

The Political and Religious Battles of the English Restoration

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The Restoration of Charles II to the English throne appeared to be an occasion for joyous celebration, ending a prolonged period of political and religious upheaval. As historian N.H. Keeble writes, “It was, then, in an already-established spirit of festival and triumph that Charles landed at Dover. There was no less a carnival air among those who greeted him.”¹ This atmosphere of celebration continued all the way to London, where Charles had been proclaimed king on May 8, 1660. Even then it did not end: Keeble continues that a “massive cedar maypole...was not only the centre for morris dancing and festivity but, in its very nature, declared that this was no longer a Puritan age.”² It seemed that with the return of the king, England could finally rest at ease after decades of civil war and religious strife.

After years of increasing tension between King Charles I and Parliament over the extent of the king’s authority, civil war broke out in the 1640s. On one side were the king and his supporters, known as Cavaliers or Royalists. On the other side were the Roundheads, supporting Parliament, or more specifically, the House



¹ N.H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 41.

² *Ibid*, 43.

of Commons. Ultimately, Charles was deposed and beheaded. His family, including the eldest son Charles, were forced to flee to France. For a period in the 1650s, the Puritan military leader of the Roundheads, Oliver Cromwell, governed the Commonwealth of England. His death led to a succession of short-lived governments, until finally Parliament invited Charles to return and take the throne as Charles II, the triumph for which he had waited for many years.

In 1685, Godfrey Kneller painted a portrait of the aging king. He found a man whose still-regal appearance masks something else.³ In the portrait, Charles' crown is not only sitting on a side table, but it is cast in shadow, easy to miss on a first glance, nearly a background piece. This seems suggestive of the king's increasing weariness, born of a two-decade struggle against relentless opposition, both political and religious. The Restoration did not settle the questions of authority raised by the English Civil War. As evidenced by the debates over religious dissent as well as the struggles between Charles and Parliament for control, the question of where ultimate authority lay was still a contentious issue. Using primary sources from Charles' reign, both from government insiders and religious outsiders, I show that the conflicts which arose following the Restoration contributed to an increasingly turbulent atmosphere. These conditions would give rise, within three years of the king's death, to a new revolution in England- the Glorious Revolution.

Charles II vs. Parliament: An Unraveling Relationship

In Charles' personal writings, especially in his parliamentary speeches, it is clear what his priorities were as the new Convention Parliament convened. There were two issues which

³ Godfrey Kneller, *King Charles II* (Liverpool.: Walker Art Gallery, 1685)

immediately drew the king's attention. First, he asked that an Act of Indemnity and Oblivion be passed to officially forgive those who had opposed the monarchy over the last twenty years, telling the House of Lords on July 27, 1660 that "I did with impatience expect that that Act should be presented to me for my assent as the most reasonable and solid foundation of that peace, happiness and security I hope and pray for, to myself and all my dominions."⁴ It was hoped that this would help reconcile a country still reeling from the Civil War and the rapid changes in government over the last several months.

But secondly, though perhaps most importantly in his mind, Charles also required money, a request which only Parliament could grant. In another speech on August 29 to the whole Parliament, the king also reminded them, "I am not richer, that is, I have not so much money in my purse, as when I came to you."⁵ Neither of Charles' requests were initially met. Many Royalist members of the Convention were not so ready to forgive those against whom they had fought so bitterly and for so long. Only grudgingly did they pass the Act before their summer session ended with the personal intervention of the king. When the newly elected "Cavalier" (Royalist) Parliament convened in 1661, they too reluctantly passed another Act of Oblivion. However, in November of that year Charles' need for money had still not, at least in his mind, been sufficiently met: "But I come to put you in mind of the crying debts which do every day call upon me..."⁶ Even eighteen months into his reign, the king still struggled to get Parliament- a very Royalist Parliament, no less- to carry out his desires without having to personally plead his case. Charles could no longer expect unquestioned loyalty from even his greatest supporters,

⁴ Charles II, *The Letters, Speeches, and Declarations of King Charles II*, ed. Arthur Bryant (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 100.

⁵ *Ibid*, 103.

⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

who now felt free to oppose certain of his wishes without suffering major consequences for doing so.

These divisions became only clearer with the debate over religious toleration. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, was Charles' chancellor upon his return, and he chronicled what happened in his *History*, which ran until 1667 and the end of Clarendon's tenure. The earl recounts that Charles told the House of Commons "he could not but lament... that he and they and the kingdom, were yet without that present fruit and advantage, which they might reasonably promise themselves from such a harmony of affections..."⁷ The king believed that the next step in making England, and his throne, more secure, was to reduce religious conflict by allowing toleration. But once again Parliament disagreed, and in this case, it took a course directly contrary to the king's wishes.

Clarendon recounted that the Act of Uniformity passed by Parliament included a clause requiring all ecclesiastical positions in the Church of England to be filled by those directly ordained by bishops. In addition, another clause required "a form of subscription, that every man was to make, who received, or before he received any benefice or preferment in the church...every such person was to declare his unfeigned assent and consent to all, and every thing contained and prescribed in and by the Book intituled [*sic*] 'the Book of Common Prayer'..."⁸ The Cavalier Parliament, still upset by Charles' willingness to forget the past sins of his enemies, openly opposed his preference for toleration despite his pleas on behalf of this course. In fact, they went out of their way to impose adherence to the Church of England on the country at large, at least legally. Practice was another issue, as we will see later. In any case, it

⁷ Edward Hyde, *The history of the reign of King Charles the Second, from the Restoration to the year 1667* (London: M. Cooper, 1757), 315.

⁸ Hyde, *History of the reign of King Charles the Second*, 322.

was clear that the king's wishes were no longer the primary factor to consider in making laws. But for Charles, things were only to get worse as the decade wore on.

In 1665, war broke out between England and the Dutch Republic. A major point of contention had been the Navigation Act of 1660, which put protections on English shipping at the expense of the Dutch. Additionally, in 1664 the English had seized Dutch West African trading posts, as well as the Dutch North American colony of New Amsterdam, a way “to exclude the Dutch from trade with the North American colonies.”⁹ But the war went quite poorly for England, and by 1667 a Dutch admiral managed to burn the English fleet and blockade the Thames. According to N.H. Keeble, “As a guardian of the national interest, the Restoration regime was thoroughly discredited.”¹⁰ Members of Parliament set up a commission to investigate how the king had spent earlier royal grants, believing that the war had been a setup for Charles to persuade Parliament to give him more money. Charles' chancellor, the Earl of Clarendon, became the direct focus of much of the ire, and the war became the final straw in his downfall, but one cannot deny that Parliament was still suspicious of the king himself. Clarendon was merely a scapegoat on whom they could more easily concentrate their fire. The readiness to investigate the monarch and his government implied that Parliament could pose a threat to the plans of the king. But the war was only one blow of several at this time to Charles.

Another of these blows was the Great Fire of London in 1666. Samuel Pepys was a government official and a copious diarist who recorded his experience during the fire. He described people fleeing with all the possessions they could take, rather than stay to try to put out the flames. He himself even buried a wheel of Parmesan cheese to protect it from the flames. Pepys was brought to King Charles and James, the Duke of York, where he recommended that

⁹ Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603-1714* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961), 211.

¹⁰ Keeble, *The Restoration*, 103.

“unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down, nothing could stop the fire.”¹¹ This was an order which Charles promptly gave, but while his presence amidst the disaster was cause for praise in several quarters, it did not win over his opponents. Fears of French or Catholic involvement in the blaze spread in the following months.¹² Given that the king was often accused of being under French and Catholic influence, and that the Duke of York, who was also present during the crisis, was himself Catholic, it is reasonable to believe that these rumors did Charles no favors in the eyes of his political opponents.

But while these storms came and went, one issue refused to fade from the political scene. Over the coming years, religion would continue to be an issue between the king and Parliament. In 1672, Charles issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which was designed to encourage tolerance while also promoting the Church of England. This declaration allowed religious dissenters to meet publicly to worship according to their own practices if they still paid tithes and dues to the Church. But Charles’ treatment of Catholics became problematic. About them he wrote, “We shall in no wise allow Publick Places of Worship, but onely Indulge them their share in the common Exemption from the execution of the Penal Laws, and the Exercise of their Worship in their private Houses onely.”¹³ Catholics would be able to privately practice and would not face criminal prosecution for practicing. However, Catholics were not afforded the same level of tolerance as Protestant dissenters, who could worship publicly. But even this measured tolerance provoked not only supporters of the Church of England, but even the Protestant dissenters also covered under the declaration. Neither group was willing to tolerate Catholicism in England, and it seemed to further confirm fears that the king was too favorable to the Catholics. Eventually, the king was forced to revoke the declaration. Charles attempted to impose his will over

¹¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Shorter Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 660

¹² Keeble, *The Restoration*, 164

¹³ Charles II, *His Majesties declaration to all his loving subjects, March 15, 1671/2* (London.: *The Savoy*, 1672), 7.

Parliament's will by royal decree, something more reminiscent of the absolutist monarchs of the past. But this effort to bolster the monarch's power failed, thanks to the strong opposition of two disparate groups.

Charles was now forced to find another way to exercise his power. The most straightforward way to neutralize opposition to his policies was to simply not call Parliament so frequently. The body was, indeed, called significantly less over the following decade. This did not mean that opposition to Charles decreased. Historian John Miller writes that it was of a different type to that which Charles I had faced earlier: "the very fact that there had been a civil war and that world had been turned upside down gravely inhibited the king's critics: most wanted to force a change in policy..."¹⁴ The king's opposition did not want war; they wanted policies that reflected their goals and desires, not those of Charles. However, the same debates over the limits of royal authority were still ongoing, even if not in the form of open war. The absence of pitched battles did not diminish the importance of these rising tensions. In fact, they came to fruition in the years after Charles' death. So, despite the lowered availability of a forum in which to express their views, these critics still posed a threat to the monarchy and its power. As political opportunities to oppose the king declined, religious dissenters' voices increasingly became dominant in England.

Living in the End Times: The Religious Resistance of the Laypeople

Following the Restoration of Charles II, the Church of England, which had lapsed and faded during the Civil War and Commonwealth periods, became part of the larger debate over religious

¹⁴ John Miller, "Politics in Restoration Britain," in *A Companion to Stuart Britain* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 411.

comprehension and toleration occurring in Parliament. However, this debate soon became irrelevant, as the Church began to return on its own. Keeble writes that “while the legislative process was stalled and ominous divisions were appearing in the Puritan ranks, restoration of the episcopal Church of England was taking place at grassroots level...”¹⁵ The Book of Common Prayer was once again being used, even though this had not yet been declared legal by the government. Though many ordinary people were eager for the Church’s return, many others explored various forms of religious dissent as well. Historian John Spurr explores these lay attitudes, concluding that for most of the regular people of England, the Church of England was merely one of their options when choosing the form of Protestantism that appealed to them most.¹⁶ No longer did the Church, of which the king was the head, hold a monopoly over the English people’s religious practices. Nonconformity and dissent were parts of everyday life, whether one adhered to them or not.

These religious dissenters increasingly saw danger and moral decay in the government of Charles II. In his *New Advice to a Painter*, poet Andrew Marvell warned Charles of Catholic influences: “Papist and Presbyterian both combine,/ And *Sampson’s* flaming Foxes Tails conjoin/ To Rob thee of thy crown, and to destroy,/ With thee our Lives, Religion, Liberty.”¹⁷ The fear of Catholics was especially prevalent at the time, given that James, the Duke of York, was a Catholic, and Charles was suspected of secretly being one as well. The danger of Catholics making a full-fledged return to power was a nightmare scenario for these dissenters, and they were paranoid about the possibility of Catholics undermining Protestantism in government.

¹⁵ Keeble, *The Restoration*, 113.

¹⁶ John Spurr, “Religion in Restoration England,” in *A Companion to Stuart Britain* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 423.

¹⁷ Andrew Marvell, *New Advice to a Painter*, (1679).

Dissenters also homed in on the sexual debauchery of the king's court. According to Keeble, Charles kept several mistresses throughout his reign, and his courtiers also pursued many affairs. In the eyes of religious nonconformists, Keeble continues, "What had been construed as a welcome emancipation from political and religious tyranny [had] now become an abnegation of all moral restraint which threaten[ed] the governance of the state."¹⁸ To them, Charles had lost all moral authority by permitting flagrant sexual immorality to be practiced at the highest levels of his government. How could the head of the Church of England allow such deeds to go unpunished? Surely, they must have thought, God could not long permit this state of things to continue without some form of retribution.

One of the primary methods for religious dissenters to publicize their opposition was through literature. Themes of moral depravity and references to the English Civil War populate the works of famed authors, and dissenters, John Milton and John Bunyan. James Turner examines some of these literary themes across Milton's and Bunyan's Restoration-era works. In Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Turner sees evidence of the Puritan ire towards the royal court: "Samson's forgiveness of Dalila expresses not 'calm of mind' but sexual fury, combining the white-hot resentment of the divorce tracts with contemporary misogynist hatred of the royal mistresses."¹⁹ In the original story, Samson is gifted by God with superhuman strength, if he keeps a vow to never cut his hair. He falls in love with Dalila, who eventually tricks him into revealing this to her. But she betrays him, cuts his hair and hands him over to his enemies. The sexual sin of Charles' mistresses was viewed by Milton as a primary source of evil in the

¹⁸ Keeble, *The Restoration*, 175

¹⁹ James Turner, "From Revolution to Restoration in English Literary Culture," in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 808

government, and so it stands to reason that he would choose to equate them to Dalila, Samson's seducer and betrayer.

For his part, Bunyan wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, originally published in 1666. However, as time went on and new editions of the book were published, Bunyan began to draw more and more links between the Puritans of the civil war and the Restoration dissenters: "The more distant the dread year 1660, the more Bunyan retrieves and inserts episodes explicitly set in the revolutionary decades...and amplifies the details of his youthful depravity..."²⁰ By doing so, Bunyan portrayed himself and fellow nonconformists as inheriting and continuing the revolutionary struggle, even if they were not going into outright war against the king as in the earlier years.

Additionally, in his most famous work, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan included a scene which is vividly illustrated by Frederick Barnard, as two figures called Formalist and Hypocrisy climb over the wall marked "Salvation" onto the Christian's path.²¹ Formalist represents those who follow religious practices but experience no change of heart, while Hypocrisy pretends to be spiritually pure when he is, in fact, morally bankrupt. These descriptions accurately portray Bunyan's view of the Church of England and Charles II's Restoration government. In his mind, church and government were both spiritually empty, unmoved by true religious zeal, and the government especially was full of hypocrites who proclaimed their Christianity while committing adultery and debauchery.

To be effective, religious dissenters had to maintain the moral high ground and be portrayed as morally firm, in direct juxtaposition to the immoral royal court and government.

²⁰ Turner, "From Revolution to Restoration," p. 807

²¹ Frederick Barnard, *Formalist and Hypocrisy coming into the way over the wall*, from John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678.

This was a goal of Lucy Hutchinson when she wrote a memoir of her husband, Colonel Hutchinson, who had been a “regicide” during the Civil War. Hutchinson had been one of 59 commissioners at the trial of King Charles I who had signed his death warrant; these people became known as “regicides” for their role in killing the king. The colonel was arrested a couple of years after Charles II’s return. The couple were Puritans and had taken sides against the monarchy during the war. Colonel Hutchinson had been accused of a plot by the Duke of Buckingham, who ordered the Marquis of Newcastle to arrest him. But, Mrs. Hutchinson claimed, the marquis was impressed by her husband: “my lord was so fully satisfied the colonel was innocent of [the plot], that he dismissed him without a guard to his own house, only engaging him to stay there a week, till he gave account to the council, upon which he was confident of his liberty.”²² By claiming that even Royalists saw how upright and righteous her Puritan husband had been, Lucy Hutchinson sought to make him into an ideal: this was the type of person dissenters strove to be. Mrs. Hutchinson’s distinction was expanded on by many other dissenters, as they continued to decry the sins of Charles and his government while extolling their own virtue, and thereby legitimize their resistance.

The opposition of the religious nonconformists reached new heights in the wake of the disasters of the mid-1660s. The year 1666 had long been the subject of apocalyptic predictions, linked to 666, the biblical number of the beast. Keeble writes, “1666 was anticipated as a key date in the drama of the Last Things, perhaps the year of the conversion of the Jews, of the destruction of Antichrist, perhaps of the Second Coming.”²³ The apocalyptic predictions were well founded. In 1665, a large outbreak of bubonic plague struck England, and the following year saw the Great Fire of London. Through all of this, the Second Dutch War was ongoing, and

²² Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (London: J.M. Dent, 1913), 346.

²³ Keeble, *The Restoration*, 165.

England was not faring particularly well. All of this contributed to a growing sense of discontent against Charles and his government. Yet even that was not the whole picture. According to Keeble, “National humiliation at the hands of the Dutch, rumours of plots and insurrections, Clarendon’s unpopularity and impending impeachment, all gave the impression of a government rudderless, and, what was worse, a government not much bothered by the sorry state of affairs.”²⁴ With the country in this condition, it is not surprising that opposition and resistance would spike. That is exactly what happened, especially in religious circles.

For once, the Church of England and the dissenters saw eye to eye. Both agreed that these disasters were God’s punishment against a country led by sinners. In this anonymous painting depicting the fire, one can see what the artist portrays as an apocalyptic event, as ashes rain down



and people crowd the river line to escape the flames.²⁵ For many, the end times seemed to be at hand, brought about by the wickedness of their rulers. In addition, Keeble writes, “During the Plague, on 6 July 1665, a monthly fast day was proclaimed to express national

repentance and to seek reconciliation with God, but in many quarters it was believed that the government itself had most need of repentance. Dissatisfaction came to be articulated especially through dismay at what was taken to be its preference for hedonistic indulgence over duty.”²⁶

Even the government, we see, felt the need to ask for the Lord’s forgiveness for the sins of the

²⁴ Ibid, 164.

²⁵ Anonymous, *The Great Fire of London* (London: Museum of London, 1666-1675)

²⁶ Ibid, 166.

country, but refused to take the blame, putting the onus on England at large to repent for their sins without acknowledging their own. But the dissenters and nonconformists were determined to hold the monarchy accountable for its' lack of morality and leadership. In their eyes, Charles II and his government had brought the country into disfavor with God, and now they were being punished. There was no longer inherent trust in the monarch to carry out God's will.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the resistance to the Restoration at all levels of society and from various quarters shows the degree to which England was still in turmoil. Blind faith and trust in the monarch no longer existed; everything was subject to question. In politics, not even Royalist members of Parliament were willing to let the king simply have his way without question. Charles found himself increasingly having to persuade legislators that his position was right before they would do anything to fulfill his wishes. Religion continued to be a flash point in debates over toleration. Increasingly, King Charles and his court were seen as morally degenerate; to the nonconformists and dissenters, there was no inherent reason why he was entitled to rule, because there was no moral superiority on his part. Meanwhile, everyday people felt no obligation to the Church of England, increasingly seeing it as only one option among many forms of Protestantism. The low point came in the mid-1660s with the disasters of plague, fire, and war. Apocalyptic sentiments led many to believe that England was being punished for immorality, especially in the king's government. Combined, it was clear that the Restoration had not magically brought peace to a troubled country.

The lingering questions from the Civil War continued to fester. While Charles would be spared the fruits of this dangerous combination, his successor, James II, would not. Religious tensions and political resistance to monarchical overreach would lead to the Glorious Revolution, and the true beginnings of constitutional monarchy in Britain. Charles had been unable to smooth over the tensions that eventually brought the country to this point. His actions in the events described above show that, while he comprehended the need for peace in England, his royal mindset had not been shifted enough by the Civil War to accommodate the move toward constitutional monarchy. In the end, Charles was caught between two eras of monarchy- absolutism and constitutionalism- and he found himself out of place and adrift in a world he did not understand.

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