagating of New Religions.*"<sup>151</sup> As DePorte shrewdly observes, Swift makes a clear distinction between upstart heterodoxy and Christianity, which, arguably, was a new religion:

But what of the new divinity and method of worship taught by St Paul? Claiming certain knowledge of "things agreed on all hands impossible to be known" is the sure sign of madness. How are we to distinguish Jesus from other propagators of new religions? The obvious answer, and the answer Swift gives in his sermons, is that Christianity is not the vision of a single man but the direct revelation of divine will.<sup>152</sup>

Given that Christianity is exempt from this classification, one can consider the zealous conquerors and the schismatic philosophers as collapsible under the same umbrella of dissenting doctrinism.<sup>153</sup> The distinction between the two lines of attack again blurs when the author puzzles in Section IX over the tendency of "Introducers of new Schemes in Philosophy. . . to advance new Systems with such an eager Zeal,"<sup>154</sup> a term Swift repeatedly employs in his designations of extremism and fanaticism. Swift's characterization of Presbyterianism as an infectious menace in the character of Jack illustrates that Swift was far more concerned about the potential for this strain of dissenting enthusiasm to spread

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 102. Swift, in the undated *A Sermon upon the Martyrdom of King Charles I*, recalls this passage of *A Tale*: ". . . By bringing to mind the tragedy of this day, and the consequences that have arisen from it, we shall be convinced how necessary it is for those in power to curb, in season, all such unruly spirits as desire to introduce new doctrines and discipline in the church, or new forms of government in the state" (*Ibid.*, IX, 225).

<sup>152</sup> DePorte, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Swift, *Prose Works*, I, 105.

<sup>153</sup> Harth, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97.

epidemically among the population, than for atheism, deism, or Catholicism to disseminate pervasively.<sup>155</sup> In this arena of doctrinal agon, Swift acknowledges a debt of influence to Paul for guidelines on preaching, proselytization and preserving the faith. Advising young clergymen to protect themselves from the baneful influence of sophistication, Swift reveals his indebtedness to and affinity with the apostle: "Others again, are fond of dilating on *Matter* and *Phænomena*; directly against the Advice of St. *Paul*, who yet appears to have been conversant enough in those Kinds of Studies,"<sup>156</sup> advice which Swift clearly takes to heart with regard to the perceived infectious threat to the Church of England posed by Presbyterianism.

Ironically becoming one of the "*Rabble of Scriblers*" himself, Swift's author in "The Preface" of *A Tale* defends accusations that their proliferation has reached epidemic proportions. Ever fascinated by the dynamics of influential oratory, Swift relates a seemingly digressive "short Tale" on this very subject in the process of dilating the above theme: "*A Mountebank in Leicester-Fields, had drawn a huge Assembly about him,*" and among the crowd is "*a fat unweildy Fellow*" who complains of being unduly pressed.<sup>157</sup> The corpulent auditor's grumbling provokes a weaver standing nearby to a verbal assault which has subsidiary implications of wishing the dissenter excised from the flock via

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<sup>154</sup> *Prose Works*, I, 104.

<sup>155</sup> Indeed, making a clear distinction between Puritanism and deism—both infectious hazards—was not entirely necessary from the perspective of someone such as Swift: "In so far as the *Tale* was Swift's response to the cry 'the Church in danger', his main contribution to its defence against its chief opponents, deism and dissent, was to diagnose both as symptoms of insanity" (Speck, *op. cit.*, p. 93).

<sup>156</sup> *Prose Works.*, IX, 77.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 28.

infection: "*A Plague confound [defeat] you. . .*"<sup>158</sup> Later in "The Preface" the author describes satirists as the "large eminent Sect of our *British Writers*" who overshadow the ancients, whose "Dedications, and other Bundles of Flattery run all upon stale musty Topicks, without the smallest tincture of any thing New; not only to the torment and nauseating of the *Christian* Reader, but (if not suddenly prevented) to the universal spreading of that pestilent Disease, the Lethargy, in this Island."<sup>159</sup>

Given that for Swift the terms "Christian" and "Anglican" hold virtual equivalence, forgetful torpidity here is viewed as an infectious threat to established religion, a faith which would presumably also succumb in the face of a complete dissemination of the spiritual malaise.<sup>160</sup> Elucidating just such a view, Swift notes in *The Sentiments of a Church of England Man* that "a general Calamity, a Dearth, or a Pestilence" would follow from "Abolishment of that [Anglican] Order among us" which is "fittest, of all others for preserving Order and Purity."<sup>161</sup> If the episcopacy were eliminated, plague—synonymous with dissent—would inevitably follow. Innovation, rather than promoting a vigorous

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 28.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 30. Significantly, Swift here uses the term "Sect," which has as a primary meaning "a body of people subscribing to religious doctrines usu[ally] different from those of an established Church from which they have separated" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Additionally, the term can also be a derogatory expression used to refer to a nonconformist faith.

<sup>160</sup> The 1711 treatise *Argument Against Abolishing Christianity* is essentially an argument against the elimination of Anglicanism, which for Swift is the only true Christianity. Weakening of the Church of England's stance against nonconformists would "take in all Sorts of *Dissenters*; who are now shut out of the Pale upon Account of a few Ceremonies, which all Sides confess to be Things indifferent" (*Prose Works*, II, 34). Employing demographic terminology reflecting religious division in Ireland, Swift implies that ideally, nonconformists would be quarantined and prevented from spreading influential irreligion.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 5.

faith, would only breed a corrupted doctrine, a system of belief overrun by a fatal malevolence:

It was [Swift's] firm belief that the Church of his day must move backwards, historically speaking: were it to move with the times, the times would eventually get rid of it. A tolerant Church of England, Swift insisted, could not do the duty of an Established Church: immunity from competition was essential to its existence.<sup>162</sup>

Toleration of nonconformity, it follows, would amount to a breakdown of prophylactic protection from its inevitably infectious essence, even if regression were necessary to achieve such a safeguard against such progressive forces.

Heightening the pervading irony of Swift's position as apologist of the Church of England is the fact that his institution had been historically described by Puritans as a source of malignancy itself. Looming large in any hereditary disposition Swift may have had against Puritanism would likely involve his grandfather, Vicar Thomas Swift, the staunch royalist during the Civil War who was described in 1642 by Parliamentary forces as "malignant,"<sup>163</sup> which happened to be "a term of abuse applied by the Puritans to the Royalists."<sup>164</sup> In *A Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test*, Swift makes clear his knowledge of the Puritan tradition of labelling Anglicanism as an infectious entity: "... I should be loath to see my poor titular Bishop *in partibus* [a reference to George Coke,

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<sup>162</sup> Dennis, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>164</sup> John Wilders and Hugh de Quehen, eds., *Samuel Butler: Hudibras Parts I and II and Other Selected Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 49.



Bishop of Hereford, "who was ejected from office by the Roundheads"<sup>165</sup>], seized on by Mistake in the Dark for a Jesuit, or be forced my self to keep a Chaplain disguised like my Butler, and steal to Prayers in a back Room, as my Grandfather used in those Times when the Church of *England* was *malignant*."<sup>166</sup> And when Swift declares in the next sentence that "this is ripping up old Quarrels long forgot,"<sup>167</sup> one is made aware that while the conflicts may be long-standing, they are far from being consigned to oblivion. Thus while Swift might have been loath to be labelled either immoderate or infectious in the senses discussed above, he would not have been surprised to be—depending upon the source. Likewise, Swift would have been decidedly gratified to receive such appellations had Anglicanism been somehow subsumed by Puritanism once again. After all, Swift, holding a cynical view of the popular theory of progress,

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<sup>165</sup> Dennis, *op. cit.*, p. 33 n.

<sup>166</sup> *Prose Works*, II, 121. Swift's fellow Anglican humanist Samuel Johnson shares with his predecessor an antipathy toward Presbyterianism significant for its wording which echoes that frequently employed by earlier doctrinal antagonists. During Johnson's tour with James Boswell of the western islands of Scotland in 1773, a visit to Raasay's ruined church provoked a commentary on all such ruins: "It is not only in *Raasay* that the chapel is unroofed and useless; through the few islands which we visited, we neither saw nor heard of any house of prayer, except in *Sky*, that was not in ruins. The malignant influence of *Calvinism* has blasted ceremony and decency together; and if the remembrance of papal superstition is obliterated, the monuments of papal piety are likewise effaced" (*A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 52-53. Paul Fussell's discussion of the passage might just as easily be directed at Swift, indicating that the application of the infection metaphor to irreligion resonates well into the eighteenth century: "So profound is [Johnson's] suspicion of the slightest hint of determinism that we may even be led to infer that a part of his hostility to Scotland results from his sensitivity to the deterministic strain in Calvinism. Although much of his outrage is clearly caused by spectacles of ruined and ill-kept holy places, some of the violence he displayed on the Scottish tour seems hardly explicable except as a doctrinal reaction" (*The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965; repr. 1969), pp. 93-94.

<sup>167</sup> *Prose Works*, II, 121.

had seen enough of nonconformity in his own lifetime (even if some of it was introspective) to believe that it posed a perennially potent contagious hazard to the established orthodoxy of the Church of England.

***Conformist Nonconformity: Presbyterian Apologetics and the Paradoxical  
Polemic against Infectious Sectarianism***

Perhaps the most powerful indication of the potency of the false religion-infection metaphor so widely used between 1621 and 1722 is its employment by those against whom it was often so virulently employed. The Presbyterians, categorized consistently throughout this period as agents of pestilential Calvinism by such diverse authors as Milton, Cleveland and Swift, turn the same metaphorical weapon not so often on those who seek to stigmatize them, but against those sectarians who pose essentially the same threat to their organization that the Presbyterians perennially pose to the Anglican establishment. Although the chain of this metaphor's intertextual influence vividly links defenders of the Church of England, it should also be observed that Presbyterian writers variously display a keen perception of the effectiveness of this dissent-as-contagion metaphor.

Three quite diverse Presbyterians either adroitly brandish the figurative assault against sectarian enthusiasts, such as in the case of the staunchly Presbyterian apologist Thomas Edwards and even Daniel Defoe, or denounce its application to them as does Thomas Vincent, one of the hundreds of nonconformist divines ejected for refusing to acknowledge the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Edwards emerges as the tireless keeper of catalogues of infectious sectarian heresies during the apex of Presbyterian hegemony in the 1640s; Vincent is considered by restored Anglican authorities in the 1660s to be the equivalent of a pestilential agent to be guarded against by using extreme doctrinal control measures which recall similar laws designed to combat the plague; Defoe, arguably a lifelong Presbyterian even if only in name, looks back

on the seventeenth-century wrangling and adopts the punitive tone of a High Church priest in designating dissenters as a contagious menace in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702), and designates a sectarian enthusiast as an infectious menace in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). While Defoe the merchant and journalist coyly denies a ministerial qualification in publishing openly homiletic plague warnings in several numbers of *A Review of the State of the British Nation* from 1709, he—rather like Burton—nonetheless proceeds to sermonize on the relationship between godliness and preservation from pestilential danger. Speaking elsewhere as an orthodox Presbyterian through his narrator in *A Journal*, Defoe describes the ravages of the 1665 London plague against a backdrop of religious controversy wherein the relationship between infection and false religion is explicitly articulated.

Uniting the three Presbyterians—two who preached extensively and one who was trained for the Presbyterian ministry—is an unmistakeable yet varied homiletic impulse which manifests itself in their writings. Edwards's relentless vilification of extreme Puritanism as a pestilential menace in *Gangraena* is nonetheless motivated by what he sees as a fulfilment of his ministerial role; Vincent's *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667) is itself an expanded sermon wherein the subjects of pastoral responsibility as well as doctrinal conflict are addressed with keen biblicism. Vincent identifies the Five Mile Act restricting nonconformist preaching—which was enacted during the 1665 London plague—as legislation which only increased God's wrath and exacerbated the epidemic catastrophe. Many of Defoe's writings—including *The Shortest Way* and *A Journal*—are imbued with the moralistic tone that one would expect to find in the work of one who at one time seriously considered entering the

ministry. Additionally, all three Presbyterians—ranging from the intolerant vehemence of Edwards to the expansive toleration of Defoe's narrator in *A Journal* and very possibly Defoe as well—interlard their discourse with scriptural references which in one way or another involve the dynamics of false religion and infection.

Interestingly, both Vincent—one of Defoe's sources for *A Journal* and one of those ejected with approximately 2,000 other Presbyterians who refused to conform to Anglicanism after passage of the new Act of Uniformity in 1662—and Defoe, whose development was heavily influenced by several of those ejected Presbyterians ministers, react strongly to the Five Mile Act of 1665. The stimulus of this legislation, the last of the group of laws collectively known as the Clarendon Code, was the continual proliferation of influential nonconformity. The language of the "Act for restraining Non-Conformists from inhabiting in Corporations" even suggests that its goal was to inhibit the continuing dissemination of infectious doctrine by dissenting preachers who never refuse "an opportunity to distill the poysonous Principles of Schisme and Rebellion into the hearts of His Majestyes Subjects to the great danger of [the] Church and Kingdome."<sup>1</sup> Those "in holy Orders, or pretended holy Orders, or pretending to holy Orders" who do not take an oath of loyalty to the king "shall not at any time come or be within Five miles of any Citty or Towne Corporate or Burrough that sends Burgesses to the Parlyament."<sup>2</sup>

As the severity of the London plague increased, nonconformist ministers—including Vincent—filled the pulpits left vacant by Anglican

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<sup>1</sup> 17 Car. II, cap. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

clergymen fleeing the contagion. Consequently, dissenting preachers were prohibited from residing within a five-mile radius of any corporation in an attempt to stifle what was considered by Charles II and the Anglican establishment as a secondary epidemic: nonconformist proselytization. Vincent is one of many dissenters ousted after the 1662 Act of Uniformity who suggests that the physical plague outbreak erupted as a result of God's judgement of the abusive monarchy, in *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667). Additionally, Edwards, Vincent and Defoe—not unlike St Paul and Bunyan—all undergo imprisonment for preaching (or publishing, as in Defoe's case) insurrectional religious discourse, a measure which may be seen as a form of quarantine taken to protect orthodoxy from infectious doctrine. Paradoxically, these incarcerations result from what is in their view orthodox pastoral motivation to counter the potential epidemics springing from rival doctrines.

Of the three Presbyterians upon whom this discussion will focus, it is Edwards who must be classified as the most consistently contentious in performing his calling. Defoe, although capable of inflammatory abuse while writing in the ironic mode of *Shortest Way*, emerges as a benevolent mediator in *A Journal*, either in repeating the sentiments of the thoughtful Vincent or even in revealing his essential open-mindedness. Although doctrinal controversy looms in the background of Vincent's famous sermon, its language cannot be said to reflect a desire on his part to overtly engage doctrinal antagonists in controversial intercourse. But from the beginning of his preaching career, Edwards distinguished himself as a defiantly independent and vociferous controversialist. In February 1627, after having been appointed university preacher at his alma mater, Cambridge, Edwards was imprisoned for advocating

a disregard for temporal authority: "... [H]e preached a sermon in which he counselled his hearers not to seek carnal advice when in doubt" and "declared he would testify and teach no other doctrine though the day of judgment were at hand."<sup>3</sup> From this point forward, Edwards's "nonconformist tendencies very soon excited attention," and this resulted in being "suppressed or suspended" by Archbishop William Laud—ironically the very same course of action Edwards was to recommend so enthusiastically to control the spread of contagious sectarianism.<sup>4</sup> Additional irony derives from Edwards having been prosecuted in the high commission court for delivering, in his own words, "such a poor sermon as never a sectary in England durst have preached in such a place and at such a time,"<sup>5</sup> but the result is not known.<sup>6</sup>

But with the ascendancy of the Presbyterians in the 1640's, Edwards "came forward as one of their most zealous supporters, not only preaching, praying, and stirring up the people to stand by them, but even advancing money."<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 1644, Edwards attacked resurgent independents "with unexampled fury from the pulpit," which led to the publication in 1646 of *Gangraena*, his vituperative catalogue of sectarian heresies "which wellnigh exhausted the language of abuse which ran to three parts by the end of the year."<sup>7</sup> Paradoxically, Edwards's revilement of doctrinal opponents—which often emerges in the relentless yoking of sectarianism and infection—is so forceful that it loses its force: "Any controversial value which Edwards's work might

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<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*. Edwards was ordered in March 1628 to make a public recantation and did so the following month.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

possess is almost entirely set at naught by the unrestrained virulence of his language, and the intemperate fury with which he attacked all whose theological opinions differed, however slightly, from his own."<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding his immoderate language usage, Edwards did see himself in the role of a defender of orthodoxy even if he displayed some of the zeal which he so repeatedly denounces:

Central to Edwards' denunciation of the sectaries is a Presbyterian-Calvinist conception of the proper religious ordering of church and state. . . . By the beginning of 1646 when the first part of *Gangraena* was issued Edwards' fears for the fate of church, state and society were intense.<sup>9</sup>

Part of this anxiety derived from the fact that the Independents were now attacking the Presbyterians in much the same fashion that the Presbyterians had attacked the Anglicans: "Ready themselves to fulminate in the pulpit, to use the press both to accuse and to propose, and to work both openly and covertly, fairly and unfairly, for their cause, they were distressed and angered to see their tactics taken up by their opponents."<sup>10</sup> Toward this end, Edwards's copious denunciations in *Gangraena* constitute, from his point of view, notice of the urgency of erecting protective barriers against "turbulent sectaries" who seek to seduce others with their infectious doctrine:

. . . I write this Tractate to preserve many tender consciences from falling, by giving warning to them beforehand, . . . that they

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> M.M. Goldsmith and Ivan Roots, eds., *Gangraena*, by Thomas Edwards (Exeter: *The Rota* and the University of Exeter, 1977), p. 9; p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



may fear, and tremble, and look to themselves, as also that I might brand errours and false doctrine too well thought of, and too kindly dealt with in these times.<sup>11</sup>

More to his purpose, Edwards elsewhere stipulates that it is precisely his priestly devotion to ensuring the spiritual vitality of those under his guardianship which necessitates casting sectarian enthusiasts as contagious infidels:

Ministers in their meetings, should advise and agree together, to consider of and think upon some wayes and means, for the preventing the further growth of the sects, preserving their people from the infection, and the remedying of them; and therefore it were good, that in the City and in each County, the Orthodox godly Ministers would chuse a company among themselves, make a Committee to attend upon this work, and draw up some things that might be useful [*sic*] to put a stop to our errours, which might come forth in the name, not of any one man, but of all; as many eyes see more then one, and many hands build up more . . .<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Edwards in a sense sees *Gangraena* as a sort of counter-infection which would ideally stave off any further growth of heterodoxy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years* (London: Ralph Smith, 1646), p. 14. (This first part of *Gangraena* will hereafter be referred to as Vol. I).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 165.

<sup>13</sup> For Edwards, according to Goldsmith and Roots, "Truth, indeed, was necessary to combat the lies and errors that Edwards saw spreading about him. It was not enough merely to denounce them; many of his Presbyterian brethren had done and were doing just that. So he set out to compile a detailed catalogue of them" (*Ibid.*, p. 7).

Thus the impetus driving Edwards to complete the three volumes containing the accounts of some 200 heresies was simultaneously an abhorrence of the spreading contagion of sectarianism and an obsession with its inner workings: "The pestilence terrified him but also exercised a fascination which drove him through sheet after sheet and volume after volume."<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Swift reveals precisely these combined sentiments of repulsion and allurement in his attacks on Presbyterianism.

Setting the stage for a catalogue that would ultimately extend into three volumes, Edwards in his dedication to "The Right Honovrable The *Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament*" cautions that "*sects and schismes increase and grow daily,*" and that "*Sectaries . . . doing even what they will, committing insolencies and outrages, not only against the truth of God and the peace of the Church, but the Civil state also, going up and down Countries, causing riots, yea tumults and disturbances in the publike Assemblies!*"<sup>15</sup> Hinting at the notion that such uncontrolled zealots "*cast out of other Countries for their Errours, not only live here, but gather Churches, preach publicly their Opinions!*"<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Edwards, sounding rather like an Anglican clergyman of a decade earlier, declares that "*there hath not been to this day any exemplary restraint of the Sectaries*" and that paradoxically, as with earlier restrictions on Roman Catholics, legislation to inhibit their growth only spurred a recrudescence:

. . . [P]reaching of laymen was never more in request then since your Ordinance against it, Presbyteriall Government never more preached, printed against, then since your Votes, Orders and

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<sup>14</sup> Goldsmith and Roots, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I, unpagged.

*Ordinances for it; never more dangerous unlicensed Books printed, then since the Ordinance against unlicensed printing; and when men have been complained of for the breach of Ordinances, as that of lay preaching, &c. how are they dismissed, and preach still, infect still?*<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps in attempting to explain the psychological motivation of embracing a prohibited system of belief, however, Edwards's spirited condemnations in *Gangraena* will only exacerbate the problem if it be allowed that vociferous complaints encourage additional spiritual waywardness.

The dedicatory epistle to Parliament also contains an indication of one of Edwards's major contentions about the proliferation of sectarians: "*swarms . . . of all sorts of illiterate mechanick Preachers,*" several of whom Edwards will excoriate uniformly as infectious itinerants spreading hazardous dissent to whomever comes into contact with them.<sup>18</sup> Despite the appearance of a haphazardly assembled collection of instances of doctrinal contamination, Edwards follows a tight linear argument regarding these insidiously mobile agents disseminating religious disease. Perceptively identifying the contagious nature of amateur sectarian preachers having contact with potential proselytes, Edwards asserts that they "spread their errours the more in some great Town where some of the Sectaries being souldiers have been quartered," and "they have desired the use of severall houses of persons well affected, that in the after-noon some Christians might meet to confer together of some points."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, I, unpagued.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I, unpagued.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I, unpagued.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 66.

Dangerous schismatics, almost as if by biological impulse, seek to come into contact with as many hosts to accommodate their contagion—"not contenting themselves to reason in the house where quartered, or in any one house that might be larger to hold many, but to get a new house every day, the more to infect and possesse the people with their wayes and Tenets."<sup>20</sup> Edwards likewise reports that a "godly Minister told me . . . that some souldiers belonging to Colonell *Iretons* Regiment quartering but two nights in his Parish, infected many" and that "he had rather have given a great deal of mony then they should have come thither" for disseminating Arminian principles.<sup>21</sup> The noxious belief that Christ died for all men is further spread, according to Edwards, by "such and such men [who] hold all kind of errorrs, and vent them up and down, and they say 'tis their conscience" and "preach, write and infect all that come neare them."<sup>22</sup>

Featured examples of these irrepressible enthusiasts emerging from the meaner peasant class are "one . . . *Iohn Hich* of Hauridge . . . who . . . was before a Souldier"; "one *Marshall* a Bricklayer, a yong man living at *Hackney*"; and "one *Lamb* who was a Sope-boyler" in London and beyond. Edwards takes pains to point out that each of these renegade preachers arose from the working class, presumably sufficient reason in and of itself to call their orthodoxy into question. But Edwards offers much more in support of his argument that such pestilential ministers must be controlled as would be an infectious disease threatening the general population. Edwards relates that Hich "lived in the Parsonage-house lately"—already an objectionable incursion—and "became a preacher to many

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 96.

with his dangerous Tenets and uncivil carriage."<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, Hich "hath infected the said Hauridge and places Adjacent, and labours at Markets, Fairs, and private meetings, (which he hath almost every Lords-day) to poyson and infect the whole Country, and hath disturbed the peace also."<sup>24</sup> Marshall the bricklayer "infects many with his errors" and "maintained . . . that he for his part understood the mystery of God in Christ better then St. *Paul*," that "to the Citizens, The Scripture is your golden calfe" and "that the Scriptures are full of contradictions, and all sin is more from God then from men . . ."<sup>25</sup>

Much to the dismay of Edwards, Lamb the soup-boiler boasts "a Church that meets in Bell-Alley in Colemanstreet called *Lambs Church*"—and both the man and the church "are very Erroneous, strange doctrines being vented there continually, both in Preaching and in way of Discoursing and Reasoning . . ."<sup>26</sup> The notion of contagious enthusiasts "venting" dangerous dogma becomes for Edwards something of a mantra, establishing another precedent for Swift's airborne Aeolism:

Heresies and errours, spread sooner, further, and more incurably; yea, take and infect them, whom corrupt manners could not prevail with; in broaching and maintaining heresies, men vent their parts, learning, get a name and fame by them, which they do not by committing drunkennesse, uncleannesse; men will dye in their errours, and stand to them to the death, going by a rule (as

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 248.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 70.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 70. Edwards's description of Hich ironically follows that made by Tertullus of St Paul wherein the apostle is "a pestilent *fellow*, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world . . ." (Acts 24. 5).

<sup>25</sup> *Gangraena*, I, 80.

they conceive) but men all along purpose to repent of their wicked practises . . . <sup>27</sup>

An atmospheric release of infectious inspiration, literally, is in fact Edwards's principal concern, as reflected in the title of the first part of *Gangraena*, which catalogues the "*Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years.*"

Again using "vent" in the sense of publishing or spreading abroad a doctrine or opinion,<sup>28</sup> Edwards in the second part of his catalogue distinguishes England's enthusiasts for their insidiousness: "[T]he Sectaries of our times have in many respects . . . gone beyond the Sectaries of other ages and kingdoms, and done worse then their fathers, justifying them in all their abominations which they committed."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, they "have vented and spread so many poysonous and dangerous principles and positions, as are enough to corrupt and infect all the Christian world, if the Lord in mercie do not prevent it."<sup>30</sup> With an attitude toward the sectarians just as scornful, the Royalist (and still Anglican) Dryden in *The Medal* employs the same terminology in casting Puritans as a contagious menace: "The swelling poison of the sev'ral sects, / Which wanting vent, the nation's health infects / Shall burst its bag, and fighting out their way / The various venoms on each other prey" (294-97). Indicative of the gravity of his denunciation of the zealous rabble, Dryden in the same poem employs the same rhyme to make the same point: "All hands unite of every jarring Sect; / They cheat the Country first, and then infect." (197-98). Somewhat ironically,

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 92.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 152.

<sup>28</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, signification 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Gangraena*, II, 179.

Dryden's "language of abuse in his satirical verse, though often directed against the Dissenters, nonetheless owes something to Puritan pamphlets."<sup>31</sup>

Additional theological defilement from the perspective of Edwards—perhaps an even greater threat than that generated in conventicles—results when "*Lamb Preaches* sometimes (when he can get into Pulpits) in our Churches."<sup>32</sup> Countering the principles of Calvinism, Lamb preaches "universal Grace, the Arminian Tenets; and he Preaches in the Countreys up and down," and "*Lamb* with one *Oats* and others of that Church . . . Preach their corrupt Doctrines, and . . . Dip."<sup>33</sup> Upon another occasion, "*Lamb* & one *Tomlins* with others, were travelling in *Essex* to do the Devils work . . . to make Disciples and propagate their way, and indeed into most counties of *England* . . . some Emissaries out of the Sectaries Churches are sent to infect and poyson the counties . . ."<sup>34</sup> Further transmission of this doctrinal disease even threatens to corrupt regions beyond the borders of England:

[S]everal Sectaries went early to *Bristol* and those parts, . . . and into *Wales* also, so that we are like to have Sectarisme like a universal Leprosie over-spread this whole Kingdom. I pray God keep it out of *Ireland*; and I hope *Scotland* by Gods mercy, and the benefit of the Presbyterial Government will keep it out there."<sup>35</sup>

Again Edwards's cautionary utterances closely resemble those made (to no avail) by defenders of Anglicanism in the previous decade. And ironically, Edwards's

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 179.

<sup>31</sup> James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Gangraena*, I, 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 92.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 93.

concern for maintaining Presbyterianism's protective barrier against pestilential sectarians is mirrored in the attitude of the sectarians toward Presbyterian system. Edwards relates that "two honest men . . . last *July* told me, that they had heard an Independent . . . say . . . that the *Scots* and the [Westminster] Assembly were pests and plagues of the Commonwealth . . ." <sup>36</sup>

Relying in part upon biblical precedent, Edwards also attributes the spread of infectious enthusiasm to diabolical forces, such as when he extrapolates from the image of "the unclean spirit . . . gone out of a man" who "walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none" of Matthew 12. 43:

But the Devil that wicked and envious spirit, when he saw the state of the Church of God to be so happy and prosperous, he could not endure it; but begins to think upon subtile and pestilent Councils, searching diligently all kind of wayes by which he might wholly overthrow it. <sup>37</sup>

Elsewhere portraying zealous Puritanism as the equivalent of infectious Satanism, Edwards further supports his argument in finding biblical parallels, most notably Colossians 2. 8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit . . ." Christians, Edwards maintains, "had need beware of the sheeps clothing, of Satan transformed into an Angel of light, and that they may be preserved" and should "shun [the] society and company" of erroneous

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 93.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 24. Edwards adds that "the Sectaries have carried themselves towards the Assembly with the greatest scorne and reproach that ever any sort of men carried themselves towards such a company of Ministers learned and godly" and that "the Assembly [is] call'd Antichristian, Romish, bloudy, the plagues and pests of the Kingdome, Baals Preists, Diviners, Southsayers . . ." (*Ibid.*, III, 230).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 131-32.



preachers.<sup>38</sup> Employing the same imagery as Milton in *Lycidas* to denote a contagious hazard posed to the flock by malevolent ministers, Edwards declares that *Gangraena* has resulted in “many Sectaries being so discovered” who will therefore “not be able for the future to do so much hurt and mischief among the people” because “their Sheeps skins are by this pull’d over their Wolves ears, and many will now shun, and be afraid of them who before knew them not, and this disappointment of infecting and corruping (*sic*) others vexes and mads them to the heart.”<sup>39</sup>

Setting forth a precept which amounts to erecting a prophylactic barrier against false teachers of heterodoxy, Edwards cites apostolic advice regarding contact with influential apostates. In doing so, Edwards proceeds to apply two of these warnings to seventeenth-century schismatics: “[S]o Christians are commanded . . . to avoid them, . . . to turn away from them spoken of sectaries, . . . not to receive thim into house, neither bid them God speed, give them no countenance.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Edwards paradoxically bemoans the fact that salubrious enthusiasm no longer overrides sectarian fanaticism: “O the zeal that hath been in the Primitive times against keeping of company and familiarity with hereticks!”<sup>41</sup> Finally, offering a crowning example of a polemic conflation of false religion and infection, Edwards compares sectarian places of worship to breeding grounds of contagious heresy: “They [Christians] must take heed of

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 173.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 173. Here Edwards cites Romans 16. 17 regarding agents of religious faction: “avoid them . . . which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned”; II Timothy 3. 5: “from such turn away”; and II John 10: “If there come any unto you, and bring not [Christ’s] doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 173.

going to their Conventicles and Churches, to hear them preach and exercise; those private meetings are the nurseries of all errours and heresies, very pest houses."<sup>42</sup>

In the preface to the third part of *Gangraena*, Edwards also applies the Old Testament to his argument against factious contemporaries:

*In this following Book . . . every impartiall and ingenuous Reader may plainly behold the many Deformities and great Spots of the Sectaries of these times, Spots of all kinds, Plague spots, Feaver spots, Purpule spots, Leprosie spots, Scurvey spots, Spots upon them discovering much malignity, rage & frensie, great corruption and infection, of whom may be said as in Moses Song,*

Deut. 32.5.<sup>43</sup>

After citing this biblical passage, wherein the unfaithful "have corrupted themselves, their spot is not *the spot* of his children: *they are* a perverse and crooked generation" (Deuteronomy 32. 5), Edwards desires that "*the Sectaries themselves and others*" will be deceived with "*good words and faire speeches*" to counteract heretical influence. By reading his book "*in the feare of God,*" Edwards is "*confidently perswaded many of the Sectaries who know not the depths of Sathan would quickly be taken off, become out of love with their way and returne, and others kept from going after those wayes.*"<sup>44</sup> Finally, Edwards contends that *Gangraena* will serve as "*a Sovereigne Antidote both to expell the poyson already received and to prevent the taking infection.*"<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 173.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, III, unpagued.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, III, unpagued.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, III, unpagued.

Characteristically applying diverse biblical texts to his immediate context of advising against contact with contagious sectarians, Edwards exhorts his congregation at-large through his printed sermon to give wide berth to those broadcasting irreligious influence:

Hence then from all the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies, and wicked Practises that are to be found among the Sectaries in their Assemblies and Conclaves, let all such who have been deceived and drawn to them under pretences of greater purity, holinesse, &c. and have any fear and awe of God and his Word, be exhorted to leave and forsake them, and to return to the publike Assemblies, and communion of this and other Reformed Churches.<sup>46</sup>

In support of his argument, Edwards cites Song of Solomon: "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee" (6. 13); a verse drawn from St Peter's first sermon: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2. 40); and "that call from Heaven" to abjure Babylonish whoredom: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18. 4).<sup>47</sup>

Unintentionally admitting to having effected a less than total reclamation of sectarians into the fold of Christianity, Edwards introduces the second part of *Gangraena* by announcing that his additional "Relation of more Stories and Practises of the Sectaries" will convince readers "that the plague of Sectarisme rages more and more, putting forth Symptoms presaging death and destruction

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 203.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 203.

both to Church and State, if not timely prevented."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Edwards further claims that *Gangraena* is "a great means (through the blessing of God) of preserving the earth from being corrupted and tainted by the fornications and poysonous principles of the Sectaries," in part because "it hinders making of Proselytes, and so for want of growing up to such a number as they designe and hope for, they may misse of a Toleration, and so in the issue, a Domination, which is so much fought for by them."<sup>49</sup>

Again taking the credit for exposing the pestilential nature of the extreme nonconformists, Edwards toward the close of the third part of *Gangraena* decries the unfair advantage of the sectarians military establishment in establishing a network of proselytization among the general population: "[We] may see from all the Errors, Heresies, Insolencies of many Sectaries in our Armies and among the Souldiers laid downe in *Gangraena*, what a great plague and judgement of God to this Land" they have been.<sup>50</sup> For Edwards, it must logically follow that God is exacting punishment upon the land in the form of soldiers spreading religious dissension wherever they are quartered:

We must needs be under a great plague to have those who should be the Instruments of our safety, and have the sword in their hands, to be such kinde of men, and to do as they do: Heresies and Errors in any men are a great evill upon a Land, a sad matter, but in the Souldiery 'tis armed impiety, who by power and force may propagate and spread all kinde of errors and opinions without

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 135-36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 265.

controle, and by marching from Countrey to Countrey, have opportunity of infecting all parts of a Land."<sup>51</sup>

As if Edwards's expansive inventory of incidences of the diffusion of schismatic contagion were not enough to demonstrate the validity of his argument, he finally makes a not inappropriate appeal to authority: "Certainly the Sectaries in the Armies (I speake now as a Minister of the Gospell, judging of things according to Scripture, and not according to carnall policy and outward appearance) are the greatest plague and judgement of God that hath been upon this Kingdom this hundred years . . . "<sup>52</sup>

Yet another great "plague and judgement of God" was to follow nearly twenty years after the publication of *Gangraena* in 1646 and Edwards's death in 1647 as a harried exile in Holland: a literal and figurative plague, that of 1665 which was to become not only the worst outbreak in the period under consideration, but also the last major episode in Britain. For Edwards, God's punishment manifested itself in the figurative plague of unchecked expansion of extreme nonconformity during the decline of the Anglican establishment. For Vincent, London was afflicted with the literal plague of 1665 as divine castigation for the Restoration parliament's having ejected some 2,000 nonconformist ministers on St Bartholomew's Day 1662 under the Act of Uniformity . Additionally, Vincent saw the London fire of 1666 as God's punishment for the government's passage of the Five Mile Act, also aimed at controlling dissenting activity:

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 265.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 265.

Here I might speak of the judgment executed, August 24, 1662, when so many ministers were put out of their places; and the judgments executed, March 24, 1665, when so many ministers were banished five miles from corporations; the former by way of introduction to the plague which some time after did spread in the land, but chiefly raged in the city; the latter by way of introduction to the fire, which quickly after did burn down London the greatest corporation in England.<sup>63</sup>

Like Edwards, however, Vincent sees orthodox Presbyterianism as the only legitimate defence against infectious outbreaks, either figurative or literal, the latter of which was in part brought upon England for Charles II's anti-Puritan policies.<sup>64</sup>

When the best of the ministers were ejected in 1662, the city was left spiritually and physically defenceless: "Let London seriously consider whether her *Gospel-privileges* were not her best defence against temporal calamities," Vincent implores, "and whether, since her slighting, abuse, and forfeiture, and God's seizure and stripping her so much of these, she hath not been laid naked to those heavy strokes of extraordinary judgments which she hath lately

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<sup>63</sup> *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (London: James Nisbet, 1831; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, repr. 1997), pp. 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Slack notes that national sins could easily be equated causally with outbreaks of pestilence: "Particular epidemics were therefore to be explained by national vices, such as swearing, negligence in attending church, atheism, play-going, covetousness and extravagant female fashions. They could also be attributed to recent Catholic, Protestant or Laudian changes in religion, or to the sins of Parliamentarians or Royalists in the Civil War, depending on which side one was on" (*Op. cit.*, p. 26). Specifically, it is worth noting that in the seventeenth-century mindset, a plague of irreligious behaviour dovetails with incidence of physical pestilence.

received.”<sup>55</sup> Before the expulsion of Presbyterian divines, “London had the Gospel ordinances, powerful, pure, plentiful; ministers excellently qualified and rarely furnished with ministerial abilities” and “their abilities for preaching and defence of the truth; such gifts of prayer London-ministers had, which were no small defence of the city”—this in a sense providing a protective barrier against both spiritual and physical infection.<sup>56</sup> Vincent underscores this notion of Presbyterian prophylaxis: “Gospel-ordinances, and Gospel-ministers were the safeguard of London, the glory and defence.”<sup>57</sup>

Vincent, who like Defoe’s narrator H.F. remained in London throughout the plague ordeal, characterizes the catastrophe as a sermon in itself, which like any other homily should be clearly communicated to the congregation by a responsible preacher aware of its significance:

I shall give a brief narration of this sad judgment, and some observations of mine own (who was here in the city from the beginning to the end of it) both to keep alive in myself and others, the memory of the judgment, that we may be better prepared for compliance with God’s design in sending the plague amongst us.<sup>58</sup>

Underpinning Vincent’s sermon is the message that misguided nonconformist persecution by the Anglican establishment and the consequent divine visitation of pestilence are one and the same; “this sad judgment” may be applied by to both afflictions simultaneously. Checking the impulse to justifiably vilify

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<sup>55</sup> Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

episcopacy for its culpability in provoking God's wrathful punishment, Vincent coolly restricts himself, as he promises, to "some observations of mine own."<sup>59</sup>

Aligning himself with the prevailing tendency of dissenting ministers to choose not to abandon their congregations during plague epidemics, Vincent judiciously arraigns those who fled (principally Anglican clergymen)—even to the point of conceding that not all of them have left London on account of their being frightened away: "The ministers also (many of them) take occasion to go to their country-places for the summer time; or (it may be) to find out some few of their parishioners that were gone before them."<sup>60</sup> By doing so, such ministers were "leaving the greatest part of their flock without food or physic, in the time of their greatest need," an action which in a sense deprives the parishioners of protective spiritual guidance.<sup>61</sup> Vincent is quick to add, however, that "I don't speak of all ministers"—nonetheless, "those which did stay out of choice and duty, deserve true honour."<sup>62</sup> Especially deserving of accolade are those formerly ejected nonconformist preachers who filled the pastoral void left by the authorized parish ministers

This is precisely the view taken by the tolerationist Presbyterian Richard Baxter, who singles Vincent out for especial praise for his steadfast sermonizing throughout the epidemic. Employing the ever-popular pastoral metaphor to describe the spiritual crisis brought about by the physical London plague, Baxter recounts that "when the Plague grew hot, most of the Conformable Ministers

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.



fled, and left their Flocks in the time of their Extremity," prompting, in language reminiscent of Vincent's, a move to fill the ministerial void:

... [D]ivers Non-conformists pitying the dying and distressed People, ... resolved that no obedience to the Laws of any mortal Men whosoever, could justifie them for neglecting of Men's Souls and Bodies in such extremities; Therefore they resolved to stay with the People, and to go in to the forsaken Pulpits, though prohibited, and to preach to the poor People before they dyed; and also to visit the Sick, and get what relief they could for the Poor, especially those that were shut up.<sup>63</sup>

Pointing specifically to Vincent as the paragon of the dutiful shepherd, Baxter stipulates that "[t]hose that set upon this work, were Mr. *Thomas Vincent*, ... and others ..."<sup>64</sup> Preaching during the contagious episode inspired the ministers as well as those thronging to find solace in their sermons: "The Face of Death did so awaken both the Preachers and the Hearers, that Preachers exceeded themselves in lively, fervent Preaching, and the People crowded constantly to hear them ..."<sup>65</sup>

H.F.'s recollections of the uncanny swelling of congregations as the plague worsened, carry something of Defoe's progressive and tolerationist attitude toward the various strains of Christianity; after all, while H.F. is certainly a seventeenth-century figure modelled on Defoe's uncle, the unmarried saddler, Defoe is a man of the eighteenth, and the latter voice clearly

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<sup>63</sup> *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ: Or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times* (London: Matthew Sylvester, 1696), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

shines through his narrator's assessment of the shift from divisiveness to a paradoxical resurgence of church attendance.<sup>66</sup> First of all, H.F. recalls the status quo of the prevailing religious enmity leading up to the pestilential catastrophe:

It was indeed, a Time of very unhappy Breaches among us in matters of Religion: Innumerable Sects and Divisions and separate Opinions prevail'd among the People; the Church of *England* was restor'd indeed with the Restoration of the Monarchy, about four Years before; but the Ministers and Preachers of the Presbyterians, and Independants, and of all the other Sorts of Professions, had begun to gather separate Societies, and erect Altar against Altar, and all those had their Meetings for Worship apart, as they have [now] but not so many then, the Dissenters being not thorowly form'd into a Body as they are since, and those Congregations which were thus gather'd together were yet but few; and even those that were, the Government did not allow, but endeavour'd to suppress them, and shut up their Meetings.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> F. Bastian concisely concludes that "H.F., the supposed author of the *Journal*, can be identified with Defoe's uncle, Henry Foe, with complete certainty," ("Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* Reconsidered," in *Review of English Studies*, 16, 1965), p. 158.

<sup>67</sup> *A Journal*, p. 26. According to Ian A. Bell, the Act of Uniformity, to which Defoe here refers, and persecution of dissenters in general, profoundly affected the author: "The sense of belonging to a persecuted minority never left him. The almost clandestine nature of Puritan worship contributed to his life-long love of secrecy and disguise" (*Defoe's Fiction*, London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 15.

Brought to the extremity of having to rationalize suddenly contracting the deadly infection, however, Londoners of all doctrinal persuasions set aside their differences—sadly, however, only temporarily:

But the Visitation reconcil'd them again, at least for a Time, and many of the best and most valuable Ministers and Preachers of the Dissenters, were suffer'd to go into the Churches, where the Incumbents were fled away, as many were, not being able to stand it; and the People flockt without Distinction to hear them preach, not much inquiring who or what Opinion they were of: But after the Sickness was over, the Spirit of Charity abated, and every Church being again supply'd with their own Ministers, or others presented, where the Minister was dead, Things return'd to their old Channel again.<sup>68</sup>

Ironically, the spread of the physical contagion occasions a spread of regular worship.

Something of the dissenting influence communicated indirectly through nonconformist sermons such as those of Vincent and others answering the same call to duty, is detected in the language of Baxter, who perceives a link between the rampant preaching by Presbyterians and Independents, and the subsequent attempt by the Anglican hegemony sitting safely removed from the plague at Oxford, to inhibit such opportunistic proselytization:

... [A]ll was done with so great Seriousness, as that, through the Blessing of God, abundance were converted from their Carelessness, Impenitency, and youthful Lusts and Vanities; and

Religion took that hold on the Peoples Hearts, as could never afterward be loosed.<sup>69</sup>

Of greatest concern, however, to Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon—described by Ronald Hutton as the “champion of intolerant episcopalianism”<sup>70</sup>—and the others leading the fight toward renewed persecution of dissenting ministers, was the possible conversion from Anglicanism to Presbyterianism or another form of Puritanism as a result of such sermonizing. Baxter, immediately following his discussion of the preaching of Vincent and others during the plague, mentions what he terms the “Act of Confinement,”<sup>71</sup> otherwise now known as the Five Mile Act, “a bill intended to prohibit any ejected minister from residing within five miles of his old parish or of any corporate town, . . . ” unless the given preacher swore an oath not to take up arms against Charles II and not to seek any alteration in church or state.<sup>72</sup>

Not only did Vincent and others of his persuasion see in the plague itself a paradoxical demonstration of providence, but also in the challenge presented to the remaining ministers to answer the call to preach under the most arduous circumstances. Referring in part to himself, Vincent records that “some ministers (formerly put out of their places, who did abide in the city, when most of [the] ministers in place were fled and gone from the people, as well as from the disease, into the countries)” reacted accordingly after “seeing the people crowd so fast into the grave and eternity” and seem “to cry as they went, for

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<sup>68</sup> *A Journal*, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History of England and Wales, 1658-1667* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; Repr. 1990), p. 200.

<sup>71</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Hutton, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

spiritual physicians."<sup>73</sup> Under such dire circumstances, Vincent and the other expelled ministers, "perceiving the churches to be open, and pulpits to be open, . . . they judged that the law of God and nature did now dispense with, yea, command their preaching in public places, though the law of man . . . did forbid them to do it."<sup>74</sup> Vincent astonishingly observes that the reinstated preachers effected a reversal in the progress of the physical plague by providing spiritual protection: "About the beginning of these ministers preaching, . . . the Lord begins to remit, and turn his hand, and cause some abatement of the disease."<sup>75</sup> In such a perspective, the plague is a means to an end, enabling a reaffirmation of godliness through orthodox preaching which ultimately defeats the infection.

Adopting the prudent tone rather like that of the Anglicans Casaubon and More while under the control of the Puritan hegemony of the 1650's, Vincent in 1665 finds fault in part with the Church of England for its ecclesiastical malfeasance. Although atheism and enthusiasm are not insignificant antagonists, Vincent by association singles out Anglicanism to bear the greatest burden of guilt for chronic pastoral indifference. In one instance, Vincent prefaces his comments by reiterating that " . . . God hath, indeed, spoken very terribly, but he hath answered us very righteously."<sup>76</sup> Expanding upon this statement, Vincent that "if London had been more generally godly, and more powerfully godly [here read "godly" as "Presbyterian"], these judgments might have been escaped, and the ruin of the city prevented: No! it was the

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

ungodliness of London which brought the plague and fire upon London."<sup>77</sup>

Clearly linking false religion with infection, Vincent then demonstrates his willingness to consider figurative applications for contagion: "There was a general plague upon the heart, a more dangerous infection, and deadly plague of sin, before there was sent a plague upon the body . . . "<sup>78</sup>

For Vincent, one particular variety of contagious ungodliness which precipitated the plague epidemic related to the Church of England's insufficient commitment to furthering the cause of reformation; essentially, Vincent opines that the Protestant mission has been sorely neglected by the episcopal authorities who also so wrongfully oppress nonconformist preaching:

Neglect of *reformation* am I speaking of? Nay, have not many who call themselves ministers, endeavoured rather the overthrow than the promotion of it? Have they not had sneers in the pulpits at holiness and zealous profession, which they have seconded by a conversation of dissoluteness, malicious opposition, and persecution of those especially, who have been the most religious?<sup>79</sup>

Without using terms that would overtly malign particular doctrines, in this case Anglicanism, Vincent proclaims that there have been "[s]ad neglects . . . of reformation in London, and that when London lay under such obligations to reform," adding that "I verily believe this is the great sin God is scourging London for; God is contending for a reformation, and if they do not endeavour it

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. As might be the case with Vincent, Edwards clearly associates the terms "godly" and "Presbyterian." See the references above to *Gangraena* I, 165; and III, 96, 230.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

more vigorously, the sooner, I fear, he will bring desolation upon them."<sup>80</sup> Just as with Milton's neglectful priest in *Lycidas*, pastoral dereliction and indifference engender pestilential punishment of the blameless flock.

Yet another contributing factor to God's castigation via pestilence is the epidemic of atheism afflicting the nation's chief city: "And can we be at a loss for a reason of God's righteousness in his thus punishing England, by beginning thus furiously with London? When were there so many atheists about London, and in the land, who denied the very being of God[?]"<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Vincent offers a Pauline catalogue of sins committed by Londoners which have provoked the physical plague outbreak, including "... hatred and opposition against the power of godliness, ... wallowing in filthy fornication and adultery, in swinish drunkenness and intemperance; ... oppression, bribery, ... malice, cruelty, ... unheard of wickedness, and hideous impiety, grown to such a height in the land ..."<sup>82</sup> Another impetus of the continuing plague epidemic derives from impiety of another sort: "[S]ome, in their murmurings have wished for a plague, that the survivors might have the better trade ..."<sup>83</sup>

Recalling the pestilential punishments against murmuring of Numbers 14. 36-37 and 16. 1-33, Vincent again applies biblical precedent to the contemporary afflictions of the 1665 plague and the 1666 London fire:

Is it a wonder, then, if God have sent plague and fire, which some have called for by such murmuring speeches? The Israelites in the

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75. This series of spiritual ills echoes any of Paul's similar lists, especially Romans 1. 28-32, Galatians 5. 16-21 and II Timothy 3. 1-5.

<sup>83</sup> Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

wilderness were plagued for their murmuring, and the murmuring company of Corah, that were not swallowed up with him, were consumed by a fire from heaven.<sup>84</sup>

Interestingly, Vincent further yokes irreligious behaviour with the plague and fire, which in themselves are causally connected: "... [T]he plague of sin doth rage so much after the plague is removed; and the fire of lust doth burn so much, when the other fire is extinguished . . . "<sup>85</sup> Seeing no evidence of the London population having learned to mend its impious ways, Vincent concludes that "God's anger doth still remain, yea, is more enraged by this aggravation of their wickedness, and . . . he is stretching forth his hand to give them another blow."<sup>86</sup>

Praising those dissenting ministers who stayed throughout the plague (and begrudgingly acknowledging those Anglican priests who remained at their posts), Vincent echoes Burton in declaring that spiritual malignancy infecting society has reached epidemic proportions, and for Vincent, this religious disease—much more serious—warrants greater attention than physical illness, especially because the cure of the former allows for the elimination of the latter. Thus Vincent notes that "the obligation upon ministers was stronger, and the motive to preach, greater" because "the need of souls was greater than the need of bodies, the sickness of the one being more universal and dangerous than the sickness of the other . . . "<sup>87</sup> Specifically justifying his submission (and that of other ejected nonconformists) to a higher law dictating a medical ministry,

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.



Vincent observes that “the unlicensed ministers which stayed, when so many of the licensed ones were gone” would have “incurred the guilt of soul-murder, by their neglect to administer soul-phycic, [and this] would have been more heinous and unanswerable.”<sup>88</sup> Vincent, who remained in London and continued to preach throughout the 1665 epidemic, considered himself to be providentially spared from the affliction; more than this, he as well as the others who answered their call to duty understood their having been preserved as proof of God’s solicitation of their preaching expertise during the catastrophe: “. . . [T]hat they were called by the Lord into public, I suppose that few of any seriousness will deny, when the Lord did so eminently own them, in giving many seals of their ministry unto them.”<sup>89</sup>

Defoe, who adopts a markedly ministerial tone in numerous key texts involving impiety and infection, also addresses the question of whether ministers should flee from a plague outbreak or remain at their pulpits. In his discussions of this question and others, Defoe initially aligns himself with the orthodox Presbyterian practice shared by Vincent and others, to dutifully preach to congregations voraciously seeking any divine guidance to help them come to terms with the decimating pestilence. Defoe deftly manages in the *Journal* to simultaneously criticize (if only implicitly) Anglican priests who abandoned their parishioners, and to excuse what he ultimately determines to be the most rational choice—to flee. In doing so, Defoe exhibits his lifelong Presbyterian sympathies, yet at the same time he espouses a more doctrinally tolerationist outlook manifested in his tendency to ascribe, for example, the plague, to

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

natural (albeit through God) rather than supernatural causes. As a result, the chameleonic Defoe, the master of the authorial mask, derives the basis for his rationalist arguments, in large part, from the providentially oriented seventeenth century to forge ahead into the eighteenth.

While many critics have gone to considerable lengths to view Defoe's discourse in the *Journal* as anything but pastorally motivated, reading key passages with an eye to the fact that Defoe is preoccupied with ministerial conduct yields an understanding of his deep-seated compulsion to preach—not from a pulpit as he is once rumoured to have done, but by publishing many works which may be regarded as essentially homiletic.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, Defoe's religious foundation and training are more often than not downplayed in discussions of many of his works, but his formative years as a beleaguered dissenter who came within reach of Presbyterian ordination must be considered as elemental to many of his doctrinal writings. Rather in the fashion of Burton, Defoe in fact openly denies, especially in his *Review*, any intention of performing a priestly role—nonetheless, also as does Burton, he plows ahead anyway with a characteristically seventeenth-century sermon. Such sleight of hand reaches its apex of sophistication in the *Journal*, wherein may be discerned a seemingly ambiguous, protracted and frenetic sermon concluding with this advice (not

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<sup>90</sup>Indicative of the reluctance to cast H.F.'s observations as Defoe's pulpit oratory, is commentary by John J. Richetti: "... Defoe's narrator is not, after all, a professional sermonizer . . .," adding that *A Journal* "requires not a professional preacher or exegete but a bewildered individual . . . attempting to apply Christian categories to what he sees in order to find their consoling patterns" (*Daniel Defoe*, Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 122. However, while Defoe is technically not a professional preacher, he does capably produce a text ordered within a seeming chaos that probes theological matters with an eye to pastoral benevolence.

heeded himself) for his fellow Christians: "... I must leave it as a Prescription, (viz.) that the best Physick against the Plague is to run away from it."<sup>91</sup>

Most telling of Defoe's unwillingness to entirely abandon a pastoral outlook is his announcement at the opening of a series of numbers of the *Review* wherein he appears to unequivocally renounce any intention of preaching; however, Defoe's cautionary essay regarding methods of preventing the spread of pestilential disease which follows clearly flies in the face of his claim that he is unworthy of disseminating homiletic communication.<sup>92</sup> In the often-quoted opening of one of the editions, Defoe begs leave to deliver a message from the pulpit even though he proclaims to have no ministerial expertise:

And now, good People all, will you allow me to preach a little?—It is not often that I trouble you with any of my Divinity; I acknowledge, the Pulpit is none of my Office—It was my Disaster first to be set a-part for, and then to be set a-part from the Honour of that Sacred Employ—<sup>93</sup>

Nonetheless, Defoe intends "to turn upon [the reader] with Instruction, and attempt to move [the reader] in a Thing which it is your Interest to regard," adding in terms evocative of oratory, "perhaps you will not hear, because of the Man that speaks—," hoping regardless "to let them hear the Doctrine for its own

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<sup>91</sup> *A Journal of the Plague Year*, ed. by Louis Landa (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 197-98.

<sup>92</sup> As James Sutherland rightly observes, the *Review* "was, in fact, to be Defoe's pulpit, a pulpit from which this unorthodox nonconformist could preach political sermons, and exhort his fellow countrymen to do this or that as the circumstances arose" (Defoe, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1938), pp. 110-11.

<sup>93</sup> *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, Vol. VI, Number 86, 22 October 1709, p. 341.

Sake—"94 Defoe then warns that his rudimentary sermon will not derive from scripture even though in many senses it indirectly does: "My Text shall be taken out of no Book, no not the Bible— . . . And it is in short express'd thus; *PLAGUE, FAMINE, BLOOD*," adding that "It is a terrible Text" involving a subject that "requires to be handled seriously, and listen'd to awfully . . . "95

Next Defoe claims that he will "proceed by my own Method, without Regard to Pulpit-Forms" in making the argument that these three afflictions "*have been, are at this time, or quickly will be, raging all over Europe*."<sup>96</sup> On the one hand claiming that "I hate alarming Mankind" and that he is not "easie to be alarm'd my self," Defoe indicates that he will expand upon "what Reason we have to fear, [that we] *will be* afflicted with all these Judgments."<sup>97</sup> Sermonizing in the Presbyterian mode typical of Vincent and other dissenting ministers, Defoe links "your general Conduct" with the onset of these plagues which are all three interconnected.<sup>98</sup> Employing the rhetorical mode of repetition, the sermon continues in the next number with Defoe reiterating his call for alarm at the threat of God's castigation of the continent's population for misguided political conflicts which ultimately have at their root religious enmity:

Having undertook to preach to you a little—as *I call it*; I am upon explaining and proving my Text Doctrines, and the formal Part of the Pulpit Work I may omit—But you'll find them in Substance, if you miss them in Name; I have laid down my Proposition thus;

*Plague, Famine, and Blood, either have been since the Revolution,*

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341, 342.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

*now are, or probably quickly will be raging in every Nation in Europe.*<sup>99</sup>

Defoe then describes, in terms recalling Vincent's phrasing of *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, pestilence, famine and war as "the Footsteps of Divine Vengeance upon the greatest Part of Christendom."<sup>100</sup> In the following issue of his *Review*, Defoe continues his sermon by classifying as "the blackest Part of my Text—that fills all *Europe* at this Time with Trembling and Terror, I mean, the PLAGUE," referring to "Diseases, reigning Fluxes, Surfeits, Gripes, Calentures, and at last FEVERS, which, encreasing with the Cause, grown pestilential and contagious . . ." <sup>101</sup> Defoe here suggests that "Plagues and Infection . . . immediately spread themselves into other Parts, by the Intervention of Armies or Commerce."<sup>102</sup> The notion of roving military populations spreading literal pestilence echoes Edwards's repeated denunciations of sectarian soldiers spreading infectious enthusiasm throughout 1640s England.

Thus it must be granted that to a large extent the pulpit was Defoe's office. To determine the extent to which Defoe was influenced by his religious indoctrination in order to later be capable of ironically or otherwise characterizing doctrinal dissent as anathema, it should be recalled that he was born into religious controversy in 1660 as a nominal Anglican until the Act of Uniformity in 1662 forced tallow-chandler James Foe and his family into Presbyterianism along with their pastor Samuel Annesley, leader of the

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, Number 87, 25 October 1709, p. 345.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, Number 88, 27 October 1709, p. 349.

Cripplegate, London, congregation.<sup>103</sup> Another major influence on Defoe was the Independent minister James Fisher, also ejected on St Bartholomew's Day 1662, who oversaw a private school in Dorking which Defoe attended in the early 1670s.<sup>104</sup> The third major spiritual influence on Defoe was Charles Morton, an Independent clergyman and head of Newington Green, "the foremost Dissenting academy in England," which Defoe attended from about 1674 to 1679.<sup>105</sup> The fourth Bartholomean identified by James Robert Moore as a considerable influence on Defoe was John Collins, another Independent clergyman, six of whose sermons Defoe recorded throughout 1681 during a time of spiritual crisis.<sup>106</sup>

It was at this time that Defoe decided against entering the Presbyterian ministry, a decision which James Sutherland characterizes as a significant loss for the Presbyterian ministry:

When James Foe's son decided to apply himself to business, the Dissenting pulpit lost a notable minister, one who would have revelled in the opportunities given him by his sacred office to

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>103</sup> Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 1. Annesley, according to F. Bastian "one of the most eminent Presbyterian divines of the age," was to remain a considerable influence on Defoe: "In manhood Defoe not only attended Annesely's (*sic*) services, but became his personal friend and wrote a poem in his memory on his death in 1697 . . ." (*Defoe's Early Life*, Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981), p. 15. Annesley is described by Sutherland as "quite unlike the canting enthusiasts that Swift and other satirists were so fond of picturing when they thought of a Presbyterian minister" (*op. cit.*, p. 23).

<sup>104</sup> John Robert Moore, *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 28, 345. According to Moore, "Fisher was the second of the Bartholomeans who influenced Defoe so deeply" (*Ibid.*, p. 30).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

rebuke the mighty, to astonish the complacent, to dumbfound the self-righteous.<sup>107</sup>

Toward the end of his time at Newington Green, Defoe "must have begun the theological curriculum," notes Paula R. Backscheider, which would have provided him with the necessary foundation to enter so confidently into polemical doctrinal controversy.<sup>108</sup> Thus when Defoe immersed himself in the rhetorical fray after having decided against the ministry, he did so after being steeped consistently in a Presbyterian-Independent tradition.<sup>109</sup> And although Defoe "may have ranged [far] into theological space, he . . . never escaped from the gravitational pull of the Calvinist faith in which he had been brought up . . .," and there were "no signs that he ever contemplated embracing any other version of the Christian faith."<sup>110</sup>

Although Defoe was on the receiving end of the attacks made upon dissenters by the Anglican establishment throughout the seventeenth century, he was, as is evident in *The Shortest Way*, capable of making the same attacks—ironically, of course—upon those of his own persuasion. Defoe is certainly capable of applying plague metaphor as a dissenter, against the Anglican establishment, such as in his 1700 poem *The True-Born Englishman*: "For wise men say 't's as dangerous a thing, / A ruling priesthood, as a priest-rid

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<sup>107</sup> Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>108</sup> *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> F. Bastian places Defoe's religious orientation into perspective quite concisely: "After the Restoration, when the Church of England was firmly back in the saddle, and Presbyterian hopes of taking over the national Church had finally faded, the differences between them and the Independents became less significant. They often collaborated, and Defoe was to have many contacts with ministers of both persuasions. All the same, he always identified himself as a Presbyterian" (*Op. cit.*, p. 15).

king. / And of all plagues with which mankind are cursed, / Ecclesiastic tyranny's the worst" (755-58). More noteworthy, however, is that Defoe so capably parodies the rhetorical attacks made upon nonconformists made by the High Church party in his anonymous 1702 pamphlet to the extent that he even anticipates Swift's 1704 designation of Presbyterianism as the "Epidemick Sect of *Aeolists*" in *A Tale of a Tub*. Responding to the notorious sermon preached at Oxford in June 1702, wherein he urged the Church of England to "hang out the bloody flag, and banner of defiance" against dissenters.<sup>111</sup> Although Sacheverell nowhere designates nonconformists as agents of infection as do many of his co-religionists, Defoe takes it upon himself in *The Shortest Way* to fall so much in line with the Anglican tradition drawn out of the previous century.

Defoe does clearly echo, first of all, Sacheverell's declaration that the Church of England is "the Purest and most Apostolical Religion in the World."<sup>112</sup> Adopting the Anglican persona, Defoe laments the fact that James I did not take stronger measures to banish Puritans from the land in the early seventeenth century, an action which if taken would have prevented the rebellion under Charles I: " 'Twas the ruin of that excellent Prince, King Charles the First. Had King James sent all the Puritans in England away to the West-Indies, we had been a national unmixed Church; the Church of England had been kept undivided and entire."<sup>113</sup> Then Defoe proceeds to offer as one of his

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in *Daniel Defoe*, ed. by J.T. Boulton (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 267.

<sup>113</sup> *The True-Born Englishman and Other Writings*, ed. by P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 134.



suggestions a prescription for eliminating infectious nonconformity from England:

If we are to allow them, only because we cannot suppress them, then it ought to be tried whether we can or no; and I am of opinion 'tis easy to be done, and could prescribe ways and means, if it were proper, but I doubt not but the Government will find effectual methods for the rooting the contagion from the face of this land.<sup>114</sup>

Drawing a powerful connection between biblical precedent for employment of this false religion-contagion metaphor and its contemporary application to religious antagonism, Defoe as the Anglican polemicist intentionally inflates the number of those infidels killed for their waywardness in Exodus 32:

Moses was a merciful meek man, and yet with what fury did he run through the camp, and cut the throats of three and thirty thousand of his dear Israelites, that were fallen into idolatry; what was the reason? 'twas mercy to the rest, to make these be examples, to prevent the destruction of the whole army.<sup>115</sup>

As P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens note, the number ordered slain by Moses in Exodus 32. 28 for the worship of the golden calf is given as three thousand: "The imaginary author is evidently exaggerating."<sup>116</sup> Now Defoe's narrator directly links extermination of spiritual apostates with preservation from physical plague

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284. Boulton conservatively notes that Defoe's enlargement of the death toll is "[p]ossibly a deliberate exaggeration" (*op. cit.*, p. 268). However, given Defoe's intimate knowledge of scripture, it would seem more likely that

in the immediately following paragraph: "How many millions of future souls we save from infection and delusion, if the present race of poisoned spirits were purged from the face of the land."<sup>117</sup>

Highlighting what for Defoe is the all-too-prevalent tendency of his own spiritual brethren to submit to occasional conformity with the Anglican establishment for their own material welfare, his clergyman persona advises holding fast to the threat of harsh punishment in order to coerce the wavering and mistaken dissenters into returning to the womb of the established church, and thereby curtail the spread of infectious nonconformity:

Now, if as by their own acknowledgment, the Church of England is a true Church, and the difference between them is only a few modes and accidents, why should we expect that they will suffer gallows and gallies, corporeal punishment and banishment for these trifles; there is no question but they will be wiser; even their own principles won't bear them out in it, they will certainly comply with the laws, and with reason, and though at the first, severity may seem hard, the next age will feel nothing of it; the contagion will be rooted out . . . <sup>118</sup>

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this is an intentional mistake intended to cast aspersion on Anglican preachers such as Sacheverell.

<sup>117</sup> *The True-Born Englishman and Other Writings*, p. 140.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142. Maximillian E. Novak identifies the paradoxical identity of Defoe's narrator in that he speaks as a minister but lacks the virtue considered by Burton, Milton and Defoe himself to be essential to a true Christian pastor: "Defoe's writings are rooted in the real and the specific. He directed his irony against particular problems most of the time, and it takes some perspective to see that what is wrong with the speaker in *The Shortest Way* . . . is his total lack of Charity, that he is very much of a priest and nothing of a Christian" ("Defoe's Use of Irony," in *Irony in Defoe and Swift* by Novak and Herbert J. Davis, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 37.

One embedded irony of this passage is that Defoe himself was prosecuted, imprisoned and pilloried, ostensibly for high crimes and misdemeanors in publishing *The Shortest Way*, which instilled fear and panic into the dissenting community at being threatened with hanging, and ridicule and embarrassment in the High Church camp for initially celebrating the author's project for eradicating nonconformists.

While Defoe vigorously takes pains in the 1703 tract issued shortly after his arrest, *A Brief Explanation of a Late Pamphlet, Entitled, The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, to proclaim that "it seems impossible to imagine it should pass for any thing but an irony,"<sup>119</sup> Defoe's narrator H.F. in the *Journal* may be seen as holding in the same disregard the semi-fictional character of Solomon Eagle, a musician-turned-Quaker properly named Solomon Eccles whom Defoe anachronistically places on the streets of London infecting the plague-stricken populace with his brand of contagious prophetic zeal:

I suppose the World has heard of the famous *Soloman Eagle* an Enthusiast: He tho' not infected at all, but in his Head, went about denouncing of Judgment upon the City in a frightful manner; sometimes quite naked, and with a Pan of burning Charcoal on his Head: What he said or pretended, indeed I could not learn.<sup>120</sup>

Aside from H.F.'s contradictory claim that he was unable to obtain knowledge of the substance of Eagle's utterances—(the narrator subsequently quotes from one of his character's enthusiastic preaching episodes)—it is striking that Defoe makes a distinction—rather as does Swift in the character of Jack in *A Tale of a*

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>120</sup> *A Journal*, p. 103.

*Tub*, between bubonic plague and a contagion of extreme zeal seen as a mental affliction.

Simultaneously casting a barb at Anglican ministers as well as immoderate sectarians, H.F./Defoe, speaking of Eagle, stipulates that "I will not say, whether that Clergyman was distracted or not: Or whether he did it in pure Zeal for the poor People who went every Evening thro' the Streets of *White-Chapel*."<sup>121</sup> In his pioneering book which is now generally held in disrepute for his overreaching claim that "there is not a single essential statement in the *Journal* not based on historic fact," Watson Nicholson perceptively detects in Defoe's character Eagle the negative type of nonconformist described by him in *The Shortest Way*:

The history of the troublesome, prophesying Quakers of the 17th century and the early part of the 18th century is well known to students of the period, and Defoe especially had good cause to remember the dissenters of that time as one of his satirical pamphlets about them got him into serious trouble.<sup>122</sup>

After making the claim that he cannot describe Eagle's manic prophesying, H.F. proceeds to do so with surprisingly fine detail: "[W]ith his Hands lifted up, [he] repeated Part of the *Liturgy* of the Church continually; *Spare us good Lord, spare thy People whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious Blood*."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>122</sup> *The Historical Sources of Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year* (Boston: Stratford, 1919), pp. 3, 15.

<sup>123</sup> *A Journal*, p. 103. The prayer uttered by Eagle glances at Ephesians 1. 7 and Colossians 1. 14.

Reinforcing his already contradictory statements, H.F. restates his lack of qualification to comment on Eagle's activities, almost as if ashamed of appearing to know too much:

I say, I cannot speak positively of these Things; because these were only the dismal Objects which represented themselves to me as I look'd thro' my Chamber Windows (for I seldom opened the Casements) while I confin'd my self within Doors, during that most violent rageing of the Pestilence . . . <sup>124</sup>

Aside from the collapsing credibility of the narrator's description of Eagle, it is worth noting, given previously discussed representations of dissenting enthusiasts in, for example, Edwards and Swift, that Defoe's portrayal of the Quaker zealot as an infectious threat is subtly supported here over and above the explicit designation of the fellow as "infected . . . in his Head." By recording that he was at his window as Eagle paraded past, H.F. admits that he was drawn to observe the opportunistic prophet to the extent of making note of what he could while keeping the window closed. Furthermore, a connection may be made between H.F.'s prophylactic action ostensibly taken to prevent contraction of the physical contagion, and its simultaneous effectiveness—although apparently not entire—to block Eagle's infectious sermonizing.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>A *Journal*, p. 103.

<sup>125</sup> The historical Solomon Eagle may have been disseminating his zealous doctrine through the London streets at the time H.F. indicates, and was something of a pest himself. Originally a musical composer, he converted to Quakerism in about 1660 and became a shoemaker. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "Eccles was much given to protesting against the vices and follies of the age, and did it with the enthusiasm of an exceptionally ill-regulated mind." In 1662, Eccles was ejected by a church congregation for attempting "to mend some shoes in the pulpit to show his contempt for the place," and the following Sunday was arrested for hopping from pew to pew and

Whereas Defoe's narrator may be aligned with, for example, Edwards, in his assault upon Eagle via the enthusiasm-infection metaphor, he could just as easily be regarded as an Anglican based upon passages other than those cited above seeming to praise dissenting ministers such as Vincent. While F. Bastian's initially striking statement that H.F. "is portrayed as a conformist and a churchgoer" need not be accepted without some reservations, his claim points to a quality of the narrator, superseding doctrinal division, which was shared by Defoe himself: a tolerationist rationalism.<sup>126</sup> The passage referred to by Bastian involves H.F. on the one hand again finding fault with the government's persecution of dissenters, but on the other declaring that the rampant attacks by the dissenting ministers against the vanished clergymen were uncalled for:

[T]he Dissenters reproaching those Ministers of the Church with going away, and deserting their Charge, abandoning the People in their Danger, and when they had most need of Comfort and the like, this we cou'd by no means approve; for all Men have not the same Faith, and the same Courage, and the Scripture commands us to judge the most favourably, and according to Charity.<sup>127</sup>

As Moore observes, it was Defoe's "lifelong plea" that he sought to dissolve faction among the Protestant divisions:

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working again at the pulpit. He was arrested in 1665 for "attending an unlawful meeting and refusing to pay certain fines," and he "made a preaching excursion into Scotland, and at Galloway, bearing his brazier and half naked, went into a 'popish mass house,' and so violently denounced the worshippers that he had to be removed by force" and sent to prison. He subsequently spread the Quaker faith in some of the colonies, but was later banished from them as well (*DNB*).

<sup>126</sup> "Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*," p. 164.

<sup>127</sup> *A Journal*, p. 235.

It was one of the many ironies of his career that he was engaged in more controversies than most other men have ever lived through and that his enemies persisted in regarding him as a firebrand. He was a Puritan and a Dissenter, but he never tired of expressing his esteem for the Church of England . . . <sup>128</sup>

Recalling again that H.F.'s conclusion that the best action to take in a plague epidemic is to run away from it, it may be argued that Defoe supersedes doctrinal faction and ultimately provides a sermon deriving from the narrator's "folly" of remaining in London, a choice which provided the narrator—now infused with eighteenth-century progressivism—with the evidence that common sense might be the best guide after all. Incorporating but reaching beyond the prevalent impulse to link anathematized religion with contagion which runs from Burton to Swift, Defoe looks as much ahead to the enlightenment as he does behind to the religious turmoil of the seventeenth century: "Defoe never lost his interest in religion, but, as the years passed, it had become largely an intellectual one; he was at least half-way on the road to rationalism."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>129</sup> Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

Although this thesis makes some incursion into the study of eighteenth-century English literature as the inheritor of a surprisingly durable rhetorical device brought into play throughout the seventeenth century, its focus is primarily that of the period in which its usage reached its zenith: the seventeenth century proper. Bunyan, in the middle of the 100-year period under discussion in this thesis, illustrates, for example, how biblical material—itsself rife with incidences of this particular strain of metaphor—could easily be drawn into service when necessity arose. Not surprisingly, the employment of this particular irreligion-infection metaphor permeates the writings of a varied assortment of participants in religious embroilments of the seventeenth-century, yet the analogy lingers strongly into the first quarter of the eighteenth when its relevance begins to wane as such controversy cools.

Not only is the fading vehemence of doctrinal hostility a contributing factor in its diminished role. When Defoe revives the metaphor in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), he does so in keeping with his representation of the work as the scribblings of a London resident who witnessed the last great plague outbreak in 1665, but also at a time when plague struck in Marseilles and gave every indication that it would spread northward. Curiously, physical contagion dissipates simultaneously with its usage as a figurative vehicle in the writings of the authors herein considered. Swift, the other author whose numerous works of the eighteenth century yield copious examples of this analogy, is in many ways, as sundry critics have argued, more a man of the earlier century.

Overall, students of religious literature of the seventeenth century may use this metaphor as an index toward reaching a greater understanding of the passion with which polemical missiles were launched by mutual doctrinal antagonists representing all of the major parties involved. Each of the individual



authors under examination here is illuminated at particularly fervid moments, during episodes of engagement in a conflict more often than not fuelled by deep-rooted emotions. The manner in which each writer discussed employs this metaphor reveals much of their character and temperament even when in the guise of a narrator: Burton's cool verbosity emerges just as clearly on the one hand as does Thomas Edwards's scathing invective on the other. It is hoped that this thesis has established the prominent position afforded this powerful rhetorical device in the polemical armoury of the period and the insights its study can provide.

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