

ARTICLE

The Reception of Thomas Delaune's *Plea for the Non-Conformists* in England and America, 1684–1870

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Abstract

In a 1683 sermon, Benjamin Calamy, an Anglican priest, claimed that the separation of Dissenters from the Church of England was unjustifiable. Thomas Delaune, a London Baptist schoolmaster, responded in *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* (1684), which compared seventeenth-century Dissenters to sixteenth-century Reformers who had escaped from the “Church of Rome.” The Restoration authorities judged the book to be a seditious libel, for which Delaune was arrested, tried, and imprisoned in Newgate, where he was soon joined by his poverty-stricken wife and two children. By 1685, the whole family had perished in Newgate. This tragic story guaranteed Delaune's status as a martyr for generations of Nonconformists. Indeed, the *Plea* achieved amongst Dissenters the reputation of an “unanswerable” text. Its enduring appeal transcended denominational and geographical boundaries. This paper explores the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reception of the *Plea*, which Dissenters, both in England and America, repurposed for various politico-theological circumstances. Throughout the eighteenth century, Dissenters invoked the *Plea* against perceived cases of episcopal tyranny. By the pluralistic nineteenth century, however, this external, episcopal threat had largely been replaced with an internal one, prompting Dissenters to deploy the *Plea* against corruption and lethargy within their own denominations.

Keywords: Nonconformity; Book History; Persecution; Church of England; Baptists

Restoration England was a “persecuting society,” in which over 1,000 Dissenters died in prison for violating the establishment's repressive laws against Nonconformity.¹ For many Church of England clergymen, the Protestant Dissenter was a dangerous subversive who could not be trusted. This suspicion stemmed from memories of regicidal Puritans and anarchical Levellers, of whom Nonconformists were seen to be direct

All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version, which was the predominant version in England and America between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹Mark Goldie, “The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England,” in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 331; John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95n5.

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descendants. Conversely, many Nonconformists, including John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, recorded their experiences of Anglican persecution, thereby ensuring that the “memory” of the Restoration was instilled in their descendants. Following the Glorious Revolution, the Toleration Act (1689) removed many, but not all, of the legal restrictions on Dissenting worship. The Test (1673) and Corporation (1661) Acts, which imposed legal disabilities on Dissenters seeking public office, were not repealed until 1828. For many High Churchmen, the Toleration Act represented an overly generous—and potentially dangerous—concession to religious fanatics.² Dissenting authors, on the other hand, praised the Toleration Act, while arguing that it had not gone far enough.

Throughout the “long” eighteenth century, the past served as a politico-theological battleground, on which Anglicans and Dissenters fought by advancing rival martyrologies. One particularly influential Dissenting martyrology was Edmund Calamy’s *Account* (1713) of the approximately 2,000 ministers who were ejected from their livings following the passing of the Act of Uniformity (1662), which mandated the use of the Book of Common Prayer in Church of England services.³ Other influential Dissenting martyrologies included John Walker’s *Sufferings of the Clergy* (1714) and Daniel Neal’s four-volume *History of the Puritans* (1732–1738).⁴ Neal’s *History* was published against the backdrop of campaigns for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.⁵ In the final volume, Neal claimed that the persecution of Restoration Dissenters had “hardly a parallel in the Christian World.”⁶

Also, works by Restoration Nonconformists were republished and repurposed constantly throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ensuring that the authors’ experiences were remembered for generations. Scholars are turning increasingly to the reception history of seventeenth-century Nonconformist literature, illuminating the ways in which these texts were appropriated and sometimes redacted for use in new contexts.⁷ Isabel Rivers, for instance, has explored the reception of Bunyan’s *The*

²For Anglican responses to the Toleration Act, see Ralph Stevens, *Protestant Pluralism: The Reception of the Toleration Act, 1689–1720* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2018).

³See David L. Wykes, “‘To let the memory of these men dye is injurious to posterity’: Edmund Calamy’s *Account* of the Ejected Ministers,” *Studies in Church History* 33: *The Church Retrospective*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, UK: Ecclesiastical History Society, Boydell Press, 1997), 379–392. For the “Great Ejection,” see David Appleby, *Black Bartholomew’s Day: Preaching, Polemic and Restoration Nonconformity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Alan P. F. Sell, ed., *The Great Ejection of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath, and Ecumenical Significance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); N. H. Keeble, ed., *‘Settling the Peace of the Church’: 1662 Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴See John Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Religious Division and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Matthew Neufeld, “The Politics of Anglican Martyrdom: Letters to John Walker, 1704–1705,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62, no. 3 (July 2011): 491–514; Mark Burden, “John Walker’s *Sufferings of the Clergy* and Church of England Responses to the Ejections of 1660–2,” in *‘Settling the Peace of the Church,’* 233–262.

⁵See Andrew Thompson, “Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s,” *Parliamentary History* 24, no. 1 (February 2005): 58–70.

⁶Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans or Protestant Non-Conformists*, 4 vols. (London: Richard Hett, 1732–1738), 4:529.

⁷See Emma Mason, “The Victorians and Bunyan’s Legacy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150–161; Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City: Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical Literary Culture in England 1720–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 4; “General Introduction: The Character and Reception

Pilgrim's Progress (1678) among eighteenth-century Calvinist evangelicals, such as William Mason, whose 1778 edition of this classic work contained lengthy footnotes attacking Wesleyan Arminianism.⁸ Simon Burton has similarly highlighted Baxter's enduring influence among nineteenth-century evangelicals, such as William Orme, a Scottish Congregationalist, who published a compilation of Baxter's works in 1830. Baxter's "catholic spirit" was applauded by Orme, who encouraged interdenominational cooperation among the godly.⁹

No less influential, but now almost wholly neglected, was *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* (1684) by Thomas Delaune, a London Baptist schoolmaster. In this work, Delaune deployed biblical and patristic arguments against key Anglican tenets, including episcopacy and infant baptism. Nevertheless, the *Plea's* enduring influence stemmed more from the martyrological status of its author than from its content. Indeed, the Restoration authorities judged this text to be a seditious libel, for which Delaune was arrested, tried, and imprisoned in Newgate, where he was soon joined by his poverty-stricken wife and two children. By 1685, the whole family had perished in Newgate. The *Plea* achieved amongst Dissenters the reputation of an "unanswerable" text. Few books have such a long history of reinvention as the *Plea*, of which twenty-three editions—published in England and America between 1684 and 1845—are extant. There were, however, almost certainly more editions which have not survived.¹⁰ This study explores the ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors and editors applied the *Plea* to various politico-theological issues, including the Sacheverell affair, the rise of evangelicalism, the bishop controversy in colonial America, and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in Britain. Unlike Bunyan and Baxter, Delaune has been virtually forgotten. For this reason, a brief introduction to his life is necessary.

Thomas Delaune was born in Brinny, County Cork, Ireland, on an unknown date, which would have been no earlier than 1635. He was raised by poor Roman Catholic parents on a farm owned by Major Edward Riggs, a Cromwellian soldier and founder of Cork Baptist Church, who had settled in the county in 1651. Delaune's conversion to the Baptist faith stemmed from his relationship with Riggs, who oversaw his education until he was about sixteen years old. His baptism was performed in a fishpond on Riggs's estate, near Kinsale. For several years, Delaune was employed as a clerk by a fishery in the west of Ireland. As a result of growing tensions with his Catholic neighbors,

of the *Reliquiae*," in Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, Or, Mr Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, ed. N. H. Keeble, John Coffey, Tim Cooper, and Tom Charlton, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1:1–121. See also multiple essays in Tessa Whitehouse and N. H. Keeble, eds., *Textual Transformations: Purposing and Repurposing Books from Richard Baxter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁸Isabel Rivers, "The *Pilgrim's Progress* in the Evangelical Revival," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 537–554.

⁹Simon Burton, "Richard Baxter," in *Making and Remaking Saints in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Gareth Atkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 161–176, at 164.

¹⁰Twenty editions are recorded in the *English Short Title Catalogue*, which extends to 1800. Using *WorldCat*, I have traced a further three editions, published in England in 1817, 1834, and 1845. In his preface (1706), Daniel Defoe reported that the *Plea* had been "printed at least seven times." Only four earlier editions are, however, extant. See Thomas Delaune, *De Laune's Plea for the Non-Conformists: Shewing the True State of Their Case, and How Far the Conformist's Separation from the Church of Rome for Their Popish Superstitions, &c. Introduced into the Service of God, Justifies the Non-Conformist's Separation from Them* (London: John Marshall, 1706), i.

Delaune eventually moved to London, where he married Hannah Hutchinson, daughter of Edward Hutchinson, a Baptist minister. They settled in London, where Delaune worked as a schoolmaster.¹¹ By the late 1670s, Delaune was publishing works attacking pedobaptism and other doctrines that contradicted Baptist orthodoxy.¹² His most famous work, however, was the *Plea*, for which he ultimately paid with his life. Before exploring the contents of this work, it is important to introduce the circumstances that prompted its publication.

I. Background to and Contents of the *Plea* (1684)

In 1683, Benjamin Calamy, incumbent of St Mary Aldermanbury, London (and uncle of Edmund Calamy), published his most influential treatise, *A Discourse About a Scrupulous Conscience*. Based on a sermon on Luke 11:41, Calamy's *Discourse* condemned the "Enemies of our Church and Government," who "make no Scruple of Disobedience, Schism, Faction, and Division." It was, therefore, essential that such "wayward skittish Consciences" were "restrained." Citing Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Calamy argued that, for the "sake of Peace and Order," there was no "better way" of "directing and quieting men's Consciences" than enforcing their compliance with the "customs of the Church." Calamy dedicated his *Discourse* to Sir George Jeffreys, Chief Justice of Chester. Jeffreys' fervent loyalty to Charles II was evidenced by his severe treatment of Whigs and Dissenters who were implicated in the 1683 Rye House Plot to assassinate the King and his brother, James, Duke of York. Calamy was convinced that, by dedicating his work to Jeffreys, all Dissenters would be "justly afraid" of "quarrelling" with him. He was wrong.¹³

At least one Dissenter responded to Calamy's apparent challenge—Thomas Delaune.¹⁴ Indeed, the *Plea*—which Delaune published under the pseudonym "Philaethes" ("lover of truth")—was advertised as "a Letter to Dr. Benjamin Calamy, upon His Sermon, Called Scrupulous Conscience."¹⁵ To Delaune, the "Non-Conformists Separation" from the Church of England was comparable to the actions of sixteenth-century Reformers, who had separated from the "Church of Rome" to escape its "Popish superstitions." Both Anglicans and "Papists" were, according to Delaune, guilty of introducing various unscriptural innovations into their worship. The surplice, for instance, originated among the "Pagans," from whom it was "brought into the Church by Pope Adrian,

¹¹R. C., "Records of the Baptists of Cork," *Notes and Queries*, 6th ser., vol. 3 (January–June 1881): 41–43; Michael A. G. Haykin, "Delaune, Thomas (d. 1685)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter ODNB] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹²See Thomas Delaune, *Truth Defended: Or, a Triple Answer to the Late Triumvirates Opposition in Their Three Pamphlets* ([London]: Francis Smith, 1677). Also, Delaune collaborated with several other Baptists, including Hanserd Knollys, on *The Baptists Answer to Mr. Obed. Wills, His Appeal Against Mr. H. Danvers* (London: Francis Smith, 1675).

¹³Benjamin Calamy, *A Discourse About a Scrupulous Conscience. Preached at the Parish-Church of St. Mary Aldermanbury, London* (London: Rowland Reynolds, 1683), unpaginated preface, 33. This biblical passage states, "But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you." For the Rye House Plot and its aftermath, see Melinda S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999), chaps. 4–5.

¹⁴I have been unable to trace any other responses to Calamy; this suggests that most Dissenters were backed into submission. Given Delaune's fate, the apparent absence of any other responses is hardly surprising.

¹⁵The title was not particularly original. In 1674, John Humfrey, an ejected minister, had published *A Plea for the Non-Conformists; Tending to Justifie Them Against the Clamorous Charge of Schisme*.

Anno 796." Kneeling at the altar was similarly described as a "popish" practice lacking biblical or patristic precedent. Rather, during "Tertullian [c.155–c.220] and Chrysostom's [c.347–407] time" it was normal for Christians to "stand at the Altar, when they partook of the Supper." Equally, if not more, controversial was Delaune's claim that pedobaptism was such an innovation. Citing Hugo Grotius's (1583–1645) discussions of Matthew 19:14—a passage often used to justify pedobaptism—he claimed that infant baptism was "not ordinary in the Greek Church." Constantine the Great (c.272–337) was not baptized until he "came to years," despite his mother Helena's "zealous" Christian faith. The same was true of Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329–390), the "Son of a Christian Bishop."¹⁶

Other "Novel Inventions" included the numerous feasts and fasts prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, which Delaune compared to the "Will-worship" of Jeroboam, the idolatrous King of Northern Israel. In the tradition of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563), Delaune praised various religious groups, including the Waldensians and the Lollards, who had defended Christ against "Jeroboam's Calf Worship" throughout the ages. As with many Dissenters, Delaune also condemned the Church for prohibiting extemporary prayers in favor of a "prescript form" of prayer. That prayers needed to be Spirit-led was evidenced by St. Paul's declaration, "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). These alleged innovations, Delaune claimed, also extended to the Church of England's governance. While "not one word in all the New Testament" supported episcopacy, precedent for such a hierarchical church structure was provided by the "Superior Priests" who had ruled over ancient "Heathen" religions. Equally reminiscent of paganism was the Church's "malicious" suppression of Dissent. To Delaune, England's anti-Dissenter legislation was no different from the coercive tactics of Nebuchadnezzar, who flung Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—"three eminent Dissenters"—into a furnace for their "Non-conformity" to the established religion (Daniel 3). It is unlikely that Delaune expected the *Plea* to be met with silence. He could not, however, have foreseen the tragic consequences of its publication.¹⁷

Throughout the Summer and Autumn of 1683, tensions between Tories and Dissenters were especially high due to the recent exposure of the Rye House Plot. It was therefore unfortunate for Delaune that he published the *Plea* against the backdrop of these tensions. The first edition of the *Plea* was published privately by Delaune, who sourced an unnamed printer. By late November 1683, "many hundred sheets" had been printed, ready for imminent publication. News of this forthcoming book quickly reached Robert Stephens, a "Messenger to the Press," whose duty was to identify seditious publications. On November 29, 1683, Delaune was "apprehended" by Stephens, and "carried before" Sir Thomas Jenner, Recorder of London. Perceiving the *Plea* to be a seditious libel, Jenner had Delaune committed to Newgate. On December 8, 1683, the imprisoned Delaune wrote to Benjamin Calamy, urging him to intervene.

¹⁶[Thomas Delaune], *A Plea for the Non-Conformists, Giving the True State of the Dissenters Case. And How Far the Conformists Separation from the Church of Rome, for Their Popish Superstitions and Traditions Introduced into the Service of God, Justifies the Non-Conformists Separation from Them for the Same. In a Letter to Dr. Benjamin Calamy, upon His Sermon, Called Scrupulous Conscience, Inviting Hereto* (London: Printed for the Author, 1684), title page, 19, 21. Matthew 19:14 quotes Jesus as saying, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 13–14, 36, 41–42, 66–67.

It was, after all, unfair to “gag the Respondent, when the Opponent’s Mouth is at liberty.” Delaune added diplomatically that, compared with someone of Calamy’s “figure,” he was “one of the meanest of the Flock.” Nevertheless, as a follower of the “Shepherd of Souls,” it was incumbent on him to answer Calamy’s sermon.¹⁸

Calamy responded to this letter, informing Delaune that he would provide “any kindness” that he owed. However, when no further action from Calamy seemed forthcoming, Delaune wrote him another letter, dated January 9, 1684, reiterating his plea for a written response. Calamy informed Hannah Delaune that he was “unconcerned” in her husband’s matter, having not seen his name mentioned in any of the sheets examined by Jenner. Upon hearing this news, Thomas Delaune appealed to Calamy’s “conscience” in a third and final letter, dated January 14, 1684, with which the title page of the *Plea* was enclosed. On January 18, 1684, Delaune was found guilty of seditious libel at the Old Bailey. The presiding judge was Calamy’s patron, Jeffreys, who was now Lord Chief Justice of the King’s Bench. Unable to pay the fine of “100 marks” (approximately £67), Delaune was forced to remain incarcerated in Newgate. The court also ordered that copies of the *Plea*—which was now in circulation—were to be burnt publicly “before the Royal-Exchange in London.”¹⁹ Many years later, Edmund Calamy claimed that his uncle “took pains with Jeffreys to get him [Delaune] released.” It was apparently “no small trouble” to Benjamin Calamy that the zealous Jeffreys denied his request. The elder Calamy died in early January 1686, shortly before what would have been his fortieth birthday.²⁰

As with Bunyan, Delaune continued to write and publish during his incarceration. Delaune’s account of his arrest, along with copies of his letters to Calamy, was published in *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Thomas Delaune* (1684). Another work by Delaune, entitled *Eikōn Tou Thēriou, or, The Image of the Beast* (1684), was also published during his imprisonment. In the latter work, Delaune argued implicitly—but not subtly—that the persecuting regime of the Restoration Church of England was characteristic of the “Pagan Church” and the “Beastly Papal Church.”²¹ Both the *Narrative* and the *Image of the Beast* were appended to a subsequent London edition of the *Plea*, also published in 1684, in which Delaune was named as the author on the title page. This format was followed in almost all later editions. Delaune’s poverty-stricken wife and two children were soon forced to join him in Newgate. They all predeceased Thomas Delaune,

¹⁸Thomas Delaune, *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Thomas Delaune for Writing, Printing and Publishing a Late Book, Called, A Plea for the Nonconformists, with Some Modest Reflections Thereon. Directed to Doctor Calamy; in Obedience to Whose Call, That Work was Undertaken* ([London]: Printed for the Author, 1684), 1–2, 5; Haykin, “Delaune, Thomas.” Regarding Stephens, see Leona Rostenberg, “Robert Stephens, Messenger of the Press: An Episode in 17th-Century Censorship,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 49, no. 2 (Second Quarter, 1955): 131–152.

¹⁹Delaune, *Narrative of the Sufferings*, 8, 10–11, 15–16; Haykin, “Delaune, Thomas.”

²⁰Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life, with Some Reflections on the Times I Have Lived In: (1671–1731)*, ed. John Towill Rutt, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 1:60–61. Benjamin Calamy was buried on January 7, 1686, at St Lawrence Jewry, London. See Jim Spivey, “Calamy, Benjamin (bap. 1646, d. 1685/6),” *ODNB*. An elegy, published shortly after Calamy’s funeral, claimed that he died on January 3, 1686. See *A Tear Dropt from the Hearse of the Reverend Dr. Benjamin Calamy; Late Minister of St. Lawrence Jury London, who Departed this Life on Sunday the 3d of January, 1685/6* (London: George Croom, 1685 [1686]).

²¹[Thomas Delaune], *Eikōn Tou Thēriou, or, The Image of the Beast, Shewing, by a Paralell Scheme, What a Conformist the Church of Rome is to the Pagan, and What a Nonconformist to the Christian Church, in Its Rites, Service and Ceremonys, the Better to Exemplify the True and False Church* ([London]: s.n., 1684), 1.

who succumbed to the “miserable conditions” in early to mid-1685.²² During that same year, Calamy’s *Discourse* featured in *A Collection of Cases and Other Discourses Lately Written to Recover Dissenters to the Communion of the Church of England* (1685). Designed as a means of creating a united Protestant front against Roman Catholicism, this two-volume compilation contained works by various Anglican divines, arguing in favor of a reunion with Dissenters, albeit largely on the Church of England’s terms.²³ An abridged version of the *Collection of Cases*, entitled the *London Cases*, was published in 1700 by Thomas Bennet, an Anglican clergyman and controversialist.²⁴ By 1728, Bennet’s *London Cases*, which included Calamy’s *Discourse*, had gone through six editions. In 1712, a stand-alone edition of Calamy’s *Discourse* was published in London by John Morphew, who sold much Tory literature. Morphew’s edition was sparked by the *Plea*’s enduring influence in early eighteenth-century England.

II. Eighteenth-Century England

Throughout the relative honeymoon period that was the Williamite years, Dissenters in England saw little need to invoke the *Plea* in their publications. By the beginning of Queen Anne’s reign, however, the *Plea* was starting to gain renewed attention among Whigs and Dissenters amid heightened attacks on “occasional conformity” from Tory High Churchmen. Under the terms of the Test Act, Dissenters could assume public office if they received communion in the Church of England once a year. This loophole infuriated Tories, who wished to bar all Dissenters from public office. During the 1704 session of Parliament, a group of high Tories tried unsuccessfully to end this practice by “tacking” an Occasional Conformity bill to a taxation bill.²⁵ As a result of this controversy, “Tacker” became a derogatory term for Tories, which was used by the stridently Whig journalist, John Tutchin.²⁶

Tutchin was also a firm admirer of Delaune’s *Plea*. In the March 3, 1704, issue of his *Observer*, Tutchin described the *Plea* as “the present Bulwark of the Dissenters Case” because “all the High Church-Men in England can never Answer it.”²⁷ This passage was quoted in the first eighteenth-century edition of the *Plea*, published in London in August 1704. The 1704 edition included a short preface, written anonymously by one of Delaune’s fellow inmates in Newgate. As would become characteristic of later editions, the author of the preface claimed that the *Plea* had “never been Answered.” The “Liberty” enjoyed by post-Revolution Dissenters had initially deterred this individual from reprinting the *Plea*. Its republication was, however, eventually rendered

²²Haykin, “Delaune, Thomas.” The exact date of Delaune’s death is unknown. Daniel Defoe claimed that he was incarcerated for “about 15 Months,” which places his death during the early to middle months of 1685. See Delaune, *De Laune’s Plea for the Non-Conformists* [1706 John Marshall edition], viii.

²³See William Gibson, “Dissenters, Anglicans and the Glorious Revolution: *The Collection of Cases*,” *The Seventeenth Century* 22, no. 1 (2007): 168–184.

²⁴See *An Answer to the Dissenters Pleas for Separation, or, An Abridgment of the London Cases; Wherein the Substance of Those Books is Digested into One Short and Plain Discourse*, ed. Thomas Bennet (Cambridge: Alexander Bosvile, 1700).

²⁵Brent S. Sirota, “The Occasional Conformity Controversy, Moderation, and the Anglican Critique of Modernity, 1700–1714,” *Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (March 2014): 81–105.

²⁶Edward Taylor, “John Tutchin’s *Observer*, Comment Serials, and the ‘Rage of Party’ in Britain, 1678–c.1730,” *Historical Journal* 63, no. 4 (September 2020): 862–884, at 876.

²⁷*Observer*, 3 March 1704.

“necessary” by attacks on Dissenters from “High-Flyers,” who cared not to ask Nonconformists for any “Justification for their Dissent.”²⁸

In 1706, the *Plea* was republished at least four times in London by William Marshall, his son and partner, Joseph Marshall, and John Marshall, who was probably from the same family. All three men sold works by various classic Puritan authors, including John Bunyan and John Owen. One 1706 edition, published by John Marshall, maintained the preface from the 1704 edition. William and Joseph Marshall published the other three 1706 editions, from which the 1704 preface was omitted. All four of the 1706 editions, however, featured a new, much longer (and, ultimately, much more influential) preface by the Dissenting author and journalist, Daniel Defoe.²⁹ By 1706, Defoe’s literary campaign against Toryism was in full flow. Many of Defoe’s polemics appeared in his triweekly periodical, *The Review*, which was launched in 1704, and folded in 1713. Sometimes, Defoe ridiculed his opponents by posing as them. In *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702), he posed as a tyrannical High Churchman, calling on his brethren to follow the example of Moses, who commanded the Levites to “cut the Throats of Three and thirty thousand of his dear Israelites, that were fallen into Idolatry” (Exodus 32).³⁰ Most, though not all, readers saw this work for the satire it was. Once he was identified as the author, Defoe was charged with seditious libel, damaging his reputation considerably. He endured a spell in Newgate, where Delaune had perished nearly twenty years earlier.³¹ It is not clear whether Defoe had met Delaune. At the time of Delaune’s imprisonment and death, Defoe was in his mid-twenties, living in London, and working as a hosier.³²

In his preface to the *Plea*, Defoe claimed that, throughout his incarceration, Delaune displayed the same “spirit” in his “Conversation” as he did in his writings. This personal description of Delaune’s last days suggests that Defoe visited him in Newgate. Alternatively, Defoe may simply have interviewed former inmates and surviving friends of Delaune. To Defoe, Delaune’s death stood as a “Monument of the Cruelty of those Times,” in which “near 8000 Protestant Dissenters” died in prison. These (dubious) statistics were, according to Defoe, far worse than anything experienced by Protestants during the “Days of Queen Mary” and the “Civil War.” The latter episode was something of which Dissenters were constantly reminded by High Churchmen, who published “long Accounts” of “Parliamentary persecution.” Defoe was thankful that the degree of conflict witnessed during the previous two centuries had largely subsided. He praised the Toleration Act as not only an “Ease to the Dissenters,” but also to the Church of England, which had previously used “Cruelty and Persecution” as

²⁸Thomas Delaune, *De Laune’s Plea for the Non-Conformists: Shewing the True State of Their Case, and How Far the Conformist’s Separation from the Church of Rome for Their Popish Superstitions, &c. Introduced into the Service of God, Justifies the Non-Conformist’s Separation from Them for the Same* (London: Booksellers in London and Westminster, 1704), A2; *Daily Courant*, 24 August 1704.

²⁹The preface was attributed to the “Author of the Review” and signed “D. Foe.” There is much controversy surrounding attributions to Defoe. The preface to Delaune’s *Plea* is reproduced in the third volume of the authoritative *Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, ed. W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000). An earlier collaboration between Furbank and Owens, entitled *Defoe De-Attributions* (1994), rejected many traditional attributions to Defoe.

³⁰[Daniel Defoe], *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters: or Proposals for the Establishment of the Church* (London: s.n., 1702), 20.

³¹Howard D. Weinbrot, *Literature, Religion, and the Evolution of Culture 1660–1780* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), ch. 2.

³²Paula R. Backscheider, “Defoe, Daniel (1660?–1731),” *ODNB*.

"Tools of Power." Such "dishonourable" behavior had been exhibited by Benjamin Calamy, who ignored his "Duty as an Aggressor" by not interceding on behalf of Delaune. The notion that Delaune was wrong to "embroil himself" in this dispute was a "Vulgar" objection because Calamy had posed an "open Challenge" to Dissenters. If Delaune had failed to respond to him, all Nonconformists would have been accused of "Dissenting on Politick, not Religions Accounts," making their suppression more "rational to the Common people." Defoe's anger was not, however, reserved entirely for the Restoration establishment. Indeed, he was also critical of the "whole Body of Dissenters in England," who had failed to raise the money required for the release of Delaune and his family, leaving them to "starve in a Dungeon."³³ Defoe closed his preface with the following endorsement:

The Book is perfect of itself; never Author left behind him a more finish'd piece, and I believe the Dispute is entirely ended: If any Man ask what we can say, Why the Dissenters differ from the Church of England? And what they can plead for it? I can recommend no better Reply than this. Let them answer in short, Thomas Delaune, and desire the Querist to Read the Book.³⁴

Unlike the 1704 preface, which was omitted from almost all post-1706 editions, Defoe's preface became a definitive feature of the *Plea*. The legacy of Defoe's preface is evidenced by its inclusion in several influential histories of Dissent, including Neal's *History* and Thomas Crosby's *History of the English Baptists* (1738–1740).³⁵ On December 15, 1709, Defoe republished the *Plea* under the deceptive title *Dr. Sacheverell's Recantation*. On November 5, 1709, Henry Sacheverell, a stridently Tory High Churchman, had preached an incendiary sermon in St Paul's Cathedral. It was published as *The Perils of False Brethren*, a title Sacheverell derived from 2 Corinthians 11:26. In this sermon, Sacheverell lambasted the Revolution settlement, claiming that its concessions to Dissenters would lead to an uprising of bloodthirsty Republicans, mirroring events from the previous century.³⁶ Presumably, the aim behind *Dr. Sacheverell's Recantation* was to introduce Delaune's work to a fresh readership, while antagonizing Sacheverell's supporters in the process. This element of disguise was, of course, reminiscent of Defoe's *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, which he had similarly republished under the guise of a sermon by Sacheverell in February 1703.³⁷ At least one of Sacheverell's allies responded to the "recantation," branding it a "sham-pamphlet."³⁸

³³Delaune, *De Laune's Plea for the Non-Conformists* [1706 John Marshall edition], i–viii.

³⁴*Ibid.*, ix [printed erroneously as page xi].

³⁵Neal, *History of the Puritans*, 4:554; Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists, from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of King George I*, 4 vols. (London: Thomas Crosby et al., 1738–1740), 2:368–369, 375–379.

³⁶*Daily Courant*, 15 December 1709. According to *WorldCat*, only two copies of *Dr. Sacheverell's Recantation* are extant in libraries, both of which are in the US. For Sacheverell's sermon and his subsequent trial, see Geoffrey S. Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973).

³⁷[Daniel Defoe], *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters: [Taken from Dr. Sach—ll's Sermon, and Others.] or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church* (London: s.n., [1703]); Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 126.

³⁸R.G., *Doctor Sacheverell's Defence, in a Letter to a Member of Parliament. Or, Remarks upon Two Famous Pamphlets, the One Entitled A True Answer to Doctor Sacheverell's Sermon, Preach'd Before the*

Defoe's triumphalist depiction of the *Plea* was echoed by other contemporary Dissenters. In 1708, an anonymous author, writing under the pseudonym "Country Roger," defended the Dissenting laity against a recent attack from "Mr. Jago." The author mocked Jago's ability as a polemicist by asking rhetorically, "Why must Delaune's *Plea* for the Nonconformists remain so long unanswer'd, when we have so able a Disputant on the spot, who can refute his Opponents Arguments, and silence all the Dissenters Pleas with a wet Finger?"³⁹ Another Dissenting author, writing under the pseudonym "Enosh Mophet," advertised their 1708 attack on Tory High Churchmen as an "Appendix" to Delaune's *Plea*, thereby illuminating its classic status further.⁴⁰ Inevitably, it was not long before "High-flying" authors started to bite back.

During the 1710s, the *Plea* came under attack from two authors, both of whom were former Dissenters. The first response was *Dissenters Self-Condemn'd* (1710) by William Robertson, a former Dissenting preacher. Robertson claimed that, following Defoe's republication of the *Plea*, he was "challeng'd by several Dissenters" to justify his conformity to the Church of England by answering it. Robertson devoted much of *Dissenters Self-Condemn'd* to highlighting the doctrinal differences between Anglican and Roman Catholic practices. Anglicans, Robertson argued, knelt at the altar to "signify their humble and grateful Acknowledgement of the benefits of Christ therein given to all Worthy Receivers." Roman Catholics, on the other hand, knelt to show their "adoration" for Christ "Corporally present" in the Eucharist. Robertson also sought to deflect Delaune's charge of "popery" onto Dissenters. Citing Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699), he compared the extemporary prayers of Dissenters to the "spiritual" prayers performed by Jesuits. Ultimately, however, *Dissenters Self-Condemn'd* was a weak response to the *Plea* and failed to match Delaune's engagement with patristics.⁴¹

A stronger and, ultimately, more influential response was *The Bulwark Stormed* (1717) by Edward Hart, a bricklayer. Hart, a former Baptist, was a Non-Juror, who viewed the Glorious Revolution as an ungodly usurpation, and, therefore, refused to swear his allegiance to the Hanoverian monarchy.⁴² *The Bulwark Stormed* was aimed primarily at Hart's former Baptist brethren. He urged them to "consider their own Reputation" before describing such a "scandalous Piece" as "unanswerable." For Hart, the *Plea* was a "Mouse" advertised as a "Mountain." He criticized Defoe—the "Master-keeper of this extraordinary Piece"—for placing his "whole dependence" on its arguments. Robertson's earlier response to the *Plea* had, according to Hart, not been deemed a "sufficient Answer" by Delaune's followers. As with Robertson, Hart claimed that, on many occasions, Dissenters had lent him a copy of the *Plea*, urging

Lord Mayor, November 5. 1709, *the Other (a Sham-Pamphlet) Entitled, Doctor Sacheverell's Recantation* (London: John Reade, 1710).

³⁹Country Roger, *The Dissenting Laity Pleading Their Own Cause Against the Clamours and Calumnies of the Highflying Clergy: Justifying Their Present Separation from the Church of England to be No Sinful Schism Occasioned by Some Late Invective Pamphlets Writ Against Them*, by Dr. Wells, Mr. Jago of Looe, Mr. Agate the Agagite, and Others of the Highflying Class (London: Joseph Marshall, 1708), 32.

⁴⁰Enosh Mophet, *An Appendix to Delaune's Plea: or, a New Dispute Which Lately Happen'd in the City of Bethel, Between Adam Gojim & Ben Kahal, About Matters of Religion. Being a Just Vindication of the People of God, who are Commonly Stigmatiz'd with the Name of Schismatics* (London: Joseph Marshall, 1708).

⁴¹William Robertson, *Dissenters Self-Condemn'd: Being a Full Answer to Mr. De Laune's Plea for the Non-Conformists, Lately Recommended by Mr. Daniel Foe, Author of the Review* (London: John Morphew, 1710) ii, 95, 122.

⁴²For Hart's life and writings, see Simon Lewis, "Edward Hart: Bricklayer, Theologian and Nonjuring Martyr," *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 5 (2021): 664–679.

him to explain why its arguments had failed to convince him to “leave the Church of England and again be one of them.” Hart surmised that, if Delaune had “liv’d in the primitive Ages of the Church, and publish’d such Notions as he has in his Plea,” he “would have had a much greater . . . Fine laid upon him.” In response to Delaune’s rejection of any “primitive” precedent for episcopacy, Hart observed that the “Churches of Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, &c. were all governed by Bishops in the very next Age to the Apostles.” It was, therefore, inconceivable that “such a change of Government could happen” without a “Historian of those Times” noting it. Hart found Delaune’s attack on pedobaptism to be equally contrary to “primitive” Christianity.⁴³

Circumcision, which marked the admission of infants into the “Jewish Church,” had, according to Hart, been replaced with infant baptism in the “Christian Church.” Furthermore, Tertullian, who lived within “150 Years distance from the Apostolick Age,” had described pedobaptism not as a disputed matter but rather as a “common Practice of the Church in his Time.” Also, in a letter to Pope Victor I (d. 199), Polycrates of Ephesus claimed to have lived “threescore and five [65] years in the Lord.” Dismissing the possibility that Polycrates was significantly older than 65 when he wrote this letter, Hart described this source as “Proof for the Antiquity of Infant Baptism.” To Hart, Delaune’s rejection of pedobaptism proved that the title, *A Plea for the Non-Conformists*, was far “too general” because such sentiments contradicted the practices of Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Hart even claimed to have heard that Delaune “had his own Children baptized,” thereby defying Baptist orthodoxy. More personal, however, was Hart’s description of an encounter with an unnamed Baptist, who claimed to have been one of the “eighty Persons, Men and Women”—including “eight Ministers”—who were imprisoned in Newgate with Delaune. “Few or none” of these individuals had “cared for his [Delaune’s] Company.” Despite being a “witty Fellow and a Scholar,” he was, apparently, a “Man of little or no Religion!” From this anecdote, Hart concluded that Delaune was “not a worthy Martyr.”⁴⁴

Robertson and Hart’s responses failed to dent the reputation of Delaune’s work. Indeed, Defoe’s preface was included in most subsequent editions of the *Plea*, thereby ensuring that it continued to be advertised as an unanswered text. In 1712, at least four London editions appeared, two of which were published by Arthur Bettesworth, a prominent bookseller, who specialized in works of divinity. A 1720 London edition, published by John Marshall, was followed by a 1733 London edition, published by Joseph Marshall. It was probably more than a coincidence that the latter edition was published amid increased calls from Dissenters for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Their plight was aided by anticlerical Whig politicians, who dominated the House of Commons throughout the 1730s. Nevertheless, any bill which was perceived to erode the powers of the Church of England was swiftly quashed by the bishops in the House of Lords.⁴⁵

⁴³Edward Hart, *The Bulwark Stormed: In Answer to Thomas De Laune’s Plea for the Non-Conformists. Wherein is Shewed the Fallaciousness and Unconclusiveness of Every Argument in That Pretended Unanswerable Book* (London: W. Innys, 1717), 3, 7, 9–11, 15, 135.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 19–20, 121, 123–125, 128.

⁴⁵See Stephen Taylor, “Sir Robert Walpole, the Church of England, and the Quakers Tithe Bill of 1736,” *Historical Journal* 28, no. 1 (March 1985): 51–77.

The *Plea* gained renewed attention in England during the 1770s, which witnessed a resurgence of radicalism among Dissenters. Under the terms of the Toleration Act, Dissenting ministers were required to subscribe to most of the Church of England's formulary, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Between 1772 and 1773, over half of the Dissenting ministers in England and Wales signed petitions to Parliament, calling for this requirement to be abolished. These petitions prompted two anti-subscription bills, which passed easily through the House of Commons, only to be defeated in the House of Lords on both occasions.⁴⁶ Against the backdrop of this campaign, Samuel Palmer, a London Independent minister, published *The Protestant Dissenter's Catechism* (1773), which aimed to "instruct and establish Young Persons among the Dissenters in the Principles of Nonconformity." In this work, Palmer stressed that Dissenting objections to the Articles stemmed not from their "Calvinistical" content, but rather from the notion that subscription to a formulary written by "fallible men" should never be a "necessary qualification for preaching the gospel." Citing Delaune's *Plea*, Palmer also attacked the Book of Common Prayer, which "was taken for the most part from the old popish liturgy." The *Plea* featured at the top of a list of eight books, appended to Palmer's *Catechism*, which was recommended to young Dissenters who sought a "fuller Acquaintance with the History and the Principles of the Protestant Dissenters."⁴⁷

In 1779, the *Plea* was republished in Cambridge—the birthplace of much anti-dogmatist literature—by Thomas Fletcher, who also sold works by Robert Robinson, Baptist minister of Cambridge and Dissenting historian.⁴⁸ It was around this time that Dissenters made a significant political gain in the form of the Dissenters' Relief Act (1779), which freed their ministers from the requirement to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Of course, Dissenting radicalism in late eighteenth-century England was inspired by the anti-episcopal rhetoric of American revolutionaries.⁴⁹ In America, Delaune's *Plea* had long been a popular text among Dissenters. To colonial Anglicans, such as Samuel Johnson, this text was a constant menace.

III. Colonial America and the New Republic

In 1722, Samuel Johnson lost his Yale professorship when he moved from Congregationalism to Anglicanism. After travelling to England for his reordination, Johnson returned to America as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). Johnson settled in Stratford, Connecticut, where he served as rector

⁴⁶Dissenting ministers were excused from Articles XXXIV (Of the Traditions of the Church), XXXV (Of the Homilies), and XXXVI (Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers), along with the first clause of Article XX (Of the Authority of the Church), which declared that "the Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith." Baptists were also excused from Article XXVII (Of Baptism), which referred to infant baptism. See G. M. Ditchfield, "How Narrow will the Limits of this Toleration Appear? Dissenting Petitions to Parliament, 1772–1773," *Parliamentary History* 24, no. 1 (February 2005): 91–106.

⁴⁷[Samuel Palmer], *The Protestant Dissenter's Catechism. Containing, I. A Brief History of the Nonconformists. II. The Reasons of the Dissent from the National Church. Designed to Instruct and Establish Young Persons Among the Dissenters in the Principles of Nonconformity* (London: J. Buckland, 1773), 47, 64–65, unpaginated appendix.

⁴⁸See John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁹See James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Non-conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

until 1754, when he was appointed first president of the new King's College, New York. Upon his retirement from this role in 1763, Johnson returned to Stratford, serving again as rector until his death in 1772.⁵⁰ As with William Robertson and Edward Hart, Johnson had all the zeal of a convert and was determined to reach out to his former brethren. In a *Letter* (1733) to his "Dissenting parishioners," Johnson named the *Plea* as one of several "wicked books" that was being "scattered about" in Stratford. In response to Delaune's "abusive insinuation" that the Church of England was guilty of "bloody" persecution, Johnson asked his Dissenting readers to recall the days of Oliver Cromwell, when "the Dissenters were uppermost, and the Church was suppressed, and her clergy sequestered, plundered, imprisoned and barbarously treated." Also, far from being the "popish" innovation described by Delaune, precedent for clerical vestments could be traced back to the "Mosaic Dispensation," as evidenced by Ezekiel's command, "when they come to minister in the inner Court, they shall be clothed with linen garments" (Ezekiel 44:17). Precedent from the "Gospel times" could, according to Johnson, be found in St. John's statement, "The Church should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is [the Emblem of] the Righteousness of Saints" (Revelation 19:8).⁵¹

By the late 1730s, however, Johnson and other High Churchmen shared a common enemy with many New England Congregationalists—the evangelical "enthusiast." To traditional "Old Light" Congregationalists, "New Light" evangelicals were guilty of fueling anticlericalism and disorder by preaching in the open air and praying extemporaneously. Paradoxically, on both sides of the Atlantic, evangelicals and their opponents used the *Plea* as a stick with which to beat each other. In a 1740 work, Jonathan Warne, a Calvinist Dissenter in England, defended George Whitefield's extemporary prayers by directing his readers to his "Lay-Brother" Delaune's *Plea*.⁵² Conversely, the December 15, 1740, issue of the *Boston Evening-Post* ran an advertisement for an anti-Whitefield polemic, written by Alexander Garden, the Anglican Commissary of South Carolina, and republished by Thomas Fleet, who also edited this staunchly anti-evangelical newspaper. Despite having gone through "Two Editions," no answer to Garden's work had yet been forthcoming. Clearly pitching this work to an Old Light Congregationalist readership, Fleet predicted that Garden's polemic would "remain as long unanswer'd, as 'tis said Mr. Delaune's *Plea* for the Nonconformists has done."⁵³

During the 1760s, the *Plea* gained renewed attention among colonial Dissenters, who felt increasingly threatened by the Church of England's seemingly ever-growing power and influence in America. To New England Congregationalists, it seemed as though SPG missionaries were interested primarily in converting European Protestants to Anglicanism, with little regard for the salvation of indigenous people. Many

⁵⁰See Donald F. M. Gerardi, "Samuel Johnson and the Yale 'Apostasy' of 1722: The Challenge of Anglican Sacramentalism to the New England Way," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 47, no. 2 (June 1978): 153–175.

⁵¹Samuel Johnson, *A Letter from a Minister of the Church of England to His Dissenting Parishioners. Containing a Brief Answer to the Most Material Objections Against the Establish'd Church That Are to be Found in De Laune's Plea, The Answer to the Bishop of Derry, The Plain Reasons for Separating, &c. and Others. Together with Plain Reasons for Conformity to the Church of England* (New York: John Peter Zenger, 1733), 5–7, 10–11.

⁵²Jonathan Warne, *The Spirit of the Martyrs Revived in the Doctrines of the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and the Judicious, and Faithful Methodists* (London: T. Cooper, 1740), 99 [printed erroneously as page 64].

⁵³*Boston Evening-Post*, 15 December 1740.

Congregationalists—including Jonathan Mayhew, minister of Old West Church, Boston—feared that, unless preventative steps were taken, the establishment of episcopacy in the colonies was imminent.⁵⁴ Delaune's ardently anti-episcopal *Plea* was one weapon at their disposal. In a letter to Thomas Secker, archbishop of Canterbury, dated January 7, 1763, Henry Caner, rector of King's Chapel, Boston, reported that local Dissenters had recently reprinted the *Plea* "in order to give people the worst impressions" of the Church of England.⁵⁵ On October 17, 1763, the *Plea* was republished in Boston by William McAlpine, who sold much Puritan and evangelical literature.⁵⁶ McAlpine was still selling copies in 1768.⁵⁷ During the Spring and Summer of 1765, copies of the *Plea* were sold by Daniel Fowle, editor of the Portsmouth-based *New-Hampshire Gazette*, who subsequently became an ardent Patriot.⁵⁸ Despite being a radical printer, Fowle did not wish to shield his readers from counter-arguments to the *Plea*. Indeed, between December 1763 and January 1764, Fowle sought subscriptions for Hart's *Bulwark Stormed*.⁵⁹

As the bishop controversy gained momentum, colonial Dissenters turned increasingly to the *Plea*. In 1768, Andrew Croswell, a New Light Congregationalist pastor of Connecticut, invoked the *Plea* in an attack on the 1766 SPG annual sermon, preached by the bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton. In response to Warburton's complaints about "Presbyterian" hostilities towards SPG missionaries, Croswell attacked the Society for proselytizing the "liturgy and ceremonies of the Church of England" to Nonconformists, thereby neglecting the "poor heathen." The newfound political solidarity between colonial Dissenters and freethinkers was evidenced by Croswell's claim that "Gentilism" in America stemmed, not from "philosophick" colonists (as Warburton had argued), but rather—as "Delaune hath proved"—from the "spreading" of episcopacy.⁶⁰ Benjamin Franklin was one freethinker who owned—and, therefore, probably read—Delaune's *Plea*. Indeed, Franklin's library contained the first edition (1684) to include the *Narrative and Image of the Beast* sections.⁶¹

In February 1769, the *Plea* was republished by the Manhattan bookseller, Garrat Noel, at the behest of a recently formed "Society of Dissenters." United by a shared opposition to the establishment of episcopacy in America, the society was led by several influential Presbyterian laymen, including Peter Van Brugh Livingston, a merchant, and John McKesson, a lawyer, who served as secretary. On July 24, 1769, the *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* printed a "Circular Letter" from McKesson to Dissenting congregations across the English-speaking world, encouraging them to

⁵⁴Peter W. Walker, "The Bishop Controversy, the Imperial Crisis, and Religious Radicalism in New England, 1763–74," *New England Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (September 2017): 306–343.

⁵⁵"Mr. Caner to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 7 January 1763," in *Papers Relating to the History of the Church in Massachusetts, A.D. 1676–1785*, ed. William Stevens Perry ([Hartford, CT]: Privately Printed, 1873), 489.

⁵⁶*Boston Evening-Post*, 17 October 1763.

⁵⁷*Boston Chronicle*, 15 February 1768.

⁵⁸*New-Hampshire Gazette*, 31 May 1765; 5 July 1765.

⁵⁹*New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle*, 23 December 1763; 6 January 1764.

⁶⁰Andrew Croswell, *Observations on Several Passages in a Sermon Preached by William Warburton, Lord Bishop of Gloucester, Before the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts: on Friday February 21. 1766. Wherein Our Colonies are Defended Against His Most Injurious and Abusive Reflections* (Boston, MA: Thomas and John Fleet, 1768), 15, 23–24.

⁶¹Edwin Wolf II and Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society and the Library Company of Philadelphia, 2006), 242–243.

form similar societies. Before outlining the society's articles—which included the stipulation that “no Matters of Doctrine” were to be discussed in meetings—McKesson briefly described a “small treatise, written near one hundred years ago.” The treatise in question was, of course, Delaune's *Plea*. Manhattan Dissenters were directed to Noel's bookshop on Dock Street, where the *Plea* could be bought for the “small price” of one shilling and sixpence. McKesson praised Delaune for describing the “reasons and grounds of our non-conformity” so “unanswerably.” Any Dissenting society that wished to replicate McKesson's blueprint was advised to disseminate the *Plea* amongst their “neighbours, and acquaintances.”⁶²

The *Plea*'s enduring influence among New York Presbyterians did not escape the attention of colonial Anglicans. In April 1770, Thomas Bradbury Chandler, rector of St. John's, Elizabethtown, New Jersey, informed his aging mentor, Samuel Johnson, that a response to the *Plea* was being written by Samuel Seabury, rector of St. Peter's, Westchester, New York. Seabury did not, however, enjoy this task, which he compared to “suing a Beggar, or shearing a Hog, or fighting a Skunk.”⁶³ Seabury's reservations were shared by Henry Caner. In a letter to Chandler, dated August 20, 1772, Caner lamented that copies of Hart's *Bulwark Stormed* were scarce, despite it having been reprinted in Boston several times. Copies of the *Plea* were, according to Caner, usually “reprinted about once in 10 or 15 years” in Boston. A recent republication in the Boston and Salem area had generated neither much interest nor much “hurt.” Caner was, however, quick to add that he did not wish to discourage Seabury's endeavors.⁶⁴ On August 29, 1772, Caner informed Samuel Auchmuty, rector of Trinity Church, New York, that he had gained 82 subscriptions to Seabury's forthcoming response to Delaune.⁶⁵

On April 29, 1773, the *New-York Journal, or General Advertiser* ran an advertisement for Seabury's polemic, entitled *A Vindication of the Church of England, from the Glaring Misrepresentations and Malicious Abuse of Thomas De Laune, in his Libel entitled, A Plea for the Nonconformists*. This work was, apparently, “ready for the press” and due to be published “shortly.” Subscriptions for Seabury's forthcoming *Vindication* were sought from “Friends of the Church of England in all the neighboring Colonies,” and directed to John Holt, a New York printer. By September 1773, this newspaper was still running the same advertisement, claiming that Seabury's response to Delaune would be published “shortly.”⁶⁶ This eagerly anticipated work was still in the pipeline in early December 1773, when Caner informed Chandler that he had obtained “about 100 Subscribers” to “Bro. Seabury's Answer to Delaune.”⁶⁷ Yet, for some unknown reason, Seabury's *Vindication* was never published. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest it was ever completed. Chandler had earlier expressed concerns that the phraseology of Seabury's response might be too severe. It is, therefore, possible

⁶²*New York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy*, 27 February 1769; *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, 24 July 1769; William Harrison Taylor, *Unity in Christ and Country: American Presbyterians in the Revolutionary Era, 1758–1801* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 50.

⁶³Quoted from Bruce E. Steiner, *Samuel Seabury 1729–1796: A Study in the High Church Tradition* (Oberlin: Ohio University Press, 1971), 124–125.

⁶⁴Henry Caner to Thomas Bradbury Chandler, 20 August 1772, in *Letter-Book of the Rev. Henry Caner, S.P.G. Missionary in Colonial Connecticut and Massachusetts Until the Revolution: A Review of His Correspondence from 1728 Through 1778*, ed. Kenneth W. Cameron (Hartford, CT: Transcendental Books, 1972), 147.

⁶⁵Henry Caner to Samuel Auchmuty, 29 August 1772, in *ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁶*New-York Journal, or General Advertiser*, 29 April 1773; 16 September 1773.

⁶⁷Henry Caner to Thomas Bradbury Chandler, 6 December 1773, in *Letter-Book*, 154.

that the work was eventually deemed to be a blunt instrument, which would do more harm than good.⁶⁸ The absence of a new response to the *Plea* in America was compounded by the colonial clergy's limited access to "orthodox" Anglican texts. In September 1766, the SPG agreed to send Edward Bass, incumbent of Newburyport, Massachusetts, 50 copies of William Wall's *Conference between Two Men That Had Doubts About Infant Baptism* (1706), along with one copy of Wall's two-volume *History of Infant Baptism* (1705). Edward Hart had cited the latter work in the *Bulwark Stormed* to defend pedobaptism against Delaune's objections. In March 1771, Bass requested copies of Hart's polemic from the SPG. By November 1773, Bass was still waiting for these books.⁶⁹

Delaune's *Plea* continued to be venerated in the New Republic. Between 1773 and 1790, its absence in Harvard College Library was addressed through the acquisition of two copies, both of which were 1712 London editions.⁷⁰ In the second volume (1784) of his *History of New England Baptists*, Isaac Backus, pastor of Middleborough, Massachusetts, claimed that the formation of a Baptist church in New London, Connecticut, in 1739 stemmed partly from widespread reading of the *Plea*.⁷¹ In 1800, the *Plea* was republished in Ballston, Saratoga County, New York, at the behest of Elias Lee, who served as Baptist pastor in the town. The Ballston edition included both Defoe's preface and a new preface by Lee. Its publication was sparked by a dispute between Lee and the Ballston Episcopal minister, Ammi Rogers, who had described the *Plea* as a "false, seditious, and scandalous libel against the Church of England." To Rogers, Delaune was a "man of a bad character, a lying malicious, peevish school-master." The bulk of Lee's preface consisted of an attack on Rogers's denomination, which promoted "universal tyranny" by teaching about "the divine rights of episcopacy" and "an uninterrupted succession of Ecclesiastics." Such "popish" doctrines were inconsistent with a "true republican government" because they excluded "both the magistrate and the people from any share in the regulations of the church." Lee observed that, under Rogers's rule, an American book favoring episcopacy was just as seditious as a "book in favour of the dissenters in Great Britain." He mockingly reassured Rogers that, because the Constitution was "averse to religious establishments" and "foreign to persecution," Episcopalians in America were far "happier" than Dissenters in England, who were forced to await a revolution before they could enjoy the same liberties. Lee asked rhetorically, "what a sweet relief, would such a revolution as we have had in America, have been to poor Thomas De Laune and his fellow sufferers?" He closed by commending the *Plea* as a book that "remains and ever will remain invulnerable to the attacks of its most potent and formidable enemies."⁷²

Lee's sentiments were echoed in an item that appeared in the September 6, 1803, issue of the Springfield, Massachusetts, *Republican Spy*. The anonymous author

⁶⁸Steiner, *Samuel Seabury*, 125.

⁶⁹Daniel Dulany Addison, *The Life and Times of Edward Bass: First Bishop of Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1897), 83, 126–127.

⁷⁰*The Printed Catalogues of the Harvard College Library 1723–1790*, ed. W. H. Bond and Hugh Amory (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1996), 335.

⁷¹Isaac Backus, *A Church History of New-England, Vol. II: Extending from 1690, to 1784* (Providence, RI: Philip Freeman, 1784), 125–126.

⁷²Thomas Delaune, *A Plea for the Non-Conformists, Shewing the True State of Their Case; and How Far the Conformist's Separation from the Church of Rome, for Their Popish Superstitions, &c. Introduced into the Service of God, Justifies the Non-Conformist's Separation from Them* (Ballston, NY: William Child, 1800), vi, xii–xv, xix, xxi–xxii.

criticized the situation in England, where the government bestowed “peculiar favors upon the Church.” Despite having “fled out of Popery,” the Church of England had maintained the “same persecuting spirit” as the “Church of Rome.” Anyone who doubted this accusation was advised to read Delaune’s “unanswerable Reply” to Benjamin Calamy, which “procured” the former a “lodging in a noisome prison,” where “he and all his family . . . took their flight to another (and we hope a better) world.” Blending revelation and reason, the author argued that, by “thinking for themselves,” Delaune and other Dissenters in England had utilized a gift conferred on them by the “God of Nature.”⁷³ Some American Protestants, however, looked much closer to home for cases of ecclesiastical corruption.

On July 4, 1809, the Congregationalist Church in Sangerfield, New York, was shaken by the suicide of a member, Mrs. King, whose husband, Thomas, along with several others, had been excommunicated by the church council. Their excommunication was the culmination of a feud with some wealthy council members, whom they accused of corruption. These influential laymen had allegedly slandered the character of a prospective minister because he did not share their approval of balls and similar social gatherings. Despite still being a communicant herself, the “melancholy” Mrs. King was convinced that her own excommunication—for which she would “go to hell”—was imminent, leading her to commit suicide. An 1811 work by Joseph Tenny, a separatist, provided an account of the events leading up to the tragedy. In the preface, Tenny invoked Delaune’s *Plea* to show that the plight of the Sangerfield separatists was no different from their ancestors’ separation from the “church of Rome.” Without denying that the “persecuting spirit” witnessed by Delaune was absent in America, Tenny maintained that many of the traditional methods used to silence “dissenters” remained at congregational levels. Here, he was, of course, alluding to his own excommunication.⁷⁴ The belief that corruption and lethargy were sometimes negative side effects of religious freedom was voiced subsequently by one anonymous Dissenter in England, who republished the *Plea* in 1834.

IV. England in the Age of Catholic and Nonconformist Emancipation

The circumstances for Dissenters in England improved radically in 1828, when the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed, enabling them to serve in public office without receiving Anglican communion. The 1834 edition of the *Plea*, published in Chelmsford, Essex, reflected on these changes. This edition was heavily abridged. Unlike all other post-1684 editions, only the original section, containing Delaune’s response to Calamy’s *Discourse*, survived the cut (and this section was condensed). The 1834 edition was also the first post-1706 edition to omit Defoe’s preface. Instead, it began with the anonymous preface, written by one of Delaune’s fellow inmates, which featured in the 1704 edition, but had not been published since 1706. The 1704 preface was preceded by a new preface, in which the anonymous editor happily declared that the “day of legal persecution for religious opinions” had, for the most part, ceased in England. Dissenting readers were reminded that they owed the “State Church” nothing for this change, which had occurred “under God.” The editor hoped, albeit in vain, that the Church of England would soon be “in the same relation

⁷³Republican Spy, 6 September 1803.

⁷⁴[Joseph Tenny], *Persecution in America! Occasioning Suicide!! And the Same Persecution Continued on Others!!! Alias, Sangerfield Suicide or Self-Murder!!: Which Took Place July 4, 1809, on the Wife of Thomas King, with the Subsequent Trials of Her Fellow-Sufferers Under Oppression* (Utica, NY: s.n., 1811), i–iv, 5.

to the state” as the “Congregational or Independent sect.” This hope was, however, joined with a fear that, as the last restrictions against Dissenters were “speedily removed,” the “great principles of nonconformity” would be lost. Entry into the “regenerated brotherhood” was achieved not through invitations to the “monarch’s banqueting hall,” but by walking in the “path of humiliation, of suffering, and of shame, of lowly obedience and unceasing toil.”⁷⁵

It was, therefore, important for emancipated Nonconformists to read Delaune’s treatise as a means of contrasting their “present flourishing condition” with the “tyranny” endured by their “forefathers” at the hands of that “disguised Papist,” Charles II. The editor urged their readers not to be deterred by the “antique dress” in which Delaune’s sentiments were “clothed.” The decision to remove much of the material included in earlier editions was justified on the grounds that these passages described the “peculiar local and temporary circumstances” of Restoration Dissenters, which would only have “perplexed the general reader.” The 1834 edition followed the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829), which removed most of the remaining legal disabilities suffered by Catholics. It was probably because of these reforms that the editor chose to omit the most ardently anti-Catholic aspects of the *Plea*. While clearly critical of Roman Catholicism, the editor despised the dogmatic zeal that had characterized the Reformation. Quoting a recent article by the radical pamphleteer and staunch advocate of Catholic emancipation, William Cobbett, the editor claimed that the Reformation was “effected by violence” stemming from the “wickedest of motives.”⁷⁶

Some, however, denied that Delaune’s apocalyptic anti-Catholicism was an anachronism. An 1845 edition of the *Plea*—published in Manchester by John Gadsby (son of the Baptist pastor, William Gadsby)—simply replicated one of the 1712 London editions, thereby leaving Delaune’s *Image of the Beast* section intact. Clearly, by the mid-nineteenth century, anti-Catholicism remained a powerful cultural and political force in England. The first tentative steps towards Catholic emancipation had occurred during the late eighteenth century, when Catholics were granted freedom of worship under the terms of a 1791 law. Shortly before the passing of this legislation, Thomas Potts, a Roman Catholic divine, had published a work calling for civil liberties to be granted to Catholics in Britain. Since the Reformation, “English Protestants” had “exercised the same rigours” for which they reproached Roman Catholics. More specifically, Protestants had supported their establishment by calling in the “aid of the stake and the gibbet.” Such double standards were, according to Potts, evidenced by Delaune’s “astonishing” account of persecution under Charles II. That Delaune’s virulently anti-Catholic *Plea* was being invoked to justify Catholic toleration is ironic, to say the least.⁷⁷

V. Conclusion

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Thomas Delaune’s story had been relegated to the margins of history. Charles Thompson, an American Baptist minister, sought to remind his denomination of this “scarcely” noticed tale by writing a 457-page novel,

⁷⁵Thomas Delaune, *A Plea for the Nonconformists: In a Letter to Dr. Benjamin Calamy, Upon His Sermon Called “Scrupulous Conscience”* (Chelmsford: Alfred Copland et al., 1834), iii–vi.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, iii, vi, 54. The Cobbett item appeared originally in *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 22 February 1834.

⁷⁷[Thomas Potts], *An Inquiry into the Moral and Political Tendency of the Religion Called Roman Catholic* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson et al., 1790), 69.

entitled *Delaune: The English Baptist Martyr* (1870), which was published in Philadelphia by the American Baptist Publication Society. The novel reproduced brief extracts from the *Plea* and contained five wood-engravings by Van Ingen and Snyder of Philadelphia, which had published numerous abolitionist cartoons before the American Civil War. The predominantly fictional narrative is set against the backdrop of Delaune's imprisonment and death. Much of the story revolves around a campaign, waged by Daniel Defoe, to secure toleration for Dissenters. Defoe succeeds in gaining an audience with Charles II, the central villain in the story, who is portrayed as a debauched crypto-papist. Ultimately, Defoe's appeal to the King leads nowhere (fig. 1).⁷⁸

The best that Defoe can do for the dying Delaune is visit him in his cell. Thompson's greatest feat of poetic license is his depiction of Delaune's "triumphant" death on February 6, 1685, which is witnessed by Defoe. As Defoe departs from Newgate in mourning, he hears word that the King has just died. Defoe responds to the news by declaring, "Jehovah has his sword of retribution drawn . . . the king and the captive standing there side by side; the oppressor and the oppressed; the tenant of the cell and the tenant of the palace; the profligate despot and the martyred Baptist." In fact, as has been shown, Defoe was only able to provide an estimate of when Delaune died (early to mid-1685) in his 1706 preface to the *Plea*. Also, it is not known for certain whether Defoe ever met Delaune, let alone visited him in Newgate. Thompson's embellished novel failed to generate the desired effect, and Delaune's martyrdom continued to be forgotten.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, throughout the "long" eighteenth century, Delaune's *Plea* maintained an enduring influence that transcended denominational and geographical boundaries. This paper has illuminated the ways in which several generations of Dissenters, both in England and America, repurposed the *Plea* for various politico-theological circumstances. Responses from High Church authors, such as Edward Hart and Samuel Johnson, were deemed inadequate by Dissenters, who continued to describe the *Plea* as an "unanswered" text. Before the American Revolution, the *Plea* was used almost exclusively to attack the perceived tyranny of episcopacy. That the *Plea*'s appeal was not limited to Delaune's Baptist descendants is significant because it shows that eighteenth-century Dissenters were sometimes willing to make doctrinal sacrifices if it meant attacking episcopacy. Indeed, by exposing new readers to the *Plea*, Congregationalists and Presbyterians in colonial America were also promoting Delaune's attacks on pedobaptism, with which they disagreed. Clearly, they perceived Delaune's anti-episcopal sentiments to be strong enough to render this sacrifice worthwhile.

By the early nineteenth century, however, this perceived episcopal threat had subsided amid the pluralistic theological landscape of the New Republic. This transition did not, however, prevent American Protestants, such as Joseph Tenny, from looking inwards to their own denominations for cases of tyranny and corruption. Indeed, the Tenny polemic illuminates the changing ways in which the *Plea* was read and invoked as an authority in early America. In nineteenth-century England, the *Plea* was similarly invoked to discourage corruption and lethargy among the recently emancipated

⁷⁸Charles Thompson, *Delaune: The English Baptist Martyr* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1870), 2.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 406–408.



Figure 1. Van Ingen and Snyder, *Defoe's Appeal Before Charles II*, in Charles Thompson, *Delaune: The English Baptist Martyr* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1870), 323.

Dissenters. Also, during this period, Delaune's virulent anti-Catholicism proved to be a divisive issue among Dissenting publishers. While at least one publisher clearly viewed such sentiments as relevant to Victorian society, another saw them as an anachronism, out of place during a period of Catholic emancipation. Ironically, we have seen that the *Plea* was utilized by Thomas Potts to justify the toleration of Catholics, thereby showing that its appeal was not only diverse but sometimes paradoxical too.

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