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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

# 神圣共和国

## *A Holy Commonwealth*

Baxter

巴科斯特

Edited by

WILLIAM

LAMONT

中国政法大学出版社

理查德·巴科斯特

RICHARD BAXTER

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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE  
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



BAXTER  
*A Holy Commonwealth*

# CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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## Introductory preface

In editing this text for the modern reader certain principles were followed. Baxter's 'Theses' were retained in their entirety; the additional comments upon each only when they added fresh material. The omissions were indicated in the conventional way. There are arguments for and against retaining the original spelling, but it was decided in this case not to modernise it. Nevertheless there are many obvious original printer's errors which it would have been pedantic to preserve – e.g. 'everlasting' for 'everlasting' – and these have been silently corrected, rather than choosing to impose a rather wearying (for the reader) repetition of '*sic*'. Either Baxter, or his printer, got confused with the numbering. There are sometimes, for instance, 1, 2 and 4, and the 3 has been forgotten. Again the decision was taken to correct silently. Italicising in the seventeenth century was not an exact art. The bulk of the text has, therefore, been printed in ordinary roman type, and italicisation has been retained only for genuine emphasis, for foreign words and quotations, and for titles of books. Although many of the original typographical conventions have been preserved, along with the spelling, these have not been observed when they are outside the modern typesetter's apparatus. Where the original printer had used 1, 2, 3 in lists of numbered points, an arabic 1 (instead of a roman numeral) is used to begin the series of numbers. The original punctuation has been retained, except when to do so obfuscates the meaning. Baxter's contents pages have been removed from the body of the text and are incorporated, in abbreviated form, in the main contents page for this edition of the book. There is a discrepancy between the actual chapter headings for the text and the

## Preface

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original contents pages: nothing substantive, however, is involved and so the new contents pages now follow the chapter headings in the text rather than those set out in the old contents pages. Chapter 6 has two distinct sections: 'Of the several sorts of Commonwealths' and 'Of the objective or material differences of Government'. In the text, they become two separate chapter headings, although not numbered as such. The decision here has been taken to retain the two sections as parts of the one chapter, since to renumber the chapters would be to depart too much from the original, and would make cross-checking with the original the more cumbersome for the reader. In all these difficult decisions, a compromise has been struck between the desire to retain the original text as far as possible with the desire to ensure as much ease and accessibility for the reader as can be achieved. The 'Meditations' which Baxter added to the text, dated April 25, 1659, has been added on to the contents pages, after Chapter 13. An appendix to the text contains the Preface to Baxter's later work, *The Life of Faith*, in which he formally repudiated *A Holy Commonwealth*.

The Cambridge University Press has an enviable record for the help which it gives its authors. This is the second occasion on which I have had the pleasure of working with Jean Field as my copy-editor. The demands imposed by the tricky decisions, described above, made this a fiercer assignment by far than on the previous occasion, and my debt to her is therefore all the greater. She has been a most skilful and sensitive guide. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge (not for the first time) the professional skill, in producing a typescript of beauty from my illegible hand, of my invaluable secretary, Anne Woodbridge.

William Lamont  
University of Sussex

## Introduction

*A Holy Commonwealth* is Richard Baxter's invisible masterpiece. It is high time that it was made more visible. It was written in 1659, but its author disowned it publicly in 1670. This did not save the work from being part of a great book-burning by repressive authorities in 1683. Baxter's *A Holy Commonwealth* was in good company there, alongside Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Milton's writings.

This is to flatter Baxter. He is not in the same league as Hobbes or Milton. His book is a curiously constructed work, which begins with a number of high-minded generalities, and only relatively late in the text gets down to discussing the practical alternative ways of governing the country. There is a very important chapter on resistance theory, in which he draws upon the writings of William Barclay, Thomas Bilson and Hugo Grotius to show the exceptional circumstances in which a ruler should be disobeyed. The last chapter is in the form of a confessional: the application of these theories to his own personal reasons for disobeying Charles I in 1642. A careful reading of the text, we shall see, will show that there is a logic to the whole, and if he ends with a personal apologia, rather than some grand summing-up statement of political theory, we have to remember that it is an *unfinished* treatise. Before Baxter could finish his work, it was overtaken by events.

The major political event was the overthrow of Richard Cromwell's Protectorate. *A Holy Commonwealth* is a love poem to Richard Cromwell. It is not dedicated to him (although a companion book written a few months earlier, *A Key for Catholics*, was); however, everything in the treatise hinges upon the support that Richard



Cromwell's Protectorate could give to clergymen like Baxter. When Richard Cromwell fell, the measure of Baxter's disappointment is felt in the resigned note of his epilogue, entitled 'Meditations' (written on 25 April 1659), and in his naming of the guilty parties in the bitter introductory prefaces he added at the same time.

How had Baxter come to such a dependence? It was not predictable from his earlier career. He was born in 1615 in Shropshire, had become a salaried preacher in Kidderminster in Worcestershire on the eve of the Civil War, and had fought for Parliament between 1642 and 1647 before resuming his Kidderminster ministry. This was the profile of a Puritan Parliamentarian, but hardly that of a zealot. It is clear indeed that his service as an Army chaplain left him with a lasting distaste for radical sectarians, of whom he originally saw Oliver Cromwell as chief. He opposed the execution of the King and he refused an oath of allegiance to the new Commonwealth. How did he come to write the pro-Cromwell *A Holy Commonwealth* a decade later?

There are many interesting features about the book. It contains one of the frankest explanations offered by a contemporary of why he took up arms in the Civil War, and one which is at variance with the later explanations which he offered in his memoirs. That delicate Puritan juggling act, between the pressures to obey magistracy and to disobey ungodliness, is rarely seen to better advantage than in some of the middle chapters of this book. The subtle interplay between civil magistracy and clerical discipline is explored in profound depth. Yet the overwhelming advantage of the book is *contextual*. He belongs, in this book, to the genre of what one historian, Judith Shklar, has happily called 'action-minded utopists'. Baxter claimed that he wrote the book to confute James Harrington's *Oceana* (1656). This is not a claim to be taken too seriously. Harrington's ideas come late in the text and are dealt with perfunctorily. But Baxter and Harrington are alike in offering detailed reform proposals, model constitutions, *which they expected to see put into practice*. They had reason to do so. Kings, Lords, Bishops – all had been swept away by 1649. Reform was on the agenda. There was confusion by 1659 at the centre: various constitutions had been adopted and then discarded. We know that Harrington's followers were active in promoting his ideas in Oliver Cromwell's Second Protectorate Parliament. Similarly, Baxter's reforms in *A Holy Commonwealth* are of a piece with the private advice

he was giving to friendly MPs like Colonel Harley and John Swinfen. Baxter, like Harrington three years earlier, indeed like Winstanley, founder of the Digger communal experiment, seven years earlier, looked to Oliver Cromwell as the instrument of reform.

This marked some change from the earlier sullen postures I have described. There were two main explanations for this change. One was the success of Baxter's ministry at Kidderminster: to the end of his days they were accounted by him as the happiest time of his life. The godly discipline which he had established there was the basis for his hopes of a 'holy Commonwealth'. Moreover, it was a model which had proved exportable. It became the basis, in its turn, for the Ministerial Associations of like-minded clerical disciplinarians, first within Worcestershire and then transmitted on a county basis across the entire nation. Oliver Cromwell provided the stable context for such reforms: gratitude alone would dictate some reappraisal of former attitudes to the Protector. There was, however, a second reason. John Howe, Baxter's Puritan ministerial friend, became Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, and this provided the vital link to the Protector himself. Baxter could (and did) push in private correspondence with Howe those ideas which would surface in his public writings. When Oliver Cromwell died, John Howe continued to serve as his son's chaplain. Richard Cromwell was, for Baxter, an even better candidate as the godly magistrate than his father had been; there was nothing in *his* personal slate to be wiped clean.

For Baxter to set out in 1659 to justify a 'holy commonwealth' was, then, anything but fantastic or quixotic. He believed that England was on the verge of becoming a 'theocracy'. The way Baxter uses that word is not the way that either contemporaries or later historians would use it. The word normally connotes clerical control over the laity. That is not what Baxter means, as will be seen from a careful reading of the text. He believed that magistracy could and should become holy; Henry VIII's botched Reformation had signally failed to bring this about but he would ensure a partnership between magistrate and pastor which certainly did not mean one was superior to the other. If 'theocracy' is a potentially confusing word for the reader, so too is Baxter's use of the word 'religious' when applied to wars. He meant by such a word in its English context the hijacking of the noble Parliamentary cause by religious zealots late in the Civil War. That noble cause, however, as we shall see, was anything but secular

secular in our sense of the word. Men had legitimately, Baxter argued, taken up arms to defend themselves against Papists (who operated with the connivance of a fellow-travelling crypto-Papist, Charles I). That, says Baxter, is not religion but simple self-preservation. This argument, put forward by Baxter in 1659, would be repeated by him in 1688: he was terribly anxious that people should not think that a necessary defensive action against James II meant that Parliament had committed itself to a 'religious' war.

The text which is reproduced here is not the gargantuan original. Baxter was a very repetitive writer, and it has been relatively easy to compress his ideas without violating the sense. He was anxious not to give himself false airs, and says that in writing *A Holy Commonwealth* he was not setting out to compose 'a Treatise of Politicks', thus underlining again the practical nature of the reforming proposals contained in that work. Instead he said he would lay down 'a few Political Aphorismes'. His term for these 'Aphorismes' is 'Theses'. In the event they number 380, scattered across twelve chapters. They have been reproduced here for the first time in a modern edition in their entirety. Explanatory commentaries on each 'Thesis' have only been retained when they add to the original and not (as is often the case) when they are only repetitive padding. As well as the twelve chapters which contain the 'Theses', this edition reproduces (again with omissions indicated in the conventional way) the thirteenth personal chapter, the equally personal 'Meditations' at the end, and the introductory 'Preface', 'Addition to the Preface', and excerpts from a Jesuit's writings.

The proposition offered here is that in this new sinewy form the reader should be able to reconstruct the logic of the piece as a whole. Let us therefore recreate his strategy as far as we can. He begins with a 'Preface' (which, of course, is added to the text afterwards) which is addressed to those wreckers in the Army who have overthrown Richard Cromwell. Here he actually states points to be developed at length later in the work itself. We are told that 'subjects are not allowed to resist'; even a Nero must be obeyed; the clerical profession is maligned in the present political climate; 'masked infidels or Papists' are making snares for unsuspecting Protestants; the people are not the source of power; Parliaments *could* become holy, if correct reforms are introduced. He states in the preface that the book had been written 'while the Lord Protector (prudently, piously,

faithfully, to his immortall Honour, how ill soever you have used him) did exercise the Government'. Then he writes an additional preface which swipes at Sir Henry Vane's *A Healing Question* (1656). What Vane calls 'the good old cause' is, according to Baxter, liberty of conscience (the open door to Popery) and the renunciation of the magistrate's power in spiritual matters. James Harrington, in his *Oceana* (1656), had rightly wanted England to become a Commonwealth, not Vane's godly élite, but Harrington's own anti-clericalism made him equally suspect. Baxter, writing in 1659, saw both men's works of that year as reproducing their respective weaknesses. Baxter claimed to hold a balance between these two extremes in *his* work: 'Holy' (because, *pace* Harrington, he began with God); 'Commonwealth' (because, *pace* Vane, he recognised that a nation was something more than its armed saints). The Popish Plot, finally, was condemned from the Papists' own writings.

The chapter-headings, with their Theses, show how the cumulative argument is developed. Chapter 1 (Theses 1–8) starts with the proposition that 'There is a God that is mans Creator'. Chapter 2 (Theses 9–23) argues that 'God is the Sovereign Ruler of Mankind'. Chapter 3 (Theses 24–34) describes 'the Constitution of Gods Kingdome' and Chapter 4 (Theses 35–44) 'the Administration of the Universal Kingdom'. Chapter 5 discusses 'a subordinate Commonwealth in General' (Theses 45–64), and Chapter 6 (Theses 65–100) 'the several sorts of Commonwealths'. Here he avoids the question of the legality of the title 'Protector' (Baxter had refused to take the Engagement to the Commonwealth in 1650), but calls popular government the worst form of government, and monarchy 'most suited to a moderate Government' the best. This is not quite, however, the resounding commitment to monarchy against Harringtonian democracy which he would claim, after the Restoration, had been the driving force behind his work. In the second part of chapter 6 (Theses 101–20) he would discuss 'the Objective or Material Differences of Government', and in Chapter 7 (Theses 121–89) 'the Foundation efficient and conveying causes of Power'. Chapter 8 is a discussion of 'the best form of Government and Happiest Commonwealth' (Theses 190–209). Here he makes clear that by 'Happiest' he means 'holiest': the 'public Good' and 'the pleasing of God' are his twin criteria for defining 'holiness'. Or, more pithily (Thesis 192): 'The more Theocratical, or truly Divine any Government is, the

better it is.' This sounds like a covert plea for something like Scottish Presbyterianism, but that was not Baxter's intention. Like many English Puritans, he felt that the Scots took too much power from the magistrate in order to give it to the ministry; only at the end of his life would he concede that he had been over-suspicious in that respect. His idea of 'theocracy' was one in which the magistrate retained the full panoply of powers which went back in England to the Reformation, but harnessed them to an alliance with a ministry which for its part kept a tight spiritual control over its parishioners.

James Harrington makes his first major appearance in the book in the eighth chapter, and late on even there (Thesis 208). This is important in the light of Baxter's own claim to have written his book to defeat *Oceana*. Baxter became convinced by his own experiences in the 1650s that a holy commonwealth was imminently realisable. Thus the disdainful allusion to Harrington's 'jingles' expresses something of the impatience of a pragmatic politician with the theoretician. So Chapter 9 shows 'how a Common-wealth may be reduced to this Theocratical temper, if it have advantages, and the Rulers and People are willing' (Theses 210–44). Here are articulated most keenly his worries about a secular magistrate who devolves too many of his proper coercive powers into the hands of the clergy. These powers are themselves adumbrated in the next two chapters: Chapter 10, 'the Sovereigns Power over the Pastors of the Church, and of the difference of their Offices' (Theses 245–70) and Chapter 11, 'the Sovereigns Prerogatives, and Power of Governing by Laws and Judgement' (Theses 271–316).

The last two chapters turn from magistrate and pastor to subject. Chapter 12, 'Of due Obedience to Rulers, and of Resistance' (Theses 317–80), is the heart of the book. He begins conventionally enough with Romans 13, and the subject's submission to the higher powers. He moves from there, by the most careful gradations, to that extreme, *almost* unthinkable (and unsayable) exceptional case, when the subject is forced for preservation of self to resist the ruler/madman who invades his own realm. He cites Barclay, Bilson and Grotius as his authorities. Although he doesn't always differentiate very clearly between the positions of these three, he does (correctly) identify them all as teachers of *obedience*. The Theses end here, but not the book, for his last chapter is his personal apologia: why these counsels to subjects in general have specific relevance to one subject in particular,

and that one himself. Chapter 13, 'Of the late Warres', explains why Baxter fought for Parliament in the Civil War, and why if necessary he would do so again. He fights on the grounds set out for him by Barclay, Bilson and Grotius. This is not the explanation he offered in the memoirs he wrote after the Restoration, and it becomes critically important in evaluating historical explanations of the origins of the Civil War to determine what weight should be given to it. The 'Meditations' appended to the work after the collapse of Richard Cromwell's Protectorate are moving in their restraint: the bile is siphoned off into the 'Prefaces', written, of course, at the same time.

*A Holy Commonwealth* is an *immediate* work, with all the disadvantages that entails. His wife always regretted that he didn't take more time over his work, to give it more polish. When we look at the text, even in this abbreviated form, we can see that she had a point. It is not that the work has no internal logic (as we now see), nor that it ducks the great theoretical issues (see Chapter 12), but that it is a rushed response to immediate events (hence the disjunction in mood between text on the one hand, and the two 'Prefaces' and 'Meditations' on the other). However, for the historian this immediacy has itself a compensatory element. The odd oscillation of moods between hope and fear tells us much about the psychology of 1659.

There was nothing fortuitous about Baxter's choice of title for his most important work. He knows the implications this title carries: 'ordinarily the same persons are fit to be members of Church and Commonwealth'. That would sound like Vane's godly élitism: a revolution of the saints. After all, the majority are ungodly: that is the trouble with democracy. However, Baxter's 'Holy Commonwealth' or 'National Church' (his preferred term for the same concept in 1691) is not minority rule. This is because of Baxter's recognition that the Church has not only its 'members within' but those without. His Kidderminster success had been built upon the catechising of his parishioners. This was no less important in his County Associations of Ministers and ultimately in their extension across the nation. There was a 'ripening' process by which 'catechumens' were brought into Church membership. Beyond them, more distantly, were those who had been excommunicated and neighbouring infidels who still came under the aegis of a true 'National Church'. A 'Christian Commonwealth' owned none as *Civis* but he who was fit to be a Church member, yet there were many 'meer subjects' who were nevertheless

entitled to look to the State for the protection of their lives and possessions. Vane's holiness dissolved commonwealths; Harrington's commonwealth denied holiness. Baxter squared the circle.

Baxter, reared on English Protestant reverence for a magistrate-led Reformation, was not blind to its defects. Coleridge, steeped in Baxter's thought, offered his own 'National Church' in 1829, which was based not on what the Reformation was but on what *it should have been*. That 'should have been' was the theme of Edward VI's 'Commonwealth' preachers: social justice, new schools and universities, a Welfare State, hospitals, ministerial discipline over Church members; the programme in fact that Baxter outlined to similarly minded correspondents throughout the 1650s. It is no accident that the twelfth chapter of *A Holy Commonwealth* concludes with the lament: 'How sad a blow was it to England that Edward the Sixth was so soon taken away!'

The trouble with one of these correspondents, John Humfrey, was that *his* thinking had stopped with Henry VIII. He might invoke the term 'National Church' along with Baxter (and even suggest that it would make a good title for the next Baxter book), but it did not have the same resonance for him that it had for Baxter. Baxter knew what Humfrey's Erastianism lacked:

You should not have left out the word [Christian] when you allways distinguish the *Commonwealth* from the *Church*. A *Christian Commonwealth* that is *No Church* is as grosse a Contradiction, as an Army that are no Soldiours, or a Kingdome that are no Men.

He then adds that he wishes that the world had 'more such Nationall Churches as New England is (if a Province may be called a Nation)'. He knew all about New England from, among others, John Eliot, the missionary who was converting the native Indians to Christianity. The excited correspondence of the two men – for there were parallels in the problems posed by American heathens and Kidderminster reprobates – throughout the 1650s would result in two near-identical titles, published in the same year of 1659: Baxter's *Holy Commonwealth* and Eliot's *Christian Commonwealth*.

So much for the hopes. But the time of greatest hope for English Protestants was, paradoxically, also the time of greatest dread. As long as Richard Cromwell was in power, hope prevailed: after April

1659 the balance swung the other way. To see what fuelled Baxter's fears, it is worth looking more closely at the Prefaces he wrote after Richard had fallen. The first address is to the Army who had destroyed Richard. In this Preface he believes that the rot had set in earlier, by 1646. It was in the preceding summer that he became a chaplain in the Parliamentary Army and met at first hand the radical antinomian preachers. These were the men (as he would argue later in his memoirs) who turned the Civil War into a 'War for Religion', and destroyed the legitimacy of Parliament's case. This, as has been said, has caused some confusion. Baxter did not like 'Wars for Religion' at any time in his life. He thought it quite inappropriate as a description of the revolt against James II in 1688. When applied to the English Civil War it has led some to think that, if Baxter believed that it only *became* a religious war later, it must earlier have been exclusively about constitutional disagreements. That is not, however, what Baxter is saying in the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of *A Holy Commonwealth*. He is saying that a legitimate self-preservative action took place against an alien invader, even if it was debased later to serve sectarian ends. In 1691 he argued that exactly the same self-preservative forces which justified Parliament in 1642 were at work against James II. What fuelled that self-preservative drive *on both occasions* was less a concern for mixed monarchy (he blamed Richard Hooker repeatedly for encouraging populist theories of government) than a concern for Protestantism.

Why was Protestantism in danger in 1659, just as it had been when Irish Papists launched their rebellion in October 1641? In the earlier period the Catholics' threat had been a direct one; in the later period, they worked under the cover of 'masks'. Quakers, antinomians, Fifth Monarchy Men, 'Vanists' – what were they but the 'visors' put on by Papist conspirators? The second preface assaults Vane in those terms. When two months after *A Holy Commonwealth*, a clerical correspondent, William Mewe, wrote to Baxter with the hope that he could lead the reconcilers, and undeceive 'the more Eminent Persons in power who have taken upp so stronge and strange a Prejudice against our Function', he made an error. He cited a personal relationship with Vane which went back twenty-six years. Baxter was incredulous. Writing back in August 1659, he asked if Mewe seriously believed that an apology for the ministry would ensure the backing of Vane. Baxter was unyielding: 'Sir HV will not be reconciled by a thousand



apologies.' Then he added this significant comment: 'I never came in danger till I set against the papists. They do all, that are seene in nothing.' Vane was a masked Papist. Read Adam Contzen (and Baxter dutifully went on to supply juicy excerpts) to see, out of their own writings, how Jesuits tricked Protestants. There were two developments within Protestantism which benefited Popery. One was the growth of sectarianism. Not only Vane was guilty here. John Owen, the leading Independent minister, was also a spiritual heir of the 1646 Army wreckers. Men like him threatened the ecumenical hopes of the Ministerial Association movement. John Howe had warned Baxter about this as early as May 1658, and the Declaration of Independent ministers at their Savoy Conference on 12 October 1658 struck a fatal blow at Church unity. The 'deeper discoverie' demanded of communicants in that resolution was far more stringent than Baxter's requirement in his Ministerial Associations of a profession of outward faith: 'how low then hath this laid our hopes of Reconciliation', Baxter wrote in manuscript at the time. He believed that Owen and like-minded ministers had personally collaborated with Fleetwood and the Army plotters to destroy Richard Cromwell: a belief written into the manuscript of his posthumously published memoirs, and promptly edited out of these again by his literary executor, Matthew Sylvester.

There was a second Protestant development which could only help the advance of Popery. That was the popularity of 'Grotian' views in the English episcopate. In the year before *A Holy Commonwealth* appeared Baxter had published his fullest exposé of their plot, *The Grotian Religion Discovered*. Hugo Grotius was a Dutchman whom Baxter admired for his theology (the Arminianism of his *Catholic Theologie* owed much to Grotius), his political theory (obedience tempered by self-preservation), his ecumenical spirit (reflected in Baxter's correspondence with John Durie) and his views on the Papacy (not Antichrist). He had one fault, but that was monstrous. He thought that Protestant union with Rome was possible on modified terms. The modification was 'French', not 'Italian', in conception: a recognition of conciliar, not papal, supremacy; but for Baxter this concession was worthless. Catholicism, whether 'French' or 'Italian', meant the 'revolt to a foreign jurisdiction'.

Even more clearly than in the thirteenth chapter of *A Holy Commonwealth*, Baxter applied this insight to the English Civil War in his