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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE PROBLEM OF ORDER IN EARLY RHODE ISLAND

THEODORE DWIGHT BOZEMAN

IN 1669, thirty-three years after the establishment of the tiny "southwarde" settlement of Providence, its elderly but yet vigorous founder reflected upon the state of affairs in the much-expanded colony of Rhode Island. In so doing, he struck a note often sounded in his writings since 1639: "Now, as from [the] fourth wild beast in Daniel . . . have arisen all the storms and tempests, factions and divisions, in our little world amongst us, and what the tearing consequences of it will be, is known only to the Most Holy and Most Wise."¹

The picture emerging from the earliest records of the independent Narragansett settlements (1636-1647) and of the later united Colony of Providence Plantations, as well as from the writings of the chief actors in the drama of settlement and colony formation, is not idyllic. It is true that the area served many of its settlers as a refuge for what Williams called "soul liberty," and that they evaded there the standard restrictions of the religious establishment. It would be false, however, to suggest that Rhode Island's "livelie experiment" with religious disestablishment and political democracy was at first either frictionless or orderly. Williams' rueful commentary upon "storms and tempests" indicates a continued state of stress and disorder in the early colony. Sufficient evidence supports the suggestion that Rhode Island faced, in its formative period, an incessant problem of civil order which deepened at times into tumultuous crises. The need to devise a social and political "order" in a wilderness brought with it vexing problems. But also, by setting itself against the prevalent cultural axiom which held that the basis of civil cohesion and magisterial authority was a positive and official rela-

¹ Roger Williams, Letter to John Whipple, *The Letters of Roger Williams* (hereafter *Letters*), John Russell Bartlett, editor, Publications of the Narragansett Club, First Series, vol. 6 (Providence, 1874), VI, 330.

tionship between church and state, Rhode Island suffered the throes which commonly accompany basic social and political innovation. It was largely through efforts to establish an effective mastery over the persistent quandary of civil disorder that Rhode Islanders hoped to justify their experiment in religious toleration.

I

The initial task faced by Roger Williams and those who joined with him in the first Narragansett settlement of Providence, as well as by those later comers who were to establish themselves at nearby Aquidneck (later Rhode) Island, and at Warwick to the south, was the creation of an effective system of authority. If they were to deal successfully with matters of common concern, and to provide for orderly resolution of the host of conflicts which at once emerged, effectual governments had to be instituted at once.

That the first settlers experienced difficulties in developing a workable government is not surprising. They did not represent organized and financially endowed "companies," as did Massachusetts Bay. Nor did they hold authoritative charters. Thus the earliest governments—at Providence, Portsmouth, and Newport—were the creations merely of communal fiat and agreement. They were literally "social compacts," resting upon local initiative. Predictably, they suffered from chronic instability, and often schism. Since governmental authority lacked at first the strength afforded by the enduring habit of tradition, it often proved inadequate to the task of order.

At Providence, Roger Williams and five associates established a "towne" in mid-1636. Already in 1637 Williams was compelled to turn to John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay for counsel regarding "one unruly person who openly in town meeting more than once, professeth to . . . long for a better government. . . . Such a speech . . . levels at . . . nothing other than the raising of the fundamental liberties of the country. . . ."² Portsmouth, the first Aquidneck Island settlement

² Letter to John Winthrop, May, 1637, *Letters*, 23.

(1637), was forced in November, 1638, by various internal disturbances to appoint two police officials, a "constable" and a "sergeant," "to see that the peace be kept, and that there be no unlawfull Meetings, or anything that may tend to Civill Disturbance practised."³ Somewhat later, in February of 1639, an "Alarum" system was organized in Portsmouth to provide warning in case of Indian assault. Notable, however, is a provision that the Alarum may be sounded also "for quelling any insolences that shall be tumultuously rayseed within the plantation."⁴ These scattered references do not permit precise identification of the "insolences," but they do hint at an element of instability and conflict.

Indians were a constant source of difficulty to the early Rhode Island settlements. The colony records disclose that Indian relations constituted the largest single concern of each of the towns, and later of the united colony, throughout the early decades. It is possible to identify a number of sanguinary conflicts,⁵ which in turn necessitated careful and often elaborate military preparations. The ebb and flow of crisis atmosphere generated by Indian conflict constituted a major problem of order.

Conflict with other colonies—chiefly with Massachusetts—also contributed to civil tension in Rhode Island. Massachusetts Bay, for instance, apparently refused to allow inhabitants of Providence or Aquidneck to purchase necessary supplies in its markets, forcing Newport, at least, to "treat with the Governour of the Dutch to supply us with necessaries."⁶ More significant was the question of land jurisdiction. Massachusetts Bay authorities, perturbed by the threat of infectious heresy on their borders, were understandably eager to establish jurisdiction over the renegade Rhode Island towns, or at least to make their situation as untenable as possible. In October of 1643, in a dispute involving both land and doctrine, the Bay

³ *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (hereafter *Records of Rhode Island*), Bartlett, editor (Providence, 1856), I, 56.

⁴ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 68.

⁵ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 61, 64, 77, 80, 104, 121, 153, 218, 294, etc.

⁶ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 126.

sent an expedition of nearly sixty men several miles below Providence, seized a small group of inhabitants from the Shawomet (later Warwick) settlement, brought them forcibly to Boston, and tried and convicted them on various charges.⁷ Another abrasive encroachment occurred in 1642, when William Arnold and three other inhabitants of the area just north of Providence were taken under the "jurisdiction" of Massachusetts Bay. Viewing this act as an "obstruction of all orderly proceedings among us," Williams appealed to the Massachusetts General Court for an end to this "obstructing of all order and authority. . . ." He saw the constant and blatant intrusion of the Bay into the Narragansett jurisdiction as a menace to the stable practice of government there.

Another obstacle to the achievement of order in the developing colony was the unstable political situation of the English government, the ultimate source of legitimacy for colonial government. From 1636 to 1644, the only source of "legitimate" authority in the Narragansett townships were the voluntary compacts into which all save Warwick had entered. The steady and often contemptuous encroachments of Massachusetts Bay upon her southern neighbors made the authority claimed by these compacts largely ineffectual. It was this intolerable situation which induced the government at Providence to send Roger Williams to England in 1643 to negotiate for an official charter. This charter, embracing all the Narragansett settlements, was issued under Parliamentary authority in 1644, and became the basis for the inclusive Rhode Island government established in 1647.⁸ In 1658, however, with the death of Cromwell, the charter ceased to be secure. A new series of negotiations was now undertaken, and in 1663, after much difficulty, the desired new charter was obtained. In each case, despite zealous opposition by Massachusetts Bay agents,

⁷ In the course of the dispute, Samuel Gorton, the group leader, had written a number of insulting and "blasphemous" letters to the Massachusetts Bay General Court. The basic charge placed against the prisoners was heresy. See *Records of Rhode Island*, II, 52.

⁸ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 323; for similar encroachments, see 494, 133.

⁹ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 143-148.

the Rhode Island petition had met with success. But it must be remembered that during each period of negotiations the colony's political existence stood in serious jeopardy. The resulting insecurity contributed to a spirit of discord within the colony.

Uncertainty about the charter was compounded in the years following 1649 by actions taken by William Coddington, a prominent figure in the Newport government. By various machinations, Coddington sought to overturn the existing charter and reconstitute Aquidneck Island as a separate political entity with himself as governor. He tried to accomplish this at first by petitioning the United Colonies, an association of the other New England colonies for Indian defense, to receive Aquidneck as an independent member. Within Rhode Island, this high-handed move resulted in a period of schism and insubordination. Williams lamented in a letter to John Winthrop, Jr. that "our poor colony is in civill dissension. Their last meetings . . . have fallen into factions."¹⁰

When his appeal was refused by the United Colonies,¹¹ Coddington took the more remarkable step of traveling to England in 1651 and making personal petition for a separate charter for Aquidneck, with himself to be appointed governor *in perpetuum*. By a set of confusing circumstances, Coddington actually acquired the charter he desired, even though it conflicted with the charter obtained by Williams in 1643. When news of this usurpation reached Rhode Island, John Clarke and Roger Williams were hurriedly sent to England to seek its nullification.¹² Although this was eventually effected, and the 1643 charter vindicated, Rhode Island was again thrown into turmoil. For nearly three years the general government was fractured into *de facto* Providence-Warwick and Newport-Portsmouth factions.¹³ Williams wrote to John Winthrop, Jr.

¹⁰ Letter to John Winthrop, Jr., Jan., 1649, *Letters*, 166.

¹¹ *Records of Plymouth Colony*, Nathaniel Shurtleff, editor (Boston, 1855), IX, 110.

¹² *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 233 n.

¹³ See e.g. "A Brief Remonstrance of the two Townes of Providence Plantations . . ." in *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 268-271.

in February, 1654: "We have had some gusts amongst us as to our whole Colony and civil order. At my coming over [his return from England] our neighbors were run into divisions."¹⁴ The apparent failure of the government established upon the original charter had evoked serious expressions of independent recalcitrance even against the provisional Providence-Warwick and Newport-Portsmouth governments. The acting General Assembly of Providence and Warwick wrote Williams in desperation in 1652 that his strong hand was needed at home: "it might tend much . . . to the subjecting of persons who have been refractory, to yield themselves over as unto a settled government if [the colonial authorities] might . . . empower yourselfe to come over as Governour of this Collony."¹⁵ "Refractory" persons had apparently defaced and destroyed the Assembly orders published in the towns. A few days later, it was observed by the Assembly that "The honour of this Colonie lyeth at stake, to keep ourselves in order and union till the return of our agent from England, that provisions be made that wee be not then found in a rout."¹⁶ The increasing disorder provoked a kindly but stern admonition from Sir Henry Vane, a member of the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Plantations which had issued the original charter: "How is it that there are such divisions amongst you? Such headiness, tumults, disorders and injustice. The noise echoes into the ears of all, as well friends as enemies, by every returne of shippes from those parts."¹⁷

The potential for such an outburst was present in Rhode Island from the beginning. The various factors of stress and instability which we have described contributed to it. But an equally potent factor was the presence in the various settlements of a number of strong individualists, men who had little love of government and who tended to resist its claims when they conflicted with their own self-interest.

¹⁴ Letter to John Winthrop, Jr., Feb. 15, 1654, *Letters*, 283.

¹⁵ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 249.

¹⁶ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 255, 257.

¹⁷ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 285.

Samuel Gorton, who stood almost constantly in conflict with the existing government, was certainly the most colorful of Rhode Island's "individualists." Previously embroiled in altercations with the authorities in Connecticut and on Aquidneck Island, Gorton and a group of followers migrated in late 1640 into the area just south of Providence. In the following year, he became involved in another sharp dispute, this time with the Providence government. So effectively did he and his associates resist local law enforcement, that a group of Providence colonists sent an urgent appeal to Massachusetts for aid. The appeal reported "the insolent and riotous carriages of Samuel Gorton [and others, who] have stood . . . against the fairest and most just and honest ways of proceeding in order and government." A Francis Weston had been subjected by due process to a small fine, but having been attracted to Gorton's no-government position, he offered physical resistance to the collectors sent for the money. There resulted a bloody battle between "Gortonites" and Providence agents. Gorton and his men, the appeal charged, "intend to have no manner of honest order or government, either over them or amongst them." It pressed further the question of civil discipline: "what is likely to be the sad events of these disorders [?] . . . it is plain to us, that if men should continue to resist all manner of order and orderly answering of one another . . . they will suddenly practice not only . . . to detain things from one another . . . but openly . . . according to their own wills, disorderly take what they can come by. [Eventually] like savage brute beasts they will put no manner of difference between houses, goods, lands, lives, [or] blood. . . ." ¹⁸

This was a clear-sighted view of the threat to rational civil order represented by "Gortonism." The appeal brought no response from Massachusetts, but it demonstrated the extent to which Rhode Islanders were often thrown up against elemental problems of social order. It also reveals that serious

¹⁸ "Petition of Some of Providence Colony, to the Government of Massachusetts, against Gorton and Others," in *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, appendix one (Providence, 1835), II, 191-193.

men in the colony recognized the hazardous political consequences of heedless individualism, and that the experience of severe social discord and disunity had deepened their solicitude for civil order. ¹⁹

An additional root of unrest in Rhode Island was the reputation, which the colony early attracted, of being a place of refuge. It was not only religious dissidents who sought sanctuary within her borders. William Arnold, a resident of the area north of Providence, grumbled in 1651 that "about these partes there comes to live all the scume the runne awayes of the country, which in tyme for want of a better order may bring a heavy burthen upon the land." ²⁰ The number of such arrivals must have been considerable. In September of 1651, officials of the United Colonies wrote William Coddington, now temporarily governor of Aquidneck, that "som notorius Delinquents who are lyable to hiest sensures making escape out of severall of the Collonies; Repair to Youer Iland as to a Citty of Refuge hoping thereby to avoid the stroake of Justice. . . ." ²¹

A final source of discord was the obstacle presented to the formation and stability of the general colony government by the preexistent and jealous sovereignty of the four participating towns of Providence, Newport, Portsmouth, and Warwick. Numerous evidences of a severe conflict at this point are to be found in the colony records. In March, 1657, for example, the general government found it necessary to issue a sharp edict "that noe law or order apoynted and ordayned by ye generall and publicke authoritie of this Colonie, shall be any wayes obstructed or neglected under pretence of any authoritie of any of ye towne charters. . . ." ²²

The conclusion of this perusal of early colony records and

¹⁹ A second foe of civil order in Rhode Island was William Harris, against whom Roger Williams brought an official charge of high treason in 1657, "for his open defiance against our charter, all our laws and courts . . ." (*Records of Rhode Island*, I, 313).

²⁰ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 234.

²¹ *Records of Plymouth Colony*, IX, 215.

²² *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 333.

related documents is manifest: early Rhode Island was far from being a simple and harmonious unity. It was repeatedly menaced from within, as well as from without, by forces of disunion, by outright treason, and by a spirit of independence and individualism which occasionally erupted into tumultuous disorder. That this had an important bearing upon the experiment with religious toleration in which that society engaged, we hope now to demonstrate.

II

In 1670, Roger Williams wrote a revealing letter to his "dear and ancient friend," John Mason of Connecticut. Reminiscing gratefully about the successful acquisition of the charter of 1663, he spoke of "the King's extraordinary favor to this colony, *as being a banished one*. . . ."²³ In this terse phrase Williams pointed to a factor of great importance in the early Rhode Island experience. Composed largely of religious, social, and even criminal dissidents from neighboring colonies, and both hated and hounded by other colonial governments for its religious heterodoxy, Rhode Island was literally a "banished" colony, the outcast of New England. In the letter of supplication for charter confirmation sent to Charles Cromwell in May, 1659, the Rhode Island General Assembly reminded young Cromwell of the magnanimity of the revolutionary young Cromwell of the magnanimity of the revolutionary Parliament in granting Rhode Island her first charter "notwithstanding this *our outcast state*. . . ."²⁴ Numerous expressions of contempt for Rhode Island are contained in the colony records of Connecticut, Plymouth, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, and New Amsterdam. A special committee appointed by the King in 1664 to investigate conflicting land claims in New England reported that "This colony . . . was begun by such as the Mattachusetts would not suffer to live among them, and is generally hated by the other colonies."²⁵ Even the genial Governor of Plymouth, William Bradford,

²³ Letter to John Mason, June 22, 1670, *Letters*, 346.

²⁴ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 415.

²⁵ *Records of Rhode Island*, II, 128.

avowed "concerning ye Ilanders. . . . We have no conversing with them, nor desire to have, furdur than necessitie or humanity may require."²⁶

It is essential to understand the contemporary roots of the Ishmael stigma with which Rhode Island was branded. She was abhorred not primarily because of her too "Democratically" political structure, nor simply because many of her inhabitants were dissenters from the religious establishments which prevailed elsewhere. Not merely dissent from this or that religious doctrine or political principle was at issue, but the question of the validity and integrity of Christendom itself.

It is clear that contemporary strictures against the colony rested in part upon a deep anxiety about the strife-torn character of her political and social life. This, it was held, was exactly what must be expected of such an ill-considered attempt to invert the enduring axiom of nearly fifteen hundred years: that civil and political cohesion alike depended upon a general and coerced uniformity of religious belief. Only the hated Anabaptist fanatics of the previous century had dared question the union of church and state in the matter of religious uniformity, and they had demonstrated the anarchic bent of their motives in the murderous affair at Münster. And now, with the establishment of Rhode Island, loomed the prospect of another Münster. For there, government was pledged to a policy of "bearinge with the severall judgments and consciences" of persons whose religious beliefs were far from uniform. Lacking the foundation of a general assent to prescribed religious ideas, upon which all hope of lasting civil order rested, how could Rhode Island survive? Would it not disintegrate in a panic of violent confusion? And more important, would it not infect its neighbor societies with the pestilent germ of anarchy? For the enemies of Rhode Island, these were questions of vast import.

To her neighbors, as well as to interested observers in En-

²⁶ Letter to Richard Bellingham, March 17, 1642, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5th Series (Boston, 1825), VIII, 388.

gland, "disestablished" Rhode Island exhibited all the expected signs of civil and religious dissolution. Not only was there a highly visible measure of social and political strife, but also an extraordinary multiplicity of sects and schisms in religion. John Winthrop wrote disdainfully of Roger Williams' "rebaptism" and of the formation of an independent Baptist church at Providence in 1639.²⁷ Of "those of Aquiday [Aquidneck] island," he observed, they "broached new heresies every year." A bit later, he wrote that the religious sects of Aquidneck "were . . . in such distraction among themselves as portended their ruin."²⁸ Winthrop's picture of a fragmented, pluralist development is confirmed by the report of a royal commission which visited New England in 1665: "In this Province they have not any places set apart for the worship of God, there being so many subdivided sects, they cannot agree to meet together in one place, but according to their severall judgments, they sometimes associate in one house, sometimes in another."²⁹

Yet the pluralistic form of religious life in Rhode Island was not contrary to the general expectations of its founders. A distinct trace of the Massachusetts Bay theocratic ideal was apparent in the founding compact of Portsmouth,³⁰ but as dissidents like Anne Hutchinson joined the settlement, the uniformitarian intent of the original compacters quickly gave way before the fact of pluralism.³¹ Providence, of course, was specifically intended by Williams and his associates as "a shelter for persons distressed of conscience."³² Thus in 1647, the newly formed General Court, which represented a central administration over the four towns, having prepared and pro-

²⁷ John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, James Savage, editor (Boston, 1825), I, 293.

²⁸ John Winthrop, *The History of New England*, I, 173; see also II, 38, 40-41.
²⁹ *Records of Rhode Island*, II, 129.

³⁰ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 52.

³¹ In 1639 there was a "secession" of several of the original inhabitants, who were apparently dissatisfied with the settlement's growing religious diversification. This group founded Newport, but the new compact into which they entered was void of religious reference (*Records of Rhode Island*, I, 70).

³² *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 22.

mulgated a body of laws for the rule of the colony, concluded: "Otherwise than what is herein forbidden, all men may walk as their consciences perswade them, every one in the name of his God."³³

III

Next to Roger Williams, the foremost apologist for religious liberty in Rhode Island was John Clarke, who founded the first Baptist church in Newport in 1644.³⁴ The story of Clarke's visit with two companions to Massachusetts in 1651, and of their consequent arrest and punishment on grounds of preaching Baptist "heresy," is well known. Afterwards, Clarke went to England to enter an official complaint against Massachusetts Bay. While there he wrote a full account of the episode, together with an assault upon the principle of coerced uniformity, entitled *Ill Newes from New-England*. Underlying his argument was the assumption that the keen "inwardness" of genuine religious experience is inaccessible to the "outwardness" of civil legality. Faith, unlike civil discipline, cannot be marshaled by the outward measures of political authority. The religious conscience, "this spirit and great commander in man, is such a sparkling beam . . . that it cannot be lorded over, commanded, or forced." An application of force, however vigorous, simply "cannot come neer or touch the spirit . . . of man."³⁵ Clarke's argument turned primarily upon the intensity of sectarian religious experience.³⁶ This point becomes clear in the context of a discussion of the specifically Baptist principles which Clarke espoused. He believed that Scripture gave sanction alone to immersive baptism, and argued that the Massachusetts practice of baptism by sprin-

³³ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 190.

³⁴ John Callender, *An Historical Discourse on the Civil and Religious Affairs of Rhode Island*, in *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, IV, 117; Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, 1963), 203.

³⁵ John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England* (London, 1652), in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th Series, II, 6-7.

³⁶ Samuel Gorton presented a similar argument for toleration, which also rested upon a disparagement of "outward" religion (*Simplicities Defence against Seven-Headed Policy*, in *Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, II, 46); see his letters to the Massachusetts General Court, in the same volume.

klung "no way resembles the death, burial or resurrection of Jesus Christ."⁸⁷ Baptism, in his view, must rather simulate outwardly the ecstatic experience of complete "rebirth" upon which the early Baptist sects were principally founded. Here the essential point at issue between establishment and disestablishment in religion, as argued by sectarian dissenters like Clarke, becomes clear. In the light of the overwhelming emphasis placed by them upon the inward operation of the "sparkling beam" of conscience, the Massachusetts emphasis upon outward, behavioral discipline and conformity was perceived as incongruous with true religion. If religion is essentially inward, authentic virtue in religious behavior will follow only from a natural and voluntary conformity of the outward appearance of "Christian" behavior with the inner richness of conversion and renewal. Hence a genuine "Christendom," in Clarke's view, must be one in which the priority of the inward principle is recognized and supported by an enforcement of toleration rather than of uniformity.

IV

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that the question of religious freedom in Rhode Island can be understood apart from the intimately related issue of civil order. It was essential to begin this essay with a discussion of civil disorder in the colony, because it was precisely the general concern for the maintenance of public order which lay at the heart of the question of religious toleration in the seventeenth century. Rhode Islanders recognized that religious liberty could not be legitimated solely on the ground of the priority of inner spiritual experience. If they were to realize the promise of their "livelie experiment," they must demonstrate that ordered communal existence was possible, in the absence of uniform religious belief and practice. And they must, as best they could, "explain away" the existence of unusual discord in their body politic.

It has not often been noticed that the first official act of the Massachusetts Bay government, as it entered the Anne Hutch-

⁸⁷ Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England*, 14.

inson affair, was to order the disarming of all suspected adherents of the new heresy: "Whereas the opinions . . . of Mr. Wheelwright and Mrs. Hutchinson have seduced and led into dangerous errors many of the people heare in Newe England, insomuch as there is cause of suspition that they, as others in Germany, in former times, may upon some revelation, make some suddaine irruption upon those that differ from them in judgment, for prevention whereof it is ordered, that all those [adherents] shall . . . deliver in . . . all such guns, pistols, swords, shot and match as they shall be owners of."⁸⁸ Here was plainly the ghost of Münster, still a terror to the mind of Christendom, and a constant reminder of the necessity of religious uniformity for the security of peace and order in any community. The task of Rhode Island was the almost impossible one of eclipsing the ready memory of Münster by providing a vivid and forceful demonstration that violent chaos was not the necessary result of a departure from the established model of religious uniformity.

There is much evidence that many Rhode Islanders were deeply concerned about the disorder so regularly manifested in their civic life. They perceived it, as did their hostile neighbors, as an obstacle to the success of their program of religious toleration. Apparent in numerous administrative actions, as well as in the various *apologia* of men like Clarke and Williams, was a concern both to rationalize, to "explain," and to rectify the frequent disarray of public life. Thus when, during the period of the Coddington usurpation, the now temporarily separate "colony" of Providence-Warwick received the letter of admonition from Sir Henry Vane protesting "headiness, tumults, disorders and injustice," the town council of Providence drafted a reply in which it was frankly admitted that Rhode Island faced a problem of adjustment to the unprecedented policy of religious toleration: "For we have long drunck of ye cup of as great liberties as any people that we can heare of under the whole Heaven." That they had at first

⁸⁸ *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay*, Nathaniel Shurtleff, editor (Boston, 1853), I, 211.

staggered under the challenge of freedom was necessary to confess with candor, for it provided some explanation of the recent "tumults." Thus they did not hesitate to admit "that possibly a sweete cup hath rendered many of us wanton and too active." Their "speciall priviledges" had been enough, they felt, "to render ye best of men wanton and forgetfull."³⁹

It was in the same spirit that Clarke, now in England as Rhode Island's agent for the procurement of a new charter from the government of Charles II, drafted a carefully worded petition to the King. For Clarke took especial care to point out that Rhode Island had always adhered vigorously to the legitimacy of the Stuart regency. Far from weakening her relationship to royal authority, religious toleration seemed to have strengthened it. Clarke did not hesitate to suggest, that during the interregnum of civil war and of Cromwell's rule, Rhode Island had not faltered in its devotion to the Crown. The colony celebrated the memory, he told Charles, of "your Royall father," for his grant of the 1644 charter. The government established upon that charter was specifically designed to "proceed in his Majestie's name," and so it was that now, "upon the first intelligence of the wonderfull workinge hand of the most High, in makeinge way to administration for your Majesties returne unto your Royall throne," Rhode Island was bold to press its claim for a new charter. It wished merely to continue its devotion to the King.

In the petition, Clarke also pointed out that the decisive act of the first government had been the assiduous compilation, with "excessive travail," of a "briefe body of lawes, for the maintaining of civill society, and for the administration of judgement and justice. . . ." This body of laws, moreover, was "drawn from and founded upon the lawes of England."⁴⁰ The plain implication of all this was the intent to underscore the fidelity of Rhode Island to the recognized model of English civil order. How could the King but conclude, therefore, that the colony had made good on its obligation to build an intact

³⁹ *Records of Rhode Island*, 1, 288-289.

⁴⁰ *Records of Rhode Island*, 1, 487.

and rationally functioning society, despite its peculiar innovation in the matter of religious toleration?

In "An Address from Rhode Island to King Charles," drawn up by a committee of the General Assembly and presented to the King shortly after Clarke's petition, the argument was strikingly similar. It claimed that the intent of the original charter application to Charles I had been to commit Rhode Island to the only legitimate source of stabilizing political sovereignty, thereby "causing all the visible acts of power" in the colony "to issue forth in his Majestie's name." Promptly upon hearing of "your Majestys returne to your Royall throne," the General Court had held a special session to declare "their ready and joyfull reception of you, and of their faithfull allegiance to you," and to order public celebrations in every town, marking the restoration.⁴¹ On these grounds, the Assembly thought to have ample basis for their new charter application, and for the special provision therein sought "to hold forth a lively experiment, that a flourishing civill State may stand, yea, and best be maintained . . . with a full liberty in religious concernments, and that true pyety rightly grounded . . . will give the best and greatest security to true sovereignty, and will lay in the hearts of men the strongest obligations to truer loyalty."⁴²

The attempt to assert and sustain a positive correlation between religious toleration and civic responsibility was a constant and important theme in early Rhode Island history. A royal commission report of 1665 specifically observed that a sufficient connection between liberty and discipline had been effectively maintained within the colony: "They [restrict]

⁴¹ *Records of Rhode Island*, 1, 490-491.

⁴² *Records of Rhode Island*, 1, 491, underscoring mine. The petition was regarded by several highly placed members of the new English government as a work of barefaced audacity. Roger Williams, who possessed personal information respecting its initial reception at the royal court, later reported "his majesty declared himself that he would experiment whether civil government could consist with such liberty of conscience. This his majesty's grant was startled at by his Majesty's high officers of state . . . but fearing the lion's roaring, they couched, against their wills, in obedience to his majesty's pleasure." (Letter to Major Mason, June 22, 1670, *Letters*, 346).

liberty of conscience . . . to all who live civilly."⁴³ Likewise the General Court, upon receiving the hoped-for charter from Charles II, did "order and declare, that [only] soe many of them that take the . . . engagement [i.e. an oath of "true and faithfull alleagiance unto his Majesty"] and are of . . . civill conversation, and obedient to the civill magistrate, shall be admitted" to the privileges of citizenship.⁴⁴ The stress upon order had been present from the beginning. In 1641, the General Court of newly founded Newport ordered "that none bee accounted a Delinquent for Doctrine: Provided, it bee not directly repugnant to ye Government or Lawes established."⁴⁵ The new colony government of 1647 eagerly countered the charge frequently made that the proposed program of religious disestablishment "shall prove an Anarchie." It would show itself doubly zealous "to preserve every man safe in his own person, name and estate."⁴⁶

V

It was John Clarke and Roger Williams who developed the most effective and cogent accounts of how toleration could subsist with order. Clarke's theory of toleration precluded any legitimate intervention by any constituted "outward" authority into strictly religious matters. But by limiting magisterial authority to matters of civil behavior alone, Clarke believed that he had in fact provided for the restoration of the magistracy to a more legitimate function, and in effect strengthened its hand by removing the necessity for constant, tiresome, and ultimately futile encroachments into a sphere beyond its actual ken or reach. The lawful exercise of the magistrate's power, consistent with its own outward character, was quite sufficient, in Clarke's view, to secure "the peace, liberty, and prosperity of a civil state."⁴⁷ The argument for

⁴³ *Records of Rhode Island*, II, 127.

⁴⁴ *Records of Rhode Island*, II, 113.

⁴⁵ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 113.

⁴⁶ *Records of Rhode Island*, I, 157-158.

⁴⁷ Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England*, 5.

toleration is regularly coupled in his writings with a demand for order in the civil community.

But it was Williams who proved the supreme apologist for toleration. That he understood the delicate and controversial issues involved in the Rhode Island program is apparent throughout his works. He knew that religious liberty represented a startling and revolutionary innovation in Western political life, that it was nothing less than the ancient Christendom formula for church and state which was at stake, namely "that commonly received and not questioned opinion, viz., that the civill state and the spirituall, the church and Commonweale, they are like Hippocrates twins, they are borne together, grow up together, laugh together, weepe together, sicken and die together."⁴⁸ It should be remembered at this point that Williams, during each of his trips abroad on behalf of the Rhode Island charter, participated directly in the emerging situation of religious pluralism in England, and the growth there of a substantial ideological challenge to the "commonly received" axioms of Christendom.

Williams felt, particularly in view of developments in England, that the time was right for an effective subversion of the Christendom idea. He vindicated religious toleration in part as a requirement of the "Seeker" assumption that religious truth is fleeting, fragmentary, and not susceptible of dogmatic statement or institutional organization.⁴⁹ Yet there was another, highly significant, and little-noticed argument used by Williams in his defense of toleration. For he was one of many persons in the seventeenth century who were sickened at the spectacle of bloody intramural conflicts within "Christendom." The brutal Thirty Years' War had only recently ended, and in England itself, the conflict between Catholic and Protestant policy had produced a host of martyrs. Many had begun to recognize that the age-old premise of religious

⁴⁸ Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* (London, 1644), in Publications of the Narragansett Club, III, 333.

⁴⁹ See e.g., Letter to Governor Endicott, Aug., 1651, *Letters*, 216.

uniformity had become a danger to the peace and welfare of Western society.

It is important to recognize that Williams often urged religious toleration as a remedy for the conflicts by which Christendom was slowly being torn to pieces from within. "Inforced uniformity," he insisted, "is the greatest occasion of civill Warre . . . of the hypocrisie and destruction of millions of souls. The permission of other consciences and worships than a state professeth, only can . . . procure a firme and lasting peace (good assurance being taken according to the wisdom of the civill state for uniformity of civill obedience from all . . .)." ⁵⁰ In another context he argued that "The Church . . . is like unto a . . . Corporation . . . a Company . . . which companies may hold their Courts, keep their records, hold disputes . . . dissent, divide, breake into Schismes and Factions . . . yes, wholly breake and dissolve into pieces . . . and yet the peace of the Citie [i.e. the civil state] and so the well being and peace thereof is essentially distinct from those particular societies." ⁵¹ Religious freedom, then, is conceived by Williams as a peace platform, designed to meet the dilemma of a fragmented and divided Christendom which persisted in thinking of itself as an intact uniformity. By the simple device of assigning civil and religious authority separate spheres of jurisdiction, he thought to exempt the commonweal from the acrid divisiveness of post-Reformation Christianity.

Thus Williams addressed himself precisely to the central issue at hand in Rhode Island. Could religious liberty subsist with a well-ordered and peaceful society? He not only answered affirmatively, but insisted that "libertie" alone is the key to a lasting civil peace. If Massachusetts thought it had established a just peace on the basis of coerced uniformity, he asked Governor Endicott, what then of the vicious reign of terror which had been waged there against countless dissenters? "Are all of the thousands of millions of millions of con-

⁵⁰ Williams, *The Bloody Tenent* . . . , 3-4, 302.

⁵¹ Williams, *The Bloody Tenent* . . . , 72-73.

sciences, at home and abroad, fuel only for a prison, for a whip, for a gallows?" ⁵²

Williams was highly sensitive to the fundamental need for reliable order. He was constantly disturbed by disruptions of the civil peace in Rhode Island, and was foremost in upholding the stern use of the "sword," limited to its proper sphere. In a letter to the Massachusetts General Court in 1654, he felt it necessary to remind them: "I never was against the righteous use of the civil sword. . . ." ⁵³ In the same year, an unknown person sent "a seditious paper" to the town of Providence, in which it was declared "That it was blood guiltless, and against the rule of the gospel to execute judgment upon transgressors against the public or private weal." ⁵⁴ To this expression of political anarchy, although it was grounded in religious principle, Williams' reaction was swift. In a trenchant letter to the town of Providence, he slapped aside indignantly a suggestion that he had written the piece. "That ever I should speak or write a title, that tends to such an infinite liberty of conscience, is a mistake, and which I have ever disclaimed and abhorred." ⁵⁵ There followed his well-known parable of human society as "ship." It might happen that upon a given ship, persons of diverse religious conviction have taken passage. Religious freedom, in this case, would consist solely in the right of all persons aboard to attend, or decline to attend, the "ship's prayers or worship," or to hold "their own particular prayers or worship." But should any person, passenger or crew, be so misguided as to assume "freedom" to refuse his given duties, or to withhold his fare, or to "refuse to help . . . towards the common charges or defence; [or] if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship . . . or shall rise up against [his] commanders . . . [or] should preach or write that there ought to be no commanders or officers, because all are equal in Christ . . .

⁵² Letter to Governor Endicott, *Letters*, 216.

⁵³ *Records of Rhode Island*, 1, 293.

⁵⁴ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (Newton, Mass., 1871), 1, 296.

⁵⁵ Letter to the town of Providence, Jan., 1654, *Letters*, 278.

the commander . . . may judge, resist, compel and punish such transgressors. . . ."⁵⁶ The seriousness of Williams' concern for order and discipline in society is here underscored with convincing ardor. By so addressing himself to the problem of the social consequences of religious toleration, and sharply renouncing the suggestion that toleration in any way imperils the common peace, he again demonstrated the social viability and realism of the Rhode Island doctrine of "soul liberty." The fears and doubts of Christendom thinkers respecting the consequences of religious disestablishment here received a convincing confutation. It was thus in Williams that the hated colony of Rhode Island found its most effective defender against the strictures of those who could see in religious freedom only the ruin and despair of the fragile "commonweal."

⁵⁶ Letter to the town of Providence, *Letters*, 279.

HAWTHORNE'S TREATMENT OF THE ARTIST

R. K. GUPTA

HAWTHORNE's critics have found his attitude toward the artist rather perplexing, even ambiguous. They have felt that the novelist Hawthorne does not present the artist in a very favorable light. F. O. Matthiessen, for example, wrote that Hawthorne was "not wholly sympathetic with his artists."¹ According to Newton Arvin, "the artist's power" was, for Hawthorne, "always a potential and here [in "The Prophetic Pictures"] an actual curse. . . . Hawthorne's portraits . . . become the symbols not only of the artist's clairvoyance but of a malignant fatality of which he may be the guilty medium."² Mary Dichmann also finds an "ambivalence of attitude" in the novelist's treatment of the artist. Hawthorne, she believes, was continually vexed by "the dichotomy of the act of artistic creation, which Hawthorne seems to have felt is man's most spiritual achievement, and of that 'dark necessity,' which, he feared, impels the artist by virtue of his very artistry towards the unpardonable sin, the violation of the human heart."³ The painter in "The Prophetic Pictures," for example, "lives apart from humanity on the plane of his own ideas." Although "his attributes are in themselves praiseworthy, . . . he is touched by a suggestion of diabolic madness, which implies that he may use them evilly."⁴ Thus "the sunlit features of Hawthorne's artist" are obscured by "certain gloomy characteristics and dark potentialities that shadow his figure in ambiguities."⁵ Rudolph Von Abele sees in Hawthorne a clash between the "two ways of life to which he felt himself committed— . . . the bourgeois life of his fellow-Americans, and the heterodox life

¹ F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), 223.

² Newton Arvin, Introduction to *Hawthorne's Short Stories* (New York, 1947), xi-xii.

³ Mary E. Dichmann, "Hawthorne's 'Prophetic Pictures,'" *American Literature*, xxiii, 188 (1951-1952).

⁴ Dichmann, 193-194.

⁵ Dichmann, 192.