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ACCUSATIONS OF BLASPHEMY IN ENGLISH ANTI-QUAKER POLEMIC, C. 1660–1701

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the conviction amongst zealous English Protestants, living between 1660 and 1701, that Quakerism constituted a form of blasphemy. Through an analysis of the accusation of blasphemy in anti-Quaker polemic it develops a cultural history of blasphemy as representation, illuminating a spiritual critique of Quakerism as enthusiastic antitrinitarianism and a sense of blasphemy commensurate with Thomistic theology. In so doing, this paper provides an insight into the contemporary theological anxiety that Quakerism was fundamentally wicked and anti-Christian.

KEYWORDS

blasphemy; anti-Quaker; polemic; theology; antitrinitarianism; enthusiasm

INTRODUCTION

In the years 1697–98, the Quaker apostate turned vicious anti-Quaker Francis Bugg (1640–1727) published two savage tracts against Quakerism as part of his long-running campaign to provoke Quakers into public debate: a battle of words which he believed would result in the destruction of Quakerism.1 Bugg’s aggressive stance would have been an embarrassment to many irenical clergy; nevertheless, he enjoyed the patronage of the bishop of Norwich, John Moore (1646–1714), as well as more general support from several Norfolk clergymen.2 Indeed, on 27 October 1698, clerical representatives from Bugg’s circle wrote a letter to a group of local Quakers, led by Richard Ashby (1663?–1734), making plain their grievances:

I. We Charge you with Blasphemy against God.
II. With Blasphemy against Jesus Christ.
III. With Blasphemy against the Holy Scriptures.
IV. We Charge you with great contempt of Civil Magistracy, and the Ordinances which Jesus Christ Instituted, viz. Baptism by Water, and the Lord’s Supper, with Bread and Wine.
V. We Charge you, that the Light within as taught by you, leaves you without any certain Rule, and Exposes you to the aforementioned, and many other Blasphemies.3

This provocation saw Bugg’s wish finally granted. On 8 December 1698 Bugg and his followers clashed with Quakers in a public debate at West Dereham Church, Norfolk.4 The meeting proved an anticlimax, quickly descending into intractable wrangling about how the conference had arisen in the first place and what textual evidence was admissible. However, the controversy continued in print and a bitter theological battle ensued. This kind of dispute was far from uncommon; for in theological debates of the second half of the seventeenth century, Quakers were accused of blasphemy on a scale endured by no other contemporary religious group.

Such accusations can be shown to have been much more than an aggressive rhetorical strategy to lambaste Quakers, even though those who accused Quakers of blasphemy were not necessarily attempting to initiate criminal proceedings since the complex and obscure crime of blasphemy was rarely invoked against anyone. While the so-called Blasphemy Act of 1650, which not only covered human denials and appropriations of God but also laid an emphasis on accepting actions as diverse as drunkenness, sodomy, and murder as transgressions of divine law, was used against Quakers in the early 1650s, its efficacy was suspect. Moreover, since the Act was a piece of commonwealth legislation it was annulled upon the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. A much narrower and weaker Blasphemy Act that focused on denying the doctrine of the Trinity appeared on the statute book in 1698, but this appears to have never been used. At common law, prosecutions for blasphemy were principally against blasphemous language (written or spoken) and were entangled with modes of spiritual offence and libel. In many of the known cases, the criteria for criminal blasphemy were based upon a vague sense of wickedness rather than a discrete set of definable transgressions. In 1677, for example, Lodowick Muggleton (1609–1698) was found guilty at the Old Bailey of publishing works that were ‘so horrid and blasphemous, that we think it fit to spare the Christian modesty of each pious ear’, but further details about his crime were not disclosed.5 Given that the nature of criminal blasphemy was so imprecise and open to interpretation,6 the suggestion by scholars such as Rosemary Moore that Quaker organisation and self-censorship kept Quakers from being prosecuted for blasphemy is overly simplistic; so too is Richard Bailey’s claim that Quaker radicalism can be seen as proportional to blasphemy prosecutions.7

In this paper I want to take an alternative approach that will move away from critiques of criminal blasphemy and focus on the accusation of blasphemy as a symptom of theological division between Quakers and Protestant non-Quakers. Many non-Quakers took such exception to the theological precepts of Quakerism, particularly its Christology vis-à-vis the doctrine of the Trinity, that they became anti-Quakers who openly challenged the validity of Quakerism and labelled it inherently wicked. This paper will explore how and why accusations of blasphemy were made against early Quakers in an attempt illuminate the contemporary notion of blasphemy and to understand better the anti-Quaker position on its own terms. In turn, it is hoped that this focus might stimulate further study into the history of early Quaker
theology. I do not seek to mediate between the history of Quakers and non-Quakers on the issue of theological orthodoxy, but rather to explore the polemic of anti-Quakers by considering blasphemy as theological representation: that is to say, the projection of perceptions of blasphemy in a theological context. Move away from the dominant modern conception of blasphemy as a mode of temporal offence between human beings, I shall argue that Quakerism was perceived by many anti-Quakers as blasphemous primarily because they believed it to be an example of enthusiastic antitrinitarianism commensurate with the Thomistic conception of blasphemy as aggravated unbelief.

My concern here is with what some scholars have called 'heretical blasphemy': a type of blasphemy hardly ever seen as applicable to post-medieval times and rarely expounded upon beyond the reasonable assumption that heresy also constituted blasphemy. In the context of contemporary religious culture, however, I want to reinterpret this category as 'speculative blasphemy', encompassing those ideas and beliefs that were deemed to be blasphemous on the grounds of substantial theological, exegetical, or epistemological claims. This situates the discourse of blasphemy within the context of 'speculative theology' and, hence, part of the profound debates among different Christian groups about the 'authoritative interpretation of truth'. As the nonjuring clergyman Richard Welton (1672–1726) made clear, ‘by Renouncing any Doctrine, which...[God] hath reveal’d, and commanded; we do not only betray our Faith, and Trust; But we, in Effect, BLASPHEME his VERACITY, his Revealed Truth’. Thus, blasphemy was potentially manifest in heresy (a deliberate deviation from the doctrines of the accepted orthodoxy), but whereas blasphemy was about the denial of God, heresy was principally concerned with the temporal tensions between unity and disunity within organised religion. The terminology of blasphemy was part of a spiritual critique of heterodoxies which derived meaning from theological discourse.

A Trinitarian conception of God was fundamental to orthodox Christianity. The belief that ‘there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one’ (1 Jn 5:7), was constituted as part of the Nicene Creed and developed further in what became known as the ‘Athenasian Creed’. This creedal definition informed the first article of faith according to the Church of England, as set down in the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1571, and it was also recognised in the Book of Common Prayer. It was the incarnate Christ and the Holy Spirit which, as co-substantial persons of the Trinity, provided the means by which spiritual knowledge was passed from God to humans, illuminating ‘rational’, non-provendental modes of grace. To deny the Trinity in the quest for a closer relationship with God was perceived by most Protestants as misguided in the extreme because it demonstrated a desire for autonomy from divine will that tended towards an anti-soteriological position. For zealous defenders of Trinitarian orthodoxy (taken here to be described by the ‘Athenasian Creed’), any form of non-Trinitarian doctrine was viewed as inherently antitrinitarian and not merely heresy but a form of speculative blasphemy because it negated both the nature and truth of God.

According to St Augustinian, speculative blasphemy was a denial of self-evident and unquestionable divine truth, a lie about God himself that was caused and
perpetuated by human pride. The ability to believe a lie about God and to propagate it as truth, for example in the form of heresy, was the consummate skill of a false prophet and as St Augustine decreed, 'every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and is the antichrist'. The denial of Christ in Trinity was arguably what St Thomas Aquinas had in mind when he provided one of the most comprehensive discussions of blasphemy in his Summa Theologica. For Aquinas posited the idea that blasphemy was aggravated unbelief and was generally understood via a threefold description: when something was attributed to God which was not his; or when God was denied something that was his; or when an attribute of God was bestowed upon a creature. Aquinas did not actually own this view, although he was one of the first theologians to give such an exposition, for he preferred to conceive blasphemy more abstractly as denying God via the two processes of (erroneous) affirmation or negation. This substantial description of blasphemy was intertwined with inferences of a more modal account of blasphemy as aggravated unbelief. In all, Aquinas understood blasphemy to be the worst mortal sin 'foreasmuch as it made any sin greater'.

This paper will demonstrate that between 1660 and 1701 many anti-Quakers were consumed by abject terror that Quakers were blasphemers. A thematic analysis of the supposed blasphemy of early Quakerism will be undertaken by using the points raised in the Norfolk clergy’s charge sheet to structure an investigation of the substantive detail of that controversy and of a further four theological debates which will be outlined in a moment. Before turning to the evidence, however, it is necessary to sketch out the relevant historiography and provide an overview of early Quaker theology and anti-Quaker polemic.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

While studies of early Quakers and Quakerism regularly provide a cursory account of Quakers prosecuted for blasphemy, there has yet to be any sustained investigation of the representation of Quakers as blasphemers. Partly as a result, a scholarly assessment of the perceived blasphemy of early Quakerism has hitherto arguably been reduced to one notorious episode: the trial of the Quaker preacher James Nayler (1618–1660) for ‘horrid blasphemy’ by the Second Protectorate Parliament in 1656. Nayler’s primary transgression was represented as imitating Christ’s ride into Jerusalem at Bristol. This might be construed primarily as a form of practical, rather than speculative, blasphemy. Moreover, the context of Nayler’s trial was heavily influenced by post-revolution politics, particularly the Protectorate’s religious settlement, and it may be suggested that political intervention resulted in Nayler being made an example of because he was a charismatic leader of a supposedly dangerous and ill-understood movement, rather than an exponent of blasphemous Quakerism in particular. The fact that Nayler’s prosecutors chose not to invoke the Act of 1650, but to use the exceptional legal jurisdiction of Parliament, underscores this point and perhaps emphasises the extent to which socio-political anxieties dominated the proceedings. While much has been written about Nayler’s trial there has yet to be a sustained study of his ‘blasphemy’ qua blasphemy. Due to the exceptional nature of the case
to believe a lie about God and to propar-resy, was the consummate skill of a false spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is antichrist.\textsuperscript{14} The denial of Christ in is had in mind when he provided one of phemy in his \textit{Summa Theologica}.\textsuperscript{15} For aggregating unbelief and was generally something was attributed to God which thing that was his; or when an attribute quins did not actually own this view, ns to give such an exposition, for he strictly as denying God via the two gation. This substantial description of a more modal account of blasphemy as ad blasphemy to be the worst mortal sin 1660 and 1701 many anti-Quakers were blasphemer. A thematic analysis of the be undertaken by using the points raised ture an investigation of the substantive rological debates which will be out­ence, however, it is necessary to sketch an overview of early Quaker theology

\textbf{RAPHY}

\textbf{EARLY QUAKER THEOLOGY AND ANTI-QUAKER POLEMIC}

The foundation of Quaker theology was a belief in the Light within, the immediate inspiration of God in the believer. Once established, Quakers believed that the Light within became the primary authority in all matters of faith, taking precedence over
mediated authorities such as the words of creeds or Scripture: the premise being that
the Apostles had not read texts in order to establish a relationship with God.25
Inspired by primitivism and Reformation zeal, traditional typologies of theology and
language were circumvented.26 In theory, the Light within gave indisputable legiti-
macy, and hence authority, to the protestations of every believer, creating the possi-
bility for massive multiplicity. A consequence of the doctrine of the Light within was
that the nature and expression of Quaker theology appeared inherently individualis-
tic.27 Yet the risk of individualistic idiosyncratic interpretations of the Light within
quickly became obvious to leading Quakers and measures were taken to combat such
views.28 As the Quaker leadership began to secure legitimacy and campaign for legal
toleration in the 1660s and 1670s, they moved towards an anti-individualistic doc-
trine of the Light within that was more acquiescent to the fundamentals of Protestant
theology, particularly with regards to the Trinity. Indeed, it was the Quakers’ ability
to convince the authorities of a consensual belief in the doctrine of the Trinity which
helped them secure legal toleration in 1689.29 One of the Quakers’ greatest apologists,
George Whitehead (1637–1724), publically affirmed the Quakers’ belief in the Tri-
inity in *The Christianity of the People commonly called Quakers* (1689) and the founder
of the Quaker movement George Fox (1624–1691) used his *Journal* (1694) to rebut the
suggestion that the Quakers denied the ‘Christ that died and suffered at Jerusalem’.30
This shift created a potentially fatal paradox in Quaker theology: individual
proclamations by first- and second-generation Quakers, which were retrospectively
deemed incompatible with the public face of Quakerism as a form of Nonconformist
Protestantism, could not be denounced because such repudiation would have argued
Quakerism out of existence. The exact nature of the multifaceted, non-linear devel-
opment of early Quaker theology is not my concern here; however, I wish to suggest
that the Quaker paradox meant that anti-Quakers could set about proving Quaker-
ism to be blasphemously heterodox by using the Quakers’ own words. As will be
shown below, it was this paradox that fuelled controversy and exacerbated the theo-
logical claims that the Quakers were wicked liars. Accepting that early Quaker
theology was contestable by nature and that historical sources are invariably framed
by contemporary arguments with anti-Quakers, it is, nevertheless, important to
provide a sketch of the dominant characteristics of the individualistic manifestation
of Quaker theology. The summary that follows draws upon the work of Leo Damrosch
and Ted Underwood, but takes as given that no definitive account of early Quaker
theology can be written because early Quakers regularly equivocated about their
beliefs and that their early theology was, quite understandably, somewhat fluid and
contestable precisely because it was a new and developing belief system.
Early Quaker conceptions of the Light within seemed to rest upon a Christology
which tended towards a quasi-Unitarian position that emphasised the oneness of
Christ and God the Father, largely disregarding the Holy Spirit (I use the term
‘Unitarian’ advisedly to refer to the belief in the unipersonality of the Godhead: this
should not be confused with certain types of Unitarianism, such as Arianism and
Socianism, which stressed the humanity of Jesus rather than his divinity).31 The terms
Christ, God, and Holy Spirit were not denied, but appeared to have been used
interchangeably to describe the Light, rather than to acknowledge the existence of
distinct divine persons. Early Quakers most commonly identified the Light with Christ, professing that the pre-incarnate and the incarnate Christ were the same. Christ on earth was, therefore, not manifest in human form, but a celestial being in the vessel of a human body. Thus, from this position Christ was wholly supernatural and provided a uniquely spiritual soteriology. To many contemporary anti-Quakers, Quakerism seemed akin to a series of heresies, including Docetism, Sabellianism, Arianism, and Socinianism. While such assertions were inaccurate, they underscored the central principle on which Quaker theology was adjudged heterodox: its non-Trinitarianism.

The Quakers’ type of non-Trinitarianism meant that they rejected the traditional tenets of Christian belief: faith was not a bridge between human and divine, and mortals did not receive the grace of God, but experienced him immediately (i.e. without mediation). For the Quakers, the language of ‘inwardness’ was effectively a euphemism for the only true way to form a relationship with Christ; for his celestial being had no cause, or means, to mediate with humans, but dwelt within them. Although Richard Bailey’s exposition of Quaker Christology is somewhat unconvincing (perhaps because he tries to establish it as more stable and uniform than it actually was), one can appreciate the thrust of his argument that Quaker conviction hinged upon a Christo-present, rather than Christo-centric belief system. Akin to the Familists before them, Quakers could have been seen as quintessential religious enthusiasts, rejecting ‘outward’ manifestations of religion and claiming a form of oneness with God. A consequence of the Quakers’ apparent individualistic theology was that it appeared that Quaker beliefs were heavily influenced by its most charismatic believers. The personal cult of George Fox provided a forum for him to claim that he was the ‘Son of God’ and able to perform prophecies and miracles. Such assertions were, as Rosemary Moore has shown, rarely verified or supported by other Quakers. However, James Nayler was another ‘Quaker Jesus’ who regularly described himself and the Quakers in highly exalted language. The Quaker James Milner also claimed the power of prophecy; while brethren such as John Gilpin (fl. 1653-55) and John Toldervy (fl. 1656) were said to have exhibited signs of spiritual possession. These claims are important to understanding how contemporary non-Quakers perceived Quakerism; however, it must also be acknowledged that the Quaker movement later marginalised and disowned the significance of such claims in their own history.

The perception that Quaker enthusiasm was blasphemous may be traced back to the prosecutions of Quakers under the so-called Blasphemy Act of 1650. One section of the Act called for punishment against those who professed themselves ‘to be very God, or to be Infinite or Almighty, or in Honor, Excellency, Majesty and Power to be equal, and the same with the true God’. On 30 October 1650, two Justices of the Peace, Gervase Bennett and Nathaniel Barton, found George Fox and his companion John Fretwell guilty of blasphemy under the terms of the Act, and committed them to the house of correction in Derby. I would concur with Kate Peters that this event, along with a reading of the Act as pertaining to Quakerism, was formative in shaping early anti-Quaker arguments. As anti-Quaker polemic took off, leading Quakers continued to be arrested and incarcerated for blasphemy, although few
charges reached formal trial. From the very inception of the Quaker movement, the theology of the Light within was undermined by a perception, embellished by the law, that it was inherently and self-evidently blasphemous.

Away from critiques of infamous individuals, much of the literature against the Quakers focused on wider aspects of speculative theology. On the eve of the Restoration, George Fox’s epic apology *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (1659) encapsulated the intensity and character of the theological war with anti-Quakers that had been raging during the 1650s. From scores of anti-Quaker tracts, Fox had selected particular accusations against Quakerism and rebutted them point by point. In referring to the Quakers’ perception of Christ’s human body, Richard Baxter (1615–1691) had asked, ‘Do not they blasphemously make Christ an Idol, that call our Temples, Idols Temples?’ Fox’s riposte was that, ‘Christ’s body was and is the Temple of God, who ended all outward Temples made with hands, and so that is no idol, but others are Idols, held up by you and the Pope’. The Independent minister Samuel Eaton (d. 1665) asserted that, ‘It is palpably false, and blasphemy to say, that the Saints know all things, and have power to work miracles to the glory of God’; Fox answered ‘But yee have anointing from the holy one, and know all things, I John 2.20’. In response to the claim that ‘It is blasphemy they say and colourable pretences to witness an infallible spirit in them’, Fox stated that, ‘The spirit that leads the Saints into all truth, is infallible and that shall reprove the world, and he that hath the spirit of Christ, hath that which is infallible’. To the allegation that the Quakers were full of ‘blasphemous pride, to say they are as pure as God’, Fox answered ‘doth not Christ say; Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, is that blasphemy?’ This was polemical theology at its rawest: horror and disbelief of an opponent’s position forced a polarisation of the debate; any one issue was concentrated to just a few sentences, with each side looking for the knockout blow; the terminology of idolatry, pride, and pretence provided the necessary theological cues for the accusation of blasphemy. What has so far gone largely unrecognised by historians is that this type of polemical conflict continued well into the 1690s and beyond. At this juncture I want to quickly introduce four debates which, in addition to the one instigated by the Norfolk clergy in 1698, I shall draw upon for evidence to support my arguments. The following mini-case studies are just four examples of a large and diverse number of theological debates involving Quakers, but they have been chosen here for their particular usage of the discourse of blasphemy.

In 1668 the London based Presbyterian minister Thomas Vincent (1634–1678) remonstrated with local Quakers he believed to be guilty of corrupting his own congregation. Exasperated by defections, he warned his fellow Presbyterians that, ‘If ever you go again, I will give you up, and God will give you up, that you may believe a lie, and be damn’d’ (a reference to 2 Thess. 2:10-13). Incensed, two leading Quakers William Penn (1644–1718) and George Whitehead challenged Vincent to a public debate for ‘Truth’s-sake’. Not long afterwards the two sides clashed at Vincent’s Meeting House in Spitalfields, which was reportedly packed with Vincent’s supporters hissing and laughing at Penn, calling him ‘villain and blasphemer’. Extended reports of the oral dispute soon appeared in print; whereupon Vincent took the opportunity to warn Penn and Whitehead that, ‘The Lord convince you
very inception of the Quaker movement, eminently by a perception, embellished by identically blasphemous individuals, much of the literature against the latitudinal theology. On the eve of the Restored Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded stracter of the theological war with anti-1650s. From scores of anti-Quaker tracts, figur Quakerism and rebutted them point conception of Christ’s human body, Richard blasphemously make Christ an Idol, that call: was that, ‘Christ’s body was and is the empires made with hands, and so that is no 1d the Pope’. The Independent minister palpably false, and blasphemy to say, that the miracles to the glory of God; Fox answered know all things, I John 2.20.’ In response and colourable pretences to witness an infallible at leads the Saints into all truth, is infalli­ble that hath the spirit of Christ, hath that at the Quakers were full of ‘blasphemous wered doth not Christ say; Be ye perfect as 31. This was polemical theology at its nt’s position forced a polarisation of the just a few sentences, with each side look­ of idolatry, pride, and pretence provided ation of blasphemy. What has so far gone his type of polemical conflict continued incure I want to quickly introduce four numb­ers of theological debates involving or their particular usage of the discourse of a minister Thomas Vincent (1634–1678) ved to be guilty of corrupting his own e warned his fellow Presbyterians that, ‘If id God will give you up, that you may 2 Thess. 2:10–13). Incensed, two lead­d George Whitehead challenged Vincent long afterwards the two sides clashed at ich was reportedly packed with Vincent’s calling him ‘villain and blasphemer’. Appeared in print; whereupon Vincent Whitehead that, ‘The Lord convince you both of this your wickedness and give you repentance, that you may recant those damnable speeches, whereby you have not only blasphemed God yourselves, but endeavoured to provoke others to do the like.51

By 1672 an unassuming Nonconformist minister from Hertfordshire called John Faldo (1634–1691)52 had become equally dismayed by Protestant apostasy: ‘He is a great stranger in our Israel, who observes not the great shoals that have been taken in the net of Quakerism’.53 With his publishing debut, Quakerism No Christianity (1672), Faldo attempted to stem the flow of converts by proving Quaker theology baseless and anti-Christian.54 The foundation of Faldo’s argument was that Christianity existed through the truth and purity of its doctrine, while Quakerism ‘made its way by, and began in blasphemies’.55 William Penn acknowledged that Faldo’s move had been prompted by the ‘coming over of some of his Hearers to the Way we profess’,56 but rather than fall into complacency, Penn returned fire with Quakerism A New Nickname for Old Christianity (1673). The two men continued to exchange blows, producing nine major publications between them in the next three years. Like many other disputes between Quakers and their adversaries, fear and resentment about conversion had proved a catalyst for detailed and intense theological controversy.

Another dispute broke out in the summer of 1676 when John Cheyney (fl. 1674– 94), a Church of England clergyman from Burtonwood in Lancashire, had become alerted to defections in the nearby parish of Crowton. In response, Cheyney made his first foray into print with A Skirmish Made Upon Quakerism (1676),57 attacking William Penn and denouncing Quakerism as nothing but a concoction of ‘God­blaspheming and Soul-damning Errors’.58 At a mere fourteen pages long, Cheyney’s effort was rather inadequate, but it nevertheless met with printed ripostes from, among others, the local Quaker preacher Roger Haydock (1643–1696) and Penn himself. The pamphlet war that followed turned Cheyney and Haydock into staunch enemies and they eventually came face-to-face on 23 January 1677 in a public debate in front of hundreds of people at Arley Hall in Cheshire. Cheyney’s contention throughout was summed up by the title of one of his subsequent pamphlets: Quakerism Proved to be Gross Blasphemy and Anti-Christian Heresie (1677).

In 1696, the non-juror Charles Leslie (1650–1722) unleashed a polemical tour-de-force against Quakerism: The Snake in the Grass: Or, Satan Transform’d into an Angel of Light. The title of the work was inspired by St Paul’s warning to the Corinthians about the diabolism of ‘false apostles’ (2 Cor. 11:13–14); and the content was no less confrontational. Leslie lambasted ‘our Present Obstinate Quakers’, who ‘Fearlessly go on, and pretend themselves to the same Extraordinary Commission, of Immediate Divine Revelation’, dismissing such notions as ‘nothing short of Blasphemy; Rank, Wild Blasphemy!’59 The blasphemous enthusiasm of Quakerism was ‘more dangerous than Atheism’, for it ‘steals away many Devout and Well-meaning Persons’.60 Such charges did not go unanswered for long. One of the Quaker old guard, George Whitehead, weighed in with An Antidote against the Venome of the Snake of the Nation (1697), followed shortly afterwards by Joseph Wyeth (1663–1731) with Anguis Flagellatus: Or a Switch for the Snake (1699). With each tract well over two-hundred pages long, the tussle between Leslie and his Quaker adversaries was no puny pamphlet battle; it was a theologically charged polemical war.
At a national level, it may well have been the case that the Quaker leadership was able to convince the authorities that Quakerism was not radically heterodox, a view which facilitated de jure toleration in 1689 and a subsequent shift towards de facto acceptance as a Nonconformist group.61 Yet, at a local level, the experience and fear of defection frequently forced a diverse range of Protestants to discredit vigorously Quaker theology through disputation. To provide some tangible context to the anti-Quakers' preoccupation, it is worth highlighting that Adrian Davies has shown that Quaker membership in the county of Essex grew continuously between 1655 and 1684, and did not suffer significant decline until after 1714.62 For both Quakers and anti-Quakers alike, theological conflict was seen as a useful exercise in maintaining religious loyalty because, as Leo Damrosch has acknowledged, 'debate over fine points of doctrine was an important way of establishing group identity'.63 Here, the nexus between oral and literary publication, which has hitherto been predominately understood via studies into popular culture, was clearly invaluable.64 It allowed disputants to combine the immediacy of a face-to-face meeting in front of local crowds with the ability to reach out to interested parties in London and elsewhere. Kate Peters has recently illuminated the full extent of Quaker pamphleteering in religious disputes during the 1650s; however, it should be underscored that the sheer speed with which printed responses were produced, not to mention the detail and length of individual works, was not far short of astonishing: a clear testament to the vitality of debate on both sides. It was in this context that a diverse group of anti-Quakers consistently levelled accusations of blasphemy against the nature and perceived consequences of Quaker theology. Quakers took such allegations seriously and, showing little of the distrust of worldly speaking which governed their social interactions, refuted them with vigour and asserted their own theological position.65

Scholars are now well aware that contemporary religious disputation, particularly oral debates, tended to be grounded in the scholastic tradition. Accordingly, strict protocols were to be observed: a worthy justification for taking part was essential; the rules of the debate and the central questions to be debated were to be set in advance; and the whole process was to be precise, dignified, and edifying.66 Such ideals were not always adhered to; however, as Ann Hughes has shown, this did not undermine the role of formal disputation in the contest for religious truth between 'orthodox' and 'radical' groups during the Interregnum.67 After the Restoration, Church of England clergy often sought to provoke public debates both to chastise and edify Presbyterian and Catholic adversaries.68 In such instances, to decline a challenge, or not to respond directly or quickly to a question, would have resulted not only in loss of face, but serious wounding to a protagonist's cause, in a manner analogous to duelling. I would suggest, however, that scholars should be cautious of using standard modes of contemporary disputation to critique the Quaker theological disputes.

In debates with Quakers, the epistemological aims of disputation still held sway but the circumstances dictated that debate rarely comprised of a straightforward dichotomy between reasoned argument and astute rhetoric. The key strategy of anti-Quakers was to prove their opponents guilty from their own words.69 Such was the conviction that it was 'almost impossible for the Quakers to withstand the Force of the Quotations taken out of their Books',70 anti-Quaker polemical literature sometimes...
n the case that the Quaker leadership was not radically heterodox, a view held at least until after the restoration, the experience and fear of Protestants to discredit vigorously temporary religious disputations, particularly in a manner analogous to the Quaker’s cause, in a manner analogous to establishing group identity. Here, the textual exercise in maintaining has acknowledged, ‘debate over fine establishing group identity’. Here, the s, which has hitherto been predominately, was clearly invaluable. It allowed disputants to provide some tangible context to the anti-Quaker polemical literature sometimes consisted of little more than a title and a structured list of quotations taken from Quaker texts, with no interlinking commentary or analysis. Taking the Norfolk clergy’s A Brief Discovery of Some Blasphemous and Seditious Principles and Practices of the People, called Quakers (1699) as a prime example, the text was the raw evidence in support of the charge provided in the title. Here, the polemical force of the work was largely based on an assumption that the reader would interpret the evidence in the same way as the author. Faced with supposedly obvious and unquestionable proof of their audacious heterodoxy, the Quakers’ failure to capitulate both upped the stakes of the debate and confirmed the view of anti-Quakers that they were nothing but brazen liars. Francis Bugg, for one, stood aghast at the Quakers’ attempts ‘to defend, vindicate, or excuse every Error, every Blasphemy, every Seditious and Treasonable Principle’. Similarly, the clergyman Thomas Comber (1645–1699) noted that, ‘each Writer states things according to his own conceit, Learning or Advantage; and withal they have rare Arts of Equivocation under colour of Figurative Expressions, and curious Salvoes to bring one another off from the brink of Blasphemy’. In an effort to legitimate their respective positions, both sides vigorously refuted the accusations of the enemy point by point, often reasserting their claims and embellishing them with scriptural quotations and theological polemic.

Furthermore, however collected and confident anti-Quakers may have appeared in the first instance, they were clearly enraged by the ability of supposedly wicked Quaker beliefs to corrupt otherwise innocent, God-fearing Christians. The abstract problem was spiritual, but the temporal effects of losing one’s congregation were also devastating and only served to affirm a sense of spiritual crisis. The situation was little different for the Quakers: converts provided a crude measure of the effectiveness of Quaker preachers to proclaim the truth. For disputants, theological polemic took on the guise of attack as the best means of defence. The semblance of academic disputations had given way to a kill or be killed mentality. Quakers lamented the state of such open War, which had been proclaimed by their enemies. Yet the willingness to go beyond discursive reasoning was a mark of the zealot, irrespective of the cause, and the Quakers proved to be the most extreme advocates. For example, in a manner reminiscent of the notorious stunts of Richard Farnworth (c. 1630–1666), the Quaker Solomon Eccles (1617–1682) challenged John Cheyney to a five-day fast without food, drink, or sleep to see which religion was true. Reason and rhetoric had collapsed into a boiling pot of polemical strategies, which were executed with as much passion as shrewdness, inevitably polarising the debate into a series of binary opposites. Just as the Church of England had perceived Catholicism to be not merely heresy but blasphemy, a form of counterfeit Christianity, the same was now the case for the anti-Quakers’ view of Quakerism.

THE REPRESENTATION OF QUAKERISM AS BLASPHEMY

The representation of Quakerism as blasphemy was rooted in the perceived nexus between its antitrinitarianism and enthusiasm. Scripture stated that, ‘Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, hath both the Father and Son’ (2 John 9). But...
what Sin is it to deny or suppress one's own \[belief in God\], and submit to another's Inspiration? In this case, Anti-Quakers would appear to have believed that, whatever '[Satan] cannot affect by Atheism and Prophaneness: he attempts by Enthusiasm, under the pretence of an higher Religion, to root out the old so Divinely and firmly settled; for the taking away of the rational motives of Faith, and the sensible grounds of Religion. The Book of Deuteronomy (18:20), and the Second Epistle of St Peter (2:1) gave stark warning of 'false prophets', detailing the destruction they would bring and the divine vengeance they would suffer. Furthermore, St Paul described how God could enforce the delusions of those that did not believe his truth as a form of providential punishment, so 'that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thess. 2:10-13).

Anti-Quakers were adamant that, 'The light in a Quaker differs from the light that is in an Anti-quaker' for the Quakers took the 'Light within to be God and Christ, and above the Scriptures; such be their Captains and foreleaders, who so maintain by their writings, and avow and defend for their chief principle'. The Norfolk clergy asserted that, 'There is a spiritual Lunacy that possess Quakers, so that they speak Orthodoxy by fits, they are not always in the raving mood of Blasphemy, tho the mad fit was upon Penn and Whitehead...against the Trinity and the outward Blood'. In attacking the Quakers, William Allen (d. 1686) made clear that, 'it cannot but be highly ridiculous for such as are ignorant in the very A, B, C, of Christianity...to pretend to such Sublimity and Spirituality'. The Norfolk clergy made plain that, 'this Light of the Quakers be not any Beam of the true Light, but a spark from the Devil's Forge' and derided Quakerism as a 'counterfeit Commission' and nothing but impudent 'blasphemy'. John Cheyney claimed that the Quakers did 'call the light within by the very name of God and Christ, and ascribe unto it the attributes of both, and are very Blasphemers and opinionative Idolaters'. Quakers were represented as 'Rebel-traitor[s] against Christ and the name of God'. By professing 'their peculiar Light within' the Quakers were identified as being in rebellion against the established order, and were portrayed as dangerous heretics.

In sum, it was widely posited that Quakerism was shot through with the tincture of blasphemy. For the remainder of this paper, I shall provide some detail and clarity to this powerful but chaotic polemic by discussing the representation of the Quakers' blasphemy against the Trinity in general, then specifically against God, the incarnate Christ, the Scriptures, and scriptural sacraments.

For anti-Quakers, there was 'Blasphemy in the very denial of the Doctrine of the Trinity'. Thomas Vincent, for one, was convinced that 'William Penn plainly denieth...that the Lord Jesus Christ is God', and was thus guilty of 'wretched blasphemy!' At the 1668 meeting at Spittlefields, Vincent declared that, 'having proved the Trinity, W. Pen must either deny Moses and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles, and God himself speaking from Heaven, or else confess the Blasphemy'. Here, the Presbyterian minister sought to force Penn to choose between the blasphemy of denying the reality of the Trinity, denigrating the substance of God, and the blasphemy of maintaining a lie about the truth of God. In other words, as far as Vincent was concerned, Penn had to capitulate because his position was totally untenable. Yet which was the greater sin: Scripture and that since satisfaction, it was but a Unitarianism: Quaker theol... the 'great function' for him a six-mon...
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untenable. Yet Penn refused to be undone. In The Sandy Foundation Shaken (1668), which was partly a printed account of the oral debate, Penn reasserted his belief that Scripture and ‘right reason’ affirmed ‘ONE to be God, and God to be ONE’, and that since satisfaction was ‘dependant on the Second Person of the imagin’d Trinity’, it was but a ‘Vulgar Doctrine’. This twofold claim encapsulated the Quakers’ Unitarianism: protestations of direct sanctification may have been on the wane, but Quaker theology was still radical. Vincent dismissed Penn’s assertion as ‘a strange composition...of impudence and folly’, which ‘boldly and blasphemously’ destroyed the ‘great fundamental truth’ of God. Moreover, Penn’s polemical outburst landed him a six-month stay in the Tower of London for blasphemy.

On 16 December 1668, Secretary of State Lord Arlington (bap. 1618, d. 1685) gave orders that Penn should be taken into custody for writing the ‘Blasphemous Sandy Foundation’. Penn may well have been initially incarcerated as part of a crack down on unlicensed Quaker pamphleteering; however, once in prison the emphasis quickly turned to his ‘blasphemous and Hereticall Opinions’. Indeed, under the auspices of the King, Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699), then rector of St Andrew’s, Holborn, was granted access to the Quaker explicitly to make an assessment of Penn’s beliefs. Penn later acknowledged that he had been courted by the Socinian patron Thomas Firmin (1632–1697) at the time and so the Established Church might have been on a high state of alert, fearing a pincer-like assault on the doctrine of the Trinity. The Sandy Foundation had certainly not gone unnoticed; for the diarist John Evelyn (1620–1706) noted that Penn had concocted ‘a blasphemous booke, against the Deity of our B[lessed] Lord’. It would appear that there was an assumption by many non-Quakers that the Quaker’s denied the incarnate Christ and shirked away from his divinity. This was far from the case; however, it may be speculated that Quakers were able to use this erroneous theological assumption to their advantage. By professing to believe in the deity of Christ in unity with God, Quakers might have been able convince non-Quakers of their Trinitarianism without actually undermining their quasi-Unitarian theology. While in prison, Penn wrote to Arlington, stating that he had ‘always expressly own’d & maintain’d the eternall diety of Jesus X’, and substantial unity of Father, Word & Spirit. Penn subsequently made a similar, public declaration in Innoecency with Her Open Face (1669). Once set in the context of Quaker theology, Penn’s comments can be construed as little more than a carefully worded affirmation of non-Trinitarian Quakerism; yet it was reported that Stillingfleet, among others, was convinced that Penn ‘is sensible of the Impiety & Blasphemy of his said Hereticall Opinions, and that he doth recant and retract the same’. A sober, apparently Trinitarian, confession of faith, rather than a clear and detailed recantation, was enough to see an order given for Penn’s release on 28 July 1669. Many anti-Quakers remained unconvinced of Quaker orthodoxy vis-à-vis the Trinity. At best Penn was seen as a dangerous equivocator; at worst a conceited liar; for, ‘to say that he could not speak Blasphemy in one place, because he is Orthodox in another, is idle and inconsistent’. If Vincent had been alive in 1684, he would no doubt have been appalled to discover that the Sandy Foundation had been republished. The perception that the Quakers were cloaked antitrinitarians was as strong as...
ever: as an indignant Francis Bugg later claimed, ‘They [the Quakers] tell you they own a Scripture Trinity, but mean not a word of it’.104

Working from the premise that ‘where-ever God is essentially, there is whole God, the infinite God’, anti-Quakers took the Light within to mean that God dwelt essentially within the believer.105 Confirming a Thomistic conception of blasphemy, Thomas Vincent declared that, with regards to the Trinity, ‘The Title of God with universal sovereignty, and eternal blessedness, cannot without blasphemy and absurdity be ascribed unto any creature’.106 Similarly, Thomas Comber noted that to believe in an essential indwelling of Christ ‘dethrones Christ from God’s Right Hand, and destroys our Faith, our Hope and our very Religion, even the whole Covenant of Grace’.107 This representation of aggravated unbelief was exacerbated by the anti-Quaker consternation that such a sin exhorted the most preposterous and perverse lie that God was co-substantial with human beings, making the creator also the created.108 The supposed blasphemous heterodoxy of Quaker theology with respect to God’s essence had already been demonstrated by the ‘Quaker-Jesus’ phenomenon. Henry Pickworth (c. 1673–1738), a religious writer and former supporter of the Quakers, declared, ‘it is no less than Blasphemy in their great Apostle Fox, to pretend himself to be the Son of God...[and also] a high degree of the same Blasphemy for him to exalt his Nonsensical Scribbles, as the infallible Word of the Eternal God’.109 According to Charles Leslie, the extreme ‘Possess’d Quakers...do impiously Blaspheme, and call themselves Christ’, with very Christ construed th that Burrouy and of his followers were not co1663) as an 114 controversial figure of the 17th century. The Light within was thus conceived to be a fallacy, an idol constructed by the human mind, which conveniently exalted human lunacy. Anti-Quakers represented Quakerism as ‘blasphemous’ because it was manifest through ‘such pride’ and ‘the fulness of iniquity’, confirming Quakers as ‘impudent Creatures, Devils incarnate, [who] dare outface heaven, and vie with God’.112

Anti-Quakers were not able to acknowledge Quaker claims on anything like their own terms, but critiqued the Light within from their theological and impassioned perspective, which helped fashion a blasphemous monster from an alternative belief. Furthermore, beyond the discrete spheres of anti-Quaker experience, it may be speculated that the preoccupation with affirming Protestantism as a ‘rational religion’ meant that supposed enthusiasm was increasingly understood via rationality rather than theology, leaving the latter to predisposed Calvinist defenders of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Pondering how Quakers might conceive the indwelling of Christ, anti-Quakers tended to believe that they ‘proselite souls to the Light within’.113 Thus, according to anti-Quakers, the Quaker’s deity was but a projection of themselves, for they sought to redefine the nature and role of the human soul so that it could house a supposed divine entity.

From St Augustine to John Calvin, it had been a fundamental theological truism that ‘the soul is made by God’ and was ‘an immortal yet created essence’.114 As Calvin made clear, ‘creation is not inpouring, but the beginning of essence out of nothing’,115 hence there was no transfer of divine essence from creator to the created. The creation and immortality of the soul were not seen as mutually exclusive, nor was the latter a signifier of divinity. God created an incorporeal element within humans that had the capacity for spiritual knowledge. This conception of the
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human soul was crucial to a Trinitarian explanation of how human beings could be
aware of and believe in God. By contrast, non-Trinitarian theology did not
necessarily adhere to such a notion of the soul; and this was particularly true of the
Gnostic tradition. Indeed, both Augustine and Calvin had defended their positions
on the human soul against the ancient heresies of Priscillianism (a branch of
Gnosticism that flourished in fourth-century Spain) and Manichaeism (a belief system
founded by the third-century Persian Mani which focused on providing a synthesis
of contemporary religions) respectively. However, in seeking to defend a truism,
debate inevitably became polemical. Augustine denounced the Priscillians as
blasphemous liars;116 while Calvin asserted that, ‘if man’s soul be from the essence of
God through derivation, it will follow that God’s nature is subject not only to
change and passions, but also to ignorance, wicked desires, infirmity, and all manner
of vices’.117 It would appear that anti-Quakers used similar tactics in their polemic.

According to the Norfolk clergy, the Quakers’ blasphemy against God primarily
consisted of their claims to be ‘one Soul with God’.118 This representation of blas-
phemy clearly corresponded with the Thomistic conception of blasphemy as aggra-
vated unbelief on account that it simultaneously negated the supposed nature of true
divinity and appeared to confer divinity upon humankind. To take just one example,
seized upon a 1656 passage by the Quaker polemicist Edward Burrough (1633–
1663) as an apparent admission of guilt. In answer to the question, ‘Is that very
Christ, with that very Body within you, Yea or Nay?’ Burrough had replied, ‘The
very Christ of God is within us, we dare not deny him’.119 Here, the Norfolk clergy
construed the term ‘very’ to mean ‘identical’ (an understandable presumption given
that Burrough had gone on to state, ‘we are Members of his body, and of his flesh,
and of his bone’) to denounce the blasphemy of the claim.120 In an attempt to refute
the charge of blasphemy, Richard Ashby sought to distance contemporary Quakers
from the wayward comments of the deceased Burrough: ‘though, he had received a
Measure of the same Spirit, which was in the Holy Pen-men; yet Dispensations
Vary according to the manifold Wisdom of God; and therefore we prefer the Bible before
[Burrough’s] Books, and all other Writings Extant whatsoever.’121 George White-
head’s refutation was much less defensive. Besides theological conviction, Whitehead
would have perhaps been bound by a sense of duty to defend the man who had been
second only to George Fox in the Quaker hierarchy since Nayler’s demise. In
launching into a powerful counter attack, Whitehead asked, ‘Examine your selves
whether you be in the Faith, Prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that
Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates’ (reference to 2 Cor. 13:5).122 The clergy
were not convinced. Like many other anti-Quakers it was the failure of the Quaker
disputants to renounce former Quakers as blasphemers that proved the sticking point:
“We may see how loth Whitehead is that Burrough should be counted a Blasphemer”.123

In reiterating their original point the clergy suggested that if Burrough had spoken
directly and honestly then he

must say that very Man Christ, and that very Body of Christ is within us; but that is
such an evident Falsehood, that is beyond the power of any man alive to defend it,
even of Whitehead himself, whose chiefest faculty lies in that way...to shape the most
ugly deformed Blasphemies, so that they shall appear most Divine Truths.124
The failure by Quakers to recognize Quakerism as anything but a patent untruth and a sanctimonious delusion was seen as proof that the Quaker lie about God was so big and so ingrained that it extended to blasphemy.

For John Cheyney, the Quakers' supposed pitch essentially to unite the human soul with God was a frightful and detestable notion. What was more, Cheyney believed that the evidence of the Quakers' blasphemy on this count was plain. For example, he noted that in 1673 William Penn had declared 'We (Quakers) assert the unity of God and Soul'. For anti-Quakers, such a declaration appeared to be an admission that Quakers could be divine. Cheyney made clear that no human could claim to be God 'without highest Blasphemy and Usurption'. Here, the term usurpation provides a sense of the way in which blasphemy was conceived of as spiritual treason. Citing George Fox, in his *Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (1659), Cheyney asserted that the Quakers 'do plainly hold the Soul of Man to be without beginning, and infinite itself'. This was in direct contravention of the orthodox conception of the human soul as created by God; for as Cheyney reminded his readers, 'God only is without all beginning' (Ps. 90:2). Cheyney played out the hypothetical scenario of conflating God and human: 'O Blasphemy and Impiety! If mans Soul be God, then God is sinful, and shall be damn'd and tormented in Hell; for the damned in Hell have Souls, and are damned for sin.' Here, Cheyney's polemic can be seen to match that of Calvin's: the emphasis was not a one-dimensional notion of unbelief, but a polemical representation of aggravated unbelief: the blasphemous victory of the liar, the anti-Christ.

It would seem that the inter-relatedness of orthodox doctrines was one of the principal reasons why non-Trinitarian speculative theology was perceived to be so destructive. Through a quasi-Unitarian conception of God, early Quakers subscribed to an alternative conception of the Godhead that rendered the theological precepts of orthodox Christianity meaningless. For this reason, the doctrine of the Light within was not only seen as blasphemous by nature but also by its consequences. As Charles Leslie made clear, the 'monstrous Notion of the Light within, is the Ground and Foundation of all their other Errors and Blasphemies'. According to the Norfolk clergy's charge sheet, the other blasphemies of Quakerism concerned the person of Christ, Scripture, and scriptural ordinances. I shall now address each of these in turn.

The historicity of Christ was essential to revealing the archetypes of God's grace: incarnation and atonement. Thus, to renounce the nature and purpose of Christ incarnate and believe in an alternative would have been seen by the vast majority of Protestants as a wholly perverse act which inverted truth and falsehood, God and the Devil. Non-Trinitarian Quaker theology was perceived to be a lie against 'That Jesus Christ is God and man', exhuming the blasphemous 'extrems' of 'old Hereticks' like Arius. Thomas Comber was unequivocal that Quakerism 'destroys the Reality and Truth of his [Christ's] Humane Nature' and as such was inherently 'Antichristian'. Charles Leslie similarly noted that Quakerism had reduced 'the true and real Christ, of whom that Man Christ Jesus was but a Type or Figure'. This emphasis on the
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truth and reality of the person of Christ seems to resonate with Thomistic blasphemy. Since God's nature was believed to be a criterion of his truth, the Quakers' apparent speculative blasphemy had the potential to deny both in the most demonstrably wicked fashion. To investigate the evidence used to accuse the Quakers with blasphemy against Christ, I shall briefly consider Charles Leslie's controversy.

Like many anti-Quakers, Leslie was convinced of an unholy alliance between Quakerism and Socinianism: a diabolic plot to uproot and destroy Christianity. Such a view may initially seem unfathomable since early manifestations of the former pertained to a belief in Christ's total divinity, while the latter emphasised his humanity. However, the offence of antitrinitarianism lay not merely in its false description of the Godhead, but also in its theological implications. Hence, Leslie was able to allege that, 'the Quakers are direct Socinians for they positively deny the [doctrine of] Satisfaction'. Here then, both enthusiasts and rationalists were drawn together by their supposed blasphemy against the person of Christ: the lie against the truth of atonement, whereby the implicit appeal to human perfectibility proved the state of pride necessary to maintain the delusion. In one attack, Leslie noted that George Whitehead 'Runs on Blaspheming, and (with the Socinians) Ridiculing the Doctrin of Satisfaction by Jesus Christ, whom he Denies to be God-Man or the Saviour of the World'. Penn was also denounced as a blasphemer for continuing 'the old Socinian Job Trot' that Christ's satisfaction was 'Irreligious and Irrational'. Leslie argued that in denying Christ's satisfaction, Quakers and Socinians alike had no conception of God's mercy for sinners, which was 'great Non-sense as well as Blasphemy; and utterly inconsistent with the First Notions of a God'.

Leslie maintained that Quakerism held an indisputable 'blasphemous contempt of Christ'. To legitimate this claim, he reminded his readers of the protestations of earlier Quakers. In 1654, Christopher Atkinson (fl. 1653–64) had railed against orthodox priests by claiming, 'Your imaged God beyond the Stars, and your Carnal Christ is utterly deny'd—That this Christ is God and Man in one Person is a Lyre'. In 1659, Humphrey Woolrich (c. 1633–1707) had declared, 'That Christ was never seen with the any Carnal Eye, nor his Voice heard with any Carnal Ear'. In the same year, George Fox had stated that, 'if there be any other Christ but that was Crucify'd within, he is a False Christ'. In what modern readers might see as the banal polemic of oppositionalism to support an alternative belief, the theological critique employed by anti-Quakers observed a most complex manifestation of wickedness. For anti-Quakers, the Quakers' apparent denial of an outward Christ was not represented as a one-dimensional transgression, for its apologetic defiance was evidence of the most consummate lie, which aggravated the sin to the point of blasphemy.

The supposed denial of Christ's humanity was seen as proof enough that the Quakers' theology was enthusiastic antitrinitarianism: the product of an 'Ignorant and Deluded heart', forming 'the height of Spiritual Pride'. Appealing to Scripture, Leslie spelt out the full horror of the unending nightmare that would befall blasphemous Quakers:

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a strong Enthusiastic habit may fix a Man's Thought so long upon a beloved Object, as to dazzle his Understanding, and glare so in his Eyes, that without considering,
grossest Absurdities will go down; and the highest Blasphemies gain a pretence, even of Piety and Exalted Devotion. This is the Devil transform'd into an Angel of Light. This is the most Fatal and Irrecoverable State of a Soul we fall in Love with our Diseases, and, as in a Calenture, mistake the deepest Oceans of Presumptuous Blasphemy, for sweet and pleasant Fields of Contemplation, and even Humility; and thus mistake Hell itself for our Heaven.145

Here, it would appear that St Paul’s decree on ‘false prophets’ was woven with the Thomistic theology of blasphemy as aggravated unbelief. Misplaced religious enthusiasm could, if unchecked, lead to spiritual ignorance, creating a vacuum that was filled by human pride. At a stroke, a desire to know God was replaced by a potentially fatal deviation. Pride created the capacity to accept heresies willingly. An unflinching belief in heresy as truth marked the beginning of blasphemy, and an eschatological tipping point. To become a ‘false prophet’ tipped the balance towards damnation, for this was a higher state of enthusiasm whereby a lie about God was propagated as divinely inspired. This act confirmed that one was irredeemable. It can be speculated that what seems to follow helps to explain the notion of the greatest blasphemy as an unpardonable sin. Via providence, God seized the individual which was lost to him and ensured that their blasphemous delusions continued for eternity.

Turning to the nature and role of Scripture: St Paul decreed that the scriptures ‘are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ’ because ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (2 Tim. 3:15-16).146 This view was enmeshed into Reformed biblical theology. Faith in Christ allowed the Scriptures to be read correctly, enriching spiritual knowledge and legitimating belief. A denial of an historical Christ undermined his role as mediator of that spiritual knowledge which was set down by the inspiration of the Father in scripture (Heb. 9:15).147 Calvinism revelled in the omnicompetence of Scripture, contrasted with the fallibility of human reason, while the doctrine of ‘right reason’ offered an alternative way of subordinating one’s scriptural exegesis to divine law. The crux of orthodox belief was that humankind could not unilaterally pass judgment on the status, meaning, or efficacy of Scripture. To do so was to turn away from God in a pride-induced blasphemous enterprise. In citing St Jerome, Thomas Comber warned that ‘the Book of Chronicles is such that without it, if a man arrogate to himself the knowledge of Scriptures, he doth but abuse and delude himself’.148 For Charles Leslie, any human proclamation which claimed to have greater authority than Scripture was ‘Proof of his being Stark-Mad’.149 Many anti-Quakers were convinced that the Quakers’ blasphemous enthusiasm combined a corrosive pretence to higher spirituality with a delusional circumvention of a mediated manifestation of God. To address the evidence anti-Quakers used to charge their enemy with blasphemy against the Scriptures, I shall consider the claims of the Norfolk clergy.150

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Francis Bugg’s associates poured over Quaker texts to find *prima facie* instances of blasphemy against the Scriptures. They observed that George Fox had, in his seminal *Newes coming up Out of the North* (1653), dismissed the Scriptures as ‘Carnal’, describing how the ‘GOSPEL IS BUT DUST, MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, and JOHN, which is the Letter’.151 The force of Fox’s claim was seen as a breathtaking example of how the Quakers did ‘Vilifie and Speak Contemptuously of the Scriptures’.152 Contemptuous vilification of God was the very essence of Thomistic blasphemy, describing both a state of aggravated unbelief and the degradation of God. In response to the Norfolk clergy, George Whitehead attempted to clarify Fox’s statement by explaining ‘The Letter it self is not made up of Spiritual Matter, or Lasting Materials, but of such as will decay, and turn to Dust’.153 However, the clergy dismissed this as a ‘trifling Answer’ which negated the ‘first Languages whereby the Doctrine of Salvation was conveyed to the World’.154

Another affirmation of the Quakers’ perceived guilt was seen to be clearly evidenced in the 1653 joint declaration of George Fox and Richard Hubberthorn that, ‘It is DANGEROUS to read (viz. the Scriptures) which the Prophets, Christ, and the Apostles spoke forth freely’.155 This claim appeared to encapsulate early Quaker belief that the Scriptures were but a worldly and corrupt substitute for a direct relationship with God. George Whitehead once again defended the words of his brethren by introducing the caveat that, ‘Tis not said to be dangerous to all Men to read the Scriptures’ but only men ‘that pervert them’.156 The clerical retort was that the Quakers performed ‘a profane Slander upon the Scriptures’ and that ‘it must still go for a Blasphemy against the Scriptures, that it’s dangerous to read them’.157 The gulf between Protestant biblical theology and non-Trinitarian Quakerism rendered a serious discussion of scriptural exegesis pointless. Whitehead’s implicit allegation that it was the Church of England which peddled a false view of the Scriptures was ignored because it was seen as a baseless and desperate charge which only masked the blasphemy of calling God’s word dangerous.

The Norfolk clergy were also keen to stress that the Quakers’ view of Scripture was a product of their wicked pride. They leapt upon an early comment by Fox and Hubberthorn—that their critics ‘might as well condemn the Scriptures to the Fire as some of...[their] Queries’—as evidence that the Quakers believed their writings to be as holy and edifying as God’s word: ‘Most impudent Blasphemy!’158 Similarly, William Penn’s 1673 assertion that, ‘No Command in the Scripture, is any further acknowledged unscriptural, than as it is profane, vain, or trifling Answer’ which negated the ‘first Languages whereby the Doctrine of Salvation was conveyed to the World’159

In summary, Quakerism was represented as enacting blasphemy against the Holy Scriptures by degrading them via a pride-riddled and wickedly false belief system. As one Quaker apostate trumpeted:

> Come, and behold (a thing most true)
> The **Quakers**, how they do pursue;
> With Daggers Points, GOD’s holy Word,
> It to destroy, with one Accord.
Lo! how it breaks their Daggers keen,
And makes those **Monsters** to be seen.\(^{160}\)

Here was a reminder to both Quakers and non-Quakers that the power of God’s word would uncover ‘false prophets’ and damn them for the blasphemous demons that they were. The poem was accompanied by an illustration which depicted the hands of Fox, Penn, Whitehead, and Burrough stabbing a copy of the Bible with daggers (see Fig. 1 below). The Quaker lie about the Scriptures extended to spiritual treason against God, graphically presented as an attempt to murder his word.

![Figure 1. Marther, W., *Of the Quakers Despising the Holy Scriptures*, 3rd edn; London, 1700, broadsheet.](image)

By appearing to deny the divinity, and hence purpose, of the Scriptures, non-Trinitarian Quaker theology was also represented as making the Gospel ordinances void. Reformed theology understood Scripture as the mediator between the doctrine of predestination and sacramental modes of grace: the latter was necessary and wholly commensurate with the former. Sacraments were neither external ceremonies, nor spiritually autonomous events, but the means by which Christ gave assurance to his people.\(^ {161}\) John Calvin noted, ‘in Scripture the Spirit of God is continually urging us to hope for the resurrection of our flesh[;] Thus baptism, according to Paul, is the seal of our future resurrection (Col. 2:12); no less does the sacred Supper invite us to confidence in it’.\(^ {162}\) Baptism was one of the most essential sacraments, affirming the New Covenant and profoundly separating those cleansed of hereditary original sin from those inadmissible to the Church. According to St Peter, ‘even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection ofJesus Christ’ (1 Pet. 3:21). The belief that baptism was a spiritual ‘new birth’ was upheld as the twenty-seventh Article of Faith of the necessary part of one nians together and ac of communion did tantiation. The two Supper was a sacram the theological role of the politics and and communion, sc identity and unity: t Church through sac against the sacramen

For Faldo, the cl Gospel’ was one of ‘ that, in 1655, James f formal imitation, and t to be nothing but ‘F William Smith (d. 1 claiming that the on invention’,\(^ {169}\) whereas but the administration read the Scriptures t The Quakers’ comm of the sacraments th Faldo’s controversy t to Penn expressing h particularly its rejec lent thinges of the G the odnesse and indi an intimation not un of their masters wor blasphemed’ (1 Tim. Quakers’ apparent d trines of both bapt thing’).\(^ {174}\)

In summary, the (much longer and i The Light within wa plex notion of Chris pin of the Trinitaria the true pathways to denied the truth and but to construct anc claimed to be true w
d non-Quakers that the power of God's damn them for the blasphemous demons by an illustration which depicted the rough stabbing a copy of the Bible with about the Scriptures extended to spiritual as an attempt to murder his word.

hence purpose, of the Scriptures, non- presented as making the Gospel ordinances sure as the mediator between the doctrine grace: the latter was necessary and wholly were neither external ceremonies, nor ns by which Christ gave assurance to his the Spirit of God is continually urging us Thus baptism, according to Paul, is the less does the sacred Supper invite us to: most essential sacraments, affirming the those cleansed of hereditary original sin cording to St Peter, 'even baptism doth the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a rection of Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 3:21). Theirth was upheld as the twenty-seventh Article of Faith of the Church of England. Partaking in the Lord's Supper was also a necessary part of one's ongoing spiritual commitment to Christ, bringing true Christians together and admonishing heretics (1 Cor. 11:18-34). The spiritual meaning of communion did not diminish after it was stripped of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The twenty-eighth Article of Faith reminded believers that the Lord's Supper was a sacrament of redemption. It is important, therefore, to highlight that the theological role and the spiritual ideal of the sacraments were somewhat distinct from the politics and inconsistencies that blighted their practice. Through baptism and communion, soteriology was mixed with the opportunity to define spiritual identity and unity: that is to say, a belief in the truth and reality of Christ and the Church through sacrament. To finally consider the case for the Quakers' blasphemy against the sacraments, I shall turn to the work of John Faldo.

For Faldo, the claim that 'there is no such thing as ordinances now under the Gospel' was one of 'the Capital Errors and Blasphemies of the Quakers'. He noted that, in 1655, James Parnell (bap. 1636, d. 1656) had dismissed baptism without to 'be formal imitation, and the invention of man, and so a meer delusion', and the Lord's Supper to be nothing but 'Feeding upon the husk and shadow, which is carnal'. Emboldened, William Smith (d. 1673) had played the proverbial card of Reformation polemic by claiming that the ordinances of baptism and bread and wine 'rose from the Pope's invention'; whereas, John Higgins (1633–1667) had claimed that 'Water-Baptism was but the administration of John'. Flabbergasted, Faldo stated that for anyone who had read the Scriptures this was clear blasphemy for it was 'too palpable an untruth'. The Quakers' commitment to inward baptism demonstrated 'their abundant scorn' of the sacraments that descended to 'down-right railing'. In 1675, the year that Faldo's controversy came to an end, the theologian Henry More (1614–1687) wrote to Penn expressing his extreme disquiet about wayward elements of Quaker theology, particularly its rejection of baptism and communion. For More, 'that the most excellent things of the Gospel be not slighted, condemned or suspected, by men through the odnesse and indiscretion of such as seem the most zealous professors of them' was an intimation not unlike St Paul's decree: 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke of their masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed' (1 Tim. 6:1). Such a view was only confirmed and exacerbated by the Quakers' apparent demonic ability to 'delude people' by claiming to own the doctrines of both baptism and communion, when they 'call [them] quite another thing'.

In summary, the Quaker's claim to direct inspiration threatened to circumvent the much lengthier and convoluted route to salvation detailed by orthodox Christianity. The Light within was doctrinal minimalism, destroying at a stroke the vast and complex notion of Christianity that had gone before. By appearing to pull out the linchpin of the Trinitarian Christ, anti-Quakers were convinced that Quakerism denied the true pathways to grace through Christ, Scripture, and sacrament; and in so doing denied the truth and reality of God himself. To deny God may have been atheism, but to construct and purport to believe in an elaborate fiction which maliciously claimed to be true was devilish blasphemy.
CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to go beyond the generic slur that Quaker 'Wild Enthusiasm ends in Blasphemous Pretence to Sinless Perfection, Infallibility and Equality with God', to understand the theological basis for the representation of Quakerism as blasphemy. As far as anti-Quakers were concerned, Quaker enthusiasm propagated something far more dangerous than socio-political subversion from a supposedly idiosyncratic and flawed theology. On account of their apparent antitrinitarianism, Quakers were represented as having turned away from God to become the latest generation of 'false prophets', one of the greatest theological threats to Christianity. In such cases, enthusiastic antitrinitarianism signalled spiritual treason: blasphemy against God, Christ, and the Scriptures. Richard Clark has noted that the doctrine of the Light within was the Quakers' Achilles heel because it frequently created a barrier to Protestant acceptance. This paper demonstrates that, in some quarters, it was much more than that. In summarising the sin of Quakerism, John Faldo turned to the second-century Father Irenaeus who had once said: 'While Hereticks speak like the faithful, they not only mean otherwise than they say, but clean contrary. And by their Tenets full of Blasphemies, they destroy the Souls if those, who with their fair words, suck in the poison of their foul opinions'. For anti-Quakers, the battle with Quakers was theological as well as social and political, for Quakerism was perceived to epitomise the wicked blasphemy of the false prophet.

NOTES

* This paper is derived from chapter six of my PhD dissertation, 'Blasphemy in England, c. 1660-1730' (University of Cambridge, 2009). An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the Early Modern History Graduate Workshop at the University of Cambridge during the Lent Term of 2006. I would like to thank Mark Goldie, Michael Mullett, Kate Peters, and my anonymous referees for their advice in writing this paper.
1. Bugg, F., A Brief History of the Rise, Growth and Progress of Quakerism; Setting forth that the Principles and Practices of the Quakers are Antichristian, Antiscriptural, Antimagisterial, Blasphemous, and Idolatrous from Plain Matter of Fact..., London, 1697; and Pilgrim's Progress, from Quakerism to Christianity, London, 1698.
2. They included: Henry Meriton (d. 1707), rector of Oxborough; his son, John Meriton (1662-1717), rector of Boughton; Edward Beckham (1637?-1714), Doctor of Divinity and rector of Gayton-Thorpe, and Lancaster Topcliffe (1646?-1720), rector of Hockwold and fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.
3. [Beckham, E., et al.], The Quakers Challenge Made to the Norfolk Clergy, or a Relation of a Conference between some Clergy-Men of the Church of England, and some Quakers, held (on the 8th of December, 1698 in West-Dereham-Church in the County of Norfolk, London, 1699, p. 12.
eric slur that Quaker 'Wild Enthusiasm' refraction, Infallibility and Equality with or the representation of Quakerism as ascened, Quaker enthusiasm propagated political subversion from a supposedly unt of their apparent antitrinitarianism, away from God to become the latest atest theological threats to Christianity. 

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PhD dissertation, 'Blasphemy in England, c. earlier version of this paper was delivered to the University of Cambridge during the Lent Term and Progress of Quakerism; Setting forth that the Antiscriptural, Antimagisterial, Blasphemous, and Pilgrim's Progress, from Quakerism to rector of Oxborough; his son, John Meriton i (1637?-1714), Doctor of Divinity and rector i1720), rector of Hockwold and fellow of

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5. See Proceedings of the Old Bailey online (POB): t167701t17-1; [Anon.], The Blasphemer Tried and Cast: Or a more full Narrative of the Tryal of Lodowick Muggeiton... (1676).
6. For a more expansive discussion, see Chapter 1 of my PhD dissertation.
12. See Chapter 5 of my PhD dissertation.
16. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 2a. 2e. 13.3.


31. For further details on the points raised in this paragraph, see Damrosch, *Quaker Jesus*, pp. 69-114; Underwood, * Lamb's War*, passim. For an alternative view, see Moore, *Light in their Consciences*, pp. 98-111.

32. Docetism was a third-century Gnostic belief which claimed that the physical body of Christ was a mere illusion; see Frost, 'The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology', p. 509. For the allegation that Quakerism was a form of Sabellianism, see [Hedworth, H.], *The Quakers Quibbles, Set Forth in an Expostulatory Epistle to William Penn: Concerning the Last Meeting Held in the Barbican the 9th of Octob. 1674 between the Baptists and Quakers...*, London, 1674, p. 36. Sabellianism was a third-century antitrinitarian heresy. For a comparison between Quakerism and Arianism, see Bug, F., *A Modest Defence of My Book, Entitled, Quakerism Exposed...*, London, 1700, unpaginated dedication, [p. x].


39. For a discussion of how James Nayler was represented by Quaker historiography, see Erin Bell, 'Eighteenth-Century Quakerism and the Rehabilitation of James Nayler, Seventeenth-Century Radical', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59 (2008), pp. 426-46.
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45. Fox, Mistery, p. 1.
46. Fox, Mistery, p. 215.
47. Fox, Mistery, p. 232.
48. [Penn, W.], The Sandy Foundation Shaken: Or those so Generally Believed and Applauded Doctrines of One God, Subsisting in Three Distinct and Separate Persons, The Impossibility of God Pardoning Sinners...Refuted from the Authority of Scripture Testimonies, and Right Reason, London, 1668, unpaginated, [p. 5].
49. [Penn], Sandy Foundation, [p. 5].
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51. Vincent, T., The Foundation of God Standeth Sure. Or, a Defence of Those Fundamental and so Generally Believed Doctrines... Wherein His and the Quakers Hideous Blasphemies, Socinian and Damnable-Heretical Opinions, are Discovered and Refuted..., London, 1668, p. 20.
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58. [Cheyney], Skirmish, p. 14.

59. [Leslie, C.], The Snake in the Grass: Or, Satan Transform’d into an Angel of Light. Discovering the Deep and Unsuspected Subtily which is Couched under the Pretended Simplicity of Many of the Principle Leaders of those People Call’d Quakers, London, 1696, pp. viii-ix.

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63. Damrosch, Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus, p. 69.


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70. Bugg, Modest Defence, part 1, p. 6.

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82. [Cheyne], Quakerism Proved to be Gross Blasphemy, p. 14.

83. [Cheyne, J.], A Call to Prayer, in Two Sermons on that Subject, Lately Preached to a Country-Auditory. With an Account of the Principles and Practice of the Quakers in the Matter of Prayer, Subjoined..., London, 1677, p. 111.

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86. Beckham et al., Quakers further shown to be Blasphemous and Seditious, p. 6.

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88. [Cheyne, J.], Quakerism Subverted: Being a Further Discovery and Confutation of the Gross Errors of the Quakers; Published and Maintained by William Penn and Others of that Sect..., London, 1677, p. 3.


90. Vincent, God Standeth Sure, p. 22.

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93. [Penn], Sandy Foundation, pp. 12, 16.

94. Vincent, God Standeth Sure, p. 49.


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101. [Penn, W.], Innocency with Her Open Face Presented by way of Apology for the Book Entituled the Sandy Foundation Shaken, to all Serious and Enquiring Persons, Particularly the Inhabitants of the City of London, London, 1669.


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110. [Leslie], Snake, p. xxii.
111. [Cheyney], Quakerism Subverted, p. 30.
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115. Calvin, Institutes, Bk. I, Ch. 15, § 5.
116. Augustine, Against Lying, p. 136. Priscillianism was a fourth-century Spanish heresy derived from the Gnostic doctrines of Manichaeism. For further details, see online: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/.
117. Calvin, Institutes, Bk. I, Ch. 15, § 5. Manichaeism was a Gnostic religion founded in third-century Persia. For further details, see online: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/.
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120. [Burrough], True Faith of the Gospel, p. 27.
121. Ashby, R., The Defence of the People called Quakers being a Reply, to a Book Lately Published by Certain Priests of the County of Norfolk, Under the Pretended Title of the Quakers Challenge..., London, 1699, p. 6.
123. Beckham et al., Quakers Further Shewn to be Blasphemous and Seditious, p. 9.
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125. Penn, W., Reason against Railing and Truth against Fiction..., London, 1673, p. 153; cited in [Cheyney], Gross Blasphemy, p. 28. Penn's original text read as follows: 'And from our asserting the Unity of God and the Soul, and our Denial of their Carnal Resurrection, He [Thomas Hicks] blindly concludes, that the Soul is part of God...'
126. [Cheyney], Gross Blasphemy, p. 12.
127. Cheyney, Warning to Souls, p. 3. The quotation was in reference to Fox, Great Mystery, pp. 29, 90.
128. Cheyney, Warning to Souls, p. 3.
129. [Cheyney], Gross Blasphemy, p. 9.
130. Cheyney, Warning to Souls, p. 3.
132. [Blome], Fanatick History, pp. 141-42.
133. [Comber], Christianity No Enthusiasm, unpaginated epistle to the reader [p. xxiii-xxiv].
134. [Leslie], Snake, p. xxvii.
135. See also Faldo, Quakerism No Christianity, part 2, pp. 70-82; Beckham et al., Brief Discovery, p. 12; Beckham et al., Quakers Further Shewn to be Blasphemous and Seditious, pp. 57-60.
136. [Leslie], Snake, p. 211.
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138. [Leslie], Snake, p. 212. The quotation was in reference to Penn's comments in Reason against Railing, p. 90-93.
illianaism was a fourth-century Spanish heresy.

For further details, see online: http://

In reply to several Answers London, 1700, part 1, p. 181. The quotation was in reference to Penn’s comments in Reason

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p. 8.

paginated epistle to the reader [p. xxiii-xxiv].

iety, part 2, pp. 70-82; Beckham et al., Brief

Yon, 1671, p. 20. For Humphrey’s original text, see Wollrich, H., A

Declaration to the Baptists Concerning the Name of the Lord..., London, 1659, p. 13. Set in context the quotation read as follows: ‘Even the same that was before the world was, one with the Father, and stillleth Heaven & earth, and was never seen with any carnal eye, nor his voice heard by any carnal ear, but in the pure eternal, unchangeable light is he revealed and seen more and more, as it is written, Psal. 36:9’.

143. Fox, Mysteri, p. 206; cited in [Leslie], Snake, p. 228.

144. [Leslie], Snake, pp. lxxvii, lxxviii.

145. [Leslie], Snake, pp. 240-41.


148. [Comber], Christianity No Enthusiasm, p. 179.

149. Leslie, Defence, part 1, p. 52.

150. See also Faldo, Quakerism No Christianity, part 1, pp. 18-39; Cheyney, Warning to Souls, pp. 6, 10, 15; [Leslie], Snake, pp. 142-70.


152. Beckham et al., Brief Discovery, p. 9.


154. Beckham et al., Quakers Further Shewn to be Blasphemous and Seditious, pp. 37, 38.


157. Beckham et al., Quakers further shewn to be Blasphemous and Seditious, pp. 37, 38.

158. Beckham et al., Quakers further shewn to be Blasphemous and Seditious, p. 41.

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David Manning recently completed his PhD in History at Clare College, Cambridge. His other publications include, ‘Anti-Providentialism as Blasphemy in Late Stuart England: A Case Study of “the Stage Debate”’, *Journal of Religious History* 34 (2008), pp. 422-38.

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