

## JAMES NAYLER AND THE LAMB'S WAR

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### ABSTRACT

James Nayler was perhaps the most articulate theologian and political spokesman of the earliest Quaker movement. He was part of a West Yorkshire group of radicals who added revolutionary impetus to George Fox's apocalyptic preaching of Christ's coming in the bodies of common men and women. With other Quaker leaders, Nayler insisted upon disestablishment of the Church, abolition of tithes, and disenfranchisement of the clergy, in order that Christ might rule in England, through human conscience. For early Friends, Christ's sovereignty in the conscience was less a principle of individual freedom to dissociate religiously than a basis for collective practices of revolutionary worship, moral reform, social equality, and economic justice. All these were features of the nonviolent struggle Nayler called the 'Lamb's War'. His meteoric career is outlined in this study, a movement from apocalyptic prophet, to stigmatised Christ-figure, to withdrawn quietist.

### KEYWORDS

James Nayler, Lamb's War, apocalyptic, revolution, anarchism, George Fox

James Nayler is best remembered for his notorious entry into Bristol on 24 October 1656, symbolising Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Reaction to that provocation culminated in a moment of high political drama, comparable the trial and beheading of Charles I in 1649. Moreover, the conflicts between Nayler, George Fox, Martha Simmonds, Edward Burrough, and others before the Bristol event constitute an intense interpersonal drama. The personal and political dramas surrounding that one fateful moment in Nayler's life have often drawn scholarly attention away from his overall prophetic career between 1652 and 1660. The larger, revolutionary thrust of his witness and of the early Quaker movement is thereby lost.

Two important biographies of Nayler in recent years have much merit, but fail to articulate the deeper reasons why Nayler's provocation elicited such violent political and popular reaction. William Bittle's study (1986) is the best overall account of Nayler to date. Given that he writes from the perspective of political history, his attention to detail in Nayler's life is fine and his sensitivity to theological issues is admirable. He excels at narrating and analysing Nayler's trail and its political

aftermath. But he fails to grasp the deeper political logic of Nayler's action and the Quaker movement generally, and their true threat to the Puritan regime. Leo Damrosch (1996) approaches Nayler from a background in literature. His attention to biblical typologies in Nayler's writings is often insightful, but stops short of understanding the apocalyptic manner in which those typologies were so intensely realised in the personal experiences and revolutionary praxis of early Friends. Damrosch reads Nayler's testimony to the light in human conscience from a modern, individualistic perspective. Consequently, he hears only personal liberty and equality proclaimed (e.g. 1996: 129, 145, 237). The collectivist impetus of the light in early Quaker understanding is missed. Although Damrosch exceeds even Bittle in detailed accounting of Nayler's trial, he portrays the latter simply as a martyr for the cause of personal expression (Spencer 2001: 115 makes similar criticisms). The vision and stakes of the early Quaker movement were much higher.

So the purpose of the present study is to examine the revolutionary political valences of the early Quaker movement, as focused acutely in the life of James Nayler. Nayler was probably the most eloquent theological and political spokesman of the earliest movement, although his positions were shared by early Quaker leadership generally. We must inevitably deal with his Bristol action, some of the interpersonal conflicts surrounding it, and the political reaction it precipitated. But we will place those within the overall trajectory of his prophetic career, both before and after 1656.

#### JAMES NAYLER AND QUAKER BEGINNINGS

The Civil Wars of the 1640s were fought at various sites around England. But the political contest over their outcome centered strongly in the South. Besides the political debates in Parliament, the South was the main locus of radical ideas and experiments. Those intensified to a crisis point around the time of Charles' final defeat, trial, and execution in 1648–49. But as the Purged, or 'Rump', Parliament that condemned Charles failed to enact the religious and political liberties that radicals expected, disillusion and resentment set in. Much of that was categorised under the label 'Ranterism'. Although there was no sect or movement of 'Ranters', the name still attests to a significant cluster of individuals and groups, mainly in the South, who vented audaciously against the emerging establishment. Their rebellious writings and actions amounted to a stark inversion of Puritan morality and religion.

Political historian Ronald Hutton comments upon the panic that such antinomian ideas and gestures elicited in Puritan society in 1649–50:

The mere fact of their existence was enough to horrify many people, whether commoners or MPs, and to inspire the sensational and overimaginative stories of the press. In fact those who shared in this 'moral panic' were facing the wrong way, worrying about incidents in the south of England. They ought to have been watching the dales of the North, where the most important and dramatic popular heretical movement in English history was brewing up, unnoticed by outsiders... By the end of 1652 they were forming an organisation for the purpose of nationwide evangelism. At that date they were scattered over most of the...north... Unlike previous radicals their numbers included many farmers and well as artisans, bridging the worlds of town and country. They were starting to refer to each other as the Friends (Hutton 2000: 33–34).

There was no reason to expect the Quaker uprising in the North. And central government took little notice until the movement reached the South. But Quaker preaching evoked an upsurge from the 'political unconscious' of the nation. The movement mobilised social sectors—geographic, gendered, and socio-economic—that had hitherto been under-represented in the English revolution. Historians such as Hutton and Barry Reay (1985) have brought fresh political perspective to the early Quaker emergence. Their work has provided important corrective, particularly for modern Friends, who often see only sectarian foundings in that history. But the deeper revolutionary meaning of early Quaker prophetic witness is easily missed by secular and sectarian historians alike.

James Nayler, native of the West Riding of Yorkshire, spent more than eight years in the Parliamentary Army. He served ably as a quartermaster in General Lambert's regiments and occasionally preached among the ranks. David Neelon (2001) has carefully gleaned what can be known of Nayler's military service. For health reasons, Nayler finally left the Army sometime after the battle of Dunbar in September 1650, returning home to his wife and three daughters on their farm at West Ardsley. He was part of a small group of Army drop-outs and other radical spirits in that neighborhood. They had been in correspondence with George Fox while the latter was imprisoned at Derby in 1650–51. In late 1651, shortly after his release, Fox traveled to Yorkshire to meet the group (see Hoare 2002: 7–32). In his *Journal* (1952: 73) Fox mentions James Nayler among those convinced as a result of his preaching. It may be, however, that the convincement was mutual. Fox imbued that group of advanced spirits with a new sense of empowerment and direction. At the same time, that group brought to Fox's message a social and political programme one does not detect in his earlier preaching around the Midlands in the late 1640s.

Early the following spring, Nayler felt called to join Fox's apostolic ministry and abruptly left home. He described that call during his trial for blasphemy at Appleby in January 1653. He testified that one day while plowing, he was called out from his home and family, began to make arrangements, but then balked. He fell acutely ill in some manner he attributed to the wrath of God. After recovering, he resumed arrangements to leave. Then one day, as he accompanied a friend to the gate of his home, he simply kept going, wearing an old suit, carrying no money. He left without saying farewell to his wife or children, not even thinking of any specific journey. He concludes, 'and ever since I have remained, not knowing today what I was to do tomorrow' (Nayler 2003: 33–34).

The story strongly echoes the radical call of Jesus in Luke 9.57–62. Nayler's identification with the Son of Man, who 'has nowhere to lay his head', was acute from the beginning. To be sure, he gravitated strongly to Fox and Margaret Fell, as well as his closest Yorkshire Quaker friends, such as William Dewsbury and Richard Farnworth. But there is a rending abruptness in his departure from home and family that prefigures a self-annihilating quality in his spirituality, and an unmediated absolutism in his politics.

Nayler's letters of spiritual counsel and political tracts are similar to Fox's in most respects. But politically, Fox combined prophetic confrontation with conciliatory conversations with those in power. Likewise, within the movement, he combined

strong leadership with careful consultation with other Quaker leaders. Nayler was both more *absolute* in confronting the powers and more *intimate* in his personal engagement with Friends. Consequently, he elicited strong affection from those closest to him and virulent hatred from those he denounced. That divergence in personality and leadership style between Nayler and Fox eventually culminated in a breakdown between them and in Nayler's Bristol provocation. That does not place Fox in the right and Nayler in the wrong, as more orthodox Friends often prefer. Nor is it helpful to cast Nayler as the romantic rebel and Fox as the stern authoritarian, as many liberal Friends consider them today. They were different personalities and different leaders. Fox might be considered the more Pauline and Nayler the more Christ-like (or the Apollonian and the Dionysian respectively, if one prefers). The genius and dynamism of the early Quaker movement generated from the combination of such elements, even if it generated tension and difficulty along the way.

The absoluteness in Nayler's spirituality diverges somewhat from Fox's testimony regarding his own experience. For example, in *What the Possession of the Living Faith Is* (1659), Nayler describes his own conviction and conversion process. He writes,

I came to see the begotten of the father manifest in measure in me in the pure image of a holy child... Christ formed in me as the scriptures witness... I was made to endure the loss of all things, and to deny all things that ever this holy spirit did war against in me, which might in any way oppress this holy plant, or hinder its growth, owning his judgment in the light, upon whatever was in my heart or affections but him alone... (Nayler 1829: 427).

Fox might not have *disagreed* with Nayler's course here. Both men describe considerable mortification in their spiritual transformations. But Fox describes a less totally self-denying spirituality. For example, he witnesses his inward mind joined to the Seed of God in himself (Fox 1952: 13). But Nayler seems determined to efface himself utterly, that nothing but Christ might act, or even think, in him.

The West Yorkshire prophets began to multiply Fox's efforts, re-igniting radical religion and politics. Popular frustration with the Rump Parliament's stagnation was growing by 1652. It helped fuel the spread of Quaker revolt across the North, moving westward from Yorkshire through Westmoreland and Lancashire. Fox and his cohorts proclaimed that 'Christ is come to teach his people himself, and to take them off the world's religions and ways' (see this in varied forms in Fox 1952: 104, 107, 109, 143, 149-50). The message, and the spiritual guidance accompanying it, offered men and women an acute experience of *Christ's return* through the light in their consciences. The power of that *apocalyptic revelation* inspired a powerful aversion to the worship and clerical leadership of the established Church. The latter was already widely resented in the North, where parishes had long been neglected by central Church government in the South.

So the sublime experience of gathering into local groups to wait in silence upon Christ's direct teaching combined powerfully with a blazing denunciation of the established Church. The personal experience of being deconstructed and reconstructed in Christ's inward light empowered many early Friends to enter local 'steeplehouses' and confront false authority in the official Church. Such Friends

understood themselves to be the faithful gathered around the Lamb upon Mount Zion, engaging in holy war against the forces of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet (see Rev. 13–14). Hence, they used a variety of martial imageries for their nonviolent spiritual conflict. It was Nayler who eventually coined the term 'the Lamb's War' by 1657, but the terminology existed in so many words in Quaker writings from the start (for a fuller exposition of Fox's apocalyptic preaching, see Gwyn 1986).

Throughout the 1650s, Quaker writers affirmed that God's hand had been with Parliament in the Civil War. But they witnessed that the War had been a hollow victory for the English people and had thwarted God's purposes. The desolating spirituality of their conviction by the light had brought Friends to a posture of deep surrender to the power of God (for examples, see Gwyn 2000: Chapter 8)—but not to human power. Hence, the tactics of the Lamb's War were nonviolent but highly conflictual. Although Quakers were the first to mobilise a mass movement around such a vision, some pre-Quaker writers articulated this new mode of conflict a little earlier. The Digger Gerrard Winstanley wrote in 1649 that the conflict was shifting from the Civil War's dragon against dragon, to dragon against Lamb. Joseph Salmon wrote similarly the same year, as he dropped out of the Army and launched into his Ranter apotheosis (see Gwyn 2000: 145, 175–76).

The earliest published tracts by Fox and the Yorkshire Quaker leaders relentlessly attack the established Church as Antichrist's dominion in England, while calling people to come to the light in their consciences and join the army of the Lamb (for samplings from these earliest tracts, see Gwyn 1995: 138–44). The central focus of their political struggle was to discredit and disestablish the Church of England. They also wrote strongly on behalf of the poor, against corrupt merchants, magistrates, and lawyers, for legal reform, and for religious liberty. But they viewed the state-enforced Church as the key element for reform. So long as human consciences were deformed through forced Church attendance, through listening to university-trained preaching, and through coerced tithe-payments, other social ills would remain largely unquestioned.

To a nation sliding into a political quagmire, Quakers preached Christ's kingdom, Christ's right to rule in England, through human conscience. Theirs was not an individualist but a collectivist sense of human conscience, realised through a growing network of local communities that discerned and obeyed Christ's leadings together. That network formed the basis for a new social order, a social reconstruction from the grassroots upwards. Early Friends evinced no ambition to topple or take over the government. They simply demanded the right to carry on their revolution-from-below, asking central government to overrule the local clergy and justices who arrested and imprisoned them. Such a revolutionary conception of conscience and religious liberty is difficult for our post-Enlightenment minds to grasp.

Nayler was soon the equal of Fox in generating enormous excitement and conflict through his preaching and confrontations with local clergy. In November 1652, he was arrested at the request of alarmed clergy in Lancashire, charged under the 1650 Blasphemy Act, and imprisoned at Appleby. He developed his Quaker theology while answering the various petitions against him. At his trial in January 1653, he exonerated himself so convincingly that the judge, Anthony Pearson, joined the

Quaker movement. Nevertheless, petitions against him were still being received, and Nayler was held at Appleby until all of them could be answered. Lancashire clergy also wrote urgent petitions to Parliament, demanding action against the Quaker uprising. But it all seemed rather remote to southerners, and to a Parliament mired in its own conflicts. The Rump Parliament was finally dissolved by Oliver Cromwell and the Council of State in April 1653, the same month Nayler was freed. He resumed itinerating in the North and into the Midlands over the next two years, expanding the movement and responding to problems (Moore 2000: 23)

England was unlikely to elect a new Parliament willing to realise the Commonwealth the Rump had proclaimed in 1649. So the Council hand-picked a small assembly of 140 moderate-to-radical reformers, which began sitting on 4 July 1653. This Nominated Parliament (nicknamed the 'Barebones' Parliament) aroused cautious hope among Quakers and other radicals around England. There was talk of a disestablishment of the Church and an abolition of tithes. But moderates quashed that initiative within the first month of the new Parliament. It was the beginning of a long series of political disappointments for early Friends.

In his tract, *The Power and Glory of the Lord Shining out of the North, or the Day of the Lord Dawning*, published in August 1653, Nayler denounced Parliament's failure of nerve, while proclaiming good tidings from the North:

and you that are in power, mind the promise of the Father, at the coming of Christ to his kingdom, 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn, till it comes into his hand whose right it is [Ezek. 21.27], and upon his shoulders shall the government be established' [Isa. 9.6]... And take notice how many have been overturned already, who have been limiting him by their wisdoms... and you above all have declared that your desire is that Christ alone may reign in his kingdom... Oh that there were such a heart in you, to lay aside all your own wills and carnal consultations, and to take counsel at the Spirit of the Lord and be guided by his pure light shining into your conscience, which would bring you into the fear of the Lord and to depart from self-ends, interests and exaltations, and to follow the law of God in establishing laws for yourselves and others to walk by... [T]here shall be no rest until his kingdom be established above all mountains. Hear all ye powers of the earth, the Lord alone will reign (Nayler 2003: 185-86).

It was probably unclear to powers in the South whether Friends saw themselves as violent agents of such divine 'overturning'. But Nayler's annunciation here focuses clearly on the power of Christ working in human conscience.

In November 1653, as the Nominated Parliament slowly collapsed upon itself, Nayler published *A Lamentation over the Ruins of this Oppressed Nation*, addressing a betrayed people:

O England! how is thy expectation failed, now after all thy travels? the people to whom oppression and unrighteousness hath been a burthen, have long waited for deliverance, from one year to another, but none comes, from one sort of men to another. Hast thou looked for reformation, but all in vain? For as power hath come into the hands of men, it hath been turned into violence, and the will of men is brought forth instead of equity... Their houses are filled with oppression, their streets and markets abound with it; their courts, which should afford remedy against it, are wholly made up of iniquity and injustice, and the law of God is made altogether void, and truth is trodden under

foot. And plainness is become odious to the proud, and deceit set on high: and the proud are counted happy, and the rich are exalted above the poor...

And this is not done by any open enemy; for then it had not been so strange unto thee; but it is done by those who pretend to be against oppression, and for whom, under that pretence, thou hast adventured all that is dear unto thee, to put power into their hands; and now thou criest to them for help, but findest none that can deliver thee. O foolish people! When will ye learn wisdom? When will ye cease from man, who is vanity, and the sons of men, who are become a lie?

Are not these the choicest of thy worthies who are now in power?... And are not they now become weak as other men, and the land still in travail, but nothing brought forth but wind? [A]nd you that have so much cried up the kingdom of Christ in words and yet have been bold to limit him in his kingdom (the consciences of his saints), therefore above all the rest you shall not escape unpunished... Therefore will I arise, saith the Lord...and I will appear for her [Zion] in the midst of her enemies, and I will gather the outcasts thereof, who have not been regarded, but have been scattered by you as the off-scouring of the world...for the world's outcasts are my jewels, and I will bring them to possess the gates of their enemies; even by the word of the Almighty shall this be accomplished; the day is near at hand (Nayler 2003: 196-97, 203-204).

By that time, Friends were probably already planning their invasion of the South in the coming year. Such apocalyptic and revolutionary rhetoric is not unique to Nayler. It is typical of all the leading Quaker writers of these earliest years. Nayler articulates here the Quaker political principle that Christ shall rule England through his kingdom in human conscience. Successive Parliaments have limited *Christ's freedom* to rule, first of all by limiting *religious freedom*. But since neither Parliament nor the Generals will grant that freedom for Christ, God is now gathering the outcasts, the off-scouring of the world (these quaking bumpkins from the North) to advance the revolution from below, from the inside out, from the North to the South. It is a remarkable blending of *revelation* and *revolution*, a political apocalypse that begins in human conscience and personal morality, but extends to all aspects of society. Many of Nayler's writings in these early years also protest the arrests and imprisonments of Quaker prophets like himself, whose itinerant ministry was crucial to spreading this apocalyptic social revolution.

Nayler continued working in the North after the Quaker revolution moved southward in the summer of 1654, with sensational successes in Bristol and London. In December 1653, the Nominated Parliament had dissolved itself. Shortly thereafter, Cromwell was named Lord Protector under a provisional constitution, *The Instrument of Government*, drafted by John Lambert (Nayler's Civil War commander). But no new Parliament was elected until September 1654. So Cromwell and the Council ruled the nation alone for eight months. Again, an abolition of tithes was considered, then rejected.

In April 1654, Nayler wrote an epistle *To the Rulers of This Nation*. He reminds leaders that they had promised liberty of conscience years before, during the Civil War. Men like himself had risked everything in fighting the king in order to have 'liberty to profess Christ alone, to be king in conscience, and submitting alone to his pure law going forth of Zion, denying all laws that are contrary to that of Christ in the conscience' (Nayler 2004: 583). He notes that since the war, as long as people

like himself only *talk* of the kingdom of Christ, they are not persecuted. But now that Christ has gathered them to himself to *enact* the kingdom through his rule in their consciences, they are persecuted. He goes on to list the various Quaker behaviors and testimonies for which they are persecuted. Then he observes,

and now you that call those small and frivolous things knows not the law of a pure conscience. For where the conscience is kept pure it counts nothing little that Christ commands or forbids...and here be your witnesses against yourselves, who calls that little for which you inflict such heavy punishments and long imprisonments and large fines; and for those little things, we are looked upon as not worthy to live in the nation, and in those things you call little do we appear to be transformed into the kingdom of Christ and out of the kingdoms of the world (Nayler 2004: 584–85).

These strange ‘little’ Quaker manners and everyday resistances were matters such as refusing to swear oaths, speaking without flattery, refusing to remove their hats before magistrates, women’s prophecy, etc. But in such behaviors, Friends saw themselves obeying a sovereign authority alien to the consciousness of mainstream society. These were the first enactments of a radically new, more equitable, and moral society. Such politics were *anarchist* in nature, a daring faith in Christ’s Spirit to inspire, coordinate, and direct the movement beyond anyone’s understanding or intention. From these eccentric and exasperating behaviors, they expected great things to grow.

This was anarchism with a strong *martyrological* impulse. ‘The kingdom of Christ’ in Nayler’s usage here is not simply a synonym for ‘the kingdom of God’. The kingdom of Christ in Christian theology might be called a provisional revolutionary government. It wars with the world, using the same tactics Jesus used—nonviolent passive resistance. Quaker understanding of the cross led them to believe that their suffering for righteousness’ sake was redemptive in some larger work of God in the world, beyond their comprehension or strategy. (That early Quaker motif of course offers another key to Nayler’s later action in Bristol.)

#### NAYLER IN LONDON

The First Protectorate Parliament was elected and sat in September 1654. It proved hostile to the Protector and Council and was purged of its most antagonistic members within ten days. An infuriated Cromwell dissolved it the following January. So the Protector and Council again ruled alone for the next seven months. They sought to establish a general religious toleration. But they would not tolerate the notorious disruption of parish services by Quakers and some others. They proclaimed a ban on such activity in February 1655. The following April (following a failed royalist plot), they also enacted the Oath of Abjuration, requiring citizens to forswear the authority of the Pope. This too proved a handy legal device for imprisoning Quakers, who were well known for their refusal to swear. With these successive moves, the government sought to subdue opposition from both right and left. Persecutions of Friends rose sharply, particularly in the West Country, where the movement was expanding dramatically. In August 1655, the government resorted to direct military rule. Major-Generals were placed in authority over various regions of the country for



the next eleven months. While the general population was hostile to this development, Quakers expanded eagerly into the political space the Army afforded them. It provided more opportunity for advancement than any elected Parliament was likely to allow.

Meanwhile, Nayler moved South to London in June 1655. He joined Burrough and Howgill in the work they had so spectacularly begun a year before. Fox had been in London since March. Like the other Northern Friends, Nayler regarded London with genuine trepidation, unsure whether he would prove equal to the sophistication of the city. But his personal charisma and debating skill drew large crowds, ranging from earnest Seekers to curious members of London's elite. Sometime before September, Nayler and Fox wrote an open letter to Cromwell, the Army, and 'to all that are in authority, that you may more set up God in your hearts and consciences, and give liberty to that of God in all consciences'. They advocated a full disestablishment of the Church. They argued that forcing the conscience with regard to religion is the beginning of all forms of spiritual and social alienation, and all social and political disorder. Nayler closed with a personal appeal to Cromwell and the Generals:

Thus in faithfulness to God, and in love to you, with whom I have served for the good of these nations betwixt eight and nine years, counting nothing too dear to bring the government into your hands in whom it is...now my prayer to God for you is that you may lay down all your crowns at his feet, who hath given you the victory, that so the Lord being set up as king in every conscience, all may be subject to your government for conscience sake (Nayler 2004: 262).

So, while the early Quaker struggle was primarily within the social infrastructure, it needed allies in the political superstructure. The movement needed legal space in which to operate and expand, with a minimum of persecution. Early Friends clearly saw Cromwell and the Generals as their best potential allies. That does not represent a militarist tendency among early Friends, but a practical assessment that the Army posed the 'juristic person' most likely to grant the liberty they needed to further their revolution. So Nayler's exhortation to 'lay down all your crowns at [Christ's] feet' translates more-or-less to a call to the Generals to abet these rag-tag prophets from the North and the rabble they were rousing around the nation. It was certainly a long-shot! But Quaker politics were inspired in part by recent memory. No one had anticipated the Civil War in 1640. Radical tendencies had proven decisive at every turn since then.

Burrough and Howgill left London in July 1655, to spread the revolution into Ireland. They didn't return for nine months. Fox remained based in London until December, but also itinerated around the South. Nayler worked relatively on his own, particularly in early 1656. As his fame there grew, it placed strains upon him, particularly given his personality and leadership style. He was surrounded by a small group of admirers, women and men intensely devoted to him and prone to ecstatic singing and oracular speech. Burrough and Howgill returned to London in the spring of 1656 and took their places alongside Nayler in leadership. All apparently went well until Nayler left London in June for some Meetings in Yorkshire and to visit his

wife and family. He returned by July to find a polarisation in progress between his London inner circle and his Northern comrades. Extant correspondence indicates that, in order to assert control, the Northern leaders became more didactic and directive. In reaction, the Nayler group became more insistently ecstatic. In one Meeting in July, Martha Simmonds sang for about an hour in a free-form manner that included denunciations of the Northern leaders as agents of the beast (Damrosch 1996: 129). Nayler was pressed by both sides to take up their cause. But he had always resisted reflecting negatively on anyone's earnest sense of the Spirit's leading. That same year he had written in answer to a Fifth Monarchist attack that there should be no 'master teachers' among God's people (Bittle 1986: 94). When pressed by Martha Simmonds for support, Nayler withdrew and became severely depressed.

Meanwhile, Fox had been arrested at Launceston, Cornwall in January 1656. He was imprisoned for refusing the Oath of Abjuration. Despite his lengthening confinement, Fox coordinated the movement and advanced political negotiations, utilising correspondence and emissaries. He worked chiefly with George Bishop, a newly convinced Friend in Bristol who had earlier been highly placed in the government. Fox hoped to use Bishop's connections to negotiate greater toleration for Friends, particularly around Bristol, where persecution was increasing. Bishop approached Major-General Desborough for toleration in the West Country and appealed to sympathetic judges around the nation on behalf of Friends. Both Bishop and Fox also wrote to Cromwell. Finally, they collaborated in writing *The West Answering to the North* (1656, under Fox's name), enumerating various Quaker persecutions as unlawful and contrary to religious liberty (Feola-Castelucci 1992: 64-66; Feola 1996: 78-85). Although Fox consulted widely among Quaker leaders in this work of political negotiation, Nayler was left out of such communications. Perhaps his prophetic absolutism had already begun to marginalise him, as Fox's leadership became more directive and tactical.

Nayler traveled toward Launceston in August to consult with Fox regarding the conflicts in London. But he and his closest followers were arrested and imprisoned at Exeter. Letters were exchanged between the Launceston Quaker prisoners and those at Exeter. Although Fox was concerned about Nayler's situation, he apparently didn't sense serious danger to the movement. One of his companions at Launceston wrote that 'George...made not much of it and bade that no Friends should be discouraged; he said the wrong in them [i.e. Nayler's followers] was got above and James Nayler had lost his dominion, but there was something in it' (quoted in Bittle 1986: 90). What was that 'something' that Fox discerned? One wonders whether, if Fox had been able to get to Nayler at an earlier stage of the crisis, he might have been able to help his friend. Fox was finally freed in September and traveled to Exeter to meet with Nayler. Conversations broke down between the two of them, owing in part to the hostile presence of Nayler's followers most of the time.

Not much is known of the content of their conversations. Extant correspondence from those near them focuses mainly on their personal conflict, not the political strategy of the movement. But it is worth reflecting for a moment on the divergence between Nayler and Fox, in terms of the Lamb's War campaign. It may be that Nayler preferred a more diverse, anarchist (even anarchic) Quaker movement.

Certainly, the group that collected around him opted to remain in the ecstatic, oracular mode of the movement's earliest phases. By contrast, Fox and the rest of the Quaker leadership were moving toward a more rational and organised focusing of the movement. Fox was a protean leader. He had been transformed into a more confrontational figure when he encountered Nayler and the other West Yorkshire radicals in late 1651. Now, as the movement matured and became strong in the South, he was changing again, balancing prophetic confrontation with more quiet negotiation, both within the movement and toward the government. Fox was a Midlander with a genius for mediating between opposites: North and South, male and female, town and country, and different economic classes. Evidently, his shifting modes troubled Nayler. James was a gifted theologian, a charismatic preacher, a trenchant debater, and a beautiful soul—but not a tactician. As he drew back from George and his Northern confederates, he sorely misjudged his new allies (as he would eventually recognise and admit).

#### THE ACTION AT BRISTOL

Nayler and company were freed in October 1656 and moved quickly toward the West Country. Their plan was evidently now clear. In strong counterpoint to Fox's and Bishop's quiet negotiations, Nayler, Simmonds, and their friends planned a provocative act evidently aimed to escalate the Lamb's War to another level of conflict. They enacted their sign of Christ's entry into Jerusalem through the streets of Wells and Glastonbury, without major local reaction or arrest. But Bristol was a centre of intense conflict between the burgeoning Quaker community and hostile local authorities. Conditions there were ripe for a decisive confrontation. Bishop was warned of their approach and feared the undoing of his strenuous efforts of recent months (Feola 1996: 86). Bristol Friends stayed away from the spectacle of James Nayler riding into Bristol in the role of Jesus of Nazareth, hailed by his adoring followers. The group processed in pouring rain through the center of Bristol and were arrested late in the day at an almshouse on the edge of town. They were questioned by local authorities, but soon sent on to London to be tried by Parliament. Bristol magistrates urged the Second Protectorate Parliament to utilise the Nayler case to crack down on Quakers and all religious dissenters: 'now take up the reins of government into your hands which have too long lain loose in this particular, and to curb the insolencies of all ungodly persons' (quoted in Bittle 1986: 111).

This Parliament had gone into session in September, ending the more tolerant rule of the Major-Generals. This Parliament needed no encouragement to stigmatise not only Nayler but the Quaker movement generally. As historian William Bittle shows, they spent three weeks debating little other than the Nayler case, particularly the punishment to be meted. Almost untouched during those three weeks were many pressing matters of a government in protracted crisis. In terms of the length of debates, the number of divisions (votes) taken, and the attendance of members during the sessions, the Nayler case was *the major business* of the Second Protectorate Parliament.

It was readily assumed that Nayler imagined himself to be Christ returned. But during the trial, it became clear that Nayler himself held no messianic delusions. He did not confuse the indwelling of Christ with his own person. As for the exalted language his followers used in leading him through the streets of Bristol, he testified,

I do abhor that any honors due God should be given to me as I am a creature, but it pleased the Lord to set me up as a sign of the coming of the righteous one... I was commanded by the power of the Lord to suffer it to be done to the outward man as a sign, but I abhor any honor as a creature (quoted in Bittle 1986: 106).

Some of his followers were less clear, however. Parliament seized upon their testimony as the true meaning and intent of the action. They also ignored letters from Fox and Fell (confiscated at his arrest) strongly ordering Nayler to separate himself from his followers. Parliament sought to place Nayler and the entire Quaker movement in the worst possible light. To condemn Nayler as a dangerous messianic pretender was their aim. But the real political horror of Nayler's act was exactly what he affirmed of its meaning: namely, *Christ risen and moving in the flesh of common people like himself*. That uprising cannot be singled out, isolated, and extinguished. Later in the proceedings, Nayler testified, 'there was never anything since I was born so much against my will and mind as this thing, to be set up as a sign in my going into these towns, for I knew that I should lay down my life for it' (quoted Damrosch 1996: 203). But evidently, as he had drifted from the rest of the Quaker leadership, his self-annihilating impulse had become decisive.

One striking feature of Nayler's trial and punishment is the manner in which *all parties* seemed determined to re-enact the details of Christ's Passion as described in the New Testament gospels. For its part, Parliament convicted Nayler of 'horrid blasphemy', as a 'grand impostor and a great seducer of the people'. Here they cast themselves in the role of the chief priests, who condemned Jesus as 'blasphemer' (Mark 14.64) and 'seducer of the people' (Luke 23.2, 14). In December, when he was publicly pilloried, branded, and bored through the tongue, three of the women closest to him were allowed to arrange themselves around Nayler, evoking the three Mary's around the cross (John 19.25). Robert Rich, another Naylerite, was allowed to place above Nayler's head a piece of paper with the words 'King of the Jews'. Naylerites and the government collaborated in a bizarre, parodic theatre.

For his part, Cromwell remained aloof from Parliament's antics. Only at one point, 24 December 1656, did he send a note to Parliament, asking by what authority they punished Nayler. Cromwell knew that Parliament had no such authority under *The Instrument of Government*. Parliament knew it as well, and never responded. Cromwell let them proceed in scapegoating Nayler in order to build political capital for a future round of negotiations between Parliament and the Generals. Nayler served as a pawn in Cromwell's skillful maneuvering. In this respect, Cromwell played the role of the seemingly passive Pilate, as portrayed in the Gospel of John. Pretending to be sympathetic with Jesus, Pilate can be seen pursuing larger political designs with local temple authorities. Fox noted the political designs around the Nayler case. In a later tract, he queried, 'Did Pilate and Herod not become friends on the day Jesus was condemned?' (see Luke 23.12) (Gwyn 1995: 168-69).

As Bittle (1986: 133) summarises, 'The House unilaterally tried and sentenced a man without a law and without any clear constitutional authority to do so'. Cromwell recognised that, for that very reason, he could draw Parliament and the Army toward some kind of *rapprochement* over the battered body of James Nayler. In a February 1657 meeting with Army officers, Cromwell noted, 'By the proceedings of this Parliament, you see they stand in need of a check or balancing power, for the case of James Nayler might happen to be your own case' (1986: 164-65). Either the Army would have to keep purging Parliaments or they would have to allow this Parliament to restrict religious liberty. In succeeding months, the proposed 'balancing power' was added under a new constitution, in the form of a restored upper house. Articles 10 and 11 of the new frame of government further outlawed Quaker offensives against parish services and reasserted Protestant orthodoxy in the land (1986: 166-67).

And yet, one notices a new, *civil* aura to this re-establishment of a Protestant national Church. Emerging was a Church defined and defended by civil power. To interrupt that Church's services was defined as a 'breach of the peace'. Fading was the sense of God's action in history to reform the state and renew the Church, the providential faith that had fired militant Puritans like Oliver Cromwell. By extension, an apocalyptic theology in which the kingdom of Christ emerges through each person's conscience and spreads through a revolutionary 'Lamb's War' was far beyond the pale. Parliament was prudent enough not to execute Nayler outright and make a more potent Messiah of him. But something greater *did* die there in the pillory, in December 1656. With the tragic outcome of James Nayler, the sense of God's hand in history begins to disappear from early modern English life. An astonishing vision of apocalyptic, revolutionary possibility had unfolded with the beheading of Charles I in 1649. It was obliterated with the savage treatment of a Yorkshire yeoman farmer in 1656 (for a fuller exposition of this view, in terms of tragedy, see Gwyn 2004).

#### THE LAMB'S WAR AT BRIDEWELL

Nayler barely survived the savage meting of Parliament's sentence. He remained imprisoned at Bridewell for the next two and a half years. Through the tender ministry of his old Northern friends, particularly William Dewsbury, he began to reconcile with the Quaker movement, even (more or less) with Fox. Early in 1658, in a public statement to the movement (*To the Seed of God Everywhere, Gathered or Scattered*), Nayler confessed that in the events leading up to Bristol,

my Judgement was taken away, and I [was] led Captive under the Power of Darkness, which all along sought my life... I had given up my Body all along, a Free Offering for the Seed's sake, ungathered in the World...yet I often could feel that exalted One above, tempting to Envy against the People of God already gathered, pretending a greater thing to come another Way... [Envy] forced Words from me, above the meek and lowly Principle... [My love was disaffected] from the Flock of God already gathered...to spy out their Failings, and delight to hear of them. [Envy is] the Old Spirit of the Ranters, which now in a new way makes Head against the Light of Christ and the Life of his Cross, which is the only thing that stands in its way (Nayler 1829: xxv-xxvi).

So Nayler admitted to a resentment of the rest of the movement, which had led him captive to the adulation of his followers. He was willing to sacrifice himself at Bristol with thoughts that it would produce 'a greater thing to come another Way'. We do not know what he imagined the action might precipitate. (By the same token, we can only guess at Jesus' intentions when he enacted his triumphal procession into Jerusalem, except that it was some ironic play upon messianic expectations.) In any case, Nayler was appalled to see the way his followers and sympathisers had gone on to play havoc with the Quaker movement. Their chronic interruption of Quaker Meetings turned the Lamb's War against itself. The movement's anarchist politics became anarchic self-parody. Nayler could only repent of his role in unleashing such energies. He now recognised his followers' envy and rage as the same spirit that had animated 'Ranters' less than a decade before.

But Nayler was entirely unrepentant toward the world. The same year, 1658, he published a tract titled *The Lamb's Warre* (expanded from a 1657 version). It offers the most programmatic statement of the early Quaker cultural revolution. Nayler summarises the nonviolent direct action of the movement in its panoramic aims:

their war is not against Creatures, not with the flesh and blood but spiritual wickedness exalted in the hearts of Men and Women, against the whole Work and Device of the god of this World, Laws, Customs, Fashions, Inventions, this is all Enmity against the Lamb and his followers who are entered into the Covenant which was in the beginning. [The Lamb has come] to take the Government to himself that God alone may wholly rule in the hearts of Men and man wholly live in the Work of God (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 106).

This is a scorched-earth view of social transformation. Nayler asserts that the light of Christ in people's consciences, particularly as it is brought into focus and direct action by a gathered people, deconstructs and reforms not only personal behavior but the entire edifice of a culture. Unlike Mao's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, it is not imposed coercively from above, but waged nonviolently from below. Nayler admits that

Many are ashamed at the Lamb's appearance, it is so low, and weak, and poor, and contemptible, and many are afraid seeing so great a power against him. Many be at work in their imaginations, to compass a kingdom...but few will deny all, to be led by the Lamb in a way they know not, to bear his testimony and mark against the world, and suffer for it with him... The Lamb's War you must know before you can witness his kingdom... He that preaches the kingdom of Christ in words, without victory, is the thief that goes before Christ (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 111, 114).

People may imagine what God's will is and 'compass a kingdom', build a political platform out of their ideas (as Fifth Monarchists had done). But to trust Christ completely, to follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev. 14.4), no matter the cost, as Nayler and other Friends had done, is an entirely different matter. Again, this is an anarchist form of social revolution, in that Friends let it unfold according to the leadings of Christ's Spirit among them, beyond their own understandings and intentions. Hence, the absence of a comprehensive political platform in early Quaker writings should by no means lead to the conclusion that early Friends were 'apolitical' (*contra*

Damrosch 1996: 62–68). Rather, the political logic of the Lamb's War must be reckoned according to its apocalyptic framing.

Interestingly, Nayler now takes up his argument not against the Puritan establishment he had confronted earlier. He addresses the new, civil sense of religious order we noted emerging in the Protectorate's new constitution the year before. Although Church and state would continue to be a vexed equation for decades to come, the new constitution anticipated the more irenic spirit of Enlightenment liberalism that would eventually prevail. Near the end of the tract, Nayler adds,

But you say, God is love and we are commanded to love all and seek peace with all. I say, is God's love in you otherwise than it has ever been in Christ and all his saints, whom the world ever hated...? The Lamb's War is not against the Creation, for then should his weapons be carnal...we war not with flesh and blood...but we fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness...which captivates the creation into the lust which wars against the soul... And this is not against love, nor everlasting peace, but [it is] that without which there can be no true love nor lasting peace (Barbour and Roberts 1973: 115).

To an exhausted nation seeking some egress from two decades of religious and political upheaval, Nayler offers no truce. A post-Puritan world will continue in alienation from the light of Christ in human conscience. According to Nayler, those gathering around the Lamb will continue in their nonviolent mode of warfare against the same spiritual darkness, whatever new political trappings it might adopt.

In 1659, Nayler published a non-recantation offering further hindsight upon his Bristol debacle, together with a damning counter-indictment of those who had sentenced him:

Thus was I led out from amongst the Children of Light and into the World, to be a Sign...till at length I was brought in their own Way before a backsliding Power to be judged, who had lost their first Love, as I had done; So they sentenced me, but could not see their Sign, and a Sign to the Nation, and a Sign to the World of the dreadful Day of the just God, who is come and coming to avenge for that pure life, where it is transgressed, and to plead his Cause of that precious Seed where-ever it is oppressed and suffers under the fleshy Lusts of this present World, and the Cup is deep and very dreadful that is seen and filling, and it hath begun at God's House, but many must drink it, except there be speedy Repentance (Nayler 1716: xliii–xliv).

At the time of his trial, Nayler had interpreted his symbolic enactment as a sign of Christ's emergence in the bodies of the common people. But now Nayler re-interprets his action as a sign of God's judgment against a backsliding power, the Protectorate government. The lost Quaker prophet became the symbol of a lost nation. That cup of bitterness was first tasted 'at God's House' (i.e. in the defection of Nayler and his followers from the Quaker movement). But it is now filled for an entire nation to drain. The imagery of the cup of staggering comes from Habakkuk 2.15–16. It also appears in the imagery of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane, regarding the brutal death he was about to suffer. Indeed, according to Paul (e.g. Rom. 5.8–10), the cross is a sign of God's judgment upon sinful humanity, absorbed by one man and transmuted into a sign of salvation. But when the former valence of the sign is

unrecognised, the latter valence can have no effect. So Nayler's sign had remained unrecognised, and by 1659 the Protectorate was rapidly disintegrating. (The imagery of the errant prophet's cup of staggering as a sign to the nation is also found in the published recantations of the Ranters Abiezer Coppe and Joseph Salmon in 1651 [see Gwyn 2000: 165, 178-82].)

#### THE LAMB'S WAR AT THE END OF THE PROTECTORATE

The Nayler episode was effectively appropriated by the Second Protectorate Parliament to mobilise greater official repression and to inspire unprecedented mob violence against Friends. Yet, in spite of its growing pariah status, the Quaker movement continued to expand and grow across the country, if not at the same exponential rates. The movement's internal conflicts slowly eased, and very few of the rebellious elements actually dropped out. After Cromwell died in September 1658, the Protectorate began to unravel. A year later, the Purged, or Rump, Parliament (dissolved in 1653) was restored. Only 65 Members answered the call. But they showed a new leniency toward Quakers and released a number of them from prisons that autumn, including Nayler.

That only raised popular fears of Quakers, and mob attacks increased. There was genuine dread that Quakers and other radicals might actually come to rule in England. Friends organised petitions for the abolition of tithes, signed by thousands and presented to Parliament and the Council. Any new rapport with the government would hinge upon that issue. Friends also drew up and presented lists of justices around the nation that they saw as just and religiously tolerant. They presented various proposals for political, economic, and social reform. Some, like Fox's *Fifty-nine Particulars*, were breathtaking in scope (see Gwyn 1995: 205-208). But when Parliament balked once again at the abolition of tithes, Friends began drawing back from the government. The entire situation drove Fox into a severe depression lasting more than two months. As he wrote in his *Journal* years later, 'I saw how the powers were plucking each other to pieces. I saw how men were destroying the simplicity and betraying the Truth. And a great deal of hypocrisy, deceit, and strife was got uppermost in people' (1952: 353-54).

Although some, such as Edward Burrough, continued to beseech the government until near the end of 1659, the recently released Nayler remained disengaged. He did some preaching and debating around London, to the admiration of many. The Protectorate/Commonwealth finally collapsed when Army divided against itself and General Monck's forces marched from Scotland to London. Negotiations began with the exiled son of Charles I for a Restoration of monarchy. Friends had placed great hopes in the Commonwealth and Protectorate regimes. But they were willing to hope that Charles II might grant the freedoms Cromwell had failed to deliver. Charles' Declaration of Breda expressed a desire for religious toleration. Several Quaker leaders wrote epistles to the new king around the time of his coronation in June 1660. They affirmed God's hand in bringing him to power and portrayed themselves as a peaceful and orderly people. Nayler added his own statement that



month, (no doubt vetted by the Quaker leadership). It is worth excerpting here, for it articulates Nayler's radical vision reframed:

O King! God hath in these Nations a People gathered by himself into his Light, who are known to himself better than to Men, and therefore have we suffered by Men under all the Powers that have risen in this Nation ever since God called us toward himself, by his Eternal Light and Spirit. And though we receive not our Laws from Man, yet we are not without Law as to our God, but have one Law-giver, even Christ Jesus our Lord...from his Laws we may not depart. And by his Law in our Conscience, and the Power of his Spirit in our Hearts, we are ordered and guided to walk holily toward our God, and harmlessly towards Men...however they be minded towards us: and by the Virtue of the Lamb...we are made to give our Goods to the Spoil, and our bodies to the Tortures of cruel Men, rather than defile our Consciences... [T]his hath God sealed in our Hearts, to seek the Good of all Men, Plot against none; but study peace and live quietly, and Exercise our Conscience faithfully toward whatever Government our God shall set up... (Nayler 1716: 596-99).

The radical Christian anarchism of Nayler's earlier writings is still intact: human laws have no bearing upon Friends. They live by the law of Christ in their consciences, which takes away the occasion for any just human law. And if Friends are persecuted for their obedience to Christ's law, they will bear it, and will refrain from plotting against any government. Although the logic is consistent with Nayler's Lamb's War writings, the revolutionary impetus is gone. He expresses no expectations that Quaker witness will seriously affect the new regime, or the reactionary political mood in society that has welcomed it so jubilantly. Nayler articulates a vision of a quiet people set apart. That vision would slowly redefine the movement over the decades to come.

At Fox's behest, in October 1660, Nayler left London to return to his home and family in Yorkshire. He was found on the road in Huntingdonshire, badly beaten from an apparent robbery. His health was already broken by Parliament's treatment, and he died at the home of a local Friend.

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