

**Postmodern Skepticism,
Relativism, and Religious Toleration
in the
Light of the Westminster Standards
and the
Thought of George Gillespie**

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Lightly Revised
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The Present Context

In this postmodern context, philosophical skepticism and relativism continue to make ever deeper inroads into the Western psyche. The confidence of the modernist, that the human mind can know and successfully grapple with reality, continues to wane. The postmodern man is asking: How can one know what is real? Attending this groundswell of skepticism is philosophical and cultural relativism. That relativism would be so closely associated with skepticism, stands to reason: If one cannot be sure that the human mind is in contact with reality (skepticism), then one's worldview is little more than a personal preference; and if one's worldview is little more than a personal preference, there are *no grounds* for asserting that one's own worldview is superior to another's or is in closer conformity to reality than another's. It is considered sheer arrogance to pretend that one's *subjective* worldview is *objective* truth, commanding the assent of all men; and, consequently, it is bad manners to impose one's subjective worldview on others. Almost any perspective (religious or otherwise) is tolerated provided that there be no assertion of objective truth and no attempt to impose it on others.¹

Any sort of treatment or evaluation of the *contemporary* discussion concerning these issues is beyond the scope of the present essay;² the current purpose is to shed *old light* (no less brilliant for its age) on the present darkness. Skepticism and relativism are not new, not unique to postmodernism, so there is much to be gained by a consideration of how Christians in former eras contended with these "vain philosophies" (see Colossians 2:8) and pernicious habits of mind, and by a consideration of how they overcame "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). The Second Reformation in England and Scotland is particularly worthy of consideration in this regard, for skepticism, relativism, and the appeal for a

¹ There is a fear of, and disdain for, any transcultural "meta-narrative"; the assertion of a meta-narrative is antithetical to the postmodern relativistic dogma (irony intended). See J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 69-79.

² For a discussion of the issues in the current debates concerning epistemology, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998) 144-404. For a brief critique of skepticism from an evangelical perspective, see Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976) 13-28.

relativistic religious toleration were great obstacles to the completion of the reforming work. It should be observed from the outset that the responses and remedies set forth by the Second Reformation men are quite alien to the twenty-first century mind; so patience is required, lest this historical divide lead to misunderstanding, or to an easy and unwarranted dismissal of their position. There is much to be gleaned from an investigation of their opposition to the appeal for religious toleration, and of the epistemology underlying that opposition; and, therefore, much to commend it to the attention of the Christian man living in this present confused and confusing cultural context. Indeed, the spiritual weapons forged in that bygone era are still “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5).

The Westminster Standards: Epistemological Certainty

Again, skepticism and relativism are not movements only of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; they are as old as recorded philosophy.¹ English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians were not naive with respect to these philosophical movements; quite the contrary, the Reformers self-consciously rejected skepticism as it made itself evident in Roman Catholic theology. In the Roman Church, there is a certain skepticism with respect to the Scriptures; the Bible is seen to be a book of such difficulty that even the learned ought not to make final determinations with respect to its teaching, much less the unlearned laity.² Although the Roman communion has always allowed significant diversity within itself, a complete relativism has been avoided by the authority of the Pope and the traditional teachings of the Church. So, limits have been set on the extent of diversity.

Again, the Reformers self-consciously rejected the skeptical tendencies in Rome's view of Scripture. Luther rebuked Erasmus when he manifested these same skeptical tendencies.³ Luther is merely one instance of a general rejection of Roman skepticism by the Reformers; instead, the Reformers asserted the perspicuity of the Scriptures.⁴ The English and Scottish Puritans of the seventeenth century were inheritors of this tradition, and this Reformation tradition is manifest in the teaching of the Westminster Assembly.

¹ Frank Thilly sees the first recorded traces of Greek philosophical skepticism in the thought of Xenophanes in the sixth century BC. *A History of Philosophy*, rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951) 36.

² For a brief summary of the Roman doctrine of the "obscurity" and "incompleteness" of Scripture and the consequent need for infallible interpretation by the Church, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001) 104-110.

³ Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, D. Martin Luther Werke, vol. 18 (Weimer: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1908) 603-609. Against Erasmus Luther argues that the making of assertions is necessary and unavoidable for the Christian. A Christian can have confidence in the truth of assertions because of the ministry of the Spirit and the clarity of the Scripture. The Christian need not be a skeptic because "*Spiritus sanctus non est scepticus...*" 605.

⁴ See Ulrich Zwingli on the clarity of Scripture. "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953) 72-95. See also Francis Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992) 143-147.

There is a truth, and it can be known: these are presuppositions of Puritanism.¹ More specifically, the Westminster divines taught that “the goodness, wisdom, and power of God” are known through “the light of nature and the works of creation and providence” so as “to leave men unexcusable” (WCF 1:1).² Not only *is it possible* for man to have knowledge of nature, but he *does indeed possess* such knowledge of nature that he can see that God is “manifest” in it. “[T]he goodness, wisdom, and power of God” are so readily perceived by man in the creation that he is “unexcusable”. Robert Shaw provides a clear summary of this section of the Confession:

When we affirm that the being of God may be discovered by *the light of nature*, we mean, that the senses and the reasoning powers, which belong to the nature of man, are able to give him so much light as to manifest that there is a God. By our senses we are acquainted with his works, and by his works our reason may be led to trace out that more excellent Being who made them.³

“By [man’s] senses” he is acquainted with the Creator’s works, and by his “reason” operating upon those works he is able to “trace out that more excellent Being.” In this way, the Westminster Divines show themselves opposite to the skepticism and relativism of the present day; the knowledge of God in the creation is so readily acquired that the man without it is also without excuse.

However, Puritanism was always far more interested in the knowledge of God that one might have from the Scriptures. Although in nature one can know something of God as the Creator, it is in the Scriptures that one comes to that most sublime and excellent knowledge of God as the Redeemer (WCF 1:1). The Westminster divines present objective evidence that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God:

¹ It is beyond the bounds of this work to present a thorough critique of skepticism, but at this point it should be observed that the Puritan position holds the philosophical high-ground. Skepticism is always ultimately self-refuting. Any defense of skepticism is doomed to failure, skepticism being inherently indefensible. Highly complex, sophisticated, and nuanced defenses, rather than justifying the position, ultimately demonstrate the inadequacy and the failure of it. The true skeptic will produce no defense, but will “shut one’s mouth, expound no theories and die.” Ayn Rand, *The Ayn Rand Lexicon*, ed. Harry Binswanger, vol. 4, The Ayn Rand Library (New York: Meridian, 1986) 47. Although it is rarely a good idea to trivialize a position that has had such staying power in the history of thought, it is unavoidable with skepticism, a deep and persuasive presentation being by the nature of the case impossible.

² All quotations of the Westminster Standards are taken from *Westminster Confession of Faith*, reprint (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997).

³ *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1845 edition) 2.

...[T]he heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God... (WCF 1:5).

Robert Shaw observes that these evidences “produce a rational conviction that the Scriptures are the Word of God,” but, as a thoroughgoing Calvinist, he also asserts with the Confession that “it is only the Holy Spirit’s effectual application of them to the heart, in their self-evidencing light and power, that can produce a cordial and saving persuasion of it.”¹ Although sinful man, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in him, will deny the truth that is set plainly before him, the truth is so readily accessible and clear that men are without excuse if they possess it not.

Furthermore, the Westminster divines assert that not only is it readily perceptible that the Scriptures are the Word of God, but that the gospel taught in the Scriptures is also readily apprehensible. They contend that “those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (WCF 1:7). The gospel, the summation of all “those things which are necessary...for salvation,” is readily available to the understanding through “a due use of ordinary means.” Again, because this knowledge is readily available to men (living in a nation to which God has providentially granted His inscripturated Word), readily available without recourse to extraordinary means, men are responsible for it. This is not to deny that some Scripture passages and truths are exceedingly difficult; indeed, “[a]ll things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all” (WCF 1:7). The Scripture is filled with mysteries, sublimities, and difficulties, and this is altogether fitting. In full accord with the Westminster Confession of Faith, Francis Turretin observes:

...[W]e unhesitatingly confess that the Scriptures have their *adyta* (“heights”) and *bathē* (“depths”) which we cannot enter or sound and which God so ordered on purpose to excite the study of believers and increase their diligence; to humble the pride of man and to remove from them the contempt which might arise from too great plainness.²

¹ Ibid., 14.

² Francis Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, 143.

Thus it is plain that, although “those things which are necessary...for salvation” are readily available through the “use of ordinary means,” some aspects of the Scripture can only be understood after long and diligent study. However, this does not excuse any theological error. For many, these truths could have been apprehended had the requisite attention been given; but sloth prevents. The wealth of knowledge that could have been attained is squandered because of “idleness” (WLC 142), which is a failure to love God with all of one’s mind and strength (WLC 102). For others, these sublime truths are misapprehended due to presumption; after neglecting the requisite study, conclusions are drawn without adequate justification. Once an erroneous position has been adopted, it then becomes very difficult to correct because the pride of the sinner becomes inflamed; it is a humbling thing to admit an error. Although it is a difficult thing for twenty-first century man to accept, the Westminster Assembly unequivocally asserts that theological errors are sins.

Thus it becomes evident just how distant the Puritanism of Westminster is from the skepticism and relativism of this present day. Again: One can know from nature that there is a God and that the Scriptures are His Word. One can know “those things which are necessary...for salvation” as they are taught in the Scriptures by “a due use of ordinary means.” And all the sloth, presumption, and pride that leads to theological errors in difficult matters is also decried as sin. Man is altogether without excuse for his departures from the truth.

The Westminster Standards: The Nature of Theological Error

A careful study of the Westminster Standards bears out the conclusion that theological errors are sins. Although it is shocking to contemporary American Christianity, it should be clear that the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms teach this. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Larger Catechism. In the Larger Catechism, the divines assert that “ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of [God]...heresy, misbelief” are all “sins forbidden in the first commandment” (WLC 105). This list of cognitive, doctrinal sins is further expanded in the Larger Catechism’s discussion of “the sins forbidden in the third commandment”: “misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the word, or any part of it...the maintaining of false doctrines...the maligning, scorning, reviling, or any wise opposing of God’s truth” (WLC 113). Thomas Ridgeley, in commenting on this answer in the Catechism, observes that “we are guilty of [violating the third commandment] by maintaining false doctrines, that is, when we pretend that any doctrine is from God, when it is not, or that he makes himself known by it, when it is altogether disowned by him.” He adds: “This commandment is farther broken, by reviling or opposing God’s truth...whereby we cast contempt on that which is most sacred, and lightly esteem that which he sets such a value on, and makes himself known by.”¹ It must be observed that not only is heresy considered sin, but any “misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the word” (WLC 113). From the greatest to the least, theological errors are sins; and the only remedy for sin is repentance.

¹ *Commentary on the Larger Catechism*, previously titled *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly’s Larger Catechism*, vol. 2 (1855; Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books reprint, 1993) 340.

The Westminster Assembly and Religious Toleration

With the preceding theoretical/theological thought-world in view, the actions of the Westminster Assembly are much more readily apprehensible. The appeal of the Independent dissenters for a toleration of their views and practice was bound to be met with disapproval; for, in the final analysis, it amounts to a request for a toleration of sin.

The appeal for religious toleration arose in the context of the debates within the Assembly concerning the form of church government. It is interesting to note that, as Robert Paul argues, the majority of the English divines were initially expecting to settle a modified form of episcopacy.¹ It appears as if the debates conducted in the early months of 1644 swayed many to embrace the Presbyterian position.² However, the Presbyterian argumentation was not able to bring unanimity; there was a small handful of “Dissenting Brethren”³ who continued to argue for an Independent form of church government. It appears as if the argument for religious toleration arose from these men as it became apparent that the Presbyterian form of government was going to be settled in spite of their best efforts.⁴ The appeal of the Independents was met by staunch opposition, whether in the “dignified and Christian-like calmness” of Mr. Herle’s reply, or in the “very ample and strong” reply of Thomas Edwards.⁵ The London ministers were also against the granting of toleration to dissenters.⁶ Again, it should be observed that this is not surprising when one considers the theoretical/theological thought-world previously presented.

Even if it be granted that theological errors are sins, a whole host of practical difficulties immediately arise. Are all deviations from the truth to be

¹ *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1985) 105-110.

² *Ibid.*, 111.

³ The “Dissenting Brethren” were also called the “septemvirs”. The seven consisted of Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughes, William Greenhill, and William Carter. *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴ See Westminster Assembly Committee for Accommodation, *The Papers and Answers of the Dissenting Brethren and the Committee of the Assembly of Divines* (London: 1648) 15-17.

⁵ William H. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edmonton: Still Water Revival Books, 1856 edition) 190. See Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia: or, A Full Answer to the Apologeticall Narration* (London: G. M., 1644).

⁶ Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*, 489-491.

treated alike? Is every one deviating to be treated alike? Who is responsible for the discipline of those deviating? These questions, and a great many more like unto them, require concrete, practical, Biblical answers.

The Contribution of George Gillespie

The Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly certainly were not silent on these matters. They opposed the appeal for religious toleration, being acutely aware that it would undermine a Presbyterian settlement. They voiced their opposition both in verbal and in written debate. Samuel Rutherford and Robert Baillie both published on the subject.¹ George Gillespie also weighed in, and his treatment of the problem of religious toleration repays careful consideration.

George Gillespie, in his *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty*,² is primarily addressing the civil magistrate's responsibility to be involved in the discipline of "Hereticks and Sectaries". In arriving at his conclusions concerning the magistrate's responsibility, it is important to note that Gillespie begins with the same set of Puritan presuppositions: there is a truth, and it can be known; skepticism and relativism are not valid philosophical options. Gillespie brings these presuppositions to bear on an objection current in his day, that there is a great danger in having the civil government involved in disciplining error, for it is possible that the civil magistrate, who is also *sinful* and *prone to error*, may in fact be the one in error; the civil magistrate may find himself persecuting the righteous. Gillespie recognizes that this has indeed been a problem in the history of the Church; however, it is interesting to observe how Gillespie attacks this objection at its skeptical root. He asserts that one need not be infallible in order to be right; one can know the truth and be confident in the knowing:

It followes not that because Parliaments may not presume of an unerring spirit, therefore they cannot be certaine that they are in the truth concerning this or that particular, so that they may confidently compel men to it, without feare of fighting against God. The acknowledgement of a possibility of error, and that we know but in part as long as we are in this world, may well consist with mens

¹ Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London: R. I., 1649). Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1645).

² (London: Christopher Meredith, 1644). Although *Wholesome Severity* was published anonymously, it has long been ascribed to Gillespie, and his authorship is here supposed. The case for Gillespie's authorship is made by Chris Coldwell in "Whose Severity? Was George Gillespie the Author of *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty*?" *The Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2008) 3-46.

fulness of perswasion from the light of Gods word, concerning this or that truth to be believed, or duty to be done.¹

When skepticism is not viewed as a valid option in rational discourse, the simple assertion that one's opponent is fallible is not an adequate refutation of his position. It is not enough to assert that one's opponent *can* make a mistake; one must demonstrate that in this particular case he *did indeed* make a mistake.

With the Westminster Assembly, Gillespie maintains, not only that the truth can be known, but that erroneous theological positions are blameworthy, are sins; indeed, he could not be clearer on this point: "It is good divinity to maintain that scepticism, fluctuation and wavering, concerning those things which God hath revealed to be believed or done by us is a sin; and to be firm, fixed and established in the faith, is a duty commanded."² And, since theological errors are sins, they are blameworthy and liable to censure.

Some had objected that errors ought not to be punished because they are held by a man, not *voluntarily*, but *necessarily*. In other words, a man's convictions concerning the truth of a particular matter are not subject to change by his will; consequently, the civil magistrate ought not to punish a man for a thing that he cannot *will* to change. Gillespie observes that such an objection strikes at the very justice of God, who does indeed hold men responsible and guilty for their deviations from the truth (1 Corinthians 2:14; John 8:43; 14:17).

In elucidating the justice of God in holding a man blameworthy and guilty for departures from the truth, Gillespie argues in this way:

...[T]here is a grosse fallacy in the argument, for we must distinguish necessity, there is a *naturall necessity*, which takes away the δύναμις, and a *moral necessity*, which takes away the ἐξουσία of a mans being of another judgement or way. Again, there is an *absolute necessity*, and a *hypotheticall necessity*. Now the necessity of a Hereticks judging thus, because his reason concludeth him thus, is not a *morall* necessity or obligation upon him, as if it were not lawfull to him to judge or doe otherwise, (nay he ought and is bound by the word of God to judge otherwise, and doe otherwise) but it is a *naturall* necessity, (I meane of sinfull nature) and that not *simple* and *absolute*, neither, but *hypotheticall* only, and upon this supposition that he hath not yet opened his eyes to receive more light, nor set his heart singly and in the feare of God to seek more light. So that the plaine English of this [objection] is this: Though Gods word bindeth a man to such a duty, yet if his owne erroneous, perverse and corrupt judgement conclude him so farre that his

¹ George Gillespie, *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty*, 21-22.

² *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions*, The Presbyterian's Armoury, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, and Oliver & Boyd, 1844) 57.

opinion cannot agree with the word of God, and himself cannot be brought to the practice of that necessary duty; such a man ought not to be punished. Or as if one should argue thus: He that hath borrowed from me a thousand pound, hath by his own fault disabled himselfe to pay it: therefore I may not call him to an account for it.¹

In answering those that assert that a man is not blameworthy for errors because he holds them *necessarily*, rather than *voluntarily*, Gillespie distinguishes between two sorts of necessity, *moral* and *natural*. He defines *moral necessity* as that “which takes away the ἐξουσία of a man being of another judgement or way.” Here, ἐξουσία is properly defined as *freedom of choice*, or *right*.² So, *moral necessity* lays upon a man an ethical obligation to be of a certain judgment, removes the ethical freedom to be of another judgment; a man cannot be of another judgment and still be in the right, or righteous. If *necessity* is taken in this *moral* sense, then the justice of God in reckoning a man, erring in judgment, blameworthy is easily proven: God, speaking by His Word, lays a man under an ethical obligation to affirm and believe the assertions of truth contained therein; it is *morally necessary*. Gillespie observes that it would be most unreasonable for one to argue that he was under a *moral* necessity to believe an error, but rather it is a *moral* necessity that the man repent of his error and embrace the truth.

Gillespie will in nowise grant that a man is under a *moral* necessity to embrace an error; however, he does concede that the man is under a *natural* necessity of a certain sort. Gillespie defines *natural necessity* as that “which takes away the δύναμις”; here, δύναμις is properly defined as *power* or *ability*. It appears that Gillespie is arguing that man’s ability to will what is spiritually good has been taken away by the Fall. It should be observed, however, that Gillespie immediately qualifies this by means of another distinction: Man is not under an *absolute* natural necessity, but under an *hypothetical* natural necessity. By this Gillespie seems to mean that the fallen condition of man has not *absolutely* removed the man’s ability to embrace the truth by an act of the will, for the embracing of the truth remains properly an object upon which the will could act; rather, the man, in his fallen condition, has no disposition of heart to exercise his will in pursuing true opinions, and in this way is under a *hypothetical* natural necessity (that is, a necessity *upon some supposed conditions*, the condition here being his sinful indisposition) of embracing error. Again,

¹ George Gillespie, *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty*, 21.

² Illustrations of this use of the word are provided in 1 Corinthians 9:4-6: “Have we not power (ἐξουσίαν, *the right or freedom of choice*) to eat and to drink? Have we not power (ἐξουσίαν) to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power (ἐξουσίαν) to forbear working?”

the opening of the eyes and the setting of the heart on the truth of God are still properly objects of the will, but it is his sinful indisposition to the truth that prevents the man from doing so; thus the man is blameworthy. Again, theological errors are blameworthy, are sins.

As previously mentioned, Gillespie's chief burden in this work is to justify the civil magistrate's involvement in the discipline of those holding erroneous opinions. Gillespie will argue that the civil magistrate has been given the responsibility by God to enforce both Tables of the Ten Commandments.¹ In his *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions*, Gillespie also addresses the Church's responsibility to pursue uniformity, for the pursuit of religious uniformity is an Apostolic command.² It is beyond the scope of this work to take up his arguments from Scripture justifying the involvement, not only of the Church, but of the State in disciplining erroneous opinions. However, having rejected skepticism and relativism and having acknowledged that theological errors are sins, it is not surprising that Gillespie would look to Scripture for the God-ordained means for disciplining these sins.

Briefly, it should be observed that Gillespie is quite clear that not all deviations from the truth and not all deviators are to be treated in the same fashion. In his careful and clear distinctions, he provides the Church with a wealth of wisdom in addressing theological error. Gillespie is not promoting the persecution of "pious and peaceable men." Instead, the civil magistrate (and the Church, no doubt) is to punish "hereticks and sectaries" but only "as the degree of their offense and of the Churches danger shall require..."³ For first offenses or small offenses, the civil magistrate is wise to impose a "medicinnall" punishment, a mild punishment to stimulate repentance. If repentance is not forthcoming, stiffer punishments are required. "Connivance" in error by the authorities is a "cruell mercy", but correction is a "mercifull severity". The civil magistrate may continue to bear with the offender, if there is yet hope of agreement or accommodation; even if there is no hope of agreement or accommodation, the civil magistrate may continue to show mercy provided that there is no danger to the peace and well-being of the Church and society. However, when peace and security are threatened the civil magistrate has the

¹ *"The plain english of the question is this: whether the Christian Magistrate be keeper of both Tables: whether he ought to suppress his own enemies, but not Gods enemies, and preserve his own ordinances, but not Christs Ordinances from violation. Whether the troublers of Israel may be troubled."* Ibid., "To the Christian and Courteous Reader" (before the regular pagination).

² *The Presbyterian's Armoury*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, and Oliver & Boyd, 1844) 84.

³ George Gillespie, *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty*, "To the Christian and Courteous Reader" (before the regular pagination).

responsibility to meet these threats, with “exterminative” punishments if necessary.¹ The authorities must weigh the circumstances of each case.²

¹ Ibid., 31-33.

² Ibid., 35.