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The Church Settlement of Oliver Cromwell

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Abstract

In the first months of his Protectorate, Oliver Cromwell's council created two administrative bodies of 'Triers' and 'Ejectors' to govern England's clergy. This church settlement lasted for the remainder of the Interregnum and aroused heated controversy. The Protector repeatedly recognized it as the most important administrative achievement of his regime. Nevertheless, the settlement of 1654 has been largely neglected (or misinterpreted) by historians. This article narrates the history of the Cromwellian church settlement and examines how it operated. It establishes that the effort to secure the settlement ranked as a central political issue of the Interregnum, and it details Cromwell's close personal involvement in that effort. Finally, this article places the Cromwellian church settlement within the broader religious history of the English Revolution.

During the spring and summer of 1654, as one of the first accomplishments of his new protectoral regime, Oliver Cromwell established a church settlement to replace England's abolished episcopal and discredited Presbyterian ecclesiastical regimes. The Cromwellian church settlement had four components: free conscience for Christians other than episcopalians, Catholics or radical sectarians; maintenance of parishes and the tithe; and two important administrative bodies: a central committee of 'Triers' to examine and appoint new ministers, and local county committees of 'Ejectors' to investigate and evict 'insufficient' incumbent ministers. The Triers and Ejectors, established by ordinances in March and August 1654, were the settlement's most visible innovations. Designed by leading Independent divines within Cromwell's inner circle, they were intended to re-establish some measure of central control over the national clergy after years of chaos. As Cromwell himself repeatedly acknowledged, the church settlement of 1654 was almost certainly the most significant institutional achievement of the Interregnum regimes.¹

¹ *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. W. C. Abbott (4 vols., Cambridge MA, 1937–47) [hereafter Abbott], iv. 489, 495; see also iii. 440, and iv. 273, 495.

It is therefore surprising that historians have had little to say about the church settlement of 1654.² The characterization of Cromwell's church drawn by the great Whig historians of previous generations – for whom the English Revolution was a benchmark on the high road to liberalism, and Oliver Cromwell a precocious champion of religious toleration – has been allowed to stand. Historians like Samuel Gardiner and Winthrop Jordan viewed Cromwell's religious settlement as the antithesis of Catholic and Anglican ecclesiastical severity. They were captivated by what they saw as the relative religious toleration that Cromwell permitted sectarians, and by the birth of English religious pluralism during the Interregnum. The institutions of Cromwell's church settlement were squeezed into this interpretative corset. Gardiner described the Triers and Ejectors as 'broad and generous'. Jordan characterized them as the 'loose' institutional creations of a 'spiritual anarchist'.³ Later interpretations have largely accorded with the spirit of these assessments. The Cromwellian church has been presented as an *ad hoc* effort to restrain the excesses of religious toleration,⁴ with Cromwell himself as an easy-going anti-formalist, and his Triers as a body concerned only with soothing sectarian bickering.⁵ Historical accounts of the Cromwellian church are typically brief and tend to fret over its failures: its lack of a liturgy, canons and a creed.⁶

But this prevailing portrait of the protectoral church settlement does not accord with the most compelling revisionist accounts of the religious outlook of Oliver Cromwell and his cohort of Independents. Recently a small number of historians, of whom the most prominent is Blair Worden, have begun correcting the pervasive impression that Cromwell and his allies were early advocates of modern religious liberty and the morally neutral state. Worden has demonstrated that the leading Independents

² There are a few exceptions. W. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil War and Interregnum* (2 vols., 1900) [hereafter Shaw, *English Church*]; Ethyn W. Kirby, 'The Cromwellian Establishment', *Church History*, x (1941), 144–58.

³ S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649–1656* (4 vols., 1903) [hereafter Gardiner, *C & P*], iii, 24; W. A. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England* (4 vols., Cambridge MA, 1932–40), iii, 144–7; William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603–1660* (1969), p. 143.

⁴ 'The appointment of "Triers" and "Ejectors" was a practical attempt to curb the loose living and to control the abuses which had defied central control. It in no way mitigated Cromwell's basic views on toleration' (Pauline Gregg, *Oliver Cromwell* (1988), p. 259).

⁵ J. C. Davis, 'Cromwell's Religion', *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, ed. J. S. Morrill (1990) [hereafter Davis, 'Cromwell's Religion', and Morrill, *Cromwell*], pp. 200–8. Davis elsewhere refers to the 'mild supervisory authority of the Cromwellian Triers', see Davis, 'Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution', *Historical Journal*, xxxv (1992), 515 [hereafter Davis, 'Religion and Freedom']. See also Anthony Fletcher, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Godly Nation' in Morrill, *Cromwell*, pp. 220–1; Austin Woolrych, *England without a King, 1649–1660* (1983), p. 33.

⁶ Claire Cross, 'The Church in England, 1646–1660', *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement*, ed. G. E. Aylmer (1972) [hereafter Aylmer, *Interregnum*], pp. 104–5; Ivan Roots, *Commonwealth and Protectorate: The English Civil War and its Aftermath* (New York, 1966), pp. 176–7; John New, 'Cromwell and the Paradoxes of Puritanism', *Journal of British Studies*, v (1965), 55; Robert Paul, *The Lord Protector: Religion and Politics in the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1955), p. 332; Aylmer, *Interregnum*, p. 105.

of the mid-seventeenth century did not embrace full religious toleration, nor were they willing to accommodate significant religious pluralism. Rather, they espoused 'free conscience' within a narrowly defined theological spectrum, a spectrum that essentially accommodated the Protestant left but excluded some radical sects, all episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. Independents allowed 'hot Protestants' a degree of free conscience, but they sought to build a common edifice of doctrinal fundamentals, not a free market in belief. The religious programme of the Cromwellian Independents, Worden argues, 'becomes much clearer when we see it as a search not for the toleration with which [Cromwell] is often commended, but for union; for the unity of the godly party', and for the 'creation of a Commonwealth fit for God's eyes'.⁷ Beyond the narrowly defined arena of free conscience necessary for achieving these ends, the Cromwellian Independents could and did coerce their religious opponents, both sectarians on their left flank, and high-churchmen on their right.⁸

If the tolerationist instincts of the Independents have been anachronistically exaggerated, it remains to discover how and under what conditions the Protectorate exerted authority over the religious life of English men and women. This article presents research into the institutional history and functional nature of the Cromwellian church settlement. It rebuts the prevailing assumptions that Cromwell lacked an interest in central church administration and that his church settlement was not widely implemented. It further concludes that the Cromwellian church settlement represented the institutional culmination of an Erastian ideological impulse that had fundamentally propelled the religious programme of the Long Parliament.

When Cromwell returned from Scotland in late 1651 at the summit of his popularity among supporters of the Revolution, the long-troublesome question of church government remained unresolved. For years Presbyterianism and Independency had grappled 'like Jacob and Esau struggling in the womb',⁹ but by 1651 the hostility of the Rump Parliament had rendered the 1646 national Presbyterian settlement virtually defunct, and the disintegration of clerical authority had permitted religious radicalism to explode.¹⁰ Unable to co-opt Presbyterian opinion, the Rump had moved to crush it. An act passed in 1649 forbade ministers from

⁷ Blair Worden, 'Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate', *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Sheils (1984), pp. 207, 210; István Bejczy, 'Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lviii (1997), 367; Davis, 'Religion and Freedom', 523–6.

⁸ Avihu Zakai, 'Religious Toleration and its Enemies: the Independent Divines and the Issue of Toleration during the English Civil War', *Albion*, xxi (1989), 4–7; George Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 11–15; Carolyn Polizzotto, 'The Campaign against the Humble Proposals of 1652', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxxviii (1987), 569.

⁹ *The Life of Adam Martindale, Written by Himself*, ed. Richard Parkinson, *Chetham Society Publications*, iv (1845) [hereafter Parkinson, *Martindale*], p. 61.

¹⁰ B. Reay, 'Radicalism and Religion in the English Revolution', *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford, 1984), pp. 10–11.

interfering in matters of state. 'Cutting sermons' of that year had raised the 'wrath of the rulers against Presbyterian ministers' in London.¹¹ Monthly fast days, long a staple of revolutionary piety but now a liability because they had been so conspicuously ignored by the Presbyterians, were repealed.¹² In November Parliament ordered the removal of ministers who refused to take the Commonwealth's Engagement oath. The Toleration Act, passed on 17 September 1650, repealed the old Elizabethan act mandating church attendance. This sounded the death knell for the terminal church settlement of 1646. In March 1651, three Presbyterians were arrested for complicity in a royalist plot; in August, one of these, Christopher Love, was executed with much gory fanfare. In this way the Rump had resorted to the most brutal means to break the 'back of the clerical opposition'.¹³

Cromwell was away campaigning, but had none the less played a prominent role in the Rump's increasingly anticlerical policies. His refusal to intercede on Love's behalf effectively sealed the man's fate,¹⁴ and the Toleration Act of 1650 was encouraged by a triumphant Cromwell in letters after the battle of Dunbar.¹⁵ As early as his victory at Marston Moor in 1644, Cromwell had been characterized by Presbyterians as the mastermind of the 'Independents' great plot'. It was, however, the spectacular military exploits of 1649–51 that firmly secured Cromwell's status as the Independents' champion. The Congregationalist divine, John Cotton, corresponded with Cromwell during the Scottish campaign and celebrated him as a 'vessel' waging the 'Lord's battles'.¹⁶ His colleague, John Owen, publicly allied himself with Cromwell during the campaigns in Ireland and Scotland, accompanying him as army chaplain. Other high-profile Independent ministers, such as Sidrach Simpson, also came to view Cromwell as the patron of the Congregationalist cause during the years 1649–51.¹⁷ It was this set of Independent ministers who, under Cromwell's auspices, would eventually craft the church settlement that would prevail until the Revolution's collapse in 1660.

¹¹ Parkinson, *Martindale*, p. 87. Political sermonizing was also outlawed in Scotland in that year. See *The Chronicle of Fife, being the Diary of John Lamont of Newton from 1649 to 1672* (Edinburgh, 1810), p. 45.

¹² Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1648–1653* (Cambridge, 1974) [hereafter Worden, *Rump*], pp. 80–3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30, 243; Israel Spemont to Dr. Hall, 30 Aug. 1651, British Library Additional Manuscript [hereafter BL Add. MS] 15,858, fo. 162.

¹⁴ George Bishop to Cromwell, 20 July 1651, and Robert Hammond to Cromwell, 22 July 1651, *Original Letters and Papers of State Addressed to Oliver Cromwell . . . Found among the Political Collections of John Milton*, ed. John Nickolls (1743) [hereafter *Letters to Cromwell*], pp. 74, 75.

¹⁵ Gardiner, *C & P*, ii. 2–4; David Underdown, *Pride's Purge* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 268–9, 275; Worden, *Rump*, pp. 201, 238; Cromwell to Lenthall, 4 Sept. 1650, Abbott, ii. 325; George Bishop to Cromwell, 14 Jan. 1651, *Letters to Cromwell*, p. 49.

¹⁶ Cotton to Cromwell, 28 May 1651, *Hutchinson Papers, 1711–1780* (2 vols., New York, 1967), ii. 262–7.

¹⁷ Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, 1971), pp. 33–5; Lilburne to Cromwell, 7 Jan. 1651, and Sidrach Simpson to Cromwell, 20 Sept. 1650, *Letters to Cromwell*, pp. 22–3, 48.

Blair Worden and others have compellingly established that Cromwell and the Independent divines who closely advised him (John Owen, Philip Nye and Thomas Goodwin, among others) did not espouse complete religious toleration or radical separatism. It is more accurate to view the Cromwellians as proponents of a 'magisterial Independency', willing to accept some coercion over national religious life. It is equally important to recognize that, while they were deeply suspicious of any proposed national clerical hierarchy, the Cromwellian Independents countenanced religious authority specifically exercised by the *temporal* sovereign. The *Apologeticall Narration*, for instance, published by leading Independents in 1643 to justify their dissent from Presbyterianism, argued that Congregationalism was more consistent than Presbyterianism with the religious authority of the state.¹⁸ So too the anonymous and influential *Ancient Bounds* of 1643 argued the Independents' case for free conscience against the clergy, but also offered a vigorous 'apology' on behalf of the spiritual power of the Christian magistrate.¹⁹ Even more influential was the New England divine John Cotton's *Keyes to the Kingdom of Heaven*, which affirmed that an Independent church was 'not to refuse subjection to the civil Magistrate in the exercise of some publick spirituall administrations'.²⁰

Most of Cromwell's closest clerical advisers belonged to the 'magisterial' camp of Independency and manifested a quasi-Erastian attitude towards the state's religious power. John Owen, the most important of these advisers, affirmed that the 'magistrate's sword' was appropriately used for the 'preservation and furtherance' of true religion against radical sects, Catholics or episcopalians. He also argued that Independency was the church form that most securely confirmed the religious authority of the state.²¹ Thomas Goodwin's published sermons conflated the cause of the kingdom and the cause of the saints and called upon the government to advance godliness.²² Philip Nye, eventually a dominating presence within Cromwell's church, consistently affirmed that Independency was 'more consistent with the magistrate's supremacy' than other church forms.²³ Speaking for the 'magisterial Independents' against the radical separatist John Goodwin during the Whitehall debates of 1648, Philip Nye and Henry Ireton had vigorously insisted that the sovereign's

¹⁸ *An Apologeticall Narration, humbly submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament* (1643), pp. 17, 19, 23.

¹⁹ *The Ancient Bounds, or Liberty of Conscience Tenderly Stated . . .* (1645), pp. 2–4, 7, 10.

²⁰ John Cotton, *Keyes to the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), pp. 50–2.

²¹ John Owen, *Discourse about Toleration and the Duty of the Civil Magistrate about Religion* (1649), in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (17 vols., 1850–3) [hereafter Owen, *Works*], viii. 164–5, 174–6, 187, 189–95; *Two Questions Concerning the Power of the Supreme Magistrate about Religion and the Worship of God* (1659), in Owen, *Works*, viii. 508–10, 513.

²² Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interests of States and Kingdoms* (1646).

²³ Philip Nye, *A Case of Great and Present Use . . .* (1677) and *The Lawfulness of the Oath of Supremacy . . .* (1683), pp. 16–17, 42–3; D. Nobbs, 'Philip Nye on Church and State', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, v (1935–7).

authority comprehended spiritual as well as civil causes.²⁴ In short, the Cromwellian Independents were typified not merely by a willingness to countenance some coercion over religious practice, but by a specific deference to the religious authority of the state. The ease with which Independency protected the ecclesiastic power of the temporal authority was a major feature of Congregationalist polemic.

Oliver Cromwell himself was firmly dedicated to exactly such a quasi-Erastian Congregationalism. In the Long Parliament he had participated in the assault on Laudian clericalism and helped to defend Alexander Leighton, who had been prosecuted for disputing the divine right of bishops.²⁵ During the 1644–5 debates over the proposed Presbyterian church settlement, Cromwell's regular interventions consistently urged parliament to maintain its own ultimate authority over the church.²⁶ Cromwell's campaigns in Ireland and Scotland (against first a Catholic and then a Presbyterian revolt) only reinforced his deference to the state's religious authority. In both cases, Cromwell was convinced that the royalist rebels merely used the banner of Charles Stuart to cloak clerical sedition. Against both Catholicism and Scottish Presbyterianism, Cromwell's declarations consistently advanced his long-standing Erastianism. In Ireland he blasted the Catholic doctrine that 'secular power hath nothing to do [with] . . . spiritual conventions', and he denounced the distinction between clergy and laity.²⁷ In a series of revealing letters against the Presbyterian clergy which were composed during the siege of Edinburgh Castle, Cromwell condemned Presbyterian ministers for 'rail[ing]' against and 'debas[ing]' civil power, for 'assum[ing] the infallible chair', and for aiming to wield authority 'over civil governors'.²⁸ The triumphant crusades against Scotland and Ireland confirmed Cromwell's complete confidence in the religious competence of temporal power, and his hatred for clerical dualism. The evidence could be multiplied. As with the Independent divines who advised him, Cromwell's hostility to clerical power did not undermine his essential deference to the state's religious authority. Indeed, he often rebuked the former for undermining the latter. The church settlement of 1654 cannot be comprehended unless this tradition of 'Imperial Puritanism' is kept in the foreground.

As the Cromwellian Independents entered into power in 1651, the fear was abroad that the exploding 'multiplicity of Religions' would 'end in none at all'.²⁹ The Rump had passed morality legislation in a desperate

²⁴ *Puritanism and Liberty*, ed. A. S. P. Woodhouse (1951), pp. 153, 159–60.

²⁵ *Journal of Simon D'Ewes*, ed. Wallace Notestein (2 vols., New Haven, 1923–42) [hereafter D'Ewes, *Journal*], i. 19, 531, and ii. 40, 52.

²⁶ Abbott, i. 229–30, 287, 294; Cromwell to Speaker Lenthall, 14 Sept. 1645, in Abbott, i. 360, 374.

²⁷ Cromwell, 'Declaration . . . in Answer to Conventicle', cited in Abbott, ii. 196.

²⁸ Cromwell to the Governor of Edinburgh Castle, 9 and 14 Sept. 1650, in Abbott, ii. 335, 337–8.

²⁹ Robert Boyle to John Mallett, 23 March 1652, BL Add. MS 32093, fo. 292; see also *The Diary of the Reverend John Ward, 1648–1679*, ed. Charles Severn (1839) [hereafter Severn, *Ward Diary*], p. 198.

bid to contain the perceived chaos,³⁰ but a church settlement was widely demanded. As power shifted in the direction of the Independents, so too did the burden of rebuilding England's collapsing church. As early as 1650 appeals began to flood Cromwell calling for the settlement 'of that part of religion which is outward, and so in the magistrate's power'. At the beginning of 1652 these appeals became more organized and insistent.³¹ Sometime in the early 1650s, figures close to Cromwell solicited a quasi-Erastian defence of the state's ecclesiastical power from the Massachusetts Independent, Thomas Cobbett.³² The insufficiency of the ministry and the general perception of rampant moral licentiousness (church reform and moral reform went hand in glove among the godly) were exercising Cromwell's core supporters.³³ Finally, in February 1652 a cohort of Independent ministers led by John Owen presented a church settlement plan to the Rump Parliament.³⁴

Later published as *The Humble Proposals*, the Independents' church government scheme was the work of John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, and other leading Independent ministers close to Cromwell.³⁵ The *Proposals* revealingly bypassed any consideration of church discipline and focused entirely on the creation of a suitable means by which to replenish and control the clergy. The aim was to secure a general process for approving those called to preach the Gospel. Local committees, composed of clergy and laymen, were envisioned for each county. These committees would judge candidates who had secured the references of six Christians, and would ensure the sufficiency of future appointments. To purge the existing ministry of preachers 'ignorant, scandalous', or 'dis-affected to the Government', the *Proposals* called for a single board of godly men, which would circulate throughout the country ejecting insufficient ministers from their livings. The *Humble Proposals* controversially maintained the existing parish and tithe system. As to religious toleration, the *Proposals* affirmed the status quo established by the 1650 repeal of the Elizabethan church attendance act.³⁶ All persons were required to attend a recognized church, except those who abstained out of 'scruple of conscience'. These latter were required to register their alternative place of worship with the magistrate.

³⁰ *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum 1641–1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (3 vols., 1911), ii, 245, 382–411.

³¹ William Hickman to Oliver Cromwell, 16 Nov. 1650; letter from several churches to Cromwell, 1 Feb. 1650; letter from the ministers at Newcastle to Cromwell, *Letters to Cromwell*, pp. 32, 80–1.

³² Thomas Cobbett, *Civil Magistrate's Power in Religion Modestly Debated* (1653), epistle dedicatory.

³³ On the morality campaign of the 'hot Protestants', see D. Hirst, 'The Failure of Godly Rule in the English Republic', *Past and Present*, cxxxii (1991) [hereafter Hirst, 'Godly Rule'], 49–61.

³⁴ The ministers attached their scheme to a petition calling for the suppression of the Socinian Racovian Catechism: *Journal of the House of Commons* [hereafter *JC*], viii, 86.

³⁵ The proposals were first published in late March as *The Humble Proposals of Mr. Owen. Mr. Tho. Goodwin, Mr. Nye, and Mr. Sympton*. . . . They reappeared in Dec. as *The Proposals for the Furtherance and Propagation of the Gospel in this Nation*. . . . The chief difference is that the latter publication contained a list of 'fundamentals of the faith', on which see below [hereafter *Humble Proposals*].

³⁶ *Humble Proposals*, pp. 1–3, 4.

What was new in the *Humble Proposals* was the system of ecclesiastical authority that they envisioned: the local commissioners for the approval of ministerial candidates, and the central commissioners for the ejection of scandalous incumbents. These proposals, somewhat modified, would eventually serve as the blueprint for Cromwell's church; to the extent that they were innovative, they dealt not with theology or church discipline but with the composition of the ministry.

Owen's proposals infuriated radical sectarians and suffered a tumultuous parliamentary career. The increasingly conservative Rump, favourably inclined, established a Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel and ordered it to debate the *Proposals*. Cromwell himself sat on this Committee, which was widely understood to be dominated by his Independent cohort.³⁷ Progress lagged throughout the summer, but in October a public campaign on behalf of the *Proposals* was launched. During that month the Venetian Ambassador reported that the 'particular confusion' in religion 'preoccupied the government and especially Cromwell'.³⁸ The proceedings of the Rump Committee were revived, and at Cromwell's suggestion leading ministers were invited to offer their advice.³⁹ The second edition of the *Humble Proposals*, published in December, included a slate of sixteen theological 'fundamentals', which affirmed Trinitarianism, the nature of Christ's divinity and Protestant soteriology.⁴⁰ In January 1653 reports circulated that the 'magistrate's power in matters of religion' was being hotly disputed in the Committee.⁴¹ This issue – the spiritual competence of the temporal state – would continually animate public debates over the *Proposals*.

Closely advised by the Independent divines, the Rump Committee assented to the *Humble Proposals* in early 1653. The *Proposals* were debated by parliament itself in February. The Rump began by assenting to the controversial proposition that 'the magistrate hath powers in matters of religion for the propagation of the Gospel.' In March and April several of the *Proposals* were passed.⁴² It appeared that the Rump would approve the *Proposals* in the face of sectarian opposition, but larger events intervened. Urging on behalf of the army that the Rump dissolve itself, but fearing precipitous elections that might trigger a political Thermidor, Cromwell forcibly dissolved parliament on 20 April.

The Independents' church settlement scheme thus came to grief with the Rump, but it remained a priority for Cromwell and his allies, who were now even more secure in their political dominance. In July, Cromwell convened the so-called Barebones Assembly, a hand-picked parliament

³⁷ Richard Baxter to John Dury, 7 May 1652, Dr. William's Library, Baxter Letters [hereafter Baxter Letters], vi. fo. 90.

³⁸ *Calendar of State Papers Venetian* [hereafter *CSPV*], xxviii. 297.

³⁹ John Dury to Richard Baxter, 20 Oct. 1652, Baxter Letters, vi. fo. 83; *CJ*, vii. 258.

⁴⁰ *Humble Proposals*, pp. 9–16.

⁴¹ Dury to Richard Baxter, 6 Jan. 1653, Baxter Letters, vi. fo. 77.

⁴² *CJ*, vii. 258–64, 274.

vetted by the army. The Barebones Assembly opened not with a sermon but with a spiritual exhortation from Cromwell himself. He called on the Assembly to aid him in building the godly society promised by the Revolution; a critical feature of this effort was the settlement of the church. Cromwell urged the members to 'encourage the Ministry', but he condemned any ministry 'deriving itself from the Papacy, and pretending to that which is so much insisted on, "succession"'.⁴³

Cromwell's call for a church settlement was clearly intended to revive the *Humble Proposals*, and in December a committee of the Assembly responded by endorsing them. But Cromwell had again underestimated the divisive force of sectarian opinion. Sectarian members secured a narrow defeat for the plan, which they considered overly coercive.⁴⁴ Some contemporaries blamed the demise of the *Proposals* on sectarians who 'professed fully against the magistrate's power in any matters of religion'.⁴⁵ This issue – the extent to which the *Proposals* affirmed a religious role for the state – had consistently hindered the Independents' scheme. Indeed, it was specifically the failure of the *Humble Proposals* that finally motivated despairing moderates within the Assembly to surrender power to Cromwell. Although some reported that Cromwell himself had planned the dissolution of the Assembly because of sectarian opposition to the *Proposals*, his role in encouraging the moderates' surrender of power is unclear.⁴⁶

In the end, the church settlement would be achieved only by the dictatorial authority of Oliver Cromwell himself. Historians disagree on the extent of Cromwell's individual political dominance during the Interregnum, but on the crucial issue of the Independent church settlement at least, he was continually involved at critical junctures and his personal authority proved decisive.⁴⁷ The Barebones Assembly surrendered power on 12 December 1653, and four days later, with decisive alacrity, Cromwell was installed as Lord Protector. The Instrument of Government, which established Cromwell's supremacy, called for measures to establish 'able and painful teachers, for instructing the people, and for discovery and confutation of error, heresy and whatever is contrary to sound doctrine'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Oliver Cromwell, speech of 4 July 1653, cited in Abbott, iii. 62–4.

⁴⁴ Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (1982), pp. 335–9.

⁴⁵ *An Answer to a Paper Entitled a True Narrative of the Cause and Manner of the Dissolution of the Late Parliament . . .* (1653), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Report of the Venetian Ambassador, 25 Dec. 1653, *CSPV*, xxix. 160.

⁴⁷ For the view that Cromwell did not attain dictatorial authority, see Austin Woolrych, 'The Cromwellian Protectorate: A Military Dictatorship?', *History*, lxxv (1990), 207–31, and Peter Gaunt, '"The Single Person's Confidants and Dependants"? Oliver Cromwell and his Protestant Councillors', *HJ*, xxxii (1989), 537–60. Woolrych strictly examines the question of army dominance, a critical but perhaps narrow test of Cromwell's dictatorial authority (see p. 219 for the Ejectors specifically). Gaunt examines the extent to which the Council checked Cromwell's personal power (he emphasizes the inadequacy of the protectoral parliaments in this regard). Barry Coward views Cromwell's personal dictatorial power as peaking only after the failure of his first protectoral parliament. See Barry Coward, *Oliver Cromwell* (1991), pp. 117–18.

⁴⁸ *The Stuart Constitution*, ed. J. P. Kenyon (Cambridge, 1969), p. 347.

The officers who drafted the Instrument were loyal servants of Cromwell,⁴⁹ and so he had almost certainly approved this apparent gesture towards the *Humble Proposals*. Indeed, Cromwell's future secretary John Thurloe reported that taking 'care of the ministry, providing equally for its reformation as for its establishment', was an immediate priority.⁵⁰ The 'Admirable Protector' reported that one contemporary in 1654, seemingly 'wholly taken upon those great thoughts of settling the temporall affairs' of the Commonwealth, 'had still strong reflexions upon the spirituall'.⁵¹

As he had since 1652, Cromwell took the lead in advancing the *Humble Proposals*. Throughout February and March he personally consulted in his quarters with Owen, Goodwin, Nye and other leading Independents about 'purging the ministry'.⁵² A committee of the Council of State was soon formed to address the matter, and it too was advised by the chief Independents.⁵³ Two ordinances emerged from these consultations. The first, issued on 20 March, established a central committee of Triers for the 'trial of public preachers and lecturers'. The second, issued on 28 August, established county committees 'for the ejecting of scandalous ministers'.

The chief innovation made by these ordinances of 1654 was their inversion of the design of Owen's original *Humble Proposals*. Rather than a central body of Ejectors, the March ordinance established a central body of thirty-eight Triers, appointed by the Protector and based in London. All candidates for lectureships or tithe-supported 'benefices to preach' were to appear before these Triers, as was any established minister seeking a parliamentary augmentation to his living.⁵⁴ The Triers were to judge the godliness and sufficiency of each nominee based on an oral examination and three written testimonials. The Triers Ordinance explicitly protected the rights of private patrons, but after six months, unfilled livings reverted to the patronage of the Protector. A majority of the original thirty-eight Triers named in the ordinance were ministers (predominantly Independents), but the Triers' Commission was by no means a strictly clerical body. The ordinance specifically provided for a mixed Committee, and nine prominent laymen numbered among the original Triers.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Peter Gaunt, 'Drafting the Instrument of Government, 1653–1654, a Reappraisal', *Parliamentary History*, viii (1989), 28–9.

⁵⁰ John Thurloe to Bulstrode Whitelocke, 21 Jan. 1654, Longleat Manuscript XV, fos. 27^{r-v}.

⁵¹ Letter by George Green dated 23 Sept. 1654, Oxford Clarendon Manuscript 49, fo. 56.

⁵² Dury to Baxter, 22 Feb. 1654, Baxter Letters, v. fo. 199; 14 March 1654, *The Diary of Archibald Johnston of Wariston, 1650–1660*, ed. Jamer D. Ogilvie (3 vols.; Edinburgh, 1919–40), i. 214.

⁵³ The Council met with Nye, Goodwin and 'other ministers' (*Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, vii. 1, vii. 27, 30, 30–41, 76, 146, 190, 211–2, 214, 220, 308, 337).

⁵⁴ *An Ordinance Appointing Commissions for Approbation of Publick Preachers* (1654) [hereafter *Triers Ordinance*], pp. 134–5.

⁵⁵ Including Francis Rous, former speaker of the Nominated Assembly; John Sadler, master of Madgalene College, Cambridge; the regicide and future Major-General William Goffe (*Triers Ordinance*, pp. 130–2, 134–5).

The Triers chiefly investigated new nominees, but the Ejectors' Ordinance effectively brought the entire ministry under Cromwell's sway. Ejectors were appointed to countywide committees that were intended to root out 'scandalous and insufficient ministers and schoolmasters'. All tithe-supported incumbents were subject to their jurisdiction, and ministers could be ejected for: opinions contrary to the 1650 Blasphemy Act; opinions 'derogatory to God, and destructive to humane society'; moral offences; use of the Prayer Book; Roman Catholicism; and, crucially, 'writing, preaching, or otherwise publishing any disaffection to the present Government'.⁵⁶ While local ministers were named to assist the Committees, the Ejectors themselves were entirely laymen. The lay character of the Ejectors was thus even more pronounced than that of the Triers.

With these two Ordinances Cromwell at last settled the long-vexing church government question. Sectarian opinion, fearful of the settlement's reliance on state power, had obstructed the Independents' plan for nearly two years. Cromwell's assumption of protectoral authority allowed him to sweep this opposition aside. His opening speech to the first protectoral parliament in September somewhat defensively justified the Erastian ecclesiology implicit in his new church settlement,⁵⁷ but the parliament of 1654, far from disliking the system, sought to fortify it. The Independent MP, Arthur Hazelrigg, moved at once for a suppression of the sects,⁵⁸ and the parliament formed a committee to devise a slate of essential theological 'fundamentals'.⁵⁹ The *Humble Proposals* of December 1652 had included such a list of fundamentals, and perhaps John Owen was encouraging this renewed effort to promulgate them. Fourteen articles were composed by October. The committee tried to devise a Confession of Faith in the following month.⁶⁰ A subcommittee of ten was then appointed to confer with leading ministers and with the Protector himself, whose 'knowledge and experience' in 'matters of religion' was judged essential.⁶¹ The committee met throughout November and December, and a draft Confession of Faith was circulated widely.⁶² But when parliament tried to restrict the definition of blasphemy to its own prerogative, Cromwell angrily dissolved the body.⁶³ The Cromwellian church thus never

⁵⁶ *Ordinance for the Ejecting of Scandalous, Ignorant, and Insufficient Ministers and Schoolmasters* (1654) [hereafter *Ejectors Ordinance*], p. 525.

⁵⁷ Abbott, iii. 437, 440.

⁵⁸ Bordeaux to Brienne, 17 Sept. 1654, cited in Gardiner, *C & P*, iii. 182.

⁵⁹ *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq., Member in the Parliaments of Oliver and Richard Cromwell, from 1656 to 1659* . . . , ed. Towill Rutt (4 vols., 1828), i. xlvii.

⁶⁰ John Thurloe to John Pell, 24 Oct. and 10 Nov. 1654, in *The Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell . . . Illustrated in a Series of Letters* . . . , ed. Robert Vaughan (2 vols., 1839) [hereafter *Protectorate Letters*], i. 70, 77.

⁶¹ Thomas Grove to Richard Baxter, Baxter Letters, iii. fo. 169; Thurloe to Pell, 10 Nov. 1654, *Protectorate Letters*, i. 78.

⁶² John Humfrey to Richard Baxter, 7 Dec. 1654, Baxter Letters, v. fo. 126; Thurloe to Pell, 18 Dec. 1654, and Pell to Thurloe, 30 Dec. 1654, in *Protectorate Letters*, i. 101, 103.

⁶³ Thurloe to Pell, 24 Nov. 1654, *Protectorate Letters*, i. 84; Gardiner, *C & P*, iii. 249–54.

promulgated a Confession of Faith; it remained strictly a system for the control of the clergy.

It is clear that historians have not accorded the Cromwellian church settlement the prominence it deserves in the political history of the Interregnum. The painstaking process of its implementation ranked as one of the most hotly contested political matters of the years 1652 to 1654. Debating the settlement consumed much of the Rump's final year. It was the shoal upon which the Barebones Assembly foundered. It ranked as one of the Protectorate's immediate priorities. The effort to perfect it dominated the first protectoral parliament. Throughout, Cromwell's personal interest in securing the church settlement proved relentless. The claim that Cromwell lacked 'an interest in a church establishment alternative to the abortive Presbyterianism' can thus be decisively dismissed.⁶⁴

The assertion, or implication, that the Cromwellian church settlement was institutionally insignificant and not widely established can also be challenged. In truth, the church settlement of 1654 was implemented pervasively, and it probably ranks as the greatest administrative achievement of Oliver Cromwell's centralizing regimes. The Triers Committee, in its five full years of existence, passed judgement on well over 3,500 ministerial nominees.⁶⁵ It proves more challenging to gauge the implementation of the Ejectors Ordinance, as no central records were kept, but scattered evidence testifies to their wide institution.⁶⁶ The correspondence of the Major-Generals (installed as Cromwell's local viceroys in 1655) evidences active Ejector committees in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire,⁶⁷ Cheshire, Lancashire⁶⁸ and Strafford.⁶⁹ Indeed, the vigorous use of the Ejectors as part of the campaign to reform manners and cull political disaffection from the clergy was an explicit part of

⁶⁴ Davis, 'Cromwell's Religion', p. 202.

⁶⁵ The Committee register recorded only successful nominees, so this figure is certainly too low. The number of candidates yearly breaks down as follows: 1654, 766 nominees; 1655, 603 nominees; 1656, 698 nominees; 1657, 656 nominees; 1658, 703 nominees. 'Records of the Church of England during the Commonwealth Period', Lambeth Palace Library (World Microform Publications: 1978, 36 reels). The registers of approved ministers are on reels 6 and 7. There appear to be eighteen missing entries in the registry for 1658. The statistics here quoted run from March to March, according to the old calendar.

⁶⁶ Particularly after the institution of the Major-Generals. On 26 April 1655, the Council issued a letter to several counties where the Ordinance had not yet been implemented. Eleven counties were named. This can perhaps be taken as indirect evidence of the successful implementation of the Ordinance in the remaining majority of counties. In late 1655 the Council added nominees to several Committees. In many cases, only a few (or one) new name was offered, indirectly indicating that the Committee was active. *CSPD*, viii. 144 and ix. 71.

⁶⁷ Major-General Whalley to Thurloe, 17 Nov. 1655, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Thomas Birch (1842) [hereafter *Thurloe Papers*], iv. 211. Robert Beake recorded six meetings of the Warwickshire Committee between Nov. 1655 and Jan. 1656. *Diary of Robert Beake, Mayor of Coventry, 1655–1656* (Dugdale Society Publications, 1961), xxi. 114, 118, 123, 125; James Berry and Stephen Lee, *A Cromwellian Major General: The Career of Colonel James Berry*. . . (Oxford, 1938), pp. 109–10.

⁶⁸ Major-General Worsley to John Thurloe, 17 Nov. 1655, *Thurloe Papers*, iv. 267; *CSPD*, xiii. 321.

⁶⁹ Worsley reported 'articles against a great many ministers and schoolmasters'. Worsley to Thurloe, 8 and 21 Dec. 1655, *Thurloe Papers*, iv. 330, and iv. 133.

the Major-Generals' mandate.⁷⁰ Cromwell's Council corresponded with the Norfolk Ejectors Committee in 1655–7, with Herefordshire, Surrey and Worcester in 1656, with Dorset and Devonshire in 1658, and with Somerset in 1659.⁷¹ Petitions were received against the Ejectors of the four northern counties (Cumberland, Northumberland, Westmorland and Durham) in 1656; petitions were also received from Yorkshire, Northampton and Hampshire.⁷² Finally, there is literary evidence. Josselin's diary records the wide activity of the Essex Ejectors in 1656.⁷³ The Cambridgeshire Ejectors stirred controversy by proceeding against the famous Arabic scholar, Edward Pocock, in early 1655.⁷⁴ Published tracts critical of the Ejectors establish their activity in Berkshire in 1654,⁷⁵ Wiltshire⁷⁶ and Lincolnshire in 1656,⁷⁷ and Middlesex in 1657.⁷⁸ In 1655 it was reported that the Ejectors were 'very busy in many places in [putting] such men out of Church livings as are scandalous in any respect'.⁷⁹ It can therefore be established that Ejector Committees were at some point active in nearly two-thirds of the English counties between 1654 and 1659.

The establishment of the Cromwellian church owed everything to the minute direction of the Protector and his councillors, who formed a virtual third arm of the settlement. The Council directed detailed instructions to both the Triers and Ejectors,⁸⁰ accepted petitions against both bodies, and on occasion acted as a court of final appeal.⁸¹ (Neither appeals to the Act of Oblivion nor writs of *quare impedit* against the proceedings of the Ejectors and Triers were permitted.)⁸² By direction of the Protector, the Triers could approve previously sequestered ministers only with the special approval of the Council, and this placed thousands of

⁷⁰ Christopher Durston, *Cromwell's Major Generals* (Manchester, 2001) [hereafter Durston, *Major Generals*], pp. 158–66. Durston provides evidence of a wide interest in employing the Ejectors among the Major-Generals. His suggestion, however (p. 165), that the Council was less enthused on this score is conjectural and unconvincing.

⁷¹ *CSPD*, viii. 139, ix. 394, x. 210, 245, xi. 365, xii. 46, 83, 87, 196, 253.

⁷² *CSPD*, ix. 91, xii. 166, x. 232, xi. 49, 60.

⁷³ *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (Oxford, 1976), pp. 372–3.

⁷⁴ Twell, *Life of Dr. Edward Pocock, the Celebrated Orientalist* (1816) [hereafter Twell, *Pocock*].

⁷⁵ John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* ... (1655); Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum* (1655) [hereafter Fowler, *Daemonium*]; *CSPD*, xi. 150, 230.

⁷⁶ Walter Bushnell, *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Commissions Appointed by Oliver Cromwell for Ejecting the Scandalous and Ignorant Ministers* ... (1660), pp. 1, 10, 67, 211; *CSPD*, ix. 95.

⁷⁷ Thomas Grantham, *Complaint to the Lord Protector Concerning the Unjust and Illegal Ejecting of Miserable Ministers* (1656).

⁷⁸ Zachery Crofton, *Malice against Ministry Manifested* ... (1657) [hereafter Crofton, *Malice Manifested*].

⁷⁹ William Dugdale to Richard Leveson, 22 Sept. 1655, *HMC Fifth Report: Sutherland* (1876), p. 176.

⁸⁰ *CSPD*, vii. 207. For directions to local Ejectors, Public Record Office, State Papers [hereafter P.R.O., S.P.] 18/123/8.1 and P.R.O., S.P. 25/78/666–7, 881. See also the case of Edward Pocock: BL Lansdowne MS 987, fo. 97.

⁸¹ *CSPD*, vii. 73, and vii. 399.

⁸² *Acts and Ordinances*, ii. 1025; *CSPD*, viii. 212, 224.

royalist clergy under Cromwell's thumb.⁸³ On at least a few occasions, Cromwell personally examined controversial nominees.⁸⁴

Cromwell's routine involvement in the operations of his church owed much to his close personal interest in church patronage. Cromwell was already heir to the old royal patronage and, as Chancellor of Oxford, he controlled many university livings. The Triers' Ordinance granted him all livings not filled within six months of their vacancy. The centralization of church patronage under Cromwell was enormous; he made approximately 40 per cent of all the presentations on which the Triers deliberated.⁸⁵

Cromwell's immense church patronage helps explain his support for the tithe throughout the 1650s. The maintenance of the tithe was essential to the efficacy of the Triers in particular.⁸⁶ In the absence of a new means of state support for the clergy, Cromwell refused to endorse the tithe's abolition. As its opponents never failed to observe, the tithe maintained a 'hireling ministry', but this was no objection in the eyes of the regime. Shortly after the institution of the Triers, an anonymous Council memo argued that tithes and first fruits were 'the only badges of the ministers' subordination to the Supreme civil power, and where they hath cast off this tribute, the civill Supreme magistrate hath bin Subordinate to the power Ecclesiastical'. The memo directly linked the effective collection of tithes with the establishment of the Triers.⁸⁷ Such arguments apparently swayed Cromwell, who later in 1654 ordered his legal adviser, the staunch Erastian, William Sheppard, to publish a guide on the law of tithe.⁸⁸ Indeed, the financial control exerted by the state over the English clergy may well have peaked during the Interregnum. Traditional sources of clerical income were either abolished or severely diminished, and the stipend augmentations provided by the Interregnum regimes as compensation were entirely contingent on case-by-case state approval.⁸⁹ Trustees for the Maintenance of the Ministry were created in September 1654, operating under the direction of the Council. Indeed,

⁸³ *Acts and Ordinances*, ii. 1025. For cases effected by the order, see *CSPD*, xii. 83, and xi. 268.

⁸⁴ *The Clark Papers*, ed. C. H. Firth (4 vols., Camden Society Publications, 1891–1901), iii. 50, 53; Abbott, iii. 368.

⁸⁵ This estimate is based on three randomly selected sets of 100 presentations. Between 4 July 1654 and 24 Aug. 1654 Cromwell made 51% of all nominations; between 1 Feb. 1656 and 2 April 1656 he made 38%; between 25 March 1657 and 2 April 1658 he made 44%. See pp. 45–151 in vol. 3, pp. 504–604 in vol. 4, and pp. 38–71 in vol. 6 of the Registers of Admissions (reels 6 and 7 in the Commonwealth Church Records). Cromwell's control over appointments varied by region. It was considerably lower in Essex, a known Puritan hotbed, where Cromwell made 47 of 151 presentations (Harold Smith, 'Admissions to the Essex Livings by the Triers', *Essex Archeological Society Transactions*, xx (1930–3), 199–210).

⁸⁶ According to one account, Francis Rous, former speaker of the Nominated Assembly and a prominent member of the Triers, agitated strongly in Council for the maintenance of the tithe, and influenced Cromwell in this direction. See Severn, *Ward Diary*, p. 121.

⁸⁷ 'Arguments for the Continuing Payments of First Fruits and Tenth's' (BL Add. MS 32,093, fo. 387).

⁸⁸ William Sheppard, *The Parson's Guide, or the Law of Tithes* (1654); Nancy L. Matthews, *William Sheppard, Cromwell's Law Reformer* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 16, 75, 96–106.

⁸⁹ *Acts and Ordinances*, ii. 142–48, 369, 1000.

many hundreds of augmentations were doled out by direct order of the Protector.⁹⁰ The Protector's power over augmentations became a means by which he rewarded ministers congenial to him for theological or political reasons.⁹¹ Cromwell's maintenance of tithes, infuriating to English sectarians, was an intrinsic feature of his church settlement and helped him ensure the political subordination of the clergy.

The mandates of the Triers and Ejectors were several. Both bodies sought to eradicate scandalous behaviour from the ministry, and although charges of moral dissipation and of political disloyalty went hand in hand with suspicious regularity in Interregnum England, suppressing vice was a genuine aim of the settlement. In this regard the Ejectors in particular were a part of a sweeping morality campaign launched by the Interregnum regimes, a campaign which peaked with the institution of the Major-Generals in 1655.⁹² Both the Triers and Ejectors also judged the spiritual qualifications of ministerial nominees. Blasphemy, atheism, 'popery', opinions forbidden by the 1643 Oath of Abjuration, and use of the Prayer Book all triggered ejection.⁹³ Critics complained bitterly about such delving into theological matters.⁹⁴ The Triers had a particular reputation for repressing Arminian opinion.⁹⁵ Cromwell was generally dedicated to free conscience, but private opinion and public pronouncement were two separate arenas, and the settlement of 1654 subjected public theology to significant control.

In an era when religious allegiance often trumped political allegiance, and for a regime detested by Presbyterians, episcopalians and sectarians alike, no function of the church settlement was as essential as its repression of political disaffection within the ministry. Both Ordinances of 1654 provided for the removal of clergy 'disaffected to the present government', and Cromwell himself repeatedly and unabashedly affirmed this mandate. A protectoral declaration of March 1654 rebuked those who used

⁹⁰ 'Augmentations Approved or Ordered by the Protector and Council, 1653–1659', on reel 18 of the Commonwealth Church Records.

⁹¹ See the case of John Suffolk: *CSPD*, vii. 280.

⁹² This appears to have been the context for Richard Baxter's qualified praise of the Ejectors in his Restoration memoir. See Richard Baxter, *Relinquae Baxterianae* (1696) [hereafter Baxter, *Relinquae*], p. 72. Baxter's remark has often been quoted as a means of demonstrating the supposedly moderate nature of Cromwell's church, but its retrospective nature should be borne in mind. Interregnum rumours reported that Baxter 'dishonor[ed]' the Triers by 'saying that some of them [were] soldiers' (Richard Baxter to Thomas Willes, 17 Dec. 1657, Baxter Letters, i. fo. 237); on the campaign to reform manners, see Christopher Durston, '“Settling the Hearts and Quieting the Minds of All Good People”: The Major-Generals and the Puritan Minorities of Interregnum England', *History*, lxxxv (2000), 260–2; Durston, *Major Generals*, ch. 8; Hirst, 'Godly Rule', 49–61.

⁹³ *Ejectors Ordinance*, pp. 612–14. Bushnell and Pocock were ejected for use of the Prayer Book: Walter Bushnell, *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Commissions appointed by Oliver Cromwell for Ejecting Scandalous and Ignorant Ministers* (1680) [hereafter Bushnell, *Narrative*], pp. 3, 25; Twell, *Pocock*, p. 152.

⁹⁴ John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* . . . (1655), pp. 3, 10; Zachary Crofton, *Malice Manifested* (1657), p. 15.

⁹⁵ John Sadler, *Inquisitio Angliana* . . . (1654), p. 14; Lawrence Womack, *The Examination of Tilneus before the Triers* . . . (1657); PRO, SP 18/127/1.2; Baxter, *Relinquae*, p. 72.

religion to 'contend against Magistracy'.⁹⁶ Cromwell remained mindful of the potentially subversive nature of wrong-headed ecclesiological belief. Licentious tolerationist sentiment and the political challenge posed by *jure divino* church forms offended him equally. Cromwell declared himself 'against all liberty of conscience repugnant' to the stability of the state.⁹⁷ In the wake of an internecine religious war, this was a potentially broad qualifier to Cromwell's vaunted religious toleration.

George Bate, Cromwell's personal physician, recalled that the Triers interrogated candidates 'as much about civil affairs' as about religion, and sought to ascertain 'whether they were favorably disposed toward the political settlement'.⁹⁸ Local studies confirm that the Ejectors were consistently controlled by politically loyal cadres.⁹⁹ Clergy were ejected for expressing 'disaffection to the present government', for associating with known royalists, for disregarding official days of Thanksgiving or for prophesying the downfall of the government.¹⁰⁰ In conquered Scotland, ministers who publicly prayed for Charles Stuart were thrown into prison, and those who had taken the engagement against the Commonwealth were forbidden Communion.¹⁰¹

Such an inextricable entanglement of the political and the religious was evidenced in a surviving register of church livings that was supposedly used by the Ejectors.¹⁰² The register contained a brief description of ministerial incumbents in sixteen counties. Some of the characterizations dealt strictly with religious matters, noting 'godly ministers', 'painful preachers', the 'zealous', 'able' and 'orthodox'. Just as commonly, however, ministers were evaluated for their political proclivities. Jacob Walton of Lincolnshire, for instance, was noted for failing to observe Parliamentary Fast days and for 'speaking against the Engagement'. Robert Yates of Warrington was a 'man of good life' but submitted 'not to the present government', and Richard Archer of Dorset was singled out for having served Prince Rupert. Some flavour of the easy mixture of charges of heterodoxy, scandal and political unreliability can be savoured in the register's description of Thomas Borking of Dorset as 'formerly in army against the Parliament and expected scandalous'.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Abbott, iii. 226–8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

⁹⁸ George Bate, *Elenchus Motuum Nuperorum in Anglia, simul ac Juris Regii et Parlamentarii Brevis Enarration* (1663), p. 295.

⁹⁹ Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society, and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620–1660* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 297; J. S. Morrill, *Cheshire, 1630–1660* (Oxford, 1974) [hereafter Morrill, *Cheshire*]; Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex, 1600–1660* (1975), pp. 106–7.

¹⁰⁰ Bushnell, *Narrative*, p. 3; Twell, *Pocock*, p. 152; Crofton, *Malice Manifested*, pp. 2–6; Fowler, *Daemonium*, p. 104.

¹⁰¹ *The Chronicle of Fife, being the Diary of John Lamont of Newton from 1649 to 1672* (Edinburgh, 1810), pp. 45, 47, 51, 69, 72, 101.

¹⁰² BL Lansdowne MS 459. A note on the register indicates that it was for the use of the Ejectors in 1654. It may have been compiled earlier, but it seems likely that the Cromwellian church made use of it.

¹⁰³ Ibid., fos., 10, 12, 44–5; see the case of John Hamilton, PRO, SP 8/123/8.1–8.3.

To distinguish between political right and religious right did not suggest itself to Cromwell and the Magisterial Independents who designed his church settlement. The outlawing of episcopalianism was, above all, the repression of a seditious political faction, and the political motivation underlying much Interregnum religious legislation was lost on few. 'The loyal clergy', reported one episcopal supporter in 1655, 'cannot yet obtain leave for the exercise of their function; nothing but relinquishing the royal family and acknowledging this usurpation lawful can purchase it, which they account too hard a bargain'.¹⁰⁴ The church settlement of 1654 at once sought to secure reform and to crush political disaffection within the ministry; it made no distinction between political and religious ends. 'Thus all things,' observed one contemporary in 1654, 'whether relating to temporal or eternall concernment, conspire together (as acted by one common spirit) to confirm this establishment.'¹⁰⁵

Critics of Cromwell's church, both radical sectarians and conservative clericalists, certainly understood the settlement as an Erastian innovation, an egregious intrusion of state power into the spiritual sphere. Herbert Thorndike, former prebend of Lincoln and an Anglo-Catholic associate of leading Laudian churchmen, condemned the Cromwellian church for obliterating 'all difference between Clergy and people', and for serving the 'interest of [the] Government' rather than 'the interest of Faith'. Against this Thorndike reasserted ecclesiological dualism and the traditional prerogatives of the clerical estate.¹⁰⁶ Presbyterians were equally concerned. Robert Baillie condemned the settlement as the ungodly product of Cromwell's 'Erastian caesaro-papism' and feared that an 'Erastian committee from the English' would be erected in Scotland. When the Presbyterian Archibald Johnston made similar objections to Cromwell's face, the Protector rebuked him by insisting on the church's complete subservience to the state.¹⁰⁷

For their part, sectarians offered a dovetailing critique from the left. Roger Williams defended a 'two state' or 'two sword' model of spiritual and temporal authority, and condemned Cromwell's ecclesiastical structures as 'state-worships' and 'commonwealth religions'.¹⁰⁸ A series of tracts by the separatist John Goodwin presented the Cromwellian church as a form of 'Mahometanism' and demanded whether there was 'any whit more ground for the Civil Magistrate to act out of his sphere . . . then there is for the Church Magistrate, or Ecclesiastical Elder, to act out of his . . . ?' The most eminent critic of Cromwell's church, John Milton,

¹⁰⁴ *A Collection of Original Letters and Papers Concerning the Affairs of England, 1641–1660, found among the Duke of Ormonde's Papers*, ed. Thomas Carte (2 vols., 1739), ii. 94.

¹⁰⁵ Letter by George Green, dated 23 Sept. 1654: Clarendon MS 49, fo. 56.

¹⁰⁶ Herbert Thorndike, *A Letter Concerning the State of Religion Amongst Us* (1656), pp. 1–4, 6, 23–4.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Baillie to William Spang, 19 and 20 July 1654, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1841–2) [hereafter, *Letters of Baillie*], ii. 129, 197–8; Abbott, iv. 632.

¹⁰⁸ Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody*. . . (1652), epistle, pp. 7, 70–1, 138, 149.

famously blasted the settlement for ‘threat’ning to bind out souls with *secular chains*’ (emphasis added). His *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* characterized the Interregnum church as a ‘civil papacie’ informed by ‘Erastus and state-tyranie over the church’.¹⁰⁹ Whether advocates of traditional clerical dualism, or devotees of a new dualism of public power and private religious belief, the critics of Cromwell’s church uniformly understood it as an illegitimate effort to empower the state with spiritual authority.

It is now possible to see how the intellectual willingness of Independents to justify religious coercion, as explained by Worden and others, informed the particular institutional innovations of the Interregnum. Early Independency married a suspicion of clerical authority with a surprising deference to the state’s religious power, and this mindset informed the church settlement of 1654. In function and design it was a quasi-Erastian settlement. Institutionally, the settlement was strictly subservient to the authority of the state; constitutionally, it rejected the clerical–lay distinction; functionally, it openly conflated political and religious ends. Its particular interest was in defusing the political threat of independent clerical authority. The settlement of 1654, Cromwell explicitly affirmed, was not erected ‘as *jure divino*, but as a civil good’. In a conversation that year with a suspicious-minded Swedish archbishop, Cromwell’s diplomat, the Erastian Bulstrode Whitelocke, announced proudly that: ‘We in England had almost forgot the distinction of clergy and laity.’¹¹⁰ In short, Cromwell’s church sought to pursue the godly society by exercising state power, and by abolishing the dualist division of spiritual and temporal spheres.

The recognition that Cromwell’s church settlement operated within the context of English Erastianism in turn places the settlement within the broader history of the English Revolution. If historians have often misinterpreted Cromwell’s church as an unobtrusive, *ad hoc* effort to mitigate what was essentially a tolerationist religious policy, they have been more sensitive to the coercive nature of the ecclesiastical institutions erected by the Long Parliament. Indeed, in striking ways Cromwell’s church was modelled on the parliamentary expedients of the 1640s. The Erastian instincts of the Long Parliament had been dominant in the years 1640–2, before military necessity forced the Scottish alliance. The campaign against the Laudian church was fundamentally fuelled by hostility to its dualist ecclesiology, its protection of the clergy’s independent authority. Despite the virtually obsessive attention of revisionist historians to theological conflict in the run-up to the Long Parliament, parliamentary agitators themselves were far more concerned with protecting

¹⁰⁹ John Goodwin, *Triers Tried*, epistle, pp. 1–2, 7, 14–19; *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Patterson (18 vols., 1931–), xii. 6; John Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* ... (1659), pp. 12, 37–9, 41, 49, 65.

¹¹⁰ Abbott, iv. 495; *The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke, 1605–1675*, ed. Ruth Spaulding (Oxford, 1990), p. 332.

England's Erastian church settlement against Laudian clericalism than with theological questions proper. Speech after speech relentlessly condemned the bishops not for their theological commitments but for propagating a dualist ecclesiology that allegedly undermined the state's religious authority.¹¹¹ The Canons of 1640, for instance, were subjected to determined assault partly for their unpopular ceremonial innovations, but chiefly because they were passed by Convocation after the Short Parliament had been dissolved, and thus represented a clerical usurpation of state power.¹¹² It was openly (if preposterously) alleged that the Canons denied the Royal Supremacy and marked 'a Covenant against the King for Bishops'.¹¹³ Indeed, MPs employed Erastian rhetoric specifically to defend the king's ecclesiastical prerogatives from clerical degradation.¹¹⁴ The impeachment of the thirteen bishops, the treason charges against Laud, the Grand Remonstrance, the 1641 Minister's Petition, and the Root and Branch Petition all condemned the bishops for 'spoiling both the King and the Parliament of their power'.¹¹⁵ Impeached clergymen were regularly charged with seditiously denying the Royal Supremacy.¹¹⁶ Of course, the parliamentary opponents of Laud were variously motivated; not all of the church's critics were Erastians, and some Erastians eventually rallied to the defence of the bishops. But, far more than any threat to Calvinist theology, it was the assertive political independence of the bishops that unified opposition to the Caroline church.

The naked Erastianism of the Long Parliament was temporarily veiled by the alliance with the Scottish Presbyterians, but it is difficult to overstate the extent to which Erastian ecclesiology propelled the initial religious revolution of 1640–2. This crucial and often overlooked ecclesiological context provides the essential backdrop for any clear view of Cromwell's church settlement. Cromwell himself, of course, was an active participant in the early parliamentary campaign against church privileges. His later pronouncements against clerical dualism echoed the Erastian rhetoric of those years. When a surging Presbyterianism necessitated a successful rearguard action in the Westminster Assembly of Divines and in the Long Parliament itself, the Independents worked hand

¹¹¹ See the speeches by Harbottle Grimston, Benjamin Rudyard, Bulstrode Whitelocke and John Pym. John Nalson, *An Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State . . .* (1682) [hereafter Nalson, *Collection*], i. 510; John Rushworth, *Historical Collections: the Third Part in Two Volumes . . .* (1691) [hereafter Rushworth, *Collections*], pt. 3, i. 24; D'Ewes, *Journal*, i. 8–9.

¹¹² See speeches of Edward Bageshawe, Alexander Rigby and Pym. Nalson, *Collection*, i. 523; Edward Bageshawe, *Two Arguments in Parliament, the First Concerning the Cannons . . .* (1641), pp. 1–4, 12–19; D'Ewes, *Journal*, i. 21 and i. 126–7; *The Diary of Henry Townshend, 1640–1663*, ed. J. W. Bund (1915) [hereafter Townshend, *Diary*], i. 12.

¹¹³ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs . . .* (4 vols., Oxford, 1853), i. 111.

¹¹⁴ Sir Ralph Verney, *Verney Papers: Notes of Proceedings in the Long Parliament*, ed. Robert Bruce (1845) [hereafter Verney, *Papers*], pp. 81–3.

¹¹⁵ *Diurnall Occurances . . .* (1641), pp. 325–6; D'Ewes, *Journal*, i. 139, 163, 395, 413; Rushworth, *Collections*, i. 95; Verney, *Papers*, pp. 5, 11; D'Ewes, *Journal*, i. 458–60.

¹¹⁶ See the cases of John Cosin, Samuel Utie, and others. *CJ*, ii. 65; D'Ewes, *Journal*, i. 50, 232, 541; *Diurnall Occurances*, p. 6; Townshend, *Diary*, i. 12; Nalson, *Collections*, p. 719; *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, ed. R. C. Christie (Chetham Society, 1847), p. 7.

in glove with John Selden's more open Erastians.¹¹⁷ As outlined above, Congregationalists made much of their amenability to the religious authority of the state.

The Independents' church settlement of 1654 thus strongly recalled Erastian church settlements devised by the Long Parliament years earlier. The apogee of the Long Parliament's Erastianism had been reached in July 1641, when the Commons passed a scheme under which lay commissioners were to assume episcopal and archiepiscopal authority, and lay county commissions were to administer justice in ecclesiastical cases.¹¹⁸ The scheme, designed by Sir Henry Vane, essentially placed ordination itself under lay control by subordinating subcommittees of ordaining ministers to the jurisdiction of the county committees. The nakedly Erastian character of the proposal was heightened when a parliamentary Committee suggested removing all clergy from the central ('episcopal') commissions, which thereafter were to consist of nine laymen.¹¹⁹ 'We shall have nine lay bishops for one consecrated', complained a critic.¹²⁰ Events eventually overtook Vane's proposal, but the near implementation of such a 'peculiarly secular plan' marked the high-water mark of Erastianism in the Long Parliament. And although Vane's system was never formally passed into law, it was essentially implemented in the breach. Throughout the war years parliament's county committees increasingly usurped clerical powers and assumed supervisory authority over the ministry.¹²¹ Such parliamentary experiments in governing the church through lay committees foreshadowed the church establishment of 1654.¹²² The Cromwellian church settlement essentially sprang, in inspiration and design, out of the Erastian expedients of the Long Parliament. The settlement of 1654 was a permanent system of church government by state committee.

This recognition begins to open a new angle of vision on the nature of the English Revolution as a religious conflict. The prevailing revisionist interpretation of the English Revolution as a religious war argues that the religious unrest of the 1640s sprang from unease at the threat posed by an Arminian clergy to the Calvinist consensus in the English

¹¹⁷ Baille to Spang, 18 Feb. 1644 and 28 June 1644, *Letters of Baillie*, ii. 129, 197–8.

¹¹⁸ Shaw, *English Church*, i. 90–5; S. R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603–1641* (10 vols., 1904) [hereafter Gardiner, *History of England*], ix. 390.

¹¹⁹ Gardiner, *History of England*, ix. 407; Verna, *Papers*, pp. 104–5.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Anthony Fletcher, *Outbreak of the English Civil War* (1981) [hereafter Fletcher, *Outbreak*], pp. 102–4.

¹²¹ Introduction, *The Committee at Stafford, 1643–1655 . . .*, ed. D. H. Pennington and I. A. Roots (Manchester: 1957), p. li; Alan Everitt, *Suffolk and the Great Rebellion* (Suffolk, 1960), pp. 62–3; Morrill, *Cheshire*, pp. 82–9; Mary Coate, *Cornwall in the Great Civil War and Interregnum, 1642–1660* (Oxford, 1933), p. 313; Brian Stone, *Derbyshire in the Civil War* (Northampton, 1992), p. 108; Alan Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester, 1973), p. 126.

¹²² This observation is made by Conrad Russell, *Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1991), p. 185; see also Anthony Fletcher, 'Concern for Renewal in the Root and Branch Debates of 1641', *Studies in Church History*, xiv (1977), 285–6.

church.¹²³ This thesis relies heavily on the perspective of the printed theological disputes of the 1620s and 1630s, and on a long-standing historical belief in the propulsive force of predestinarian Christianity. Increasingly, however, the revisionist thesis has been challenged by those who dispute the supposed monolith of English Calvinism, or who doubt the potential for rarified theological dispute to trigger revolutionary unrest.¹²⁴ The tight focus of revisionist historians on theological dispute proper (leading them, for instance, dubiously to conflate all manner of ceremonial innovation with 'Arminian' theology¹²⁵) is particularly surprising in light of established trends in the revisionist historiography of the English Reformation. Historians of Tudor England have long stressed the ecclesiological features of religious unrest – the political dispute between church and monarch – rather than the supposed wellspring of popular Protestant theological commitment so often central to past histories of the Reformation.¹²⁶ Even allowing for contextual differences, this has left an awkward gulf between the statecraft practitioners who launched the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and the conscientious Calvinists who supposedly perfected it in the seventeenth.

To close this interpretative gap, attention must be paid to the consistent Erastian ideological concerns of the English revolutionaries. Oliver Cromwell's church settlement brought to a culmination a long campaign to subdue resurgent clericalism and to protect the state's authority over the church. A unity of purpose thus linked the religious project of the 1640s to that of the 1650s. Attacking Arminian theology occasionally occupied the former decade, while securing free conscience was a concern of the latter, but throughout the entire Revolution protecting and widening the Erastian foundations of English Christianity was a propulsive concern. In power in the 1650s, the Cromwellian Independents secured the Erastian revolution with the church settlement of 1654.

Contemporaries who bitterly compared Oliver Cromwell with his famous kinsman, Henry VIII's Vicegerent, Thomas Cromwell, understood that both men aimed at absorbing clerical authority into the power

¹²³ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987); Conrad Russell, *Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990); Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (1991), pp. 97–101.

¹²⁴ Stephen White, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic* (Cambridge, 1992); Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remolding of Anglicanism, 1625–1641* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 87–113; Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 5–7; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, 1992), ch. 6.

¹²⁵ Roger Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts: A Political History of England, 1603–1642* (1989), p. 317; Fletcher, *Outbreak*, pp. 91–3; Andrew Foster, 'Church Policies of the 1630s', *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (New York, 1989), pp. 193–8.

¹²⁶ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–1500* (New Haven, 1992); J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984).

of the state.¹²⁷ Both despised the antique Christian tradition of clerical dualism. Oliver Cromwell himself made consistent rhetorical recourse to the 'magisterial' precedent of the Tudors. He continually employed the language of monarchical supremacy over the church, and made a particular point of referring to 'Queen Elizabeth of famous memory', his favoured forerunner in the war against clerical usurpation.¹²⁸ 'The magistrate hath his supremacy', the Protector declared in language that could only evoke the Royal Supremacy, 'and he may settle religion according to his own conscience.'

By portraying himself as the perfecter of the Reformation, Oliver Cromwell appealed to the ideological tradition of Erastianism that had dominated English reformist thought since the Tudors. Erastianism functioned for Cromwell as it had for many English Protestants: to reconcile the tension between the godly society, which required coercive authority in religious matters, and free conscience, the repression of which was associated with clerical authority in collective Protestant memory. The revival of clerical dualism under Laud had been reversed by the Long Parliament. Cromwell, though certainly concerned to protect free conscience for sectarians outside the established church, was equally driven to protect the Erastian ecclesiological legacy of the Reformation within it. The Protector made a revealing characterization of this delicate balance in 1654, immediately after the completion of his church settlement: 'Is not Liberty of Conscience in religion a fundamental?' he asked. Certainly, 'So long as there is liberty of conscience for the supreme magistrate to exercise his conscience in erecting what form of church-government he is satisfied he should set up.'¹²⁹ An anachronistic focus on the first of these mandates obscures the equal importance of the second in understanding Cromwell's religious policies.

Oliver Cromwell's ecclesiastical regime marked the apex of the English Revolution's Erastian reform effort, which itself brought the culmination of the vigorous tradition of Erastianism within English Protestantism. The Cromwellian establishment did not merely protect conscience; it destroyed the independent corporate authority of the church, and arrogated considerable religious power to the state. In the former respect Cromwell's establishment offended clericalist opinion; in the latter it alienated once-friendly sectarians. For those willing to render their religious beliefs a private and internal matter, the promise of religious toleration could be seen in Cromwell's ecclesiastical settlement; but for those whose Christianity required visible membership in the Catholic and corporate church, the Protectorate proved an authoritarian and godless regime, intolerant of corporate allegiances beyond the state. The Cromwellian church settlement cannot simply be forced into an

¹²⁷ See the anonymous diary BL Sloan MS 63, fo. 117: 'The first [Cromwell] pulled down abbeyes. This one went on to pull down bishops, deans, chapter colleges . . .'

¹²⁸ Speeches of 17 Sept. 1656 and 25 Jan. 1658 cited in Abbott, iv, 262, 715; *ibid.*, iii, 459

¹²⁹ Speech of 12 Sept. 1654 cited in Abbott, iii, 459.

interpretative scheme fixated on the nascent tolerationist and pluralist features of Interregnum religious culture. Rather, it must be understood within the context of revolutionary Erastianism, as a watershed moment in the long effort – running from the Reformation to the Enlightenment – to secure the emerging modern state's institutional hegemony over the visible church.