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THE SALTERS' HALL CONTROVERSY: HERESY, SUBSCRIPTION, OR BOTH?

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ABSTRACT. The Salters' Hall controversy (1719) was a watershed event in the history of English Dissent. Some historians have interpreted the controversy as an early sign of the theological demise of the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians. Conversely, the controversy has also been used to demonstrate the theological steadfastness of the English Particular Baptists and Congregationalist in the eighteenth century. Yet some of the earliest accounts of the Salters' Hall controversy maintain that the controversy was not about the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases. This was the view of the revered divine Edmund Calamy, who refused to be involved in the controversy, even at the potential expense of his reputation. Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist subscriber at Salters' Hall, held a similar view of the controversy. While some historians acknowledge these accounts, they seem to ultimately doubt their truthfulness. This hesitancy is likely due, in part, to the fact that there were a few anti-Trinitarians among the nonsubscribers at Salters' Hall. Furthermore, the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians did deviate from theological orthodoxy later in the century. However, those who question the motives of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall fail to take into account a theologically orthodox, nonsubscribing tradition among the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians found in the writings of Thomas Grantham and Richard Baxter. In sum, one's orthodoxy at Salters' Hall cannot be determined solely on the basis of one's view of subscription.

KEYWORDS: Trinity, Subscription, Confessionalism, Baxter, Grantham

In February 1719, over one hundred dissenting ministers gathered at Salters' Hall in London to determine how they might advise the Presbyterians in Exeter who were concerned that their ministers held heterodox views on the doctrine of the Trinity. The meeting at Salters' Hall, consisting of Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists, was convened in order to help solve the controversy. But the Salters' Hall meetings became a separate controversy as the ministers in London were divided on how to respond to the issue in Exeter. Their division did not fall solely along denominational lines. The Baptists, Presbyterians, and Independents were divided on this: whether or not

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ministers ought to be required to subscribe to extrabiblical words and phrases delineating the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly when a minister's orthodoxy might be in doubt. Fifty-seven of the ministers there were opposed to requiring subscription. Fifty-three ministers were in favor of this requirement, and of recommending it to those in Exeter. The two parties, who became known as 'Subscribers' and 'Non-subscribers', sent two separate sets of advices to Exeter. Neither group's advice immediately influenced matters in Exeter since they arrived after a decision had already been made to remove the pastors in question there. A pamphlet war quickly ensued as members of each party sought to not only declare their orthodoxy, but also to provide their account and interpretation of what had occurred at Salters' Hall. [The request for advice came from 'the thirteen' but it is also surmised that James Peirce may have also appealed to John Shute Barrington for help in the matter. By the time that the advices were sent to Exeter, the number of Subscribers had grown to seventy-eight and the number of Non-subscribers had grown to seventy-three. Their advices likely would not have had much influence even if they had arrived on time since the Exeter Presbyterians were appalled by the involvement of 'Anabaptists' at the Salters' Hall meetings.]

A simple survey of the primary source material that came out of the Salters' Hall controversy reveals that as early as 1719 there were disagreements on how to interpret the events. Was the issue at hand subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases? Or, was opposition to subscription a thinly veiled disguise for anti-Trinitarianism? These are the questions that this essay seeks to answer. In order to answer them there are several items that must be taken into account.

First, we need a better understanding of what occurred at Exeter since it was the controversy at Exeter that precipitated the controversy in London. Second, we need to briefly recount the proceedings at Salters' Hall before interpreting them. This includes understanding the political setting just prior to 1719. Third, we must take into consideration some of the earliest accounts of Salters' Hall, particularly the accounts of the revered ministers Edmund Calamy, a Presbyterian who abstained from the controversy, and Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist Subscriber at Salters' Hall. Fourth, it must be noted that there is an orthodox, nonsubscribing tradition among the English General Baptists and the English Presbyterians connected to Thomas Grantham and Richard Baxter respectively. In the end, we can reasonably conclude that even if there were a some anti-Trinitarians among the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall, many were opposed to the additional requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases—not the doctrine of the Trinity. [Another important question that should be considered in more detail is whether or not the London ministers, particularly for the General Baptists, are representative of General Baptist sentiments throughout England. Or,

have the actions and sentiments of a few General Baptist ministers in and around London been unfairly viewed as representative of the whole? Stephen Copson is helpful on this point (Copson 2009: 56). This same critique could potentially be leveled against the use of the Caffyn Controversy to discredit the General Baptists as being wholly inclined towards heterodoxy. Clint Bass's writings offer a moderating view on the subject (Bass 2013: 179-213).]

James Peirce, Joseph Hallet, and Exeter

By his own account, James Peirce held a classical understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity until sometime around 1713 (Peirce 1720:10). In retrospect, Peirce believed that he had been 'bred up in a scheme, of which I can now make nothing else but *Sabellianism*' (Peirce 1720: 5). When Peirce first heard about the writings of William Whiston and Samuel Clarke he avoided reading them, but discussion of them was 'very much increasing' until he encountered a friend who 'reproach'd' him for his 'sloth' (Peirce 1720: 8). So Peirce purchased Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine* and Whiston's works and began to read them. He was mesmerized by Clarke's method of scripture citation, and finally 'saw clearly' that he 'must depart with some beloved opinions, or else quit' his 'notion of the authority of the holy scriptures' (Peirce 1720: 9). Peirce committed to read the Bible more carefully, and concluded that the classical doctrine of the Trinity was not taught clearly enough in the Bible to be made 'a fundamental article of the Christian faith' (Peirce 1720: 9).

Peirce soon became concerned about some practical matters related to his new beliefs. If he rejected the consubstantial Trinity, or at least did not think it expressly taught in Scripture, then his prayer and his preaching must be altered as well. Peirce's solution was to resort almost exclusively to scriptural words in worship (Peirce 1720: 9). This led Peirce to eliminate the doxology he had formerly used at the end of his prayers. Of course, this all came to a head in time after Peirce was unanimously chosen to serve three dissenting congregations in Exeter in 1713. By the time that Peirce accepted this position, he had already ceased using the doxology in prayer and had become 'throughly convinc'd that the common doctrine was not according to the scriptures' (Peirce 1720: 10). Consequently, according to Peirce, he never used the doxology in his prayers at Exeter and committed to only speak of the doctrine of the Trinity in scriptural terms.

The controversy at Exeter began in 1716 when concerns arose over Hubert Stogdon's theology of the Trinity. Stogdon had been educated in Exeter at Joseph Hallet's academy (Brockett 1962: 80). In November 1716, Stogdon openly confessed to John Lavington, the youngest minister in Exeter, that he had come to affirm Samuel Clarke's 'new scheme' of the doctrine of the Trinity (Brockett 1962: 80). Clarke's scheme had come to prominence in 1712 with the publication of *The Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity*, which led many to

reexamine whether or not the consubstantial Trinity was a biblical concept. As Clarke explored the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, William Whiston sought to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity, as it had been expressed by the end of the fourth century, was largely the creative work of Athanasius. Whiston's works *Athanasius Convicted of Forgery* (1712) and *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (1711-1712) appeared in print the same year as Clarke's seminal work, and their influence had been noted in Exeter. One Exeter citizen wrote: 'Upon the coming out of Mr. *Whiston's* Books, these new Notions about the *Trinity*, were toss'd about by Mr. *Hallet's* Academicks, with too much Fondness' (Anonymous A 1719: 4). The people of Exeter were convinced that Hallet's academy was to blame for the spread of heterodoxy there. [It was claimed that those who embraced the new scheme 'began to boast of their *Numbers*, and of their *Strength* among the *Ministers*, even defying the Assembly to take Cognizance of it' (Anonymous A 1719: 5)].

Joseph Hallet and James Peirce came under suspicion for heterodoxy as well. Peirce and Hallet, apparently aware of Stogdon's heterodox views, sent him off to a neighboring county with a letter of recommendation for his ordination to the ministry. The letter was dated July 15, 1717, and it included the name of John Withers who was also a minister in Exeter. Their recommendation for Stogdon's ordination was a source of great tension between Hallet, Peirce, Withers, and many of their congregants. Another source of consternation was Peirce's refusal to include the doxology giving 'Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as One God' at 'the close of the Psalm or Hymn'. Peirce refused to continue this practice, believing that it was unscriptural (Anonymous A 1719: 6). The cumulative effect being that many of the citizens of Exeter began to not only be concerned about the spread of heterodoxy among their youth, but they also began to question the orthodoxy of their ministers.

By January 1718, a standing 'Committee of Thirteen' along with a few other citizens of Exeter went to their ministers and requested that they defend the deity of Christ in a sermon (Anonymous A 1719: 5). In September 1718, at an assembly of the United Ministers of Devon and Cornwall, each of the ministers present stood and professed their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity in their own words. It was the 'General Sence of the *Assembly, That there is but One God; and that the Father, word and Holy Spirit is that One* God' (Brockett 1962: 87). Yet, as Brockett explains, 'Peirce openly declared his belief in the subordination of Son and Holy Ghost to God the Father, the first time he had done this in public' (Brockett 1962: 87). The Committee of Thirteen met with Hallet, Lavington, Peirce, and Withers in November 1718 in order to ascertain their beliefs on the doctrine of the Trinity. The ministers were asked to affirm either the 'general sense' of the previous assembly meeting, the answer to the fifth and sixth questions of the Westminster Shorter

Catechism, or the first article of the Church of England. The Committee of Thirteen noted: 'But we had no satisfaction to either of the said Proposals from three of our four Ministers; but instead thereof one of them expressly declared for a Subordination' (Anonymous A 1719: 21-2). Almost certainly, Lavington had complied while Hallet, Peirce, and Withers did not (Anonymous B 1719: 9). Peirce almost certainly was the one who openly declared his belief in the subordination of the Son and the Spirit. [The Committee of Thirteen consisted of: James White, Samuel Munckly, Benjamin Brinley, Francis Lydston, Henry Walrond, Anthony Vicary, John Stephens, Edmond Cock, Mark Burridg, Thomas Jeffery, John Vowler, and John Pym, and Jerome King (Anonymous B 1719: 22-3). Jerome King is not listed in a *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, according to Brockett, because he had recently died (Brockett 1962: 89). It is somewhat unclear whether this occurred at the assembly meeting in September, or at a later meeting between Peirce and the Committee of Thirteen in November, 1718. *An Account of the Reasons* seems to state the latter (Anonymous A 1719: 6).]

A neighboring minister, John Walrond of Ottery, had sent a letter to William Tong, pastor at Salters' Hall, in the summer of 1718. In the letter he expressed his concern about the spread of Arianism at Exeter. The Committee of Thirteen, having made their concerns known to several neighboring ministers, including Walrond, would eventually appeal to some of the ministers in London themselves. But Walrond's letter is important because in it Walrond not only conveys his concerns about Exeter, but also states that it is his understanding that Arianism has spread among the London ministers as well (Anonymous B 1719: 9). Tong thought the contents of the letter so important that he gathered twenty-five ministers to meet at Salters' Hall to discuss the letter and draft a response. Their response, which was premised upon how they would respond 'if ever we should be called that ungrateful Task', included five recommendations. First, 'not to suspect any among us to be infected with these Errors unless we have good Ground'. Second, 'not to be harsh or hasty with those that are doubtful and wavering, but to give them Time and what Assistance we can for their better Information and Establishment'. Third, 'to represent to them faithfully and seriously the great Danger of denying the proper Godhead of *Christ* and of the *Holy Ghost*, and the malignant Influence it must have into the very Vitals of the Christian State and Worship'. Fourth, that those who maintain such errors will not be recommended 'to the Office of the Ministry by Ordination'. Fifth, 'if any already in the Ministry shall fall into that pernicious Error, and persist in it, and teach Men so, it will become our Duty, as we have Opportunity, to warn People of them' (Anonymous B 1719: 11-2). Many of the ministers present at this meeting, which preceded the infamous meetings at Salters' Hall by approximately six months, were listed among the Subscribers in 1719. At this point,

however, they did not recommend subscription to those at Exeter. [These initial recommendations which were affirmed by twenty-five ministers, many of whom went on to be Subscribers in the Salters' Hall controversy the next year, they did not recommend subscription to a confession of faith. If the 'Mr. Hunt' who is a signatory, is in fact Jeremiah Hunt of Pinners' Hall, then he is the lone Non-subscriber present at this meeting.]

The Committee of Thirteen at Exeter also appealed to London ministers on November 22, 1718 (Brockett 1962: 89). The reply from London did not arrive until January 6, 1719, and included the names of Edmund Calamy, Jeremiah Smith, William Tong, Benjamin Robinson, and Thomas Reynolds. The recommendation from London at that time was for neighboring ministers to be brought in to help advise (Brockett 1962: 89). They concluded that there are some theological errors so serious in nature that churches are justified in withdrawing from their ministers if they hold such views. Furthermore, they maintained that denying the consubstantial deity of Christ was in opposition to Scripture and the 'common Faith of the reformed Churches'. And finally, that it is the duty of ministers to oppose dangerous errors and 'give reasonable satisfaction' of their own theological soundness (Anonymous B 1719: 27-8). [Each of these men, Calamy excluded, were Subscribers at the Salters' Hall.]

It was at this point that James Peirce appealed to his London friend and member of Parliament John Shute Barrington, a well-known defender of dissenting interests. A bill had been introduced in December 1718 by Lord Stanhope that, if passed, would repeal the Schism Act of 1714. Barrington was concerned that the Trinitarian controversy in Exeter might hinder the passage of the bill (Thomas 1953: 168, n3). According to Roger Thomas, Barrington put together a set of advices in order to keep the peace in Exeter, and put them before 'an unofficial committee of ministers and gentlemen on 5 February' (Thomas 1953: 170). The advices then went before the Committee of the General Body of the Three Denominations, which approved the advices after debate and some changes. It was then decided by the Committee to put the advices before the gathered body of London ministers of the Three Denominations. The intended goal, according to Calamy, was to add weight to the final decision (Thomas 1953: 171). This ultimately led to the infamous meetings at Salters' Hall. [Thomas notes: 'Introduced to the House of Lords on 13 December, it received the Royal assent on 18 February, the day before the first meeting at Salters' Hall' (Thomas 1953: 168, n3).]

The Salters' Hall Controversy

There are seven key dates for understanding the Salters' Hall controversy, each occurring between February and April of 1719. February 19 was the first official meeting at Salters' Hall when 'the *Body* of *Protestant Dissenting Ministers*

in, and about, *London*, were called together, to consider a Paper, containing *Advices for promoting Peace*, &c. Which Paper was recommended to them by their *Committee of Three Denominations*' (Anonymous C 1719: 18). The ministers present on February 19 agreed to consider the advices paragraph by paragraph.

February 24 was the second meeting at Salters' Hall 'at which Time the Names of all present were set down and then called over one by one; each *Denomination* being to approve or disapprove of such as were reputed to belong to them' (Anonymous C 1719: 18). After the advices were debated for several hours it was agreed upon by a majority vote of fifty-seven to fifty-three 'that *a Declaration concerning the Trinity should not be inserted in the Paper of Advices*' (Anonymous C 1719: 18-9). As Joseph Jekyl described the matter: 'The Bible carried it by four' (Whiston 1749: 220).

The third meeting at Salters' Hall, which resulted in the division of Subscribers and Non-subscribers, occurred on March 3. The issue of inserting a declaration concerning the doctrine of the Trinity was revived at this meeting even though it had been at least temporarily set aside in order to finish going through the advices. The group in favor of inserting the declaration, which would ultimately become known as the Subscribers, was not satisfied with the proceedings. Therefore, 'Instead of this, they withdrew from our Assembly, and went *by* themselves, to subscribe their Names to a certain *Roll of Paper*, wherein was contain'd (as we were told) the *first Article* of the *Church of England*, and the 5th and 6th *Answers* in the *Assembly's Catechism*' (Anonymous C 1719: 19). In a more colorful, but potentially apocryphal account, it is claimed that during this verbal scuffle someone shouted: '*You that are against Persecution, come up Stairs!* Which was pretty evenly balanced by one on the other side, calling out, *You that are for the Doctrine of the Trinity, stay below!*' (Anonymous G 1719: 10). The Non-subscribers continued to meet and consider the advices while the Subscribers apparently withdrew. Following the March 3 meeting the two groups never met together again. [The page is mistakenly numbered '16' in some copies of *An Authentick Account*. According to *An Authentick Account*, the two groups remained together through the third point of their advices. Then we read: 'Thus far we remained on *March* 3d. And then thought fit to adjourn further Consideration on these Advices till the following *Tuesday*, *March* 10th; ordering a Summons to be sent to every one of the Brethren who had withdrawn form us; which was accordingly done. We did particularly hope to have their Help in the IVth Article; and to have calmly debated, every Sentence and Word in it. Some Changes we our selves have made from what it was, both in *Substance* and *Form*; and, tho it looks to us, as it now stands, a very *Christian* and *reasonable Rule* of Conduct, yet we were not so set upon having our own Way, but we should have readily received any

thing that had been clear and convincing, in order to have changed our Minds' (Anonymous C 1719: 7-8).]

On March 9 the Subscribers met to finalize their advices, which were to be sent to Exeter. The Non-subscribers met for the same purpose on the very next day, March 10. The Non-subscribers' advices were sent to Exeter on March 17, but the Subscribers' advices were not sent until April 7. Both sets of advices arrived too late as a decision had already been made in Exeter. James Peirce and Joseph Hallet had been locked out of their churches on March 6.

The separate sets of advices and accompanying letters bear some resemblance, but also differ on key points. Both groups were in agreement that there were some doctrines so essential to the Christian faith that if rejected by a minister, the congregation was justified in withdrawing from that minister or the minister should withdraw from that congregation (Anonymous C 1719: 5, 10; Anonymous D 1719: 11, 15). Such cases should be 'managed *clearly*, *calmly*, and in the *Fear* of GOD, with Meekness and tender Compassion towards *all* with whom they are concerned' (Anonymous D 1719: 13). Both groups affirmed that ministers should be directly addressed by those in their congregation, and then assemblies or neighboring ministers if necessary. [The two sets of advices differed slightly in emphases here, but were quite similar in the main. *An Authentick Account* strongly emphasized the necessity of certainty and multiple witnesses who were willing to testify against the minister privately if necessary (Anonymous C 1719: 7). *A True Relation*, instead of emphasizing the necessity of certainty and witnesses, although 'care' and 'caution' are recommended, moves more quickly to calling 'for the Advice of Neighboring Ministers' (Anonymous D 1719: 13). Again, they were similar in the main but differ in emphases.]

The primary difference in the two sets of advices appeared near the end of each. The Non-subscribers affirmed: 'we think the Protestant Principle, that the *Bible is the only and the perfect Rule of Faith'*, and that no one should 'condemn any Man upon the Authority of Humane Decisions, or because he consents not to Humane Forms or Phrases'. Instead, he is only 'to be censured, as *not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation*, when it appears that he contradicts, or refuses to own, the *plain and express Declarations of Holy Scripture*, in what is there made necessary to be believed, and in Matters there solely revealed' (Anonymous C 1719: 8-9). Yet this should not be interpreted as a total rejection of the value of human words and forms. The Non-subscribers contended: 'We further advise, that Catechisms and other Summaries of Christianity, and Expositions of Scripture by wise and learned, tho' fallible Men, should be regarded as great Helps to understand the Mind of God in the Scriptures' (Anonymous C: 1719: 9).

Whereas both groups were clear that each congregation must determine what doctrines are worth dividing over, the Subscribers went further by stating:

> As we have with very good Reason declared the Right of the People to judge what those Doctrines are that will justify them in withdrawing from their Minister, so we take the Freedom to declare it as our Judgment, That *the Denying of the true and proper Divinity of the* Son *of* GOD *and the* HOLY SPIRIT, viz. *that they are One* GOD *with the* Father, *is an Error contrary to the* HOLY SCRIPTURES *and common Faith of the* REFORMED CHURCHES (Anonymous D 1719: 16).

The Subscribers wanted those in Exeter to know that they affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, and believed that, when rejected, it was an error worth separating over. They further declared their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity by including and subscribing to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles. This was inserted at the beginning of *A True Relation*. They further noted that they had subscribed to the fifth and sixth answers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Anonymous D 1719: 8, 17).

We can conclude from this that the Subscribers and the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall shared some similarities in their advices to Exeter. The Subscribers went to great lengths to demonstrate their own orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Non-subscribers, as will be noted in more detail below, were concerned to contend for their orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, but their advices focused primarily on the steps they thought fit for dealing with the disputes in Exeter. Yet the question of whether or not their lack of subscription necessarily served as a thinly veiled disguise for heterodoxy remains unanswered. [The disagreement about what needed to be accomplished at Salters' Hall is apparent in a work entitled *Plain Dealing*. One quote will demonstrate that the author understands the issue at hand to be the doctrine of the Trinity: 'It began first among those of the Church of *England*, since which, some of the *Dissenting Ministers* have been poyson'd therewith, which causes no small Pain and Grief of the Heart to those who are *Orthodox* in the Faith. This making such a Noise in the World, it was at length thought necessary that the Dissenting Ministers of *London*, under the three Denominations, should meet at *Salter's-Hall*, there to consult Measures, how to remove that Scandal that was thrown upon 'em by the Enemies of the *Christian Religion*, where accordingly it was propos'd that a *Declaration* should be publickly subscrib'd by all those Gentlemen in the Ministry, in Order to convince the World, that they did believe the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, oin the same Sense that all the Protestant Churches in the World do. This was accordingly done by several, whose Hearts were right with God, and yet there were many at the same Time, who would by no Means be prevail'd upon, or give their

Consent to subscribe their Names thereto, to the great Triumph of the *Arians* and *Socinians*' (Anonymous E 1719: 4-5).]

Early Accounts of Salters' Hall

When William Tong called together twenty-five ministers to meet informally at Salters' Hall on August 25, 1718 to respond to John Walrond's letter concerning Exeter, they stated rather clearly in their response that they were not aware of any great progress of Arianism among their ministers in the greater London area: 'We cannot say that we have no Apprehension of the breaking forth of the liker Errors here, but we know of none among us, hitherto that have *openly* avowed them, and of but very *Few* that own themselves to be in Doubt and Suspence about them' (Anonymous B 1719: 11). Just six months prior to the controversy at Salters' Hall, some of the leading Presbyterian ministers in and around London could confidently declare that there was no great outbreak of Arianism among their ministers.

To return to the central issue at hand, the debate following Salters' Hall centered on what the source of the disagreement between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers really was. Were the Non-subscribers merely opposed to requiring subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases and orthodox in their understanding of the Trinity? Or, was their opposition to subscription merely a disguise for their heterodox views on the Trinity? Subscribers and onlookers alike questioned the orthodoxy of some of the Non-subscribers from the outset. But the Non-subscribers openly declared their orthodoxy. They contended that they were opposed to forced subscription rather than a historic, Christian theology of the Trinity.

The Non-subscribers' Account

The Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall were insistent that they were not opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. In their letter to Exeter dated March 17, 1719 they wrote:

> We add our earnest Supplications that God would accompany them [the advices] with his Blessing to establish Peace and Truth amongst us: And freely declare, that we utterly disown the *Arian* doctrine, and sincerely believe the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and the proper Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we apprehend to be clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures; But are far from condemning any who appear to be with us in the Main, tho' they should chuse not to declare themselves in other than Scripture-Terms or not in Ours (Anonymous C 1719: 15-6).

Some took issue with this language, desiring even greater clarity on the doctrine of the Trinity, which could be found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism or the Thirty-Nine Articles (Anonymous E 1719: 11-2). As one critic

insightfully noted, the Non-subscribers were willing to use extrabiblical words and phrases in this declaration (Anonymous E 1719: 11). [Edward Wallin, a Particular Baptist Subscriber at Salters' Hall, in a letter to Elisha Callender, a Baptist pastor in Boston Massachusetts, uses the very same words 'proper divinity' by which he seems to mean that the Son is consubstantial with the Father (Wallin 1871: 491).]

Edmund Calamy

Even the respected Presbyterian pastor Edmund Calamy (1671-1732), who refused to be involved in the controversy by joining either party, contended that the issue at Salters' Hall was subscription and not the doctrine of the Trinity. A Mr. Chalmers urged Calamy the day before the March 3 meeting to be present in order that he might help defend the cause of orthodoxy. Yet Calamy was resolute that the issue at stake was not the doctrine of the Trinity. 'I told him', Calamy wrote, 'as for the true eternal divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, I was very ready to declare for it, at that time or any other, and durst not in conscience be at all backward to it'. He continued, 'But I could upon good grounds assure him, that was not the point in question among those that were to meet together on the day following' (Calamy 1830: 414-5). Chalmers, who apparently had been present at the meeting, upon his return visit with Calamy, 'was convinced most fully that I [Calamy] was in the right, and he [Chalmers] was in the wrong' (Calamy 1830: 416). According to Calamy, the point in question at Salters' Hall was not the doctrine of the Trinity.

Edward Wallin

Edward Wallin (1678-1733), a well-respected Particular Baptist minister, was numbered among the Subscribers at Salters' Hall. By all accounts, including that of the renowned John Gill, Wallin was a thoroughly orthodox, godly minister (Gill 1733). Gill preached Wallin's funeral sermon and said of him: 'Besides a large experience of the grace of God, and a considerable share of light and knowledge in the great truths of the Gospel; he had a heavenly skill to lay open the wretchedness and miserable state and condition of sinners by nature, and to set forth the glory of Christ in his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice' (Gill 1730: 42-43). Edward Wallin accepted the call to pastor the Maze Pond congregation in London at the age of twenty-seven, which he pastored until his death twenty-seven years later. Edward Wallin's son, Benjamin, followed him as pastor at Maze Pond with their pastoral tenures there covering nearly three-quarters of the eighteenth century (Wolever 2018: 45).

Wallin recounted the Exeter and Salters' Hall controversies in 1720 in a letter to Elisha Callendar, a Baptist Minister in Boston, Massachusetts. In the letter Wallin provided a balanced interpretation of Salters' Hall, noting that there may have been some anti-Trinitarians present, but that the majority

were orthodox, and concerned primarily with maintaining Christian liberty. After recounting the insistence of one party to subscribe a declaration of their faith in the Trinity, and the other party's desire to continue considering the advices paragraph by paragraph, Wallin addressed the issue at hand. His account is worth quoting at length:

> Some of the too warm among the non-subscribers would fain fix the odious charge of persecution on the other, while they again, with full as much warmth, would fix the charge of Arianism upon them. But this severity is not allowed by the greatest part of either side of the question; and I hope time will produce a better temper in both parties … As I am satisfied that some among the non-subscribers are gone too far into some of the distinctive notions of Arius, so I think some of the subscribers have given too much ground to jealousy, they intended to set up those forms as a test of orthodoxy, and the signing of them as necessary to persons being useful in the ministry. But I dare say for the much greater part of both sides, that they intended no evil to their differing brethren; and that it was a zeal for the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real divinity of our Saviour, which made some subscribe the articles, and not any desire to impose upon others; and that those who refused the subscription, did it with a design to maintain Christian liberty, rather than any design to encourage or promote Arianism. There is no great difference in the number of either side; but I think there are not so many of our denomination among the non-subscribers as are on the other side; and though I cannot say that there are none of our ministers who too much favor the new scheme, yet I may venture to say in general, that our ministers, especially those of the Particular [Baptist] denomination, are sound in the faith, as to the real divinity of Christ, and the true doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Therefore those who upbraid you with their being contrary, act either from prejudice or misinformation. But such have been the visible consequences of this difference, that brotherly love and charity, that indispensable ornament of the Christian religion, have been greatly lost in these debates (Wallin 1871: 492-3).

Wallin's firsthand account provides several helpful insights. First, as Calamy noted, tempers and suspicion abounded during and after the meetings at Salters' Hall. Second, there were some anti-Trinitarians present at Salters' Hall. Third, the majority of the ministers at Salters' Hall were not anti-Trinitarians. Fourth, the disagreement at hand was primarily about what was most necessary at that time—subscription as a means of demonstrating one's personal orthodoxy, or, continuing with the examination of the advices to be sent to Exeter. Therefore, according to Calamy and Wallin, Salters' Hall should not be understood primarily as an acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity.

An Orthodox, Nonsubscribing Tradition

In a letter to Samuel Mather dated July 28, 1731, John Walrond claimed, more than a decade after the Salters' Hall Controversy, that there were 'three

sorts' of Dissenters: 'those who have fallen into Arian or Arminian errors;' those that are 'very sound;' 'and a middle sort, the most numerous, that profess the same faith, but are so indifferent about it, and indulgent to the erroneous, that they seem to be with us in principle, but with them in interest, loving them better with their errors, than others with the truth as it is in Jesus' (Walrond 1828: 369). It was Walrond who had been one of James Peirce's fiercest foes at Exeter. But Walrond's point is instructive for a balanced interpretation of Salters' Hall. For at Salters' Hall there seems to have been a largely orthodox, nonsubscribing party, which, for the General Baptists and Presbyterians in particular, finds its historical and theological roots in Thomas Grantham and Richard Baxter respectively.

Thomas Grantham

Thomas Grantham (1633-1692) was one of the foremost English General Baptist theologians of the seventeenth century. Grantham was thoroughly orthodox in his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. In his *magnum opus*, *Christianismus Primitivus* (1678), Grantham even reprints the Nicene Creed. Elsewhere in *Christianismus Primitivus* Grantham wrote: 'But that the Son (I speak now in respect of his Divine Essence only) and the Holy Spirit are Eternal, as the Father is Eternal, or consequently of the same Nature or Essence, may be gathered from these Testimonies' (Grantham 1678: Book II, Part I, 40). Grantham went on to quote a variety of texts that demonstrated that the Son was consubstantial with the Father regarding his deity.

Yet Grantham was hesitant to require others to use extrabiblical words and phrases. According to Grantham, the word 'Trinity' was in 'no way offensive to Christianity'. Yet he concluded: 'It is not necessary to impose words upon any Man which God himself hath not used, by which to make known himself. Yet truly this term, *The Trinity*, hath a very near affinity with the Language of the Holy Ghost' (Grantham 1678: Book II, Part I, 40). This hesitancy led Grantham scholar, Clint Bass, to reasonably conclude: 'Had Grantham been at the Salters' Hall meeting in 1719, he might have been a Nonsubscriber' (Bass 2013: 189). There is, in fact, a direct connection to Grantham at Salters' Hall. Nathaniel Foxwell who early in his ministry was sent by the General Assembly to assist Grantham, 'in the Ministerial work of the Gospell' at Norwich, was a Non-subscriber at Salters' Hall (Whitley 1909: 31). Foxwell left Norwich in 1699, and served at Hart-street as an assistant for one year before moving to Paul's Alley, Barbican. The larger point surrounding Grantham, however, is that he potentially serves as an example of an orthodox, nonsubscribing tradition among the English General Baptists. [The English General Baptist, Joseph Hooke, carried Grantham's legacy on subscription into the eighteenth century. Hooke was an ardent defender of orthodoxy, demonstrated by his work *The Socinian Slain With The Sword of the Spirit* (1700), which was a reply to Daniel Allen's *The Moderate Trinitarian*

(1699). In 1729, ten years after the Salters' Hall controversy, Hooke published a work entitled *Creed-Making and Creed-Imposing Considered; And The Divinity of Christ, And The Doctrine of the Trinity Defended* (1729). In it, Hooke was strongly in favor of the composition of creeds and confessions of faith. Hooke wrote: 'God *makes* the Creed; and Man declares it, according to the best of his Understanding; and calls it a *Creed*, a Thing to be believed'. Furthermore, Hooke was in favor of separating from and even expelling pastors who rejected essential biblical doctrines such as the Trinity. He was resolutely opposed to any unity or fellowship that was not 'founded in our faith'. But Hooke followed Grantham on subscription: 'This is my Judgment, concerning imposing of *Creeds*, or *Confessions of Faith of human Composure*; and I have, upon divers Occasions, declared my self to be against imposing *such Creeds*; wherein I agree with the *blessed* Mr. Grantham, and many others, both antient and modern Writers of good Esteem in the Church' (Hooke 1729: 3, 7, 10).]

Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter had an unmistakable influence at Exeter and Salters' Hall as his writings were regularly referred to, and the influence of his thought seems quite apparent. Baxter's influence on Salters' Hall is particularly apparent in *A Letter to Mr. Robinson* (1719). The author wrote concerning an 'imposing Spirit': 'Mr. *Baxter* … gives us an Instance of this High Church Temper in his Time, that bears a very near Resemblance to the Creed-making Disposition that prevails at this Day among us' (Anonymous F 1719: 13). Baxter referred to himself as a 'meer Christian'. Paul C. H. Lim notes that the title was first employed by the English Socinian, John Biddle, not Baxter (Lim 2012: 240). Baxter used the term to denote a sort of strict biblicism that emphasized the supremacy of Scripture over all confessions, creeds, and councils. While many English Protestants might have shared Baxter's views in principle, Baxter went beyond merely affirming the supremacy of Scripture to regularly critiquing the bishops involved in the councils at Nicaea and Ephesus. The intended purpose of Baxter's attacks on early church councils was to demonstrate not only that councils may err, but to expose the immoral qualities of 'thuggish' bishops such as Cyril of Alexandria (Lim 2012: 255). As Lim explains, 'Baxter saw sanctification or 'laborious holiness' as an existential proof of the theological pudding. Seeing the utter absence of such saintly dispositions and behaviors at Nicaea and Ephesus was what turned Baxter off from being enthusiastic about the doctrines formulated therein' (Lim 2012: 248). Baxter provocatively asked, '*Did the Primitive Church require Subscription to all our 39 Articles, or to any more than the words of Scripture?*' (Lim 2012: 247). The cumulative effect of Baxter's critiques, however, was that his own orthodoxy was called into question (Lim 2012: 247).

Baxter's consistent concern was ecclesiastical unity rather than theological uniformity (Lim 2004). He maintained his hope for some sort of ecclesiastical

unity, even after the Glorious Revolution and the Toleration Act of 1689 (Keeble 2006: 297). Baxter's desire for unity often led him to oppose the stringent theological precisian of theologians such as John Owen and Francis Cheynell, which Baxter believed bred unnecessary division. Related to Baxter's desire for unity was his opposition to creedal subscription. Baxter boldy asserted in 1654: 'No particular Words in the World are *Essentials* of our Religion' (Keeble 2006: 282). Keeble notes regarding this statement, 'What lay behind these words was a deep-seated suspicion of credal formulae, confessions, and platforms' (Keeble 2006: 282). Baxter exhibited a strong primitivist impulse, which he believed, required a return to the doctrinal simplicity of the early church. Baxter concluded: 'The great cause of our uncharitable censures and divisions, hath been departing from the Antient simplicity of Faith, and also from the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures, to be the Rule and Test of Faith' (Keeble 2006: 282). For Baxter, the essentials of the Christian faith could be summarized in the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments (Keeble 2006: 284). These, he believed, were sufficient tests of orthodoxy. When it was objected that Papists and Socinians could subscribe these statements, Baxter shockingly replied: 'So much the better, and so much the fitter it is to be the Matter of our Concord' (Keeble 2006: 284). Yet as Lim rightly points out, one would be remiss to overlook the rest of what Baxter said:

> if you are afraid of Communion with *Papists* and *Socinians*, it must not be avoided by making a new Rule or Test of Faith which they will not Subscribe to, or by forcing others to Subscribe to more than *they* can do, but by calling them to account whenever in Preaching or Writing they contradict or abuse the Truth to which they have Subscribed. This is the Work of the *Government* (Lim 2004: 163).

Such was Baxter's view of subscription and his desire for unity. He certainly was not a proto-Unitarian in his desire for unity and his opposition to subscription. But Baxter did not believe the multiplication of creeds and confessions or the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases to be the answer to stamping out theological heterodoxy. As Calamy, who collated and printed Baxter's works, carried Baxter into the eighteenth century, the Baxterian tradition, particularly as it relates to a sort of credal minimalism and opposition to the requirement of subscription, was significant at Salters' Hall. [The influence of Baxter does in fact seem to loom large at Salters' Hall in particular. Baxter is cited in some of the pamphlets that came out of the Salters' Hall controversy, which certainly demonstrates a connection between the opposition to subscription at Salters' Hall, and Baxter's opposition to subscription. Baxter had been dead for less than thirty years when the controversy occurred. Therefore, while it would be a mistake to see Baxter as some sort of proto-Unitarian, as his opposition heterodoxy was clear, it

would also be an overreaction to such claims to see Baxter's approach to subscription as having no influence at Salters' Hall. This point is further bolstered by the connection that Keeble makes between Baxter and Calamy.]

Conclusion

The case for the majority of the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall being theologically orthodox regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, but opposed to the requirement of subscription to extrabiblical words and phrases, is strong. There certainly were some anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall. The decades following Salters' Hall saw an increase of anti-Trinitarianism throughout England, particularly in the Church of England, among the Presbyterians, and among the General Baptists. Yet the proliferation of anti-Trinitarianism in the decades following Salters' Hall does not necessarily entail a wholesale theological deviation from the doctrine of the Trinity among the Non-subscribers. The history of eighteenth-century English Dissent proves that this latitudinarian spirit, which pervaded Salters' Hall, did open the door even wider for theological deviation. The *sola Scriptura* principle, which was in many cases more akin to *nuda Scriptura*, could not stem the rising tide of heterodoxy. No matter how well-intended the Non-subscribers at Salters' Hall were, if they hoped to maintain any sort of theological orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, their near categorical opposition to subscription proved unwise (Holmes 2020: 28). [Benjamin Avery (Presbyterian), Nathaniel Lardner (Independent), Jeremiah Hunt (Independent), and Samuel Chandler (Presbyterian) are the most likely anti-Trinitarians at Salters' Hall. Others may be discovered through further research.]

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