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Perusing the manuscript catalogue of Stillingfleet's library held in the Marsh's Library one thing becomes immediately apparent: that is the proliferation of Biblical material of all varieties. Whether in folio, octavo or otherwise Stillingfleet owned at least 72 variant editions of Scriptural texts. Among this collection he owned texts as varied in time and place of publication as the famous Complutensian edition, Brian Walton's polyglot and more obscure versions such as the Anglo-Saxon translation published at Dordrecht in 1665 or the Bible in Irish (1690). As well as owning translations of the Bible in Hebrew, Chaldaic, Greek, French, Latin and many others, Stillingfleet also possessed a full compliment of commentaries and criticism from the early Church fathers to modern critics such as Father Simon, Jean LeClerc and John Locke. To say that Scripture and biblical studies formed the basis of Stillingfleet's collection might not be an overstatement.¹

Indeed the authority of Scripture was at the heart of Stillingfleet's intellectual world: defending its authenticity as the true word of God, whether against papists or socinians, or against atheists or heathens was a backbone of his theological strategy.² In *Origines Sacrae* (first published in 1662 but reprinted many times into the eighteenth century) Stillingfleet took his stand against 'the affronts and indignities which have been cast on Religion; by such, who account it a matter of judgement to disbelieve the Scriptures'. Focusing on the 'most popular pretences of the Atheists of our Age', especially their suggestions regarding 'the irreconcilableness of the account of times in Scripture, with that of the learned and ancient Heathen nations', Stillingfleet inverted the blasphemies of such proposals and instead upheld the 'excellency of the Scriptures' against the failings of non-divine texts.³ Indeed throughout the *Origines Sacrae* Stillingfleet took the text of received Scripture as a canon and standard against which Heathen sources could be compared and disabled. Deviation from the historical

¹ See *Catalogue of Marsh's Library*. Much work needs to be undertaken analysing the nature of the collection. It is clear the library held not only orthodox but also many volumes of heterodox material. Much of the latter may have come from the library of Richard Smith: see E.G. Duff 'The Library of Richard Smith' *The Library* VIII (1907) and J.A.I. Champion, R.H. Popkin 'Bibliography and Irreligion: Richard Smith's 'Observations on the Report of a Blasphemous Treatise by some affirmed to have been of late years published in print of three grand impostors' c1671' *The Seventeenth Century* (Forthcoming, 1995).

² See S.Hutton 'Science, Philosophy, and Atheism: Edward Stillingfleet's defence of religion' in R.H. Popkin (ed) *Scepticism and Irreligion in the late seventeenth century* (Leiden, 1993); idem 'Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and the decline of *Moses Atticus*: a note on seventeenth century Anglican apologetics' in R.Kroll, R.Ashcraft, P.Zagorin (eds) *Philosophy, science and religion in England 1640-1700* (Cambridge, 1992). See also R.T. Carroll *The Commonsense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet* (The Hague, 1975); R.H. Popkin 'The Philosophy of Bishop Stillingfleet' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971).

³ E.Stillingfleet *Origines Sacrae* (1680 edition) Preface 1, main text 2.

certainties found in Scriptural accounts was a means of illustrating and exposing the forgeries, inaccuracies, and mistakes of non-biblical material. Throughout *Origines Sacrae* however the tools of philological criticism turned so effectively against pagan sources remained undirected at Scripture itself. In a similar manner Stillingfleet's polemic against the Catholic Sergeant, *A Rational Account of the Grounds of Protestant Religion* was premised upon defending the 'Protestant way of Resolving faith': the 'certain grounds which we build our Faith upon' were achieved by applying 'reason' to 'testimony' to create a reasonable belief. The determining testimony was not patristic, conciliar or papal but scriptural. For Stillingfleet, Scripture was 'God's infallible testimony' and as such was superior to all forms of human tradition.⁴ Again throughout Stillingfleet's argument 'Scripture' was assumed to be a given and identifiable quantity, something real and concrete which had to be defended against the doubts of atheists, the ignorance of papists, and the manipulations of socinians.⁵

Stillingfleet's powerful attempt to defend scripture as 'God's infallible testimony' engaged with what we might call a meta-scriptural problem. He was concerned to defend the place of 'scripture' within the wider context of belief and doctrine: part of this strategy was deliberately contrived to sidestep discussions of the authenticity of Scripture itself. Between the 1650s and the 1700s however there were attacks not just upon the role scripture played in the texture of intellectual conviction but more fundamentally upon the text and accuracy of Biblical material itself.⁶ In this paper an attempted outline of some of the central components of this attack on the Bible and its significance in the intellectual ferment of the mid to late seventeenth century will be proposed. One of the main purposes of this sketch will be to re-inscribe the continuity of public strategies of assault upon religious orthodoxy between the days of the English Revolution and the early eighteenth century. The second proposition will focus upon the connection between what might be called the technical history of Biblical 'scholarship' and practical purpose of radical criticism in the period. In this discussion there is neither the physical nor intellectual space to pay any more attention than a mere gesture towards the profundity, complexity, and sheer amount of scholarly industry devoted to what could be termed orthodox biblical scholarship in England from the 1630s through to the 1720s. It is perhaps enough to say that there was a continuity of technical hermeneutical investigation, both in terms of intellectual agendas and scholarly and political relations, from the days of Archbishop Laud to those of Richard Bentley. The starting points for disinterring this

⁴ E. Stillingfleet *A Rational Account of the Grounds of Protestant Religion* (1710 edition) 195-196.

⁵ For Stillingfleet's polemic against the Socinianism of men like Johan Crell and other radical biblical critics see G. Reedy *The Bible and Reason. Anglicans and Scripture in late seventeenth century England* (Philadelphia, 1985) *passim* but also 145-156.

⁶ For two important contributions see D. Katz 'Isaac Vossius and the English Biblical Critics 1670-1689' and J. Force 'Biblical Interpretation, Newton and English Deism' in Popkin (ed) *Scepticism and Irreligion*. See also C. Hill *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* (1993).

continuum of theologically orthodox criticism should focus upon the circles surrounding key figures such as Archbishop James Usher and later in the century the Oxford critic John Mill.⁷ Although this paper will not explore the nature of this orthodox scholarly enterprise it should be thought of as the backcloth to the examination of what non-orthodox critics attempted to achieve. Indeed, one of the suggestions made here will be that the vast quantity of philological, hermeneutic and textual scholarship undertaken by orthodox Anglican theologians became a resource that was vulnerable to being plundered and publicised by critics of the established Church.⁸

REVISING PROTESTANT CERTAINTIES

Some of the first public moves against Protestant certainties and the authenticity of Scripture were made at two levels during the 1640s and 1650s. At a practical and popular level mechanic preachers, prophets and millenarians burnt, defaced and re-wrote the text of received Scripture.⁹ Such was the orthodox fear of popular anti-scripturalism that the Blasphemy Acts of 1648 and 1650 placed at the centre of concern a defence of Holy Scripture: those who challenged the canon of the Bible would be subject to imprisonment and ultimately much more severe punishment.¹⁰ Importantly this concern with defending the sanctity of Scripture was reiterated in stentorian terms in the rubric of the 1698 Blasphemy Act. Although the legal proscriptions against tampering with the text of Scripture were severe this did not restrain many inspired men and women throughout the period. An officer in the early 1650s was dismissed from his commission for insisting 'that the Scripture is no more to be beleaved but as the Turks Alchoron, or other books of men's writings, so far as it is truth, and that there are many things in it contradictory one place to another'.¹¹ A more interesting case can be found described in the autobiographical narrative of the Quaker Mary Penington whose transition from the Church of England to Quakerism was accompanied by an abandonment of faith in the Bible. As she became more disenchanted with the rituals and rubrics of the Laudian Church she literally deconstructed the sacred text by first tearing out of the bound volume 'the common prayer, the form of prayer, and also the singing psalms, as

⁷ A brief sense of the community of scholars focused upon the person of James Usher can be achieved by examining his correspondence: see *The Life of James Usher* (1686). Many thanks to Michael Hunter for drawing my attention to these materials. For the later period the context of orthodox scholarship in the 1690s and 1700s can be reconstructed from (amongst others) the letters of John Locke and Isaac Newton as well as the diaries and remarks of Thomas Hearne. I am currently engaged in exploring these connections.

⁸ For the context to this attack upon the Church of England see J.A.I Champion *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken. The Church of England and its Enemies 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁹ See C.Hill *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972); idem *The English Bible*; N.Smith *Perfection Proclaimed* (Oxford, 1989); idem *Literature and Revolution* (Yale, 1994).

¹⁰ For the text of the law see C.H. Firth, R.S. Rait *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum 1642-1660* (1911) 3 volumes.

¹¹ See *A List of some of the Grand Blasphemers and Blasphemies, which was given to the Committee for Religion* (1654).

being the inventions of vain poets'. Ultimately she abandoned reading Scripture at all.¹² A more public and violent example of hostility towards the Bible can be found in the case of John Pennyman, merchant draper of the City of London who in the early 1670s repeatedly stated that it was his intention to burn the holy text in public at the Exchange as he had done to his collection of Quaker pamphlets. As Henry More commented in September 1670 'Neither do I think that it is so far from the spirit of a real Quaker to burn the bible, when as the letter is so little believed by them. For that unbelief takes away the very sense of the bible, the fire consumes only the paper'.¹³ At a more cerebral level Thomas Hobbes was responsible for launching a much more profound deconstruction of scriptural certainties in his *Leviathan* (1651).¹⁴ Importantly in Chapter 32 'of the number, antiquity, scope, authority, and interpreters of the books of Holy Scripture' Hobbes made his point with almost uncharacteristic succinctness: 'who were the originall writers of the severall Books of Holy Scripture, has not been made evident by any sufficient testimony of other History, (which is the only proof of matter of fact); nor can be by any arguments of naturall reason'.¹⁵ Hobbes continued to insist that the only real method for addressing issues of authors and composition was to examine the matter contained in the 'bookes themselves'. Famously he went on to suggest that the Pentateuch, the Books of Joshua, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles (among others) were probably written by others than those traditionally assumed to have composed them. As an important component of Hobbes' critique of protestant certainties not only did he raise questions about authorship but also about the 'authority' of received texts: as he put it 'It is a question much disputed between the divers sects of Christian Religion, *from whence the Scriptures derive their Authority*; which question is also propounded sometimes in other terms, as, *How wee know them to be the word of God, or Why we beleieve them to be so*'. Hobbes' reply to these typically blunt questions was simply: men could have no knowledge 'that they are God's word' but only 'beleefe' so the real question 'truly stated is, *by what authority they are made law*'. Scripture only became canonical or law by the authority of the sovereign within the Commonwealth.¹⁶ Although the first canon had been drawn up in 364 by the Council of Laodicea, the implication for Hobbes was clear: there was an historicity to Scripture.

Hobbes' doubts about authorship and canonicity were not isolated in the 1650s. It is clear from the fragmentary surviving sources that between 1652 and 1657 many theologians and

¹² *Experiences in the life of Mary Penington Written by herself* (1911) 26.

¹³ S.Hutton (ed) *The Conway Letters* (Oxford, 1992) 306, 512.

¹⁴ For Hobbes attitudes towards Biblical Criticism see Champion *Pillars of Priestcraft*; A.P. Martinich *The Two Gods of Leviathan. Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge, 1992) Chapter 11; D.Johnson *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, 1986); L.Strauss *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York, 1965) has some useful passages comparing Hobbes and Spinoza on scripture.

¹⁵ T.Hobbes *Leviathan* (ed) R.Tuck (Cambridge, 1991) 261.

¹⁶ Hobbes *Leviathan* 266-267,356.

politicians in the Republic and the Protectorate were concerned about the authenticity of the public Bible. The Grand Committee for Religion summonsed printers who had issued defective editions 'grossely misprinted' and confiscated the faulty copies.¹⁷ Later between 1656 and 1657 a subcommittee was convened, that included Brian Walton and Ralph Cudworth under the care of the Lord Commissioner Bustrade Whitelocke, to look into the possibilities of a new and more accurate translation of the Scriptures: it was only the dissolution of the Protectorate Parliament that rendered the business 'fruitless'.¹⁸ Calls for a reaffirmation of the text of Scripture can be found in the writings of more orthodox Anglican Churchmen like Robert Gell, sometime Chaplain to Archbishop Laud and vicar at St Mary Aldermanbury in the City of London, who in his 1659 essay argued that the King James version 'may be improved ... by many instances'. Gell, in collaboration with Dr Thomas Drayton, William Parker and Richard Hunt, spent two 'sharp winters' work researching the defects of the authorised version consulting variant editions (amongst many others) in Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, and High and Low Dutch. Mistranslations, misinterpretations and human deceit conspired to make the 'necessity of an exact and perfect translation of the Holy Bible' urgent. The 'wrested' and 'partial' translation of 1611 'speaks the language, and gives authority to one sect or another'. Gell's aspirations in cleansing Scripture were clear: to preserve a true text was essential to upholding the authority of the priesthood. Citing *Malachi* 2.7, 'They shall seek the law at the mouth of the Priest', Gell insisted that an accurate and authentic translation of Scripture was essential to reinforcing the authority of the Christian priesthood.¹⁹ For Gell, only learned priests could give the true 'sense' of the Bible.

Concern with the authenticity of received scripture, exemplified in Walton's polyglot edition published in six volumes between 1654 and 1657, was in one sense a result of the coincidence of the need for the Church to reinforce its social authority and the growth of scholarly interest in ancient scriptural manuscripts.²⁰ As Hobbes had already made clear there was a history to both the composition and reception of the Old and New Testaments. Walton's polyglot had used manuscripts in nine different languages: the New Testament appeared in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic and Persian. The libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, repositories of important manuscripts such as the Codices Beza and Alexandrinus, provided series of variant

¹⁷ See J. Stoughton *Religion in England, from the opening of the Long Parliament to the end of the eighteenth century* (1881) II 142-143, see also 96. See *Commons Journals*, 20th November 1656 (at 456) and 11th June 1657 (at 554) for concerns about misprinted Bibles. For earlier Parliamentary debates about translation see *Commons Journals* 11 Jan 1653 and 4 March 1653. For further details see Thomas Burton's account in *The Diary of Thomas Burton* (ed) J.T. Rutt 4 volumes (1828) I 348, 351n, 352. See also *CSPD* 21 October 1656 for the composition of the committee on religion.

¹⁸ *Commons Journals* 351.

¹⁹ See R. Gell *An Essay toward the Amendment of the last English Translation of the Bible, or a Proof, by many instances, that the last Translation of the Bible into English may be improved* (1659) xxv, xxvi, xxxvi.

²⁰ For a general discussion of Walton see A.Fox *John Mill and Richard Bentley* (Oxford, 1954) 47-49.

readings of a supposedly fixed Biblical text. Indeed Walton had included many of these variations in the Greek New Testament (borrowed from Usher) in volume six of his work. Here is clearly not the place to attempt any more than a superficial discussion of the impact of manuscripts on the Biblical culture of the period but clearly the availability of non-standard material, combined with the destabilisation of religious authority (at both the level of the printed word and as a social and political institution) provided in tandem a resource that the orthodox needed to integrate with established versions but also a potential source of hostile criticism.²¹ In other words the mere existence of variant manuscripts combined with an increasingly sophisticated scholarly discourse meant that ancient manuscripts and their interpretation became a cultural resource that needed careful definition.

FROM APOCRYPHA TO APOCRYPHAL

One of the most powerful strategies adopted by non-orthodox writers was to disinter scriptural material from the university libraries and private archives that challenged the established canons. Debates about the distinction between canonical and non-canonical scripture had persisted from the early days of Christianity: doubts about the authority of the Apocrypha became more pronounced from the fourth century. As early as AD 156 Montanus had attempted to redraft the number and scope of authoritative scriptural texts.²² The substitution of apocryphal for canonical texts was one of the means that radical critics employed from the 1650s to the 1700s to undermine the cultural power of the established Church. Indeed the question of the sacredness of apocryphal literature had bedevilled the established Church from the reformation period in England. Throughout the later part of the sixteenth century 'precise' Protestants had objected against the inclusion of the 'Apocrypha' in printed editions of the Bible although the 39 Articles of the Church of England (Canon 6) recognised that they were useful texts for the 'examples of life'. Indeed the Kalenders of readings from Scripture established by the Book of Common Prayer (between 1561 and 1661) suggested that on at least fifty days of the year lessons would be taken from the Apocryphal books. Archbishop Abbott had forbidden the sale of Bibles without the Apocrypha as early as 1615, but from at least 1599 they were omitted from English editions of the Geneva Bible, and from the 1620s were also being left out of some printings of the Authorised Version. Biblical scholars such as Hugh Broughton (1549-1612) had indicted the inclusion of Apocrypha with canonical texts: as he commented 'all who hold the Apocrypha part of the Holy Bible make God the author of lying fables and vain speech, whereby wisdom would they should not come side by side with the Holy Books, nor under the same roof'.²³ The

²¹ Identifying where the different codices were would be an important project towards establishing who had access to the material. A start can be made for the later seventeenth century by consulting the Unitarian Joseph Hallet's (1691-1744) *Index to Mill* (1728) which includes an appendix with lists of mss and library locations.

²² See J.N.D. Kelley *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th edition, 1980) Chapter 3.

²³ D. Norton *A History of the Bible as Literature. From Antiquity to 1700* (Cambridge, 1993) 139.

Hebrew scholar John Lightfoot in a sermon to the House of Commons in 1643 demanded the Apocrypha be left out of printed editions and indeed the Long Parliament banned their use in Church services after 1644: as the Westminster Confession insisted the Apocrypha had 'no authority in the Church of God'. John Vicars in his *Unwholesome henbane between two fragrant roses* (1645) made the case against the Apocrypha in no uncertain terms when addressing the Westminster Assembly and Parliament: 'it is not only thus indecent and uncomely, but indeed, most impious, and unlawful to misplace them in the midst of God's Book, or, indeed, in any part thereof'. The Apocrypha was 'meer humane stinking breath, between the two sweet and most sacred lips'. They were erroneous and deviant: contrived only to encourage popish superstition and formalism. Carrying on the work of the Reformation the apocryphal books had to be 'utterly expunged and expelled out of all Bibles'.²⁴ Even after the Restoration much controversy between Dissenter and Anglican was focused upon the re-establishment of the Apocrypha to the Church service.²⁵

The simple point to be made here was that there was even in terms of the accepted biblical material disputes amongst the Godly about what might be counted as the word of God: defining the legitimate circumference between scriptural and non-canonical texts was a profoundly problematic debate.²⁶ Defining the limits or inclusiveness of the canon was a critical enterprise. It was into this context that Samuel Fisher (1605-1665) projected his scholarship and criticism. Fisher's intellectual odyssey and ecclesiastical career is a valuable case study for the examination of transformations of radical protestants into radical critics in the crucible of the English Revolution. The son of a Northampton haberdasher Fisher was educated at Trinity College from 1623 but being 'puritanically inclined' transferred to New Inn. By 1632 he had been made vicar at Lydd in Kent. From the early 1640s he became increasingly unorthodox: in 1643 much to the devout horror of the Churchwardens he allowed two Anabaptists 'messengers of God' to use his pulpit at Lydd. By 1649 he had renounced his cure and was debating the merits of infant baptism with other ministers before huge crowds in Lydd market place.²⁷ In the 1650s he continued his polemics against the orthodox Church and travelled throughout northern and southern Europe. At the Restoration he again engaged in public disputes at Sandwich in Kent, eventually moving to London where he 'kept

²⁴ J. Vicars *Unwholesome henbane between two fragrant roses. or reasons and grounds proving the unlawful and corrupt and most erroneous Apocrypha between the two most pure and sacred Testaments* (1645) 2, 3, 7-8.

²⁵ See B. Metzger *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (OUP, 1957) 190-198; F.F. Bruce *The Canon of Scripture* (1988) 105-109; F. Procter, W.H. Frere *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer* (1961) 378, 172-173. See also W. H. Daubney *The Use of the Apocrypha in the Christian Church* (Cambridge, 1900).

²⁶ See B.F. Westcott *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (7th edition, Cambridge, 1896).

²⁷ See for a context to Fisher's confrontations A. Hughes 'The Pulpit Guarded: confrontations between Orthodox and Radicals in Revolutionary England' in A. Laurence, W.R. Owens, S. Sim (eds) *John Bunyan and his England 1628-88* (1990)

conventicles, and thereupon was imprisoned in Newgate'. He died in a Southwark prison in the Great Plague of 1665.

Fisher has been subject to important examination by Christopher Hill and Richard Popkin who have both insisted upon the radical innovation of his critique of the Bible and his proximity and indeed intimacy with Spinozist arguments, especially in his massive *Rusticos Ad Academicos* (1660). Fisher, opposing the collective arguments of 'four of the Clergy's Chieftains' John Owen, Thomas Danson, John Tombs and Richard Baxter, had in the latter work thrown doubt upon the accuracy of the received text because of textual variations and mistranslations. Indeed by comparing Fisher's criticism of the texts of the Bible with that of Robert Gell's proposals for reforming the authorised translation it is possible to high light in the most defined chariascuro how theories of translation and Biblical scholarship were enmeshed with the politics of social authority and religion. For Gell the purpose of restoring the scriptural text was to disable the prerogatives of private opinion in interpretation. The fact that the 'spirit of opinion' rather than the 'spirit of God' guided the understandings of those who interpreted the Bible meant that '*Africa semper aliquid apportat novi*, some hideous shape or other daily is brought forth; and every one fathered on the Scripture'. Translation should avoid all 'rhetorical colours' in favour of 'perspicacity, as the best elegancy'. Plain work rather than fashionable embroidery was the divine method. For Gell the imperative of translation was to 'follow the Clue of the Original Tongues': thus Hebrew texts should be rendered exactly into English without imposing our 'own sense upon it'. As Gell acknowledged a literal translation rather than a stylish one would make the text 'uncouth and strange' to the unlearned reader. This, for Gell, however was the central point. The unlearned private man did not have the authority to understand: that was the business of the priesthood. As he insisted 'it will be the Preachers duty, business, and comfort, to explain it unto the people, together with the Spiritual meaning of it'. Gell reviled those who 'at least in their own opinion' claimed to be 'so skillfull in the Letter of the Scripture'. Without divine ordination these people perverted Scripture 'to their own by-ends and purposes, they make them speak everyone their own sense and private interpretations'. As he reiterated Jesus 'maketh the Ministers of the New Testament able ministers, not of the Letter, but of the Spirit': understanding the Bible was not then a process of grammatical explication but a gift implicit in the *ordo* of priesthood.²⁸

It is at this point that the difference between Gell and Fisher can be seen at its clearest. Fisher in the *Rusticus Ad Academicos* (1660) took as his starting point that the orthodox clergy claimed to be 'the misty ministers of the meer letter' while the Apostles had been ministers of

²⁸ R. Gell *An Essay toward the Amendment of the last English Translation of the Bible, or a Proof, by many instances, that the last Translation of the Bible into English may be improved* (1659) Preface ii-iii,xxvi,xxix,xxxv.

the 'mystery of the New Testament or the Spirit'.²⁹ It was Fisher's point (following Spinoza) that since the text or letter was corrupt the 'spirit' of Scripture must exist outside of the pen and ink of manuscripts and bound volumes: thus the indeterminacy of the received text enfranchised the private spirit of each man. For Fisher, on the one hand, then the textual indeterminacy established by sacred scholarship and philological criticism was an argument for reforming the 'poor Priest-ridden British Nation'; for Gell, on the other hand, using much of the same technical scholarship, textual obscurity and imprecision reinforced the claims of the priesthood.

Central to part of Fisher's argument was a discussion of the concept of canonicity which he undermined by including extended discussion relating to the existence of other valuable scriptural texts regarded as non-canonical by orthodoxy.³⁰ Fisher considered 'some of thy Cloudy Conjectures & Conceits concerning the bounds of the Canon'. His main point was that the notion of canonicity was human - or more precisely - priestly: as he explained, 'where learnest thou all these lessons, but from the Lectures and Lying Legends, and voluminous lexicons of the illiterate Literatists of the World, that are always laying on, and loading one another with their endless, boundless, and bottomless Scribbles about the outward Original Text, and Transcriptions of the Scripture in their tedious Tomes, Talmuds, and Talmudical Traditions till they are lost from the very letter'.³¹ The 'congregationally constituted, synodically composed, ecclesiastically authorised, clerically conceived canon' was an obscure and partial thing. 'Who was it? Was it God, or was it man that set such distinct bounds to the Scripture', 'Is all Extant? All Remaining?' were questions that exploded from Fisher's text.³² His reply was devastatingly simple: 'There's not all in your Bible by much, and by how much who knows?'.³³ To compound these points Fisher included a list of apocryphal works. So for example he lauded the 'Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs' which was 'now extant' and the Book of Enoch.³⁴ Importantly Fisher also commented upon New Testament apocrypha describing a list of material that included Paul's letters to the Laodiceans and to Seneca and the correspondence between King Agbar of Edessa and Christ.³⁵ An illustration of the attitude Fisher contrived towards orthodox understandings of the canon can be seen in his account of

²⁹ S. Fisher *Rusticos Ad Academicos* (1660) To the Reader 31-32. For a fuller discussion of Fisher see R.H. Popkin 'Spinoza and Samuel Fisher' *Philosophia* 15 (1985) and C.Hill *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) Chapter 11.

³⁰ For more detail on Fisher see W.C. Braithwaite *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (2nd Edition, 1979) 288-294; A. Wood *Athenae* III col 700-703; N.Penney (ed) *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge, 1911) I 429; of particular importance for the question of Fisher and apocrypha is H.J. Cadbury 'Early Quakerism and Uncanonical Lore' *Harvard Theological Review* XL (1947).

³¹ S. Fisher *The Testimony of Truth Exalted* (1679) *Ad Academicos* 264, 268.

³² Fisher *Ad Academicos* 269, 274-275.

³³ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 274-275.

³⁴ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 274-275.

³⁵ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 277, 281-289. On the Epistle from Laodicea see J.B. Lightfoot *St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (1875) 340-366

public debate with Thomas Danson at Sandwich about the authenticity of Paul's letters to the Laodiceans. Danson refused to acknowledge even the existence of such a text until one of the audience 'stood up, and said he had the Book': it was Fisher's point not to probe too carefully the authenticity of the letters but merely to establish that there was at least a script to work with.³⁶ Generally it was Fisher's case to contrive enough doubt about the accuracy and comprehensivity of canonical scripture: he lambasted orthodox scholars who insisted they could establish a text with 'Sacred Truth and Certainty'. Theologians wandering from library to library collating and comparing might produce 'to a tittle entirely true and exactly corrected copies' but this was but the 'Dead Corps' of Scripture.³⁷

Importantly Fisher probably popularised this attack upon the canon by publishing a much shorter and more accessible pamphlet that reiterated his point more concisely: the work is titled *Something Concerning Agbarus, Prince of the Edesseans* and can probably be dated to 1660, although importantly there were reprints of it in 1680 and 1697 and there is some evidence that manuscript variants were in circulation both in England and the American colonies.³⁸ The text which also has material in common with works published by George Fox in 1659-1660 is intriguing.³⁹ Not only does it include transcriptions of the letters exchanged between Agbar and Christ, and Paul and the Laodiceans, but also a list of 'those scriptures which are mentioned, but not inserted in the Bible' and 'several scriptures Corrupted by the Translators'.

That Fisher almost certainly took the Agbar material from Eusebius' *History of the Church* which included a transcription of the exchange between King Agbar the Black and Jesus is evidenced by the inclusion of Eusebius' commentary in the introduction to *Something Concerning Agbarus*.⁴⁰ Indeed although Fisher acknowledged both Jerome and Eusebius 'whose credit herein is not small' as ancient sources for the tradition the way in which he presented his copy emphasised the historical ambiguity of the republication. Fisher was concerned to stress the historical authenticity of his text: 'the Reader hath an approved Testimony of these things in writing, taken out of the recorded Monuments of the Princely City Edessa, for there are found inrowled in their publique Registry things of Antiquity, and which were done about Agbarus' time, yea and preserved unto this day'.⁴¹ 'Yea and preserved unto this day' reinforced Fisher's intention of presenting the documents as historically

³⁶ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 282.

³⁷ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 299-300.

³⁸ See Cadbury 'Early Quakerism'.

³⁹ See G. Fox *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded and Antichrist's Kingdom revealed unto destruction* (1659) in G. Fox *Works* volume III (Philadelphia, 1831: new edition 1990) at 581-583.

⁴⁰ See Eusebius *The History of the Church* (ed) G.A. Williamson (1981) 65-70. Translations of Eusebius were widely available in the mid 1650s.

⁴¹ *Something Concerning Agbarus 2*; compare with Eusebius *History* 66.

accurate and authentic: as he continued 'there is no reason to the contrary but that we may have the epistles themselves, copyed out of their Registry, and translated by us out of the Syrian Tongue in this manner'. The Letters of Agbarus were translated 'word for word' out of their original script. Fisher projected his work as accurate historical scholarship: the irony of this literary use of a language of scholarly authenticity is to be found in the fact that it was lifted from Eusebius' original history: without acknowledgement Fisher transformed Eusebius' words into his own voice. Fisher's pamphlet continued in the same vein of scholarly imposture with the transcription of Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans. As he noted, the epistle 'was found in the oldest Bible that was printed at Worms' and in the Jerome Vulgate translated by John Hollybushe and printed in Southwark by James Nicholson in 1538, but more importantly 'in a certain Antient Manuscript of the New Testament Text, which I have seen and can produce written in Old English 340 years since'. Cadbury suggests that the latter manuscript was probably a Wycliffite version that Fisher had access to.⁴² The point again was that Fisher was popularising quite profound and academic knowledge: the thrust of his presentation of these partial and obscure texts was to emphasise their antiquity and genuineness. Having published such 'genuine' transcripts of 'lost' texts Fisher supplemented his case with a 'Catalogue' of still more examples: the implication being that these scriptural materials could too be republished if they could only be found.⁴³ The intention of the work in destabilising the authenticity of the established Bible was further highlighted in the last section where Fisher included a short list of places in the authorised version where mistranslation had corrupted the original meaning.

Clearly Fisher's text could be read in a number of ways. At one level *Something Concerning Agbarus* was simply making the intensely intricate and learned polemic of *Rusticos Ad Academicos* available to a non-learned audience. In the latter Fisher had simply stated that the Letters of Agbarus were as 'worthy (as particular as it is) to stand in your standard, and claim a room in your Canon, as that particular letter of Paul to Philemon'.⁴⁴ Crucially, in the shorter work, Fisher did not interlard his transcriptions, lists and catalogues with any pronounced authorial instruction: that is he did not point explicitly to the subversive implications of the work but simply presented the material for private understanding. This undirected interpretation could have read the meaning of the text in a number of ways. Fisher himself did point rather quietly to one possible implication in citing 2 Timothy 3.16 'All Scripture given

⁴² For details see Cadbury 186-187 esp. footnotes 26-28.

⁴³ It is perhaps worth giving the full list of Biblical references included in Fisher (page 8): Jude 14 - The Prophecy of Enoch; 2 Chron 20.34 - The Book of Jehu; Num 21.14 -The Book of the Battles of the Lord; 2 Chron 9.29 Nathan the Prophet, the Book of Iddo, the Prophesie of Abijab; 2 Chron 12.15 Shemaiah the Prophet; 2 Sam 1.18 - Book of Jashar; 1 Chron 29.29 - Book of Gad; 1 Cor 5.9 - Epistle to the Corinthian, the Books of Henoah; 1 Kings 4.32-33 - the Books of Solomon, the Epistle of Barnabas.

⁴⁴ Fisher *Ad Academicos* 277.

by inspiration of God, is profitable to teach, to improve⁴⁵ perhaps suggesting that he was merely reclaiming scriptural material for Godly purposes. Clearly, as Cadbury acutely proposed,⁴⁶ the publication of the Letters of Agbarus, Christ and Paul in a double-columned format which could have easily been inserted into the the canonical editions was not only an intellectual threat to Scripture but also a practical assault on the canon of the orthodox Bible. Fisher was not only propagating new 'sacred' material for edification, but at the same time he was also suggesting that the received canon was defective and/or corrupted by proposing a list of other texts that either existed or had been lost. Fisher's pamphlet not only gave the unsuspecting and unlearned reader something new (but authentic) to examine, but also subtly insinuated a doubt about the comprehensiveness of the received text.

Fisher's *Something Concerning Agbarus* is an intriguing text. It shows that he had access to a series of manuscript and printed sources: for example he cites from the Codex Beza and Syriac and Wycliffite editions as well as early printings by Tyndale and Coverdale. In the case of the Letters to and from Agbar Fisher uses Eusebius as his source complemented by 'Jerome and other grave writers'. Contemporary scholarship suggests that the Agbar text originated in second century Eddessean desires to establish lineage with the primitive church. Although the text survives in Syriac, Greek, Latin, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, Slavonic and Irish it was rejected by the Gelasian decree as apocryphal.⁴⁷ Orthodox scholarly opinion following the humanist scholarship of Lorenzo Valla (via Erasmus' annotations) also exposed it as forgery. It is unclear whether Fisher believed in the text or not: what is clear however is that the form in which he presented it to a non-learned public meant that it 'looked' authentic on the printed page.

CATALOGUING THE APOCRYPHA

Trying to assess the impact of Fisher's assault upon the Bible within the limited confines of this piece is difficult. Fisher's works were republished in 1680 and 1697. It is clear that other Quakers published apocryphal texts in the 1650s and after the Restoration, as well as making the more general arguments against the comprehensivity and accuracy of the Authorised Version.⁴⁸ The Quaker assault upon the Bible has not been treated as anything other than a marginal aspect of their confessional history. However if the writings of Fisher are considered in a wider cultural context than simply that of Quakerism it is possible to suggest that the

⁴⁵ The AV reads 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine ...'

⁴⁶ Cadbury 187.

⁴⁷ See *Dictionary of Christian Biography*; M.R. James *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924) 476-77); J.K.Elliott *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1993) 538; E.Henneck et al *New Testament Apocrypha* (1963) 438-39. For background on the Agbar legend see J.B. Segal *Edessa. 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970). May thanks to J. Phillips for this reference.

⁴⁸ For example as well as owning, publishing and circulating in manuscript editions of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Book of Enoch, works such as the Letters between Paul and Seneca, and the Gospel of Nicodemus were disseminated: see Cadbury 186-191.

particular assault upon orthodox scripture was the product of a much more profound and persistent radical tradition. Too commonly historians have adopted an interpretative myopia when examining the religious radicalism of the 1650s. The world may have been temporarily inverted in the interregnum but was firmly placed upon its feet in 1660. Although Ranters, Quakers and Fifth Monarchists may have terrorised the souls of orthodox Christians these were projected rather than real anxieties. The history of the Restoration has thus become testimony to the muscularity of the Church of England and the defeat of both speculative and practical radicalism. The radicalism that survived 1660 was resolutely secular in political idiom.⁴⁹ Part of the suggestion in this piece will be that try as they might historians of the seventeenth century should not (just like the Church men of the period could not) underestimate the impact and cultural consequences of the 1650s in determining many of the intellectual and literary problems that confronted the pillars of political orthodoxy. The polemics of men like Fisher against the Bible provided both a literary resource and cultural example for later generations of radical critics. This is not to suggest some form of teleological narrative where radical religion of the 1650s mutated into the critical freethought of the 1700s but simply to point to continuities of discourse in the period. Again to reiterate the point I do not intend to imply that there was (somehow) a causal relationship between the intentions of authors in the 1650s and those in the 1700s, but that the cultural crisis of the 1650s did in some sense redefine the mental and cultural landscape which enabled later writers to think and argue in new ways.

As a case study the reputation and criticism of the letters exchanged between King Agbar and Christ also form a convenient literary bridge between the days of Samuel Fisher and the times of John Toland.⁵⁰ Indeed there does seem to be an important and unacknowledged intellectual affinity between Fisher the collaborator with Spinoza and Toland whose nick-name was 'Tractatus-Theologicus-Politicus'.⁵¹ The specific congruence between the intentions and polemics of the two men can be proposed by a consideration of the relationship between Fisher's *Something Concerning Agbarus* (1660) and Toland's *A Catalogue of Books ... as Truly or Falsely ascrib'd to Jesus Christ, his Apostles, and other eminent persons* (1726)⁵² and *Nazarenus* (1718). Toland the scholar and freethinker needs little introduction but his *Catalogue* probably does. The full length work was published in the posthumous collection of works in 1726 but had its origins in works written defending John Milton's life and works in

⁴⁹ For a revision this view see T.Harris, P. Seaward, M.A. Goldie (eds) *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (1990) and T. Harris *Politics under the Later Stuarts* (1993).

⁵⁰ For Toland see J.A.I Champion *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*; idem 'John Toland: the politics of pantheism' in G. Brykman (ed) *Toland, politique et semiologie* (VRIN, 1994); idem (ed) *John Toland Nazarenus* (forthcoming Voltaire Foundation Studies in the English Enlightenment, 1996). The best intellectual biography of Toland remains R.Sullivan *John Toland and the Deist Controversy* (Harvard, 1982).

⁵¹ J.Toland *A Collection of Several Pieces* (1726) 2 volumes I liv.

⁵² Toland *Collection* II 350-403.

the late 1690s. Toland had in passing reflected upon the suppositious Royal authorship of *Eikon Basilike* (1649) and drawn a parallel between such secular forgeries and the foisting of illegitimate works upon Christ and the Apostles. His original comments both on Charles I's penning of the *Eikon* and apocryphal scriptural works fomented much orthodox complaint that Toland was challenging the received canon of sacred literature.⁵³ Reluctant to withdraw from a contentious debate Toland girded his pen with scholarship (both patristic and modern criticism) and redrafted and much expanded his original *Catalogue*. Citing a full range of antique sources as well as cutting edge modern criticism such as Simon, Grabe, Sykes, Fabricius and Plassius, Toland simply compiled a 'list' of potentially sacred material, that drew very little distinction between items that were clearly spurious, non-existent or downright fictitious. Indeed the very literary form of Toland's catalogue was provocative: as David McKitterick has pointed out the 1690s heralded an expansion of scholarly cataloguing as a means of organising knowledge. Edward Bernard's attempt at a national union catalogue of manuscripts in Britain was intended to facilitate orthodox, pious, respectable scholarship. Although Toland's literary form adopted the orthodox style of a catalogue its intentions were anything but pious.⁵⁴

The fifty page work catalogued Toland's reading of a variety of Biblical criticism and historical commentary. It was projected as a work of scholarship. Toland proudly acknowledged the reception his researches had received upon the continent: Professor Fabricius of Hamburg had treated it with particular favour while Christopher Pfaffius, Professor at Turinge, called it a 'remarkable Catalogue' in his own critical dissertations upon the New Testament.⁵⁵ The structure of the catalogue from Chapter I to XV ran through the list of spiritual authors starting with Christ and Mary, and working through the apostles from Peter to Barnabas. Chapter XVI dealt rather contentiously with various Jewish texts (some of which he dismissed as pious Christian frauds) before Toland jogged his own elbow with the reminder, 'But I forget that I am in this CATALOGUE reciting the spurious books of the Christians, and not of the Jews, who were very near a fertile and expert in forgeries'.⁵⁶ Chapters XVII to XX dealt with 'General Pieces' a bland title that allowed Toland to discuss works

⁵³ Toland made the first assertion in his edition of Milton's works: *A Complete Collection of the Historical Political and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton* (Amsterdam, 1698) 26-30. The first version of the catalogue can be found in *Amyntor* (1699) at 20-41. For an important unnoticed manuscript response by Toland to the latter see British Library Birch 4372 (f37-43) 'Dodwell Mss' and below. For a full account of the bibliographical exchanges see F.F. Madan *A New Bibliography of the Eikon Basilike of King Charles I* (Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, 1949) 139-146. I will be pursuing this debate in more detail my 'Introduction' to a critical edition of *Nazarenus*.

⁵⁴ See D. McKitterick 'Bibliography, Bibliophilia and the organisation of knowledge' in D. Vaisey, D. McKitterick (eds) *The Foundations of Scholarship: Librarians and Collecting 1650-1750* (William Andrews Clark, University of California, 1992) esp 31-33.

⁵⁵ Toland *Collections* II 356. Ironically, Pfaffius' work was designed to rebut the deistical criticism of men like Toland: for a typically ascerbic commentary see T. Hearne *Remarks and Collections* 1709 274-276.

⁵⁶ Toland *Collections* II 383.

such as the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Gospel of Nicodemus and the Epistle of Lentulus. The final analysis leapt 'over the monstrous and infinite impostures down from the fourth century to this day' to expose the gospel 'of his own framing' that the Jesuit Xavier imposed upon Persian converts to Catholicism. Altogether Toland provided critical discussions of nearly 150 distinct apocryphal texts. Peter had fourteen texts fathered upon him, while Paul was the supposed author of at least nineteen works.

Toland's catalogue to modern readers might seem a rather dull work: but every entry and the very structure of the list would have needled orthodox scholars and theologians. The simplicity of the organisation of the text - title of apocrypha, sources and references for the literary tradition, and occasionally direction to modern editions or extant manuscripts - conspired to leave the unlearned reader with the impression that there existed, or had existed, a plethora of spurious and fictional 'holy' material. With each entry the principle of an authorised canonical scripture was rendered more fragile. Part of the literary power of the catalogue was its simplicity. Toland baldly listed the title and its bibliographic sources invariably without passing scholarly comment. The example of the entries for Paul provide an apt illustration of Toland's deliberate technique of scholarly austerity. Take entry 3 'THE *Epistle of PAUL to the Laodiceans*. Coloss. 4. 12. Tertul. adversus Macion. 1. 5. c. 11,17. Hieronym. in Catal. c. 5. Epiphani. Haeres. 42. n. 9:& alibi. Philastr. Haeres. 88. Theodret. Commentar. ad Coloss. 4. 12. tom. 3 Legantur etiam Theophylactus, Gregorius Magnus, & Council. Nicen. II. act. 6. part. 5.' Here the title of the text is followed by a dense thicket of references. The learned reader might examine the supporting evidence and assess their value. The unlearned reader might simply deduce that the scholarly references (especially the scriptural reference to Coloss. 4.12 which does not obviously support the existence of an Epistle to the Laodiceans) uphold the genuineness of the assertion. The next entry suggests the existence of a third epistle to the Thessalonians and then continues that this was 'forg'd in his own life time, as some deduce from Thes. 2.2'. Again Toland accrued credit to his scholarship by using authentic scriptural texts to establish the authority (or not) of suppositious works. Two last examples will illustrate the literary trickery of the work:

'8. ARCHBISHOP USHER, and Dr. JOHN GREGORY, have seen an Armenian Manuscript of Sir GILBERT NORTH'S, where there was an *Epistle of the Corinthians to PAUL*, with PAUL'S *answer* to the same: and both these *Epistles* are lately publish'd at Amsterdam, in the Armenian and Latin tongues, by Mr. DAVID WILKINS, now Doctor of Divinity, and Library-Keeper at Lambeth.

10. THE *Epistles of PAUL to SENECA*, with those of *SENECA to PAUL*. These have been so far approv'd, that JEROME, on this account, places SENECA among the Christian writers, if not Saints: and they are defended as genuine by FABER *d'Estaples*, SIXTUS SENESIS, ALPHONSIUS SALMERON, and others. The ancient authorities for them are, *Hieronym. in Catal. c.12. Augustin. de Civit. Deo L 6. c.10. Idem in Epist. 15. Edit Benedictin. scilicet ad Macedonium. Joan Sarisberiens. in Polycrat. 1. 8. c.13.* If I may reckon this last among the ancients? The *Epistles* however are still extant.⁵⁷

In entry 8, Toland implicates scholars of high reputation into his scheme: Archbishop Usher and John Gregory 'have seen' the manuscript in question. The authenticity and 'reality' of the document is further established by the fact that a critical edition has been published by the librarian of Lambeth Palace. Again there is no assessment of the value of these remarks, just simple statement: the mere mention of Usher, might to the unlearned, vouchsafe the authenticity of the ancient manuscript, Wilkins publication made it potentially available to everyone. In entry 10 Toland's straightfaced lack of embellishment reached a high point. The texts under discussion, the exchange of letters between Paul and Seneca, had been subjected to profound scholarly criticism, and although there was an humanist tradition that had insisted upon Christianising Seneca, by the 1700s the commonplace view would have denied their authenticity.⁵⁸ Again Toland plainly rehearsed the modern and ancient sources and concluded the entry with 'The *Epistles* however are still extant'. No discussion, just assertion masked by a veneer of scholarly reference.

The point to be emphasised here is that although the catalogue may strike the modern reader as a profoundly dull piece of work it was in fact, given the scholarly conventions of contemporary Augustan literary discourse, an intensely sophisticated irritant for orthodox readers. The catalogues of theologian critics like Grabe and Dodwell were discursive and analytical: they presented collations of ancient manuscripts with judicious and careful assessments of their historicity and authorship.⁵⁹ A Grabe or even a Whiston might write many hundreds of pages reviewing the evidences for the authenticity of just one text. Toland

⁵⁷ Toland *Collections* II 379-380.

⁵⁸ For the history of Renaissance criticism see L. Panizza 'Gasparino Barzizza's commentaries on Seneca's Letters' *Traditio* 33 (1977) and idem 'Biography in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: Seneca, Pagan or Christian?' *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* 2 (1984). For a modern discussion of the correspondence see J.K. Elliott *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Clarendon, 1993) 547. The Correspondence is available in C.W. Barlow *Epistolae Senecae ad Paulum: Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome* 10 (1938).

⁵⁹ For John Ernest Grabe see G. Thomann 'John Ernest Grabe (1666-1711): Lutheran Syncretist and Anglican Patristic Scholar' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992).

pillaged these researches and abstracted them into short digests that evaded the scholarly delicacy of the originals.

Important for establishing a link with the sort of cultural criticism that Fisher engaged in the first item on Toland's list was 'The Letter of Jesus in answer to that of Abgarus King of Edessa', supported by citations from Eusebius, Nicephorus, Procopius, Cedrenus and Constantinus Porphyrogenetus and finished with the simple word 'extant'. Indeed a rough comparison between the catalogue of books 'not inserted in the Bible' listed in Fisher's work and that of Toland shows an intriguing coincidence: four of the missing texts - the Revelation of St Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Prophecy of Enoch and the Epistle to the Corinthians occur on both lists. Toland also gives full coverage to works mentioned elsewhere in Fisher's work - Paul's letters to the Laodiceans and to Seneca, the Letter of Lentulus and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. Indeed, as already discussed above, one of the intriguing aspects of Toland's catalogue is the problem of trying to distinguish his research from the publications of clearly orthodox Biblical critics. A case in point to illustrate this ambiguity concerns commentary upon the *Letters of Agbarus* undertaken by orthodox divines: John Ernest Grabe, closely associated with the Oxford circle surrounding John Mill, published the text in his *Spicilegium* (1698) as did Fabricius in his *Codex Apochryphus Novi Testamenti* (1719). Both these scholars were devout Christians and accomplished Biblical critics. As Grabe's work transcribing Septuagint from the *Codex Alexandrinus* suggests (1707-1709), the intellectual and theological concerns of this group of scholar theologians were to preserve the word of God in its most authentic form. To this end they produced comprehensive and learned, but importantly Latin, discussions of the textual evidences and testimonies concerning particular documents. Toland on the other hand, clearly competent in his own right in the fields of linguistics and criticism, not only plundered the orthodox volumes of scholarship for textual variations and potentially controversial documents, but then published such commentaries and discussions in plain and lucid English, rendering the scholarship transparent to non-expert comprehension. Although much more comprehensive than Fisher's project Toland's intentions seem to have had a similar purpose and one correctly identified by clerical contemporaries of undermining the established canon with the tools of biblical scholarship.

Assessing the relationship between Fisher's and Toland's intentions can only be speculative. There is little direct evidence that Toland knew Fisher's work although it was available in recently published collections. Certainly Fisher and Toland shared a common intellectual interest and perhaps personal connection with Spinoza and his circle. Fisher collaborated with Spinoza in the publication of a Hebrew edition of Margaret Fell's *A Loving Saluation*.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See R.H. Popkin 'Spinoza's relations with the Quakers' *Quaker History* 73 (1984); idem 'The Hebrew translation of Margaret Fell's 'Loving Saluation'. The first publication of Spinoza?' (*Studia Rosenthalia*, 1987).

Although Toland never had direct contact with Spinoza he certainly did know the Dutchman's physician Dr Henri Morelli who was involved in the clandestine circulation of irreligious ideas.⁶¹ That Toland was familiar with Quaker writings and attitudes towards apocryphal texts is also hinted at in the *Catalogue* where the *Epistle of Lentulus* was acknowledged as text that 'was formerly in high credit with the Quakers'.⁶² In some sense, given the Spinozist connection, it might be possible to see some sort of lineage between Fisher and Toland. This not however to suggest that Toland simply acted as a legatee of the Quaker. Although both writers were engaged in a similar polemic against the literary foundations of the authority of the established Church the audience for the different authors was distinct. Fisher's work was contrived as part of a confessional polemic against the corruption of the Presbyterians and Anglicans. The tone of *Rusticos Ad Academicos* was sharp and brontolare: the text is one that confronted and ridiculed orthodox beliefs. It would be difficult to imagine an unsuspecting reader picking up Fisher's writings and mistaking them for a calm detached review of the problems of canonicity and Biblical criticism. Toland's work, on the other hand, was exactly calculated for such a reception. By assuming the literary style of detached unembellished criticism it seems likely that Toland hoped to insinuate doubts about the established canon. Far from representing himself as defending any particular confessional interest Toland constructed the *Catalogue* as a work of objective discussion: he deliberately set out to engage with scholarly discourse. When reading Fisher's writings it is difficult not perceive his point; with Toland's *Catalogue* the simple listing of titles, references and classmarks devolved the meaning of the text away from the author to the reader. This was precisely to Toland's wider polemical purpose: that every individual might create their own sense of religious conviction rather than being led by a *ecclesia docens*.

PRACTICAL CRITICISM

In conclusion it is important to consider the relationship between orthodox biblical scholarship and religious dissidence in this period. The affinities between Fisher's and Toland's strategies of publicising and disseminating non-canonical material are ample testimony to the continuities of the radical attack upon clerical orthodoxy between the 1650s and the 1700s. The one question that remains concerns the irreligious intentions and motivations of these writers: how sincere was Fisher when he republished the *Letters of Agbarus*? The case of Toland is even more ambiguous. His reputation as a scholar was widely acknowledged although (almost) always invariably with a rider that doubted his commitment to established Christianity. This strategy of popularisation worked upon two levels: the

⁶¹ On Morelli see R.H. Popkin 'Seredipity at the Clark: Spinoza and the Prince of Conde' *The Clark Newsletter* 10 (1986). For the connection with Toland see Champion *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*.

⁶² See Toland *Collections* II 396. The description of Christ in the letter was meant to bear a striking resemblance to the leading Quaker figure James Naylor. See also Cadbury 189-190.

intellectual and the practical. Opening the question of the authenticity of established Scripture posed a theoretical doubt, but publishing vernacular extracts of non-canonical texts gave literate but non-scholarly readers real material to consider. Fisher achieved this on a small scale with his publications of the *Letters of Agbarus*, Toland was to go one step further in his publication of *Nazarenus* (1718). Directly related to the project of the *Catalogue* in *Nazarenus* Toland took the opportunity to give an extended account of two early (apocryphal) Christian texts - the Gospel of Barnabas and 'an Irish manuscript of the 4 Gospels' described by Toland as the 'Codex Armachanus'.⁶³ Here is not the place to give a detailed analysis of Toland's reading of these two apocryphal manuscripts. It is enough to say that in *Nazarenus* Toland brought to practical fruition some of the suggestions he made in the *Catalogue* by disinterring two manuscripts which he had located in continental archives and publishing them in the literary style of orthodox biblical criticism. However, much to the devout disgust of many churchmen, Toland's expert hermeneutics were refined to produce an argument that overturned many of the shibboleths of orthodox Christian doctrine and ecclesiology. Priestcraft and clericalism were refuted: the Church was not originally 'a political empire, or an organis'd society with a proper subordination of officers and subjects; but the congregation of the faithful thro-out the world'.⁶⁴ Original Christianity had none of the liturgies or rituals of either contemporary Catholicism or Protestantism: 'faith consisted in a right notion of God, and the constant practice of Virtue'.⁶⁵ Once again a series of political and theological arguments had been built on the foundations of biblical criticism.

The question remains about the priority of scholarship and dissidence in the thought of people like Fisher and Toland. Did their readings of ancient manuscripts and learned commentaries lead them to radical criticisms, or was the rhetoric of Biblical criticism a convenient and effective instrument to project their non-orthodox opinions? One answer to such an inquiry might point to the changing cultural context of Biblical scholarship in the period. The long legacy of humanist interest in the manuscript remnants of antiquity, combined with the pious injunctions of a Church that needed a primitive heritage produced a literary culture encumbered with the dusty odour of codex and documents. The spirit of the antiquarian collector melded with the Protestant historical ideology of *renovatio* produced a cultural infrastructure of historical artefacts that became the subject of intense scholarly scrutiny and

⁶³ There is an important account to be written of the Codex Armachanus: the manuscript which Toland examined had been in the possession of Archbishop Ussher. The codex complete with marginal annotations by Ussher is now in Marshes Library, Dublin. For a brief account see A. Harrison 'John Toland and the discovery of an Irish Manuscript in Holland' *Irish University Review* (1985). See also C. Graves 'on the date of the manuscript commonly called the Book of Armagh' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* III (1847).

⁶⁴ Toland *Nazarenus* (1718) Part II 34-35.

⁶⁵ *ibid* 16-17 and 19ff.

polemical struggle.⁶⁶ Put simply, because of the endeavours of men like William Laud and James Ussher, by the mid-seventeenth century, there were many collections of sacred and holy manuscripts deposited in private, college and national archives that became the focus of earnest scholarly and theological interest.⁶⁷ A brief illustration of these cultural practices can be seen in the account of Zacharius Conrad Von Uffenbach's travels around the libraries and museums of England in the summer of 1710. Visiting various Oxford and Cambridge college collections Von Uffenbach made it his business to search out the oldest or most eminent manuscripts: a Wycliffite Bible at Emmanuel, the Baroccian Mss at the Bodleian, Saxon Gospels in London, and the high point of his visit a meeting with Dr John Grabe in October 'where we at last saw the Codex Alexandrinus'.⁶⁸ Von Uffenbach, a reknowned collector of manuscripts and books himself, clearly had a scholarly map of important texts to examine while in England. In examining the holdings of the Oxbridge colleges von Uffenbach was concerned to explore and assess the authenticity of the texts themselves and scholarly opinion about them. He was keen to examine the Codex Alexandrinus and also to meet and discuss the Biblical researches of John Mill. From the times of Walton's polyglot there seems to have been an almost collective enterprise of collecting and collating sacred materials into what Fisher vilified as an 'exact copy'. The business of discovery, criticism and assimilation of ancient sacred texts was considered part of the intellectual economy of religious life. Reinforcing and establishing an authentic and accurate text was essential to refurbishing and maintaining the social and political authority of the established Church and priesthood.⁶⁹ Scholars, theologians and critics who engaged in analysis and commentary on ancient texts were not simply undertaking literary studies, but given the bibliocratic nature of the Church, were actually employed in activities that fashioned the cultural dimensions of social power.⁷⁰ Biblical scholarship and criticism, then, ought not to be thought of as a pure discipline independent of politics or theology but as a literary technology for establishing where the authoritative power of Scriptural interpretation resided.⁷¹

⁶⁶ These statements, of course, compress many cultural and religious transformations of the early modern period: for a brief outline of some of the themes see D.R. Kelley *Foundations of modern historical scholarship* (New York, 1970); J. Levine *The Battle of the Books. History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Cornell, 1991). I intend to pursue the question at greater length elsewhere.

⁶⁷ On Laud's interests in the collection of Oriental Biblical material see H.R. Trevor-Roper *Archbishop Laud 1573-1645* (1940); on Ussher idem *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (University of Chicago, 1988) 120-166.

⁶⁸ See J.E.B. Mayer (ed) *Cambridge Under Queen Anne* (Cambridge, 1911) 142, 167, 390, 391, 400.

⁶⁹ See R.W.F. Kroll *The Material Word. Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁷⁰ For some preliminary discussions along these lines see J.O. Newman 'The Word made Print: Luther's 1522 New Testament in an age of mechanical reproduction' *Representations* 11 (1985); G. Brennan 'Patriotism, Language and Power: English Translations of the Bible, 1520-1580' *History Workshop Journal* 27 (1989).

⁷¹ See D. Lawton *Faith, Text and History. The Bible in English* (Harvester, 1990).

Thinking about Biblical criticism and scholarship not just in terms of literary encounters but as part of a debate about the location and distribution of cultural power must cause some revision of the nature of the radical attack on organised religion (for convenience sake it can be labelled 'deism'). It is perhaps an historical commonplace that a central plank of the deist attack on organised religion was a rejection of revelation. As one commentator has recently put it, 'the characteristic current of mainstream deism [was] a negative rejection of revealed truth'. This rejection was contrived in terms of a rational challenge to the veracity of the mysteries of revealed doctrines: reason was above religion.⁷² Although there is clearly much sense in this analysis, to insist that the deist assault upon scripture was simply the product of rational discourse would be an overstatement. Central to the tradition of the 1650s - Hobbes, Spinoza and Fisher - was an historical, rather than a purely rational, critique of Scripture. Similarly with the writings and criticism of John Toland (carrying on the Hobbist and Spinozist traditions): the critique of orthodoxy was borne not from reason alone, but from the results of textual exegesis. Toland employed the very same tools that orthodox Biblical critics used for very different purposes: he, and others, were not stepping outside the cultural parameters of orthodox discipline but bending them to new purposes. What Fisher and Toland undertook was to challenge the fundamentalism of Anglican Biblical criticism not by rejecting revelation but by extending the textual basis for what revelation was on to uncertain grounds. That this sort of enterprise might be designed for devout purposes is clear from the examples of men like William Whiston, who, appealing to the testimony of 'original' documents like the *Apostolic Constitutions*, attempted to reform the doctrines and institutions of the Church of England.⁷³ Although it is not possible to ascribe the same level of piety to either Fisher's or Toland's ambitions and intentions, it is important to acknowledge the methods they adopted in their attempted revisions of established religion. It is possible, at least in the case of John Toland, to write with a little more confidence about the irreligious intentions of his public biblical criticism. In October 1701, while on a diplomatic mission relating to the Hanoverian Succession, Toland engaged in private discussion with Isaac Beausobre, an Huguenot cleric at the court of Sophia, Electress of Hanover, about the authenticity of Scripture. Although Toland initially acknowledged that he was a Christian he expressed that 'il avoit de grande scruples sur l'autorité des livres du N. Testament'. While he commenced his discussion by casting doubts upon specific texts (II Peter and parts of the Gospel of Matthew) the results of his arguments suggested that much of Scripture was little more than fable and popular superstition. It was Beausobre's opinion that after two hours intense discussion that Toland was a man of little or no religion who had 'rendre L'écriture douteuse'.⁷⁴ Further evidence of the gap between Toland's published attitude towards

⁷² See J. Force 'Biblical interpretation, Newton and English Deism' 282.

⁷³ See W. Whiston *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (1711).

⁷⁴ See J.P. Erman *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de Sophie Charlotte reine de Prusse* (Berlin, 1801) 200-208.

Scripture and the true extent of his private opinions can be explored in two other manuscript pieces. One of Toland's favourite past-times was composing rough plans for new works usually in the form of a draught title page and list of chapter headings: 'Christopaedia: or an account of the pueril studies of JESUS CHRIST' is one of the most contentious of his proposals. Given the proposed content it is hardly surprising that he never dared to publish such a work.⁷⁵ Pretending to translate the work from a German text Toland intended to discuss a non-scriptural history of Christ drawing in particular on the messiah's books, tomes and manuscripts (27 volumes in all!). The publication of such a work could have been no other than an attempt to parody the life of Christ by employing deeply suspect, if not downright forged, historical materials. Importantly the one piece of apocryphal material Toland named was 'an Epistle to Abgarus King of Edessa'. In another unnoticed manuscript Toland adopted a less ridiculous tone towards the issue of canonicity as a direct response to criticism of his *Amyntor*: the privacy of his own notes however allowed him far more license than he had employed in his published texts. In an extended commentary upon the orthodox theologian Henry Dodwell's views on the canon employing the full rigour of a Spinozist and Simonian vocabulary, Toland not only exposed the historical uncertainty of the formation of the Protestant canon, but also suggested that the very notion of a universal revelation in the form of scripture was deeply problematic if not actively unlikely.⁷⁶ There can be small doubt then that Toland's private convictions led him to articulate profound scepticism about the divinity of the text of revelation. There is similarly little doubt that Toland adopted an explicitly Spinozist attitude towards the heuristical function of Scripture.⁷⁷ Knowing Toland's private

⁷⁵ BL Add Mss 4295 folio 69. 'Christopaedia: or/An account of the pueril studies/of/JESUS CHRIST,/What languages he learnt, what callings he followed, &/What books he wrote, with several other remarkable/things concerning his Education, not contain'd in ye/Scriptures of the New Testament./By/The Reverend and very worthy divine,/Mr Christian Hilscher,/Minister/of Old Dresden in Saxony/After three days they found him in the Temple, sitting in the/midst of the Doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions./- and Jesus encreased in wisdom and stature, and in fa/vor with God & man. Luc.2.44,52/London printed&/The Contents/Christ for a time laid aside the exercise of his divine nature. Sect 1/He did in the same manner with other men, increas'd in wisdom---11/He becam a school boy, and had for masters Lachus, ano/ther nameless one much given to whipping, also Josua the/son of parachia, & Elkanan -----III/Of his dispute with the Doctors iin the Tmple, & what it concern'd IV/Whether he learnt to write or no, & probably yt he did not V/Whether, besides his mother tongue & Hebrew, he understood/Greec and Latin VI/That he was conversant in the books of the Jews, and as Rabbi, Doctor and Priest VII/His learning vindicated against his townsmen of Nazareth VIII/That he was not a Conjuror IX/That he was not an Apparitor, Dyer, or [insert in pencil 'the maker of false images'] a Painter X/That he as a Messianic; but controverted whether a mason, carpenter, blacksmith, or Goldsmith; or whether a Cartwright, shipwright [insert in pencil illegible] joiner, or Architect; and the dispute reconciled, by his having a smater of all XI/The books said to be written by him, as XXVII tomes wch he left at his ascention into heaven, a treatise of magic address'd to Peter and Paul, an Epistle to Abgarus King of Edessa, a hymn wch he secretly taught his disciples, his parables and sermons, ~~his subscription, seal and manuscripts~~ XII/An advertisement concerning the whole, or the conclusion address'd to all sober Christians XIII/'.

⁷⁶ See BL Add Mss 4373 'Dodwell Mss' I intend to publish the manuscript with commentary in the near future.

⁷⁷ See Champion *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*; idem 'Civic Religion'; idem 'The Politics of Pantheism'.

opinions about the authenticity thus allows a greater insight into the exoteric purpose of his publication of *Nazareus*. On one level Toland was engaging in deliberate literary forgery but as Grafton has discussed in other contexts this 'forgery' had explicitly pragmatic purposes in undermining popular perceptions of canonicity and the authenticity of scripture.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See A. Grafton *Forgers and Critics. Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (1990); see also idem 'Higher Criticism Ancient and Modern: the lamentable deaths of Hermes and the Sybils' in A.C. Dionisotti, A. Grafton, J. Kraye (eds) *The Uses of Greek and Latin. Historical Essays* (Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, XVI, 1988); see also on Scriptural forgeries B.M. Metzger 'Literary forgeries and canonical pseudepigrapha' in *New Testament Studies. Philological, Versional, Patristic* (Leiden, 1980)