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Some Separatists

The Martyrs of 1593

R. Tudur Jones and Alan Tovey

**Congregational Studies Conference
Papers 1993**

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Foreword

Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were hanged at Tyburn on 6 April 1593. On the morning of 29 May in the same year, a warrant for the execution of John Penry was hastily drawn up (one of the signatories was John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury). Later that day, Penry was taken to St Thomas-a-Watering (near the present Old Kent Road) and hanged.

In a letter dated 12 June 1593, a Mr William Sterrell, writing to a Mr C. Paget, commented, 'Penry was hanged lately, as two of the principal Brownists, Barrow and Greenwood were hanged before, so that, that sect is in effect, extinguished'. Four hundred years later, about 100 members of that extinguished sect met to hear about the events that led to the martyrdom of these three men, and to consider why it was that they were not prepared to abandon their convictions even though it meant death.

When the centenary of the execution of Barrow and Greenwood and Penry came in 1893, *The Times* regretted that anyone should be concerned at the fate of 'these misguided men'. Whether these men were 'misguided' or whether *The Times* of 1893 was displaying its religious prejudice and ignorance we leave to the readers of these pages to judge. For ourselves we are happy to ascribe to them the words of Hebrews 11:38, 'of whom the world was not worthy'. The pun in the title of this booklet is deliberate. These men were indeed *Some Separatists!*

We are grateful to Dr Tudur Jones and the Rev. Alan Tovey for their knowledge and expertise in setting before us the life and testimony of Barrow, Greenwood and Penry.

Derek Swann

Studies Conference Chairman

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A Reforming Pair—Henry Barrow and John Greenwood

by Alan Tovey

Let no-one be in doubt today that I, so to speak, represent the first course, the *hors d'oeuvre* on today's menu. The main course, along with the dessert, will be provided by Professor Tudur Jones who is by any standard one of the leading authorities on English and Welsh dissent and I have no claim to be associated with him today. Imagine my consternation when, preparing this paper, I happened to be reading Professor Geraint Jenkins' *Protestant Dissenters in Wales 1639–1689*. After speaking of the superb merit of Professor Jones' writings Professor Jenkins says that those writings “represent the fruits of meticulous research ... and a sympathetic but critical appraisal of the subject ... the works of R. Tudur Jones bear the unmistakable stamp of a literary craftsman. He is quite simply the most prolific and important writer on religion in Stuart Wales”.¹

If, therefore, you are in any doubt over the contents of my contribution today you had better check it all out with him. At least I meet him now in what, to me, must be more propitious circumstances, since the last time we met was in an examination room. I was seated across the table from him and was the trembling candidate; he, along with Dr Christopher Haigh, was a careful but merciful examiner.

However, to the matter in hand: *A Reforming Pair – Henry Barrow and John Greenwood*.

Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were fellow-Separatists. Both had come to the reluctant conclusion that the Church of England as administered under the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity passed on the accession of Queen Elizabeth I (in 1558) should be branded a false church – a sham, not real, not true. We could express their conviction in the words of Henry Barrow's most famous and certainly longest writing in which he purported – and here's the title – *A Brief Discovery of the False Church*. The title page carries the date 1590 and bears the text of Ezekiel 16:44 which is given as “As the mother such the daughter is”. Hence Barrow's thesis is evident from the outset: he is going to demonstrate that the Church of England is actually derived from the church of Rome – “As the mother such the daughter is”. John Greenwood, in his conference of 3 April 1590, answers Thomas Sperrin, Rector of St Mary Magdalen, on Milk Street, by castigating the worship

¹ Geraint Jenkins, *Protestant Dissenters in Wales 1639–1689*, University of Wales Press, 1992, p. 7

and the ministry of the state church as “popish”.² It was, of course, a bold claim and not one shared by other radical puritans such as Thomas Cartwright who, almost two decades before had been deprived of his divinity chair at Cambridge for his advocacy of a biblical church order in his lectures to the University students. And certainly not a contention which would have been shared by moderate puritans like Robert Some who seemed more or less content with the main structure of the Church of England and who would be involved in a literary debate on the question with both Henry Barrow and John Penry.

We shall return to Barrow’s *A Brief Discovery of the False Church*.



What do we know about the two men – Barrow and Greenwood? The answer is that we know only the barest details – though some of that we do know is very significant.

Perhaps the most revealing document about Barrow’s background – containing words from his own mouth – is his *Examination* of 19 November, 1586 (that is the date given – though it is actually 1587). He is being interrogated by John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Mullyns, the Archdeacon of London, and Dr Richard Cosin, the Dean of the Court of Arches³ – and the examination takes place at Lambeth. The document is to be found in Volume 3 of *Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts*, edited by Professor Leland H. Carlson. Here then as I say we have a considerable amount of personal information about Barrow. Let me take the details in the order in which they come in the interrogation.

First of all, about Barrow’s Arrest

We discover that he was visiting John Greenwood in the Clink prison; he recounts that the 19th was the Lord’s Day and that between 9 and 10 in the morning he, along with a colleague, went to visit John Greenwood and other brethren in the prison. They had not been there more than a quarter of an hour when Mr Shepherd, the jailer, came up, rebuked Greenwood, “and stayed me, saying he had commandment from his Lord’s grace so to do”. So Barrow, himself, was imprisoned. Mr Shepherd went off to see the Archbishop at Lambeth. He returned at about 1 o’clock, bringing with him two officers. Barrow was put into a boat and taken to Lambeth.⁴

Secondly, we learn about his early training as a lawyer

Let me quote the examination. Archbishop Whitgift is asking a question: “Know you the law of the land?” To which Barrow responds, “Very little, yet was I of

Gray's Inn some years."⁵ In fact we know that Barrow became a member of Gray's Inn on 21 November, 1576.

Thirdly, we learn about his university career

During the course of the examination Barrow refers to a passage of Scripture which, by the way, he has difficulty in finding. Whitgift asks that he should cite it in Greek or Latin. Barrow comments: "It might be if he had asked me that question when I knew him in Cambridge, I should then have answered him." To which Whitgift retorts: "Were you then of Cambridge?" and also enquires to what college there Barrow had belonged. Barrow had become a fellow-commoner at Clare College on 22 November, 1566, and graduated B.A. in 1569/70. Whitgift himself was born about 1530, matriculated at Pembroke College in May 1550, became Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in 1563, Regius Professor of Divinity and Master of Trinity College in 1567.⁶ So when Barrow was an undergraduate at Cambridge, Whitgift had occupied senior academic and administrative positions there.

Fourthly, we learn about Barrow's Occupation

Here's the record of the exchange. The Archbishop asks:

	"Of what occupation are you?"
Barrow	"A Christian."
Archbishop	"So are we all" – [a comment which, by the way, shows Whitgift's concept of the state church, and one which Barrow strongly denies.]
Archbishop	"But are you a minister?"
Barrow	"No."
Archbishop	"A schoolmaster?"
Barrow	"No." [It turns out that Barrow comes from family of the gentry. So the questioning proceeds.]
Archbishop	"Have you lands?"
Barrow	"No, nor fees."
Archbishop	"How live you?"
Barrow	"By God's goodness, and my friends."

Finally, we learn a little about his family and his native place

The Archbishop asks:

‘Have you a father alive?’
Barrow ‘Yea.’
Archbishop ‘Where dwelleth he, in Norfolk?’
Barrow ‘Yea.’
Archbishop ‘Where dwell you – in London?’
Barrow ‘No’.

So, the examination draws to a close and Barrow is taken from Lambeth to the Gatehouse, another of London’s prisons.

Let’s pull things together and add one or two other relevant details. What do we know of Barrow?

He came from a Norfolk gentry family. In fact, from Shipdam, near Thetford. He had well-connected relatives – Lord Bacon (d. 1624), possibly Bishop John Aylmer of London (1521-1594) and even, very remotely, Lord Burghley, who achieved high offices of state under Elizabeth. Barrow’s father was called Thomas, and Henry was the third of eight children, five sons and three daughters. According to Professor Carlson’s calculations he was born about 1551. We know he died – was executed – on 6 April 1593. He was educated at Clare College, Cambridge, where he perhaps imbibed habits which, later, during a period in London “earned for him the reputation of being ‘licentious and a gamester.’”⁷ (When Dr Caius, founder of Caius College, visited Cambridge in 1558 this is what he discovered: “The undergraduates no longer ‘spent their pocket money on books’; their minds were no longer given to study. Money and mind alike were ‘devoted to dress and the adornment of their chambers. They wandered about the town, frequenting taverns and wine-shops; their nether garments were of gaudy colours; they gambled and ran into debt.’ And Clare Hall [now Clare College] is noted as a specifically troublesome haunt of misrule”.⁸

Six years after leaving Cambridge Barrow became a member of Gray’s Inn becoming a member in 1576. He was, however, never called to the Bar. Certainly city life attracted him and he never seemed to be in short supply of money. He became a courtier but if he had hoped to win the Queen’s favour in this he did not succeed; others did succeed by this very route for Elizabeth “however serious in her statecraft, was given over to vanity in social life”. She rewarded flattery or appearances and manners in those around her. So Christopher Hatton, a young law student, earned the Queen’s attention by his fine dancing. He left the law, became a courtier, and in due time was advanced to the position of Lord Chancellor.⁹

Barrow was a man of strong emotions. When he did a thing he threw himself heart and soul into it. Just as he had been the worst of sinners so he became the most earnest of saints.¹⁰

A Reforming Pair—Henry Barrow and John Greenwood

So, how was Barrow converted? F.J. Powicke puts the date of this as about 1580-1581;¹¹ and he quotes this account from Alexander Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*:

“Walking in London one Lord’s day with one of his companions, he heard a preacher very loud as they passed by the church. Upon which Mr Barrow said to his consort, ‘Let us go in and hear what this man saith that is thus earnest.’ ‘Tush,’ saith the other, ‘What! shall we go to hear a man talk?’ But in he went, and sat down. And the minister was vehement in reprovng sin, and sharply applied the judgements of God against the same, and it should seem, touched him to the quick in such things as he was guilty of, so as God set it home to his soul, and began to work for his repentance and conviction thereby, for he was so stricken as he could not be quiet, until, by conference with godly men, and further hearing of the Word, with diligent reading and meditation, God brought peace to his soul and conscience, after much humiliation of heart and reformation of life. So he left the Court and retired himself to a private life, sometime in the country and sometime in the city, giving himself to study and reading of the Scriptures and other good works very diligently; and being missed at Court by his consorts and acquaintances, it was quickly hinted abroad that Barrow was turned Purita.¹²

Evidently, then, after his conversion, Barrow “ceased to live permanently in London, although he might return now and then on a visit.” His “means of living were derived mainly from his friends, i.e., his kindred (particularly his father).” We may therefore conclude that his family had not disowned him.¹³

As for John Greenwood our earliest information about him is as a student at Cambridge. He was at Corpus Christi some 10 years later than Barrow was at Clare College. Greenwood became a Sizar at Corpus on 18 March 1577/8 and graduated B.A. in 1581. He was ordained in the Church of England and was beneficed, in turn, in Lincolnshire and Norfolk, but, as he tells us in his *Examination* in March 1588/9, he repudiated Anglican orders.¹⁴ He became a chaplain to the puritan Lord Rich (Rich’s home was Rochford Hall in Essex) and was among 21 Separatists who were arrested and committed to the Clink for taking part in private conventicles in London.¹⁵ We have already recounted how Barrow now visited Greenwood in the prison, and was himself arrested.

In July 1592 some Separatists, including Greenwood, were freed from prison into the custody of “responsible citizens”.¹⁶ The Separatist church was organised in September of that year, with Francis Johnson appointed as pastor and John Greenwood as teacher.¹⁷ John Penry arrived from Scotland, having recently embraced a thorough Separatist position, in the autumn, and he and Greenwood preached in early December (possibly 3 December) in a Garden House at Duke’s Place, near Aldgate.¹⁸ Greenwood was arrested again, along with Francis Johnson, on 6 December 1592.

After further examinations Barrow and Greenwood were convicted of a felony under the Statute 23 Elizabeth Chapter 2 on 23 March 1592/3. This law was “An Act against seditious words and rumours uttered against the Queen’s most excellent Majesty”.¹⁹ Clause 4 of this Statute provided that any person who shall “write, print or set forth any manner of book . . . or writing, containing any false seditious and slanderous matter to the defamation of the Queen’s Majesty” will be deemed to have committed a felony and “shall suffer such pains of death and forfeiture as in case of felony is used, without any benefit of clergy or sanctuary . . .”²⁰

Barrow and Greenwood then had to endure two agonising reprieves. In between times further conferences and interrogations took place; on 26 March, Lord Egerton, the Attorney General, wrote: “I have spent this whole afternoon at a fruitless, idle conference, and am now returned both weary and weak.”²¹ Barrow made a last, desperate appeal to a kinswoman of some influence, entreating her to intervene. This was Anne Russell and the date was 4/5 April, 1593.²² “We do not know,” avers Professor Carlson, “if she interceded for Barrow with Queen Elizabeth.”²³ F.J. Powicke is more optimistic: “One can hardly doubt that the lady was moved by so piteous an appeal to do her best. But if she did she failed” and on the 6 April, just a couple of days later, Barrow and Greenwood were escorted from Newgate, their London prison, to Tyburn near modern-day Hyde Park and Marble Arch and there executed.

But how did Barrow and Greenwood embrace the Separatist position? Were they influenced by Robert Browne who, in 1585 and much to their disgust, had returned to the Anglican fold after a very forthright stand for Separatism? About this the scholars disagree: Dr B.R. White, a modern historian of the early Separatist movement,²⁴ and Professor Tudur Jones²⁵ say “No”; certainly, Barrow and Greenwood denied that they owed anything to the influence of Browne. But Dr Powicke brings some cogent reasons for thinking that Browne did influence them. However, it may well be that Barrow and Greenwood had reached their position simply by a fresh study of the Scriptures or had been influenced, as Dr White reckons, by an earlier Separatist tradition. Greenwood, Dr Powicke would have us believe, influenced Barrow in the direction of Separatism.²⁶



While “much is unknown about the two men, their reasons for separating from the Church of England . . . were made very clear.” So records Dr Barrie White.²⁷ Again, he writes, “Barrow’s position . . . had a twofold foundation. On the one hand, he lived in a situation of total apostasy, on the other, there was the clear command of God implicit in the New Testament revelation to rise and rebuild.”²⁸

The aim of reformation, says Henry Barrow, (and interestingly in the light of his virtual wholesale condemnation of the Church of England that is the word he uses), is to produce a church fashioned according to the “primitive pattern of God’s Word”. He grants that reformation of the church is the Prince’s duty, just as much as it is the ruler’s task to reform the commonwealth. But, and here is the Separatist distinctive, the Prince does not have the power to restrain either the church or the individual from implementing the will of God according to their several callings. Nor may the Prince command things for the church which are clearly wrong.²⁹ Hence, in a significant move, Barrow distinguishes between the ecclesiastical power and the civil power of the ruler.

So let me introduce you to some of these themes by an analysis of some of Barrow and Greenwood’s writings. Then, finally, in a brief conclusion, I shall attempt to recall some of the main features of their teachings.

First of all then Barrow’s *A Breefe Sum of Our Profession*

This according to Professor Carlson should be dated around 1587-1588 and is thus one of the earliest of the Barrowist manifestos and only slightly later than Barrow’s *Four Causes of Separation*.³⁰

A Breefe Sum of our Profession is a one page document which Barrow reproduced in his larger work *A Brief Summe of the Causes of Our Separation, and of Our Purposes in Practice ... A Brief Summe of the Causes of Our Separation* was written in 1588 and printed in 1591 and 1605 as a part of the book, *A Plaine Refutation*.³¹

The first five articles of *A Breefe Sum of our Profession* set out the Barrowists’ aims. Article 1 is a general statement in which Barrow says that above everything else they simply seek God’s peace and protection and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Then four things are specified: they seek to worship God as He has commanded in his Word; they want to be in “fellowship and communion” with God’s “faithful and obedient servants” and to enter with them into covenant with the Lord – and thereafter to elect under the Holy Spirit’s guidance their own ministers and officers in accordance with the prescription of Scripture; all the laws and regulations of their church, they claim, will be established by Christ “without altering, changing, innovating, wresting, or leaving out any of them”. And they say, finally, in a prophetic word that by the Holy Spirit’s enabling they are prepared to give their lives in the cause of this faith and order.

Only then do they go on to the negative aspects of their separation – that is, the criticism of the Church of England.

Those criticisms are expressed in four points: they deplore the Anglican form of worship, namely, worship following the Prayer Book – it is “the invention of

man, even of that man of sin” – the reference of course being to 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and the accusation being that Anglican worship originated with the Pope and with the Roman Catholic church; in the second place they condemn the mixed membership of the parish churches which consisted of worthy and unworthy communicants (the Separatists, we may add, held that people, including the Monarch, should become church members only on a credible profession of faith); again, the ministry of the established church is “false and anti-Christian” (the Separatists believed that neither the form of that ministry nor the manner of its appointment by the benefice system were biblical); then, finally, the system of discipline which operates in the parish churches is nothing but contrary to the will of Christ and ungodly (again we may explain that that system functioned by all manner of fines and penalties imposed by spiritual courts). This last criticism was a common puritan complaint.

These negatives may be summarised by saying that the Barrowists complained about the worship, membership, ministry and discipline of the Church of England and Professor Carlson rightly comments: “Throughout the writings of Barrow and Greenwood, these ideas constitute a central core around which they develop their arguments.”³²

So, if we fully grasp these points we will understand what the Barrowists’ protestation was all about.

Secondly, the *Four Causes of Separation*

This work is contained in the Giles Wiggenton manuscript in the Congregational Library³³ and is the earliest extant writing by Barrow (for the background to it see Carlson³⁴).

The date is prior to Barrow’s arrest in November 1587 – and approximately the spring or summer of 1587. Of it Professor Carlson says, “It is a clarion call for the people of England to forsake the Church of England”.³⁵ And he continues: “The internal threat of Barrowist Separatism thus begins in 1587, one year before the external danger from the Spanish Armada, six years after the Brownists had emigrated to Middelburg, and two years after Robert Browne had made his submission to Archbishop Whitgift”.³⁶

“What occasioned the treatise?” asks Professor Carlson. And he supplies his own answer. It was Barrow’s “desire to see his concept of the New Testament model of the primitive church realised in England” which is the “underlying cause, but the occasion of this treatise may have been a letter, a manuscript treatise, a sermon, or a request to have some doubts resolved. The treatise is a refutation of, a defence against, and a denunciation of, the tolerating preachers”, particularly Presbyterians such as Thomas Cartwright, William Charke, William Floyd (Fludd?)

and Giles Wiggenton himself.³⁷ That is to say, like Robert Browne, Henry Barrow wanted “Reformation without tarrying for any”.

The four causes of separation are itemised:

- “1. The false manner of worshipping the true God...
- “2. The profane and ungodly people received into and retained in the bosom and body of their churches...
- “3. The false and antichristian ministry imposed upon their churches...
- “4. The false and antichristian government wherewith their churches are ruled”.³⁸

Under the fourth principal cause what Barrow attacks is the unwillingness of the Church of England to reform itself without the magistrate’s permission: “To the fourth principal cause they allege many slight and lame excuses, as that the fault is not in them but in the civil magistrate that these disorders and bondages remain”.³⁹ But Barrow protests; Christ has left sufficient power to His church to do its own work, without, if need be, reference to the secular authority.

Barrow does not prevaricate; he introduces his treatise thus: “Four principal and weighty causes why everyone that knoweth God and acknowledgeth the Lord Jesus, or seeketh salvation in him, ought speedily without any delay to forsake those disordered and ungodly and unholy synagogues, and the false teachers of these times as they generally stand in England”.⁴⁰

Thirdly, A Brief Discovery of the False Church

This was Barrow’s most significant work which was printed in Holland by February 1590/1591. It was from it that extracts were quoted at his trial to find him guilty of making slanderous statements. Ironically, it was Robert Stokes who helped finance its publication: he was later to forsake the Separatist cause and consequently suffered excommunication. George Gifford, the Presbyterian, was to reply to this work of Barrow’s in *A Short Reply* (1591).

In his “To The Reader” Barrow compares the lamentable state of the nation in his day with that of the Jews in the days of the young Josiah and in the time of Jeremiah; and as Josiah rent his clothes on account of such defection from the ways of God, and as the situation moved Jeremiah to “such deep and extreme lamentations”, so Barrow is constrained to say that all true Christians should sorrow and lament the current spiritual desolation. But, he says, what is the response of the leaders of the church? It is bitterly to persecute all Christ’s servants who call for a restitution (reformation is actually his word) of the true ways, and obedience to the ordinance of Christ.⁴¹

Some privately call for reformation and bring suits to Parliament to carry it out; “But alas, private sorrow will not help public calamity”.⁴² And since no-one else, he claims, is taking up the battle, he will do it, unequipped and unworthy though he feels himself to be. His justification for the task – as though he needed one – is that Christ’s faith is not tied to the Pharisees’ lips or the Rabbis’ chair. He has eschewed all humane arts and learning (wherewith the whole world is now so deeply delighted and wholly carried away) – typically Barrow! – and simply attempted to convey the truth taught by God’s Holy Spirit; and it is by that standard that he wishes to be judged.⁴³ The reader must pardon the rambling nature of the book, an admission over which, Barrow says, he takes no pleasure; but three reasons are provided by way of mitigation.

1. The subject is a diffuse one: after all he is trying to remedy Babel, so what can you expect at the start but confusion!
2. His own lack of skill in handling the subject.
3. The circumstances in which it was written. Remember, Barrow is in the Fleet Prison – though we perhaps ought to recall also that many a good book has come from a prison cell. However, Barrow could do no more, he says, than write a page at a time, and page by page his manuscript was laboriously smuggled out.

Try writing a book, Barrow as good as says, when you are not even allowed to glance back at what you wrote a few pages previously. Try and offer an orderly presentation in such circumstances. Moreover, there was no opportunity to retract or revise what he had written, once each page had gone. But then, having won our sympathy, Barrow irresistibly goes savagely on to the attack: “But now remaineth the very argument and subject of this book, which of all other will be most disliked, and held most odious and heinous of all sorts of men, who will never endure to hear the magnificence of the false church, wherein they have so long been nourished in so great delight, reprov’d and cast down”.⁴⁴ Sadly, the church and her leaders have been seduced, so that instead of heeding rebuke and instruction, they persecute those who witness to the truth, falsely accusing them of treason, schism and heresy. “But unto all the power, learning, deceit, rage of the false church, we oppose that little book of God’s word, which (as the light) shall reveal her, as the fire consume her, as a heavy millstone shall press her and all her children, lovers, partakers, and abettors, down to hell: which book, we willingly receive, as judge of all our controversies, knowing that all men shall one day (and that ere long) be judged by the same: by this book whoso [whosoever] is found in error or transgression, let them have sentence accordingly”.⁴⁵

That last sentence brings to us the essence and tone of Barrow’s book. In *A Brief Discovery of the False Church* the four causes of separation, as we have

encountered them elsewhere, are still discernible, as Barrow criticises the ministry, the sacraments and the constituency of the Church of England. It is not merely a diatribe; there is much argumentation and reasoning; but the tone is unquestionably denunciatory, and Barrow will urge, rather drastically, that not only should true Christians leave this false church, but even the buildings themselves should be rased to the ground lest they draw us again to Popery.⁴⁶

And finally, A True Description Out of the Word of God, of the Visible Church

A True Description was the first Barrowist publication to be printed⁴⁷ – late 1589 or early 1589/90. The work has variously been attributed to Henry Barrow, Francis Johnson and John Penry, but as Professor Carlson points out, the latter two were not Separatists in 1589. The title may have been suggested by Dr Robert Some's *A Godly Treatise* of 1588. That book consists of 9 points, the ninth of which is "The Church of England is the Visible Church of Christ".⁴⁸ So, to Barrow's description of the visible church.

What It Is. There is only "one church, called in one hope, joined in one profession, guided by one rule, even the word of the most high". Barrow goes on: "This church as it is universally understood, containeth in it all the elect of God that have been, are, or shall be. Being considered more particularly, as it is seen in this present world, it consisteth of a company and fellowship of faithful and holy people gathered (together) in the name of Christ Jesus, their only king, priest, and prophet, worshipping him aright, being peaceably and quietly governed by his officers and laws, keeping the unity of faith in the bond of peace and love unfeigned". Barrow then proceeds to pile up the descriptions of the church which are to be found in the Scriptures – appropriately, the work is replete with numerous biblical references.⁴⁹

How It Is Governed. In typically Reformed manner the ministries of the church are pastors, teachers, governors (or elders), deacons and, separately, relievers (or widows). The *pastor* is to teach the Word of God in a way which delves into the very souls of the hearers diagnosing their spiritual diseases and prescribing and applying the cure of God's truth. The *teacher* is more concerned with educating the congregation in theology. The *elders* are to assist the pastor and teacher in the right ordering of the church. They are also to watch that the officers perform their duties, without invading their prerogatives. *Deacons* are to receive the church collections, distribute them to needy members and use them to support the ministers. Note, by the way, the implication here that the congregation is to be responsible for the financial support of its ministers. The *relievers* are to minister to the sick and infirm and show an example to the younger women. It is the

congregation, however, which appoints and, when appropriate, ordains the officers; it is also the congregation which, ultimately, exercises discipline. These officers thus serve the congregation which is described as “a most humble, meek, obedient, faithful and loving people”.⁵⁰

Its Privileges and Responsibilities. Here Barrow employs a military metaphor. “Thus, this holy army of saints, is marshalled here in earth by these officers, under the conduct of their glorious emperor Christ, that victorious Michael. Thus it marcheth in this most heavenly order, and gracious array, against all enemies both bodily and ghostly. Peaceable in itself as Jerusalem, terrible unto them as an army with banners, triumphing over their tyranny with patience, their cruelty with meekness, and over death itself with dying”.⁵¹ Barrow goes on to outline the church’s disciplinary procedures as they are to be found in the gospels and epistles. When all other admonitions fail to bring the offender to repentance the congregation, in a prayerful spirit, is to proceed to excommunication. Thereafter the church is to treat the disobedient person as a heathen and to abstain from all normal social contact with him “unless it be such as of necessity must needs, as his wife, his children and family”.⁵² Yet even they are not to join with him in spiritual exercises. Even so, the church is not to treat him as an enemy but as a brother and should continue to admonish him and to pray earnestly for his restoration.

So Barrow draws his treatise to a close. One of his concluding paragraphs sets this high aspiration for the life of the congregation: “Moreover, in this church is an especial care had by every member thereof, of offences: the strong ought not to offend the weak, nor the weak to judge the strong; but all graces here are given to the service and edification of each other in love and long-suffering”.⁵³

That is the Barrowist ideal for the church: it is a custodian, a school, a family, and this is perhaps the appropriate point on which to end this lecture. However, the end is not quite yet!

The picture of the Barrowist church has emerged, and with this I will close!

It will be derived from the New Testament exclusively; it will consist of professing believers who have repented and believed in response to gospel preaching; such believers will have covenanted with each other and with God; this church will offer Spirit-directed worship free from the restrictions of the Prayer Book (and the Lectionary); in it the members will, before God, exercise ultimate authority (though governed by officers they have elected); the members will be responsible for the maintenance of the ministry and not depend upon the support of the state; although the secular power has the right to reform the church, the church is not bound by the ruler.

So there we take our leave of *A Reforming Pair – Henry Barrow and John Greenwood* and eagerly await instruction on my fellow-Welshman and great hero, John Penry.

A Reforming Pair—Henry Barrow and John Greenwood

John Penry

Prof. R. Tudur Jones

John Penry first became known to the public in England as an ardent Welshman and his name has always been linked in a unique way with his patriotism. He was born in 1563. But where? That is now a moot question. The Congregational historian, John Waddington, gave currency to the tradition that John Penry was born at Cefn-brith in the parish of Llangamarch in Breconshire. It is an oral tradition and there is no firm confirmation of this tradition. Professor Geraint Gruffydd has unearthed manuscript evidence which suggests that Penry was a Glamorgan man. So we leave the question of Penry's birthplace unresolved. As a result we can say nothing about his early education.¹

We are on firmer ground when we consider his university education. By 11 June 1580 he was at Peterhouse College, Cambridge. The principal of the college was Dr Andrew Perne, a man remarkable for the facility with which he changed his religious opinions to match the changing fashions of the time. He was a Protestant during the reign of Edward VI, a Roman Catholic during the reign of Mary Tudor and a Protestant once again when Elizabeth became queen. We have no means of knowing whether he had any influence on Penry. In a confession penned shortly before his death, Penry says 'that the Lord vnder her gracious raigne brought me vnto the knowledge of his Ghospell'.² Thomas Nashe, a contemporary of Penry's at Cambridge and a scurrilous pamphleteer subsequently, says that Penry was 'as arrant a Papist as ever came out of Wales' and that it was 'by conversing with French men neare Christes Colledge, of a Papist hee became a Brownist'.³ What Nashe writes must always be taken with considerable reservations. Some historians dismiss this story about Penry without more ado but it is not impossible that he was still a Catholic when he went up to Cambridge and that he underwent evangelical conversion there but there is no evidence that at this point he became a disciple of the Congregational pioneer, Robert Browne. That he became a committed Puritan is beyond doubt.

John Penry graduated B.A. in February 1584 but in the following August his name disappears from the college records. He was away for fourteen months and although there is no proof of it, he may well have spent the time at home in Wales. He took up residence again on 2 October 1585 and remained at Peterhouse for seven months. By 20 June 1586 he had migrated to St Alban's Hall, Oxford, (merged later with Merton College), and in July he graduated M.A. at that university.

So Penry, now twenty-three years of age, a graduate of both universities, was ready to start his career. What form would it take?

Puritanism

Let us pause for a moment to consider the religious and social context of John Penry's labours. He soon became a significant figure in the Puritan movement.

What was Puritanism? It took many forms, so many that historians have had some difficulty in agreeing on a standard definition of the word.⁴ The difficulty is not so acute in the age of Elizabeth as in the age of Oliver Cromwell. Briefly, Puritans were people who felt that the Protestant Reformation as embodied in the Church of England did not go far enough. They felt that it fell short of the standards set out in the New Testament. The movement was a dynamic one and it did not confine itself to purely religious activities. It was vigorously represented in the House of Commons and since the Church of England had been given shape by parliamentary acts, they felt that it was only by suitable legislation that it could be further reformed. And that meant political activity and a political activity that was frowned upon by Queen Elizabeth and her government. The name usually given to the type of church government that the majority of Puritans favoured is 'Presbyterianism' because they wished to set up a system of presbyteries and general conferences to displace government by bishops. And Puritanism also had a social dimension in that many sections of the gentry were keen supporters of it not least because it would give them a stronger voice in the government of the Church. It was to this movement that young Penry gave his allegiance when he came down from university.

Penry's centre of operations for much of his brief career was Northamptonshire. Since Penry has sometimes been portrayed as a lone agitator, it is helpful to say something about the social context of his early public career. In addition, his boldness, which sometimes appears as foolhardiness, becomes more explicable when we realise that he was in direct or indirect contact with some very influential figures in the Elizabethan establishment. He may have assumed that they would shield him from harassment by the state authorities; if so his trust was misplaced. But at least we can achieve a fuller understanding of his attitudes and actions if we pause to glance at the men sympathetic to Puritanism in Northamptonshire and the diocese of Peterborough which includes the county.

Sir Walter Mildmay (1520?-89), Chancellor of the Exchequer and the founder of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, was a mild Puritan.⁵ More committed was Sir Richard Knightley (1533-1615), the squire of Fawsley. He was several times elected an M.P. and married as his second wife Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, Protector during the minority of Edward VI.⁶ The

powerful Earl of Leicester (1532?-1588) was partial to Puritanism and together with Knightley showed an active interest in the founding of the quasi-Presbyterian discipline at Northampton.⁷ Nor must we forget Job Throckmorton (c.1545-1601), Penry's chief patron, who lived over the boundary at Haseley in Warwickshire.⁸ And others besides Knightley had connections with such influential people as Sir Christopher Hatton and William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief minister. At the same time there were less distinguished people who were to play a part in Penry's life, such as Roger Wigston and his wife, Henry Sharpe, the bookbinder, Giles Wiggington of Oundle and, of course, the daughter of Henry Godley, Eleanor, of Northampton whom Penry married on 5 September 1588 at All Saints' Church.⁹ And in the county generally there were amongst the gentry people of strong convictions who proved to be willing listeners to the Puritan preachers.¹⁰

And what were these Puritan preachers doing?

The Puritans of Northamptonshire were not content to wait patiently until parliament passed laws to allow them to put their ideas into practice. They were exceedingly active. They made generous use of institutions called 'prophesyings'. These had nothing to do with foretelling the future! We would recognise them as a cross between a Bible class, a devotional meeting and a discussion group. Of course, for people of Presbyterian convictions, they would also be presbyteries in embryo. They had long been popular on the Continent, in places like Zurich and Strasbourg. They were intended to be a means for bringing ministers together and enriching their knowledge of the Bible. The man who was chiefly responsible for initiating the experiment in Northampton was Percival Wiburn, who had been an exile during Queen Mary's reign and who was intimate with such leaders as Miles Coverdale, Alexander Nowel (the Dean of St Paul's), Laurence Humphrey and Thomas Sampson when they attempted in 1565 to persuade the Church Commissioners to relax the rules enforcing the wearing of what they considered to be popish garments in church.¹¹

Wiburn founded the prophesying at Northampton on 5 June 1571 with strict rules of procedure to ensure order and dignity at the meetings. The bishop of Peterborough at the time, Edmund Scambler, objected to this activity and withdrew Wiburn's licence as town preacher. The Earl of Leicester was displeased and his intervention secured a respite for Wiburn. But the bishop was not deflected from his intention to suppress this activity and he began to eject disobedient ministers from their parishes. Nevertheless, the Puritans were not discouraged. They continued their activities and by the end of the century some three dozen parishes were being described as Puritan ones.¹² Similarly, in the neighbouring county of Nottingham 38 parishes had enjoyed a Puritan ministry by 1600.¹³ In fact, despite the attempts of Archbishop John Whitgift and others to suppress the Presbyterian movement, its protagonists became more insistent. In 1587 a presbytery was

organised at Northampton and it contained at least eighteen ministers and some laymen. Three presbyterian conferences were organised to cover the county to which some 113 ministers belonged.¹⁴ John Penry himself was a member of the Northampton presbytery. Amidst all this nonconforming activity he must have felt that the Presbyterian campaign could only culminate in complete success. That would enable us to account for his fervent polemics in support of it.

On to the Public Stage

Penry returned to Wales to prepare his first personal contribution to the great debate about the religious condition of the country. It was to be a book in the form of a petition submitted to the House of Commons. What was rather uncommon about it was that it dealt with the religious condition of Wales. But then, the Puritan movement took a lively interest in local affairs and was assiduous in gathering detailed information that would illustrate the predicament of the Church of England.¹⁵ That Penry hoped to attract the attention of the Queen is shown by the title of his book,

A Treatise containing the Aequity of an Humble Supplication which is to be exhibited vnto hir Gracious Maiestie, and this High Court of Parliament...

It was printed by Joseph Barnes at Oxford and on sale at Toby Cooke's bookshop in St Paul's Churchyard, London. It is dated 1587.

That year the House of Commons was in session from 15 February to 23 March. Penry had intended a longer treatise but in order to present it during that session, he had to abbreviate it.¹⁶ The debate on the *Aequity* began on the floor of the House on 28 February. It was opened by Edward Dounlee, a Buckinghamshire man who was also the squire of Abercynfor in the parish of Llandyfaelog in Carmarthenshire, of which county he was the member of Parliament. He was one of those who, with the blessing of the bishop of St David's, Marmaduke Middleton, had taken some measures to alleviate the spiritual hunger in west Wales.¹⁷ Dounlee was supported by Job Throckmorton. The previous day he had pressed the Puritan case for adopting the Genevan service book and introducing presbyterianism into the Church of England. He had said bitter things about the condition of the Church.

'Of all the deformities in our Church', he said, 'the foulest, the most shameful and unworthiest of all is...our dumb ignorant and unlearned ministry...If I were asked what is the bane of the Church and commonwealth...a thousand times, I must say the dumb ministry. I mean our bare reading ministry'.

It is little wonder that a man who could speak in that vein should prove later one of Penry's closest allies! The Queen and her ministers were deeply offended by his speech and he had to apologise to Lord Burghley on 3 April 1587.¹⁸

If things went badly for Throckmorton, they were even more threatening for Penry. The Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, issued writs to confiscate all copies of the *Aequity* and to arrest Penry. He was examined by the Court of High Commission, the supreme disciplinary body in religious matters. As was usual in that court, no formal indictment was presented to Penry before he appeared but the Archbishop, so Penry related later, accused him 'not onely to be a factious slanderer of her Majesties government; but also to haue published flat treason and heresie'.¹⁹ The heresy to which the greatest exception was taken was to maintain that preaching was the only usual means of salvation. John Aylmer, the bishop of London, first said so during the hearing and Penry sought to defend his view by quoting a number of Scriptures. It seems that the argument among the bishops became somewhat heated and that was no wonder since there were many bishops in the land who would agree with Penry. In the end Thomas Cooper, the bishop of Winchester, proclaimed that it was indeed a damned heresy. Penry replied that it was a heresy which he was prepared to defend with his life. The Archbishop turned on him severely and said, 'Thou shalt recant it as a heresy'. 'Nay,' said Penry, 'never so long as I live, God willing'.

This account of his interrogation before the High Commission is very revealing. It shows in a vivid way what kind of treatment was meted out to offenders who appeared before it. It was a very unpleasant experience, not least because the High Commission did not adhere to the legal principles that governed the Common Law courts of the land. And the account also reveals of what stuff young Penry was made. He was not easily silenced and he was not given to the use of crafty diplomacy. In fact, he never learnt the lesson that bold confrontation is not the only way in which his cause could be best served.

There was not much that the High Commission could do. Parliament had accepted the *Aequity* and it had been printed and published in accordance with the restrictive laws of the day. So after a month in custody, Penry was released.

What then did Penry write in the *Aequity* to cause such offence? We need to remind ourselves that he was firmly committed to the view that it was the business of the State to reform religion. That meant that if there were scandals or deficiencies in the Church, then the responsibility for allowing them to continue devolved upon the State and that meant not only Parliament but the Queen, the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. It was this last consideration that explains why Penry could be accused by Whitgift and others of treason. He says hard things about the Queen. The lack of teaching ministers may well lead people to complain that there has been no improvement during Elizabeth's reign. Her

apologists, of course, may say that the Queen has no wish to deprive anyone of religion. But if she continues to neglect her duty people will say that she did not wish other people to profess the same religion as her and they may even say that she is a Protestant merely to enjoy the wealth of the monasteries. This was very dangerous stuff, although it is presented as no more than a possibility.

The bulk of the treatise is taken up with his discussion of the religious condition of Wales. He wrote,

For our estate is such, that we haue not one in some score of our parishes, that hath a sauing knowledge. Thousands there be of our people that know Iesus Christ to be neither God nor man, king, priest nor prophet: o desolate and forlorne condition! yea almost that neuer heard of him...The rest of our people are either such as neuer think of anie religion true or false, plainly mere Atheists, or stark blinded with superstition...Hence flow our swarmes of southsaiers, and enchanters, such as will not stick openly to professe that they walke, on Tuesdaies, and Thursdaies at nights, with the fairies, of whom they brag themselues to have knowledge...

Ignorance is so prevalent that people have the most misguided ideas about God. They ascribe cruelty to God the Father because he so severely punished his Son, but they speak of Jesus Christ as 'a fine fellow'. Many of the outrageous customs of the country Penry blames on Catholicism.

There be many sinnes essential almost vnto our nation. Profaning the name of God in common talk is prodigious. 40 affirmations or negations will bring thirty oathes out of a great many. Some shires in South wales haue gotten them an ignominious name by this sin...What a hand we haue had in adultery and fornication, the great number of illegitimate and base born among vs do testify.

In the introduction to the *Aequity*, Penry complains that his fellow countrymen are ignorant of the significance of preaching,

My brethren for the most part know not what preaching meaneth, much lesse think the same necessarie for saluation. Though they grant it needeful, they think it sufficient to heare one sermon perhaps in al their life.

But the future of Protestantism itself is put in jeopardy,

as long as the Parliament wil permitte Non-residences, impropriate liuinges, swarmes of vngodlie ministers, the insolent, and tyrannicall proceedinges of some, ioined with pomp too too vnreasonable, to keep out a learned and godlie ministerie, by whose means the Lord Iesus would recouer his owne againe²⁰.

What then is the remedy? It is well to appreciate how seriously Penry (like other Puritans) considered the need for reform. He sums up his petition by pressing Parliament,

to regard the lamentable and wofull estate of vs your poore subjects and brethren, which liue at this day altogither without the knowledge of a sauing God, because we have not teaching Ministers among vs, & that some order may be taken by your Majesty and the estate, whereby wee may bee freed from that destroying grosse darckenesse of ignorance, wherein we nowe are bewrapped to the woe of our souls for euer...21

So what practical measures does he suggest? In general, says Penry,

...speedie prouiding vnto vs such pastors, as may feede vs with the food of life, the pure word of God, and bring vs home vnto the only Lord of pastors, & shepherds, the Lord Iesus.

More specifically, absenteeism amongst the clergy must be stopped,

Non-residencies haue cut the throte of our Church. Some that neuer preached haue three Church liuings. Many of our liuings are possessed by students...who neuer come amongst vs, vnles it be to fleerce. This I hope will be tolerated no longer...²²

But it is not sufficient to have ministers who reside in their parishes. They must be 'teaching ministers'. 'Teaching ministers' is a crucial demand by Penry. What he means is ministers who preach, that is ministers who in their sermons (and otherwise) expound the Scriptures. Merely reading the services set out in the Book of Common Prayer is insufficient. Salvation is mediated by the preached word. He put the point in eloquent words,

The way then to procure that the people of Wales maie cry with a loud voice, Woorthie is the lambe, to take the booke, & open the seales thereof, because he was killed, and hath redeemed vs to God out of euery kindred, and tongue, people, and nation, is to bestow the worde preached vpon them.²³

The provision of a teaching ministry is therefore a crucial necessity. Without it a whole nation is in peril of eternal damnation. Where are such ministers to be found? Obviously they must be Welsh-speaking. After all it was one of the principles of the Protestant Reformation that preaching as well as church services should be 'understanded of the people' and 99% of the Welsh people knew no English. Were they to be damned because they did not know English? But there were numbers of Welsh speakers in the two universities; let them be sent to Wales. Moreover, there was need of a Welsh translation of the Bible. The New Testament had been available in Welsh since 1567. But it was necessary to have the Old Testament as well. Clearly, Penry at this time did not know that Bishop William Morgan was already preparing his great translation for the printers. These, then, were some of the remedies proposed by Penry.

Was Penry exaggerating the spiritual crisis in Wales? The information that can be gleaned from episcopal reports and similar sources show the immense

difficulties with which the bishops had to contend in seeking to transform the Church and make it truly Protestant.²⁴ Even more telling is a document to be found amongst the State Papers. It is entitled 'A *briefe collection of the state of Brecknock Shire... where Gods service is neglected, and his worde not effectuallye preached? the Common wealth cannot prosper, or be well governed*'. It is dated May 1586, a few months before the publication of Penry's *Aequity*. It tells us that there is not one preacher in the county. Most of the parishes are served by 'ignorant and vnlearned stipendarie curates' and many of those serve two or even three parishes. In most of the country parishes morning prayer is said but in such a manner 'that the hearers are little or nothing the better for it'; but 'seldome or never is there any evening prayer'. 'And many tymes for want of the Minister, the parishoners are fayne to burie the dead themselves'. The bishop [Marmaduke Middleton] preaches himself but has no preacher 'attending vppon him'.

Hereof it cometh to passe, that infinite people of ripe and great yeeres can neither saye the Lordes prayer, the Articles of their belief, nor the X commaundments in the language they vnderstande; and hardlie can any Childe, or aged bodie be founde, that doth vtter any speech, without great othe, or Curse; as By God, By Jesus, The devill have my Soule &c. A thing most horrible and offensive to the maiestie of God.²⁵

There is a strong suggestion of Puritan sympathy in this document and one wonders what might be its relationship to Penry's own writing. But John Penry was not exaggerating. The spiritual condition of Wales when he embarked on his campaign was desperate.

If his campaign was to bear fruit, he had to appeal to people in Wales itself. In April 1588 he published his second book. It is entitled *An exhortation vnto the gouernours and people of hir Maiesties countrie of Wales...* Here he addresses in the first place the President of the Council of Wales. He was the Earl of Pembroke, Henry Herbert, admired not only for his knowledge of Wales but for his love of its language and literature.

Here he reinforces the argument of his first book. But the *Exhortation* is even more scathing than the *Aequity*. He opens his argument on a stern note. It is not enough merely to have parted from Roman Catholicism and to have been content with the mere reading of the services. That is 'palpable and grosse darkenes'. He admonishes the Lord President and others in authority to 'haue the woorde of reconciliation' proclaimed amongst the Welsh people. Otherwise, 'on the fearful & dismal day of iudgement, both the one and the other of you shalbe iudged vnto euerlasting woe and destruction'. He then rehearses forty considerations in support of his argument that God has ordained preaching as the normal means of salvation.

He then turns towards the bishops. He starts his treatment of them with a disclaimer. He insists that he is not one of those who think ‘faith and the power of religion...to consist onely in the detestation of bishops.’ It is not that he wishes to spare ‘these cormorants’, as he calls them, but he does not want to appear as one who wishes ‘to feede the humors of busibodies...who thinke nothing so well spoken or written, as that which is satyricall and bitingly done against L[ord] Bysh[ops] and the rest of that stamp’. It is a most odd disclaimer in view of the drubbing he gives the bishops in what follows. He attacks them bitterly for admitting all kinds of unsuitable persons into the ministry, adulterers, thieves, rogues, vagabonds and spendthrifts – men whose ignorance and neglect of their duties condemn their parishoners to ignorance. He echoes Ezekiel in his condemnation of them,

Therefore wo be to the shepherds of Wales, saith Iehouah, which feede themselues ... but you feede not the flocke. Take this from mee ... that vnlesse you forsake your idlenes, those personages and those chaires of pestilence wherein you sit, I mean your Bishops seas will spue you out. And the Lorde I hope will make them so abhominable, and reprochfull, that all men fearing God, will be afraid hereafter to enter into those seas of Dauids, Asaph, Bangor and Landaff ... And I trust in the Lord Iesus, to see his church flourish in wales, when the memorie of Lord-Bishops are buried in hell whence they came.²⁶

This is an example of Penry at his most ferocious. The bishops of Wales in 1588 may not have been the best that the country ever had but this kind of unqualified vilification was hardly calculated to secure the improvements that Penry had in mind. He goes on to argue that an unpreaching minister is no minister. He lacks the divine calling for ‘no bare reader is capable of the ministerie before GOD.’²⁷ Moreover, whoever receives the sacrament from the hands of an unpreaching minister sins. And then follows a series of arguments to confirm these statements. It should be noted how close Penry is in this passage to the Separatists. He obviously stands at the extreme left wing of the Presbyterian movement.

The third of Penry’s contributions to his Welsh campaign was a book usually referred to as the *Supplication* from its running headline. The title-page reads,

A viewe of some part of such publike wants & disorders as are in the service of God, within her Maiesties countrie of Wales, together with an humble Petition vnto this high Court of Parliament for their speedy redresse.

It is dated 1588 and was published about 20 March 1588. There is a note of hesitancy in its foreword. ‘The Parliament’, he wrote, ‘hath hytherto reiected this cause’. Nevertheless, he feels compelled to add, ‘yet I see that the Lord will haue the cause once againe brought vnto the Parliament in my hands...’ This tract lacks the vivacity of the *Aequity* as well as the truculence of the *Exhortation*. Its title

raises the reader's hopes that it will contain some factual details to illustrate his complaints. Those hopes are not realised and the argument moves on a general theoretical plane. The warmth of his concern for Wales is however undiminished. Wales suffers in two ways. First of all, it is burdened with an unbiblical ministry which consists of Lord Bishops, Archdeacons, dumb ministers, nonresidents, commissaries and the like. He explains his objections to the exercise of civil authority by bishops and insists that this hierarchy must be replaced by a godly, biblical ministry. Second, Wales lacks the 'meanes of saluation by the worde preached, and the comfort of fayth, by the right administration of the Sacraments'²⁸.

Theology

It is possible, of course, to describe Penry's theology as 'Calvinism' or even as 'Puritanism'. But that does not help us to appreciate what precisely provided him with the inspiration and dynamic to do his work. And it is rather simplistic of Donald McGinn to write that in the case of Penry 'the "gospel" to be taught and preached was the Bible as interpreted by Calvin, Cartwright, and all other theologians who found a presbyterian system therein'.²⁹ This gives the impression that Penry's primary concern was with the mechanics of church organisation. Of course, his theology can be described as 'Calvinism' in the sense that his formal expression of it would be very similar to that proposed by any other thinker who took his lead from John Calvin. This is evident from his own confession of faith.³⁰ But we need to distinguish between the formal shape of a person's confession and the dynamic of his theology. It is true of all of us that there are some aspects of our beliefs which arouse our enthusiasm to a greater extent than others and which motivate our actions although we find no difficulty in subscribing to all parts of our confession.

If you look carefully at Penry's theological vocabulary, you will discover that the key word is 'salvation'. The word 'presbyterianism' does not appear at all. No matter what he is discussing, he returns to the question of salvation. In his preface to the *Aequity* he beseeches the House of Commons 'that you hinder not his [God's] honour, the salvation of perishing souls'.³¹ What moved him to petition Parliament, he wrote, was 'respect of the Lords honour, the desire of the salvation of my brethren, my loyal obedience vnto her Maiesty, and the discharge of my own conscience'.³² And in the last of his tracts concerning Wales, he defines his priorities in the same words when he wrote in the *Supplication*

The suite is, that Gods honour may be truely yeilded vnto him by the subctes of this kingdome, and that their soules may be saued in the day of Iesus Christ; such a suit as a greater cannot be consulted of amongst the sonnes of men.³³

The most important thing in the world for Penry was not the promotion of Presbyterianism, or a particular theological system, nor the service of the State; it was the saving of souls. There is no need to multiply quotations because it is a consistent theme in his writing. Wales's tragedy for him is that the nation is 'altogether without the knowledge of a sauing God'.

If salvation is of such fundamental importance, to be deprived of it is the supreme tragedy. And the opposite of salvation is perdition. For an age that has abandoned belief in hell, it is extremely difficult to share Penry's horror at the thought that it will be the fate of those who have been deprived of the Gospel. But we have to make the effort to sympathise with his conviction if we are to come to terms with the fierceness of his writing when he discusses his profound anxiety about the future of his countrymen. For him, losing one's soul is the ultimate tragedy and those whose neglect of duty deprives people of the opportunity to hear the gospel of salvation are murderers of souls.³⁴

On what authority does he base this system of priorities? The answer is, 'The Bible'. The Revd. Alan Tovey in his excellent research thesis (Oxford University, 1992) has analysed in meticulous detail Penry's use of the Bible. For him it is the Word of God. When, for example, he quotes Hebrews 4:12 he describes the words as spoken by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament and the New Testament are of equal authority and all our ideas must be brought under the jurisdiction of Scripture.

How is knowledge of the Bible to be mediated to the public? The divinely appointed instrument is preaching. Hence his desperate pleading for more ministers to be sent to Wales. But he is quite specific about what he means by preaching. 'By preachers,' he writes, 'I mean not euery one that can speak for an houre in the pulpit, but such in deed, as shew by the euidence of their teaching, that they are ordained of God, for the gathering together of the Saints'³⁵ There must be an inner call of God which is made manifest in the necessary gifts, while the outward call is to be invited by the Church, in conformity with God's ordinance, to exercise the necessary gifts in a suitable place.³⁶ Reading is not enough. He never tires of condemning such a practice.

Is reading the way whereby the Lord will bestow vpon men the spirite of wisedome, and reuelation thorough his knowledge? No, no, downe therefore vnto hell with the doctrine whence it sprang ... that seeketh saluation vnto men by reading of that which cannot be vnderstoode, without an expounder.³⁷

The formation of the Church depends on preaching the Word. He defines the character of the true Church succinctly,

The marks of a true church, out of our sauour Christs owne words, are gathered to be three, the woord preached, the right administration of the Sacraments, and the outwarde form of gouernment.³⁸

He, like others in the Reformed tradition of churchmanship, saw a clear pattern of ministry in the New Testament that consisted of ministers, elders and deacons. Other kinds of ministers, such as archbishops, bishops, archdeacons and canons, are not mentioned in the New Testament and so must be man-made. But in these matters the words of Jesus Christ have final authority. He refers frequently to Christ's kingly dignity or honour. He is 'the onely Sauior and redeemer of men, the onely lawgiuer of his Church', and so 'the roiall souerainty that Iesus Christ hath in his church' must be respected.

This brings us back to our starting point. To respect the royal dignity of Jesus Christ is to embrace the salvation which He has secured for us. The fundamental consideration for Penry is the salvation of souls. The rest follows from that.

The Secret Press

Penry had a profound concern about the condition of his native Wales but, as we have seen, his centre of operations was Northampton and he was closely associated with the activities of Puritans there. In consequence, he committed himself to the dangerous task of helping to produce illicit Puritan literature for the English market. There are unsolved mysteries about this stage in his career, as we shall see.

In Elizabethan times, publishing was closely monitored. Printers had to have licences and books had to be authorised by the Stationers' Company. Such a control meant that radical Puritan pamphlets would never see the light of day. Just as in communist Russia in our own century, enthusiastic radicals felt it necessary to defy the law and print tracts illegally. These were the activities that dominated the second stage in John Penry's career.

His own entry into this area was a result of his inability to find a printer for his own *Exhortation*. In view of the trouble caused by the publication of his first book, the *Aequity*, its printer, Joseph Barnes, would have nothing to do with printing anything else by Penry. A man who had already printed books illegally was Robert Waldegrave. In 1584 the House of Commons had ordered the destruction of his press and the following year he suffered twenty weeks of imprisonment for printing illegal books. He was the man who printed Penry's *Exhortation*. While in the middle of that task his house was raided but the copies that had been printed were already in a safe place and he succeeded in taking some type with him when he escaped. But the press was confiscated.

It is suggestive that the man who found a new printing-press for Waldegrave was Penry. This implies that he was something much more significant than one of Waldegrave's customers. In fact, it is quite obvious that he was to play a leading

part in the adventures of the secret press. We may perhaps, quite legitimately, draw the conclusion that Penry was its controller.³⁹

During the months that followed the press operated in houses owned by Mrs Crane at East Molesey. It was there from April until late October 1588 and it printed not only Penry's *Exhortation* but also another tract of his, *A Defence of that which hath bin written* published in August of that year.

Then on 15 October there appeared a tract called the *Epistle*. It soon proved to be a sensation. Its author was Martin Marprelate – a pen-name. This brings us to one of the enduring mysteries of English literature. Who was Martin Marprelate? The correct answer is that nobody knows. But from the beginning it was rumoured that Penry himself was Marprelate and one American scholar, Donald McGinn, has enthusiastically argued that Penry was indeed Marprelate, but his argument has not been endorsed by other scholars.⁴⁰

As we have seen, the Puritans were serious men. One does not read their books for light entertainment. Puritans were in no mood to crack jokes or amuse their readers. Martin Marprelate adopted a completely different idiom. True enough, he argued for Presbyterianism and attacked episcopacy. But his argument was couched in strongly personal terms and presented in provocative banter. He took great delight in poking fun at the bishops. One of his most frequent targets was John Aylmer, the bishop of London. Here is an example of Martin's banter:–

Who made the porter of his gate a dumb minister? Dumb John of London. Who abuseth her Majesty's subjects in urging them to subscribe contrary to law? John of London...Who bound an Essex minister in £200 to wear the surplice on Easter Day last? John London. Who is a carnal defender of the breach of the Sabbath in all places of his abode? John London. Who goeth to bowls upon the Sabbath? Dumb, duncical John of good London, hath done all this.⁴¹

And much more in the same spirit. The Marprelate Tracts have been of great interest to students of English literature because he was the pioneer of satirical writing in the language. It was little wonder that the authorities were incensed by this kind of thing and consecrated all their resources to arrest the culprits. By 13 November 1588 the Queen had ordered the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Treasurer to write to Archbishop Whitgift asking him to order the High Commission to search for the traitorous author.

At the time, of course, Penry knew nothing of this move. But Mrs Crane had become nervous about the printing activities at her house in East Molesey. It was Penry who sought a new haven for the press. Before the middle of November Penry was back in Northamptonshire, at Fawsley. He showed the steward there a ring which had been given him by the squire of Fawsley, Sir Richard Knightley, to prove that he was acting on his authority. And so the press was now stationed

at Fawsley, not at the manor surely, but in some convenient outbuilding on the estate.

And by the end of November Martin Marprelate's second tract, the *Epitome*, was on sale on the streets of London.

The authorities were hot on the heels of the conspirators. Enquiries were being made at Kingston-upon-Thames about the suspicious movements that had been reported at East Molesey.

It was prudent now to move the press from Fawsley and it was housed for a fortnight at Norton, near Daventry. By January 1589 the Archbishop had gathered sufficient evidence to implicate John Penry in the work of the secret press and on 29 January 1589 his study in the house of Henry Godley at Northampton was raided. Henry Godley by this time was Penry's father-in-law. His daughter, Eleanor, married Penry at All Saints Church, Northampton, on 6 September 1588.

About the end of January 1589 the press was moved to John Hales's house at Coventry and it was there that two new tracts by Martin were printed as well as John Penry's *Supplication*.

Things were now moving to a crisis. Brave Robert Waldegrave, the printer, had had enough and decided to retire. Even more worrying was the realisation that one of Sir Richard Knightley's servants had been indulging in slack talk at a tavern in London about some of the mysterious goings-on at Fawsley.

Penry succeeded in securing the services of a new printer, John Hodgkins and his two servants, Valentine Simms and Arthur Thomlyn. They decided to set up their press at Manchester but they were discovered and arrested by the Earl of Derby's men and taken to the Tower of London to be examined under torture.

In the meantime Penry was able to prepare the last of the Marprelate Tracts although he had to do some of the type-setting himself. That was done at the house of Roger Wigston, Wolston Priory.

It was the end of the story for the secret press. The authorities now had sufficient evidence to put a stop to its activities. But they were no nearer solving the problem of Martin's identity. They knew that Penry was implicated in the illicit printing and that was sufficient to identify him as Martin. Penry realised that his life was now in danger. By the middle of September 1589 he was reported to be hiding in a tavern in the Midlands – 'lurking here and there like a fox', says one informant. He had no choice but to flee. Early in October he was on his way to Scotland and called to see his friend, John Udall, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The outlook was bleak indeed. By now the majority of those who had a hand in the enterprise were in custody – Sir Richard Knightley, John Hales of Coventry, Roger Wigston, John Hodgkins, the printer, as well as his colleagues, Valentine Simms and Arthur Thomlyn, and Mrs Cranes' servant Nicholas Tomkins.

Penry alone had made good his escape. He could hope for a safe haven in Scotland, that bastion of Presbyterianism which, as a separate kingdom, was outside the jurisdiction of the English courts.

In Scotland

During his residence in Scotland, Penry's views underwent a change which is of particular interest to Congregationalists. He was welcomed by the Scots and was invited to preach in the Church of Scotland. He arrived in Edinburgh at the beginning of Winter 1589 and was joined in the following Spring by Eleanor, his wife, who had left their little daughter, Deliverance, at Northampton. They were also joined by Waldegrave who was granted the post of Royal Printer by King James VI.

Penry continued his literary work in defence of the Puritan standpoint. He was however uneasy in Scotland. He tells us in his book *Reformation no Enemy* that a warrant for his arrest had been issued by Archbishop Whitgift and other members of the Privy Council. King James VI, who had no wish to offend the leaders of the Kirk nor the Queen of England, whose successor he would soon be, could not be relied upon to shield Penry. But in addition there is every reason to believe that the form taken by Presbyterianism in Scotland raised questions in his mind. It was more centralised in its administration than the Presbyterianism envisaged by the English Puritans. But there was another consideration too. As we have seen, Penry had shown a consistent faith in the ability of the state to bring about further reform of the Church. All along he had appealed to Parliament and the Queen to abolish episcopacy. In Scotland there was none of this trust in the Crown. There the Presbyterians were engaged in a determined battle against James VI's desire to introduce episcopacy. It is a distinct possibility that his experience in Scotland had convinced Penry that the independence of the Church must be preserved at all costs. His campaign to persuade Parliament had ended in disillusion as the Puritan movement in England was finally shattered in 1590. It had become clear to him that, to use Robert Browne's famous phrase, if there was to be further reformation, it must be reformation without tarrying for any. Christians must organise their church life in the light of Scripture whether the State allowed that or not. In a word, the ardent Presbyterian was driven into the Congregational camp.

He decided to return to England and face the consequences. Eleanor Penry left first, accompanied by the two little girls born in Scotland, Comfort and Safety. Towards the end of August 1592 Penry himself left Edinburgh, travelling with his friend, John Edwards. He reached London safely in mid-September 1592 and joined his family at the Cross Keys Inn in Stratford-by-Bow.

The End of the Journey

When he reached London, Penry joined the Separatist congregation there. According to his own testimony, he did not intend to stay long in London. During the judicial examination conducted before his final trial he told Justice Fanshawe,

it hath bin my purpose allwayes to imploye my smale talent in my poore cuntrye of Wales, where I knowe the poore people perishe for want of Knowledge, and that was the only cause of my cominge forth out of that cuntrye where I was, and might have stayed privily all my life [10 April 1593].

So he joined the newly constituted Separatist church in London whose minister was Francis Johnson. His friend, John Edwards, testified that he had heard him preach to the congregation at a service held in Duke's Place, near Aldate, just before Christmas. Life was dangerous for that congregation. Of course, it had no church building. It met at members' homes or in the open air and had to move its place of meeting from Sunday to Sunday for fear of being discovered. The authorities were watching it with a sharp eye. On 17 December, when the church was holding its service at a school in St Nicholas's Lane, its members were taken prisoner. We discover from Penry's private diary that he was safe. He was not so fortunate on 4 March 1583. On that Sunday the service was held in the woods at Islington, the preacher being George Johnson, the minister's brother. Fifty-four people were arrested, amongst them a 'John Harrison'. The constable did not realise that 'Harrison' is an English rendering of Ap Henry. Penry wrote in his diary on 4 March, 'The church taken, yet I escaped'. But the authorities soon realised their mistake and the Privy Council issued a new warrant for Penry's arrest.

Penry fled once again. On 18 March he was at St Albans, then he moved to Hertfordshire and then returned to London. He was there on 21 March 1583 when he was betrayed by the vicar of Stepney, Anthony Anderson. Penry was arrested and taken to the Poultry prison.

During the following days he was closely questioned. On 8 April he wrote to his wife,

I see my blood laid for my beloued, and so my days and testimony drawing to an end for aught I know, and therefore I think it my duty to leave behind me this testimony of my love to so dear a sister, and so loving a wife in the Lord, as you have been to me.

And indeed Eleanor Penry deserves to be remembered with admiration as one of the heroic women in this story. Penry asks her to pray for him,

Remember me also and my brethren in bonds, that the Lord would assist us with the strength and comfort of his Spirit, to keep a good conscience and to bear a glorious testimony to the end.

Penry's trial opened at the King's Bench on 21 May 1593. It was Penry's hope that there was nothing that could be called treason in his printed books. It was a profound shock to him when it became clear that the prosecution would use papers that he had cast aside when he was at Edinburgh precisely because he thought that they might be seditious. We are told that, as far as is known, this was the first time this kind of evidence was admitted in an English court. The accusation was 'overthrow of religion, treason and rebellion'. Lawyers who have studied the proceedings are agreed that the trial was a parody of justice. Penry was not allowed to have an advocate to argue his case and he was suffering considerable physical distress as a result of his imprisonment. The jury found him guilty of the charges against him.

The sentence was death. On Tuesday, 29 May 1593, he was hanged at St Thomas a Watering. No friend was allowed to accompany him nor was he permitted to say a word before execution.

The Summing Up

John Penry saw himself in the succession of the Protestant martyrs. During his interrogation before Justices Fanshaw and Young he said that he bore the same testimony as 'Mr Wicliffe, Mr Brute, Mr Purvey, Mr White' as well as 'Mr Tindal, Mr Lambert, Mr Barnes and Mr Latimer'.⁴² Historians like Champlin Burrage have been dismissive of the attribution of the description 'martyr' to Penry. Legally, of course, he was not condemned for his Congregationalism nor for his former Presbyterianism but legal niceties should not inhibit us from acknowledging his courage in adhering to his convictions at the cost of his life. We are perfectly entitled to describe him as a martyr.

But was he not hot-headed and needlessly foolhardy in the way in which he conducted his campaigns? It is very difficult after four centuries to recapture the atmosphere of the Elizabethan age with its predilection for violent polemics and vicious state oppression. It is easy for us to find fault with men whose religious convictions drove them to risk everything in their confrontations with the authorities. The other side of the coin is that the impatience and recklessness of men like Penry did contribute towards the growth of tolerance. That was indeed a very slow growth in this kingdom. There is an eloquent and prophetic sentence at the very end of the account of the examination of Barrow, Greenwood and Penry. It reads, 'Imprisonments inditements yea death it self are no meet weapons to convince mens consciences'. Our religious freedom was bought at the price of blood.

What of Penry's patriotism? There are historians who dismiss this aspect of his convictions as a mere tool in his campaign against the established church,

John Penry

while those modern Welshmen who consider it a signal contribution to the development of Welsh national identity are scoffed as mere sentimentalists. But I find it impossible to read Penry's treatises about Wales without discerning in them the ring of sincerity. In a word, we do well to salute John Penry as a sterling, self-sacrificing Christian.

John Penry

