

## Archbishop John Tillotson and the 17th Century Latitudinarian Defense of Christianity, Part I

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In the years following the religious and political tumult of the 1640s and 50s, a group of Anglican clergy emerged to take leadership in the Restoration Church (1660-1688). Known originally for their compromising ecclesiastical status before and after the Restoration, the Latitudinarians numbered among them future leaders of the Restoration Church of England such as Simon Patrick, Edward Fowler, Joseph Glanvill, Edward Stillingfleet, Gilbert Burnet, and John Tillotson. Tillotson became one of the first and foremost leaders representing this new group of Anglican divines known not only for their political concessions but also for their theological moderation and congenial temperament.

In a seminal work on the Latitudinarian movement of the Restoration period, Martin Griffin provides an historical survey and analysis of this group of seventeenth-century English Church divines who shared similar characteristics of thought distinguishing them from their contemporaries. These traits Griffin lists as:

(1) orthodoxy in the historical sense of acceptance of the contents of the traditional Christian creeds; (2) conformity to the Church of England as by law established, with its episcopal government, its Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer; (3) an advocacy of 'reason' in religion; (4) theological minimalism; (5) an Arminian scheme of justification; (6) an emphasis on practical morality above creedal speculation and precision; (7) a distinctive sermon style; (8) certain connections with seventeenth-century science and the Royal Society.<sup>1</sup>

This two-part essay will argue that Tillotson's unique educational and ecclesiastical experiences, especially within the context of mid-seventeenth-century religious strife, contributed to his particular Latitudi-

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1. Martin Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of Eng-*

narian theology and praxis that emphasized religious certainty and political stability. In particular, Tillotson's insistence on a rational theology, accommodating ecclesiology, and moral Christianity—especially against the apparent doctrinal speculation of Puritanism and the superstitious traditionalism of Roman Catholicism—will be described to demonstrate the underlying theological and pastoral motivations that contributed to his unique brand of Anglican Latitudinarianism during the Restoration period.

Part one of this essay will give a brief account of the educational and ecclesiastical career that shaped his particular theology and ministry. Part two of this essay (in the next issue) will consist of a description of his contribution to and influence from his Latitudinarian associations especially as it shaped his apologetic defense of the protestant Christian religion against the Church's enemies.

### Education and Ecclesiastics

Tillotson was born in 1630 in the Yorkshire village of Sowerby to prosperous clothiers. According to his biographer Thomas Birch, Tillotson seems to have been influenced by his father's Calvinism:

His father, Mr. Robert Tillotson, was . . . remarkable for a good understanding, and an uncommon knowledge of Scriptures; but so zealously attached to the system of Calvin, which was almost universally received in that age, that his prejudices in favour of it were scarce to be moderated by all the reasonings of his son, whom he lived to see Dean of Canterbury, being, as appears from a letter of the Dean, alive in May 1679.<sup>2</sup>

Raised in a strict Puritan household, young John was sent to Clare Hall, Cambridge, in 1647 where he remained as a fellow until 1656. Tillotson's collective experiences and relationships in the university and the

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*land*, ed. Lila Freedman (Leiden: Brill, 1992), vii. See also William Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); John Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men 1660-1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson, and Hobbism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 407-427; John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," *The Historical Journal* 31 (1988): 61-82; Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74-118.

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

church would shape his particular Latitudinarian convictions and practices.<sup>3</sup>

### *At Cambridge University*

Here at the University, his early Presbyterian convictions were nurtured under the tutelage of David Clarkson, who according to Richard Baxter was “a divine of extraordinary worth for solid judgment, healing, moderate principles, acquaintance with the Fathers, great ministerial abilities, and a godly, upright life.”<sup>4</sup> But his Puritan upbringing and training was complemented by other stimuli that would eventually influence his religious sensibilities and sympathies.

Though Tillotson’s early influences were the Puritans, Birch notes that Tillotson “felt somewhat within him, that disposed him to larger notions, and a better temper.”<sup>5</sup> This temperament was further nurtured after reading William Chillingworth (1602-1643), a writer who in a later sermon Tillotson would call “incomparable, and the glory of his age and nation.”<sup>6</sup> Chillingworth’s most popular work, *The Religion of the Protestants* (1638), especially seemed to have advanced Tillotson’s convictions and character:

This admirable book gave his mind the ply, that he held ever after, and put him upon a true scent. He was soon freed from his first prejudices, or rather he was never mastered by them. Yet he still adhered to that strictness of life to which he was bred, and retained a just value and due tenderness for the men of that persuasion; and, by the strength of his reason, together with the clearness of his principles, brought over more serious

3. Tillotson’s life and career was first documented by Thomas Birch in his *The Life of the Author, Compiled Chiefly from his Original Papers and Letters* (London, 1752) affixed to Tillotson’s three-volume *Works*. This work is arguably the best and most complete biography of Tillotson to date. See also the following works: Gilbert Burnet, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Most Reverend Father in God John by the Divine Providence, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate and Metropolitan of all England* (London: Chiswell, 1694); Alexander Gordon, “John Tillotson,” in *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 19:872-878; Louis Locke, *Tillotson: A Study in Seventeenth Century Literature* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1954), 16-18; Irène Simon, *Three Restoration Divines: Barrow, South, Tillotson* (Paris: Société d’Edition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1967), 1:275-277.

4. *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times* (London, 1696), 3:97.

5. Birch, “Life of Tillotson” (1820), 1:iv.

6. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 9:425.

persons from their scruples to the communion of the church of England, and fixed more in it, than any man perhaps of that time.<sup>7</sup>

At the university, Tillotson also befriended a group of students and teachers who later would be termed the Cambridge Platonists: Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, George Rust, John Worthington, and John Smith.<sup>8</sup> These Platonists, especially the writings of Henry More against enthusiasm and atheism and the teaching of Benjamin Whichcote, seem to have influenced Tillotson's partiality to a reasonable defense of the Christian religion that would provide stability for the nation.<sup>9</sup> According to Tillotson, Whichcote, during the "wild and unsettled times" of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, "contributed more to the forming of the students of that University to a sober sense of religion than many in that age."<sup>10</sup>

### *Early "Puritan" Ministry*

In 1656, after several years working at the university, Tillotson became tutor to the son of Edmund Prideaux, Oliver Cromwell's attorney general. This association with the Puritan Prideaux introduced Tillotson to a formative circle of distinguished London men of differing political and ecclesiastical backgrounds. Though they came from diverse backgrounds, they were nonetheless united in their friendship and mutual toleration in religious and political matters. According to

7. Birch, "Life of Tillotson" (1820), 1:iv.

8. Tillotson preached Whichcote's funeral sermon (see *Works* [1820], 2:351-373). Cambridge University divines Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, and John Smith shared similar views concerning the fuller recognition of private judgment and the rationality of the Christian religion. Because of their belief in the central place occupied by reason in intellectual inquiry, they received the name Cambridge Platonists. See James B. Mullinger, "Benjamin Whichcote," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, 21:1-3; G. A. J. Rogers, "The Other-Worldly Philosophers and the Real World: The Cambridge Platonists, Theology and Politics," in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 1997), 3-15; John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the 17th Century*, vol. 2, *The Cambridge Platonists* (Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961); C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin, eds., *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England 1640-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31-150.

9. Birch, "Life of Tillotson," 1:iv-v.

10. J. Tillotson, "A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of Reverend Benjamin Whichcot, D.D. (24 May 1683)," in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, 3 vols. (London, 1712-14), 3:278.

John Beardmore (one of Tillotson's former students), Tillotson at this time "improved very much" by his acquaintance especially with Ralph Brownrig, the excluded Bishop of Exeter, with John Hacket, later Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, and with William Bates, a prominent Presbyterian minister.<sup>11</sup> These relationships must have left an indelible impression on Tillotson's growing sentiment that no particular religious system was uniquely endowed with absolute truth. Nonetheless, at the time of these tutoring responsibilities, Tillotson remained a Presbyterian. In fact, Tillotson's Presbyterian connections continued through the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660. Furthermore, Tillotson's first sermon in print was part a collection that was preached by Presbyterian ministers at the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate in 1661.<sup>12</sup> Soon after, as Richard Baxter related, Tillotson sat among the Presbyterian delegates at the Savoy Conference in 1661.<sup>13</sup>

The Savoy Conference was called by the King in 1661 in order that Episcopalian and Presbyterian divines could undertake a revision of the Prayer Book "for the giving of satisfaction to tender consciences and the restoring and continuance of peace and unity in the churches under our protection and government."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, after the Presbyterian delegates were continually bullied and shouted down by their Anglican counterparts for four months, nothing was accomplished. Geoffrey Thomas has argued persuasively that for Presbyterian moderates like Richard Baxter, Thomas Manton, and young John Tillotson, the Savoy Conference seemed to force them to choose their allegiances between two extreme groups: High Church Anglicans from the Laudian tradition and the Independents and Presbyterians who regarded all moderate Presbyterians as traitors.<sup>15</sup> Though Tillotson aligned himself with the Presbyterian moderates at Savoy, changing religious convictions within and shifting political tensions without would soon force him to move his ecclesiastical affiliations from the Presbyterians to the established Church of England.

11. J. Beardmore, "Some Memorials of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson, late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury," in *The Life of the Most Reverend, Dr. John Tillotson, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. T. Birch (London, 1753), 387.

12. Published in *The Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, or Several Cases of Conscience practically resolved by sundry Ministers—September 1661, by Dr. Samuel Annesley* (London, 1661).

13. *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 2:337.

14. Geoffrey Thomas, "The Savoy Conference, 1661," in *Puritan Papers*, vol. 1, 1956-1959, ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2000), 101.

15. Thomas, "Savoy Conference, 1661," 101.

### *From Presbyterian to Anglican Ministry*

As a part of the Restoration settlement in 1662, all ministers were required to subscribe to the Book of Common Prayer and its exclusive use in any and all worship services. Ministers who were not episcopally ordained would also lose their positions. Furthermore, all ministers and schoolmasters were required to make a declaration that taking up arms against the King was illegal. As a result of this Act, over 2000 Presbyterian ministers who refused to acquiesce to these demands were ejected from their livings. Tillotson, on the other hand, immediately submitted to the Act in 1662 and was ordained by a Bishop into the Church of England. Although many deprived ministers complained about the Act of Uniformity, the hostility toward the Act itself did not compare to the consuming hatred many Presbyterian ministers felt toward those brethren who switched sides with such unscrupulous expediency. Tillotson would hear the wrath of many of these ministers for many years to come.

Tillotson's decision in 1662 to conform to the Church of England may have been influenced from more than just political and economic pragmatism. Four years prior to his determination to minister within the confines of the established Church, Tillotson witnessed an event that seemed to support his growing distaste for extremes in religious discourse and temperament. In London, when Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, he witnessed what he believed to be a shocking display of enthusiasm offered as prayers by such Puritans as John Owen, Peter Sterry, and Thomas Goodwin. In the *History of His Own Time*, Gilbert Burnet recalls young John Tillotson's description of that fateful day when by accident he stumbled upon a fast-day prayer meeting at Whitehall palace a week after Cromwell's death:

On the one side of the table Richard with the rest of Cromwell's family were placed, and six of the preachers were on the other side: Thomas Goodwin, Owen, Carril, and Sterry, were of the number. There he heard a great deal of strange stuff, enough to disgust a man for ever of that enthusiastic boldness. God was, as it were, reproached with Cromwell's services, and challenged for taking him away too soon. Goodwin, who had pretended to assure them in a prayer that he was not to die, which was but a very few minutes before he expired, had not the impudence to say to God "Thou hast deceived us, and we are deceived." Sterry, praying for Richard, used those indecent words, next to blasphemy, "Make him the brightness of the father's glory, and the express image of his person."<sup>16</sup>

16. Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford Uni-

The shock of this incident could have contributed to sway his sympathies away from his Presbyterian heritage to the established Church of England. Though he was able to count many Presbyterians as his friends and colleagues, Tillotson would never forget what he believed was an arrogant and presumptuous display of enthusiasm for years to come. In this way, Tillotson found himself sharing similar convictions with other young Anglican divines like Edward Stillingfleet, Simon Patrick, and Edward Fowler, who insisted upon moderation and mutual toleration in matters of religion and worship.

After brief ministries in Cheshunt and Keddington, Tillotson's preaching ministry grew in popularity and influence. In 1663 he was elected as preacher to the influential lawyers at the Society of Lincoln's Inn. Interestingly, early at Lincoln's Inn many "complained that Jesus Christ had not been preached amongst them since Mr. Tillotson had been settled in the parish."<sup>17</sup> Tillotson seems to allude to this early complaint when in a sermon some thirty years later he says,

I foresee what will be said, because I have heard it so often said in the like case, that there is *not one word of Jesus Christ in all this*. No more is there in the *Text*. And yet I hope, that *Jesus Christ* is truly preached, whenever his *Will* and *Laws*, and the *Duties* enjoined by the *Christian Religion*, are inculcated among us.<sup>18</sup>

This comment is noteworthy because here in a nutshell is the growing conviction during the Restoration that the essence of true Christianity is preaching and practicing God's moral demands and duties. This emphasis on the moral prescriptions of religion would be one of the hallmarks of the Latitudinarian message of the reasonableness of Christianity and the excellence and necessity of moral virtue. This message sat in stark opposition to both the overly abstract and speculative doctrinal preaching of the Puritans and the ornate and other-worldly preaching of the metaphysical Anglicans.

These early criticisms, however, did not hinder his ever-growing public admiration and respect. His reputation growing, Tillotson was invited the following year to preach the Tuesday lectures at St. Lawrence Jewry. This was a church that, according to Gilbert Burnet, "was commonly attended by a numerous audience, brought together from the remotest parts of the metropolis, and by a great concourse of the clergy, who came thither to form their minds."<sup>19</sup> From that time onward Tillot-

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versity Press, 1833), 1:151.

17. Birch, "Life of Tillotson" (1820), 1:xviii.

18. J. Tillotson, "Against Evil Speaking," in *Works* (1752), 1:404.

19. Burnet, *Funeral Sermon*, 19-20.



son would spend his Sundays preaching to the lawyers at Lincoln's Inn and to the city congregation which met at St. Lawrence on Tuesdays. He was such a popular preacher that though he would often preach the same sermon on both days, many would still come in hopes of hearing the same sermon twice.<sup>20</sup>

Tillotson's time at St. Lawrence fostered many formative relationships that would influence his growing Latitudinarian views on religion and Christianity: he first served under John Wilkins and then under Platonist Benjamin Whichcote.<sup>21</sup> John Wilkins (1614-1672) was the vicar at St. Lawrence and was one of the founding members of the Royal Society in 1662 who popularized the plain, direct style of preaching and speaking.<sup>22</sup> After Wilkins's death in 1672, Tillotson edited and published his *Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675) and his *Sermons* (1677), further contributing to the fame of the view that Christianity is reasonable and the plain style of preaching which would support and sustain that view.<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683) succeeded John Wilkins at St. Lawrence in 1668 when the latter was appointed to the Bishopric at Chester. For many years until his death in 1683, Whichcote would expound his views that would be tied with the mid-seventeenth-century movement known as the Cambridge Platonism.

Tillotson quickly moved up within the ranks of the Church: In 1668 King Charles II made him one of his Chaplains; in 1670 he was

20. Birch, "Life of Tillotson" (1820), 1:i-x. See also Locke, *Tillotson*, 16-18; Simon, *Three Restoration Divines*, 1:275-277; and A. Gordon, "John Tillotson," 19:872-878.

21. In 1664 Tillotson married John Wilkins's stepdaughter Elizabeth French, whose mother Robina Cromwell was the sister of Oliver Cromwell (Birch, "Life of Tillotson" [1820], 1:xxv).

22. Francis Sanders, "John Wilkins," in *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 21:264-267. Wilkins's well-received *Ecclesiastes* (1646) was one of the earliest and more influential defenses of the "plain style" of preaching and speaking that would dominate Restoration preaching and literature. See Barbara Shapiro, *John Wilkins: An Intellectual Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 71-78; and W. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of Its Literary Aspects* (London: S.P.C.K., 1932), 107, 330; and Joseph Subbiondo, ed., *John Wilkins and 17th-Century British Linguistics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1992). It was probably due to his work with Wilkins on linguistics that Tillotson was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1671. Outside of reporting on Halley's Comet nothing is known of Tillotson's contributions to the Society (Simon, *Three Restoration Divines*, 1:276).

23. Concerning this editorial relationship, Gilbert Burnet said, "He went into all the best things that were in that great man, but so, that he perfected everyone of them" (*Funeral Sermon*, 12).



made Prebendary and then Dean (1672) of Canterbury; in 1675 he was made Prebendary and Canon of St. Paul's; and after William and Mary's accession to the throne in 1688, he was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691. Tillotson's elevation as the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691 was not only an important period in the historic struggle between the non-jurying clergy and the revolutionary government of William and Mary but it also represented the temporary triumph of the group of preachers and theologians during the Restoration era known as the Latitudinarians. Other members of this group of clergymen also received important positions within the Church in the wake of the Glorious Revolution of 1688,<sup>24</sup> but it was John Tillotson who most effectively communicated the Latitudinarian message of the reasonableness of Christianity as London's most popular preacher from the early 1660s to his death in 1694.<sup>25</sup> Such was the popularity of his preaching that when his remains were taken to the church where he had preached so often, the streets were lined by mourning crowds and "there was a numerous train of coaches filled with persons of rank and condition who came voluntarily to assist at that solemnity from Lambeth to the church of St. Lawrence Jewry."<sup>26</sup>

Tillotson's prominence and influence are acknowledged by many diverse people during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Bishop Gilbert Burnet wrote that Tillotson "was esteemed the best preacher of the age"; John Locke in a treatise on education recommended reading everything by Tillotson for clearness and propriety in the art of speaking; and John Evelyn wrote in his diary no less than nine times between the years 1673-1689 about hearing the "excellent sermons and discourses by Tillotson."<sup>27</sup>

Tillotson's influence not only spread among the clergy of the period but also among the literati like Dryden, Steele, and Addison.<sup>28</sup> Birch

24. Others who received important positions from William and Mary include: Edward Stillingfleet to Worcester, Gilbert Burnet to Salisbury, Simon Patrick to Chichester and then Ely, and Edward Fowler to Gloucester.

25. At his death, King William mourned that Tillotson was one of the best friends he ever had.

26. Birch, "Life of Tillotson" (1820), 1:ccxxii.

27. Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 1:343; J. Locke, "Some Directions Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman," in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. J. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 398-399; J. Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 4:84, 107, 240, 244, 371, 373, 435, 505, 628.

28. James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: The Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 16.

records that Dryden “frequently owned with pleasure, that if he had any talent for English prose . . . it was owing to his having often read his Grace’s writings.”<sup>29</sup> His popularity even stretched across the Atlantic to New England. Norman Fiering writes, “Tillotson was an extraordinary popular force, a literary phenomenon whose sermons were probably the most widely read works of religious literature in America between 1690-1750.”<sup>30</sup>

In March 1664, Tillotson preached a sermon before the Lord Mayor of London and the Court of Aldermen at St. Paul’s Church. The sermon, “The Wisdom of Being Religious” (from Job 28:28), first published in 1664, develops many of the themes that Tillotson would preach throughout his lifetime: the reasonableness of Christianity, the absurdity of irreligion, the nature of faith, and the necessity of a moral life.<sup>31</sup> This sermon was later reprinted in a collection of sermons published in 1671. In the preface to that collection, Tillotson wrote that this sermon and the next (“The Folly of Scoffing at Religion”) were designed to show the unreasonableness of atheism and the reasonableness of Christianity. He writes about his goals:

*First*, To show the unreasonableness of Atheism, and of scoffing at religion. . . . *Secondly*, To recommend religion to men from the great and manifold advantages which it brings both to public society and to particular persons. . . . *Thirdly*, To represent the excellency . . . of the Christian religion. . . . *Fourthly*, To persuade men to the practice of this holy religion. . . .<sup>32</sup>

It is evident from the arrangement of the sermons that Tillotson organized the 1671 collection in a manner that would demonstrate the intentions that he described in the preface.<sup>33</sup>

29. Birch, “Life of Tillotson” (1820), 1:ccxxxv.

30. Norman Fiering, “The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett, and Philosophical Anglicanism,” *The New England Quarterly* (September 1981): 307-344. Fiering, citing David Lundberg and Henry May’s research (“The Enlightened Reader in America,” *American Quarterly* 28 [1976]: 262-263) states, “Of the titles that Lundberg and May looked for—a preselected list that included virtually all the well-known late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors exclusive of writers of fiction—Tillotson’s ‘sermons’ in various editions was the most widely read ‘book’ in America between 1700 to 1776” (309, n. 4).

31. Tillotson, *Works* (1820), 1:317-339.

32. J. Tillotson, *Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions* (London, 1671), preface.

33. From 1673 to 1694, there appeared six volumes of a total of fifty-four sermons published with Tillotson’s authority. In 1696, a one-volume folio edi-

Some twenty years later these same themes would be seen in an outline that Tillotson formulated in his commonplace book (diary) for a book that he tentatively titled, "A Summary of Christian Theology Distributed in Four Books." Found in his own Latin handwriting, this outline was dated March 1, 1690/1, a few months after he ascended to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. The entire outline in English translation is as follows:<sup>34</sup>

"A Summary of Christian Theology Distributed in Four Books"

- I. On Natural Religion and Ignorance in Human Minds
  1. On God
  2. On the Law of Nature
  3. On Divine Providence
  4. On the Immortality of the Soul
  5. On Rewards and Punishments after Death
- II. On Divine Revelation
  1. On Varieties of Divine Revelation
  2. On the Revelation Which Occurred to Noah
  3. On the Revelation to Abraham
  4. On the Revelation through Moses to the Jews
  5. On the Revelation through the Most Perfect and Greatest Christ
  6. Why It was Not Made Earlier But Delayed for a Long Time
- III. On The Christian Religion
  1. On Our Lord and Savior Jesus, and the Author of the Christian Religion
  2. On the Substance of His Revelation
  3. Whether Christ Brought a New Law
  4. On the Perfection of His Religion
  5. On the Sacraments of the New Covenant
- IV. On the Office of the Christian Man
  1. On the Necessary Faith of the Christian Man
  2. On Penance/Repentance
  3. On Christian Obedience in General: Its Parts
  4. On Piety before God
  5. On Temperance and Continence or Charity
  6. On the Virtues or Proximal Offices to Those Who Hope
  7. On Charity of All the Other Virtues Root and Branch
  8. On Sincere Obedience and Truly Evangelical

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tion of the entire fifty-four sermons (*Works: Containing Fifty-Four Sermons and Discourses, on Several Occasions. And Now Collected into One Volume*) was published containing the same preface as the smaller 1671 collection. Irène Simon has compiled the early printing history of Tillotson's sermons (*Three Restoration Divines*, 2:349-362) furthering the work of David D. Brown, "The Text of John Tillotson's Sermons," *The Library* 13 (1958): 18-36.

34. Lambeth Library, MS 690, f. 52. This outline is also found in Birch, "Life of Tillotson," 1:ccli-cclii.

9. On Preparation for Death
10. On Supreme Judgment
11. On the Rewards of the Future Life and Eternal Punishments

As the outline demonstrates, Tillotson designed this work to show the Latitudinarian tenets of the reasonableness of the Christian religion and the necessity of virtuous morality.

This overall outlook would exemplify not only the religious sensibilities of Tillotson, but also the convictions of a small group of clergymen that would eventually rise within the Church of England to become the dominant ecclesiastical party during the Restoration. Tillotson would emerge as one of the leaders of that group—a group that came to be known as the Latitudinarians.

### The Latitudinarians

After some twenty years without a monarch, the English people in May 1660, welcomed the exiled Charles II as their King. John Evelyn described the scene he witnessed on May 29 when Charles entered London, “with a triumph of above 20,000 horse and foot, brandishing their swords and shouting with inexpressible joy; the ways strewed with flowers, the bells ringing, the streets hung with tapestry, fountains running with wine.”<sup>35</sup> While on the political front the nation seemed to be finding her stability, challenges still remained for the nation as she sought to recapture her religious identity.

After the trials she faced during the twenty years of the Civil War, the Interregnum, and the Protectorate, the Church of England reclaimed her rightful place as the center of England’s religious life. No sooner did she begin with her march to the throne, however, before old and new foes of the Church began to emerge creating new challenges for her. Old foes that had been dormant appeared with new found vigor while new enemies spawned in the wake of the Puritan ejection commenced their path to claim their stake in the battle for the English soul. From old enemies like the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics to the new groups like the Unitarians and Deists, the Church of England was vying not only to assert her rightful place as the state religion but also to defend herself from vicious attacks. Could the church stand in light of these many pressures? According to one contemporary historian, the church might have “quite lost her esteem over the nation,” had it not

35. J. Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), entry for 29 May 1660.

been for the emergence of a “new sect of men” amongst her clergy, called “Latitudinarians.”<sup>36</sup>

### *Origins of the Word*

The terms “latitude-men” and “latitudinarian” were first used in the 1650s and 60s to depict a group of men in the Church of England who desired a moderating position between two perceived extremes—high church Laudians and the independent Puritans. Used pejoratively by both groups, this term was used by high churchmen to describe a group of moderate Anglicans who were viewed as traitors since they transferred their ecclesiastical allegiances during the Interregnum. But the Nonconformists, who a few years later lost control of the church after the restoration of Charles II to the monarchy, viewed them as time-servers and moralists. For them, these Janus-faced Anglicans apparently wanted to reduce the Christian religion to a few fundamental moral truths that could be readily understood and applied by the rational Englishman. “Latitudinarian” then, was a word of contempt referring to those particular persons who, from the Interregnum into the Restoration, adapted their religious and political principles to suit the religious trends of their day.<sup>37</sup>

In his book *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, Martin Griffin has demonstrated persuasively that though the word was first applied to the Cambridge Platonists due to their toleration toward episcopal government and their Arminian view of justification, “Latitudinarian” grew to include other theological issues.<sup>38</sup> As such, the term was quickly bestowed upon a younger group of Anglican divines who, according to Burnet, had been “formed under” the Cambridge Platonists. Burnet listed as most representative of this group

36. Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 1:339. See also Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 2-3.

37. The most useful sources on Restoration Latitudinarianism are the following: Gerald Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950); Norman Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), esp. ch. 5; Martin Griffin, *Latitudinarianism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962); McAadoo, *Spirit of Anglicanism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965); Irène Simon, *Three Restoration Divines* (Paris, France: Société d’Edition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1967); John Spurr, “Anglican Apologetics and the Restoration Church” (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1985) and “‘Latitudinarianism’ and the Restoration Church,” *Historical Journal* 31 (1988): 61–82; Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Barbara Shapiro, “Latitudinarianism and Science in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past and Present* 40 (1968): 16-41.

38. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 4-5.

John Tillotson (1630-1694), Edward Stillingfleet (1636-1699), Simon Patrick (1626-1707), Thomas Tenison (1636-1715), and William Lloyd (1627-1717).<sup>39</sup> Thus, Griffin writes,

[I]nspection of the uses of the word reveals that although it sometimes referred to the Cambridge Platonists, more often, and increasingly as the century advanced, it referred rather to the persons and principles of the younger group, who were rising rapidly in the church.<sup>40</sup>

They were rising indeed, though in 1660 their numbers were small and their influence restricted. By the 1690s, they were the most dominant, though not the majority party in the Church of England.<sup>41</sup> What then were some of the theological issues that characterized these men according to both her supporters and opponents?

### *Latitudinarian Characteristics in Context*

To supporters, Latitudinarian positions were simple, obvious, and self-evidently true; to their opponents, however, they were subversive, dangerous, and opened the way to Socinianism, deism, and even atheism. Non-juror Charles Leslie would write of Tillotson, for example: "His politics are Leviathan, and his religion is Latitudinarian, which is none; that is, nothing that is positive, but against every thing that is positive in other religions."<sup>42</sup> One of the most common charges was that "a Latitude-Man . . . being of no religion himself, is indifferent what religion others should be of."<sup>43</sup> Another definition given to a Latitudinarian was that he was "a gentleman of wide swallow," meaning that "his conscience is the seat of his latitude, and his name includes the . . . lovely character" of being an ecclesiastical time-server and place-seeker.<sup>44</sup>

39. Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, 1:346-347.

40. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 5.

41. Tillotson became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691; Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester; Patrick, the Bishop of Ely; Tenison, Tillotson's successor at Canterbury; and Lloyd, the Bishop of St. Asaph, Lichfield and Coventry, and Worcester, respectively.

42. Leslie, *The Charge of Socinianism*; quoted in Birch, *Life of the Author* (1752), 297.

43. David Lloyd, *Wonders no Miracles: or, Mr. Valentine Greatrakes Gift of Healing Examined . . . in a letter to a Reverend Divine* (London, 1666), 12. This section on the contemporary reception of Latitudinarianism is indebted to Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 5-13.

44. Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices, Of certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England, Abusively called Latitudinarians (Greatly mis-understood) Truly Represented and Defended . . . in a Free Discourse between Two Intimate Friends*, 2d ed. (London, 1671), 10.

Decades later John Wesley would write that speculative Latitudinarianism is “an indifference to all opinions . . . the spawn of hell”; a latitudinarian is “one that fancies all religions are saving.”<sup>45</sup> So, not only were they criticized for their tolerance in religious and ecclesiastical matters, the Latitudinarians were also castigated as being skeptics.

Socinianism was a favorite charge received from many different enemies. Though it referred to the apparent heterodoxy in their view of the Trinity, the label was used more often to decry the perceived Latitudinarian magnification of reason—specifically that they spoke incessantly about the rationality of the Christian religion. As one opponent wrote, the Latitudinarians made “Reason, Reason, Reason, their only holy Trinity.”<sup>46</sup> They were suspected of attempting to “supplant Christian religion with natural theology,”<sup>47</sup> to “disparage the Gospel, and make it the very same, excepting in two or three precepts, with mere natural religion.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, their doctrine of justification turned “the grace of God into a wanton notion of morality.”<sup>49</sup>

Based on the contemporary reception of the Latitudinarianism by her opponents, Griffin concludes that the charges can be reduced to three main themes:

One was that they tried to make religions too “reasonable.” A second was that their doctrine of grace and their scheme of salvation were Pelagian. A third was that they were too permissive and lax in their opinions on Church government and liturgy. The basic theme of the accusations from the side of doctrinaire Calvinism was that the Latitudinarians gave too much to reason, not enough to revelation; too much to nature, not enough to grace. From High Church Anglicans and Roman Catholics came the charge that they were but Presbyterians in Anglican surplices, and that they gave insufficient importance to the doctrinal teaching authority of the Church.<sup>50</sup>

45. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. F. Baker et al. (1975, in progress): Volumes 1-4, *Sermons*, ed. A. C. Outler (Nashville: 1984-87), 2:92, n. 39, “Catholic Spirit” (1755).

46. Robert Grove, *A Vindication of the Conforming Clergy from the Unjust Aspersions of Heresie, &c. in answer to some part of M. Jenkyn’s Funeral Sermon upon Dr. Seaman With short Reflections On some Passages in a Sermon Preached by Mr. J. S. . . . In a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1676), 60.

47. Grove, *Vindication*, 59.

48. Fowler, *Principles and Practices*, 86.

49. Grove, *Vindication*, 59.

50. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism*, 9.



Thus, “Latitudinarian,” was used by opponents to denote a certain kind of Anglican clergyman and his particular religious principles—in this case, a theological and ecclesiological liberalism.

To her supporters, however, Latitudinarianism represented a movement that stood in response to the theological climate prevailing during the Interregnum. Early exponents of this position were resolute in articulating that they were against both the divisive doctrine preached by the Puritans as well as the restrictions placed upon the Church of England during the Interregnum upon those who were nevertheless willing to work within the Cromwellian establishment. Three important and illuminating apologies written in the 1660s and 1670s clarify these positions: S. P.’s (usually attributed to Simon Patrick) *A Brief Account of the New Sect of Latitude-Men* (1662), Edward Fowler’s *The Principles and Practices, of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England* (1670), and Joseph Glanvill’s “Anti-fanatical Religion, and Free Philosophy,” Essay 7 of *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (1676). A fourth work, Gilbert Burnet’s *History of My Own Time*, also conveys a sympathetic account of the origins of the movement.

Each account expresses different emphases concerning the original identity and agenda of those called “Latitudinarians.” Simon Patrick wrote of these particular divines:

[They] were so far from being sowed with the Leaven of the times they lived in, that they were always looked upon with an evil eye by the successive usurping powers, and the general out-cry was, that the whole University was over-run with *Arminianisme*, and was full of men of the Prelatical Spirit, that apostatized to the Onions and Garlick of *Egypt*, because they were generally ordained by Bishops; and in opposition to that hide-bound, strait-laced spirit that did then prevail, they were called *Latitude-men*; for that was the first original of the name, whatever sense hath since been put upon it.<sup>51</sup>

Patrick stressed the apparent theological and ecclesiological moderation found in the men at Cambridge University during the 1650s. Glanvill, on the other hand highlighted the fact that what ought to set the Latitudinarians apart was their gracious and temperate spirit over against the divisive and disagreeable spirit that seemed to be evident during the Interregnum period:

One of the most Common names given them was Latitudinarian from a word that signifies compass or largeness, because of their opposition to the narrow stingy Temper then called Orthodoxy; and their opinion of the lawfulness of Compliance with the Rites and Ceremonies of the

51. Patrick, *A Brief Account*, 5.

Church of Bensalem [i.e. England], which had been cast out with so much detestation as Anti-Christian and Abominable. These were the first occasions of that name, which was very hatefull to them, because it signified a Fundamental Contrariety to their Spirits and Opinions. But afterward among them that knew not those persons, it came to be taken in a worse sense, and Latitudinarian went for one of a large Conscience and Practice . . . When they came to be better understood, they were called Cupri-Cosmits, which word hath its derivation from the place of their Rise [i.e., Cambridge], and the disposition of their Spirits, which was Catholic and general, not Topical or confined to opinions and Sects.<sup>52</sup>

Writing later in the 1680s, Burnet expressed the following concerning his fellow Latitudinarians:

All these, and those who were formed under them, studied to examine farther into the nature of things than had been done formerly. They declared against superstition on the one hand, and enthusiasm on the other. They loved the constitution of the Church, and the Liturgy, and could well live under them: But they did not think it unlawful to live under another form. They wished that things might have been carried with more moderation. And they continued to keep a good correspondence with those who had differed from them in opinion, and allowed a great freedom both in philosophy and in divinity: From whence they were called men of Latitude. And upon this men of narrower thoughts and fiercer tempers fastened upon them the name of Latitudinarians.<sup>53</sup>

The Latitudinarians saw themselves as leaders of a movement within the Anglican fold that would provide England with the religious stability it so long needed. This stability would be achieved through a platform endorsing and exemplifying the following: a rational defense of religion, an accommodating position of ecclesiastical issues that were indifferent, a moderating view on salvation, and a plain sermon style that emphasized practical morality. John Tillotson was an instrumental figure in spreading the clear Latitudinarian defense of reason, moderation, and morality.

52. J. Cope, "The Cupri-Cosmits': Glanvill on Latitudinarian Anti-Enthusiasm," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 17 (1954): 271.

53. Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time*, 2 vols. (1724, 1734), 1:188.