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LATITUDINARIANISM

from

AGONTIUS to CHILLINGWORTH

Ann McCauley Askew

Increasing strife and disunity developed in religious matters in England after 1600. Simultaneously moderate men became increasingly concerned about the future of a unified Christianity. Probably the most systematic and religiously conscious^S of the solutions offered resulted from the work of three dedicated laymen, the Latitudinarians.

To John Hales of Eton, William Chillingworth, and Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, Latitudinarianism was the result of their intensive study of the eminent religious philosophers from the Renaissance to their own time. Latitudinarianism, a lay philosophy, rested on three primary tenets. To bring peace and unity to the Christian world once more, men must tolerate all Christian beliefs and repudiate persecution. Each individual must employ his reason to learn God's will and gain salvation, depending only on the Bible as an infallible guide. Being of free will and conscience, the individual should judge on his own the validity of non-essential religious passages. Doctrine should be minimized to the essential beliefs that were manifest in the Bible, so that all Christians would be able to agree and effect a reunion in Christendom.¹

The concepts were gleaned from sixteenth century laymen, notably Jacobus Acontius, who experienced religion as deeply as the Latitudinarians, but, also, looked on the religious spectrum with fine objectivity. They wished to impress upon their fellow Christians knowledge of the personal responsibility involved in religious thinking and of the doctrines which were held in common by all the

faithful. Realizing that dogma and intolerance were clerical weapons to control men's minds, moderate laymen attempted to return man's mind and conscience to him. The Latitudinarians held this same purpose in mind as they developed their ideals to unify and revitalize Christianity in a divided and disturbed England.

BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENT OF LATITUDINARIANISM

As the Renaissance moved across Western Europe, spreading humanistic and rationalist values, it proved to be a force, disruptive of accepted tenets and authority in Christianity. Liberal religious philosophers of the sixteenth century, whether lay or cleric, were chiefly concerned with discovering religious truth and establishing the individual as the pivotal figure in religion. Prior to this movement the clergy and the doctrinal system had represented the authority in religious direction.

The Italian Academicians of the early sixteenth century were a distinguished and influential outgrowth of the Italian Renaissance, jogging the minds of lay philosophers with their liberal, sceptical ideas for many decades to come. Students of humanism and rationalism, they applied their ideals to religious beliefs and traditions. As a group they rejected authoritative Church tradition, bigotry, and persecution. Exercising private judgment in selecting suitable doctrines, and reason in testing the Scriptures, they soon denied the divinity of Christ and the ideal

of the Trinity, thereby founding Unitarianism.^{1A} In the North Erasmus had published several revolutionary ideas, advising toleration and freedom of thought. The Bible should be the only foundation for teaching faith and morality and Christian doctrine should be so composed that it would be acceptable to all Christians. In the Opus Epistolarum he wrote "that which has to do with faith can be disposed of in the very fewest articles."² But Erasmus kept his thought within the confines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. In England in 1516, Sir Thomas More presented his idea of the ideal spiritual commonwealth, Utopia. All its citizens honored the central god, Mithra, but also worshiped another particular god of their own choosing. The ruler maintained a policy of toleration and the Established Church, which accepted all true believers on a broad doctrinal basis.³ Such a system would later be ordained by Queen Elizabeth I to obtain unity and uniformity.

The Academicians stimulated the most immediate response among the objective, but sensitive thinkers to find a remedy for the bloodletting and bigotry. Probably the most eminent lay philosopher of the sixteenth century, Jacobus Acontius surpassed the efforts of his fellow laymen in designing the comprehensive and charitable nature of lay thought. Every aspect and relationship in Christianity, the most difficult but insistent relationships being those of the individual to his faith and to his fellow man, were thoroughly argued and systematically woven into his

theory of a pure and fulfilling Christianity by Acontius.⁴ By vocation Acontius practiced law; by avocation he was a religious philosopher, profiting from his friendship with several of the liberal Academicians, as Castellio, Ochino, and Lelio Socinus, the uncle of Faustus. Acontius visited England, in the role of engineer, where he had occasion to champion toleration for the Anabaptist sect, refusing to be intimidated by an excommunication decree in 1562,⁵ just as he had championed his beliefs before threats of persecution and death.

Acontius' mind was as flexible and receptive as his person was courageous and his philosophy comprehensive and tolerant. His finest work, the Satanae Stratagemata libri octo was published in Switzerland in 1565, but spread its message into the Low Countries and into England, published there in 1631^{5A} at Oxford. According to Acontius, the Devil's strategy consisted merely of causing dissension among Christians, and their separation into hostile sects, claiming exclusive salvation and sole possession of religious truth. To combat the Devil the individual believer should read the Scriptures interpreting them by his own reason, deciding in his private judgement what he should accept as truth. He must not allow any other factor, such as the authority in church tradition or of clerics, to enter into his decision or his beliefs. The Church could not in any way force its dogma upon the individual. There was no possible reason or justification for

persecution as the bigoted clerics held.

Certainly claims of exclusive salvation were not a reasonable basis for forcing a man's conscience, since man only needed to find religious truth or God's will and to abide by these truths throughout his life to receive salvation. Acontius perceived that in all the dogmas there existed basic similarities, and all Christians adhering to a confession reduced to the essentials for faith should tolerate any varying opinions on the non-essentials in faith. In the Bible the essentials were few, but readily apparent, simple and uncontroversial. The non-essentials, however, included whatever seemed blurred in meaning and did not warrant so strict an interpretation that it would cause dissension and bigotry among Christians. God clearly lighted what he desired all believers to hold sacred. Acontius wrote that:

some confession of faith may sometime be composed such as may satisfy all pious churches. For though controversies may remain, men between whom they arise should be persuaded of common loyalties and that as brethren their disputes might be so calmly debated that strife should perish, agreement be reached, and occasions for calumny on the part of adversaries be removed.⁷

Acontius thoroughly and rationally examined the Scriptures, deciding which few Scriptural passages must be accepted and followed to obtain salvation. This confession of faith would satisfy all faithful men, for it contained essentially what God clearly placed in the Scriptures as a guide to salvation through God, Christ, and the divine lessons. Acontius

concluded that Christians must:

acknowledge the one only true God, and Him whom He hath sent, Jesus Christ His Son, being made man...and that by His name we shall obtain salvation, and that we place not our righteousness in the works of the Law, but that we be truly persuaded, that there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved.⁸

If men should doubt their quest or ~~the~~ truths they were seeking, Acontius considered it an occasion for rejoicing, as proof that they were indeed searching and succeeding in their mission. There existed no absolute truth or evil, but by the learning process men could distinguish right from wrong. To work to know Christ's commands and to obtain salvation, men must be unconditionally free in will, judgment, and inquiry.

The ideals of Acontius were credited for their scope and piety both by the Arminians and William Chillingworth.⁹ Therefore Acontius' emphasis on reason and toleration, his denial of any infallible authority in religion and his efforts to weave one confession for all Christians were positively continued in the Low Countries and in England.

In Switzerland, the leader of the philosophical group to which Acontius belonged was Sebastian Castellio.¹⁰ Castellio, too, concerned himself with persecution which he regarded as the means to supremacy among sectarians. He and the other lay thinkers were actually reacting to Catholicism and Calvinism both of which barred free and rational inquiry and forced their doctrines on dissenters. Any dissenting opinion did not breathe heresy, for only those who, "obstinately hold to some vicious sect or opinion are properly called heretics."¹¹ This very

same definition was adapted by John Hales and Falkland. The sects disputed the non-essential doctrines and thereby caused schism. The essential doctrines for all were manifest in the Bible and Castellio concluded that the one doctrine necessary to salvation was belief in Christ as the Son of God.¹² "The fundamental truth of Christianity is to be found in the law of love," according to Castellio and the more man knew of truth the more tolerant and charitable he would become of his fellow man.¹³

A comparison of Acontius and Castellio would reveal the clash of the objective and the emotional approaches to the religious difficulties. Castellio's dismay and revulsion were expressed primarily in his works. But Acontius, although sensitive to the unworthy methods of the churches and sects, remodeled the numerous old religious structures, uncomplementary and jealous of each other, into a unified and spacious structure, reaching Heavenwards.¹⁴ Acontius' definitive method characterized the Latitudinarians.

The Socinians, early Unitarians, were also rooted in the Academician group and based their concepts on a thoroughly tested Bible. Because reason ruled the Socinians and caused them to deny the very basic concepts of Christianity, they had to bear the detestation and extreme bitterness of the majority of Christians. In Switzerland, Bernardino Ochino (1487-1565), a friend of Acontius, wrote his objections to persecution and intolerance in the Dialogues, published in 1563. He declared

that the practice of persecution had no basis in the Bible nor in reason. Ochino denied the doctrine of the Trinity and believed that the purpose of Christ's crucifixion was to change man and not God.¹⁵ But the complete and systematic formulation of Socinian doctrine was the result of the work in Poland by Faustus Socinus (1537-1604). The preface to the Catechism of Rakau stated:

In giving to the world the Catechism of our Church it is not our intention to make war on anybody. With good reason pious people complain that the various confessions or catechisms which the various Churches are publishing at the present time are apples of discord among Christians because it is sought to impose them upon other people's consciences and to regard those who dissent from their teachings as heretics. Far be it from us to commit such a folly: our intention is not to proscribe or to oppress anyone. Let each be free to judge of religion.¹⁶

The Socinian statement of doctrine is markedly similar to Acontius' views since both stood firm for rational testing of the Scriptures and individual judgment of the truth derived. Both also refuted the existence of an infallible authority in religion and of any basis for the practice of persecution. Since Socinus believed his doctrine marked the next stage in progressive development of religious thought, the Socinians allowed no one to join their group who did not accept their tenets, but looked on all sects with tolerance and expected the same.¹⁷ Socinus worked also to reduce the necessary tenets of belief in order to form a common ground for all Christians as a means to reduce dissension and bigotry.

The Socinians' reason, therefore, led them too far

afield from any acceptable common ground of beliefs, when they rejected the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, and the doctrine of the atonement. Although many scorned their doctrine, the rationalism and liberalism stimulated the minds of men, dismayed by the violent ruptures of persecution and the darkening prospects for Christianity. The numerous tracts, therefore, that dealt with the doctrine were printed often, especially in the Low Countries, and ^{were} easily accessible to any Englishmen interested in them by 1637.¹⁸ Anthony Wotton, later provost at Eton, was accused of Socinianism between 1611 and 1614.¹⁹ The three Latitudinarians did not escape such accusations and, indeed, William Chillingworth, captured by Parliamentary forces in 1644, was persecuted by Francis Cheynell, a fanatical Presbyterian determined to force Chillingworth to repent. Anyone who supported such ideas as a rational approach to religion and a reduction in dogma before 1650 in England was immediately branded as a Socinian, for the hated Socinian doctrines were not distinct from other "isms" advocating much the same basic ideals.²⁰

Influenced by the teachings of Acontius, the Dutch liberals split off from the Established Church in Holland, opposing the doctrine of exclusive salvation and the barriers to free enquiry inherent in the Calvinist dogma. The Arminians developed their doctrine under several leaders after the intellectual and moral basis was laid by D. V. Coornhert (1522-1580) who rejected the dogma and the intolerance of the Calvinists.²¹ Jacobus

Arminius led the group from their split with the Established Church until his death in 1609. He and his colleague Uytenbogaert had studied in Geneva under Calvinist influence, but also under the liberalizing influence of Perrot, who advised that anyone who disagreed with the Established dogma should not be condemned as long as he was faithful to the essentials. His intellectual inheritance was liberal, being the humanism of Erasmus and Coornhert. In fact, Coornhert's doctrine, which he was assigned to refute, was the immediately decisive factor in his doctrinal reversal of 1590 when he undertook anti-orthodox ideals.²² Sectarians claimed to control salvation and used persecution to force compliance with their dogma, but Arminius maintained that Christ died for all men and not the elect. All men were equally able to gain salvation if they would follow Christ's commands. Religious intolerance would not settle dissension and since it was practiced increasingly by fanatics, Arminius feared Christianity might lose its identity. Toleration was the only sane and charitable means to preserve Christianity, for through toleration the faithful would once more see the common bonds and agreement on basic doctrines.

Shaping the Arminian doctrine, also, were Episcopius and Hugo Grotius, disciples of Arminius. Both enjoyed healthy reputations in England and were contemporary to the Latitudinarians. Episcopius might be characterized as the Dutch counterpart to Falkland, for he loved peace and unity above all else. Episcopius stated that the individual possessed the right to decide his religious views for himself and he should do so by scanning the Scriptures and finding the essentials for salvation. Any passage

that might cause disputes he considered unimportant. He rejected persecution and interference by any claimant of authority with a man and his conscience. Discussing his primary thesis, Episcópius wrote:

I believe...that to draw a line of distinction between essential and unessential truths, and to promote unity and peace among Christians, should be the end and object of all our labors and writings, and that to which every~~thing~~ else ought to be subservient.²³

Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) mainly concerned himself with rationality in religion and condemn~~ed~~ the clerics who sought to rule men's thoughts and sway their wills. In De Jure Belli ac Pacis, written in 1625, he wrote that toleration would end clerical tyranny and bigotry. His formula for toleration was based on rationalism and Erastianism or subordination of the church to the state. He promoted the ideal of universal grace, that is, bringing about a reunion of all Christians through a common committment to toleration and Grotius' four fundamentals of faith. The fundamentals involved the acceptance of the being and unity of God and belief in God as a spiritual being, as guardian of the world, and ~~as~~ the creator of all.²⁴ The emphasis was on the nature of the supreme being. Grotius and Acontius would agree that the Godhead was the only essential Christian doctrine. Falkland, admiring Grotius' ideals, honored him in a poem. John Hales came to know the Arminian doctrines well because of his attendance at the Synod of Dort, and followed their ideals closely. For both the Latitudinarians and the

Arminians were promoting the significance of the individual in religious matters, as well as Christian unity.

English philosophers after 1550 did not develop a totally liberal doctrine, but their ideas did influence the Latitudinarians somewhat. Between 1593-1597 Richard Hooker wrote The Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity, considered the classical statement of Anglican doctrine. Hooker supported the Elizabethan Settlement which was Erastian and broadly based, so as to be comprehensive of all faithful Englishmen. Hooker maintained that a state could not remain united and powerful, if religious dissension thundered about the state. The citizens must not think that they could change the form of their government or debate governmental policy, because of their relative freedom in dealing with religious matters. The aim, therefore, of Hooker's work was to prove that Puritan ideals would not be workable in English governmental institutions and that the Puritans in stirring up controversy were gradually destroying political authority.²⁵ The state would establish and maintain a dependent national church and the citizen would automatically become a member. The state could not allow anyone to leave the Established Church. In writing this:

Schism and disturbances will arise in the church if all men may be tolerated to think as they please, and publicly speak what they think.²⁶

and in his rejection of private judgement which was integral to liberal lay thought and theories of toleration, Hooker precluded

himself from presenting a theory of toleration.²⁷ Only anarchy would be the result, if men exercised their private judgement in religious matters. ~~The~~ **I**nterference in the religious relationship might be avoided, for Hooker did advocate the minimizing of doctrine to the essentials through rational investigation of the Scriptures. The church would decide any disputed area. Hooker, therefore, supported a broad and rational religious system, but he shied away from toleration for fear of chaos. The Latitudinarian promotion of a comprehensive religious basis and minimum doctrine was, ~~the~~ traditional, but they made little reference to the church-state relationship.

Edwin Sandys liberalized Hooker's view somewhat. Son of the Archbishop of York and widely traveled, Sandys wrote View or Survey of the State of Religion in the Westerne Parts of the World stating that intolerance would be Christianity's personal executioner and the government should enforce toleration. Like Grotius, he wished for a reunion of all Christians on the basis of broad fundamentals. John Donne, whom Falkland admired and remembered in verse, thought that the search for truth, although difficult, must be each man's duty. Men happened onto their faith by birth, accident or because of the country in which they lived, but they must not accept this faith but search for their own. He adhered to a doctrine of essentials also, writing that all faiths are the "virtual beams of one sun."²⁸

The line of influence in Latitudinarianism is traceable from ~~the~~

Italian Academicians, through the layman Acontius and the Arminians. From the Low Countries the liberal rational philosophy flowed to England by means of books, merchants and returning exiles of the very early 1600's.²⁹ Acontius had surpassed all thinkers in his century as a person in charity and piety and as a philosopher in his rational study of religion. He would establish the individual as the decisive factor in a personal religion and as a member in the union of all Christians. Such an ideal could be accomplished only through toleration and adoption of essential Christian beliefs to be the basis of the union. The Arminians adopted Acontius' ideal, for they knew Acontius, as well as, Erasmus. Being more contemporary with the Latitudinarians, and accepted in England, they were the most logical and immediately available source of liberal ideas to the Latitudinarians. Approaching the main stream as tributaries are the Socinians presenting their systematic doctrine of toleration, rationalism, and comprehension, and Hooker, presenting the traditional Anglican views as established by Elizabeth's religious policy.

THE LATITUDINARIANS

In England during the earlier years of the seventeenth century there grew up an apprehension among certain laymen concerning the zeal and intolerance of the Sectarians and the danger this situation might portend for Christianity or for both the English state and Christianity. The Establishment of Elizabeth was breaking under the Stuart's desire to strictly

define the doctrines and the structure of the National Church. This policy alienated the Puritans who were becoming increasingly fanatical and desirous to achieve their ends through political means. Intolerant sects were becoming more entrenched in spite of persecution, and new religious notions, whether conservative or liberal, were constantly in transit between the factious Low Countries and England. As the situation became more confused and volatile, building up toward the Civil War in the 1640's, three distinct moderate groups rose. They were the Latitudinarians, the Rationalists, and the Erastians, constituted by objective laymen, catholic in outlook.³⁰ Explaining the moderate position of Rationalist Sir Thomas Browne, W. K. Jordan characterized the newly arisen lay thought in England before 1640. He noted that:

The manifold forces which were moulding English thought into new forms, the apprehension and distaste which intolerant sectarianism was producing amongst intelligent men, the rising spirit of inquiry and rationalism, the noble latitudinarianism and moderation which were being raised as the reply to bigotry are everywhere manifest.³¹

A group of early moderates immediately preceded the Latitudinarians and included William Vaughan, author of the Golden-Croue, Francis Quarles (1592-1644), probably influenced by Archbishop Ussher toward moderation and toleration, and Sir Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), a renowned Calvinist minister who attempted to formulate a moderate and rational church doctrine as a basis for Christian unity. All moderates protested extremism and persecution. Sir Henry Wotton, provost at Eton, and a friend of John Hales of Eton, possessed a remarkably flexible mind. He

blamed the clergy for causing the bigotry and persecution without which Christians could see the common links in doctrine and could build a unified church upon these fundamentals.³²

The Rationalists, contemporary with the Latitudinarians, were sceptics whose influence became more apparent toward the end of the seventeenth century. These laymen were not of religious leanings and adored reason as their god. They made a rational and scientific study, based on observation, of the religious basis of ecclesiastical authority and intolerance. They looked upon religion with pure objectivity. Reason instigated all thought and man found God through his reason alone. The Rationalists sought to suppress passion, tradition or whatever might affect a man's objectivity. Only then could truth be discovered. Sir John Davies (1569-1626) believed in man's perfectibility. Another Rationalist was Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) who wrote of his personal search for truth in Religio Medici, first circulated in 1635. Browne argued that reason conquered all, but that the individual must find the truth only through his abilities. He urged a universal church and thought that God's mercy included all good and charitable men.

The Erastian thought was ably put forth by Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and the greatest sceptic of all, John Selden (1584-1654). Their main thesis, developed by Episcopius, Grotius, and Althusius, concerned the relationship between church and state.³³ The state must control the church on religious affairs but always with moderation and tolerance. The Erastians primarily sought to avoid civil disorder and religious persecution.

Lay contemporaries of the Latitudinarians were concerned with peaceful co-existence among Christians as an essential to political unity. The Latitudinarians, however, embodied the principle of religion for its own sake. They were attempting to separate religion from the Roman Catholic Church and the sectarians and ^{to} revitalize Christendom through renewed unity in spirit. They were not concerned with the state-church relationship, but rather with the individual Christian and his relationship with God and with his fellow Christians. They professed that toleration, rationalism and a common confession would cement relations among Christians and with God.

The "ever-memorable" John Hales (1584-1656), the eldest Latitudinarian, worked in his own well-stocked library at Eton, avoiding public notice.³⁴ His all-embracing charity caused him to subordinate every ideal to his hopes for universal toleration, and influenced him to nearly abandon Calvinist dogma and adopt liberal Arminianism at the Synod of Dort in 1619. His unmatched charity pervades this statement from the Contract Concerning Schism and Schismatics, written in 1636 for Chillingworth's benefit:

For why might it not be lawful to go to church with the Donatist, or to celebrate Easter with the Quarto-deciman, if occasion so require? Since neither nature, nor religion, nor reason doth suggest anything to the contrary, for in all public meetings pretending holiness, so there be nothing done, but what true devotion and piety brook, why may not I be present in them, and use communication with them? Nay what if those, to whose care the execution of the public service is committed do something either unseemly or suspicious or peradventure unlawful? What if the garments they wear be censured as, nay indeed be, superstitions? What if the gesture of adoration be used at the altar, as now we have learned to speak? What if the homilist or preacher deliver

any doctrine of the truth of which we are not well persuaded...yet for all this we may not separate, except we be constrained personally to bear a part in them ourselves.³⁷

Hales knew that dogmatic systems tended to become exclusive and intolerant. Their benefit to Christianity was negative and often caused further separation. A basic doctrine of fundamentals would satisfy all and the interpretation of the non-essentials, not clearly stated in the Bible, depended on the individual man and his reason. Whatever his interpretation might be, there is no excuse for those who disagreed to force him from his own considered judgment. They held no more authority nor were they more infallible in insight than he and should never interfere with the exercise of reason and judgment. Hales could easily tolerate and be charitable to any man, no matter what his religious views, if that man took as his personal responsibility the search for truth. He understood, as Chillingworth did not, that man would always hesitate and err, for truth was not readily at hand. If man should err in his quest for reason, he would not be damned. Enshrining reason in his apology to Archbishop Laud, Hales wrote:

The pursuit of truth hath been my only care,
ever since I understood the meaning of the word
...If, with all this cost and pains, my purchase
is but error, I may safely say...it is not my
fault, but my misfortune.³⁸

The structure of an ecclesiastical system therefore concerned him little, for his desire was to permeate men's minds with charity and send each man seeking truth to gain salvation through reason.

As long as men tolerated each others' opinions concerning religion , Christianity and its faithful would remain a productive and positive force in England and in the world.

If Hales contributed incomparable humanity, the noble, tolerant scholar, Lucius Cary, Viscount of Falkland (1610?-1643) contributed spiritual leadership to the Latitudinarians. Scholars, usually sympathetic to the Latitudinarian philosophy, met at his manor Great Tew in Oxfordshire for discussion and study. Among the visitors were Henry Hammond, a minister who later defended Falkland's Discourse of Infallibility and a future Archbishop, Gilbert Sheldon. Chillingworth and Falkland were the core of Latitudinarianism in the circle and published their philosophy.

Falkland thought and believed deeply, embracing all aspects of Latitudinarianism, but desiring unity before all else. He realized that man's reason and conscience must be free to discover Christ's commandments and the road to salvation. He must be free from any authority except the Bible which was the only infallible guide and authority for God's words to man. Man must test all he touched in his thoughts with reason. In the Discourse of Infallibility, published in 1643, Falkland explained that there could be no loss of God's mercy because of honest errors. Falkland dismayed of the enervating affects upon the individual and Christianity from persecution and disunity.

This opinion of damning so many, and this custom of burning so many, this breeding up those, who knew nothing else in any point of

religion, yet to be in a readiness to cry,
'to the fire with him, to Hell with him.'³⁹

in Falkland's *view* condemned the persecutor. Reducing Christian doctrine to the essentials would bring about Christian unity once more, leaving the non-essentials to the individual man and his reason. Whatever he might decide about the unnecessary points should be of no offense or concern to any other person, for religious truth was relative to each man's needs and thoughts. In an eclectic approach to unity Falkland admitted that there were valuable doctrines to be found in every Christian church. Finding the good points and combining them into a confession satisfactory to all believers might achieve unity. This idea was treated by Chillingworth also but was not a strictly Latitudinarian concept. It would seem reminiscent of John Hales' charitable approach. In explaining the eclectic system, Falkland also touched upon his personal goal i. e. unity:

It is seeking the truth impartially...An impartial search will lead us to the approval of what is good in any Christian church. It will be the means, if generally followed, of restoring Christian unity, not uniformity, but that best unity, which is of charity. Let us be Christian eclectics, seeking the good in diverse places.⁴⁰

Whether the common confession was based on fundamental Christian beliefs or on doctrines carefully selected among all the sects and churches, Falkland wished to bring about a reunion of Christians. For this would put an end to intolerance and bigotry and begin a bright, new era of religious concord as God intended.

Falkland's Latitudinarianism grew out of thorough and tedious study of the numerous religious philosophies and he found that he must resist tempting doctrines. The claim of infallibility by the Roman Catholics was the most difficult to overcome, for it seemed to provide religious security. To help others avoid the pitfall, Falkland sought to refute any claim that the Roman Catholic Church might have to infallibility and for this purpose he penned the succinct Discourse of Infallibility. He wrote that the Catholics sought to prove their claims by references to the ancient writers, Scripture, and the Church's long traditional authority in religious affairs. He did not understand from the proofs offered that God had so appointed the Church and reasoned:

Yet though it be infallible, unless it both plainly appear to be so (for it is not certain to whom it doth not appear certain) and unless it be manifest which is the Church, God hath not attained his end.⁴¹

The arguments put forth by the Church primarily rested on its own testimony and decrees not on God's words. Therefore, they were weak and irrational.

The Anglican church became his target in a Parliamentary speech of 1641 concerning episcopacy. He harshly criticized the bishops for misuse of their ecclesiastical and temporal power and for the destruction of Christian unity in England. They reintroduced Catholicism into the church once again:

Some have evidently laboured to bring in an English, though not a Roman popery; I mean, not only the outside and dress of it, but equally absolute, a blind dependence of the people upon the clergy, and of the clergy upon themselves.⁴²

But knowing little about government and fearing disunity above all else, Falkland remained a moderate. Bishops might be stripped of any powers that would distract them from their religious duties, but Falkland felt it would be wiser not to abolish episcopacy.⁴³

William Chillingworth's the Religion of the Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation doubled as the systematic and full expression of Latitudinarian doctrine and as the continuation of Richard Hooker's statement on Anglicanism, although thoroughly revised. Published in 1638, with Laud's blessing, its supposed purpose was to definitely and finally refute the Catholic Knott's statement that salvation could not be obtained in the Protestant realm. Chillingworth (1602-1644) meticulously accomplished his argument by disputing Knott paragraph by paragraph. The entire work was written at Great Tew with its library at his fingertips and with Falkland, to aid and advise him. Actually, Chillingworth was revealing the Latitudinarian philosophy in its entirety, demonstrating its advantages by refuting the unreasonable dogmatic doctrines and intolerance of the exclusive churches and sects. In the quotation below, Chillingworth explained the full range of Latitudinarianism as based on reason, toleration, and Christian unity:

If instead of being zealous Papists, earnest Calvinists, rigid Lutherans, they would become themselves and be content that others should be, plain and honest Christians, if all men would believe the Scripture, and freeing themselves from prejudice and passion, would sincerely

endeavour to find the true sense of it, and live according to it, and require no more of others than to do so;... There would of necessity be among all men, in all things necessary unity of opinion.⁴⁴

Being noble and charitable men, the Latitudinarians were naturally inclined to objectivity and toleration. As products of a religious age, they felt a deep commitment and personal need to preserve Christian brotherhood. As successors to the liberal rationalism and humanism of Acontius and the Arminians, they realized the sanctity of the individual and his reasoning. They were immediately sensitive to any source potentially destructive to their ideals. They had to combat just such a situation in the 1630's in England. Chillingworth, Falkland, and Hales combined their knowledge and insight to produce Latitudinarianism, the rational and tolerant solution for universal Christian unity. The philosophy possessed the same fine and worthy qualities as its proponents. But no matter how matchlessly ^{WOVEN} were their ideals and goals, the Latitudinarians were swimming against the currents of the time. Whatever influence they might have gained, they lost during the Civil War, for to preserve any of their influence they were forced to choose sides, whether completely in agreement or not. They accomplished nothing as moderates in reasoning with fanatics and extremists whose tyranny ruled the opposing parties. Sectarianism would be firmly established and in a few years the government would be compelled to grant toleration to a disunified Christendom

The failure of the Latitudinarian goals, however, was not entirely due to the deteriorating state of religious and political stability. The movement was primarily an aristocratic ideal and their ideas did not filter into the lower, more influential, classes where they would have had to take root to endure. Latitudinarianism, emphasizing a scholarly approach to religion, would hardly appeal to the lower classes in society for it was necessary that they be literate and be at leisure to contemplate the Scriptures. It seemed reasonable and imperative, therefore, that Chillingworth should have drawn up a confession of the essential doctrines. To him, so sceptical, it may have seemed to be an infallible guide or a well-intentioned doctrine that might quickly develop dogmatic qualities. ⁴⁵ Rationalism was only a step ahead of scepticism and men could justify belief through rationalism. It would be a vicious circle, as men misused Latitudinarianism to prove their beliefs, extreme or reactionary, and build new dogmatic systems. Rationalism might also produce only doubt and scepticism. Realizing that scepticism easily could conquer faith Falkland said:

There were few truths so clear that it was not more hard to prove them than to find something to object against them. ⁴⁶

Latitudinarianism might seem to be a beautiful ideal and surely it was positive but in the end men would fail because of human frailty to keep its tenets. Its enduring significance lay with its advocacy of tolerance and with the human and noble qualities of the three laymen who so devotedly developed it.

They were forced to bear their own failure to turn back the destruction and then the actual division of England. Hales lived through the Civil War, but less contented and happy, and Chillingworth died in 1644 as a result of pneumonia coupled with the insane persecution of Francis Cheynell. Falkland, heart-broken and realizing only death could soothe his anguish, rode into the heat of battle and died. He endures in Clarendon's fond portrayal and in his admiring epitaph he described Falkland as:

A person of such prodigious parts of learning and knowledge, of that inimitable sweetness and delight in conversation, of so flowing and obliging a humanity and goodness to mankind, and that primitive simplicity and integrity of life, that if there were no other brand upon this odious and accursed Civil War, than that single loss, it must be most infamous and execrable to all posterity.⁴⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹ W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), II, 349-350.

^{1A} W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), I, 306-308.

² Kurt Weber, Lucius Cary, Second Viscount Falkland (New York, 1940), p. 252.

³ Jordan, I, 42.

⁴ Ibid., p. 303.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 315-316.

^{5A} John McLachlan, Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England (New York, 1951), p. 59: This edition was in Latin.

⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jordan, I, 339-340.

⁹ McLachlan, p. 58.

¹⁰ Jordan, I, 315.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 313.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 314.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 314-315.

¹⁵ McLachlan, p. 4.

¹⁶ Jordan, I, 307.

¹⁷ McLachlan, p. 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

²⁰ William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1938), p. 195.

²¹ Jordan, I, 331.

²² Ibid., II, 322.

²³ Ibid., p. 340.

- 24 Ibid., pp. 346-348.
- 25 Ibid., I, 222.
- 26 Ibid., p. 224.
- 27 Ibid., p. 225.
- 28 Ibid., II, 40.
- 29 McLachlan, pp. 34-35.
- 30 Jordan, II 316-317.
- 31 Ibid., p. 447.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 363-364.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 328-329; Althusius, a disciple of Arminius, urged
trastionism, but demanded complete toleration from the state.
- 34 Kenneth Murdock, The Sun at Noon (New York, 1939), p. 15.
- 35 McLachlan, p. 70.
- 36 Ibid.,
- 37 John Hales, Several Tracts (London, 1716), pp. 177-178.
- 38 McLachlan, p. 71.
- 39 Jordan, II, 376.
- 40 Weber, p. 246.
- 41 Falkland, Lucius Cary, 2nd viscount, Discourse of Infallibility,
n; Henry Hammond, Works, (Oxford, 1646), p. 2.
- 42 Theresa Lewis, Dame, Lives of the Friends and Contemporaries of
Lord Chancellor Clarendon (London, 1852), I, 55.
- 43 Ibid., p. 61.
- 44 McLachlan, p. 84.
- 45 Jordan, II, 393.
- 46 Murdock, p. 128.
- 47 Clarendon, Edward Hyde, Earl, History of the Rebellion and Civil
Wars (Oxford, 1846), IV, 240-241.

- 24 Ibid., pp. 346-348.
- 25 Ibid., I, 222.
- 26 Ibid., p. 224.
- 27 Ibid., p. 225.
- 28 Ibid., II, 40.
- 29 McLachlan, pp. 34-35.
- 30 Jordan, II 316-317.
- 31 Ibid., p. 447.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 363-364.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 328-329: Althusius, a disciple of Arminius, urged
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- 34 Kenneth Murdock, The Sun at Noon (New York, 1939), p. 15.
- 35 McLachlan, p. 70.
- 36 Ibid..
- 37 John Hales, Several Tracts (London, 1716), pp. 177-178.
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- 42 Theresa Lewis, Dame, Lives of the Friends and Contemporaries of
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- 43 Ibid., p. 61.
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