

PRESBYTERIANS IN *BEHEMOTH*

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1. *Presbyterians and Puritans*

Presbyterians play a large role in Hobbes's history of the English Civil War, as one might expect. He thought that the corruption of the people was one of the causes of the English Civil War, and that the Presbyterian clergy were one of the corrupting groups. Indeed, they are the first group that he mentioned in this regard. The Presbyterians are followed by Roman Catholics ("Papists"), Independents, university educated gentlemen, the city of London, spendthrifts, and people ignorant of their political obligations (pp. 2-3).¹ Hobbes's view contrasts with that of contemporary historians. Although Elizabethan Presbyterians are often mentioned for purposes of providing background, they are not mentioned as a cause of the civil war by standard books on that topic, for example, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642* by Lawrence Stone (1972), *The Causes of the English Civil War* by Conrad Russell (1990), and *The Causes of the English Civil War* by Ann Hughes (1991).²

If Hobbes is wrong to blame the Presbyterian clergy, as I shall show he was, why did he make this mistake? Perhaps the source for his history claimed that the Presbyterians were at fault. In a prefatory note to *Behemoth*, he says that he relied on "Mr. Heath's chronicle." This is James Heath's long treatment of the Civil Wars, *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War in the Three King-*

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Page references to *Behemoth* are placed in the text. In the quotation above, Hobbes may be mimicking the Grand Remonstrance in which "The Jesuited Papists," "The Bishops, and the corrupt part of the Clergy," "Councillors and Courtiers" are mentioned as the "actors and promoters" of "mischief" (S. R. Gardiner, ed., *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), pp. 206-7).

² Others could be mentioned, e.g. Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

doms of England, Scotland & Ireland etc. (1663), which runs over 750 pages.³ The mention of the three kingdoms in the title of Heath's book may make it appear much more astute than it actually was. It is largely a chronicle of the battles of the Civil War; some attention is paid to political events; and almost no attention is paid to religious ones. The Presbyterians are rarely mentioned, and Heath excuses himself for not offering any causes of the wars:

No higher or greater cause for this war can be assigned ... but the fate and catastrophe of Kingdoms and Monarchies, which do at certain periods of time tast [*sic*] of that vicissitude and mutability, to which all other sublunary things are more frequently subjected.

The secondary causes of it, are so many and so uncertain, so variously reported and beleaved that it would spend the paper allotted to this Epitome in ascertaining them.⁴

So Hobbes's attribution of the causes, for good and for ill, are not Heath's, and we can say with confidence that they are his own. He had, for example, already been critical of Presbyterians in *Leviathan*.⁵

If Heath is not the cause of Hobbes's mistake, who or what is? I think much of the answer depends on semantics. Hobbes's use of the term "Presbyterian" is misleading.⁶ In today's usage, a Presbyterian is a Christian whose church has 'presbyters'⁷ and does not have bishops. Currently, 'Presbyterian' and 'episcopacy' are incompatible terms. The usage of the word in the early 1640s is more complicated. The most important point is that, although their beliefs and attitudes overlapped substantially, the Presbyterians were not puritans.

³ The year before, Heath published *A Brief Chronicle of All the Chief Actions, etc.*, which is about 55 pages long.

⁴ Heath, *A Brief Chronicle of the Late Intestine War*, pp. 1-2.

⁵ *Leviathan*, ed. A. P. Martinich (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 47.4. References to *Leviathan* are to chapter and paragraph.

⁶ Is it possible that 'Presbyterian' was simply a name for the puritans in the early 1640s? Richard Baxter says, "But the greatest Advantage which I found for Concord and Pacification, was among a great number of Ministers and People who had addicted themselves to no Sect or Party at all; though the Vulgar called them by the Name of *Presbyterians*" (Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (London, 1696), p. 146). However, in this passage, written about 1654, Baxter is talking about the decade of the 1640s. Earlier he wrote, "But the *generality* of the People through the Land ... who were then called Puritans, Precisions, Religious Persons, that used to talk of God, and Heaven, and Scripture, and Holiness, and to follow Sermons ... adhered to Parliament" (Baxter, *Reliquiae*, p. 31).

⁷ I use double quotation marks for quotations and single-quotation marks to designate a word or phrase that is mentioned.

My main goal in this essay is to discuss the accuracy of Hobbes's portrayal of them. For the most part this is a discussion of the accuracy of his portrayal of a subgroup, the Presbyterian ministers, because that is the group about which he says a great deal. It is fortunate that the topic can be restricted in this way because the Presbyterian ministers, along with the religious Presbyterians,⁸ are easier to characterize and identify in the early 1640s⁹ than the so-called political Presbyterians.¹⁰ For more than half a century, historians have been debating whether a helpful distinction can be made between religious and political Presbyterians, and if so, of what the distinction consists. This is half of a broader problem, namely, whether a helpful distinction can be made between religious and political Independents. Although the problem has been vigorously debated for decades, there is no consensus about exactly who or what 'Presbyterian' and 'Independent' denoted as regards clergy and MPs in the early 1640s. So, a large part of my discussion involves directly or indirectly the definition of a Presbyterian minister, although I do not pretend that I am advancing the general problem. In this regard, I am concerned principally with identifying whom Hobbes is talking about when he applies the term 'Presbyterian' to a minister.

Let's approach the characterization of the Presbyterians by beginning with a characterization of a puritan in the early 1640s. The puritans were those members of the Church of England of whom the following can be said: (i) they were Calvinists in theology, (ii) they favored simple ceremonies, in contrast with the elaborate ones of the Roman Catholic and the Laudian

⁸ I will often use 'Presbyterians' to mean religious Presbyterians or the Presbyterian clergy. The context should indicate which meaning it has.

⁹ I use 'early 1640s' to denote 1639-Oct. 1640.

¹⁰ Fortunately, I rarely have to refer to the 'political Presbyterians', not to mention the correlative group, the 'political Independents'. Concerning the difficulty of defining these terms or identifying people who fit the description, see for example, J. H. Hexter, "The Problem of the Presbyterian Independents," *The American Historical Review* 44 (1938), 29-49; reprinted with revisions in *Reappraisals in History* (New York: Northwestern University Press, 1962), pp. 163-84; David Underdown, "The Independents Reconsidered," *Journal of British Studies* 3, No. 2 (May 1964), pp. 57-84; George Yule, "Independents and Revolutionaries," *Journal of British Studies* 7, No. 2, (May 1968), pp. 11-32; David Underdown, "The Independents Again," *Journal of British Studies* 8, No. 1 (November 1968), pp. 83-93; Valerie Pearl, "The 'Royal Independents' in the English Civil War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series 18 (1968), pp. 69-96; Blair Worden, "The Independents: A Reprisal in History," *Past and Present* 47 (1970), 116-122; Valerie Pearl, "Exorcist or Historian: The Dangers of Ghost-Hunting," *ibid.*, 122-27; David Underdown, "The Presbyterian Independents Exorcised: A Brief Comment," *ibid.*, 128-33; George Yule, "Presbyterians and Independents: Some Comments," *ibid.*, pp. 130-33; J. H. Hexter, "Presbyterians, Independents and Puritans: A Voice from the Past," *ibid.*, pp. 134-36; and Stephen Foster, "A Rejoinder," *ibid.*, pp. 137-46.

Church, (iii) they favored a national church, and (iv) they opposed the concept of *jure divino* episcopacy. Puritans as puritans wanted religious reform, not nonreligious ones. Although many puritans were also dissatisfied with the king's policies, civil dissatisfaction is not a characteristic of the puritans as puritans.¹¹

In characterizing the puritans, two possible features do not play any role: (a) adherence to the *classis*-system, and (b) sole jurisdiction of the Church over all religious matters. Anyone who, in addition to (i)-(iv), believed in (a) should count as a Presbyterian. Usually, a Presbyterian would also believe in (b). But (b) alone is not sufficient to identify a Presbyterian since (b) alone does not distinguish Presbyterians from religious Independents, who accept (b) but not (a).

Although puritans had other dominant features, I do not think that it is necessary to include them in the characterization. One of these, however, deserves mention because Hobbes thought that it was the main way that his "Presbyterians" stirred up trouble against the King. Puritans emphasized preaching. While Hobbes did not disapprove of preaching itself, he thought that "much preaching an inconvenience" (p. 64). He made his complaints specific in this passage:

What needs so much preaching of faith to us that are no heathens, and that believe already all that Christ and his apostles have told us is necessary to salvation and more too? Why is there so little preaching of justice? I have indeed heard righteousness often recommended to the people, but I have seldom heard the word justice in their sermons. (P. 63.)

So far my characterization of religious Presbyterians in terms of (i)-(iv) and (a) has the consequence that all Presbyterians were puritans. In order to make the classes of puritans and Presbyterians disjoint, I will say that puritans do not accept (a). What this means is that many puritans of the early 1640s became Presbyterians when episcopacy was no longer a viable option, and Presbyterianism seemed to be the only way to preserve a national religion.

I have been at some pains to distinguish the Presbyterians from the puritans. One might object that the effort is all for naught, because Hobbes is

¹¹ One might object that many of the puritan ministers of the early 1640s were millenarians and hence both expecting and hoping for the overthrow of secular government and the establishment of the kingship of Jesus. However, I do not think that the millenarian attitude involves dissatisfaction with civil policies or a secular government in the sense that some other civil policy or secular government would be preferred. I cannot treat the millenarian aspect of puritanism in this article. See John F. Wilson, *Puritan in Pulpit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 223-30.

justified in using the word 'Presbyterian' to refer to puritans of the early 1640s even though they were not yet Presbyterians, as long as they eventually adopted the presbyterian system of church government, just as it is justified to use 'Augustus' to refer to Octavian in discussing events prior to his obtaining that title. I accept the general point about the use of names and titles. Nonetheless, I think Hobbes's use of 'Presbyterian' to refer to puritans of the early 1640s is misleading and probably unjustified.

2. *Religious Complaints*

As the items characterizing them indicate, the puritans were agitated about the religion of England and not about the monarchy *per se*. They were angry with William Laud, his bishops, and many clergymen. Laud took the brunt of the anger because he seemed to be the driving force behind the imposition of a liturgy that the puritans considered for all intents and purposes Roman Catholic; and he seemed to be responsible for the harsh punishment inflicted on people who opposed him in the Church courts.

The chief complaints against Laud's bishops were that they were haughty and corrupt. Dissatisfaction with the policies and lives of the bishops led to the London Root and Branch Petition of 1641, which is a potpourri of complaints. It said that "the pride and ambition of the prelates ... [was] boundless," and that they were unwilling to be subject either to man or laws."¹² The Petition objected to the episcopal claim of being *jure divino*; and it charged the bishops with encouraging clergymen to "despise the temporal magistracy, the nobles and gentry of the land." In various ways it complained that the Church of England had become too much like the Roman Catholic Church, and that this was preparation for the restoration of that "superstitious religion." Finally, it expressed the fear that the "present wars and commotions happened between his Majesty and his subjects of Scotland," because of the bishops, and that the English would go "to an utter ruin" unless the episcopacy was abolished.¹³

The Root and Branch petition fueled anti-episcopal feeling, both in Parliament and in many of the ministers. A newsletter reported, "All the pulpits do now ring of the disorders of the clergy both in doctrine and discipline."¹⁴

¹² J. P. Kenyon, ed. *The Stuart Constitution*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-57.

¹⁴ Quoted from Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), p. 108.

Even moderate MPs joined in condemnation of the bishops. The speech of Harbottle Grimston in the House of Commons in early November, 1640, reflected the views of many: "Who are they that of late years have been advanced to any preferment in the Church, but such as have been notoriously suspicious in their discipline, and for the most part vicious in their lives."¹⁵ John Culpepper, Lucius Cary, and Edward Hyde, all of whom aligned themselves with the king as war approached, criticized the bishops during the first month of the Long Parliament. Hobbes reported "in a manner all the people of England, were their [the bishops'] enemies, upon the account of their behavior, as being (they said) too imperious" (p. 89). He indicated general agreement with the objections against the bishops and calls them "supercilious."¹⁶ Commenting on the Nottingham petition, one of the thirteen county petitions that followed the Root and Branch Petition, Hobbes took a moderate position in a letter he wrote from Paris to the third earl of Devonshire. He said that the "abundance of abuses committed by Ecclesiasticall persons and their Officers, ... cannot be denied or excused." But, he added, "that they proceed from ye *Episcopacy* it selfe, is not so evidently proved."¹⁷ Hobbes's view is similar to that of Digby, who said, "To strike at the root, to attempt a total alteration, before ever I can give my vote to that, ... [it] must be made manifest to me ... [that the] mischiefs which are felt under Episcopacy flow from the nature of the function [of episcopacy], and not from the abuse of it."¹⁸

The opposition to Laud and his bishops gave rise in puritans to disgust for the episcopacy as an institution. Abolishing episcopacy came to be seen as the easiest route to achieving the other reforms that disgruntled members of the Church of England wanted in liturgy, discipline, and governance. The Root and Branch Petition called for the abolition of the office of bishop and affiliated clergy. However, some of the MPs may have supported it as a tactical move against the liturgy being promoted by the bishops. Their opposition to the Laudian church and support of the Root and

¹⁵ Quoted from William Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and Under the Commonwealth, 1640-1660*, vol. 1 (New York, 1900), p. 11.

¹⁶ Letter 37 in *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 120.

¹⁷ Letter 37 in *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 120. Johann Sommerville mistakenly maintains that Hobbes thought that "lay commissioners would replace bishops in governing the church." His judgment is based upon a misreading of the letter. Hobbes alludes to the fact that the new scheme is "propounded," not "likely" (see Johann Sommerville, "Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews," in *Hobbes and History*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Tom Sorell (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 161, 165).

¹⁸ Quoted from Shaw, *A History of the English Church*, vol. 1, p. 3.

Branch Petition resulted in making some of the MPs more opposed to the bishops than they may have intended to be. They went from being against the liturgy that was supported by the bishops to being against the bishops who supported the liturgy.

In addition to the reasons for abolishing the episcopacy already given, Hobbes adds his own psychological explanation. Motivating the Presbyterians was "the delight of sharing in the government." This delight gave them a sense of power, and with that sense of power they felt that they could take revenge on "those that do not admire their learning" (p. 89; see also pp. 163, 172).¹⁹ In making this comment, it is possible that Hobbes was thinking of the Laudian claim that bishops "enjoyed ... inherently greater spiritual knowledge and grace, all apparently as a function of their consecration."²⁰ By referring to the learning of the Presbyterians, Hobbes may have been alluding to the fact that the Westminster Assembly of Divines consisted of the most part of ecclesiastical scholars. But in fact he denigrated their knowledge: "For their learning, it amounts to no more than an imperfect knowledge of Greek and Latin, and an acquired readiness in the Scripture language, with a gesture and tone suitable thereunto ..." (p. 172). They may also have had the reputation for learning.²¹ He thinks their pretensions to learning gave them a false feeling of competence. He undercut that supposed competence with this argument: Either they were learned in politics or something else. It was not politics, because their specialty is called 'divinity'. So, if anything, they are learned in divinity. But if they were learned in divinity, then they would know that they should not have been causing controversy because "religion itself admits no controversy." Religion should be uncontroversial because religion is "the law of the kingdom" (p. 90). It is the king alone who is the maker and judge of the law. In fact, Hobbes goes on, the divines do not tend to preach on religion at all but on philosophy (p. 90). And the divines are obviously not competent in philosophy. They merely think they are because they studied Latin and Greek and the ancient philosophers at their universities.²²

¹⁹ Hobbes did not admire their learning, but since he has left England in late 1640, one might think that he could not be thinking of himself. But he probably was since he feared that he had put himself in danger by circulating *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, earlier in 1640.

²⁰ Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1995), p. 469.

²¹ Baxter, *Reliquiae*, p. 140.

²² The opposite view is presented later: "Do not divines comprehend all civil and moral philosophy within their divinity?" (p. 148).

3. Puritans and Hierarchy

Notwithstanding the puritan opposition to the Laudian bishops, puritanism was compatible with episcopacy. Even puritans who eventually became Presbyterians were willing to accept a kind of episcopacy. This would be an institution in which the bishops would not be considered superior to other clergymen with respect to their ministry. The favored episcopacy was often called a 'primitive episcopacy'. In a word, the episcopacy would not be a 'prelacy'.²³ The basis for their beliefs was the New Testament accounts of the early Church, just as it was for the episcopal men and for the Independents.

These puritans recognized that good order required some hierarchy.²⁴ But they did not think that the hierarchy needed to originate from the top down. It could, and according to the Presbyterians it did, come from the bottom up. The bottom up hierarchical system of the English Presbyterians was spelled out in this way. Each congregation would have a court consisting of the minister (or ministers) and the elders of the congregation. They would represent their congregation to a *classis* (or presbytery); each *classis* would elect representatives to a provincial synod, and each synod in turn would elect representatives to the General Assembly of the entire nation.²⁵

Hobbes commented that this structure was tantamount to making "the national assembly an archbishop and the provincial assemblies so many bishops" (p. 89). His observation was apt. Although the source of the authority of the Presbyterian Church comes from the bottom and goes up, the exercise of authority goes from the top down, just like the system of archbishops and bishops. A higher level of authority of the Presbyterian Church could impose rules on the lower levels, in contrast with the Independent Churches, which made each congregation autonomous. Hobbes could also recognize how neatly his theory of an artificial person describes the Presbyterian system. An artificial person acts with authority for some other entity, usually one or more other persons.²⁶ For Hobbes, it is not important whether that artificial person consists of one person, as a bishop does, or consists of many, as assemblies do. In either case, they count as one object.

As mentioned earlier, I suspect that Hobbes's use of 'Presbyterian' to refer to puritans of the early 1640s was not innocent. I think that he wanted to

²³ 'Prelacy' was sometimes identified with any episcopal rule, e.g. in "The Solemn League and Covenant," Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, pp. 268-69.

²⁴ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 103.

²⁵ Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), p. 103.

²⁶ *Leviathan* 16.

project the militant attitudes of the mid-1640s onto the attitudes of people in the early 1640s. Since the Presbyterians supported militant opposition to the King in the mid-1640s, he thought he could attribute those same attitudes to those people when they were not yet willing to oppose the King with troops. Also, Hobbes may have thought that the Presbyterians had already worked out a system of church governance without bishops substantially earlier than 1643. But Hobbes is wrong to think that prior to the opening of the Assembly of Divines, the members knew what system of church governance they were for. They were clear or unified in their thoughts only about what system they were against.²⁷ Ironically, at one point Hobbes generalized this fact about the divines and attributed it to all the rebels: "For from the beginning of the rebellion, the method of ambition was constantly this: first to destroy, and then to consider what they should set up" (p. 192).

Intentionally or not, Hobbes exaggerated the aspirations of the Presbyterians. He thought that the Presbyterian system was part of a conspiracy to gain control over the government, in addition to the Church. For him, the Presbyterian clergy were essentially rebels. He wanted to prove that the clergymen that supported the war against the King were committed to his overthrow at least a couple of years before the fighting began. They wanted the Christian religion to be independent of the monarch. In two earlier works, he had argued that making the Church independent is setting up a second sovereign; and no man can serve two masters.²⁸ (He also thought that the House of Commons had resolved by late 1640 to "depose the King, or to let him have the title only so long as he should act for their purposes" (p. 89).) One of his major complaints against the Presbyterians is expressed in the following passage, although he is speaking in it specifically of the Scots in 1651-2:

This is a downright declaration to all kings and commonwealths in general: that a Presbyterian minister will be a true subject to none of them in the things of Christ; which things what they are, they will be judges

²⁷ Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*, pp. 114-15, and Shaw, *A History of the English Church*, p. 7. Some scholars today continue to write as if the puritan clergy going into the Westminster Assembly were already committed to a Presbyterian system. Johann Sommerville gives the mistaken impression that the puritan clergy began the Westminster Assembly committed to Presbyterianism (Sommerville, "Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism," p. 163). See also Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: The Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution, 1640-1660* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 37.

²⁸ *De Cive*, in *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 6.11 and 9.1. References to *De Cive* are to chapter and paragraph. See also, *Leviathan* 20.4, 29.15, 42.102, and 42.123.

themselves. What have we then gotten by our deliverance from the Pope's tyranny, if these petty men succeed in the place of it, that have nothing in them that can be beneficial to the public, except their silence? (p. 172)

Speaking of July 1641, he says, it "was the design of the Presbyterian ministers, who taking themselves to be, by divine right, the only lawful governors of the Church, endeavoured to bring the same form of Government into the civil state" (p. 75). He claimed that they intended to have the MPs under their thumb: "as the spiritual laws were to be made by their synods, so the civil laws should be made by the House of Commons." However, the ministers "were deceived" in thinking that the MPs would be ruled by them (p. 75). Alluding to the Assembly of Divines, Hobbes describes their plan: "the State becoming popular [democratic], the Church might be so too, and governed by an Assembly; and by consequence (as they thought) seeing politics are subservient to religion, they might govern, and thereby satisfy not only their covetous humour with riches, but also their malice with power to undo all men that admired not their wisdom" (p. 159; see also p. 195). As mentioned already, there was no significant Presbyterian group that was plotting an overthrow of religion, and certainly not an overthrow of parliament.

It is possible that Hobbes's belief that the Presbyterians had great power in the early 1640s was based on a belief that it was part of an unbroken movement that began in England during Elizabeth's reign. He mentions that when the protestants went to Geneva during the reign of Mary I, they saw how that city "set up presbyteries for the government of their several churches" (p. 136). The English exiles

were much taken with this government, and at their return in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and ever since, have endeavored to the great trouble of the Church and nation, to set up that government here, wherein they countenanced sometimes in their frequent preaching, they introduced many strange and many pernicious doctrines. (P. 136.)

However, the Presbyterian movement had been broken by the end of her reign, and did not return during the reign of James. So it is a mistake to think of Charles's Presbyterians as continuous with Elizabeth's. Richard Baxter wrote: "Though Presbytery generally took in Scotland, yet it was but a stranger here ... And when I came to try it, I found that most (that ever I could meet with) were against the *Jus Divinum* of Lay Elders, and for the

Moderate Primitive Episcopacy, ... and for an accommodation of all Parties, in order to Concord, as well as myself.”²⁹

As part of his mistaken belief about the power of the Presbyterians in the early 1640s, Hobbes misjudged their numbers. He claimed that there were far more Presbyterians than Arminians right after the Synod of Dort (p. 61). Even if we take ‘Presbyterian’ to mean ‘puritan’, it is still not obvious that he is right. Puritans were Calvinists, and there certainly were more Calvinists than Arminians in the 1610s and 1620s; but since not all Calvinists were puritans, it does not follow that the puritans outnumbered nonpuritans. He said that “the power of the Presbyterians was so very great, that, not only the citizens of London were almost all of them at their devotion, but also the greatest part of all other cities and market-towns of England” (p. 23). He may have based this on the dozen or so petitions relating to abolishing the episcopacy that were sent from the counties to the House of Commons in the wake of the London Root and Branch Petition and on the arrival of those ministers from the country who preached before Parliament. But these petitions against the bishops were not thereby petitions for Presbyterianism, and those ministers do not represent a fair sample of the population. Hobbes also unjustifiably attributes the passage of the Bishops’ Exclusion Bill in February 1642 to the Presbyterians (p. 89). The opposition to the bishops at that time was much more widespread than that.

Even if Hobbes’s judgment about the power of the Presbyterians is based upon the power of the Presbyterian clergy in the Westminster Assembly, he would still be wrong in claiming a Presbyterian plot to take over the government. The Assembly did not have any intention of participating in the civil government of England. The divines wanted (and expected) only to dictate the form and discipline of the English Church. Even if the Presbyterian clergy had aspired to more, they would not have been able to achieve it. The House of Commons wanted nothing more from the Assembly than advice, and advice only about ecclesial matters.

4. *Puritan Ministers and the Civil War*

Given that Hobbes was wrong to blame the Presbyterians for the corruption of the people, was there a group of ministers whom Hobbes might have been referring to and who were a cause of the Civil War? The short answer is

²⁹ Baxter, *Reliquiae*, p. 146. See also Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 448-67.

'yes'.³⁰ But, *pace* Hobbes, the Presbyterian ministers generally did not argue directly against the king until 1642, when armed conflict became inevitable. In late 1640 and 1641, in addition to sermons in London against the bishops and various abuses in the Church, they also preached against the secular government. Some of the most important of these sermons were the Fast Day sermons sponsored by the Long Parliament. The first two were preached by Cornelius Burgess and Stephen Marshall, both of whom later became members of the Assembly of Divines and Presbyterians. Marshall's sermon was appropriate for a new parliament and was not inflammatory. Burges's sermon had more political substance. Ostensibly talking about a crisis in Judah, Burges's references to "This Northern Army [Medes and Persians]" were easily taken as referring to the Scottish army ensconced in the north of England. This was confirmed when he went on about the deliverance of the Church depending upon "a more solemne, strict, and inviolable Covenant" with God.³¹ Near the end of his sermon, he urged the House of Commons to "carefully reforme, or cast out all idle, unsound, unprofitable, and scandalous Ministers; and provide a sound, godly, profitable and settled Preaching Ministry in every Congregation through the land."³² This sermon fit the call for the reform expressed in the Root and Branch Petition. Its demand for clerical reform was a direct criticism of the current state of religion, but not of the King. (Of course, many of the reformers knew that Charles I was the problem.) Ministers not subject to the strictures of the Fast Sermons could speak or write with less restraint. The author of *A Glimpse of Sions Glory*, often attributed to Hanserd Knollys, a Baptist, wrote in 1641, "It is the work of the day to cry down Babylon, that it may fall more and more. ... *Blessed is he that dasheth the brats of Babylon against the stones: Blessed is he that hath any hand in pulling downe Babylon. ... [C]ry down Babylon, and the Prelacie.*"³³

³⁰ Here as elsewhere Richard Baxter is level-headed: "And whereas the Kings Party usually say, that it was the seditious Preachers that stirred up the People, and were the Cause of all this, I answer, 1. It is partly true, and partly not: It is not true that they stirred them up to War (except an inconsiderable Number of them, one perhaps in a County, if so much.) But it is true that they discovered their dislike of the Book of Sports, and bowing to Altars, and diminishing Preaching, and silencing Ministers, and such like; and were glad that the Parliament attempted a Reformation of them" (Baxter, *Reliquiae*, p. 34).

³¹ Quoted from Wilson, *Puritan in Pulpit*, p. 39.

³² Quoted from Wilson, *Puritan in Pulpit*, pp. 39-40.

³³ *A Glimpse of Sions Glory* (London, 1641), pp. 2, 7. Cf. Stephen Marshall's sermon of February, 1642, *Meroz Cursed* (London, 1641): "It may be some of you may be called as souldiers, to spend your blood in the Churches cause: If you knew the honour to such a service, you would say, as the Martyr once, Had every haire on your head a life you would venture them all in the Churches cause" (p. 53). Knollys calculates the beginning of the end to be 1650 (p. 32). Wilson, *Puritan in Pulpit*, pp. 224-27, says that *A Glimpse of Sion's*

Many of the sermons had substantial political content. In *The Troublers Troubled, Or Achan Condemned and Executed*, preached on April 4, 1641, Samuel Fairclough urged all “the ‘Josuahs’ of the parliament to seek out the ‘Achans’.”³⁴ Achan was an Israelite who was stoned to death for taking plunder (Joshua 7). Fairclough, who had an indirect connection with John Pym, was obviously urging that Strafford be punished. At this time, a sharp distinction was still made between the good king and his evil counselors. The target was the evil counselors, not the king. The solution was reform, not revolution. Again, this is not to deny that these actions of the Puritan ministers, later to be Presbyterians, are part of the cause of the English Civil War. It is rather to deny what Hobbes says or implies, that they were preaching revolution.

However, both Charles and Hobbes interpreted the actions of these ministers as revolutionary. Church and State, being united in England, were ultimately under the authority of the King. So any criticism of either the Church or the State was ultimately a criticism of the King. In his speech of 21 January 1641 to the Parliament, Charles said, “Now I must clearly tell you, that I make a great difference between reformation and alteration of government; though I am for the first, I cannot give way to the latter.”³⁵ Although Charles seems to be talking more about the proposed religious reforms than the secular ones, he is comfortable using the word “government” to cover both. In March 1642, Charles wrote, “For my fears and doubts, I did not think they should have bin thought so groundless or triviall, while so many seditious Pamphlets & Sermons are looked upon.”³⁶ When the Parliament asked what pamphlets and sermons Charles meant, he mentioned *The Protestation Protested* by Henry Burton, *The Prentices Protestation*, and *To Your Tents O Israel*.³⁷ In a later address to his subjects, Charles said,

Glory is probably by Thomas Goodwin, but does not mention William Haller's arguments for attributing it to Knollys; see his *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 396-97.

³⁴ Wilson, *Puritan in Pulpit*, p. 44.

³⁵ “King Speech, 25 January 1641,” in Kenyon, *The Stuart Constitution*, p. 17.

³⁶ *A Declaration of the Lords and Commons in Parliament ... Whereunto is annexed His Majesties Speech to the Committee* (London, 1641) [Speech of 9 March 1641 (old style)]. See also *The Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 4, p. 641.

³⁷ *The Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 4, p. 686. I have not been able to find *The Prentices Protestation* or *To Your Tents* in either Thomason Tracts, Wing Short-Title Catalogue or Early English Books Online. I assume *The Prentices Protestation* refers to *The Apprentices Lamentation* (1641), though I do not have access to a copy of this work. Concerning the other, Clarendon writes the following about Charles's departure from the House of Commons: “the rude people [were] flocking together, and crying out, ‘Privilege of parliament, privilege of parliament,’ some of them pressing very near his [the King's] coach, and amongst the rest one calling out with a very loud voice, ‘To your tents, O Israel!’” (Edward

When they had made this breach upon the Ecclesiasticall State, they took care (under pretence of incouragement of Preaching) to erect lectures in severall Parishes, and to commend such Lecturers as best suited their designs, men of no Learning, no Conscience, but furious promoters of the most dangerous Innovations which were ever introduced into any State, many of them having taken no Orders, yet recommend by Members of either House to Parishes ...; and when Mechanick persons have been brought before them for preaching in Churches, and confessed the same, the power of the Grand Reformers hath been so great, that they have been dismissed without punishment, hardly with reprehension ... [A]nd such men ... boldly and seditiously preached against the Government of the Church, against the Book of Common Prayer, against Our Kingly Lawfull Power, and against Our Person ... ; All licence was given to those lewd, seditious Pamphlets, which despised the Government both of Church and State, which laid any imputations or scorns upon Our Person or Office, and which filled the ears of all Our good Subjects with lies, and monstrous discourses, to make them believe all the ill of the Government, and Governours of Church and State; Books against the Book of Common Prayer, and the established Laws of the Land suffered without reprehension to be dedicated to both Houses of Parliament ..."³⁸

Hobbes was to some extent right when he claimed that the MPs' accusation of misdeeds by "the bishops, counselors, and courtiers" in the Grand Remonstrance of December 1641 was "a more mannerly way of accusing the king himself, and defaming him to his subjects" (p. 83). His claim is made plausible by the fact that both Strafford and Laud, not to mention Windbank, Finch and others, were out of the way, and the political conditions continued to deteriorate. However, when Hobbes reports the allegation that the bishops during the 1630s had been trying "to suppress the purity and power of religion" as a way of suppressing "the doctrine of the Presbyterians," he is again confusing certain puritans with Presbyterians (p. 82).

Hobbes coupled his Presbyterians with the political opponents of the king. He represented them as acting in parallel with the "great many gentle-

[Hyde], Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, ed. W. Dunn Macray, vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 486).

³⁸ *His Majesties Declaration to All His Loving Subjects. Of August 12, 1642* (York, 1642), pp. 21-22. The same sentiment is expressed in other declarations, e.g. "For we cannot without grief of heart, ... look upon the bold Licence of some men, in Printing of Pamphlets, in preaching and Printing of Sermons, so full of bitterness and malice" (*His Majesties Declaration to His Loving Subjects by England and Wales Published with the Advice of His Privie Councell* (London 1641), p. 11).

men" who wanted "a popular government in the civil state" (p. 23). He suggested a coordinated action on the part of both groups by referring to them as a unit: "presbyterian and other democratical men," "the English Presbyterians and democracticals," "the democractical and Presbyterian English," and "the Presbyterians and men of democratical principles" (*Behemoth*, pp. 20, 30, 31, 193).³⁹ The Presbyterians approximated to being democrats in religion. Hobbes also connected the Presbyterians and democrats to each other by pointing out that they have the same place of origin. Members of both groups acquired their beliefs in the universities (p. 23). The clergy in the university is "an excellent means to divide a kingdom into factions" (p. 148).⁴⁰

There was obviously intercourse between some of the puritan ministers and MPs. And Trevor-Roper thought that Clarendon was right when he wrote: "the first publishing of extraordinary news was from the pulpit; and by the preacher's text, and his manner of discourse upon it, the auditors might judge, and commonly foresaw, what was like to be next done in the Parliament or Council of State."⁴¹ Trevor-Roper gives a colorful description of Stephen Marshall's behavior:

In the Long Parliament he would emerge as the inseparable political and spiritual ally of Pym, the interpreter of Pym's policy after Pym's death. At every stage of the revolution we can see him. Now he is thumping his pulpit on great occasions; now he is meeting with Pym, Hampden and Harley to prepare parliamentary tactics; now he is bustling through Westminster Hall to push voters into the Parliament before division; now he is retiring, exhausted, to recuperate in the well-appointed house of his good friend 'my noble Lord of Warwick.'⁴²

Nonetheless, Hobbes, I think, exaggerated the connection and the influence of the ministers. The supposed parallelism of 'Presbyterian' and democratical action breaks down in various ways. As already indicated, the

³⁹ Hobbes also refers to men of the Protectorate as "Presbyterian and men of democratical principles" (p. 193).

⁴⁰ Hobbes also criticizes the morals of students at universities: "I have often heard the complaints of parents, that their children were debauched there to drunkenness, wantonness, gaming, and other vices consequent to these. Nor is it a wonder amongst so many youths, if they did corrupt one another in despite of their tutors, who oftentimes were little elder than themselves. ... [T]he Parliament did not much reverence ... the universities ... though many of them learned there to preach, and became thereby capable of preferment and maintenance" (p. 147).

⁴¹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament," in *The Crisis in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 294.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 297-98.

'Presbyterians' were not advocating the overthrow of the monarchy in 1640-41. The ministers were helping – one might say 'ministering to' – the MPs gain more political power, rather than the reverse. They might participate in tactical discussions, but in their activities they were reflecting what should or would happen in the Parliament as dictated by certain MPs, not making the policy. Unlike the democratical men, the Presbyterians had no direct means of attacking the institution of the episcopacy. They had no power in Convocation, and little influence in the House of Lords. They had to work with members of the House of Commons. I have been emphasizing that there was no substantial English Presbyterianism in the early 1640s. How then did it arise? The history is complicated, but the salient fact is the institution and operation of the Assembly of Divines. When fighting broke out between the king and the anti-royalist forces, Charles had the upper hand. The anti-royalist faction needed the support of the Scottish army; but the Scots would come to the aid of their Protestant brothers only on the condition that the members of the House of Commons promised to work for "the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to ... the example of the best reformed Churches."⁴³ Although Parliament had been seriously considering setting up an assembly of divines to consider various aspects of religion in England, the call for the Assembly was put into action by the Parliament's need of the Scots.⁴⁴ An Ordinance calling for the Assembly was passed on June 12, 1643.⁴⁵

About 120 divines, a dozen peers, and twenty members from the House of Commons were nominated to be members of the Assembly. More than thirty of these nominees never attended because of their loyalty to the King, who disapproved of the Assembly. So, from the beginning, the members that attended favored some alternative to the Laudian episcopacy. One of these alternatives was Independency, according to which, each congregation was self-governing. Groups of congregations might be represented in associations or synods, but would not have jurisdiction over the individual congregation. To many, this arrangement seemed to spell the end of a national church. So the opponents of both a strong episcopacy and Independency looked for some middle ground to occupy. A form of Presbyterianism fit the bill. It had a hierarchy, which could exercise discipline on the Church from

⁴³ "The Solemn League and Covenant," in Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, p. 268. *The Solemn League and Covenant* was taken after the beginning of the Assembly of Divines. The Scots' insistence on reform of the English Church antedates both.

⁴⁴ Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Kenyon, *The Stuart Constitution*, pp. 237-38.

the top down, even though the origin of the hierarchy was bottom up. Ministers and elders of congregations elected representatives to presbyteries, and these elected representatives to synods, and these elected representatives to a national assembly.

5. *Last Remarks on the Presbyterians*

Once Hobbes begins to describe the battles fought in 1642 through 1644, he rarely mentions the Presbyterians until he comes to the New Model Army. At that point he says that the Presbyterians were in control of the Parliament and that “the Presbyterians (in order to their ends) would fain have the king murdered” (p. 131). This applies more to the ‘political’ Presbyterians than to the ‘religious’ ones that we have been discussing. In the same stretch of discourse, he alludes to the Assembly of the Divines as “an Assembly of Presbyterian ministers” (p. 131). By 1644, the Presbyterian *classis*-system had been worked out, and a majority of the members of the Assembly were religious Presbyterians. But there were some important dissenting ministers and some important ‘Erastians’ in the Assembly also, most notably Hobbes’s future friend, John Selden.⁴⁶

Hobbes next mentions the ‘political’ Presbyterians in order to criticize them for bungling an attempt to restore the king: “The Parliament, in which there were more [political] Presbyterians yet than Independents, might have gotten what they would of the King during his life, if they had not by an unconscionable and sottish ambition obstructed the way to their ends” (pp. 144-5).

Reflecting on the execution of the king, Hobbes lambastes the Presbyterians:

What greater vices than irreligion, hypocrisy, avarice and cruelty; which have appeared so eminently in the actions of Presbyterian members and Presbyterian ministers? What greater crimes than blaspheming and killing God’s anointed? Which was don by the hands of the Independents, but by the folly and first treason of the Presbyterians, who betrayed and sold him to his murderers? (P. 155.)

Hobbes’s views about the Presbyterians during the Civil War may be summed up in these passages:

⁴⁶ See Paul or W. M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1843), for details.

A great part of them, namely, the Presbyterian ministers, throughout the whole war, instigated the people against the King; so did also independent and other fanatic ministers... The mischief proceeded wholly from the Presbyterian preachers, who, by a long practised histrionic faculty, preached up the rebellion powerfully. ...Our late King ... was murdered, having been first persecuted by war, at the incitement of Presbyterian ministers; who are therefore guilty of the death of all that fell in that war? (Pp. 159, 95.)

Here was their plan:

the State becoming popular [democratic], the Church might be so too, and governed by an Assembly; and by consequence (as they thought) seeing politics are subservient to religion, they might govern, and thereby satisfy not only their covetous humour with riches, but also their malice with power to undo all men that admired not their wisdom. (P. 159; see also p. 195.)

Notwithstanding his inaccuracies and exaggerations, Hobbes was right to identify actions by disgruntled clergy as one of the causes of the English Civil War. He was a revisionist historian *avant la lettre*.