

Now observe at this time my judgment was this, that there was no man could be freed from sin, till he had acted that so-called sin as no sin; this a certain time had been burning within me, yet durst not reveal it to any. ... I pleaded the words of Paul, That I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there was nothing unclean, but as man esteemed it [Romans 14, 14], unfolding that was intended all acts, as well as meats and drinks, and therefore till you can lie with all women as one woman, and not judge it sin, you can do nothing but sin: now in Scripture I found a perfection spoken of; so that I understood no man could attain perfection but this way, at which Mr. Rawlinson was much taken, and Sarah Kullin, being then present, did invite me to make trial of what I had expressed, so as I take it, after we parted she invited me to Mr. Wats in Rood Lane, where was one or two more like herself; and as I take it, lay with me that night. ... Now [Abiezer] Coppe was by himself with a company ranting and swearing, which I was seldom addicted to, only proving by Scripture the truth of what I acted; and indeed Solomon's writings was the original of my filthy lust. ... Now I being as they said, "Captain of the Rant," I had most of the princip[al] women come to my lodging for knowledge, which then was called The Head-quarters.

7.18–7.19 Quakers

A religious group with greater staying power arose in the 1650s called the Quakers. Today we view Quakers as benign: pacifists of few words, reliable in negotiations, searching within for guidance from the Spirit. But in the 1650s that search took them out into the world and led them to criticize its Great Ones in a manner not unlike Coppe. Quakers also engaged in symbolic demonstrations intended to testify to their faith and the world's hypocrisy, but which, in fact, only brought notoriety and infamy. For example, Quaker women went "naked for a sign," usually wearing sackcloth with hair undone and uncovered rather than actual nakedness, in order to demonstrate humility and purity of spirit (document 7.18). James Nayler (1618–60), a prominent Quaker preacher and apostle reenacted Christ's entry into Jerusalem in Bristol in the autumn of 1656 (document 7.19). How did the authorities react to these displays? Why was Parliament so much more severe towards Naylor than the Bristol city officers towards the Quaker women? (Despite Lord President Lawrence's plea for toleration, most MPs felt that the last decade had been a referendum on the dangers of religious freedom and they resolved to have Naylor whipped, pilloried, his tongue bored through, branded with a B [for blasphemy], and committed to solitary confinement.) What justifications did Nayler give for his actions? How did the MPs interpret what he had done? What were they afraid of?

7.18 Quaker women going "naked" for a sign (May 3, 1655)²⁴

On the 3d of the 3d month [May: Quakers did not believe in pagan names for days of the week nor for months], 1655, Sarah Goldsmith, being moved to put on a coat of sackcloth of hair next her, to uncover her head and put earth thereon, with her hair hanging down about her, and without any other clothes upon her, excepting shoes on her feet, and in that manner to go to every gate, and through every street within the walls of the city, and afterward to stand at the High-Cross in the view of the town and market, as a sign against the pride of Bristol, and to abide so in that habit seven days, in obedience thereto, though in great self-denial, and in a cross to her natural inclinations, she cheerfully prepared her garment, being long and reaching to the ground; and on the 5th of the 3rd month early in the morning, two friends accompanying her, passed through the streets to the several gates, some people following them, but doing no harm: then she returned home. And about the ninth hour came to the High-Cross, and one friend with her, a great multitude of people following; there she stood about half an hour, till the tumult, which consisted of many hundred, grew so violent, that some bystanders, in compassion, forced them into a shop, out of which the multitude called to have them thrown, that they might abuse them; but by the intervention of the chamberlain kept out of their hands, and carried to the tolzey [tolbooth, guildhall]. The mayor came thither, and asked her, why she appeared in the city in that habit? She answered, "in obedience to the light in my conscience." "What if you," said the mayor, "in your obedience had been killed by the rude multitude?" She replied, "I am in the hands of Him that ruleth all things. I have harmed none, yet have I been harmed; neither have I broken any law by which I can be brought under just censure; if I had appeared in gay clothing you would [not?] have been troubled." In conclusion, the mayor, at the instigation of Joseph Jackson one of the aldermen sent her to Bridewell [prison], and with her Anne Gunncliffe and Margaret Wood, for owning and accompanying her.

7.19 Parliament on James Nayler (December 5–8, 1656)²⁵

Dec. 5, 1656. Resolved, That Nayler's report be heard. ...

The articles against him read, and summed thus – That he assumed the gesture, words, names, and attributes of our Savior Christ.

Major-General [Philip] Skippon [d. 1660]. ... It has been always my opinion, that the growth of these things is more dangerous than the most intestine or foreign enemies. I have often been troubled in my thoughts to think of this

²⁴ P. Crawford and L. Goring, *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (London, 2000), 256, from Friends House Library, London, *The Great Book of Sufferings*, 1: 548, and *Abstract of the Sufferings*, 1: 15.

²⁵ J. T. Rutt, ed., *The Diary of Thomas Burton, Esquire* (London, 1828), 1: 24–6, 46–7, 63.

toleration; I think I may call it so. Their great growth and increase is too notorious, both in England and Ireland; their principles strike both at ministry and magistracy.

Many opinions are in this nation, (all contrary to the government), which would join in one to destroy you, if it should please God to deliver the sword into their hands. Should not we be as jealous of God's honor, as we are of our own? Do not the very heathens assert the honor of their Gods, and shall we suffer our Lord Jesus thus to be abused and trampled upon? ...

Major-General [William] Boteler [fl. 1645–70]. ... My ears did tingle, and my heart tremble, to hear the report. I am satisfied that there is too much of the report true. I have heard many of the blasphemies of this sort of people; but the like of this I never heard of. The punishment ought to be adequate to the offence. By the Mosaic law, blasphemers were to be stoned to death. The morality of this remains, and for my part, if this sentence should pass upon him, I could freely consent to it. ...

It is not intended to indulge such grown heresies and blasphemies as these, under the notion of a toleration of tender consciences. He that sets himself up in Christ's place, certainly commits the highest offence that can be. ...

Dec. 6, 1656. James Nayler being brought to the bar, refused to kneel or to put off his hat. The House agreed beforehand that they would not insist upon his kneeling, being informed that he would not do it, and that he might not say that was any part of his crime. They would not give him that advantage; but commanded the serjeant to take off his hat. ...

Question. King of Israel; assumed you thus?

Answer. As I have dominion over the enemies of Christ, I am King of Israel spiritually.

Q. Are you the judge of the world?

A. I cannot deny what I said at the Committee. But the Speaker, desirous to help him, here said, "Mind what you say; are you the judge, have you no fellow-judges." Then he answered "No;" saying again, "I hope you have so much justice and charity as not to wrest my words."

Q. Why did you ride into Bristol in that manner?

A. ... I knew that I should lay down my life for it.

Q. Whose will was it, if not yours?

A. It was the Lord's will, to give it into me to suffer such things to be done in me; and I durst not resist it, though I was sure to lay down my life for it.

Q. How were you sure?

A. It was so revealed to me of my father, and I am willing to obey his will in this thing. ...

Q. Are there any more signs than yours?

A. I know no other sign. There may be other signs in some parts of the nation; but I am set up as a sign to this nation, to bear witness of his coming. You have been a long time under dark forms, neglecting the power of godliness, as bishops. It was the desire, of my soul, all along, and the longing expectation

of many godly men engaged with you, that this nation should be redeemed from such forms. God hath done it for you, and hath put his sword in the hands of those from whom it cannot be wrested. That sword cannot be broken, unless you break it yourselves, by disobeying the voice, the call, and rejecting the sign set up amongst you to convince them that Christ is come. ...

Dec. 8, 1656. *Lord President [Henry Lawrence (1600–64)]*. This gentleman has spoken very zealously, yet they were honest men, too, that called for fire from heaven, and we know how they were reprov'd. ...

I wonder why any man should be so amazed at this. Is not God in every horse, in every stone, in every creature. ...

If you hang every man that says, Christ is in you the hope of glory, you will hang a good many. You shall hear this in every man's mouth of that sect, and others too, that challenge a great interest in Christ.

I do not believe that James Nayler thinks himself to be the only Christ; but that Christ is in him in the highest measure. This, I confess, is sad. But if, from hence, you go about to adjudge it, or call it blasphemy, I am not satisfied in it. It is hard to define what is blasphemy.

HISTORIANS' DEBATES

A high road (long-term causes, revolt from below) or a low road (short-term events, high politics of the elite) to the Civil Wars?

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