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RADICAL, BAPTIST ESCHATOLOGY: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION OF VAVASOR POWELL, HANSERD KNOLLYS, AND BENJAMIN KEACH

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ABSTRACT. Amidst the politically-charged climate of seventeenth-century England, a small, but influential makeshift group of Baptist divines developed an eschatological system that both encouraged their congregations to greater holiness and threatened the very existence of the proto-denomination. Even as most of the nascent group of dissenting congregations known as Baptists sought acceptance by the more mainstream dissent, those divines who accepted this particular form of millenarianism garnered unwanted attention from the authorities as they pressed remarkably close to the line of radical dissidence. Three of those Baptist divines—Vavasor Powell, Hanserd Knollys, and Benjamin Keach—provide helpful insights both into the range of millenarianism adopted by this group of Baptists and into the legitimacy of the charges of radicalism. This article examines the published works of these three ministers, comparing their visions for the eschatological future and analyzing the charges of radicalism placed against them by their contemporaries.

KEYWORDS: Deification, English Baptists, Millenarianism, Powell, Knollys, Keach

In what has been deemed his 'first overt millenarian declaration' (Cohen 1963: 334), the itinerant evangelist, Vavasor Powell (1617-1670), announced to the listening audience—the Rump Parliament on 28 February 1650—what exactly he saw as not only the future for the church (and for all of England) but actually the *near* future: 'They that will not bow by the sweet and gracious words of Christ, must be broken by the heavy blows, and strokes of Christ, and where the kindnesse and goodnesse of Christ will not take place, there his wrath and indignation must and will take place' (Powell 1651: 64-65).

The application which followed Powell's explication could be dismissed as anti-climactic—a message almost anyone addressing Parliament in any number of eras could be expected to say. Regardless of the final pacific, non-descript tone, the banner which Powell had determined to fly was clear

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and bold. In many ways, that initial entre into political homiletics might as well have been his last; it would establish the message which would land him in jail for the majority of the last decade of his life.

A half century later in 1705, John Dunton, the eminent printer of dissenting authors, eulogized the Baptist minister, Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), by suggesting that his works would remain in print 'to the end of Time' (Dunton 1705: 236*). That appraisal certainly represented high praise from the publisher of such well-known divines as Richard Baxter, Cotton Mather, and Daniel Williams, but the description of Keach caught the reader's eye for another reason altogether, the description Dunton used as he announced Keach's presence for his reader:

> …here comes Mr. Keach—mounted upon some Apocalyptical Beast or other, with *Babylon* before him, and *Zion* behind him, and a *Hundred Thousand Bulls and Bears and furious Beast* of Prey, roaring, ramping, and bellowing at him, so hideously that unless some kind Angel drop from the *Clouds, and hack and hew*, very plentifully among 'em he must certainly be Torn as small as a Love-Letter (Dunton 1705: 236-732*).

The apocalyptic focus for which both Keach and Powell have been memorialized for posterity provide appropriate bookends for a short, but significant era of Baptist eschatological thought. Combined with the ministry of Hanserd Knollys (ca. 1598-1691), whose years of service overlapped both Keach's and Powell's, the picture of one particular vision of Baptist eschatology comes into clear view.

The Context

Given the context—both historical and intellectual—of their ministries, the connection of these three leaders to their eschatological ideals would, in actuality, have surprised few, if any, outside observers. By the time of Keach's lengthy ministry in greater London—he arrived in Southwark in 1668—the entire Protestant world had become enamored by the eschatological speculation which had up until relatively recently been considered anathema. Only a century prior, John Calvin had suggested that while 'faith is most properly invited to meditate on the visible presence which [Christ] will exhibit on the last day', any form of chiliasm—the teaching that Christ would reign over an earthly kingdom for a thousand years—must be condemned as being 'too puerile to need or to deserve refutation'. (Calvin, Beveridge and Pitcairn 1845: III, xxv, 5) The Genevan Reformer certainly did not stand alone in his condemnation, with a host of confessional statements deeming any form of eschatological imagination that included a 'golden age on earth … [or] that the pious, having subdued all their godless

enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth' (Bullinger 1566) to be antithetical to the apostolic teaching and anathema to the Christian faith.

That near-universal condemnation of chiliasm in the sixteenth century—coming, as it did, on the heels of the Peasants' Revolt and the Münster debacle, both of which were fueled, at least in part, by a certain eschatological fervor—did not paint the entire picture, however. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, divines like Thomas Brightman (1562-1607) and John Napier (1550-1617) freed their compatriots' eschatological imaginations by imbibing the pioneering work of the Lutheran theologian, Andreas Osiander (1498-1558). By 1548, Osiander's eschatological work, entitled *Vermutung von den letzten Zeiten und dem Ende der Welt aus der heiligen Schrift gezoken,* had been published in English as *The coniectures of the ende of the worlde*. In that work, Osiander determined that while the exact timing of Christ's return could not be known—after all, 'the daye and the hower no ma[n] knoweth'—eschatological speculation was not completely forbidden. '[A]lbeit the daye and howr we knowe not, yet the year maye we knowe or coniecture very nighe it' (Osiander 1548: sig. Br, sig. Biir). Even so, the chiliasm that had long been condemned, did not yet find its way onto the theological landscape.

That cataclysmic shift required the chaos that enveloped the continent during the apex of the Thirty Years' War. During that war-torn era the pens of Johann Alsted (1588-1638) and the Cambridge don, Joseph Mede (1586-1639), brought about a specific and acceptable prognostication regarding the future millennial, earthly reign of Christ. Both of these divines read Scripture as teaching that Christ would establish that kingdom at some point in the relatively near future, perhaps even in the seventeenth century. By the time of the English Civil Wars, the influence of Mede and Alsted had so spread across the English landscape that millenarian prognostication could be found in the writings of such influential divines as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), Nathaniel Homes (1599-1678), John Archer (d. 1639), John Durant (d. 1689), William Hicks (d. 1660), John Tillinghast (d. 1655), George Hammond (1619/20-1705), and even William Sancroft (1617-1693), sometime Archbishop of Canterbury. The political climate left divines and, presumably, laity alike not only meditating on Christ's visible presence in the last days—as Calvin had commended—but also finding in those meditations a specific vision for that visible presence, a vision which only half a century earlier would have been considered heterodox, at best.

The common rallying cry for these divines could be found in their 'literal' hermeneutic, which accounted not only for the various attempts to explain the often-problematic prophetic literature in Scripture but also for the nearly-ubiquitous tendency to see prophetic significance in the everyday occurrences. These theologians, pastors, and laymen alike were simply not

willing to allow the mysteries surrounding the end of times to remain only in the realm of the unknown, and they certainly were unwilling to allow significant events to take place without their biblically-based commentary. Thus, the officers and soldiers of the New Model Army, for instance, surprised no one when they gave more than a glimpse of their eschatologically-driven motivations by identifying 'the late king and his monarchy [as] one of the ten horns of the beast spoken of, Rev. xvii. ver. 13, 14, 15' (*A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq.* 1742: 4:380)

Baptist Divines and Their Eschatology

Benjamin Keach, Hanserd Knollys, and Vavasor Powell

Rising out of that chaotic theological landscape of the seventeenth century, Powell, Knollys, and Keach both inherited and built upon a theological tradition that had already become enamored by the prospect of Christ's imminent return. For these early Baptist leaders, the connections between the biblical descriptions of the end of days and the contemporary events facing their own culture practically begged to be developed. The resulting hermeneutic of prophetic material pressed the accepted standards of theological methodology—even as many of the Baptist leaders sought to develop and maintain a clear alliance with other well-respected non-conformists and to present themselves as being in agreement with 'that wholesome Protestant Doctrine' (*Second London Confession* 1677: A3r) already apparent throughout much of the greater dissenting community. The tight-rope walk necessitated by the competing desires for acceptance within more-respected theological circles and faithfulness to often-unique readings of Scripture nearly spelled the end of this nascent group even as they found some agreement within broader theological circles.

By the end of the seventeenth century, Benjamin Keach had established himself as a significant figure amongst the group of churches which, because of their stated view that God justified only a particular group of people known as the elect—a group whose 'number [was] so certain, and definite, that it cannot be either increased, or diminished' (*Second London Confession* 1677: 14), came to be known as the Particular Baptists. This group of congregations had announced themselves to the rest of society during the early days of the tumultuous decade of the 1640s, with their first official confession of faith being published in 1644. In the three decades spanning the interim between that initial confession of faith and the document now known as *The Second London Confession,* Benjamin Keach not only made a name for himself, but he also rose to a position of some respect within the independent congregations associated with the Baptist faith, eventually serving as a signatory to the 1689 publication of that second confession. That position of respect, however, did not develop without some controver-

sy, with Keach often finding himself at the center of polemical (or juridical) attention.

That controversy found Keach from his very first appearance on the public scene in 1664 when, at a trial for publishing 'Things contrary to the Doctrine and Ceremonies of the Church of England' in his earliest known publication, he attracted two related but distinct monikers. The first, that of 'baptist', he proudly wore throughout the remaining forty years of his public ministry, standing alongside (though not always agreeing with) the likes of Thomas Grantham, William Kiffin, Hanserd Knollys, Hercules Collins, inter alia as defenders of the 'mainstream' theological position of the loosely-formed group(s) of separatists known as Baptists. That particular label fit Keach perfectly as he never wavered in his stance on believer's baptism, becoming, by the end of his ministry, one of the premier apologists for what he saw as the only biblical form of the ordinance.

The second label assigned by Judge Hyde at that 1664 trial in Buckinghamshire, the label of 'fifth monarchy man', proved to be less of a fit for Keach—either as an assigned label from others or as a chosen hill upon which Keach would willingly do battle either with sword or with pen. In fact, Keach spent a significant amount of time during his ministry amongst his congregation of Baptists meeting in Southwark attempting to distance himself from charges of radical theology. For most of his baptistic contemporaries, anti-paedobaptist teaching proved to be the extent of their forays into radicalism, but Keach—despite overt attempts to align himself with well-respected theologians (most prominent among them being John Owen and Isaac Chauncey)—consistently demonstrated a willingness to press the boundaries of more radical doctrines. The charge of being a 'fifth monarchy man' belied the young Keach's tendencies to leap where others would not dare even to tread cautiously. The fact that Dunton still associated Keach with an eschatological imagination at the end of Keach's life, demonstrated the consistency with which Keach approached this theological locus.

Given Thomas Venner's (fl. 1638-d. 1661) relatively recent actions in London [January 1660/61], events which led to the arrest of several individuals of the baptistic persuasion, Keach's evident decision to include his premillennial view of the kingdom in his first primer—the passage which ultimately led to Hyde's branding him a 'fifth monarchy Man'—could potentially be excused as the immature actions of a still-young (24- year-old) minister trying to find his legs as a public figure. The easily-foreseeable arrest, trial, and punishment in the pillory which resulted from that *immature* behavior could have served as a successful lesson for a more willing pupil. But Keach was anything but willing to learn that lesson. In fact, the excuse of immaturity wears quite thin as one considers Keach's entire body of work. The focus on a theology of the last days proved to be no childish fan-

cy for Keach who jumped almost immediately back into the radicalized discussion less than two years after his initial run-in with Hyde, publishing his immensely anti-Catholic, *Zion in distress* (which he would update several times… re-publishing it in 1681, 1682, and 1691), in the eschatologically-pregnant year of 1666, or, as Keach called it, 'the fatal year' (Keach 1666). Even when baptistic congregations assembled together in the relative (and new-found) peace of the reign of William and Mary, Keach sought controversy by pressing his eschatological prognostications to their logical ends in his 1689 publication, entitled *Antichrist stormed*. That theological focus, more than any other aspect of his work, proved to be the most easily-confused and, thus, misrepresented of Keach's 'pet issues'.

Despite his willingness to push the boundaries of orthodoxy as he investigated the biblical explanation of the prophetic future, Keach clearly built his eschatological theology on the foundation laid by both Powell and Knollys. Most notably, Hanserd Knollys, Keach's close friend and sometime mentor, published numerous works detailing his own understanding of the biblical data and worked his view of eschatologically-significant events into his own teaching. No stranger to controversy himself, Knollys's vision of the eschatological future demonstrably allowed him to press the envelope of acceptability and also left him susceptible to charges of political dissent, with Knollys notably running afoul of religious leaders during a brief stay in the colonies at the end of the 1630s and later being arrested during the broad-sweeping crackdown during the aftermath of Venner's Uprising. Knollys's version of the prophetic future was not the only aspect of his theology deemed questionable by the powers that be, but it certainly did not assuage any concerns. Nor did those concerns—as expressed both by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities alike—keep Knollys from sharing his particular understanding of Scripture or from that understanding of Scripture infiltrating all of Knollys's beliefs.

To be fair to both Knollys and Keach, neither divine could be held responsible for pioneering the work of eschatological speculation within the baptistic world. That honor could be shared by any number of chaplains in the New Model Army and other divines who received the blessing of the Commonwealth's leadership. Chief amongst those divines was Vavasor Powell, a Welshman who attended Jesus College, Oxford in his youth and became an itinerant preacher at some point around 1639. By the Fall of 1646, Powell obtained a certificate from the Westminster Assembly, then responsible for the church in Wales, and later was appointed as an official preacher 'for the better propagation and preaching of the gospel in Wales' by the Parliamentary-appointed commission. His conversion to baptistic theology came, probably at the hands of Henry Jessey (1603-1663), sometime around 1654, but by that point, Powell had already adopted the then-

prevalent reading of both scripture and current events. His prominent role, supported by both the military and civil authorities, provided him with the freedom necessary to preach those views throughout the Interregnum in both his home counties in Wales and also in London. The combination of that prominent role and his eschatological views would also lead to his demise.

Fifth Monarchy Men

By the time Judge Hyde labeled the youngest of these three divines a Fifth Monarchy Man, that pejorative had already been used on this makeshift group in unofficial settings, if not in official charges. Vavasor Powell's 1650 address to the Rump Parliament practically begged for the label as he argued that the saints could be called to 'lawfully fight, for wee read that they are to have a *two-edged sword in their hands, as well as the high prayses of God in their mouthes*' and that he hoped that 'the Saints are more wise then to be cheated out of their rights and priviledges by a generation of men, who would have Saints to be their slaves, who are themselves slaves to Satan' (Powell 1651: 58-60). Powell's call to arms, including his reference to true believers as 'the Army of the Lamb' (Powell 1651: 59), did not even qualify as thinly-veiled, though he complemented that theology with an orthodox explanation of the other two parts of Christ's kingdom—the 'Cœlestiall' kingdom, which he largely ignored in his discussion due to the church's historical agnosticism on the issue, and the 'Spirituall' kingdom, which he argued had its 'seate… in the hearts of Beleevers' (Powell 1651: 50). He finished that sermon with a basic charge to Parliament: 'decree nothing that is unjust', remove 'all such things as are yet offensive to religious people, particularly such Laws as continue in force against them, and all superstitious Relicks, which keep the people still in blindnesse', and finally, '[d]oe what you can to satisfie the desires of those that are distressed; as… those that suffered for, and in the Lords Cause' (Powell 1651: 93).

Powell's mostly-peaceful admonition to the Rump did not directly incite militant action, but it certainly signaled to the listening world the potential repercussions a particular view of the last days might create for an already-beleaguered England. The fears of religious uprisings, reaching back at least to Münster and heightened by the recently-ceased religious fighting in the Palatinate, served as the only lenses through which these teachings could be received. Despite the core of the message being docile, his tangential excursions added to the consternation. In one of those rhetorical devices, Powell considered the all-important question regarding the current status of the two witnesses from Revelation 11. Two items of note from this excursus shed light on the climate of the day. First, Powell introduced the off-center topic with an 'objection' in which the audience is presented as

being 'most trouble[d]' by 'whether the witnesses be slaine yea, or no' (Powell 1651: 91). The suggestion that everyone—or at least everyone in his suspected audience (both aural and literary)—would be interested (i.e., 'most troubled') to receive this information speaks volumes, regardless of its accuracy. Second, Powell provided no extraordinary introduction to the topic of the witnesses nor to the idea that this biblical language would be pointing to his contemporary day. By the time of his address to Parliament, these issues were already common parlance for a significant amount of the English population.

Powell ended his discussion of the two witnesses without providing any direct identification. He simply noted the probability that they had already been slain—or would be slain in the near future. In addition, he argued for the special significance of the year 1650—a clear nod toward Thomas Brightman, who had previously announced 1650 as an eschatologically-significant year (Brightman [*The Workes*] 1644: 967)—which 'according to the interpretation of many, yea most godly Writers upon *Daniel,* and the *Revelation*) is to be the Saints yeare of Jubilee' (Powell 1651: 92). Powell left the specific import of that year a mystery, simply using it to solicit holy living. With no other development, this sermon could have been passed off as just one more curiosity in a curious era, but Powell involved himself in several other republican machinations, calling for a theocratic kingdom whenever possible. In 1659, for instance, Powell joined his fellow Baptists, Henry Jessey and Henry Danvers, and several other well-known divines in imploring the civil authorities to avoid re-establishing any system of government remotely resembling a monarchy. In that work, entitled *An essay toward settlement upon a sure foundation…*, the authors acknowledged the righteous fear of militant uprisings and attempted to distance themselves from the political chicanery of the day. Regardless, they settled on a call for 'a certaine number of men qualified and limitted according to his Word, …to be sett apart to the Office of chiefe *Rule and Government* over these *Nations,* as part of Christs universall Kingdome' (*An Essay toward Settlement Upon a Sure Foundation* 1659). The ramifications of Powell's vision of the eschatological future including an earthly kingdom complete with its own military and, perhaps, necessitating militant action proved to be too much for the Restoration government. Despite having been allowed to engage his preaching ministry undeterred throughout the Interregnum, upon the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, his preaching once again 'gave offence by its theocratic tone, which was interpreted as tending to sedition' (Gordon 1885-1900: 251). He was among the earliest nonconformists to be arrested in the Restoration, and he spent the majority of the remainder of his life in custody, ultimately dying while being held at the Fleet in Lambeth.

Despite his imprisonment for most of the 1660s, Powell was known to interact with Baptist congregations throughout England and Wales, and, as late as 1670 was keeping regular company with Hanserd Knollys—who at one point called on his fellow ministers, Vavasor Powell and William Kiffin, to anoint him with oil and pray for his healing. Both Powell and Kiffin obliged (Knollys and Kiffin 1692: 35), and Knollys recovered. While no definitive evidence exists to prove the sharing of Powell's eschatological vision in person with either Knollys or Keach, the personal connections suggest more than a probability of mutual development.

Of the three, Powell provided the least description of his eschatological vision, publishing only a few documents in his lifetime, including the 1650 sermon to Parliament. Both Keach and Knollys, on the other hand, dived headfirst into the prophetic passages surrounding the final Kingdom of Christ with each seeing variations of themes within the prophetic passages. As they each exegeted the diverse passages, their visions of that still-future eschatological kingdom could be distinguished, yet remained similar enough to help shape the collective vision of their group of Baptists.

Biblical Interpretation

Biblical Canon

References to the eschatological future inundated all of scripture—at least according to the biblical hermeneutic common during the seventeenth century. By the time Powell, Knollys, and Keach entered the foray of eschatological musings, Thomas Brightman had already paved the way for nearly all scripture to be read in a prophetic light after having his eschatologically-driven interpretation of the Song of Songs published posthumously in 1644. The key shift for Brightman was not that the Song of Songs referred to some aspects of redemptive history which were future at the time of the poem's writing but that much of the work remained future even after the passage of some two millennia. This opening of the Song of Songs to apocalyptic speculation released the proverbial floodwaters of creative hermeneutics for future biblical commentators—Keach and Knollys not excepted. In the end, the seventeenth-century commentator could harness all of the biblical canon for prophetic discussion—not just the obvious Books of Daniel and Revelation. Thus, both Keach and Knollys—whose extant writings far outweigh those of Powell—interpret material from every section of the canon in a prophetic manner.

Indeed, Brightman's work played an even more significant role in these divines' understanding of the eschaton. The all-important 'Fifth Monarchy' of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 2 & 7)—equated by nearly all commentators with the final reign of Christ and the origin of the pejorative label 'fifth monarchy man'—could be seen uniquely in Brightman's work as he identi-

fied two distinct churches referenced in the Song of Songs and a corresponding two inaugurations of those churches (i.e., marriages) in John's Apocalypse. Echoes of this methodology could be heard in Vavasor Powell's three-fold division of the kingdom—celestial, spiritual, and terrestrial—which he outlined in that 1650 sermon as well as in Hanserd Knollys's explanation of the coming of the 'KINGDOM of *Christ*' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 15). According to Knollys's view, the 'Glory and Perfection of Christs *Kingdom*' did not align exactly with what Powell called the terrestrial kingdom. Instead, the height of Christ's kingdom could only be found 'in the WORLD to COME', not in 'the WORLD that NOW IS' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 15). Interestingly, Knollys's understanding of the world that is to come distinguished it from the present age while maintaining some overlap with it. For '[t]he WORLD to COME is not that *eternal* State of God's *Kingdom* of GLORY in *Heaven*; but it is the *glorious* and *spiritual* State of the KINGDOM of Christ on EARTH' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 15).

Powell and Knollys may have been affected by Brightman's theological maneuver, but Benjamin Keach made the link to his creative interpretation explicit when he joined the two concepts of distinct churches and marriages, envisioning a two-fold inauguration of the final kingdom in almost direct agreement with Brightman's explication of the Song of Songs (Brightman [*Canticles*] 1644: 1077). The first of those inaugurations, the spiritual, would be 'small, and hardly discerned' (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 167), while the second would reveal the 'glorious Kingdom' and would begin with Christ's visible return (Keach 1701: III:95). This understanding allowed Keach to explain several potential logical pitfalls and historical problems as he constructed his eschatological vision.

Anti-Rome

While Brightman's work opened the entire biblical canon for eschatological consideration, the rest of these divines' collective hermeneutic was determined by their historical context. Living as they were in the time of deep and extended fear of a Catholic sovereign, the fact that each of these three influential Baptist leaders built their hermeneutic on a distinctly anti-Catholic foundation remains the least surprising aspect of their apocalyptic musings. Each of them, to one extent or another identified the Roman Catholic Church as a major player in the apocalyptic literature. Theologians of nearly all Protestant sects identified Rome as the Antichrist, Mystery Babylon, the man of sin, the beast, or the whore of Revelation. This understanding proved to be so commonplace that Keach could, without planting his tongue firmly in his cheek, argue that 'all Protestants' and 'some Papists' agreed in this identification (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 20), with the

Protestants identifying papal Rome as the Antichrist and the Papists placing that label on heathen Rome. The Papists were clearly wrong, according to Keach, because heathen Rome fell with the sacking of Rome in the early fifth century, and the succeeding papist leaders were far worse. If the Scriptures actually referred to heathen Rome as the Antichrist, the very concept would be nothing more than a mockery.

Likewise, Hanserd Knollys minced no words when he identified the enemy of Christ as 'the Roman-Antichristian-Politick and Ecclesiastick-POWER, Rule Authority, Dominion, and Government of the BEAST, [and] the ten Kings or Kingdoms, who have given their POWER and Strength unto the Beast' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 9). Powell spoke with only slightly less acridity when he noted the Roman Church being at 'the height of [her] pleasure and pride' (Powell 1651: 92). In each of these visions, the Roman Catholic Church represented the pinnacle of ungodliness, of 'Spiritual Idolatry', of the Antichrist.

Chronology

That anti-Catholic lens affected more than just the identification of key figures; it also determined the chronology of important prophetic dates. Vavasor Powell never provided a clear-cut chronology for his own vision of the future, but both Knollys and Keach did. While they did not agree on every detail, they did both build their calendars around two agreed upon themes: the biblical prophetic dates corresponded with important events in the Roman Church and their own land played a significant role in the eschatological events. For the former, Knollys identified the rising of the beast of Revelation 11—another reference to the Roman Catholic Church—as occurring sometime around AD 428. To be specific, Knollys harnessed the writings of 'the best Ecclesiastical Historians, and the later Expositors of this Book of the *Revelation*' who collectively dated the event to 'the Year of our Lord 407, 409, 410, or before 428' (Knollys 1689: 130). Choosing the latter date for that event allowed Knollys to see the end of the prophetic countdown—identified in Revelation 11:3 as the 1,260 days of the two witnesses—during his own time, specifically in 1688.

Interacting extensively with those commentators, like Brightman, who had brought their literal hermeneutic to the eschatological data of the Bible, Benjamin Keach also attempted to identify the significant events in redemptive history—both past and future. This meant that he littered his commentaries with numbers taken straight from the apocalyptic literature, using them to determine a countdown until the physical return of Christ. Thus, the 2300 days of Daniel chapter 8, the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, the 1290 and 1335 days of Daniel 12, and the 42 months and 1260 days of Revelation 11 collectively formed the Keachean framework for the end of days. He, like so

many others, including Knollys, understood the prophetical day to refer to a calendar year. He also understood the various prophecies to fit within either a solar year or a lunar year, depending on the other particulars (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 225). The resulting calculations—which he shared with his audience with a high-level of transparency—left Keach openly subservient to contemporary news. For instance, Keach dismissed the commonly-held belief that Daniel's 'abomination of desolation' (Daniel 11:31; 12:11) could be identified with Emperor Julian's attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple in AD 368 simply because nothing significant happened in AD 1658 which would have been the end of the 1290 'days' of Daniel 12. Thus, Keach returned to the proverbial drawing board as he searched for the correct application of the significant biblical dates. He finally settled on a calendar of events that centered around Syricius's term as Bishop of Rome, dating (according to Keach) from AD 383 and lasting for fifteen years. This re-setting of the eschatological countdown allowed Keach to establish the 'Deliverance to the Church and people of God' as being 'not far off' (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 219), or at some time around AD 1730.

On the second issue—the centrality of England in biblical prophecy, both Keach and Knollys identified the location of the two witnesses of Revelation as being in their own homeland. For Knollys, this conclusion proved so obvious that 'every one, who shall view and consider the Type and Antitype, will doubtless be of my opinion, and say, certainly *London* is spiritually *Jerusalem,* …where [the two witnesses] must be killed' (Knollys 1689: 140). Keach was only slightly less certain, simply identifying Great Britain as the location, rather than suggesting the events must happen in the City of London itself. To be fair, this understanding of the significance of the interpreter's homeland was not unique to the Baptist view. The French Protestant theologian, Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713), argued for the centrality of France while the famous 'German Doctor', Samuel Hartlib (c. 1600-1662), argued that Germany must certainly be the 'Street of the great City' (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 181). Regardless of the reason, this identification of locale certainly played a significant role in determining the ultimate shape of their expectations.

Whether Knollys and Keach came to these conclusions independent of contemporary headlines and applied their calendars after the fact or they fell victim to their own 'ingenious eisegesis' (Newport 2000: 29) from the start as Kenneth Newport suggests is impossible to determine with certainty. To be fair to Knollys, although some aspects of his eschatological understanding shifted during his career, his chronological methodology remained remarkably consistent from at least the 1660s. In other words, Knollys did not merely rely upon historic hindsight to aid his biblical understanding, though he did fill in his calendar with specific details ostensibly taken di-

rectly from the daily headlines. For his part, Keach claimed an independence both from other commentators and from, basing his views instead upon 'the H. Scriptures only, without the help of humane history' (Keach [*Antichrist Stormed*] 1689: 209). What can be known with certainty is that regardless of the motivation or the internal cause and effect relationship, both Knollys and Keach unguardedly mixed their readings of Scripture and their contemporary world.

Eschatological Hope

Despite the differences in their understanding of the prophetic calendar, both Keach and Knollys as well as Powell, interpreted the events of the seventeenth century—and especially those focused on the Church of Rome—as serving the church by intensifying her hope for the future kingdom. This was the 'Deliverance to the Church and people of God' Keach anticipated in his eschatological calculations, the promised '*Kingdom* of our LORD [which will be] Established with POWER and great GLORY' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 18) according to Knollys, and Powell's kingdom with 'Christ reigning on Earth, and over the World' (Powell 1651: 51). Ultimately, the three divines defined at least two different types of future hope for their congregations: the visible earthly reign of Christ and the eternal kingdom which would have no end.

The three divines, however, did not agree on all details of the visible reign of Christ—neither on the number of its days nor on the timing of Christ's appearance. For Keach, the timing of 'His second personal coming… will be at the beginning of the thousand years reign'. Prior to that appearance, Keach saw the church as being entrusted with a 'latter day Glory', a spiritual kingdom that will be enveloped by 'the universal Kingdom in this World' over which Christ and his people will reign for a millennium (Keach 1701: III, 95). For Knollys, Christ's appearance would come only after 'The *Thousand* Years of the Reign of Christ and his Saints being Expired and Ended' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 18). Ultimately, then, Knollys's understanding of the thousand-year kingdom of Revelation 20 involved a virtual and spiritual reign of Christ with and through his people with his physical, bodily return happening at the end of that time (Knollys 1674: 73). Powell, noting the controversial nature of the discussion, deftly avoided providing specifics for his view in his few publications.

The several disagreements within the specific details provided by these three representative divines did not undermine the efficacy of their ultimate goal in presenting their distinctive millenarian eschatology. Each of these ministers saw their final purpose being to point their audience to the eternal, heavenly reward—which would last beyond the thousand-year kingdom, regardless of how they understood the particulars of that doc-

trine. Keach stated this explicitly, noting that earthly rewards—even the earthly kingdom of the church reigning alongside Christ for a thousand years—provided a mere taste of the 'Glory they shall possess in Heaven for evermore' (Keach 1701: II, 66). For Powell, that eternal hope could only be found in the heavenly, or cœlestiall, kingdom and crown which Christ has prepared for his people (Powell 1651: 48). Knollys referred to this hope as the 'Everlasting Kingdom' which will far exceed mere temporal expectations (Knollys 1674: 126); it is 'the KINGDOM of our LORD Jesus [that] is not of this WORLD' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 12).

Even this focus took on different slants within each divine's framework. According to Knollys's reading of Scripture, the final destination for the people of God—and, thus, their ultimate vision for eternity—could be found in what he called 'the world that is to come', or, the new heavens and new earth promised by God. For Keach, the exact specifications of the final reward for believers was less important than their eternal nature. Still he accepted the concrete calculations of William Greenhill, who determined a near approximation for the physical location of the heavenly abode of 'the blessed Saints and Angels' (Keach 1698: 98). Various musings aside, these divines could agree that the impetus behind their considerations was simply to spur their audience on to greater holiness, to obedience to the Gospel message, or, as Vavasor Powell noted, to be 'up in believing, and be doing, for your Lord is with you', 'submit unto the Lord Jesus' (Powell 1651: 92, 65).

Radicalism?

Each of these divines provided far more details than can be considered in a single article. Despite their obvious similarities—their millennialism, their focus on righteous living, etc.—they certainly made use of their understood freedom to interpret scripture independently of each other and of other colleagues—as can be seen on even the few areas of doctrine which have been considered in detail. Within the small section of the seventeenth-century theological landscape that was both millenarian and Baptist, these three divines could be read as presenting three quite distinct views. But from the outside, these divines could easily appear to be working in close collaboration. Indeed, the historical record provides at least one place of certain agreement: these three were all charged with radicalism by the Restoration authorities. In a world filled with plots and rumors of plots, these teachings came close enough to the slippery slope of armed revolt to justify charges by the Establishment. Despite that bar for juridical action being quite low, the modern reader must admit that the language employed by Powell, Knollys, and Keach did more than merely echo the well-known radical language of the day.

Vavasor Powell charged the saints to 'lawfully fight' so that the church may not be deceived by 'a Generation of new, & upstart Courtiers that would beg the Saints for fooles' (Powell 1651: 58-59). Hanserd Knollys called the 'Kings of the Earth to hate the Whore, to make her Desolate, and to burn her with Fire' (Knollys 1679: 30), but he also called for 'the Saints in this GENERATION… not to Obey, nor to submit themselves unto the… Kings or Kingdoms, who have given their POWER and Strength unto the Beast' (Knollys 1667: The Third Part, 9). Notably, Powell and Knollys addressed these calls for radical action to the civil authorities: Powell preached his sermon directly to Parliament, and Knollys addressed the monarchy directly, even using his desire for the king's safety as a justification for his writing (Knollys 1679: 31).

In his 1689 epic-length poem, *Distressed Sion relieved*, Benjamin Keach presented a more overtly-pacifist position when he opined that

> … Non-resistance is our duty still,
> When Princes Rule by Law; nut not by Will.
> When Magistrates pursue that gracious end,
> God by advancing of them did intend;
> Then to resist them is a horrid thing,
> And God to shame will all such Rebels bring.
> (Keach [*Distressed Sion Relieved*] 1689: 31)

However, Keach did not leave his audience with that non-radical advice. In his continued discussion of those who had fought against the ungodly rule of the State, he blurred the lines of peaceful compliance and armed revolt.

> But must Superiors be submitted to,
> When they contrive to ruin and undo
> Their faithful Subjects, and o'return the State,
> And their most sacred Oaths do violate?
> Is Government ordained to destroy,
> Or to preserve the Rights that Men enjoy?
> …
> Must Servants yield, and passively consent
> Their Master from their Bones the Flesh should rent;
> Is it a crime if they won't this indure,
> But seek a better Master to procure?
> …
> To seek such was to save your selves and me,
> Which you thought Just, and hop'd would prosperous be
> And though God did Success to you deny,
> Yet you might act with all Integrity.
> (Keach [*Distressed Sion Relieved*] 1689: 31-32)

At the very least, all three of these Baptist leaders fraternized with men and women known for their radical tendencies. Not coincidentally, all three of them believed scripture to teach that armed action could be condoned—and might even be required—as the final biblically-prophesied kingdom—whatever it looked like—loomed on the horizon.

Though none of these three ever took up arms against the State, they certainly encouraged their audiences to consider the cost of discipleship to Christ in the midst of a world quickly facing its final demise. Their understanding of the eschatological future, the utter imminence of the glorious appearance of the Kingdom of Christ, and the centrality of their own homeland all but necessitated that their listeners be prepared to give up all earthly goods, to declare their radical obedience to the Kingdom of the Lord, and even to disobey earthly authorities should the need arise.

For Vavasor Powell, these views effectively signed his death warrant—though his end came at the hands of a jailor rather than those of an executioner. For Hanserd Knollys and Benjamin Keach, the possible-radical nature of their views led to direct persecution by the State with both spending time in jail and bearing the weight of official harassment from government spies and officers alike. As the days of their eschatological calendars passed without the requisite fanfare—with the last significant date being Keach's understanding of Christ's return sometime around AD 1730—their views were swiftly dismissed as nothing more than historical curiosities, although Keach is surprisingly referenced as something of an expert on apocalyptic literature as late as 1795 (*Prophetical Passages*, 1795).

Despite this view—or, more accurately, these views—being relegated to the sidelines of historical theology, the curious case of this popular, though short-lived reading of Scripture represented by these three Baptist divines provides helpful insights into the animosity between the earliest Baptists and the established authorities.

Rightly or wrongly, their ability to read scripture in a way that both affected their everyday lives and changed their understanding of world events certainly both increased their longing for the final days—causing them to 'love his appearing' (Keach and Delaune 1682: Book IV, 729)—and undergirded their desire for righteous living. To dismiss those efforts simply because of curious exegesis and sketchy hermeneutics is to run the risk of misunderstanding an entire swath of Baptist forebears who sat under the teachings of these three divines.

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