

## 'The spawn of Romish frogs': to what extent were allegations of Roman Catholicism against early Quakers valid?

Francis R. S. Rundall, Until September 2024, a graduate student at Birmingham University, UK, [francis.rundall@gmail.com](mailto:francis.rundall@gmail.com)

During the rapid expansion of Quakerism in England in the 1650s, allegations were made by several ministers of the Reformed church that early Quaker doctrines resembled those of Roman Catholicism. Some modern commentators have noted that these allegations were not baseless. The object of this article is to investigate the extent to which such allegations were justified. This is accomplished by comparing early Quaker beliefs with Roman Catholic doctrines on the topics of the light or grace; imputed justification; inherent righteousness; perfection; the priority of the Spirit over Scripture; sacraments; and revelations and immediate call. It is concluded that despite the obvious antipathy of early Quakers to the Roman Catholic church, there was a similarity in their soteriology due to a shared apprehension of the divine within believers.



## 1 Introduction

In the disputes between early Quakers and ministers of the Reformed faith in England during the 1650s, Quakers were frequently charged with being Roman Catholics, or being led or taught by Roman Catholics. Some Ministers<sup>1</sup> supported their allegations by citing specific Quaker beliefs which they claimed resembled those of Roman Catholics, and a number of modern commentators have noted that the claimed resemblance was not fanciful.<sup>2</sup> The object of this article is to set out allegations of Roman Catholicism against early Quakers which are supported by some specification of doctrines<sup>3</sup> and to compare the cited doctrines with those of Roman Catholicism in order to ascertain whether the allegations were valid.<sup>4</sup>

Almost all the Ministers who supported their Allegations with details of the Quaker doctrines which they claimed resembled those of Roman Catholics were parish incumbents who had been the subject of Quaker attacks. They were all adherents of the Reformed faith but included Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and moderate Episcopalians.<sup>5</sup> The simplest and best supported set of Allegations was advanced by Thomas Weld in his *A Further Discovery of that Generation of men called Quakers*, 1654.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In this article, 'Minister' means an adherent of the Reformed faith who made an Allegation against Quakers; and 'Allegation' means a charge of resemblance between one or more Quaker beliefs and corresponding beliefs of the Roman Catholic church.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall commented that 'although in point of fact there was no connexion between the Quakers and the Jesuits, it was less beside the point than might be thought', citing Richard Baxter's allegations relating to Quaker doctrines of salvation through attention to the Light within, infallibility, and the subordination of Scripture to the Spirit. Nuttall, G., *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, Lake, P. (repr.), Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 163. William Braithwaite commented that the minister Ralph Farmer's claim that Quakers had come to Bristol 'on Antichrist's errand' was buttressed by his suggestion 'shrewdly enough, that Quakerism is tainted with the popish tenets of universal grace, freewill, satisfaction by our own sufferings [and] justification by inherent holiness'. Braithwaite, W., *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1912, p. 172. In noting that 'Quakers were often called papists and Jesuits in the early period', Carole Dale Spencer wrote that 'like Jesuits, they were 'contemplatives in action' engaged in a variety of professions in pursuit of the evangelization of the world.' Spencer, C., *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> Space does not permit this article to cover the allegations relating to practices. In general, allegations concerning practices varied from minister to minister, and were not supported by any convincing evidence.

<sup>4</sup> This article is a simplified version of part of a dissertation written for the degree of MA by Research at Birmingham University. The dissertation may be accessed in the University of Birmingham Institutional Research Archive (UBIRA) <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/libraries/research/open-access/ubira/index.aspx> which is managed by Scholarly Communications Services [ubira@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:ubira@lists.bham.ac.uk).

<sup>5</sup> Despite the illusion of uniformity of view created by the Westminster Confession, the views of individual ministers will have ranged from supralapsarian Calvinist, through the moderate Calvinism of Richard Baxter, to Arminianism.

<sup>6</sup> The written dispute between Weld and James Nayler comprised four books. Weld made his initial attack in *The Perfect Pharisee under Monkish Holiness*, Gateshead, Durham: S.B., 1653. Nayler replied with *An Answer to the Booke called The Perfect Pharisee*, London: s.n., 1654. Weld continued the dispute with *A Further Discovery*, London: S.B., 1654, to which Nayler responded with *A Discovery of the Man of Sin*, London: Giles Calvert, 1655.

Weld was a prominent Independent Minister. He had been deprived of his parish by Laud in 1631 and had travelled to New England, but returned to England in 1641 where he defended New England Congregationalism. He was installed as minister for Gateshead in 1649.<sup>7</sup> His experiences in New England were reflected in the confidence of his denial of Quaker claims that the light of Christ is to be found in Native Americans, whom Weld called Indians, as well as in baptised Christians.<sup>8</sup>

The most explicit set of Allegations was made by William Brownsword, Minister of Kendal in Westmorland, who itemised twelve Quaker doctrines which he specified as Roman Catholic in his booklet *The Quaker-Jesuite, or, Popery in Quakerism*, published in 1659.<sup>9</sup> Brownsword's publication is a summary statement of Quaker and Roman Catholic doctrines, and makes the greater impact by being brief. He made no attempt to expound the Reformed church's views. A moderate approach might have been expected from Richard Baxter, organiser of the Worcestershire Association in 1652 which aimed at rapprochement between Baptist, Independent and even those Laudian Episcopalian Ministers who remained active and in England, from his base as Minister of Kidderminster, Worcestershire. But Baxter was irritated by the repeated and, in his view, ill-informed Quaker attacks on him, as well as the abusive nature of the language Quakers employed, and he concluded that the Quakers' aim was to undermine any ministry of the Church in England, thereby replicating the tactics of clandestine Jesuits.<sup>10</sup> William Prynne's prolix attempt to identify a Jesuit origin in Quaker practices and, to a lesser extent, doctrines reflected his established position as a polemicist and his considerable learning in the Roman Catholic authors and texts to which he referred.<sup>11</sup> But it is rendered less plausible by his fascination with magic and sorcery, and his conviction that Quaker ideas, like those of all leading Roman Catholics, were the work of the devil.

In response to Allegations, Quakers not only denied any influence from or contact with Roman Catholics but affirmed that they would espouse the truth whether or not it was found in Roman Catholic doctrines. Nayler told Weld: 'as we receive not the ground of what we practice from the Papists or you; neither do we deny the truth because they or

---

<sup>7</sup> Biographical details of Weld are taken from Winship, M., 'Thomas Weld', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, rev., 25 September 2014. <https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28986>.

<sup>8</sup> See Angell, S., "George Fox's Great Mystery and the New England Returnees", *Quaker Studies* 29 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.16995/qs.18958>.

<sup>9</sup> Brownsword, *The Quaker-Jesuite*, London: Miles Harrison, 1659.

<sup>10</sup> Baxter, *The Quakers catechism, or, the Quakers Questioned*, London: Thomas Underhill, 1655.

<sup>11</sup> Prynne, W., *The Quakers Unmasked*, London: Edward Thomas, 1655. The quotation which forms the opening to the title of the article is from *The Quakers Unmasked*, p.6.

you may profess it, but shall own it before all the world'.<sup>12</sup> They also returned the charge of Catholicism against the Ministers, arguing plausibly that there were more reasons to identify Roman Catholic origins in Ministers' practice than in that of Quakers:

Have they not builded the Idol's Temples and you worship in them? are not you one with them in observing many days, and times, and forms; as sprinkling infants, singing, and many such things? are you not one with them in bearing rule as lords and masters over the common people, and would have to do in ordering of State affairs? are you not one with them, as in your tithes and fat parsonages?<sup>13</sup>

For the purposes of this article, the Westminster Confession,<sup>14</sup> published in 1647, has been taken as an authoritative statement of doctrines of the Reformed faith affirmed by the English Church in the Interregnum. Although the recommendations of the Westminster Assembly for Church governance were never fully, or wholeheartedly, implemented, the expression of the elements of the Reformed faith in the Confession appears to have been widely accepted and adopted by the Church's ministers.

Roman Catholic doctrines on the topics which were the subject of the Allegations had been debated at the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in three separate groups of sessions, and formulated in decrees.<sup>15</sup> The Council's decrees had been formally approved by Pope Pius IV in the bull, *Benedictus Dei*, issued in 1564, and exhaustively expounded and explained by Cardinal Robert Bellarmine in his multi-volume work *Controversies of the Christian Faith* published between 1581 and 1592.<sup>16</sup> Several English theologians had published works opposing Bellarmine's exposition of Roman Catholic doctrines, of which that most frequently referred to by Ministers engaged in disputes with early Quakers was John Davenant's *A Treatise on Justification* first published in

---

<sup>12</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> 'The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith, with the quotations and texts of scripture annexed presented to them lately by both Houses of Parliament', London: The Company of Stationers, 1647.

<sup>15</sup> Quotations are taken from the compilation under the title *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Schroeder, H (trans.), London: B Herder Book Co, 1941. It should be noted that this article's treatment of the Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent as statements of Roman Catholic doctrine is adopted with the aim of achieving clarity and facilitating comparison with corresponding Quaker doctrines. A more detailed depiction of Roman Catholic doctrines in the 1650s would have to acknowledge continuing debate and discussion within the Roman Catholic church, aimed at rendering more definite the compromises and ambiguities embodied in the Council's pronouncements, not least of which were the *De Auxiliis* Controversies in the 1590s and early 1600s attempting to resolve the apparent conflict in causal efficacy between God's grace and human free will.

<sup>16</sup> The work was originally published in four volumes, each divided into a number of parts. For the purposes of this article, translations which have been consulted are St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., *De Controversiis Tomus VI*, 'On the Sacraments in General', 'On Baptism' and 'On Confirmation', Grant, R. (trans), Post Falls, ID: Mediatrix Press, 2021, and Bellarmine, R., *Controversies of the Christian Faith*, 'On the Word of God', Baker, K. (trans.), Saddle River, N.J.: Keep the Faith, 2016.

1631.<sup>17</sup> Davenant was a moderate conformist in the spectrum of theological beliefs held by Ministers in the 1650s. Though an Episcopalian conformist, becoming Bishop of Salisbury in 1621, he had impeccable Calvinist credentials having been a member of the English delegation to the Synod of Dort in 1618 where he articulated orthodox Calvinist views in opposition to Arminianism.<sup>18</sup>

The principal theological topic to which the Allegations related was Quaker soteriology. On that subject, Allegations centred on the light within; the efficacy of imputed justification; salvation by inherent righteousness; and the possibility of perfection in this life. Quakers' strident proclamation of the Spirit or the light as humanity's guide led to the next most commonly raised Allegations, those relating to Quakers' perceived denigration of Scripture as mankind's rule of faith. Quakers' assertion that humankind can have unmediated contact with the divine led to a further category of Allegations, one which encompassed a range of experience of the divine in this world and included revelations, miracles, immediate calling and the resulting claim to infallibility. Each of these Allegations will now be considered.

## 2. The Allegations

### 2.1 The Light

Brownsword headed his list of Allegations with the Quaker teaching of the light. His charge was that Quakers taught 'that all men have a light within them sufficient to convince of sin, and to lead men to repentance and salvation, if it is obeyed. This is their Master-Doctrine, For it they urge Jn 1: 9.' For equivalence to Roman Catholic doctrine, Brownsword stated, 'Papists affirm that all men have grace sufficient to salvation given to them'.<sup>19</sup> Baxter also suggested a similarity between Quaker ideas of the light and the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace.<sup>20</sup>

The ambiguity of early Quakers as to the precise nature of the light has been noted.<sup>21</sup> Consistent with their belief that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity approved by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 was a man-made, non-scriptural formulation,<sup>22</sup> they

---

<sup>17</sup> The version used for the purposes of this article has been the translation by Josiah Allport, London: Hamilton Adam & Co, 1846.

<sup>18</sup> Biographical details of Davenant are given by Larminie, V., 'John Davenant', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7196>.

<sup>19</sup> Brownsword, *Quaker-Jesuite*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Baxter, *Quakers catechism*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Moore, R., *The Light in their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary revised edn, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020, p. 111, referring to Fox's usage.

<sup>22</sup> 'And for your fourth thing, that God is three persons or substances, this is another of your lies, never such a word is declared of in Scripture: and thus have you made your folly manifest to all men. God is a mystery ... and he is but one in all though ten thousand times ten thousand.' Atkinson, C., *The Sword of the Lord drawn and furbish'd against the man of sin*, London: Giles Calvert, 1654, p. 3.

were not concerned to be exact in their description of its relation to any member of the Holy Trinity. The light was divine in nature and was placed in every person who came into the world, as they frequently affirmed, citing Jn 1:9.<sup>23</sup> Quakers did not frequently identify the light with grace but in at least one passage Fox does so: 'Come to the light wherewith Christ hath enlightened you, that with it you may see your salvation, and the Grace which comes by him, which brings your salvation, which Grace teacheth us, which Grace is sufficient in weakness and temptation, which brings the salvation, and by it we are saved.'<sup>24</sup> Roman Catholics believed that in the sacrament of baptism, grace was infused into a believer which remitted all sins,<sup>25</sup> and that it was divine in nature. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* explained that 'grace not only remits sin, but is also a divine quality inherent in the soul, and, as it were, a brilliant light that effaces all those stains which obscure the lustre of the soul'.<sup>26</sup>

Was the *prima facie* similarity between Quaker ideas of the light and Roman Catholic doctrine of grace true at a deeper level? At first glance, there appears to be a conflict between Quaker and Roman Catholic beliefs on the possibility of interaction between free will and the light or grace within. Roman Catholicism taught that saving grace was only bestowed upon people at baptism,<sup>27</sup> and each person needed prevenient grace to move him or her to seek baptism,<sup>28</sup> but affirmed the necessity for human free will to be exercised in cooperation with grace in the performance of good works to ensure progression towards salvation thereafter.<sup>29</sup> Quakers proclaimed the presence of the light in all people but denied that a believer could contribute to his or her own salvation by self-works. Edward Burrough declared 'Man's free will we do deny for the will of man shall never enter to God and men hath free will unto that which is evil, but not to that which is good'.<sup>30</sup> Yet Quaker denial of the value of self-works was intended to emphasise that the saving righteousness within a believer was Christ, and not the believer's own self.<sup>31</sup> Quakers seem to have believed that every person had the capacity, and needed to decide for themselves to make the vital decision to turn to the light

---

<sup>23</sup> Replying to Brownsword, John Story cited Heb 5:9 and 7:25, relating to Jesus, the true light of the world, becoming the author of salvation to all that obey him. Story, J., *Babilon's defence broken down*, London: Robert Wilson, 1660, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> George Fox, *Some principles of the elect people of God in scorn called Quakers*, London: Robert Wilson, 1661, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 'On the Sacrament of Baptism', (trans.) J Donovan, Baltimore, Md.: Fielding Lucas, 1829, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> 'Children can be saved, but outside the Church there is no salvation; therefore it is necessary for them to enter the Church.' Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On Baptism', Book1, Chapter VIII, p. 357.

<sup>28</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 5.

<sup>29</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 11.

<sup>30</sup> Burrough, E., *Truth Defended* London: Thomas Simmons, 1656, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> 'And because I deny Justification by our own works, and own him who worketh in us to will and to do, and herein deny self-works; this you say is an old thred-bare shuffle of the papists'. Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 22.

within, justifying their preaching ministry by pointing to the parallel of the Apostles who taught their listeners 'that Christ was their light and life, and exhorted them to wait for his appearance in them'.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as Hilary Hinds has noted, Quakers did not deny that conscious decision-making by a believer, followed by action, both internally in spirit and externally in mode of life, was necessary.<sup>33</sup> It seems that Quakers and Roman Catholics both believed that the free will of each person needed to be exercised to cooperate with the grace or light within.

Similarly, Quakers and Roman Catholics both held that the quantity of grace or light within each person varied at the divine discretion. Quakers made use of the concept of 'measure' to explain why there was variation in the state of sinlessness between believers even though whatever of the light there was in each person was in itself perfect.<sup>34</sup> Roman Catholics similarly believed that the Holy Spirit distributed grace as He wished.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, both Quakers and Roman Catholics taught that cooperation with the grace or light within would be rewarded by the increase of grace or light.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, both Quakers and Roman Catholics understood that a believer could fall away from a state of sinlessness and need to resume spiritual progression after repentance. The Nayler incident of 1656 made this realisation inescapable for Quakers. Roman Catholicism had established a hierarchy of remedies, the sacrament of the Eucharist supplying grace which would expunge minor or venial sins, the sacrament of Penance following contrition, involving repentance, confession and making satisfaction, rectifying the loss of baptismal grace due to major or mortal sins.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2 No Imputed Justification

The first in Weld's seven charges of Papist doctrines and practices against Quakers was that 'the Papists deny the imputed righteousness of Christ for justification. These also from the same spirit deny the imputed righteousness of Christ for justification'.<sup>38</sup> Brownsword made the same charge, as his third accusation. He stated that Papists affirm 'that this is their Church's Doctrine and Truth, Bellarmine saith, in this ALL

---

<sup>32</sup> Nayler, *Answer to the Perfect Pharisee*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> 'While turning to the light was not understood as an act of human will, but as a relinquishment of sinful adherence to darkness, nevertheless, in so turning, a degree of agency - divinely originating but animating the believing subject - is returned to that subject.' Hinds, H., 'George Fox' in Angell, Stephen W., and Dandelion, Pink (eds.), *Early Quakers and their Theological Thought 1647-1723*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 7.

<sup>36</sup> Nayler, *Answer to a book called The Quaker's Catechism*, London: s.n., 1655, p. 10. Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 10.

<sup>37</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 14.

<sup>38</sup> Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 9.

the Catholic Doctors agree, that the righteousness whereby we are justified, is a real inherent righteousness within us, and not Christ's without imputed to us'.<sup>39</sup>

The Reformed faith taught that justification was by declaration of God, implemented by faith, gifted by God, as the Westminster Confession stated,<sup>40</sup> enabling an individual to become united to (or engrafted into) Christ. The effect was that, by imputation of Christ's righteousness, a believer's sins were remitted and Christ's righteousness was infused into him or her, enabling life to be conducted in an ethical manner which would lead to sanctification.<sup>41</sup> Thus justification was a single, instantaneous event rather than a process through a believer's lifetime. It was external to a believer, having a forensic nature.<sup>42</sup> It was devoid of any input by the believer.<sup>43</sup>

In responding to these Allegations, Quakers denied the efficacy of any divine action unless and until actively adopted by and within a believer. Nayler answered Weld's charge by acknowledging that Christ's passion and death rendered justification possible but asserting that this was only achieved by a believer actively receiving Christ within himself or herself:

For I own no other Christ but that which suffered at Jerusalem, and by him am I saved from my sins: but had I not known him in me, my Redeemer and hope of glory, I had not known him at Jerusalem, nor should I have any more benefit by him, than covetous proud liars.<sup>44</sup>

The Minister, John Stalham, criticised Nayler for having confused justification and sanctification in a Popish way in *Love to the Lost*: 'imputing here is all one with infusing, to him. Justifying righteousness and sanctifying righteousness is the same individual obedience: which is pure Popery'.<sup>45</sup> Stalham's outrage with Nayler was justified, for in *Love to the Lost*, Nayler had indeed opposed the separation of justification and sanctification:

Although the scriptures mention these three [justification, sanctification and mortification], yet not to divide them so as to make people believe that they may have

---

<sup>39</sup> Brownsword, *Quaker-Jesuite*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>40</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XI.

<sup>41</sup> See Weld, *The Perfect Pharisee*, p. 10, and also Davenant, J., *A Treatise on Justification*, p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> Davenant cites Rom 8:33 'It is God that justifies, who is he that condemns?' and concludes that 'justification' 'denotes therefore an act of jurisdiction, not infusion.' Davenant, *On Justification*, p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> 'We therefore interpret justification simply as the acceptance by which God receives us in grace and treats us as righteous' from Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, McNeil, J. (ed.), Battles, F. (trans.), Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, Book III, Chapter XI, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Nayler, *Answer to the Perfect Pharisee*, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Stalham, J., *The Reviler Rebuked*, London: Henry Hills, 1657, p. 131.

one and not all, but as to show the several effects of that one work of man's redemption, all wrought by one thing in the creature.<sup>46</sup>

Roman Catholicism had, since Augustine in the fourth century, regarded justification as a matter of believers actually being made righteous by God, not merely being declared righteous.<sup>47</sup> The Council of Trent confirmed both that in justification believers 'are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and are just'<sup>48</sup> and anathematised the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the Roman Catholic account of justification incorporated sanctification and justification into a single process so that although initial justification could be spoken of as effected by the remission of sins through the sacrament of baptism and the term sanctification could be taken to refer to the changes brought about in believers through the infusion of grace,<sup>50</sup> the progression of a believer towards salvation through his or her own efforts cooperating with grace could more properly be termed justification.

### 2.3 Inherent Righteousness

Notwithstanding that orthodox Reformed doctrine saw righteousness infused into a believer as an inseparable part of God's declaratory justification of that person, in disputes with Quakers, Ministers treated inherent righteousness as an alternative to imputed righteousness, mutually exclusive, as the means of believers' justification. Brownsword placed the two doctrines together as a single category, alleging that Quakers affirmed the former and thus denied the latter. Quakers saw the matter similarly, as the example of a Quaker, Anthony Hodgson, indicates. Weld quoted him as saying 'I believe to be saved not by the righteousness of Christ imputed to me; but by the righteousness of Christ inherent in me'.<sup>51</sup> Bellarmine confirmed the antithesis between imputed and inherent righteousness as the cause of justification when he opposed Calvin's view that 'we are justified by the very justice of Christ imputed to us' and asserted that 'it is false that we are *formally* justified by it. We are justified by our own justice adhering in us'.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Naylor, *Love to the Lost: and a hand held forth to the helpless*, London: Giles Calvert, 1656, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> 'Augustine thus has an all-embracing transformative understanding of justification, which enfolds within a single conceptuality what some would later distinguish or separate – namely, both the event of justification (brought about by operative grace) and the process of justification (brought about by cooperative grace).' McGrath, A, *Justitia Dei: a history of the Christian doctrine of justification*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 47.

<sup>48</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 7.

<sup>49</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Canon 11.

<sup>50</sup> The opening words of Chapter 7 of the Council of Trent's 6<sup>th</sup> Session are 'This disposition or preparation is followed by justification itself, which is not only a remission of sin but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just'.

<sup>51</sup> Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On Baptism', Book 1, Chapter XVIII, p. 406.

Quakers believed that they were justified by the righteousness within themselves but denied that the righteousness which came to them through following and obeying the light within could properly be regarded as their own righteousness. It was the righteousness of Christ within them. Nayler thus responded to Weld's Allegation: 'by being made the righteousness of God in Christ and denying all our own righteousness, are we justified. And this Christ and this righteousness we witness within us in measure'.<sup>53</sup>

The Council of Trent was clear that the formal cause of a person's justification was the justice of God infused into that person.<sup>54</sup> As Ministers correctly complained, Roman Catholic doctrine asserted that the righteousness which inhered in the justified and would eventually be crowned with eternal life was not the justice of the human being but that of God which had been infused. The Council of Trent declared:

Thus, neither is our own justice established as our own from ourselves, nor is the justice of God ignored or repudiated, for that justice which is called ours, because we are justified by its inherence in us, that same is [the justice] of God, because it is infused into us by God through the merit of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

## 2.4 Perfection

Weld expressed his third Allegation in this way: 'the Papists again do confidently conclude that a man may perfectly keep the whole law. So the Quakers, their great assertion as a challenge to all is, that every Saint is perfect, that it is possible to be perfectly holy and without sin'.<sup>56</sup> Brownsword worded his corresponding Allegation similarly.<sup>57</sup>

All parties were agreed that sinlessness was a condition of entry to the Kingdom of Heaven, and thus of a person's salvation. The Reformed doctrine denied the possibility of perfection in this life due to the ineradicability of concupiscence, teaching the necessity for a further imputation of Christ's righteousness at death.<sup>58</sup> The Ministers who attacked Quakers all advanced that belief, distinguishing between justification, which was indeed perfect in that it perfectly removed past sins and guilt, and sanctification which, because the righteousness infused in consequence of a believer's faith always remained 'inchoate and imperfect'<sup>59</sup> in this life, could never be completed in a perfect state.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 6.

<sup>55</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 16.

<sup>56</sup> Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Brownsword, *Quaker-Jesuite*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter 6, Paragraph 5.

<sup>59</sup> Davenant, *On Justification*, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> 'Perfection of justification, by a most perfect imputed righteousness, we have as soon as we believe; but perfection in all degrees of sanctification we have not in this life, nor ever had it till death' in Stalham, *Reviler Rebuked*, p. 143.

Consistent with its belief that the process of justification of a believer was effected by the infusion of God's righteousness and that progress to salvation was achieved through cooperation between the believer and the infused grace within him or her, Roman Catholic doctrine held that perfection was achievable in this life.<sup>61</sup> In direct opposition to the Reformed belief, Roman Catholicism declared that all sin, not merely past sins and their accompanying guilt, was removed by baptism,<sup>62</sup> and that the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance had been created to keep believers in a sinless state by removing, respectively, venial and mortal sins.<sup>63</sup> Continuing concupiscence in a justified person was acknowledged, but the Council of Trent repeated the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that concupiscence was not itself sin, merely a tendency which, if striven against, need not result in sin.<sup>64</sup>

Quakers responded to the Allegation relating to perfection with a simple argument. They asserted that the divine within them was, by definition, perfect:

I say that we affirm self-perfection is but thy lying slander; or that we say we are Christ or God, as though saist we do, but that we witness perfection from sin, so far as we have received Christ, we own it as God's command and gift, the end of Christ's coming, and of giving forth his ministry.<sup>65</sup>

If believers totally sublimated their selves and wills to the divine light within, or if they permitted the divine seed within to grow to full maturity, they themselves would inevitably be perfect, free from all sin. Quakers argued that within a believer sin and the divine are incompatible.<sup>66</sup> It is likely that perfection for early Quakers referred to an ontological state of Adamic divinity, not merely a human ethical state of sinlessness, but this was not made clear. In his response to Weld's Allegation, Nayler advanced three arguments to support the Quaker position. First, he relied on those scriptural texts on which the Roman Catholics had relied in their dispute with the Reformed.<sup>67</sup> The debate on scriptural texts was obscure and inconclusive, partly because numerous texts could be found to support each side's contention and partly because of the different meanings for which the word 'perfect' was employed in different texts. A number of Ministers suggested that obvious inconsistencies pointed to the necessity for the application of interpretation rather than a literal reading.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 11.

<sup>62</sup> Council of Trent, 5<sup>th</sup> Session, Canon 5.

<sup>63</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Chapter 14.

<sup>64</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On Baptism', Book 1, Chapter XIII, p. 386.

<sup>65</sup> Nayler, *Answer to The Quakers Catechism*, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> Nayler, *Love to the Lost*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Such as Mt 5:48 and 1 Jn 3:6,9.

<sup>68</sup> Weld, *Perfect Pharisee*, pp. 14, 15.

Second, Nayler argued that Christ had fulfilled the law and thus that those who became united to Christ benefitted also from that fulfilment in themselves.<sup>69</sup> Third, the effect of Christ's passion and death was to cleanse believers from sin now, not to do so after their deaths.<sup>70</sup>

Quakers accepted, as Roman Catholics did, that the state of perfection was not attained immediately but required effort by a believer to be achieved.<sup>71</sup> Both Quakers and Roman Catholics believed that although a believer might reach a state of sinless perfection, falling away was possible.<sup>72</sup> On this point they were both opposed to the Reformed understanding, as Brownsword noted in his fourth Allegation.<sup>73</sup> Once achieved, constant help from God was required for the maintenance of a state of perfection,<sup>74</sup> but the fact that a believer might fall away from perfection did not render perfection impossible to achieve, as Richard Hubberthorne explained: 'the falling into that which is not perfect, doth not make that which they fall from imperfect, for the angels that kept not their first stage, which was perfect, did fall from that which was perfect'.<sup>75</sup> Quakers argued that to present believers perfect to the Father was the principal purpose of Christ's establishment of the ministry.<sup>76</sup>

## 2.5 Scripture

Weld included two claims relating to Scripture in his Allegations. First, that Quakers gave precedence to the Spirit over Scripture in the task of discerning good from bad spirits: 'the Papists affirm that the Scriptures, or the written Word of God, are not the supreme judge of Spirits. So these people [Quakers], that the Spirits are not to be tried by Scripture'.<sup>77</sup> Second, that Quakers belittled the authority of Scripture as the rule of faith: 'the Papists call the Scripture a dead letter, and nose of wax, a scabbard without a sword. So these men also not only cry down the necessity of the written word. But also call it a dead letter, a carnal letter, that they are but a declaration of them that spake it'.<sup>78</sup> Baxter made similar Allegations.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> 'It was the end for which God sent his Son manifest in the flesh, that by him the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.' Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> 'The blood of Christ ... is to cleanse people from their sins, and not to justify them in their sins.' Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Canon 23.

<sup>73</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter 11, Paragraph 5.

<sup>74</sup> Nayler, *Answer to the Quakers' Catechism*, p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> Hubberthorne, R., *The Rebukes of a Reviler fallen upon his own head*, London: Giles Calvert, 1657, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Fox, *Saul's Errand*, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Baxter, *Quakers catechism*, p. 26.

Ministers' accusations that both Quakers and Roman Catholics belittled the Scriptures were exaggerated. Quakers 'owned' the Scriptures, as was apparent from their extensive reliance on the text of Scripture as the best objective authority in their disputes with Ministers. Quakers described the Scriptures as the letter and not the Word, but they readily conceded that the Scriptures were a declaration of the Word which inspired those who wrote or spoke the Scriptures.<sup>80</sup> The point which they pressed repeatedly was that believers needed to place their trust in the Spirit or the Word which authored the Scriptures, and not in the letter of the books of the Scriptures.<sup>81</sup> They insisted that the Scriptures could only be properly understood by a person who was under the guidance of the Spirit.<sup>82</sup>

In fact, Ministers, Quakers and Roman Catholics all agreed that only the Spirit had the ultimate capacity for judging controversies and interpreting Scripture.<sup>83</sup> The contested question was how could the Spirit's intentions be ascertained? Ministers were correct in the Allegation that Quakers and Roman Catholics believed Scripture itself embodied the Spirit only partially and insufficiently to act as final authority, whereas Ministers themselves held that the Scriptures were the Spirit's written legacy to humankind and must be regarded as the only means by which the requirements of the Spirit could be known.<sup>84</sup> But Quakers and Roman Catholics differed on the location of the Spirit for guidance.

The Roman Catholic church had experience of advocates of individual spiritual enlightenment over many centuries and had concluded that the certainty delivered by the collective judgment of the church should be preferred to the enthusiasm professed by any individual.<sup>85</sup> In starting his exposition of Roman Catholic doctrine on Scripture, Bellarmine noted that Schwenckfeld had 'rejected the written word as a killing letter, and commands us to be content with the internal spirit alone',<sup>86</sup> a comment which might equally have summarised early Quaker views. Bellarmine refuted this heresy

<sup>80</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> Farnworth, R., *A Discovery of Faith*, London: Giles Calvert, 1653, p. 11,

<sup>82</sup> Burrough, E., *A Standard Lifted Up*, London: Giles Calvert, 1658, p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> 'The infallible Spirit which is the Originall of all Scriptures is the trial of all spirits ... and by that spirit the Saints was to judge of all spirits.' Nayler, *Answer to The Perfect Pharisee*, p. 16.

'It is confessed on all hands that the eternal Spirit is the original of Scriptures, and the trier of Spirits; who ever questioned that? But our question is what the Saints are to try the Scriptures by?', Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 69.

'There is also agreement between us and our adversaries that the Scriptures must be understood in the same spirit in which they were made: that is, in the Holy Spirit.' Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 3, Chapter III, p. 186.

<sup>84</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter 1, Paragraph 10.

<sup>85</sup> Council of Trent, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, *Decree concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books*.

<sup>86</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 1, Chapter I, p. 21.

and proclaimed the Roman Catholic doctrine that only the church truly possessed knowledge of the Spirit's views:

Therefore the whole question comes down to where the Spirit is. For we think that the Spirit, although he is often conferred on many individual persons, nevertheless is certainly found in the Church, that is, in a Council of the Bishops confirmed by the Sovereign Pontiff of the whole Church.<sup>87</sup>

Roman Catholicism similarly regarded the text of Scripture as constituting only one of the aids to humankind's salvation, not the exclusive means. Bellarmine pointed out that preaching rather than writing had been the principal concern of Christ and the Apostles, and thus the written text of Scripture should be treated as providing support to the preaching of the Word of the Gospel,<sup>88</sup> and acknowledged that the obscurity of certain passages of Scripture and apparent inconsistencies between different Scriptural texts required assistance from a non-scriptural source for elucidation.<sup>89</sup> Roman Catholics turned to the unwritten Word of God, the traditions of the Roman Catholic church, to fulfil that role. Explaining the *Decree concerning the Canonical Scriptures* promulgated by the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, Bellarmine wrote:

We say that the whole necessary doctrine, whether on Faith or morals, is not contained expressly in the Scriptures; and therefore that, besides the written word of God, also the unwritten word of God is required, that is, the divine and apostolic Traditions.<sup>90</sup>

Quakers denigrated all such tradition as carnal and man-made, refusing to allow any authenticity to any doctrine or practice which did not originate from the text of Scripture, thus evidencing the value which, despite their criticisms, they accorded to Scripture. Notwithstanding their characterisation of Scripture as, by itself, deficient, Quakers generally would not accept that any supplement to the text was required, other than the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit,<sup>91</sup> only hesitantly conceding that in some circumstances where the text of Scripture did not deal with circumstances which had occurred in practice, the Spirit might fill the gap.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 1, Chapter III, p. 186.

<sup>88</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 4, Chapter XII, p. 265.

<sup>89</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 3, Chapter I, p. 178.

<sup>90</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 4, Chapter III, p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> Naylor, *Saul's Errand*, p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> Concerning Quaker meetings, Fox wrote 'And if there was no Scripture for our Men and Women's Meetings, Christ is

## 2.6 Sacraments

Brownsword made two Allegations relating to sacraments. First, 'Quakers affirm that the baptism of infants cannot be proved by Scripture: the Papists affirm the same'; second, 'Quakers affirm that the Lord's Supper, as administered by our churches, is common, nothing but a bit of bread and wine: the Papists are of the same judgment'.<sup>93</sup> So far as they went, these Allegations were true. Both Quakers and Roman Catholics did deny any Scriptural basis for the baptism of infants<sup>94</sup> and any validity in the Eucharist as performed by ministers.<sup>95</sup> Although agreement between Quakers and Roman Catholics appears superficial, each group having different reasons for holding their views, at a deeper level Quaker and Roman Catholic thinking was closer than either admitted in the polemical context of the disputes, and certainly was more proximate than Quaker beliefs were to those of Ministers.

The Quaker position on the validity of sacraments was simple: the external form of all sacraments was an invention of man, 'carnal', and lacking validity. The spiritual purpose was only capable of taking effect if the sacrament was received spiritually. Quakers affirmed that the sacraments, at any rate baptism and the eucharist, could and should be understood and practised spiritually. Nayler, responding to the charge that Quakers deny 'the Gospel Ordinances, Prayer, Baptism, Supper' wrote:

Christ the Gospel Ordinance we own, and deny your carnal ordinances, and set forms; and the Supper of the Lord we own, which is spiritual; and deny your carnal sacrament, for which there is no Scripture; the Baptism of Christ we own, and are baptised by one Spirit into one Body. And the Holy Ghost and the fire we own, but deny your sprinkling of infants, for which there is no Scripture.<sup>96</sup>

Roman Catholic doctrine emphasised the necessity for specific external practices in the administration of sacraments, and denied that any particular attitude on the part of the recipient was essential. The sacraments worked *ex opere operato*, that is, as Bellarmine explained, they conferred 'grace from the force of the very sacramental action instituted by God for this purpose, not from the merit of the agent or the recipient'.<sup>97</sup> Bellarmine declared that 'the will of God is the principal cause. The passion of Christ is the

---

sufficient.' Fox, *Epistles*, Whitehead, G. (ed.), 1698, p. 388, quoted by Nuttall, *Holy Spirit*, p. 89.

<sup>93</sup> Brownsword, *Quaker-Jesuite*, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Audland, *The Innocent Delivered out of the Snare*, London: Giles Calvert, 1655, p. 20. Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On the Word of God', Book 4, Chapter IX, p. 246.

<sup>95</sup> Hubberthorne, R., *The antipathy betwixt flesh and spirit*, London: Giles Calvert, 1654, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>97</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On The Sacraments in General', Book 2, Chapter I, p. 159.

meritorious cause'. These both cooperate in a sacrament, along with the power and will of the minister and, in some cases, the disposition of the subject. But 'that which actively, and proximately, as well as instrumentally effects the grace of justification is alone that external action which is called a sacrament'.<sup>98</sup> Thus, for Roman Catholics, the justifying grace which was given in a sacrament was the effect of many causes, though 'it is not necessary that either the ministers or the recipients of the sacraments know how the sacraments are causes of justification, this is common with many mysteries of faith'.<sup>99</sup>

The basis of Quaker and Roman Catholic doctrine concerning infant baptism and the Eucharist may thus appear to differ considerably, Quakers rejecting any ceremonies and traditions as carnal, and Roman Catholics insisting on prescribed forms for sacraments. There were, however, exceptions to the Roman Catholic insistence on external forms for the efficacy of sacraments. The Roman Catholic church had long held that there could be effective baptism by blood (in the case of martyrs) or desire (in the case of 'perfect conversion and penance').<sup>100</sup> In the case of penance, a real change of heart by the recipient was necessary 'which we call a virtue, and without which exterior penance can avail very little'.<sup>101</sup> More specifically, under the pressure of English laws prohibiting Roman Catholic ceremonies in Elizabethan times, there is evidence that priests ministering to English Roman Catholics taught that the spiritual benefits of sacraments, particularly Penance and the Eucharist, could be available without physical ceremonies. Lisa McClain cited the Elizabethan John Radford who advanced the argument that God is not limited to specific channels of grace and repeated the old medieval church's argument in support of the practice of a priest receiving bread and wine on behalf of the whole congregation, that the laity were 'beneficiaries of the merits of the Mass through their membership in the body of believers'.<sup>102</sup>

Both Quakers and Roman Catholics placed the highest value on their own interpretation of Baptism and the Eucharist for the same reason, namely that through these divinely ordained means human beings become joined to Christ and thereby conducted towards their own salvation. Both Quakers and Roman Catholics held that by means of baptism and the eucharist believers are really changed by virtue of (for Quakers) becoming part of the body of Christ and (for Roman Catholics) receiving within themselves God's righteousness. The similarity of thought on the need for, and effect of, baptism and the eucharist, notwithstanding differences of view on the

---

<sup>98</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On The Sacraments in General', Book 2, Chapter I, p. 159.

<sup>99</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On The Sacraments in General', Book 2, Chapter I, p. 156.

<sup>100</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, 'On Baptism', Book 1, Chapter VI, p. 342.

<sup>101</sup> *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 178.

<sup>102</sup> Radford, *A Directorie Teaching the Way*, p. 118, quoted in McClain, L., *Lest we be Damned*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 118.

necessity of physical forms and ceremonies, may be contrasted with the understanding of the Reformed faith that baptism and the eucharist are merely signs of the work of the Spirit in justifying a believer.<sup>103</sup> Justification itself is effected by God imputing Christ's righteousness to a believer through the instrument of faith.<sup>104</sup>

## 2.7 Revelations, Immediate Call, Infallibility, Miracles

Weld's sixth Allegation was that:

the great argument by which the Papists do go about to establish the truth of their way is immediate revelations and pretended miracles; the want of which they upbraid the Protestant Ministers and charge to be no Church. So the Quakers do in their pretences to an immediate call, and their supposed miracle of quaking.<sup>105</sup>

Brownsword included the topic as one of the Quaker practices which he identified with those of monks and nuns.<sup>106</sup> Prynne thundered that: 'nothing (in my judgment) more clearly detects the popish Friars, Priests, Jesuits to be the principall inventors of speakers amongst our Quakers than the pretended extraordinary sudden extravagant quakings, revelations, illuminations; their intimate familiarity and immediate communion with God and Jesus Christ'.<sup>107</sup>

Quakers admitted that they had experienced divine revelations and immediate callings.<sup>108</sup> For Quakers, not only was an immediate call the basis upon which they were carrying out their preaching lives, it was also the foundation for their assault against the ministers. In affirming his immediate calling, Nayler attacked Weld for remaining 'in the world' and purporting to act as a minister of the Gospel despite having been selected by a temporal authority and receiving payment from his congregation.<sup>109</sup> In responding to the Allegation that their claim to infallibility disclosed an origin in Roman Catholicism, Quakers explained, in the same manner as their replies to the Allegations relating to inherent righteousness and perfection, that infallibility was a characteristic of the Spirit within them and not of their own.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> The *Westminster Confession* stated of baptism that it was 'a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace' and of the Lord's Supper that 'worthy receivers inwardly by faith spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified', Chapters 28 and 29.

<sup>104</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter 11, Paragraphs 1 and 2.

<sup>105</sup> Weld, *Further Discovery*, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Brownsword, *Quaker-Jesuite*, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> Prynne, *Quakers Unmasked*, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> 'For [God's] call is immediate, whereby he hath called his, and sent them forth; which call I witness from the mouth of the Lord.' Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Nayler, *Discovery of the Man of Sin*, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Fox, *The Great Mystery*, p. 5.

On the topic of miracles, Quakers admitted that quaking was a fact of early Quaker meetings.<sup>111</sup> Moore has suggested that the practice ‘was one of the most notable features of early Quakerism’ and that the Quakers’ device, particularly that of George Fox, of referring in publications to quaking as the manifestation of ‘the power of the Lord’ may have served to limit publicity given to it.<sup>112</sup> Apart from quaking, early Quakers accepted that the power of the divine within them could and did cause miracles. In his Introduction to his reconstruction of *George Fox’s ‘Book of Miracles’*, Henry Cadbury pointed out that even after Ellwood’s cautious editing out of some of the miracles included in Fox’s manuscript of his *Journal*, the published text still included references to twelve miracles, listed in the index under the heading ‘Miracles’.<sup>113</sup> Cadbury noted that in common with other seventeenth century writers, Quakers did not distinguish between providences, such as escape from disaster during their travels, enhanced healing assisted by confidence and faith, and miracles. They probably regarded as miraculous their survival during the numerous protracted fasts recounted in Fox’s *Journal* and early Quaker correspondence. Despite the occurrence of miracles, early Quakers made no attempt thereby to promote themselves, preferring to endure criticism for non-performance rather than charges of witchcraft or papist affiliation which would almost certainly have resulted from their publicising miraculous cures and events. Nayler responded to Ives’ charge that if Quakers were the true church they would have been able to validate their claim by carrying out miracles, by denying that all who had received the baptism of the Spirit also received the power to perform miracles.<sup>114</sup> In her account of her own conviction, Mary Penington noted that her initial scepticism of Quakers’ authenticity was due to the widespread objection that Quakers did not carry out miracles.<sup>115</sup>

Ministers were correct in highlighting experience of immediate communication with God as a significant element of Roman Catholic faith. Eire has pointed out that part of the utility for the Roman Catholic church of the reform of canonisation procedures in the wake of the Council of Trent was that the very notion of the possibility of direct divine intervention in human lives was rejected by their Protestant opponents.<sup>116</sup> Contributing to the Counter-Reformation momentum of tightening and centralising the procedures for canonisation, hagiographies became increasingly popular in Roman

---

<sup>111</sup> Nayler, *Answer to The Perfect Pharisee*, p. 25.

<sup>112</sup> Moore, *Light*, 146.

<sup>113</sup> Cadbury, H., *George Fox’s ‘Book of Miracles’*, New York: Octagon Books, 1973, p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> Nayler, *Weakness above Wickedness*, p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> Penington, M., *Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington*, London: Headley Brothers, 1911, as quoted by Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, p. 503.

<sup>116</sup> Eire, C., *Reformations: the early modern world, 1450–1650*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016, p. 400.

Catholic countries in the seventeenth century and, as Eire notes, ‘hagiography was all about miracle’.<sup>117</sup> Testimony of mystical encounters and miracles served to emphasise the continuity within the Roman Catholic church of a tradition, and the truth of that tradition, which witnessed Christ’s direct action in the world. The widely circulated, published autobiographies of Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila in the seventeenth century provided evidence of the recognition of the possibility of revelation and immediate calling within the Roman Catholic church. As to infallibility, the Roman Catholic church asserted that the Pope as Supreme Pontiff of the Church could not err in teaching the church in matters of faith, basing this belief on Christ’s promise to Peter in Lk 22: 31–32.<sup>118</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The Allegations were valid in pointing to superficial resemblance between Quaker beliefs and Roman Catholic doctrines relating to soteriology, the relative primacy of the Scriptures and the Spirit, and the possibility of immediate contact with God. Closer investigation, however, reveals significant differences. Roman Catholicism did not believe in the presence of grace in all people. Both agreed that justification was not through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness but early Quakers in practice had a more vivid apprehension of the divine righteousness within them and of the possibility of achieving perfection in this life by following the Spirit’s guidance than Roman Catholicism, despite the similarity of beliefs of the two faiths, while Roman Catholicism placed a huge stress on the necessity for a believer to allow the church to mediate the Spirit’s guidance. If both agreed that the Spirit was a senior authority to Scripture, experience had taught the Roman Catholic church that an individual’s understanding of the guidance of the Spirit could easily be mistaken, in whole or in part, and that the accumulated traditions of former believers should be allowed to supplement Scripture.

There was, however, an identity of belief between early Quakers and Roman Catholics in their adoption of the possibility of real apprehension of the divine by a believer in this life and an actual, not theoretical, interior connection with the divine element within. Even if the Reformed faith retained a belief that grasping Christ through faith would result in an infusion of righteousness to a believer as well as a forensic declaration of justification by God, the practical effect would be, at best, subconscious assistance. By contrast, Roman Catholicism still reflected in its doctrines the experiential faith of the Apostles and primitive Christians to which the early Quakers urged all people to return,

---

<sup>117</sup> Eire, *Reformations*, p. 403.

<sup>118</sup> Bellarmine, *Controversies*, ‘On the Sovereign Pontiff’, Book 4, Chapter III, p. 958.

the reliance on Christ's presence with believers in priority to intellectual understanding of the merits of His passion. Quakers may have flatly rejected the Allegations as an attempt by their opponents to colour them with the most unacceptable religious complexion known to mid-seventeenth century English people. They undoubtedly abhorred the institution of the Roman Catholic church with its sacerdotalism and its ceremonial sacramentalism. But on the core perception of the ability of a believer to experience the presence of the divine and the soteriological effect of that experience, they were in fact surprisingly aligned with Roman Catholic doctrines.

---

**Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

---

