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The Muggletonians: A People Apart

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THE MUGGLETONIANS: A PEOPLE APART

by

Juleen Audrey Eichinger

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
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requirements for the
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Muggletonians were followers of John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, seventeenth-century London tailors who believed that they were the last two witnesses of the Spirit described in Revelation 11:3. A dizzying array of religious and political groups flowered for a time in mid-seventeenth-century England, inspired by the establishment of the Church of England and the continental Reformation in prior centuries, and unleashed by the collapse of the English monarchy in 1640. Muggletonians were long considered to be heretics or lunatics, one example of the many religious eccentrics and fanatics who flourished in England during this period.

The opportunity now exists to reconsider this perception of Muggletonians. In 1978, the British Library acquired a long-lost collection of primary-source materials that includes Muggletonian tracts, letters, songs, and minute books from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. These materials reveal the concerns of Muggletonian believers and document the evolution of Muggletonian belief and practice over three centuries.

Unlike other studies, this dissertation focuses on the concerns of ordinary Muggletonians rather than on the founders, and on the religious teachings of the group rather than its internal and external social relations. Furthermore, it notes
Muggletonian links to the medieval heretical tradition rather than to the eighteenth-century antinomian tradition. It uses the archived materials, in concert with microfilm editions of original tracts, to examine Reeve and Muggleton’s claims to religious authority and believers’ responses to that authority. It investigates the Christology, soteriology, and eschatology expounded by Reeve and Muggleton and believers’ responses to those teachings. It identifies both the continuation and evolution of doctrine and practice among believers, particularly in the later seventeenth century, as they endured persecution by government and Church authorities, internal dissent, and the deaths of Reeve and Muggleton. It concludes that Muggletonians articulated a unique and coherent religious doctrine that set them apart from not only the Church of England but also from other seventeenth-century dissenting sects.
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Juleen Audrey Eichinger
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INTRODUCTION

On February 3, 4, and 5, 1651,^1^ John Reeve, a London tailor, heard the voice of God say to him:

I have given thee understanding of my mind in the Scriptures, above all men in the world. . . . Look into thy own body, there thou shalt see the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of Hell. . . . I have chosen thee my last messenger for a great work, unto this bloody unbelieving world. And I have given thee Lodowick Muggleton to be thy mouth. . . . I have put the two-edged sword of my spirit into thy mouth, that whoever I pronounce blessed, through thy mouth, is blessed to eternity. . . . and whoever I pronounce cursed through thy mouth, is cursed to eternity. . . ; and thou dost not obey my voyce, and go where ever I send thee to deliver my message, thy body shall be thy hell, and thy spirit shall be the devill that shall torment thee to eternity.^[2]\(^\)

John Reeve and his cousin Lodowick Muggleton accordingly declared themselves prophets with the unique ability to interpret Scripture. They announced that they were God's last two witnesses spoken of in Revelation 11:3.^[3]\(^\) And they set about cursing or

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1. In the modern style of dating, which England adopted in 1752 and which is commonly used today, these dates are February 14, 15, and 16, 1652. For a brief explanation of the two dating systems see Alexander Gordon, "The Origin of the Muggletonians," Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool (Liverpool: The Society, 1869), p. 269, note; and Financial Times, June 30, 1997, p. 9. Subsequent references to dates in this work are to modern dates; bibliographic references cite the date that appears on the title page.


3. "And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3; Revised Standard Version); hereafter RSV.
damning any person who doubted their authority and, conversely, blessing any person
who accepted it. They visited and discoursed at taverns where Londoners gathered to
discuss politics and religion. They printed and distributed their interpretations of
Scripture. Soon they attracted followers, people who believed that they were, in fact,
prophets and that they did, in fact, expound the truth of Scripture. These people called
themselves Believers but after the death of John Reeve came to be called Muggle-
tonians. Against all odds, and not widely known, Muggletonians survived until the
late twentieth century. This present work explores their unique beliefs and practices.

Muggletonians were never very numerous, in either the seventeenth or later
centuries. They were much derided by their contemporaries and misinterpreted by
later historians as well. So far as historians have discerned, they had no memorable
impact on English religion, politics, or society in general. 4 They were frequently
thought to be extinct, fanatics who blazed into sight for but a brief period in the mid-
seventeenth century. Yet Muggletonians are now known to have survived for more
than three hundred years and to have left a collection of primary-source materials
only recently discovered by scholars. 5 These materials allow not only Reeve and

4. Henry Clark remarked that "Muggletonianism . . . hardly counts for
anything in the religious history of the country, and for a study of religious
development does not count at all" (History of English Nonconformity from Wickliff
to the Close of the Nineteenth Century, 2 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965),
1:96.

5. The last known Muggletonian, Philip Noakes of Kent, died 26 February
1979. In response to correspondence among Christopher Hill, James Lewis, and E. P.
Thompson, published in the Times Literary Supplement (November 1974–April 1975)
and discussed in more detail below in the Review of Literature, Mr. Noakes revealed
that he possessed Muggletonian documents whose existence previously had been
Muggleton but also a wide spectrum of Muggletonian Believers through the centuries
to speak for themselves, unencumbered by hindsight or the need to reconcile beliefs
and practices that originated in an earlier age with contemporary modes of thought.
The documents allow historians to paint a new, more complete, and more accurate
picture of Muggletonian teachings. Further, the archived materials shed light not only
on Muggletonian beliefs and practices but also on the established church and on other
dissenting religious groups with whom Muggletonians coexisted and to whom and
about whom they wrote. Finally, they can help scholars understand the ways in which
new religious movements respond to their environment and how they adapt in order
to survive.

This present work treats Muggletonians as a serious religious movement and
distinguishes Muggletonians as unique among dissenting groups of the seventeenth
century. It uses the archived materials\textsuperscript{6} to describe those Muggletonian beliefs and
behaviors that were most important to Believers and those that set them apart not only

\textsuperscript{6} The so-called "Muggletonian Archive" in the British Library consists of
eighty-nine volumes (boxes): sixteen volumes of letters; twenty-three volumes of
treatises; twenty-four volumes of verses; fifteen volumes of accounts; ten volumes of
printed works; and one copperplate of Lodowick Muggleton. The British Library
holds two additional Muggletonian treatises (BL Add. 42505 and BL Add. 61950).
Eleven of the volumes are eighteenth-century collections of copies of earlier letters
and treatises, and several are duplicates (for example there are three copies of Thomas
Tomkinson's \textit{Truth's Triumph} and two of his \textit{Zions Sonne}). I consulted twenty-eight
volumes, which included virtually all letters in the collection; all treatises that do not
also appear in printed or microfilm form; and three volumes of account books. I
consulted \textit{Truth's Triumph} and \textit{Divine Songs of the Muggletonians} at the Newberry
Library in Chicago and read Reeve and Muggleton's printed treatises on microfilm.
from established Christianity in seventeenth-century England but also from other religious dissenters in the same period. It further notes links between Muggletonian teachings and early Christian and medieval heresies. Finally, it acknowledges ways in which Muggletonian beliefs and behaviors subtly changed over subsequent centuries. In particular, this work investigates Muggletonian perceptions about the nature and significance of religious authority and examines Muggletonian teachings about the nature of the Godhead, the origin of evil in the world, the way to salvation, and the anticipated end of the world.

This work consults a variety of secondary sources that deal with medieval religious thought, seventeenth-century English history, and seventeenth-century radical religion in England. It consults microfilm editions of seventeenth-century Muggletonian tracts, available through InterLibrary Loan or at local libraries. Finally, it uses the archive of original documents and letters housed at the British Library to explore the ways in which Muggletonians were a people apart, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.7

7. Early Muggletonian documents and microfilm editions of Muggletonian tracts display variants of spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation that can be puzzling, quaint, or even confusing to twentieth-century English speakers. Nonetheless, all quotes here are reproduced exactly as found in the primary-source documents.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton managed to attract a small number of followers\(^8\) from a diverse geographical area,\(^9\) but they were not particularly well-liked or respected by their contemporaries. They were physically attacked by potential converts,\(^{10}\) nearly hanged by fellow prisoners in 1653,\(^{11}\) and intensely disliked by

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9. Seventeenth-century Muggletonians hailed from a wide geographic area, from London to the Midlands to England’s colonies; see map in *World*, p. v; and Lamont, “The Muggletonian Archive,” p. 1. Most were in London but there were also followers in Bristol, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Middlesex, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, and Somerset, as well as in Antigua, Ireland, Spain, and the United States; see Barry Reay, “The Muggletonians: An Introductory Survey,” in *World*, pp. 55–56. Reay gleaned his information from the letters and records contained in B.L. Add. MSS 60168–60256 and from wills and church records (p. 50).


Quakers. When Muggleton was pilloried in 1677, onlookers “nearly killed him with their missiles.” The very title of an article written anonymously and published in 1677 sums up the perception of Muggleton and his movement that prevailed in the seventeenth century: “A modest account of the wicked Life of that grand Imposter, Lodowick Muggleton: Wherein are related all the remarkable Actions he did, and all the strange Accidents that have befallen him, ever since his first Coming to London, to this Twenty-fifth of January, 1676. Also a Particular of those Reasons which first drew him to these damnable Principles: With several pleasant Stories concerning him, proving his Commission to be but counterfeit, and himself a Cheat, from divers Expressions which have fallen from his own Mouth.”

Seventeenth-century Church and Crown authorities held no higher opinion of Reeve and Muggleton. Both men were charged and convicted of blasphemy in September 1653 and were imprisoned in Old Bridewell for seven months. Ten years

12. Muggleton’s writings against and in answer to pamphlets by Quakers include The Neck of the Quakers Broken (1663[1665?]); A Letter Sent to Thomas Taylor, Quaker, in the year 1664 (1665); A Looking-Glass for George Fox the Quaker (1667[1668?]); The Answer to William Penn, Quaker (1673); and An Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq. (1669). See also Joseph Smith, Bibliotheca anti-Quakeriana; or, A catalogue of books adverse to the Society of Friends (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968).


later, Muggleton was held in Derby jail for nine days and, although released, was called a “fanatic” by his interrogator. The authorities seized and destroyed Muggleton’s books in 1670, charging that they were blasphemous. Finally, Muggleton was arrested, tried, and convicted in 1677 for illegally publishing a “malicious, scandalous, blasphemous, seditious, and heretical book.” He was sentenced to stand in the pillory for two hours on each of three days, to watch his books being burned before his eyes, and to be imprisoned at Newgate from 17 January to 29 July 1677.

Historians writing in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries have not been much kinder to Muggletonians. If they did not dismiss Muggletonians as laughable, eighteenth-century writers surely misrepresented them. Nineteenth-century

16. Muggleton was arrested on the suspicion that he was a Quaker; the vicar who questioned Muggleton called him “the soberest, wisest man of a fanatic” he had ever seen (Alexander Gordon, “Ancient and Modern Muggletonians,” Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool [Liverpool: The Society, 1870], pp. 202-03).
18. This book was The Neck of the Quakers Broken, which bore the imprint “Amsterdam, 1663” despite its probable publication in London in 1665. It was charged that the book had, in fact, been published in 1676, which meant its authors would not be protected by the Act of Indemnity of 1674. See DNB, s.v. Muggleton, Lodowicke.
19. This is reported by Whiting in Studies in English Puritanism, pp. 249–51, citing (p. 250, n. 1) Lodowick Muggleton, “A True Narrative of the Proceedings at the Sessions House in the Old Bailey, 17th January, 1676/7, giving a full account of the Trial and Sentence of Lodowick Muggleton for Blasphemous Words and Books” (London, 1676/7). I cannot locate such a work attributed to Muggleton, however.
historians cast Muggletonians as an example of "the exceptional mire and dirt cast up by the vexed times." Lord Macaulay, for example, described Muggleton as "a mad tailor" who "wandered from pothouse to pothouse, tippling ale, and denouncing eternal torments against all who refused to believe, on his testimony, that the Supreme Being was only six feet high, and that the sun was just four miles from the earth." Lytton Strachey in 1924 wrongly supposed that Muggletonians were extinct and in 1931 imaginatively described how Muggleton had preached his "incomprehensible," "frenzied," and "incoherent" doctrine to "ever-thickening crowds." C. E. Whiting in 1931 placed Muggletonians among the minor Puritan sects. Most of these early studies are, as one later scholar has observed, "bereft of social insight." They may be "entertaining, but miss[es] almost every significant point," which renders them useless for serious scholarly research. As late as 1975, Muggletonian theology was


termed "an emasculated Puritanism verging on insanity," and Muggletonian Believers and their dissenting contemporaries were described as "an interconnected group of religious eccentrics, fanatics, and lunatics whose confused enthusiasm contemporaries found difficult to distinguish from the Ranters."  

An unprejudiced and scholarly interest in Muggletonians was begun in 1869 but then languished for more than one hundred years. In 1869, Alexander Gordon sketched, for the entertainment of his fellow members of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool, the origins of the movement and the personalities of John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton. His article earned Gordon the unexpected and highly unusual invitation to attend a Muggletonian celebration at their London Meeting place and to peruse their historical archive. This opportunity led him to write a second article, in which he summarized the entire seventeenth-century history of the movement, as well as the main teachings contained in Reeve and Muggleton’s writings. He described in some detail the life and sufferings of Reeve and Muggleton and of some illustrious Muggletonians of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and

30. Apparently Gordon was the first and last non-Believer to attend a Muggletonian annual dinner; see Lamont, "The Muggletonian Archive," p. 3.
early nineteenth centuries. He also referred to expository treatises, poems, songs, letters, bills, and account books that he had been allowed to peruse.

For more than one hundred years after the publication of Gordon's articles, scholars interested in Muggletonians were dependent upon his study, for Muggletonians were thought to have become extinct and the documents he had seen to have disappeared. In 1974–75, however, an exchange of letters among Christopher Hill, James M. Lewis, and E. P. Thompson, published in the London Times Literary Supplement, led to the remarkable discovery of a Muggletonian living in Kent and the happy unearthing of the materials that Gordon had been able to peruse in 1869–70. Since this serendipitous find and the subsequent deposit of the Muggletonian documents in the British Library, a few scholars have used the archival materials to shed light on the group's fundamental beliefs and the composition of the group's membership, and to document the differences between Muggletonianism as practiced during John Reeve's lifetime and

32. The correspondence in the Times Literary Supplement took place as follows: Christopher Hill, "Milton the Radical" (29 November 1974); James M. Lewis, Letter to Editor (13 December 1974); Christopher Hill, Letter to Editor (25 January 1975); James M. Lewis, Letter to Editor (14 February 1975); E. P. Thompson, Letter to the Editor (7 March 1975); James M. Lewis, Letter to Editor (21 March 1975); and E. P. Thompson, Letter to the Editor (11 April, 1975).

33. Thompson (11 April, 1975) lamented the disappearance of the archive that Gordon had had access to, stating that its "recovery and preservation in a national collection would be of real importance." Imagine his surprise when he was invited to meet Mr. Philip Noakes, Muggletonian, and to peruse by matchlight in a warehouse more than eighty apple crates full of Muggletonian documents that Mr. Noakes had rescued from the bombing of London during World War II—the very documents that Gordon had consulted! For details of the discovery and contents of this archive see Lamont, "The Muggletonian Archive," pp. 1–5 and, for more detail, E. P. Thompson, Witness Against the Beast. William Blake and the Moral Law (New York: The New Press, 1993), Appendix I, pp. 115–19.
Muggletonianism as continued by Lodowick Muggleton.

Barry Reay has summarized the group's beliefs and described its membership. He focused briefly on doctrine, then shifted to an exploration of the group's structure during the seventeenth century, looking specifically at its leadership, organization, social composition, and distribution. Christopher Hill has identified differences between the teachings articulated by John Reeve and those expressed by Lodowick Muggleton after Reeve's death. He has warned against according preeminence to Muggleton's teachings over Reeve's, claiming that Muggleton habitually added his name to Reeve's tracts as they were reprinted, thus elevating his own status to—and later above—that of his cousin. William Lamont has compared seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Muggletonianism and has concluded that the major differences between the early and later periods were: departure from a belief in the imminent transformation of society; and rejection of "Immediate Notice" after 1671. Douglas Greene has focused on the pamphlet war


36. Immediate Notice" is meant the belief that God takes notice of and responds to the actions and prayers of all his believers.

between Muggletonians and Quakers and has hypothesized that both groups had roots in Ranterism.\textsuperscript{38} Reay, Hill, and William Lamont collaborated to produce \textit{The World of the Muggletonians} in 1983, the only monograph published thus far on the group. The monograph collects in one volume an account of how the Muggletonian documents re-surfaced in the twentieth century, a survey of the origins of the movement and the lives of Reeve and Muggleton, an overview of the group’s membership and distribution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an example of Muggleton’s innovations after the death of Reeve, and a biography of one Muggletonian who was illustrious for a brief time: a former Ranter, Laurence Claxton.\textsuperscript{39} Despite this little flurry of scholarship immediately following the discovery of the lost Muggletonian documents, Green observed in 1983 that Muggletonian theology has not yet been thoroughly studied.\textsuperscript{40}

In fact, no further in-depth assessments of Muggletonianism have been published since \textit{World of the Muggletonians}, although the archived materials have been consulted toward other ends. For example, E. P. Thompson, in \textit{Witness Against the Beast}, painstakingly traces possible Muggletonian influences on the thought and work of William Blake. William Lamont uses Lodowick Muggleton as one of three case

\textsuperscript{38} Greene, “Muggletonians and Quakers,” pp. 102–22.
\textsuperscript{39} Claxton’s name frequently appears in both primary and secondary sources as “Clarkson.” \textit{Claxton} is used throughout this work. For an overview of Claxton’s life and his contributions to Muggletonianism see Barry Reay, “Laurence Clarkson: An Artisan and the English Revolution,” in \textit{World}, pp. 162–86.
\textsuperscript{40} Greene, “Muggletonians and Quakers,” p. 106.

The picture that emerges from these published scholarly sources—particularly those whose focus is solely Muggletonians—may be technically accurate but lacks the depth or coherence that mark scholarship on other dissenting groups in seventeenth-century England. The authors portray Muggletonians as a syncretistic sect that combined beliefs from a variety of sources, often with surprising results. But they cannot always agree on the source of specific beliefs. They cite unique beliefs and practices of Muggletonians, but cannot agree on which beliefs were key to the


movement. In fact, they cannot agree on what, exactly, Muggletonians believed.

All published scholarly sources, for example, remark on the way in which Muggletonians wove together an unusually broad and diverse set of opinions. Gordon commented that he found the most striking aspect of Muggletonianism to be:

its singular union of opinions which seem diametrically opposed to each other. It is one of the most purely spiritual and at the same time one of the most rigidly dogmatic faiths on record. It deals largely with the most mysterious parts of nature and theology; yet it is always matter-of-fact, and eager to get rid of superstitions. Its followers contend with the utmost fervor for the use and virtue of the Spirit of the Scripture, in contradistinction to the nullity of the bare letter; yet to this day they believe and maintain, on the authority of the letter of Scripture, that the sun rolls around the earth in a day’s journey, and that the whole Newtonian system of Astronomy is a series of wanton blunders.44

Reay observed that Muggleton’s ideas were “a curious stew,” explaining that:

on the one hand, he embodies . . . the London artisan’s “no-damn nonsense” approach. . . . Yet he also adhered to the most obscure ideas of angels of “pure reason,” of the Devil entering the body of Eve and becoming flesh or man’s “unclean reason and cursed imagination,” and of God entering the womb of Mary to become “the Man Christ Jesus.” On the one hand he called for liberty of conscience and claimed that kings and kingly power had oppressed the “free-born people.” On the other, one finds in his writings unashamed paternal­ism, intolerance of rival enthusiasts, and the suggestion that heaven is a “monarchical system.”45

Hill argued that Muggletonianism was a hodgepodge of beliefs pieced together from

various radical groups in the 1640s and 1650s and their predecessors, primarily the Ranters and Behmenists. The correspondence among Hill, Lewis, and Thompson—which, it must be remembered, occurred prior to the re-discovery of the archive of Muggletonian materials—also echoed this perception of a confusing synthesis. While Thompson argued that Muggletonians seemed to embrace Boehme's mysticism, Lewis insisted that they ardently despised it. While Hill and Thompson cited Muggletonian texts describing Heaven and Hell as psychological or internal concepts, Lewis cited texts that described them as very real places. Lewis insisted that Muggletonians anticipated an imminent and physical apocalypse; Thompson suggested that the apocalypse was a metaphorical concept for Muggletonians; Reay declared that the group "categorically rejected any expectation of a millennium or earthly paradise" despite their conviction in the imminence of the Final Judgment; and Lamont perceived a change after 1656 from an emphasis on an imminent apocalypse. Thompson observed, in some frustration, that "if both men were sometimes very literal-minded at other times they opened the scriptures to far-reaching allegorical reinterpretation." These secondary sources also reflect disagreement about what were the

49. Thompson, Letter to the Editor (11 April 1975).
defining beliefs of Muggletonians. Thompson in 1975 summarized the central doctrines of the Muggletonian faith as: (a) the doctrine of the Two Seeds;\(^5\) (b) the doctrine of the Third Commission;\(^6\) (c) the doctrine of the indivisibility of God and of His Incarnation in Christ; and (d) the elevation of faith over reason.\(^7\) For Gordon, writing in the nineteenth century, the most important Muggletonian teaching had been the "cardinal doctrine of the Two Seeds."\(^8\) Thompson, by the time he wrote *Witness Against the Beast,* also settled on the Doctrine of the Two Seeds as the most unique and defining theme of Muggletonianism. Reay, in contrast, argued that the most noticeable characteristics of the group were its adoption of Joachim of Fiore's schema of the three ages, its acceptance of Calvin's theory of predestination, and its conception of God as the God Man Jesus.\(^9\) Hill thought otherwise: he cited as most unique the divine Commission to the Two Last Witnesses, the idea that Elias and Moses stood in for God while God was Christ on earth, and Muggleton's insistence that God paid no immediate notice to humankind.\(^10\) At least Lamont and Hill agreed

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50. This doctrine explained the dual mysteries of God becoming flesh (dissolving into semen and impregnating Mary) and the Devil becoming flesh (dissolving into semen and impregnating Eve with Cain, through whom Evil was introduced into the human race). See chapter entitled "The Two Seeds," below.

51. I.e., the teaching that Reeve and Muggleton were commissioned by God to be His sole prophets in the third and final Age of the world. See chapter entitled "The Commission: Dispensation in Time," below.

52. Thompson, Letter to the Editor (11 April 1975).


that Muggletonians were unique in their claim that Reeve heard God's "voice of words to the hearing of the external ear"—in contrast to prophets or leaders whose authority was conferred by inspiration, revelation, vision, or dream.56

This present work carries forward the work of Gordon, Hill, Reay, and Lamont and goes further. It exploits the archive of primary documents more fully than any previous scholarship.57 It focuses more on the beliefs and concerns of ordinary Believers—as expressed in letters, hymns, and poems—than exclusively on teachings expounded by Reeve and Muggleton in their tracts. It views Muggletonian beliefs from the perspective of the history of religions in general and emergent religions in particular. Thus it identifies a coherence to Muggletonian beliefs and accepts as natural the fact that beliefs developed, changed, and shifted in priority over time as the movement strove to attract and keep loyal Believers. It notes Muggletonian links to early Christian and late medieval heresies rather than seeing the group as a precursor to the eighteenth-century antinomian tradition. In summary, it argues for the value of seeing Muggletonians as a small, obscure religious group that was doctrinally unique but also, nonetheless, emblematic of dissenting religious groups in seventeenth-century England and, furthermore, emblematic of new religious groups that survive beyond the death of their founders. If this analysis can be proven,


57. Thompson's Witness Against the Beast and Lamont's Puritanism and Historical Controversy rely heavily on documents found in the archive, but neither work attempts to further or fully explicate Muggletonian beliefs.
Muggletonians will take their place in history as a fresh example of a new religious group that built upon existing ideas, combined them into a unique framework, distinguished itself from its contemporaries, and struggled to adapt and survive beyond its first intense years.
CONTEXT

If Reeve and Muggleton—professing to be God's two last Witnesses, claiming to speak with authority given by God, and establishing a religious group that, however small, challenged the traditional teachings of the Christian church and substituted their own—had appeared three centuries earlier, they likely would have been burned as heretics. Had they lived three centuries later, they might have been regarded as eccentric but harmless fools. In the seventeenth century, however, they were in good company.

By the seventeenth century any illusion of religious unity in England had faded. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the country was awash with new interpretations of traditional Christian doctrines and new religious groups. A wide variety of religious groups—the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, continental Reformation groups transplanted to English soil, and new radical groups that sprang up in England herself—competed for the loyalty of English men and women. No one church could claim the allegiance of all English people. Most religious debate at the time not only addressed concerns about God, salvation, and the afterlife but also advanced new ideas about church governance, social structures, economic patterns, political processes, or all of the above. Thus it has been remarked that religion was inextricably bound up with—if not responsible for—political,
economic, and social change.  

Presbyterians, for example, following John Knox (1514–72) and the model of Scottish Protestantism, called for centralized control of each congregation by a local group of elders rather than diocesan control by a bishop appointed by the king. Diggers, citing Acts 4:32–35, advocated communal ownership of property. In 1645 at St. George Hill, Surrey, they earned their nickname when they attempted to establish a community of the poor by claiming, occupying, and tilling the town commons. They offered their program as a victory of good over evil and equated the

58. Barry Reay asserts that “religion . . . stimulated and fired revolution”; see his “Radicalism and Religion,” in Radical Religion, pp. 1–2. Anthony Fletcher argues that the gentry saw religious unity “as the foundation of monarchy, liberty, and law”; see his The Outbreak of the English Civil War (New York and London: New York University Press, 1981), pp. xxix–xxx. C. V. Wedgwood has determined that the most popular books among all classes in seventeenth-century England were the Bible (William Tyndale’s English translation, which had circulated since the mid-sixteenth century), Foxe’s Book of Martyrs (1554), and Knox’s History of the Reformation (mid-sixteenth century); see her The Great Rebellion: The King’s Peace 1637–1641 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 85.


60. Acts 4:32–35: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need” (RSV).

61. “The work we are going about is this: to dig up George’s Hill and the waste ground thereabouts, and to sow corn, and to eat our bread by the sweat of our brows . . . that every one that is born in the land may be fed on the earth”; Ordinance of 3 April 1645, quoted in S. Prall, The Puritan Revolution: A Documentary History (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 118–19, and reproduced in Martyn Bennett, The English Civil War (London: Longman, 1995), p. 124.
success of their program with the return of Christ. Levellers called for a significant extension of the franchise in Parliament. They also denounced compulsion in matters of religion, called for the abolition of mandatory tithes levied by the government for the support of ministers of the national church, and elevated the authority of individual conscience over church doctrine. Fifth Monarchists rose up in 1661 under a standard that read “Our Lord, King Jesus!” and with a battle cry of “King Jesus!” The manifesto of their aborted uprising of 1657 had expressed their fervent hope that “all earthly government and worldly constitutions may be broken and removed by the first administration of the Kingdom of Christ.”

By the mid-1640s, Protestant groups both small and large could be placed on a long continuum. At one end were radical dissenters such as Ranters and Seekers,

63. “For really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, sir, I think it’s clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under”; Colonel Thomas Rainborough, quoted in A. S. P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–49) from the Clarke Manuscripts (London: Dent & Sons, 1966), p. 53, and reproduced in Bennett, The English Civil War, p. 86.
64. Bennett, The English Civil War, pp. 83–85.
Fifth Monarchists, and Quakers.66 At the other end of the continuum was the
established Church of England, which included a Calvinist or Genevan party and an
Arminian or Laudian party.67 Ranging between these two ends of the continuum were
Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Puritans, and Independents; Independents were
often called left-wing Puritans or Separatists.68 The beliefs that distinguished one

66. Ranters were “the most radical and the most peculiar sect of the
Cromwellian interregnum” (Jerome Friedman, Blasphemy, Immorality, and Anarchy: Ranters and the English Revolution [Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987], p. 1). They believed that God existed in man and in material objects, and that believers were above or beyond the moral law and could not sin (A. L. Morton, The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970], p. 17). Seekers rejected all sects and organized religion as apostasy and awaited the imminent Second Coming of Christ (Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution (London and New York: Viking, 1972), pp. 154–55. J. F. McGregor asserts that neither Seekers nor Ranters were coherent movements; like the heresy of the Free Spirit in the fourteenth century, they were “largely artificial products of the Puritan heresiographers’ methodology; convenient categories in which to dispose of some of the bewildering variety of enthusiastic speculation” (“Seekers and Ranters,” p. 122). Nonetheless, the literature of the time spoke of such groups, and twentieth-century scholars still use the titles to denote if not discrete groups then coherent patterns of thought. See T. L. Underwood, Primitivism, pp. 13, 14, for a brief acknowledgment of this conundrum. For the Free Spirit see Robert E. Lerner, The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages, corrected and reprinted ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972). Fifth Monarchists called for a violent overthrow of the existing government, in order to pave the way for the Second Coming of King Jesus. Quakers in the seventeenth century disseminated a new and radical interpretation of Christianity and so were considered to be radical dissenters, despite their subsequent transformation or evolution into an accepted Christian denomination.


68. Explaining the difference among Presbyterians, Puritans, Independents,
group from another sometimes related to the ideal mode of church governance and
other times related to spiritual authority. These seventeenth-century groupings
cannot be thought of as denominations as that term is understood in the twentieth
century. In fact, a remarkable cross-fertilization of ideas and adherents characterized
the mid-seventeenth century, particularly the period between 1640 and 1660. The
boundaries between these groupings were extremely permeable, and adherents—
especially to the radical dissenting groups—floated effortlessly among the various

and Separatists is akin to navigating a minefield. Hill observes that “‘Presbyterian’
meant conservative Parliamentarian, ‘Independent’ [meant] one who favored
religious toleration”; both favored a state church but Independents supported the right
of existence to “law-abiding sects” (The Century of Revolution 1603–1714 [1961;
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982], p. 142). Elsewhere he has observed
that use of the word Puritan “is an admirable refuge from clarity of thought” (Society
and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England, 2nd ed. [New York: Schocken Books,
1967], p. 13). “In the early seventeenth century,” he asserts, the word meant “those
who desired church reform by forming separate congregations”; by the middle of the
seventeenth century the word meant those who “called for the abolition of Bishops or
their removal from the House of Lords and advocated ending the dependency of
Church upon Crown by abolishing Church Courts” (Society and Puritanism, p. 67).
Acheson has defined Separatists as [Independent] individuals or communities whose
ideas about how the religious life of the nation should be organized differed from
“official” views; persons who did not view the Established Church as a “true” church
(Radical Puritans, p. 1). Geoffrey Nuttall has argued for seeing Puritanism as a
movement along a spectrum that ranged from Roman Catholicism to at least
Quakerism, a spectrum that moved toward greater emphasis on the testimony of the
spirit than on other church ordinances (The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and
Experience [1946; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], passim; see also
the Introduction by Peter Lake, p. xx).

69. See McGregor, “Seekers and Ranters,” p. 121: “The religious debates of
the 1640s were principally concerned with the true model of church government and
it was therefore relatively easy to categorize such denominations as Presbyterian,
Independent, and Baptist according to their expression of the congregational
principle.” The “disparate range of enthusiastic doctrines” poses new problems of
categorization, however, as they were not tied to any one model of ecclesiastical
discipline.
groups. Furthermore, the subsequent history of some of these groups can skew our perception of the continuum. Baptists, for example, in the sixteenth century had been considered radical separatists, but by the seventeenth century they were eclipsed by even more radical groups, such as Ranters, Seekers, and Fifth Monarchists. Quakers are considered in the twentieth century to be a sober and mainstream religious denomination, whereas in the seventeenth century they were considered a new, radical, and dangerous group. A thorough assessment of beliefs held by all these groups is beyond the scope of this work. A brief sketch of their beliefs, however, will provide a benchmark against which Muggletonian beliefs can be evaluated, to determine the distinctiveness and uniqueness of Muggletonian thought and practice.

The Church of England defined itself as “Protestant” when it allied itself with such continental reformers as Luther and Calvin and their followers against “Popery.” With the accession of Queen Elizabeth I in 1559, Protestantism firmly asserted itself as the official religion of state in England. King James I in 1608 summarized the


faith and doctrine of the Church of England as: (a) belief in the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds; (b) reverence for the first four General Councils of the Church and for the Church Fathers from the first 500 years of Christianity; (c) belief that the Scriptures—including the Apocrypha—contained all doctrinal teachings necessary to salvation; (d) honor for saints but skepticism about legends of miracles; (e) rejection of Purgatory; and (f) belief that bishops in the Church of England held an authority continued from apostolic times. This emphasis on Creeds, Councils, Scriptures, and Apostolic Tradition as authoritative guides in religious life characterized the Church of England throughout the seventeenth century. But differing interpretations of the

still fail to keep pace with the ever-accelerating productivity of my colleagues, both in Britain and in the United States”).

72. A Premonition to All Most Mighty Monarchs, Kings, Free Princes, and States of Christendom (1609), excerpted in Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England, ed. Paul Elmer More and Frank Leslie Cross (London: SPCK, 1957). See also Lancelot Andrewes’s oft-cited teaching mnemonic: The Church of England clings to one Scripture, two Testaments, three Creeds, four Councils, and five centuries of Tradition. The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563), which constituted the doctrinal standard of the English Protestant Church, specify that the Godhead is a Trinity, with the Son and Holy Ghost being of one substance with the Father; that Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; that the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds were the basis of Christian belief; and that the Church was the witness and keeper of Scripture through its Councils, although Scripture takes precedence over Councils in matters of salvation; see the Book of Common Prayer (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1977).

73. Archbishop William Laud wrote, “to believe the scripture and the creeds; to believe these in the sense of the ancient primitive church; to receive the four great general councils so much magnified by antiquity; to believe all points of doctrine generally received as fundamental in the Church of Christ, is a faith in which to live and die cannot but give salvation,” quoted in William Chillingworth, The Religion of the Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation . . . (1638; facsimile by Xerox University Microfilms, 1975), pp. 540–41. In 1643, Thomas Browne asserted that the Church of England was “the same belief our savior taught, the Apostles disseminated, the Fathers authorised, and the Martyrs confirmed” (Religio Medicis [1643; facsimile by
implications of the teachings found in these sources contributed to the emergence of Calvinist and Arminian parties within the Church of England.

Calvinism, the Protestantism taught by John Calvin (1509–64) and established in Geneva, may be described in England generally as that Protestantism brought back, after Elizabeth I's accession to the throne (1558), by the men and women who had fled to the continent during the brief reign of her sister and predecessor, the Catholic Mary I (ruled 1553–58). One hallmark of Calvinism was its stress on absolute election to salvation and absolute election to damnation. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, most leaders of the English Church were Calvinists, although there were some—among them noted divines such as Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury (1583–1604), and Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester (1555–1626)—who had begun to criticize Calvinism's strict determinism.

The Arminian party in the Church of England followed the teachings of the

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75. Tyacke asserts that the Church of England's Lambeth Articles of 1595 were "unequivocally Calvinist" (*Anti-Calvinists*, p. 5). The Lambeth Articles were drawn up in the late sixteenth century and dealt with the issues of grace, assurance of salvation, and predestination; see Gerald L. Cragg, *Freedom and Authority: A Study in English Thought in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 101.

76. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, pp. 25, 27–29. See also the Hampton Court Conference Proceedings of 1604, at which Archbishop Bancroft argued that "the state of the infant dying unbaptized being uncertain," baptism by laypersons "in case of necessity" should be approved, against such strict Calvinists as Bishop Gervase Babington of Worcester, who asserted that "some unbaptized are elect . . . therefore some unbaptized cannot be damned" and, therefore, baptism is not
seventeenth-century Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, who taught universal salvation for all believers. Arminians questioned and refuted the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, arguing against it that every baptized person who partook of the sacrament of the Eucharist could, by means of God’s grace, attain salvation. In fact, they argued that Calvin’s strict teachings on absolute election and absolute reprobation obviate the power and efficacy of the sacraments.

Arminianism slowly gained influence among English churchmen under King James I (ruled 1603–25) and became preeminent under King Charles I (ruled 1625–49). Through the efforts of his appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573–1645), Arminianism came to mean more than simply support for the doctrine of universal salvation through grace, and Arminian teachings about predestination, grace, free will, and the sacraments became the official position of the Church of England. Archbishop Laud stressed the importance of the sacraments at the expense of preaching and therefore encouraged the clergy to make the altar rather than the pulpit the focal point of the church and the Eucharist rather than the sermon the central event of worship. He mandated that communion tables positioned in the necessary to salvation (Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists, pp. 15–22).

77. The Synod of Dort in 1619 condemned the doctrine of Arminius and affirmed, with respect to predestination: (a) the unconditional double decree of election and reprobation subsequent to the fall of Adam, as taught by John Calvin; (b) God’s will that Christ’s sacrifice would redeem only the elect even though it could, indeed, redeem the entire world; and (c) the corruptness of human nature; see Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists, pp. 87–98.

78. The altar, Laud urged, is “the greatest, yea, greater than the pulpit; for there it is Hoc est Corpus meum, “This is My Body”; but in the pulpit it is at most but Hoc est verbum meum, “This is My Word.” And a greater reverence no doubt is due
center of the nave be converted [back] into altars at the east end of chancels and be railed from the congregation, "for the advancement of God's majesty."

Archbishop Laud regarded the church building itself as a place of honor to God, a gate to heaven. It therefore seemed appropriate to him to give honor and homage to God with beautiful paintings and carvings; uplifting music and liturgy; and opulent vestments and altar carvings. Opponents charged Laud and his fellow Arminians with idolatry, Pelagianism, and "Romish popery." When Laud placed clerics in high government offices, thereby investing ecclesiastical appointees with non-ecclesiastical authority, Arminians were charged with absolutism, and Arminianism was invested with

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80. Davies, Worship and Theology, 2:187, 203.

81. The Irish monk Pelagius had argued, in the 4th century, against Augustine's teachings on original sin, that humankind chose salvation or damnation through exercise of free will. For his arguments, Pelagius was condemned as a heretic.

82. English Protestants in the sixteenth century had been convinced that their break with Rome had meant leaving behind not only the authority of the pope but also the hierarchy of the papal curia and the rich ritual of the Roman Mass. Therefore the reintroduction in the seventeenth century of ornamentation and gesture to the church service elicited, among some of their number, fears of a return to Rome's dominance. John Morrill, in fact, maintains that resentment of betrayal of "orthodox" Protestantism by popery and "covert popery" [i.e., Arminianism] actually fueled the Civil War; see Morrill, "The Religious Context of the Civil War," in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, 34 (1984), pp. 155–78, cited in Patrick Collinson, The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 133.

83. Cragg, Freedom and Authority, p. 111.
political as well as theological import.

While most of the debate between Calvinists and Arminians centered on matters of church doctrine and ritual, another arena featured debate over church governance. By 1631, Calvinists who wanted to reform worship practices and modify episcopal governance as well as follow Calvin’s teachings were called “Puritans” by the dominant Arminian party.\(^8\) Puritans wanted “purer” forms of worship\(^5\) through elimination of externals considered so important by Arminians, namely, genuflection, the sign of the Cross, kneeling at Eucharist, and clerical vestments.\(^6\) Some urged the abandonment of music as well as the destruction of such ornamentation in churches as carvings, crucifixes, and altar vestments. Furthermore, Puritans were “obsessed” with Scripture and preaching.\(^7\) They regarded Scripture as unique, infallible, and self-authenticating; the only and sufficient rule for life; and the central feature of Christian worship.\(^8\) For them, Scripture was the supreme religious authority, above all else—apostolic example, creeds, councils, tradition, or pronouncements of

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\(^8\) Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 8. Many words and books have attempted to define the term *Puritan*, with remarkable lack of success, if success is measured by a consensus among scholars. See discussion in n. 68 above; see also Lamont, *Puritanism and Historical Controversy*, pp. vii and 1–4, for a succinct summary of the difficulty with the term. The Oxford Dictionary defines Puritans as those “English Protestants who regarded the reformation of the Church under Elizabeth as incomplete, and called for its further ‘purification’ from what they considered to be unscriptural forms and ceremonies retained from the unreformed Church.”


\(^8\) Cragg, *Freedom and Authority*, pp. 142–43.
bishops. Despite their elevation of Scripture above all other sources of authority, Puritans did not disregard apostolic example. In fact, they fervently desired to usher in the New Jerusalem by establishing congregations patterned after those formed by the first apostles and described in the Scriptures—especially Acts 4:32–35. But Puritans were wary of the authority and validity of an ecclesiastical tradition passed on by fallible men. They counseled Christians to obey ecclesiastical authorities only after subjecting their mandates to scrutiny for conformity to Scripture. “God binds humankind to obedience to their superiors in all things not contrary to his revealed will in Scripture,” wrote Thomas Sparke. In the so-called Millenary Petition of 1603, Puritan ministers called for a less “popish” liturgy, more rigorous enforcement of church discipline and ritual, and an increased emphasis on preaching. They also called for the abolition of bishops or their removal from the House of Lords and advocated abolition of church courts. Despite their critique of Arminians and traditional Calvinists, and despite the fact that they frequently formed their own congregations, Puritans typically sought change from within the Church. They did not advocate secession from the Church of England.

90. Quoted in Cragg, Freedom and Authority, p. 133.
91. Hill, Century of Revolution, p. 47.
92. “Puritans had no intention of departing from the national Church,” writes Stephen Neill; rather, “it was their intention to capture it, and put it to rights—a task for which they regarded themselves as much better fitted than anyone else” (Anglicanism, 4th ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978], p. 155).
Puritan sentiment against church courts and bishops opened a floodgate, however. The notion that they—along with Presbyterians and Congregationalists—advanced, that congregations could be self-governing and free from the jurisdiction of church courts, led others to assert their independence even more boldly. A number of small independent congregations sprung up throughout the country. "The single most important aspect of the religious history of the period [1640–60]," Barry Reay has declared, "is the emergence of hundreds of independent and semi-independent congregations."93 These independent groups formed separate or "gathered" congregations that constituted a continuum within a continuum. The more conservative groups on this continuum may be called Independents, while the most radical may be called Separatists.94 On the controversies of the day, these various


94. Cragg maintains that Puritanism’s “leading Elizabethan radicals were Presbyterians, who in due course would form the right wing of a movement that was steadily moving to the left” (Freedom and Authority, p. 155). Nuttall distinguishes Separatists from Puritans by the former’s despair of possible reform within the Established Church and their drive to “form entirely new congregations on an independent, extra-parochial basis.” He notes, however, that the Separatist movement “included all shades of opinion how far, if at all, it was justifiable to have communion with the Established Church.” And, in the sense that Separatists still held the “ideas and ideals” that they embraced while Puritan, he insists, “Puritanism must be held to include Separatism,” as it must be held to also embrace the earliest Non-Conformists, who held livings within the English Church but were ejected from it in 1622” (The Holy Spirit, p. 9). Neill coins the term extremer Puritans to indicate those who in the words of Archbishop Grindal (1563), “openly separated from us, and sometimes in private houses, sometimes in the fields, and occasionally even in ships, they have held their meetings and administered the Sacraments. Besides this, they have ordained ministers, elders and deacons, after their own way, and have even excommunicated some who had seceded from their Church” (Anglicanism, p. 113).
groups took different stands. Some, for example Particular Baptists, remained committed to Calvin’s doctrine of predestination; others, for example General Baptists, abandoned it and embraced a doctrine of universal salvation. Yet these groups agreed on what constituted a godly church, and it is this agreement that allows them to be considered together as a group. A godly church was a covenant between God and man and between men, they maintained. Such a church is founded on the authority of Scripture alone and is patterned after apostolic example—it is not established by government decree—and consists only of believers. Therefore, they concluded, individual congregations are not subject to government control; each congregation should be autonomous. Most such groups disputed the authority of church courts. Often they refused to pay tithes to the government for support of ministers, believing that contributions to the church should be voluntary rather than compulsory. Some of the more radical groups even refused to acknowledge the authority of ministers educated at universities and appointed by the Crown, relying upon lay preachers instead. Many of the more radical groups also denounced infant baptism as being devoid of Scriptural warrant, recognizing only informed, adult,

95. The precise place of Baptists on the seventeenth-century religious continuum is debatable. T. L. Underwood notes that Baptists—and Quakers as well—had much in common with the Puritan tradition. He places Baptists between Presbyterians and other Independents on one side and Quakers on the other; see Primativism, p. 4. Nuttall, too, notes that Quakers and Baptists “repeat, extend, and fuse so much of what is held by the radical, Separatist party within Puritanism” or “present no important differentia,” that they cannot be denied the name or excluded from consideration” (The Holy Spirit, p. 13).

voluntary commitment to the faith. Despite shades of difference, Independents and Separatists in common adhered to the notion that a church was formed when individuals made a voluntary commitment to gather together for worship. Autonomy and voluntarism—as well as desire to establish in contemporary times communities patterned after the earliest Christian community—then, are the hallmarks of the whole spectrum of Independent and Separatist groups that flowered in seventeenth-century England. These groups based their calls for autonomy and voluntarism on Scriptural and apostolic example and downplayed the authority of early Church Councils and tradition.

Far to the left of Puritans, even farther left and less numerous than Independents and Separatists, were the radical dissenters who were perhaps most prominent during England’s Civil War. These groups eschewed the authority of both Scripture and tradition, acknowledging only the authority of the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were “fundamentally in conflict with official, institutionalized, established religion and theology” and, because of this, often articulated the “hopes and grievances of those outside of the ruling groups in English society.” To less radical Protestants and to royalists, these dissenters appeared anarchic, undisciplined, heretical, and dangerously numerous. An anonymous pamphleteer in 1651 wrote:

It is no new work of Satan to sow Heresies, and breede Heretickes, but they never came up so thick as in these latter times: They were wont to

97. Dow, Radicalism, p. 57.
Quakers, Fifth Monarchists, Seekers, and Ranters "sprouted out" during the 1640s and 1650s. Such groups may not have been large, but they made an imprint on English culture far beyond their numbers. London was their geographic center and stronghold; laborers, yeomen, traders, shopkeepers, husbandmen, artisans, and even army officers and gentlemen adhered to various of the radical groups. Defying tradition and clerical authority these sometimes-uneducated lay men—and women—preached fiery sermons, sometimes to large assemblies. Called "mechanick preachers" because of their humble origins, these men and women claimed a personal authority to discern the divine will; they claimed direct inspiration; and they called for obedience to themselves rather than to traditional Church precepts and officials. To these radical preachers, their selection by God to be spokesmen and spokeswomen for the Spirit bespoke the imminent overturning of traditional society and, often, the imminent Second Coming of Christ. In fact, nearly all the radicals shared general millenarian

100. Dow has estimated that radicals comprised approximately 5% of the population between 1643 and 1654 (*Radicalism*, p. 66).
102. Fletcher has argued that uneducated lay preachers were regarded by government and Church officials as highly offensive not so much on account of their lay preaching but, more, on account of their humble social status, combined with their claims to be "chosen vessels of honour, inspired to show forth God's word" (*Outbreak*, pp. 111–13). See also Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 11.
expectations. They and their followers thought they could, by their actions, effect a more perfect world on earth, perhaps in advance of Christ’s coming, perhaps in concert with that event.

Although the radical dissenting groups were autonomous and often violently opposed to one another, they did, in the main, share a certain set of beliefs that allows us to speak of them as an aggregate. Not only did they oppose the state church and its clergy but also they rejected theological training for ministers. They elevated direct individual revelation and inspiration above tradition and training. They rejected the authority of the Church Fathers, Creeds, traditional practice, and contemporary bishops. They disparaged the literal interpretation of the Bible. They insisted that individual conscience is the best and truest interpreter of Scripture. They rejected corporate worship, prayer, and ritual, including the sacraments. They rejected the concept of a Triune God. They pondered the reason for the existence of evil in the world, trying to reconcile its existence with the notion that the universe had been created from the substance of a God who is good. Many were “mortalists,” i.e., they

believed that after death the soul either died or slumbered until the last days, when it
would be raised with its body. Many were accused—whether rightly or wrongly—of
being subversive to law and order, of being a danger to the realm.

Where on this continuum of religious belief might have Reeve and Muggleton
seen themselves? Where might their compatriots have placed them? What sort of
relationships did Muggletonians forge with other groups on the continuum?

Many Muggletonians—including Reeve and Muggleton themselves—
formerly had been Quakers or Ranters. Reeve and Muggleton claimed that their
prophethood foreshadowed the Second Coming of Christ. They claimed that their
Commission was more authoritative than either Scripture itself or individual
conscience. They rejected the Trinity as well as the authority of the Church Fathers,
Creeds, apostolic example, tradition, and the contemporary clergy. They believed in
the mortality of the soul as well as the body. These beliefs place Muggletonians
squarely among radicals on the seventeenth-century religious continuum.

However, neither Reeve nor Muggleton was a charismatic preacher. Both men
eschewed proselytizing and waited for interested persons to approach them.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{106}\) The title page of *TST* cordially announces that “if any of the Elect desire
to speak with us concerning any thing written in this treatise, they may hear of us in
Great Trinity Lane at a Chandlers Shop, against one Mr. Millis, a Brown Baker, near
the lower end of Bow Lane.” As late as 1934, one Muggletonian rationalized to
another: “we don’t know what is in our fellow creatures and are in danger of throwing
pearls to swine and increasing their punishment if they deride it. But should a
manifestly ‘lost sheep’ come our way, one who genuinely cannot find rest for his soul
in any orthodox religion, then we are quite right not to hide our light under a bushel,
but carefully feed him with milk and then judge if he can stand strong meat” (Lamont,
Muggletonians preferred to evangelize through their writings. The Muggletonian documents housed in the British Library include careful inventory and sales records of their publications over many decades. Many items in the collection are individual copy books into which Believers copied their own favorite letters, poems, or hymns from the past. Unlike most radical dissenters—and more in accord with Genevan Calvinists—Muggletonians believed in a strict determinism: the Elect shall be saved and the Reprobate shall be damned. Moreover, Election and Reprobation are not within a person's control, they taught; they are determined by the Seed of Good or Evil within each person. Finally, Reeve and Muggleton did not ally themselves with other radicals. Rather, they distinguished themselves from their radical compatriots. They called proponents of and adherents to all other religious groups "bloody unbelievers." They denounced leaders of other radical dissenting groups. Reeve denounced Baptists in particular; Muggleton conducted a bitter debate with Quakers; both made scathing remarks about clergy of the Church of England.

An overview of Muggletonian beliefs will show that the group clearly shared many beliefs and practices with the radical dissenters. It will also show that the group held some beliefs that were typically associated with traditional Calvinist Protestant groups. And, it will show that Muggletonians articulated some beliefs that were totally new and different from those held by any of their contemporaries.
OVERVIEW OF MUGGLETONIAN BELIEFS

After hearing God's voice, John Reeve wasted no time before obeying.107 He gathered his cousin to his cause.108 After God in his second revelation directed Reeve to "go thou unto Lodowick Muggleton, and with him go unto Thomas Turner, and he shall bring you to one John Tane and do thou deliver my message when thou comest there,"109 he and Lodowick promptly denounced John Tane.110 In accordance with God's third revelation to Reeve,111 the Two Witnesses visited the prophet John Robins in prison, exposed his errors and wickedness, and pronounced upon him a

107. Reeve heard God speak to him on three consecutive days. Reeve was reluctant to take action at first, fearing that "upon the delivering of so sad an unexpected message unto men, I should immediately have been torn to pieces" (TST, p. 5). But after God threatened him that "thy body shall be thy hell, and thy Spirit shall be the devill that shall torment thee to eternity" if he would not obey God's calling (TST, p. 5), he complied.

108. "The Lord opened the understanding of my fellow witnesse, and made him obedient with me in the messages of the Lord" (TST, p. 6).

109. TST, p. 6.

110. The Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals, vol. 3, notes that Tane was alternately known as Thomas Tany; s.v. Tany: "Tany (or Tani, Tannye), Thomas (alias Theaureau John)"; and see also BL Add. 60185, fol. 4v, which refers to one "Thomas Tane." This present work uses the form John Tane throughout, except in quotations in which it originally appeared otherwise. Tane, a goldsmith, claimed that God was in all things and that all men would be saved; he rejected Scripture as mere letters, not the living Word of God; and he claimed to be the messiah, sent to lead the Jews to Palestine.

111. Reeve's third revelation sent him "unto Lodowick Muggleton" and told him to "take such a woman [Mrs. Dorcas Boose, per Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals, vol. 3, s.v. Reeve, John] along with thee; and then go thou unto one John Robins a prisoner in new Bridewell, and do thou deliver my message to him
sentence of eternal damnation.\textsuperscript{112} Reeve then printed a record of his revelation and Commission from God, \textit{A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise}.\textsuperscript{113} On the title page the prophets invited interested persons to visit them and purchase copies of the work.

\textit{A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise} is valuable as a firsthand account of Reeve and Muggleton's calling from God and of how they responded to that calling. It also can provide a précis of the first teachings upon which they built their movement. Gordon, indeed, has described \textit{A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise} as "an account . . . of the leading principles of his [Reeve's] doctrines."\textsuperscript{114} Finally, it reveals a bit about Reeve and Muggleton's perceptions of those religious groups with which they coexisted, thereby helping to clarify where Muggletonians might be placed on the religious continuum described in the previous chapter.

God's words convinced Reeve that he had been selected to be God's own prophet, his last Messenger and Witness to the world. He and his cousin were to "declare the mind of God," to "declare his prerogative will and pleasure both to the when thou comest there" (\textit{TST}, p. 6).

\textsuperscript{112} The two prophets went "unto John Robins to declare his wickednesse unto him, and immediately to pronounce him cursed in soul and body, from the presence of the Lord Jesus, to all eternity " (\textit{TST}, p. 10). The \textit{Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals}, vol. 3, describes Robins as a farmer who claimed to be God; swore he was able to raise the dead; gave his disciples authority to damn his opponents; took the property of his disciples, allowed them to switch spouses, and expected his wife to bear the messiah.

\textsuperscript{113} Although \textit{TST} is primarily a record of Reeve's calling by God and his teachings, the title page of the microfilm edition I used (see n. 2 above) lists Muggleton as a co-author.

\textsuperscript{114} Gordon, "Ancient and Modern Muggletonians," p. 188.
elect world and reprobate world."\textsuperscript{115} This included making it known that "the Lord Jesus . . . alone is the only God and everlasting Father."\textsuperscript{116} Not only were they messengers or announcers, however; they were also God's representatives. Reeve and Muggleton were responsible to "seal the foreheads of the Elect, and the foreheads of the Reprobate, with the eternal Seals of Life and Death."\textsuperscript{117} They were to do so by blessing the Elect, i.e., those men and women who believed that the prophets were God's representatives, and by cursing the Reprobate, i.e., unbelievers. The prophets had power "to set up life and death before men, or to declare blessing or cursing unto men, which is all one."\textsuperscript{118}

The truth of Reeve and Muggleton's Commission as prophets, they argued, could be proved in two ways. First, God spoke audibly to Reeve, not spiritually. Continually throughout \textit{A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise}, Reeve reminded his readers that God spoke to him "by voice of words."\textsuperscript{119} These audible words, Reeve insisted, were equivalent to God's revelations to Moses and his manifestation of himself as Jesus.\textsuperscript{120} Second, the Commission would be proved true in a short time, at the Second

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{TST}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{TST}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{TST}, title page.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{TST}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{119} For example, \textit{TST}, pp. 3, 4, 5, 34, 35.
\textsuperscript{120} "The Lord spake by voyce of word, unto his three Commissioners[.] I know God the Father spake unto Moses as a man speaks unto his friend, as it is written; and I know that God spake unto the Apostles in the form of the Son, as it is written, because I know the Lord Jesus spake unto me in the person of the Holy Ghost, or Spirit. . . ." (\textit{TST}, p. 35).
Coming of Jesus.121

*A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise* is more than an explanation and validation of Reeve and Muggleton’s prophethood. It is also their initial declaration of God’s teachings. It lists and expounds upon the beliefs by which men and women will be judged saved or damned.

Fifteen chapters are proposed on page 3 of *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*. These include, as might be expected from the preceding paragraphs, one chapter on the Commission, one on the nature of God, and several relating to the resurrection and life in heaven. One full chapter is devoted to the wicked teachings of John Robins. Several others explain the creation of heaven, the creation of man, and the creation and nature of angels and the devil. One chapter contains strident calls for pacifism among Christians, and three chapters rail against false ministers, magistrates, and prophets in seventeenth-century England. Muggletonian beliefs will be explored in depth later in this work, but summaries of Reeve’s initial teachings here will provide a thumbnail sketch of the earliest Muggletonian principles.

Reeve and Muggleton were the last two prophets ever to be sent by God, and their charge was to spread correct teachings about the nature of God, the devil and angels, and humankind. Their Commission from God to spread the truth was only one of three such commissions that God would ever give. “The Lord Jesus did purpose

121. “Suddenly after we have delivered this dreadful Message, this God the man Jesus, will visibly appear to bear witness whether he sent us or not” (*TST*, title page).
within himself, to send his Messengers three times to the world, & but three times,”

Reeve explained.\textsuperscript{122} He continued:

\begin{quote}
unto Moses and the Prophets; this personal God bare witnesse in the name or title of the Father; unto the holy Apostles God bare witnesse in the name or title of the Son; in and unto us his third last Messengers, God beareth witnesse, in the name or title of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

Men and women who believed the prophets were the Elect; those who rejected them were the Reprobate; and part of the prophets’ mission was to assure the Elect of everlasting life and the Reprobate of everlasting damnation after Judgment Day. Earth and water had existed from all Eternity, but since God had ordered those elements into the world as we experience it, he is said to have created the world. God also created angels, whom he kept obedient by feeding them regular doses of revelation. He withheld revelation from one angel, however, who then became the devil. The devil secretly impregnated Eve, and their issue, Cain, her firstborn son and the son of the devil, was actually the father of all evil in this world. God was not divided into three persons but was “one distinct person.”\textsuperscript{124} Jesus Christ was God himself. While God was in Christ’s body on earth, Moses and Elias were in charge of heaven. When God comes to earth a second time as Jesus, he will raise the dead, and both the bodies and souls of the Elect, who have been sleeping, will rise to heaven, where both bodies and souls will live eternally with God. In contrast, both the bodies and souls of the

\textsuperscript{122.} TST, p. 34.  
\textsuperscript{123.} TST, p. 35.  
\textsuperscript{124.} TST, p. 22.
Reprobate will be raised to live again on this earth, which will be converted to a barren wasteland.

In *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, the prophets Reeve and Muggleton distinguished themselves from such false prophets as John Robins and John Tane. They also distinguished themselves from clergy of the established Church and, since the established Church was supported by the Crown, from the authority of English civil government as well. No minister of any church teaches God's truths, Reeve and Muggleton declared, yet the civil magistrates appoint and support those ministers. In fact, the only true ministers are those with a Commission from God, viz., Reeve and Muggleton.

Reeve and Muggleton shared with some of the most radical dissenters of the day a contempt for government-appointed and theologically trained clergy and an expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. With Puritans, they shared a conviction that a congregation of true Believers ought to be free from government control via Crown-appointed clergy and church courts. And, like Calvinists, they believed in absolute election and reprobation. At the same time, as the only genuine prophets of God, and as the final witnesses foretold in the Bible, Reeve and

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125. Tane came in for more pointed denunciation from Reeve in a later work, *A Remonstrance from the Eternall God* (1653); hereafter *Remonstrance*. I have consulted the microfilm edition of *Remonstrance* (Early English books, 1641–1700: 1660:21), whose title page indicates authorship by John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton.
Muggleton had only contempt and criticism for ministers of other religious groups, whether marginal or mainstream. John Robins, they insisted, was “that last great Antichrist, or man of sin, or son of perdition, spoken of by Paul the Apostle in the Thessalonians.”\(^{126}\) He was the “Prince of Devils,”\(^{127}\) worse even than the pope; “he shewed such signs as the Popes could never shew nor never shall shew.”\(^{128}\) Reeve and Muggleton complained that ministers—of the Church of England, the Independent churches, and the radical dissenting groups—instituted worship practices which were “an abomination to the Lord.”\(^{129}\) Furthermore, such ministers taught incorrect doctrine about the nature of God, whether—like clergy of the established church—they propounded the notion of a Trinity or whether—like such radical dissenters as Quakers and Ranters—they advanced the notion of a god immanent in all creatures.\(^{130}\) Such ministers are:

blind leaders of the blind, . . . merchants of the letter of the Scripture, that make the blind Nations their prey; . . . ravening Wolves that come in sheeps cloathing; . . . dumb dogs in spiritual things, that bark at true

\(^{126}\) TST, p. 7.
\(^{127}\) TST, p. 10.
\(^{128}\) TST, p. 8.
\(^{129}\) “All the Ministry in this world, whether Prophetical or Ministerial, with all worship taught by them, whether invisible or visible to the people, it is all a lye, and an abomination unto the Lord; both the Ministry and their worship are as acceptable unto my God, the man Jesus that sent me, as the cutting off of a dog’s neck” (TST, p. 34).
\(^{130}\) “They preach unto the people either a God of two Persons, or a God of three Persons, that is a Monster, instead of one true personal God; or else they teach the people to worship an infinite spirit, that is every where, without a Body or Person” (TST, p. 36). Clearly Reeve and Muggleton regarded Quakers as radical dissenters, which, indeed, they were in their earliest days, despite their later transition to accepted Christian denomination.
Prophecy and heavenly revelation . . . ; those that the Apostle Paul complained on in his time, that bewitched the people to turn from the spiritual Gospel to the legal form. . . . \(^{131}\)

Civil magistrates are just as guilty as ministers, according to Reeve. Civil magistrates are necessary for good government and justice, he wrote, and all men should either obey their laws or willingly suffer the consequences. But magistrates ought not get involved in matters of religion. "There is no Magistrate in this world . . . that hath any Authority or Commission from the Lord Jesus to set up any visible form of Worship whatsoever." \(^{132}\) And, continued Reeve, only Reprobates "bow down to that false, idolatrous worship, set up by Heathen Magistrates, and their Heathen false prophets, the National Priests, who call themselves Christian Magistrates, and Christian Ministers." \(^{133}\)

Did followers of Reeve and Muggleton in subsequent years share these outspoken opinions? Did they attach importance to the very same concerns that Reeve and Muggleton so emphasized? The Muggletonian documents now housed in the British Library reveal that Muggletonians throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did, indeed, express many of these same opinions and concerns, but not all and not necessarily with the same emphasis.

In the Muggletonian letters, verses, and tracts preserved in the British Library, the centrality and authority of Reeve and—especially after Reeve's death—

\(^{131}\) TST, pp. 36–37.
\(^{132}\) TST, p. 37; see also pp. 39 and 40.
\(^{133}\) TST, p. 38.
Muggleton is striking. Believers sought out and valued advice from Reeve and Muggleton in matters both spiritual and terrestrial. In 1682, for example, Muggleton carefully replied to one man's six questions regarding assurance of eternal life after death. In 1678 he responded to a Believer's questions about the necessity of prayer. Some of the prophets' letters are simple thank-yous for "love tokens," such as the "vessel of cider and sixpence" that Christopher Hill sent to Reeve or the "token" of "a barrel of pickled limes and a box of sugar" that Thomas Nosworthy sent to Muggleton from Antigua. As Muggleton neared the end of his life, there was a rush among Muggletonians to obtain a written blessing from him. "I do declare you one of the Blessed of the Lord both in soul and body to Eternity," wrote Muggleton to one lucky follower in 1668.

Schisms among Muggletonians, when they arose, invariably centered on authority. Laurence Claxton claimed authority equal to Reeve's in spiritual matters until Muggleton set him straight:

Because you have strove to maintain your Authority without me, and . . . you have quite excluded me and have made the Commission only John Reeve's and yours . . . I do renounce and disown you upon any such account as to be a Messenger or Servant or Bishop any more to

134. BL Add. 60178, fols. 1v–14r: Lodowick Muggleton to Mr. Whitehead, 13 June 1682.
136. BL Add. 60179, fol. 2r: John Reeve to Christopher Hill, 12 January 1656; BL Add. 60179, fol. 44r: Lodowick Muggleton to Thomas Nosworthy, 3 March 1678.
137. BL Add. 60179, fol. 36v: Lodowick Muggleton to Mary Parker, 13 August 1668.
this Commission.\textsuperscript{138} When Walter Bohanen and William Medgate in 1671–72 called Muggleton the devil and said that they cared not a fart for the Prophet’s blessing,\textsuperscript{139} James Whitehead accused them of having “despoiled the prophet and mouth of this most glorious commission.”\textsuperscript{140} In 1741 John Neall chided Edmund Feaver:

I thought you know’d better than to say that all that those two last great prophets writ or spoke was a bare word when as the prophet Muggleton says that all that was wrote by the prophet Reeve upon the foundation of the Six principles was Doctrine but their private judgement a bare word which was the matter in hand between the prophet Muggleton and those rebels [e.g., Bohanen and Medgate].\textsuperscript{141}

The authority and prophetic Commission of Reeve and Muggleton remained a central feature of Muggletonianism well into the nineteenth century. In 1803, Thomas Pickersgill counseled his fellow believer Abraham Treguno to “go to the third Commission And receive some of the Prophet’s Golden Oil, take a draft or too it will much refresh you and Cheer your Sad Countenance.”\textsuperscript{142} As late as 1853, Joseph Frost would write:

I have heard some of the Old Believers say that there was a party of that sort, as is spoken in the Acts \textit{[Acts of the Witnesses]}, which called themselves Reevonians, which I have no doubt was the party which

\textsuperscript{138} BL Add. 60251, fol. 65v: “Laurence Claxton’s Excommunication,” 25 December 1660.
\textsuperscript{139} BL Add. 60254, fol. 256v: James Whitehead to William Medgate, 1671, quoting Medgate himself.
\textsuperscript{140} BL Add. 60168, fol. 14v: James Whitehead to Walter Bohanen and William Medgate, 27 Aug. 1672.
\textsuperscript{141} BL Add. 60168, fol. 77r: John Neall to Edmund Feaver, 28 June 1741. The Six Principles are discussed in more detail in subsequent paragraphs.
\textsuperscript{142} BL Add. 60183, fol. 9r: Thomas Pickersgill to Abraham Treguno, 1803.
reprinted that Divine Looking-Glass in 1760. And the same spirit appears to
be now in the Church, endeavoring to establish that Book for the true
Muggletonians' Church Book, which cannot be allowed by any who
take Muggleton for their guide.143

After the authority of the founders, the second most strikingly consistent
feature of the documents preserved in the British Library is their emphasis on the
oneness of God. Over and over in their letters, verse, and expository tracts,
Muggletonians through the centuries emphasized their belief that God was Jesus, that
the concept of a triune God was false doctrine. Reeve explained in 1656 to Alice
Webb that Jesus Christ was "the only true personal God."144 Most letters between
Believers close with the expression "Yours in the true faith of a personal God the
Man Christ Jesus" or some similar formula. "When Christ died the whole Godhead
was absolutely void of all Life heat or Motion," an anonymous Muggletonian
explained.145

143. BL Add. 60169, fols. 196r-196v: typeset notice to readers, 1853,
indicating errata for all copies of Divine Looking-Glass. Apparently, when Muggleton
in 1661 reprinted Divine Looking-Glass (originally published 1656), he left out
certain parts that praised Oliver Cromwell as "a lion of the [tribe of Judah]" (see BL
Add. 60169, fol. 206r for the complete version of the omitted text). The 4th ed.
(1760) restored Reeve's original language that Muggleton had left out, subtly
emphasizing the authority of Reeve over Muggleton. Thus Frost maintained that the
1760 edition revealed the existence of "Reevonians." See also note 185 below.
144. BL Add. 60206, fol. 26v: John Reeve to Alice Webb, 15 August 1656.
between 1660 and 1795, per Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British
Library 1976-1980, unpublished. I thank T. L. Underwood for sharing this catalogue
with me. This writer goes on to aver that "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost became
Extinct in Death," which seems to indicate that, no matter how revolutionary the
Muggletonian concept of God may have been, Believers frequently fell back on the
traditional rhetoric of the Trinity in their attempt to express their beliefs.
Now will I rejoyce and Sing  
To Christ Jesus my God and King  

Thou formed the Earth and heaven high  
And in a virgin womb did lie...  

sang Thomas Cook. 146

The founders' concerns about pacifism faded in importance—although not into oblivion—soon after the movement’s founding, however. Despite Reeve’s strong stand on pacifism in A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise, 147 within one decade Muggleton counseled Christopher Hill against taking the Oath of Allegiance, not because it would force him to act in an unchristian way by forcing him to take up arms if called but because he would be “bound... to fight for the present power or else... break your oath,” which would lead to “great Inconveniency.” 148 In 1678 he counseled Thomas Nosworthy in Antigua that:

in a strange land where no hiding place is nor none to suffer with himself,.... amongst the Heathen,... people must doe as they doe else utter ruin will befall.... I do give you leave to submit to the Laws and Customs of that Island which are for the Defense and Preservation of the Temporal Life and the estates of the people against the heathen

146. BL Add. 60189, fols. 49–50: A Song made by Thomas Cook, n.d., but probably written sometime in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, per Catalogue of Additions.

147. “All those that bear the name of Christians, and yet make use of the sword of steel to slay men, who are the image of God, they are utterly ignorant of the true God and man Jesus, and enemies to his Gospel, that commands men to love their enemies” (TST, p. 10).

148. BL Add. 60179, fol. 7v: Lodowick Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 5 February 1660. It seems quite a leap from Reeve’s insistence on “the unlawfulness for a spirituall Christian to warre with a sword of steel” (TST, p. 3) to Muggleton’s characterization of fighting for the Crown as “an inconveniency.”
and any other enemies that seek to invade the island.\textsuperscript{149}

However, as late as 1803 Thomas Pickersgill reminded Abraham Treguno that “no true believer that is established and sealed, to the third Commission, can make use of any such weapons of war as swords and guns.”\textsuperscript{150}

In \textit{Transcendent Spiritual Treatise}, Reeve and Muggleton made it clear that they believed that they were living in the final days before “the visible appearing of the distinct personal God in power and great glory, in the clouds of Heaven, with his ten thousands of personal Saints, to separate between the elect world, and the reprobate world, to all Eternity.”\textsuperscript{151} By the late seventeenth century, however, the fervent expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ had been replaced by a concern with how to live and behave in the contemporary world in anticipation of the eventual Second Coming. Also by the late seventeenth century, the reference to God’s Third and final Commission to Reeve and Muggleton had developed fully into the teaching that the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit (coming after the Ages of the Father and the Son), had begun with the prophethood of Reeve and Muggleton. This doctrine then was used as a rationale for withdrawing from civic responsibilities, parish obligations, and even religious ritual of any sort.

The “Six Principles” that John Neall referred to in 1741 (see quote on p. 47

\textsuperscript{149} BL Add. 60179, fol. 44v: Lodowick Muggleton to Thomas Nosworthy, 3 March 1678.
\textsuperscript{150} BL Add. 60169, fol. 108v: Thomas Pickersgill to Abraham Treguno, 1 December 1803.
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{TST}, title page.
above) were, in fact, considered by Believers through the centuries to be the most important statement of Muggletonian doctrine. Yet various versions of these Six Principles exist in Muggletonian documents. Writing in 1656, John Reeve had rather generally described the Six Principles as: (1) the nature and person of God; (2) the nature and persons of angels; (3) the nature and persons of devils and of the Devil; (4) the original condition of man, and the Fall; (5) what is Heaven and Glory and its Eternity; and (6) what is Hell and eternal Death. Four years later, Muggleton had collapsed the place and nature of Heaven and the place and nature of Hell into one principle, eliminated the principle concerning the original condition of man and the Fall, and added Mortality of the Soul and the Nature of Witchcraft and Witches to his own list of Six Principles. His list supplied no more detail than did Reeve’s.

Thomas Greenhill in 1670–75 compiled a collection of daily meditations which he called his “Vade Mecum, his associate and daylie Companion, when hee travells, & walks, too & fro upon this earth”; it contained six chapters: (1) how the “right Devil” became incarnate in a body of flesh, blood, and bone; (2) how the true God became incarnate with a pure human body of flesh, blood, and bone; (3) Faith and Reason = God and the Devil; (4) Unity in Trinity; (5) the gods through several dispensations or

152. Sometimes these principles were called the Six Foundations, the Six Articles, or the Fundamental Truths.
153. BL Add. 60206, fol. 26v–27r: Reeve to Alice Webb, 15 August 1656. See also Remonstrance, p. 7. See Table 1 on page 167 below for a graphic comparison of the various versions of the Six Principles.
154. BL Add. 60206, fol. 21r–25r: Muggleton to Edward Fewterrill, 1660.
witnesses upon earth; and (6) the six articles of faith contained in the third and last true Commission.\textsuperscript{155} Thomas Tomkinson in 1676 set forth the Six Principles as the following: (1) the True God, his form and nature; (2) the “Right Devil,” his form and nature; (3) the form and nature of Angels; (4) the place and nature of Heaven; (5) the place and nature of Hell, and (6) Mortality of the Soul.\textsuperscript{156} By the nineteenth century, the Six Principles had evolved into more assertive statements of belief. Gordon concluded, from his study of Muggletonian documents and his meeting with London Believers, that the Six Principles were as follow: (1) There is no God but the glorified man Christ Jesus; (2) there is no devil but the unclean Reason of men; (3) Heaven is an infinite abode of light above and beyond the stars; (4) Hell is this earth, when the sun, moon, and stars are extinguished; (5) Angels are the only beings of pure Reason; and (6) the soul dies with the body and will be raised with it.\textsuperscript{157}

Despite variations among versions of the Six Principles, the number remained constant and some common foci emerge. Muggletonians desired to comprehend the form and nature of God. They were concerned to understand the nature of God’s created world, viz., the nature of humankind, angels, and the devil or—put another way—the origin of good and evil in the world. Finally, they were interested in salvation: how to achieve it, and what and where were heaven and hell. The core of Muggletonian beliefs, then, as first articulated by Reeve and Muggleton and also as

\begin{flushright}
156. Thomas Tomkinson, \textit{Truth’s Triumph} (1676), p. x. \\
\end{flushright}
pursued and developed by their followers, revolved around: (a) religious authority and the prophets’ Commission; (b) the nature of God; (c) the origin and presence of good and evil in the world; and (d) the end of the world, salvation, and how to achieve salvation. These core beliefs will be explored in detail in the following chapters.
THE COMMISSION: AUTHORITY

The Commission given by God to John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton formed the bedrock which supported and proved all other teachings of the Muggletonian faith. This Commission was two-fold. It was God's selection of Reeve and Muggleton to be prophets, and divine authorization of their right to interpret Scripture, identify and judge the Elect and Reprobate in the world, and represent God in this world. The Commission was also understood by Believers to constitute a particular moment in history. They spoke of the Commission as a new age, the last age, the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit—all phrases that carry echoes of the teachings of Joachim of Fiore. Muggletonian teachings about the Third Age and their echoes of Joachim will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. This chapter explores the authority that the Commission conferred on Reeve and Muggleton.

"I have chosen thee my last messenger," God announced to Reeve in his initial revelation. But Reeve, called by God to be the sole prophet in the world's last age, was further directed to enlist his cousin Lodowick Muggleton as his co-

158. Joachim was the abbot of the monastery of Fiore in Calabria, Italy, who in the thirteenth-century articulated a scheme of history comprised of three status or "eras."

159. TST, p. 5.
prophet. These two men would be God’s last two witnesses, who would prophesize until the Second Coming of Jesus and the end of the world. Reeve and Muggleton took upon themselves the mantle of prophethood, calling themselves “the lord’s two last true witnesses and prophets spoken of in the eleventh of the Revelation a little before the coming of him that sent us.”160 Followers of Reeve and Muggleton through the centuries—referred to typically as “Believers” in Muggletonian writings—concurred. The Commission, explained James Whitehead in 1672, “is the only true manifestation of the only true God to his blessed offspring.”161

The Prophet Reeve and Muggleton
It unto them was given
And it is so they will let us know
The right way into Heaven.
The Lord of Heaven, he did send
Muggleton and John Reeve
That All that were of the true faith
On them they should believe,

enthused Mary Cowell in 1736, with perhaps more passion than poetic genius.162

The Commission gave Reeve and Muggleton sole authority to interpret Scripture. They averred that they possessed an “understanding of my [God’s] mind in the Scriptures, above all men in the world.”163 “God hath chosen us two only to be the spiritual Teachers of his everlasting Gospel,” they explained.164 The prophets

160. TST, p. 4.
161. BL Add. 60168: James Whitehead to Walter Bohanen, 27 August 1672.
163. TST, p. 5.
164. Remonstrance, p. 9.
disseminated their interpretation of Scripture through conversation, not preaching.

Believers apparently gathered to discuss Scripture and its meaning, and always deferred to the judgment of the prophets. "I have been told by an ancient believer who now sleeps," George Hudson testified in 1796,

that had it from one that lived in the prophets day that it was common for the Believers to dispute one with another in the prophet’s presence and he would sit and hear them provided it was without heat or anger and when they couldn’t settle it they would appeal to the prophet and he would reconcile the matter which was final, and thereby knowledge was increas’d and all was satisfied.165

Believers also circulated copies of the prophets’ written tracts. After both prophets had died, their writings continued to give Muggletonians guidance and provide authority for Muggletonian beliefs and practices. Through the centuries, Muggletonians persisted in this belief that Reeve and Muggleton alone had insight into the meaning of Scripture, could make Scripture come alive for Believers, and could reveal the mysteries contained in Scripture. “By these writings [of Reeve and Muggleton] the spirit of life from God enters into the dead Letter of Scriptures by true interpretation,” testified Roger Gibson in 1773,

for truly before I saw or knew of this third Commission, I thought the Scriptures was the most inconsistent writings I ever read, but since I came to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and Faith in the same receiving it in love, through the divine writings of his two last Commissiond Embassadors, John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, the scriptures to me appear all harmoniously to agree, as to the

165. BL Add. 60169, fol. A/107: Letter from George Hudson, recipient unknown [possibly John Silcock, as this letter appears between two others from Hudson to Silcock], 1796.
substance of essential truth.\textsuperscript{166}

The prophets' spiritual treatises, James Frost noted in 1812, are "of the highest concernment being the foundation of truth & the bullwark of strength to support and uphold the commission."\textsuperscript{167} Thomas Robinson in 1847 insisted that the Commission "and that only hath the knowledge and interpretation of Scripture. And those who seek for Eternal Life must bow to their [Reeve and Muggleton's] Judgement and Authority."\textsuperscript{168} Reeve and Muggleton were inspired "with heavenly knowledge in the Scriptures," he affirmed, "more than all other men in the World."\textsuperscript{169}

Muggletonians expended much time and energy, as well as money, on printing, storing, and selling tracts and treatises written by Reeve and Muggleton. Muggleton in 1660 reported to Christopher Hill that he had been busy overseeing the reprinting of at least one tract and was preparing another for the press.\textsuperscript{170} In 1669 he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{166} BL Add. 60182, fols. 16r and 17r: Roger Gibson to Mr. Middleton, 4 March 1773.
\item \textsuperscript{167} BL Add. 60169, fol. 113r: Letter from James Frost, recipient unknown, 29 March 1812.
\item \textsuperscript{168} BL Add. 60169, fol. 175r: Thomas Robinson to Mr. Hales, 6 February 1847. Elsewhere Robinson explained that Reeve and Muggleton had received power and ability to interpret only those three versions of Scripture that were extant in their time, viz., Cranmer's 1541 translation ("The Great Bible"), the revised 1572 edition of Cranmer's edition ("The Bishop's Bible"), and the 1611 revised edition ("The King's Bible"). "Any revision that may be written differing from those 3 versions cannot be accepted by Believers of the Third Commission not having the Authority of God and His Last Commissioners"; BL Add. 60170, fol. 71v: Thomas Robinson, "Briefe Account of the History of the Bible," 4 February 1887.
\item \textsuperscript{169} BL Add. 60169, fol. 175r: Thomas Robinson to Mr. Hales, 6 February 1847.
\item \textsuperscript{170} BL Add. 60179, fol. 6v: Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 5 February 1660.
\end{itemize}
proudly informed Ellen Sudbury that “two or three Germans” had recently been with him and, while they did not become Believers, one of them had “bought all the Books and hath written the Commission book [i.e., A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise] into the German language and hath sent it among the Germans.” In 1785 Roger Gibson wrote to London Muggletonians that he and his son desired to print Muggletonian tracts in the United States. Correspondence between Muggletonians and Muggletonian letters to non-Believers were kept at the Muggletonian “church” in London, as early as the eighteenth century. At least one bound book of letters and tracts in the British Library bears the inscription “This belongeth to the Church 1772” and also a later notation that reads “from Joseph and Isaac Frost, 1831. Even in the nineteenth century, Muggletonians collected, read, and copied tracts by the prophets and letters from Believers. In 1817 London Believers signed a memo of understanding with John Dimes, Proprietor of the Bulls Head tavern, which allowed them

171. BL Add. 60179, fol. 39r: Muggleton to Ellen Sudbury, 30 August 1669. Muggleton explained that the Germans had been banished from Germany “for not submitting to the worship sett up by that Power” and had come to see him “to see what difference there is between the Revelation and Declaration by John Reeve and myself and that Revelation their Counrymen have had”; he concluded that “the difference is as great as Heaven and Earth for their Revelation is like many that have been in England these 20 years as Prophets and Prophetesses yet know not the true God neither in Form nor Nature nor the right Devile nor any true Principle of Doctrine nor Commission. . . .”


173. BL Add. 60168, fol. A/88: Benedict Shield to Roger Gibson, 4 September 1787.

174. BL Add. 60174, G-8.
to build a “Book Closet” at the tavern for their exclusive use. In 1845 they signed a similar agreement with Thomas Hewitt of the Coach and Horses. Numerous account books record expenditures for printing and shipping books. Moreover, Muggletonians subscribed to publications, that is, they paid in advance for the reprinting of the prophets’ tracts, and then their names were listed in the reprint. In the late nineteenth century, Muggletonians found new ways to underwrite the cost of their reprints and disseminate the prophets’ writings. Joseph Frost, Joseph Gandar, and James Windsor purchased £110.10.10 stock in “the Consolidated 3% percent Annuities for the disposal of the Church, for the purpose of preserving and printing the prophets writings.” They also donated Muggletonian tracts to the British Museum in 1836. Furthermore, it seems to have been a tradition for each believer

175. BL Add. 60169, fol. 114v: 17 July 1817. Believers stored their books in the locked closet and distributed the books upon written request.
176. BL Add. 60169, fol. 148r: 27 February 1845.
177. For example, BL Add. 60169, fols. 111r–112v, 7 March 1805; fol. 116r, 8 May 1823; fols. 115r–115v, 4 June 1820; fol. 126r, 29 December 1834; fols. 153r–168v, 11 December 1845–29 April 1846; and fols. 200r–204v, 18 April 1857.
178. See, for example, BL Add. 60169, fol. 126r, 29 December 1834; and fols. 128r–129v, 5 January 1835.
179. BL Add. 60169, fol. 132v: Joseph and Isaac Frost to the Church, 30 July 1835.

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to copy his or her favorite letters or tracts into a personal exercise book, sometimes adding a personal hymn or verse to the book. Many of the writings preserved in the British Library are, in fact, such exercise books and bear inscriptions such as “This book belongs to _____” or “Copied by _____.”

This strong emphasis on reading and disseminating the writings of the prophets stemmed from the belief among Muggletonians that the writings of Reeve and Muggleton were divinely inspired and possessed the same authority as Scripture. “If we cannot find truth in Muggleton’s writing,” charged John Silcock in 1796, “we cannot find it anywhere else, for that is the only place were it is to be found, were should we go but to the prophets writings, which should or ought to be the only Mediator in all Disputes.”

John Lowden, writing in 1773 to a clergyman in Sussex, had gone even further. The “books of my late Father,” he announced,

written by the Prophets Reeve and Muggleton, . . . are as sacred altogether as the Old and New Testaments, and of a higher nature, they being no less than the third and last Testament of the only God which is Christ Jesus our Lord, and agreeing with and fully explaining the first testaments.

In classic Muggletonian form, he continued:

182. BL Add. 60183, fol. 10r: John Lowden, 5 August 1773. Apparently this letter had been printed in a Unitarian magazine (January 1824) and copied by Thomas Amor, Muggletonian, in 1825; see fol. 10r.
183. Following upon Reeve and Muggleton’s authority to pronounce men and women saved or damned, Muggletonians after them—at least in the seventeenth century—were famous among their contemporaries for verbally damning their critics and opponents. For evidence of the continuation of this practice see BL Add. 60169,
if you . . . burn the books, or cause them to be burned, than by virtue of
that power I have received from the Prophet Muggleton, who stood in
the place of God in his time, I pronounce you damned in soul and
body, from the presence of God, elect men and angels to all eternity.\textsuperscript{184}

Indeed, Believers regarded \textit{The Divine Looking-Glass} as equal in inspiration and
importance to the New Testament and the Old.\textsuperscript{185} “The Bible, the new testament, and
the third commission,” proclaimed Isaac Frost unequivocally in 1836, “are equal
sources of authority.”\textsuperscript{186}

Reeve and Muggleton also claimed the ability to “discerne betweene the Elect
and Reprobate” and to “seale them up unto eternall life and eternal death.” Part of their responsibility as prophets took this form of an obligation “to seal the foreheads of the Elect, and the foreheads of the reprobate with the eternal seal of Life and Death.” After all, queried Muggleton, “what is the blessing of a prophet but everlasting life?” In consequence, Reeve and Muggleton both were quite free with their pronouncements of blessing upon Believers and of eternal damnation on anyone who doubted their message or authority.

The Commission in fact conferred such authority on the persons of Reeve and Muggleton that acceptance of the prophets’ Commission became the means of salvation for Believers. The Commission, Muggleton explained, is “the straight and narrow Gate which few do enter at.”

There is no coming to know God or see God, but by faith in this commission of the spirit, for I having the keys to Heaven and Hell, none can get into Heaven unless the witness of this spirit doth open the Gate.

Again, “no man can love God with all his heart, soul, and strength, except he who truly believes in the Commission. No religion in the world truly knows the true God but

188. *TST*, title page.
189. BL Add. 60181, fol. 15v: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
190. BL Add. 60178, fol. 6v: Muggleton in answer to Whitehead, 13 June 1682.
he who believes in the Comission."\textsuperscript{192} In 1658, when Elizabeth Dickinson requested a blessing or assurance of salvation from Muggleton, he responded:

\begin{quote}
John Reeve and myself [are] the Chosen Witnesses of the Spirit; we having the Commission and burthen of the Lord upon us wee are made the Object of your Faith. And as your Faith is strong in this Commission of the Spirit so shall the virtue flow from it to your Eternal Rest and peace. . . \textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

George and Jane Hunt swore in 1833 that it was their "bounded duty to make [their] faith known in the prophets Reeve and Muggleton which is the only guides to heaven."\textsuperscript{194}

Not only did Reeve and Muggleton claim to be the means to salvation but also they claimed a remarkably close identification with God himself. As prophets, they were representatives of God on earth, stand-ins for God. In the Prologue to their \textit{Transcendent Spiritual Treatise} they warned that: "whoever despiseth this writing . . . [has] committed that unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit."\textsuperscript{195} Accused of blasphemy in 1653, they argued their exemption from all outside, temporal jurisdictions with the assertion: "We cannot breake the Civill Law. . . . Whosoever

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{192} BL Add. 60178, fol. 6r: Muggleton in answer to Whitehead, 13 June 1682.
\textsuperscript{193} BL Add. 60179, fol. 3r: Muggleton's blessing on Elizabeth Dickinson, 20 August 1658.
\textsuperscript{194} BL Add. 60169, fol. 122v: George and Jane Hunt to Joseph and Isaac Frost, 3 March 1833.
\textsuperscript{195} Gordon cites the Muggletonians' "Spiritual Epistles," p. 5: "Whoever is left, great or small, to speak evil of this Commission which God hath put unto us, by calling it blasphemy, delusion, a devil, or lie; in so doing they have sinned against the Holy Ghost, and must perish, soul and body, from the presence of our God, elect men and angels to all eternity . . ." ("Origin of the Muggletonians," p. 273).
\end{quote}
tryeth us by the Law of the Land it is all one as if he tried his God by the Civill Law.” Even Laurence Claxton, accused in 1660 of trying to usurp Muggleton’s authority within the movement, maintained that:

a man in Commission represents the Authority of the great god of heaven and earth that whatever he bindes imprisons or condemns on earth is so in heaven and whosoever he declares blessed or happy here are so in heaven.  

In his blessing of Mrs. Parker in 1669, Muggleton acknowledged that as “the Messenger of God and ambassador in god’s stead” he “could do no less than give judgment and sentence of blessedness upon” her. Countering assertions from William Medgate in 1671 that questioned his authority, Muggleton stated that “rebellion against the prophet is rebellion against God.” “God has raised me up,” he continued, “to be his last prophet and has set me in the place of God to nourish his people who have believed his prophet’s report.” That same year he wrote in his condemnation of Walter Bohanen: “None is to call me to an account or to resist my judgment in spiritual things or matters, but God only.” Believers indeed respected the prophets in all matters. Minutes for a meeting in 1682 record among the attendees

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196. BL Add. 60179, fol. 1r: letter written by Reeve and Muggleton, 28 October 1653.
198. BL Add. 60179, fol. 37v: Muggleton to Mrs. Parker, 14 June 1669.
199. BL Add. 60254, fol. 253r: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
200. BL Add. 60254, fol. 253v: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
201. BL Add. 60254, fol. 259v: Muggleton’s Condemnation of Walter
and their payments: “The Prophet of God, L. Muggleton, free.” The minutes also authorize payment from the general fund for “the prophet’s coach,” while the rest of the Believers presumably either came on foot or paid their own carriage fare.202

Muggleton’s claims grew ever more extravagant over the years, especially after Reeve’s death and after several challenges to his authority. He maintained that John Reeve had been infallible in matters spiritual but claimed that God had “preserved” him “to be the Judge of John Reeve’s writings, and Judge of the writings of the prophets and Apostles.”203 “A prophet represents the place of god; nay, god himself,” he wrote in 1671.204 “Seeing god hath honored me to be the last liver [i.e., he outlived Reeve], he hath given me a double power so that god hath seated and established the commission wholly upon me so that the prophet now alive doth stand in god’s place and stead and doth represent the person of god on earth.”205 Further, Muggleton claimed to have had all answers to all spiritual questions, even before God called him and Reeve to be his last prophets:

The god of my salvation never let that well that was digged in my soul before I had a Commission from him to stand dry but the well of living water did continually spring up in my soul with new Revelations in opening the Scriptures and to answer to every person’s questions and

Bohanen, 23 January 1671.
  203. BL Add. 60254, fol. 259r and 258r: Muggleton’s Condemnation of Walter Bohanen, 23 January 1671.
  204. BL Add. 60181, fol. 7r: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
  205. BL Add. 60181, fol. 14r: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
objections that could arise.\textsuperscript{206} Reeve, in \textit{A Remonstrance}, had disputed the right of civil magistrates to try him and his fellow prophet. Messengers or prophets of God, he explained, are kept “innocent from the breach of any civill Lawes of men, that wee are made examples in the fulfilling of them to the whole world.”\textsuperscript{207} Muggleton likewise claimed to be morally impeccable, at least with respect to moral law. “I could wish that all the believers of the Comission of the Spirit might be preserved from the breach of the moral Law in the act as I have been from my Childhood.”\textsuperscript{208}

The authority conferred on the prophets Reeve and Muggleton by virtue of their Commission from God was unique. Most Independents and radical dissenters in seventeenth-century England disputed some of the sources of authority to which the Church of England appealed, viz., God, Scripture, Creeds, Councils, and tradition. Instead, they appealed to Scripture alone (Baptists, Puritans) or to an inner authority (Seekers, Ranters, Quakers). Muggletonians appealed an authority of an entirely different sort, neither Scriptural nor internal. They looked to an external authority that emanated from the persons of Reeve and Muggleton, prophets commissioned by God.\textsuperscript{209} Individual Believers did not seek guidance from God through examination of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{206} BL Add. 60179, fol. 39v: Muggleton to Thomas Tomkinson, 29 July 1679.
\item \textsuperscript{207} \textit{Remonstrance}, p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{208} BL Add. 60178, fols. 8v–9r: Muggleton in answer to Whitehead, 13 June 1682.
\item \textsuperscript{209} See discussion in Underwood, \textit{Primitivism}, p. 26.
\end{itemize}
their inner conscience. They did not seek to interpret Scripture themselves. Rather, they relied on Reeve and Muggleton as the sole sources of God’s wisdom and the only authorized interpreters of Scripture. Reliance on Reeve and Muggleton replaced reliance on tradition, councils, and creeds. “The doctrine and declaration of Reeve and Muggleton are just as true as those of Moses and the prophets and the apostles,” insisted John Saddington in 1675.210

Muggletonians did not dispute the authority of Scripture but, rather, denied the claims of anyone other than Reeve and Muggleton to interpret it. Reeve frequently cited Scripture as proof texts in his tracts. The Introduction to the anonymous “Articles of the Three Records” explains that this work consists of “the articles of true Faith of the Believers of the Commission of the Spirit, with Scripture Proofs Collected out of our Books.”211 Many works written by later Muggletonians appealed to Scripture, quoted Scripture, or claimed to present the prophets’ interpretation of Scripture.212 Tomkinson’s “None But Christ,” in fact, was designed to prove by appeal to Scripture that Christ was God. Tomkinson quotes from the books of Moses, the Old Testament writings of prophets and kings, and the New Testament gospels

210. BL Add. 60206, fols. 6v–12v: John Saddington, “48 Articles of Belief,” article #45.
212. For example, BL Add. 60188: Claxton, Paradisical Dialogue; BL Add. 80187: Thomas Gregory to Madame Stantonius and Madame Crawley, 13 April 1695; and poetry written 1852 by J. D. Aspland on the 200th anniversary of Muggletonianism.
and epistles. Muggletonians believed that people need help to understand Scripture correctly; that help is available only from interpreters authorized by God; and that only Reeve and Muggleton had been authorized by God with a Commission to interpret Scripture. Only Reeve and Muggleton could help ordinary men and women understand the mysteries contained in Scripture. Believers testified in song:

Once I was with Darkness Blinded
Seeking for the living Bread

Often did I read the Letter
Which my Reason would Confound
Still by Reason ne’er the better
Till the Living Bread I found

But my God the Man Christ Jesus
Blessed be his holy Name
By this third Record has eas’d Us
Put an end to Reason’s reign.

Although both prophets and their followers often quoted Scripture to prove their arguments, Believers tended to hold literal interpretations of Scripture in low esteem. “Oh Lord God,” the prophets had prayed, “deliver they Redeemed-ones not

213. Muggletonians apparently revered the Old and New Testaments but not the Old Testament Apocrypha or the writings of Solomon. Gordon argued that by denying the authority of Solomon, Muggletonians “get rid of the testimony of Ecclesiastes to the separate existence and destiny of the soul” (“Ancient and Modern Muggletonians,” p. 224). Yet they also revered the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (written 2nd century?, trans. into Latin by Robert Grosseteste, 12th, 13th century; trans. into English by Arthur Golding, 1527) and the Book of Enoch (not trans. into English until 1821), both of which were apocryphal.

214. BL Add. 60168, fol. A/43: A Song of James Miller (n.d.; but other songs by Miller bear dates of 1738, 1743, and 1744; 72 lines total).

only from exalting the literal Scriptures above the Holy Spirit which spake them, but also from disputing against the mysteriousness of them." John Brown explained that "blindness of ignorance" leads men to "take the mysterious sayings to be spoken in a literal sense, and the literal sayings in a mysterious sense & so [they] wrest the scriptures according to the sense of their own cursed imaginations." Explications of Scripture advanced by Reeve and Muggleton leaned strongly toward the metaphorical. "What do you Quakers think," sneered Muggleton:

the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was, and that Serpent that beguiled Eve? And so the Snake crept up to the Tree, and got an Apple in his Mouth, and the Woman took the Apple out of the Snake's Mouth, and so eat of it? The Tree of Life is the "very person of God," asserted "The Articles of the True Faith," while the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the serpent were "that angel that the Lord had cast down from heaven." One Believer explained that:

as our Savior says 'except you eat my flesh & drink my blood you have no life abiding in you' which eating his flesh & drinking his blood, was only believing this doctrine, & submitting and complying with his requests and demands.

Since Muggletonians believed that Reeve and Muggleton alone were able to

219. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 4v: anon., "Articles of the Three Records."
220. BL Add. 60950, fol. 15r: "The Saints Triumph and the Devil's Downfal."
interpret Scripture correctly, they naturally disdained the authority of any other men or women claiming to be ministers. They held clergy appointed by the Crown in special disdain. “I declare from the Lord,” announced Reeve,

that all of the ministers that was or is grounded upon magistracy since the coming of Christ in the flesh or since the Commission of Jesus to the Apostles are not of the Lord: now the Lord Jesus sent them not it was the magistrates their lords that sent them therefore their reward is from the magistrates of this world and not from the Lord Jesus Christ.221

To the clergy of the Church of England Reeve posed the question, “how canst thou possibly become a minister of divine ordinances by Authority from another man’s words or writings, unless without their Letter thou wert immediately moved to speak by the gift of the Holy Spirit as they were?”222 “Your pharisaical preaching and praying with your moderate civil walking,” scoffed Claxton, “are but as dirt or the dunghill yea as a menstrous cloth.”223 John Lowden in the eighteenth century reveled in informing a clergyman that Reeve and Muggleton a century ago had discovered

221. BL Add. 60175, fol. 8r: Reeve, Treatise of the Three Records (1651/52).
222. BL Add. 60254, fol. 186v: Reeve, Joyful News from Heaven (1658). Cf. the Puritan William Prynne’s lament about prelates who, “by their fruits and works . . . are so far from being the sons or successors of Christ and his apostles, or of divine institution, that they are of their father the devil (for his work and lusts they do), the successors from the Jewish high priests who crucified our Saviour, persecuted, silenced, imprisoned, excommunicated his apostles, and so, of diabolical ordination, not divine” (A looking-glass for all lordly prelates [1636], p. 1, quoted in Paul Christianson, Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978], p. 132).
223. BL Add. 60188, fol. 44v: Laurence Claxton, “A Divine Prospect” (n.d.; assumed ca. 1660, when Claxton wrote other Muggletonian tracts; bound with Claxton’s Paradisiacal Dialogue).
and exposed "the universal cheat of the national Priests, and every branch of their Priestcraft." 224

Muggletonians were no more sympathetic to Independent preachers or to the radical dissenting sects. Baptists, accused Reeve, "build on the Letter of Scripture and their own Reason rather than on any commission from God; therefore they counterfeit the teachings of Jesus." 225 "John Robbins is the last great Antichrist, or Man of sinne, that was to appeare to fulfill that Scripture [2 Thess.]," he announced. 226 "John Tanee is the last great Mystery Babylon, of that lying Notion of the Ranters," the "Prince and head of that Atheistical lie held forth by all filthy Sodomitical Ranters, which are now in the world," he continued. 227 Indeed, Muggletonians denied the authority of inner conscience that other radical dissenters such as Quakers and Ranters upheld as supreme. Muggleton denounced his enemies:

The Ranter & Quaker are those spoken of by Paul, that should in the last times fall away from that Christ without men (which Paul & the rest of the Apostles did preach) to a Christ within men, a meere Alegorie, an Anti-Christ. 228

Their respect for Scripture set Muggletonians apart from Ranters, who taught that the Bible was of secondary authority to inner conscience. "The Bible without, is but a shadow of that Bible which is within, which is the Law spiritual, the safest and only

224. BL Add. 60183, fol. 14r: John Lowden to a Sussex clergyman, 5 August 1773.
225. BL Add. 60254, fols. 186r, 169r: Reeve, Joyful New from Heaven.
226. Remonstrance, p. 4.
227. Remonstrance, p. 4.
228. BL Add. 60186, fol. 23r: Muggleton to Isaac Pennington, Quaker (1669).
rule,” Ranters held. It was said of Ranters:

The best they say of the Scripture is; That it is a tale, a History, a Letter, and a dead Letter, and more, the fleshly History; They call it a bundle of contradictions. . . . the archest piece of witchcraft that ever was invented. . . . the greatest curse that ever came into the world . . . the cause of all misery.

Thomas Tomkinson in 1674 noted that “Blind papist, Episcopal & Presbyterian ministers usher in their faith from dead prophets,” while “atheistical Quakers” and Ranters depend for guidance on an inward human reasoning rather than on prophets who themselves heard the audible word of God. Thomas Cook indicted other churches in his verse:

There Seven Churches full of spite
Each Church pleas’d that they are Right
When they are all More dark than Right

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

and then invited his friends to:

. . . come joyn with me
In praises to Christ Magesy
Who from fawce God as sett us free
By this his Last Commission.

In the late eighteenth century Roger Gibson railed against interpretations of Scripture

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231. BL Add. 60950, fol. 126r, Letter from Thomas Tomkinson, recipient unknown (1674).
by non-Muggletonian preachers, accusing "Independents" of his time of using the
"antient policy of fraud of the papists." As late as 1803 Robert Dawson condemned
"another of the Cainish brood a serpent devil preacher I think he is called an
independent preacher." 

Unauthorized interpreters of Scripture, Muggletonians believed, actively led
men and women astray and prevented them from learning the truth. Reeve and
Muggleton had cautioned that, understood incorrectly, the Scriptures can even be
dangerous. "The Scriptures themselves are Words of pure Truth, not having the least
Error in them," they wrote, "but error proceeds . . . from that serpentine devil in men,
which take upon them to interpret the Scriptures without a spiritual gift." "I have
read," George Hudson in 1796 advised John Silcock, later charged with schism, "where
the Prophet says these words or to this effect though the scriptures are true in them
selves yet reason has made them a nose of wax and can produce them to bear witness to
all kinds of error." In fact, the prophets themselves had warned, "Tho' the Scriptures
in themselves are just and true to all those that spiritually discern them, . . . there is
nothing but death in them to a carnal spirit."

Apostolic tradition, like Scripture, was not disparaged as a source of authority

233. BL Add. 60182, fol. 14v: Roger Gibson to Mr. Middleton, 4 March 1773.
234. BL Add. 60169, fol. 104v: Robert Dawson to Mr. Robinson, 15 September 1803.
236. BL Add. 60169, fol. 66r: George Hudson to John Silcock, 1796.
by Muggletonians. They actually saw themselves as living and suffering as did the first Christians. "Look back a little of the Prophets and Apostles, and Saints how their blood was spilt for the Testimony of our blessed Jesus, how they suffered for their Faith, some even unto Death," wrote Thomas Pickersgill to Abraham Treguno, when Treguno inquired whether he should take a civil oath or not.238 But in their eyes apostolic tradition came alive only in the lives and through the counsel of the prophets Reeve and Muggleton. Muggleton himself claimed to possess the very "same authority for our doctrine as the ... Apostles had,"239 and Isaac Frost in 1836 echoed that sentiment almost verbatim.240 Frost in 1838 distinguished Muggletonians from Independents, Baptists, Ranters, and Quaker churches: Those other "arose out of the imagination in man, not by commission from God as the primitive Christians [and Muggletonians] had."241

Creeds rarely get mentioned in Muggletonian documents, at least not the traditional Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian creeds. Laurence Claxton termed the creeds of the Church of England "a rapside of nonsense," "confused blasphemy," and a

238. BL Add. 60183, fols. 8v–9r: Thomas Pickersgill to Abraham Treguno, 1803.
239. BL Add. 60186, fol. 3v: An Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq. (1669).
240. BL Add. 60183, fol. 38r: Isaac Frost to Mrs. Elizabeth Ridsdale, 15 February 1836: "John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton received their power from the same source as the apostles had theirs from."
241. BL Add. 60169, fol. 146r: Isaac Frost to George and Mary Hunt, 7 November 1838. This is one of the few references in Muggletonian documents to the authority of primitive Christianity.
"knotty, goufy thread." Thomas Gregory asserted that to accept the Athanasian creed was to deny Scripture, for Athanasius was "the first to divide the eternal god into three persons." Several of the documents in the British Library, however, are creed-like statements or summaries of Muggletonian beliefs. In 1675 John Saddington penned "48 Articles of Belief." A booklet written in the eighteenth century contains a statement of belief in seventeen points, and the anonymous "I Believe" follows the same enumeration. "A Muggletonian Creed," although it ends abruptly, affirms, in a pattern if not language similar to traditional Church creeds:

I believe in God the Man Christ Jesus, in Glory who was a spiritual body from all eternity who by virtue of his godhead power entered into the narrow passage of the Blessed Virgin Mary's womb and so dissolved himself into seed and nature as clothed himself with flesh blood and bone as with a garment; . . . made capable to suffer death who made himself man; the express image of his father's person and so became a son to his own god power. He absolutely poured out his soul unto death; and lay three days dead in the womb of the earth. The third day the eternal spirit quickened into life again and is clothed with flesh and bone as with a garment of eternal glory who is now in the highest heavens from whence he came, the same that descended is the same that . . ." 

Muggletonians revered Scripture. They acknowledged the authority of apostolic example and claimed for Reeve and Muggleton the same authority as the

242. BL Add. 60188: Claxton, Paradiiscal Dialogue, chap. 16.
243. BL Add. 80187: Thomas Gregory to Madame Stantleus and Madame Crawley, 13 April 1695.
244. See also BL Add. 60206, fols. 6r–12v.
245. BL Add. 60168, fol. 250: R. Sedgwick to Mr. Hague (1798).
247. Written on the front endleaf of BL Add. 60254: A Spiritual Treatise (copied 1845).
apostles had been given. But Muggletonians throughout the centuries denied that any government-appointed or theologically trained minister had authority to interpret Scripture or preach, and they disparaged the authority and validity of individual conscience. They eschewed creeds and the doctrinal pronouncements of Church Councils. As shall become apparent in subsequent chapters, Muggletonians denied the efficacy of all Christian religious sacraments and ritual. They consciously and conscientiously avoided any ritual that had been mandated by civil magistrates or ministers appointed to the established church, even if it had possessed a long tradition of practice among earlier Christians. The teachings of Reeve and Muggleton, they believed, superceded all teachings and rituals associated with earlier Commissions.
THE COMMISSION: DISPENSATION IN TIME

The Commission conferred God’s authority upon John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton. “The two witnesses spoken of in the 11 chap. of the Revelations,” pronounced Reeve, “is this [ . . . ] dispensation or Commission of god unto an elect world and . . . John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton are those two witnesses or commissioners of the last commission of the holy spirit unto the end of the world.”248 The Commission was the third that God had given to humankind. “There are three dispensations or commissions of the lord unto the elect world and but three,” the prophets explained: “the first by Moses and the prophets the second by Jesus and the apostles and the third and last are the two witnesses in the 11 of Revelations.”249 Thus Believers frequently called Reeve and Muggleton’s Commission the Third Commission, the Third Dispensation, or the Third Age.250 Their Commission also would be the last God would ever give. In this sense it corresponded with a special moment in time—the period before the end of the world. Their Commission would

250. The Third Commission or Third Age also sometimes was called the Age of the Spirit, indicating a correspondence to the last person of the Christian trinity, viz., the Holy Spirit. Despite their use of such language, however, Muggletonians did not hold a traditional view of the Trinity. See the following chapter entitled “God the Man Christ Jesus.”
herald and usher in the last age; it would presage Christ’s Second Coming.

“Suddenly,” warned Reeve, “after we have delivered this dreadful Message, this God the man Jesus, will visibly appear to bear witness whether he sent us or not.”251 The Second Coming of Jesus would be the culmination of history. “We are the Conclusion of this Mystery which God has made known,”252 the prophets testified. Finally, the Third Commission surpassed the two previous dispensations in authority. “When God doth give a new Commission,” Muggleton explained, “the old is made void.”253

This chapter will present Muggletonian teachings about the imminent end of the world. Then it will position Muggletonians among other religious groups which advanced similar teachings and used similar rhetoric. Finally it will investigate the three-part scheme of history that Muggletonians advanced, its echoes of the teachings of Joachim of Fiore, and its ramifications for the religious life of the community.

“Whoever lives to see an end of us, shall suddenly see the dissolution of this vain world, and all the glory thereof,” promised the prophets.254 They urged the magistrates who had arrested and imprisoned them for blasphemy in September 1653 to accept and obey Muggletonian teachings “whilst you have time,” before God’s “sudden appearing to judge both quick and dead.”255 Muggletonians continued to

251. TST, title page.
252. Remonstrance, p. 6.
253. BL Add. 60254, fol. 36r: Muggleton, “Another Epistle” (n.d.; inserted into A Divine Looking-Glass, 4th ed. [1760] and bound together with other tracts as A Spiritual Treatise [compiled by Sarah Gandar, 1845]).
254. Remonstrance, p. 6.
255. Remonstrance, p. 15.
anticipate the end of the world, even after Reeve and Muggleton had long since died.

James Miller in 1738 longed for the day when those who denied God and Muggletonian teachings would be punished for eternity:

    So unrelenting Justice will
        'Ere long on them take place
    When time no more[,] they'll have their fill
    Of Hell torments... 256

"Considering that Eternity is at the door," wrote Boyer Glover in the 1760s, "men must be Instruments in the hand of God to fulfill his Will in diverse Respects before all is finished, particularly in publishing His Third Record, thereby sealing men up for that glorious yet dreadful day." 257 "The end time is near... Seek in your own soul if ye be prepared to meet that Infinite Glorious God in the clouds of heaven," Thomas Joseph warned Abraham Treguno in 1774. 258 Subsequent generations of Muggletonians expressed their views about the end of the world more sedately but nonetheless clearly expected the world to end in the near future. In the early nineteenth century Robert Dawson addressed a letter to London Believers, "to all that long for the second appearing of our God," while Thomas Robinson in 1834 closed his letter to London Believers with, "waiting for the Coming of this Lord Jesus

256. BL Add. 60168, A/30: A Song by James Miller (1738; 48 lines total).
257. Letter from Boyer Glover, n.d. but 1760s, quoted in Thompson, Witness, p. 69 and n. 15.
259. BL Add. 60169, fol. 104r: Robert Dawson to Mr. Robinson and Friends, 1803.
Christ. Just one year later, Joseph and Isaac Frost justified their decision to buy stock, whose profits could be used to reprint Muggletonian tracts, as follows: “so that Truth may have a little time to spread before the end comes.” In their Address in *Divine Songs*, Joseph and Isaac Frost averred that Reeve and Muggleton “were the last prophets what should ever speak or write, . . . while the world doth last; then,” they continued, “this same Jesus will descend from heaven, with his holy angels, to put an end to all time; and he will collect his jewels, by gathering them from the grave.” Muggletonians never ceased to anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus, the end of the world, and the final judgment. The urgency of their anticipation faded over time, however. Whereas Reeve and Muggleton spoke often about the imminence of the Second Coming and the end of the world, later Believers were less sure that the world was teetering on the virtual brink of dissolution. Nonetheless, Believers as late as the nineteenth century continued to believe and hope that the world would end soon. In this they were clearly adventist.

Adventism, or expectation of the end of the world, long has been part of

261. BL Add. 60169, fol. 132v: Joseph and Isaac Frost to the “Church,” 30 July 1835.  
262. *Divine Songs of the Muggletonians, in grateful praise to the only true God, the Lord Jesus Christ* (London: Brown, 1829), pp. iii–vii.  
263. Lamont has observed that “at some point after 1656 Muggletonians . . . gave up believing in an *imminent* transformation of society” (“Lodowick Muggleton and Immediate Notice,” p. 126). Reay has concurred but notes that belief in the imminent end of the world re-emerged in periods of crisis after 1656 (“The Muggletonians: An Introductory Survey,” p. 26).
traditional Christian eschatology or doctrine about the end times.\textsuperscript{264} Apocalyptic thought—belief in an imminent and sudden but also intense, dramatic, and catastrophic end to the world—also has been a long-standing feature of Christianity. Apocalyptic thought tends to be pessimistic, viewing the present as fraught with evil and anticipating that the Second Coming will bring the triumph of good over evil.\textsuperscript{265} The Christian apocalyptic tradition considered the Books of Daniel, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation to be key canonical texts.\textsuperscript{266} These books, especially Revelation, enjoyed a long tradition of exegesis by Christian writers from the patristic era to our present day.\textsuperscript{267} The language of Revelation gave rise to a unique rhetoric

\textsuperscript{264} Adventism has roots in Jewish messianic thought. The earliest Christians had expected Christ to return any day. The apostle Peter declared to the crowds on Pentecost that the last days were upon them (Acts 2:17–21), and the apostle Paul later urged the Athenians to repent because God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31). Later Christians have been adventist also, sometimes to the extreme: in the nineteenth century Millerites in the U.S. sold all their worldly goods and gathered on a hilltop to await the Second Coming and their own ascension into heaven. In 1997 the Heaven’s Gate movement—a cult which apparently mixed Christian, Gnostic, and theosophic ideas with science fiction and belief in UFOs—fixed a specific day upon which the world would end, and members committed suicide so as to be ready for that day (see \textit{U.S. News \& World Report}, 7 April 1997, pp. 26–30 and 32–34; and \textit{Time}, 7 April 1997, pp. 31–36 and 40–42).


\textsuperscript{266} Additional non-canonical apocalyptic materials, such as 1 Enoch, 4 Esdras, and the Jewish Sibylline Oracles also enjoyed great respect and influence among some Christians for many centuries; see Preface to McGinn, \textit{Visions}.

\textsuperscript{267} For example, Irenaeus in the second century, Tertullian and Hippolytus in the late second/early third century, and Eusebius and Lactantius in the fourth century. Pope Gregory IX in 601 declared that his study of Scripture revealed that “as this same End of the world is drawing nigh, many unusual things will happen—
among apocalyptic Christian thinkers. This rhetoric included references to the opening of the seven seals,268 the Two Witnesses,269 a thousand-year reign of God's saints on earth,270 Antichrist271 and the whore of Babylon,272 and a New Jerusalem.273

Reeve and Muggleton employed the rhetoric of Revelation in their writings: they insisted that they were the Two Witnesses, they condemned John Robins as climatic changes, terrors from heaven, unseasonable tempests, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes.” (letter to King Ethelbert, June, 601; cited in McGinn, Visions, p. 64). Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century related that she had heard a voice telling her: “all things on earth are tending toward their end, so that the world with all its powers now weakened and oppressed by many hardships and calamities is bowed down to its End (Scivias 3:11; cited in McGinn, Visions, p. 102).

268. Rev. 5:1 presents a vision of the future through the sequential opening of seals on a heavenly scroll: “And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals”; see chapter 6 for the opening of the first six seals and chapter 8 for the opening of the seventh.

269. “I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 11:3).

270. “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (Rev. 20:4—5).

271. Rev. 13:5—8 present the figure of Antichrist: “And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months; it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.”

272. “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her unpure passion” (Rev. 14:8; Rev. 17 and 18 expand upon this image).

273. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God . . .” (Rev. 21:1—2).
Antichrist, they called the established Church the Whore of Babylon, and Muggleton penned an explication of the book of Revelation as well as one that focused specifically on that book’s eleventh chapter. Some Muggletonians described the end of the world in dramatic, pessimistic, apocalyptic language. They sang:

But long-look’d for doomsday will make the scale turn’
All nature will tremble, the sun will fall;
Their heavens once vanished, lost souls hot will burn,
And earthquakes will shake all this ponderous ball. . . .

Yet Reeve and Muggleton did not anticipate a period of horrors before the Second Coming. They did not describe the Second Coming itself or the time just before it as cataclysmic; rather, it was the Judgment itself which would be so terrible. Reeve called it “the great and notable Day of the eternal vengeance of my God.” On that day, he warned, “Jesus Christ . . . will suddenly come in flaming fire, with his ten thousands of Saints to recompence vengeance upon the soules and bodies of all persecutors of conscience, both great and small.” Thus Muggletonians were adventist, used apocalyptic rhetoric to describe Judgment Day, and at least occasionally clearly articulated apocalyptic beliefs about the Second Coming.

274. Muggleton, A True Interpretation of All the Chief Texts, and Mysterious Sayings and Visions opened, of the whole Book of the Revelation of St. John (1665); and A True Interpretation of the Eleventh Chapter of the Revelation of St. John (1662).

275. Divine Songs (1829), song #169 (anon.; not separated from song #170 by Rebecca Batt).


277. Remonstrance, p. 12.
Apocalyptic thought is frequently accompanied by millenarian anticipation, which is based upon the rhetoric of the New Jerusalem and the thousand-year reign of God’s saints on earth. Muggletonians were not millenarians. They rejected out of hand the expectation the Christ would reign over an earthly paradise before the final Day of Judgment and end of the world. “Is it not a very unlikely Matter that the infinite divine Majesty should come again personally to remain upon this bloody Earth a thousand Years with his Saints, having suffered here already?” queried Muggleton.

The thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation, he explained, should be understood to be a spiritual, not visible, reign; it was the time before God had chosen Reeve and Muggleton to be the Last Two Witnesses, when the Truth had not been spoken or taught but had resided only within Believers who were persecuted if they spoke the truth.

Muggletonians were not unique among their seventeenth-century counterparts in adopting apocalyptic thought and rhetoric, but they were definitely in a minority

278. Millenarianism is the belief in a 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, after his Second Coming; see Rev., esp. chap. 20. Millenarian thought has developed in two different directions: pre-millennialists expect Christ to return to earth to reign in peace and harmony for 1000 years before the dissolution of the world; post-millennialists do not expect Christ to return to earth until after his saints have ruled peacefully for 1000 years on earth. Pre-millennialists often believe that the millennium will be established by divine cataclysmic action; post-millennialists often believe that humans will gradually bring about the rule of the saints; see J. F. C. Harrison, The Second Coming. Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979), p. 4.


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with their rejection of the notion of a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. In the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of England's religious groups employed a
full-blown rhetoric of Revelation to tar their opponents and assert their own
conformity to divine plan. The Church of England had justified its breach with the
Roman church by equating Rome with Babylon and the pope with Antichrist.281 Later
English Separatists condemned the Church of England as Babylon, while radical
Puritans linked the episcopacy with Antichrist.282 King James I himself wrote an
interpretation of the Book of Revelation, *A Fruitful Meditation* (1588), adding a royal
view to a spate of works with an apocalyptic tenor published in the late sixteenth and
early seventeenth centuries.283 Most such works appropriated the language and
imagery of Revelation to describe current events and expressed an apocalyptic view
of the present and future. The Puritan Henry Burton's *The Seven Vials* constitutes a
fine example of this genre:

Now is antichrist come to his full height; he will now adventure his
kingdom in one main battle; now is the time in all appearance, for the
fulfilling of that prophecy of Revelation xvii. . . . Lo here this fulfilled
before our eyes this day; when were there more swarms of

283. For example, John Napier, *A plaine discovery of the whole Revelation of
Saint John* (1593); Thomas Brightman, *A revelation of the Revelation* (1609; English
ed. 1615); Hugh Broughton, *A revelation of the holy Apocalyps* (1610); and Joseph
Mede, *The Key of the Revelation* (1627; English ed. 1642). Christianson counted
more than one hundred "systematic expositions of the Roman antichrist" in English or
written by British authors between 1588 and 1628 (*Reformers and Babylon*, p. 94).
See also Underwood, *Primitivism*, pp. 7–8.
The same apocalyptic tradition supplied the framework and rhetoric used by England's seventeenth-century radical dissenters. The young Leveller John Lilburne addressed the crowds gathered around him as he stood in the pillory:

For your satisfaction read the 9 and 13 chapters of the Revelation, and there you shall see, that there came locusts out of the bottomless pit, part of whom they [the English prelates] are, and they are lively described. Also you shall there find, that the beast (which is the pope, or Roman state and government) hath given to him by the dragon (the devil) his power... so that the pope's authority comes from the devil, and the prelates and their creatures do challenge their authority, jurisdiction, and power... is from Rome.  

Reeve himself charged that John Robins was "Antichrist, [...] he that was to appeare in this last Age, a little before the personall visible coming of the Lord Jesus in the Clouds, with his ten thousands of Saints in power and great glory."  

If Reeve and Muggleton were not alone in anticipating the imminent end of the world and in using the rhetoric of Revelation, neither were they the only men in seventeenth-century England who claimed to be the Two Last Witnesses. In fact, anticipation of the Witnesses was widespread in seventeenth-century England. In 1639 Richard Farnham and John Bull announced that they were the Last Two Witnesses.  

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identified the Puritan Henry Burton as one of the two Witnesses, a conclusion Burton himself drew. The Digger Gerrard Winstanley was less concerned to identify the Witnesses as individual men; he interpreted them as Christ in his First Coming and Christ in his Second Coming. Thomas Goodwin in 1639 opined that all Protestants were the Witnesses, while Francis Woodcock in 1643 claimed that godly magistrates and ministers in England were the Witnesses. Even Thomas Edwards, the Presbyterian author of *Gangraena*, a massive volume warning against all sorts of heresies, expected the imminent arrival of the Witnesses.

John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton stood apart from their contemporaries, however, by virtue of their perception of their place in history and of what they anticipated their witness would bring. Reeve identified himself not only as one of the two Last Witnesses but also as "the holy true messenger of the third dispensation." He articulated an elaborate three-fold scheme of time and authority, in which God had mandated three periods or dispensations in time and had sent one prophet or set of prophets in each dispensation:

The Lord Jesus did purpose within himself, to send his messengers three times to the world, and but three times to this bloody unbelieving world. . . . There are three bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, . . . [and] there are three bear witnesse in Earth, the Water, the Blood, and the Spirit. . . . The Water was the Commissions of Moses, and the Prophets under the Law; the Blood

was the Commission of the Apostles, and those Ministers of the Gospel chosen by appointment from the Lord; the Spirit . . . are those two Witnesses spoken of in the Revelation . . . whose Message, or Ministry, or Prophesie, is all invisible and spiritual.\textsuperscript{292}

In 1660, Laurence Claxton elaborated:

There are three that bear record in heaven, viz., father, Word, holy ghost and three that bear witness on earth, viz., spirit, water, blood. Each record in heaven is related to a witness on earth via a commission. E.g., while God bore the title of father, Moses and the prophets held a commission; when God became flesh, Son, Christ, the apostles held a commission; and when God and Christ "became holy ghost or one entire spiritual body now in heaven glorified," Muggleton and Reeve held a commission.\textsuperscript{293}

The notion that all of history is divided into three ages or dispensations persisted in Muggletonian writings throughout the centuries. The anonymous "Articles of the Three Records" echoed Reeve's words that linked the first Commission to Water, God the Father, Moses, the prophets, and the Jewish Law and similarly linked the second Commission to Blood, "God . . . made flesh," and the apostles. It also stressed that the third Commission "bore record that Christ Jesus is the High and Mighty God and everlasting Father" and was represented on earth by the two witnesses of Revelation.\textsuperscript{294} In 1773 John Lowden explained that God bore witness to his first testament or record (the Old Testament) "under the title of I am Jehovah."\textsuperscript{295} Moses and Aaron were the commissioners of this record. The second

\textsuperscript{292} TST, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{294} BL Add. 60205A, fols. 2v–3r: anon., "Articles of the Three Records."
\textsuperscript{295} BL Add. 60183, fol. 12v: John Lowden, 5 Aug. 1773; copied 1825 by Thomas Amor.
record or testament was the witness of Jesus, and the apostles were its commissioners.

“There must be also a third record to bear witness on earth, answerable to the third record in heaven, under the title of the Holy Spirit,” Lowden concluded. Nearly one century later, Robert Wallis echoed Claxton: “there are three that bear witness in Earth the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood, and these three agree in one.” The Commission of Water was the time of the Law, Moses, and the prophets, bearing witness to the Father, Jehovah. The Commission of Blood was the time of the Gospel, Jesus, and the apostles, bearing witness to the Son, “God-become-flesh.” Finally, Wallis affirmed, the Commission of the Spirit is the time of Reeve and Muggleton, to the end of time, bearing witness to the Holy Ghost, “sanctifier-of-the-Elect.” Reeve and Muggleton, Wallis testified, were the heads of God’s third and last Commission or dispensation of heavenly knowledge.

The idea of three ages of the world did not originate with Reeve and Muggleton or any of their radical contemporaries. In some respects it is a natural outgrowth of Trinitarian doctrine, i.e., history must conform to the divine plan; and since the divinity is three in one, so also must history be. In the late twelfth century...
century, the abbot Joachim carefully studied the book of Revelation and proposed a new understanding of history that linked the teachings of biblical texts—in particular apocalyptic texts—to actual historical events. He posited the existence of three *status* of the world, each dominated successively by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Important to Joachim's understanding of history was his location of the third *status* within history; he did not envision it to be a result of and therefore after Christ's Second Coming. Joachim's scheme had great influence, especially among Spiritual Franciscans in the thirteenth century, and has been linked to writings throughout the late medieval world.

Until Joachim's time, the book of Revelation had been understood primarily as an allegory of the apocalypse. Joachim, however, attempted to make the allegory

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301. For a detailed study of Joachim and his writings see McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot*.


303. See Morton W. Bloomfield and Marjorie E. Reeves, "The Penetration of Joachism into Northern Europe," *Speculum* 29 (1954). Indeed, McGinn calls Joachim "the most important apocalyptic author of the Middle Ages" (*Visions*, p. 126). This assertion is supported by the wealth of modern scholarship on Joachim and the number of references, however oblique, by subsequent thinkers to his writings. Expositions of the book of Revelation, following Joachim, by Alexander Minorita (1235), Peter Olivi (1297), Arnold of Villanova (1300), Nicholas of Lyra (1329), and John of Rupecissa (1349) are perhaps best known or were most influential.
relevant to the current era by means of a system of concordances. Just as events related in the New Testament had been prefigured by events in the Old Testament, so events in current history correspond to prophesies in the New Testament, he maintained. Along with his system of concordances—or, more precisely, as an outgrowth of it—Joachim proposed a three-part scheme of history. Since the Old and New Testaments were linked through concordances and since concordances exist between the New Testament and the present, Joachim insisted that a new or third era of spirituality necessarily would come in the future. The Old Testament period, the New Testament period, and the future would constitute a trinity that corresponded to the divine Trinity. From Joachim's time onward, a whole industry flourished from attempts to understand and interpret the meaning of Revelation's teachings for the present day and to link the predictions of Revelation with historical events.

In the thirteenth century, interpretations of Joachim's writings produced explosive results. A young Franciscan studying in Paris, Gerardo de Borgo San

305. In later centuries men and movements fused apocalyptic anticipation and rhetoric together with political, social, and economic thought and action . . . with sometimes revolutionary results. Followers of the Czech reformer John Hus seized Prague in 1419, and his followers in rural areas—Taborites—awaited the end of the world and used force of arms between 1420 and 1452 to defend and extend their communities. In 1534-35, Anabaptists in the Netherlands viewed the Dutch city of Munster as the New Jerusalem and its leader, Jan Matthijsz, as "the true Enoch, one of the two witnesses to the last punishment of the world, mentioned in Revelation 11 v. 4" (see Alastair Duke, "The Netherlands," in The Early Reformation in Europe, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 155–57.
Donnino, published in 1254 his *Introduction to the Everlasting Gospel*, which combined selections from Joachim's writings with Gerardo's own glosses. The *Everlasting Gospel* predicted that the Third Age would arrive in 1260 and that it was itself a new text for this third age. Furthermore, Gerardo insisted that the coming Third Age would abrogate the Church of the Second Age and that Joachim's writings would abrogate the Old and New Testaments. Gerardo and his *Everlasting Gospel* were effectively silenced by Church authorities, but in the wake of what had turned into public scandal the Franciscan Order purged anyone with Joachimist tendencies, including their own Minister-General, John of Parma. Joachimism, however, did not disappear; it was kept alive through the centuries, although it was perhaps misinterpreted and misused in the process. It enjoyed somewhat of a rebirth in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Joachim's works had reached England by the early thirteenth century. Early

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306. Bloomfield, "Joachim of Flora," p. 296. Reeves acknowledges that followers of Joachim—not Joachim himself—were responsible for the notion of three ages. "The third status could quickly become a third age, with a new 'testament,' a new authority, and new institutions," she notes (*Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, p. 8).


309. Many pseudo-Joachist works circulated and were long considered to be actually written by Joachim. Only in the twentieth-century has research established a definitive canon of Joachim's works.

310. They cite, among other evidence, chronicles by Benedict of Peterborough
references to Joachim’s teachings contained few, if any references to his three-part scheme of history and instead focused on his method of establishing concordances between the Testaments and on his prophecies for the future. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, widespread apocalyptic longing found structure and hope for the present and future ages in Joachim’s writings—and in pseudo-Joachimist writings as well. The bishop and playwright John Bale, for example, in the sixteenth century summarized Joachim’s doctrine of the three status and concluded:

In the latter dayes shall apere a lawe of lyberte. The Gospell of the Kyngedom of Christ shall be taught, and the church shall be pourged as wheate is from chaff and tares. More clerely shall menne than be lerned. The Kyngedom of the fleshe shall be done awaye, and these thynges shall be fulfylled towards the ende of the world. The holy ghost shall more perfyghtye exercise his domynyon in convertynge peoples by the preachers of the latter tyme, than by the Apostles. . . . The churche of Rome shall be destroyed in the second state. And a spirituall churche shall from thens forth succede to the ende of the worlde.311

The Ranter Joseph Salmon described three successive manifestations of God:

(1) Jewish ceremonies; (2) the very flesh of the Son; and (3) the current age.312

and Roger Hoveden of the meeting between Joachim and the Anglo-Norman crusader Richard I (Bloomfield and Reeves, “The Penetration of Joachism,” p. 775); Ralph of Coggeshall’s account of Joachim’s method of correspondences (Bloomfield and Reeves, “The Penetration of Joachism,” pp. 778–89); and Adam Marsh’s request of Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, that he study Joachim’s interpretations and prophecies (Bloomfield and Reeves, “The Penetration of Joachism,” p. 785). See also Marjorie Reeves, “History and Eschatology: Medieval and Early Protestant Thought in Some English and Scottish Writings,” Medievalia et Humanistica, n.s. 4 (1973): 103–05.


312. Joseph Salmon, A Rout, A Rout: or some part of the Armies Quarters Beaten Up By the Day of the Lord Stealing upon them (1649), cited in Morton, World of the Ranter, pp. 1–10.
Joachim’s scheme of the three status of history had echoed the central Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The era of the Father, which had lasted from Creation to the birth of Christ, had been one of fear and servitude to God, as portrayed in the books of the Old Testament. It had been characterized by married men and had emphasized adherence to the Law. The era of the Son evoked faith in and filial obedience to God, as taught by the New Testament. This era was dominated by Grace and epitomized by celibate clergy, although in it secular and spiritual power were in conflict. The era of the Holy Ghost would begin in the very near future, Joachim predicted, and would be a time of love and spiritual liberty for humankind; it would be communicated not in a new book or Testament but through a new understanding of the meaning of the Bible. This Third status would be characterized by spiritual men living the monastic life. The Church would persist, but sacraments would be “spiritualized.” Joachim described a history that evolved through a series of catastrophes to an ever better stage of history and whose end was a so-called Sabbath within history.

316. Bloomfield, “Joachim of Flora,” p. 266. “Spiritualization of the sacraments” has been interpreted variously by later scholars to mean purification of the Church or internalization of the sacraments (thereby leading to their abolition). Bloomfield proposes that this phrase be understood in relation to Joachim’s contention that in the second age secular powers interfered with spiritual powers (Bloomfield, “Joachim of Flora,” pp. 267–68).  
Each of the three status marked an advance over its predecessor, that is, each brought a fuller understanding of Scripture and a closer proximity to perfection. The status of the Spirit would be “a triumph of humanity between the defeat of AntiChrist and the winding up of history at the Second Advent.” In contrast to Joachim’s view of history as moving ever closer to perfection, Christian apocalyptic thought in general had expected institutions and society to deteriorate. Calamities were expected continually to increase until the final dissolution of the world, of history, and of time on the Day of Judgment. Traditional Christian apocalyptic thought had denied a final apotheosis or glorification of history.

The Muggletonians’ rhetoric about the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit, was not unique in the seventeenth century. Some of their contemporaries at the radical end of the religious continuum, following Joachim, also viewed history as a three-part story. Only a small number, however, believed that cosmic conflict is linked to

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320. Reeves has asserted that the “main current of Christian thought” has expected institutions and society generally to deteriorate and has denied a final apotheosis or glorification of history. This mainstream view of history sees optimism only for the millennium, after Christ returns to earth after the end of time. The alternative view, that cosmic conflict is linked to historical events by divine plan and that the plan will lead to a final, golden age that falls within, albeit at the end of, history, has been strictly a minority view (“History and Eschatology,” pp. 100–01).
321. For example, the Seeker John Saltmarsh, in Sparkles of Glory or Some Beams of the Morning Star (1647), asserted that the divine pattern of all history is “folded up in” three dispensations of “Law, Gospel, and Spirit, or of letter, graces, and God or of the first, second, and third heavens (p. 52; cited in Reeves, “History
historical events by divine plan and that the plan will lead to a final, golden age that falls within, albeit at the end of, history.\textsuperscript{322} Most saw the present and future as corrupt, and, as a result, longed for a return to or restoration of the golden age of primitive or apostolic Christianity.\textsuperscript{323} Those who, inspired by Joachim’s writings, saw the present as corrupt but the future as a time of redemption, who had no desire to roll

\textsuperscript{322} For example, the scientist Thomas Brightman placed the last age of history between victory over Antichrist and the world’s end (\textit{Revelation of the Revelation} [1615]; cited in Reeves, “History and Eschatology,” pp. 110–11); this last age of history would “not be that Citie which the Saintes shall enjoy in the Heavens . . . but that Church that is to bee looked for upon earth” (Reeves, \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, p. 156). Even earlier, the Puritan John Bale had anticipated a sabbath age on earth before the final Sabbath (\textit{The Image of Both Churches} [1550], pt. 2, sig. E.vi‘ and pt. 3, sig. Civ‘; cited in Reeves, “History and Eschatology,” p. 107, nn. 34, 35); and the scientist John Napier had taught that the last age of history had begun ca. 1541 with Luther (\textit{Plaine Discovery} [1593], pp. 30–31; cited in Reeves, “History and Eschatology,” p. 109, n. 51). Interestingly enough, Reeves has observed that most English writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who drew on Joachim emphasized the triumphant apotheosis of history but ignored the concept of a three-fold dispensation leading to an Age of the Spirit, while those who embraced the concept of the threefold scheme of history were less likely to hold hope for a literal and terrestrial golden age (“History and Eschatology,” p. 119).

\textsuperscript{323} See Marjorie Reeves, \textit{The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 295–305. See also Underwood, \textit{Primitivism}, whose premise is that primitivism (“emphasis in faith and practice on the first, earliest form or pattern [of Christianity] as described in the New Testament that entailed efforts to re-create or imitate such a form in the present”); p. 4) linked groups along the entire continuum of religious practice in seventeenth-century England: Puritans, Nonconformists, and Independents; even Baptists and Quakers.
back the clock to or re-capture a golden age, were a distinct minority and, moreover, were clustered at the radical end of the seventeenth-century religious continuum.  

Muggletonians more fully than any other group even in this minority adopted the Joachimist rhetoric of the Everlasting Gospel as articulated by Gerardo de Borgo San Donnino and made it a fundamental tenet of their faith.

By virtue of God’s Commission, Reeve and Muggleton possessed the very same authority, in their followers’ eyes, as God and Scripture. Furthermore, they had knowledge not available to previous commissions. Therefore their interpretation of Scripture was more authoritative than any other. Moreover, the Commission given to Reeve and Muggleton obviated all commissions given to previous prophets. Only their Commission, Claxton claimed, had knowledge of the true nature of God, the true nature

324. Reeves calculates that nearly 70% of the radical sectarians in mid-seventeenth-century England believed that a spiritual kingdom of glory on earth was imminent (Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, p. 161). Yet if Dow’s calculations that 5% of England’s population can be counted among adherents to the radical sects are correct (see note 100 above), this is still a dramatic minority.

325. See Morton, World of the Ranters, pp. 126–27: Muggletonians carried Joachim’s ideas “to their logical conclusions.” See also Reay, “The Muggletonians: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Sectarianism,” p. 34: “Joachimism, which in a sort of bastardized form survived in the undercurrents of English religious thought, received perhaps its most explicit English espousal with Muggletonianism.”

326. Later generations of Muggletonians revered Muggleton’s Divine Looking-Glass as the text for the Third Age, equal in authority to the Old and New Testaments. It was, in fact, subtitled “The Third and Last Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ” and later editions were divided—like the Bible—into chapter and verse. See Reay, “The Muggletonians: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Sectarianism,” p. 35, n. 12 and also the 1822 edition of TST, pp. 1, 3, 9. Cf. Gerardo’s claim for his Everlasting Gospel.
of angels and devils, and the true nature of the soul.\textsuperscript{327} As late as the nineteenth century,

Muggletonians were to teach:

Now the 2nd Commission or Gospel, was the fulfillment and explanation of the 1st Commission or Law, in that when it pleased God that the 1st should end, by his not sending more prophets in under the Law, it became a Dead Letter to all people, none could understand the mysteries contained in it. But Christ, and the Apostles whom he chose and after he ascended into heaven, gave them a Commission and understanding to teach all people that believed on them and placed dependance on their Words and Authority. . . . Now when it pleased the Divine Will of God, that this [2nd Commission], also, should end, by his permitting the Persecution to the Death of these Apostles, and many of their believers, . . . God gave no Commission . . . so that after them there was no more to guide succeeding people in the path of Truth, consequently their Workings became a Dead, or Locked up Letter . . . which . . . was taken by the Gentiles, and they . . . constituted a Church, made it national, and called it Roman Catholic, . . . from whence has sprang all other Denominations, each without a Commission from God. . . . Consequently neither the Ministers, or teachers, or their believers, or hearers, can truly understand the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{328}

Reeve announced that “all true Christians are now under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and no more bound in conscience to apostolical worship than the saints were bound in conscience to mosaical worship.”\textsuperscript{329} His message or ministry to the world was:

all invisible and spiritual, cutting off, or condemning all fleshly formal worshipping of an invisible spiritual personal God, taken up by vain­glorious men from the Letter of the Scripture, which were the Prophets and Apostles Commissions, because they want a Commission from the

\textsuperscript{327} BL Add. 60188, fols. 42v–43r: Claxton, “A Divine Prospect.”
\textsuperscript{328} BL Add. 60169, fol. 175r: Thomas Robinson to Mr. Hales, 6 February 1847.
\textsuperscript{329} BL Add. 60254, fol. 186r: Reeve, \textit{Joyful News from Heaven}.  

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God's new Commission, Muggleton explained, rendered the old void "with reference to the visible worship which is set up by a Commission; therefore you know that the Apostles Commission did wholly thrust out the Visible worship which was set up by Moses."  

If old forms of worship were no longer valid, what should replace them? The Commission, Muggleton insisted, "requires nothing but Faith in the Heart which works by Love, without any outward Ordinance of Visible Worship." For Believers in the Third Commission, then, there was no more need for traditional worship. "We [Reeve and Muggleton] being the third Record of the Spirit upon Earth, we use no outward visible Forms of Worship, But do Worship God in Spirit, and Truth, as Christ said." John Lowden in 1773 counseled that "all men should pay obedience to that testament they are under and the worship set up thereby." According to the Commission given by God through Reeve and Muggleton, Believers therefore worship "one personal God in spirit and truth, and not in an outward, visible form, as

330. TST, p. 35.
331. BL Add. 60254, fol. 36r: Muggleton, “Another Epistle.” It is important to note that while Quakers abandoned traditional modes of worship because they strove to discern, unencumbered by ritual, God’s inward light within themselves and Ranters abandoned traditional modes of worship because they believed such forms were worthless, Muggletonians did so because they believed they had moved forward in time to an era in which such forms were no longer necessary.
332. BL Add. 60179, fol. 13r: Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 5 February 1660.
practiced in your nest of superstition." 334

Like many of their radical compatriots in the seventeenth century, the prophets railed against the clergy of their day, charging that preachers deliberately kept churchgoers in spiritual darkness and then themselves profited from the ignorance of the people. They criticized the system by which mandatory tithes paid by all parishioners provided economic support for ministers and they criticized the entire process by which ministers were appointed to parishes.

The Roman Gentiles . . . took possession of the letters of the Scripture . . . ordaining ministers of their own to be the Interpreters of the Scriptures, keeping the People in perpetual bondage, making such Merchandise of them that they have lived like Princes by them. Oh! How profitable have these Scriptures been to Reprobate Preachers? 335

Muggleton especially denounced public worship and public or private prayer, arguing that every day was a Sabbath and that God paid no attention to prayers. 336 Claxton noted that the Third Commission not only obviated but also forbade public worship and prayer. 337 Muggleton went so far as to charge that Believers who attended church services "with the idolators of the Nation" forfeited their assurance of salvation and eternal life. 338 Despite laws that mandated attendance at one's parish church each

334. BL Add. 60183, fol. 13r: John Lowden to a Sussex clergyman, 5 Aug. 1773, copied 1825 by Thomas Amor.
335. Remonstrance, p. 6. Cf. Joachim, who thought likewise that the Second Age was characterized by interference of secular powers with spiritual power (Bloomfield, "Joachim of Flora," p. 268).
336. BL Add. 60179, fol. 30v: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.
338. BL Add. 60179, fols. 12v–13r: Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 2 January 1661.
Sunday and punished non-attendance with fines, Believers should avoid churches, he taught: “I say you are to suffer what penalty the Powers of the Nation will lay upon you rather than to Worship in the House of Baal.” He had difficulty convincing his early followers to avoid churches, however. Church authorities levied fines upon Baptists, Quakers, Ranters, and all those who refused to attend their parish churches. Many Believers attended their parish churches in order to avoid such fines. Others simply found the habit of Sunday church-going a difficult habit to break. In exasperation Muggleton exclaimed, “cannot you live by your own Faith for a time without meeting together on those days called Sundays? Cannot you see and talk with one another as you see occasion on the working days...? He even urged Believers to lie low or flee to London rather than attend church. Claxton argued a different point; he stressed the ineffectiveness of worship. “I say that your praying preaching breaking of bread or baptism is now of no more value then circumcision or the blood of bulls and goats was in the commission of the Apostles. ...” In this he followed Muggleton’s views on prayer:

Some Believers who’s Faith is weake in the Time of Temporal Calamities and Troubles in External things will make some applications unto God and it doth procure some Satisfaction to their Spirits either to bear it more patiently and willingly submitt unto it or else they find Deliverance from it. Yet God taketh no notice of their

339. BL Add. 60179, fol. 7r: Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 5 February 1660.
340. BL Add. 60179, fol. 7r: Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 5 February 1660.
341. He advised one believer to avoid his court date, another to keep out of the way at sessions time, and still another to pay a bribe to the court (BL Add. 60179, fol. 22v).
Prayer for the deliverance it doth come from the Seed within them for God doth not work by outward and visible deliverance as he did formerly but more Spiritual and Invisible because this is the Commission of the Spirit.  

Later generations of Muggletonians apparently found it easier to live without attending worship services, although they frequently gathered to discuss spiritual questions. George Hudson revealed that in 1676 Believers met together “for the mutual enjoyment and benefit of all” and remarked that he had “rejoiced to hear another explain that which I did not understand before.”  

Thomas Tomkinson reported in 1692 that Muggletonians in his home county of Staffordshire “had no outward worship” but did meet each Sunday to “solace” themselves “in the doctrine of truth” and to “edify” each other “in the most holy Faith.”  

By the eighteenth century, Believers gathered together quite regularly, often at public houses, to discuss, eat, and sing. Account books in the British Library indicate meetings on the anniversary of Reeve’s first revelations (three days in February) and on the anniversary of Muggleton’s release from prison (July); furthermore, they held monthly meetings, at which they apparently discussed, ate, sang and fulfilled book orders.  

The death announcement for Joseph Gander in 1868 invites Believers to

343. BL Add. 60179, fol. 30r: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.  
344. BL Add. 60169, fol. 58r: letter from George Hudson, recipient unknown (1676).  
346. BL Add. 60232–36. The menu was simple and varied little: lamb, veal, or ham brought by a Believer; vegetables (typically turnips, cauliflower, cucumber, and potatoes) also provided by Believers, bread and butter provided by the public.

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gather for a special meeting, noting that it was a Muggletonian custom, at the death of a Believer, to meet to sing praises to God “and in sweet communion to exchange our hallowed reminiscences of the ransomed dead.” The anonymous “Faith and Practice,” written in 1870, avers that Muggletonians ignore all forms of public worship and denounce priestcraft, spiritual teachers, pastors, and masters. They rest on the Sabbath from all work and worldly worship. They meet annually to celebrate the anniversary of the giving of the Commission and the anniversary of Muggleton’s release from prison, and they meet monthly to “converse, sing spiritual songs, and give thanks for knowledge.” Finally, they contribute to a relief fund for their poor. Alexander Gordon remarked on the ample and pleasant social meal that

house, along with brandy, rum, gin, beer, and ale provided by the public house. The amount of food and alcohol consumed by those who attended these meetings strikes me as quite substantial. On July 31, 1815, for example, 27 people at dinner and 50 at supper consumed 54 pints of spirits, beer, and ale (BL Add. 60232, fol. 7). On March 5, 1834, at a gathering to commemorate a deceased Believer, 33 attendees paid over £26 for spirits and beer, £3.6 for tobacco, and only £11 for sugar, bread, butter, and the services of a cook and servants (BL Add. 60232, fols. 90r–v). Perhaps this explains Sarah Wallis’s brief admonition to her son Robert in 1807: “eating is believing” (BL Add. 61950, fol. 133r).

347. BL Add. 60170, fol. 7v: death announcement.
348. BL Add. 60170, fols. 18v–20v, 1 January 1870. E. P. Thompson, in fact, describes Muggletonian meetings as a sort of “private friendly or glee club.” “Ducking under the Conventicle Act” [actually a series of acts passed by Parliament 1664–70 that forbade private meetings for religious purposes], he writes, “they took to meeting in public houses. Here they would hire a room for their meetings, drawing up an agreement with the publican to install a locked closet holding their books and records . . . . They sent out to the landlord for pots of beer . . . . The divine songs which the members wrote were set to the popular tunes of the day . . . which no doubt disarmed the suspicions of the curious” (Witness, p. 67).
349. BL Add. 60170, fol. 32v.
Muggletonians served him in the late nineteenth century, then noted that they sang the "Commission Song." Finally, Williamson in 1919 described a Muggleton "service" as the reading aloud of the writings of the founders from beginning to end and the singing of songs. He further reported that Muggletonians celebrate their festivals with tea and supper; they "drink toasts to absent friends and to the household of faith," with port wine negus made according to an old recipe and ladled into "very interesting wine-glasses" with an antique silver ladle once owned by a now-deceased Believer.

How far Muggletonians traveled over the centuries, from an intense expectation of Christ's Second Coming, widespread use of apocalyptic rhetoric, and intense struggle to avoid religious ritual! Yet the quiet reading of the founders' writings and the singing of songs composed by Believers—along with the personal copying of favorite letters and tracts that was discussed in the previous chapter—served perhaps to maintain the sense of expectation of and readiness for the end times. Perhaps it indicates conviction that the catastrophes were over, that the Third Age had arrived. It is not impossible to conclude, then, that Muggletonians believed that their actions were precisely those which were most suitable for the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit, the Sabbath within History.

350. As related by Williamson, Lodowick Muggleton, p. 67. This song was probably the one composed by Nathaniel Powell, BL Add. 60208, fols. 23–28 (per suggestion by T. L. Underwood in private communication).
351. Williamson, Lodowick Muggleton, p. 49.
352. A beverage of hot water, wine, and lemon juice, sweetened and spiced (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language).
The Commission pointed out the true sources of authority for Believers, viz., John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, and oriented them in a precise place in the scheme of history, viz., the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit. Thus grounded, Muggletonians turned to these sources of authority in order to discover the true nature of God, the structure of the cosmos in which they lived, the means to salvation, and the nature of the afterlife. This chapter explores Muggletonian teachings about God, Creation, and the Trinity, all of which were so far removed from traditional Christian teachings as to startle even their more radical contemporaries.

John Reeve from the time of his first revelation advanced unusual ideas about the nature of God and the Godhead. These ideas resembled those of no other reform or heretical group before or after him. Despite the highly unorthodox character of Reeve’s ideas, Believers remained staunchly faithful to them, making Muggletonian doctrine about the nature of God one of the group’s most unique as well as enduring teachings.

Reeve believed that God is immortal yet material. God is uncreated, Reeve insisted; he had no beginning and will have no end; God is eternally present. Reeve further believed that God has a physical presence in addition to a spiritual presence; God has a physical body. God, he taught, was “a spirituall body or person in the forme
of a man, having all parts in immortalitie, as man hath in mortalitie." Observing the natural world around him, Reeve saw that various aspects of the universe—such as light or a stream of water—had identifiable physical sources—such as the sun or a great body of water—and extrapolated that a spirit cannot live without a body. Revealing a straightforwardly materialist view of the universe, he lectured an anonymous unbeliever, "There is no Light without a Sun, no Stream without a Fountain, and no Spirit without a Body." His observations led him to conclude that God cannot be pure spirit; he must of necessity have also form and a physical body.

Reeve accused Puritans and clergy of the Church of England of keeping Christians in ignorance by teaching "an imaginary God," that is, teaching that God was "infinite Spirit, having no bodily substance," or teaching that God was "a God of words only." God was both spirit and body, Reeve insisted. He charged that Baptist ministers "counterfeit the Commission of the Man Jesus"; they do not have the authority of their own Commission from God but instead preach a doctrine built from the "Letter of Scripture and their own Reason." Reeve and Muggleton both also argued vehemently against some of their radical contemporaries over the nature of God, in particular against Ranters and Quakers. Ranters caught the brunt of Reeve's venom. He termed the preacher John Tane "a filthy Sodomitical Ranter" and John

354. Reeve, General Epistle, p. 3.
355. BL Add. 60206, fol. 28r, n.d.
Robins "the last great Antichrist." Tane, Reeve charged, denied a personal God born of a Virgin and proposed, instead, a God who was "an infinite Spirit without any Personal Substance." Robins, Reeve charged, deceived his followers by means of "signs and wonders," encouraged his followers to pray to him, "and they fell flat on their faces and worshipped him, calling him their Lord and their God." As if that were not bad enough, Reeve continued, Robins actually declared himself God and demanded that his followers worship him. Tane and Robins may have been eccentric prophets moving only on the periphery of the Ranter movement, but Reeve was not far off the mark in his assessment of Ranter teachings about the nature of God; Jacob Bauthumley, a noted Ranter preacher, did in fact state:

I see that God is in all Creatures, Man and Beast, Fish and Fowle, and every green thing, from the highest Cedar to the Ivey on the wall; and that God is the life and being of them all, and that God doth really dwell, and if you will personally; if he may admit so low an expression in them all, and hath his Being no where else out of the Creatures.

Muggleton directed his fury against Quakers, against whom he wrote numerous tracts. He accused Quakers of "preaching another God than what the

358. Remonstrance, p. 4.
360. TST, pp. 8, 9.
362. Robins is said to have had "no direct connection with the Ranter movement" (Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals, vol. 3, s.v. Robins, John) and Tany to have been "variously regarded as a blasphemous Jew, a Quaker and a Ranter" (Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals, vol. 3, s.v. Tany, Thomas).
363. Jacob Bauthumley, The Light and Dark Sides of God, quoted in Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 336; see also p. 303.
364. For a list of Muggleton's works against Quakers see n. 12 above. Reeve

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Prophets, Apostles, and wee Witnesses of the Spirit have preached and believed."365

Muggleton’s assessment of Quaker teachings about the nature of Christ was—like Reeve’s assessment of Ranter teachings on the same subject—close to the mark. Quakers emphasized the spiritual aspects of the Godhead over any physical attributes; the Quaker James Whitehead even wrote: “It is both Unscriptural and Absurd to assert that Jesus Christ consisteth of a Humane Body of Flesh and bone, or is Finite.”366 Muggleton considered the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light, which held that a spark of the Divine resided within each person, anathema to his own belief in a personal and material god. “You Quakers have Eyes and see not, and Eares but heare not, you have hearts but understand not,” he jeered.367 “You have a great many shatter brain’d people who are laden with sin and ignorance that fall in among” you, he observed.368 He even suggested that Quakers were suffering great hardship and persecution because they had “defied the living personal God, even Christ Jesus, who is now in the forme of a man in heaven of the same nature height and bignesse, as he was when he was on earth, which is judged to be about 5 or 6 foot high.”369

also accused Quakers of bondage to external forms and a desire to proselytize, “just like papists”; BL Add. 60178, fol. 18v: Reeve, “Epistle to a Quaker” (1657).

365. BL Add. 60186, fol. 22r: Muggleton, An Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq. (1669).


367. BL Add. 60186, fol. 20v: Muggleton, An Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq. (1669).

368. BL Add. 60186, fol. 22r: Muggleton, An Answer to Isaac Pennington, Esq. (1669).

369. BL Add. 60186, fol. 21r: Muggleton, An Answer to Isaac Pennington,
Opponents of Muggletonians frequently laughed at them for their belief in a God who was six feet tall. Such ridicule did not sway committed Believers, however.

One of the earliest of these, Thomas Tomkinson, explained that God had a physical body just like humans:

Although the body of the uncreated Majesty was of so pure, thin, soft and sweet nature, yet was it absolutely from the crown of his glorious head to the souls of his divine feet, like unto the first man, Adam, not the visibility of their persons that differed, but the glory of them only.370

Tomkinson provided his own explication of Genesis 1:26–27:

when God came to the greater masterpiece, man, he [said] . . . ‘let us make man . . . after the same image and shape as I bear myself.’ . . . So God created man in his own shape and figure, with an upright stature, with legs, hands, and arms, with a face and a mouth to speak, and as God himself hath.371

The God of the Muggletonians was eternal, the creator of the universe, but he did not create the world ex nihilo, as traditional Christian doctrine asserts. Rather, in a unique understanding of Genesis 1:1–2, Reeve explained that:

From Eternity, before any Creature was formed . . . was the uncreated spiritual person of God the Creator, in whose glorious presence these senseless substances of earth and water were eternally resident, that the Creator might create or forme by his infinite wisedom out of those dead substances, all variety of sensible living creature. . . .372

Esq. (1669).

370. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 16.

371. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 30. Gen. 1:26–27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and . . . over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (RSV).

372. TST, p. 12. Gen. 1:1–2: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the
Muggleton agreed: “By him the World were made, but not of nothing. . . . Earth and
waters were eternal . . . darkness was over the face of the deep . . . [and] the spirit of
God moved upon the waters, so that waters were before Creation.”373 These beliefs
were wholeheartedly shared by Reeve’s followers.

Tomkinson poetically asserted that God from eternity “did not consist of any
elementary matter” but as a form of “a Bright shining glory of uncompounded
purities of so unutterable a nature in virtue, that it was swifter than thought, clearer
than chrystal, sweeter than roses, more purer than the purest gold.”374 John
Saddington, another early Believer, asserted in his “Forty-Eight Articles” that God
had a spiritual body but also had substance; he had a form like a man.375 Saddington
further explained that God had created angels “from dust above the stars.”376 The
anonymous “Articles of the Three Records” also affirmed that God was the Creator,
the maker of all things; he was “from Eternity, in time, and to Eternity”; he was an
uncreated spiritual person in form like a man.377 In 1794 R. Sedgwick described God
as “Creator of Heaven and Earth,” a “spiritual body in form of a man for all eternity,”
the “fountain of all light, life, and glory.”378 In sum, Muggletonians believed that God

374. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 16.
375. BL Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #2.
376. BL Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #3.
377. BL Add. 60205A, fols. 1r–2r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,”
articles #1 and #2.
378. BL Add. 60168, A/100, fol. 250: booklet written by R. Sedgwick to Mr.
had existed from eternity in both a spiritual and a human-like form, as had the materials from which he would form the universe.\textsuperscript{379}

If God alone was eternal and if he formed the universe, how did Evil enter the world? This question has plagued Christians through the centuries and has led to such dualistic explanations as those advanced by the many varieties of Gnosticism—both pre-Christian and Christian—and by Manichaeans in the third century,\textsuperscript{380} as well as by such later groups as Cathars in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{381} The doctrine of Original Sin was a result of St. Augustine's attempt to account for Evil in the world.\textsuperscript{382} In a bold attempt to explain the origin of Evil in God's creation, Reeve explained:

There was death from eternity, only it was not in a sensible form. . . . Eternall life or God, was a substantial forme from eternity, but eternall death or darknesse of earth and water was substance without forme,

\footnotesize

Hague, 28 September 1794.

\textsuperscript{379} Reeve, \textit{TST}, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{380} Manichaeans were followers of Mani, who in the third century taught that the universe comprised two contending principles of Good and Evil. Manichaeism was the best known form of dualism, much feared and denounced by churchmen from the time of Augustine to the late Middle Ages. See Lambert, \textit{Medieval Heresy}, esp. pp. 20–32.

\textsuperscript{381} Cathars emerged in the late twelfth century and believed that through appropriate belief and rigorous behavior humankind could leave behind the sinful nature of the flesh and could become perfected. Church authorities saw Cathars as a renewal of ancient Manichaeism. See Lambert, \textit{Medieval Heresy}, pp. 106–21.

\textsuperscript{382} St. Augustine's teachings on Original Sin held that Adam's sin was passed on to all subsequent generations, that human beings are born so sinful that they are unable to redeem themselves but must be saved by God's grace. See Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Growth of Medieval Theology}, vol. 3 of The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), esp. p. 26.
void of all spirit or life. 383

The only way God could make himself known to men and angels, Reeve explained, was by “creating or forming of some creatures to live sensibly in death and darkenesse, shame and misery, and by his creating other creatures in opposition sensibly to live in life and light, joy and glory.” 384 Thus God himself created some men to be Elect and others to be Reprobate, a notion which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. The fact that this teaching made God responsible for the damnation of certain men seemed to faze Muggletonians not at all. 385

Traditional churchmen, whether affiliated with the Church of England or tending toward Puritan or Independent Protestant thought, found it quite alarming that Reeve and Muggleton denied the concept of creation ex nihilo and that they taught that God had a physical, bodily form like that of humankind. Reeve’s insistence that Jesus Christ was the very same, body and spirit, as God the creator raised even more hackles. “There is no Creator, nor God, nor never was, but the man Jesus,” Reeve pronounced. 386 Church magistrates pounced upon this assertion as blasphemous and quickly, in 1653, committed Reeve and his mouthpiece, Muggleton, to prison. The prophets were unrepentant, however. In A Remonstrance, written after their six-month incarceration, Reeve reiterated his teaching that “the Man Jesus that died at

383. TST, p. 12.
385. See discussion below, in chapter entitled “The Two Seeds,” for the way in which Muggletonians danced around the question of the origin of evil.
386. Reeve, General Epistle, p. 4.
Jerusalem, and arose from death to life by his own power" was "the only God and Everlasting Father." Christians struggled long to articulate clearly the nature of a triune God and the precise relationship among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and not since Sabellians in the late second century had the assertion been made so boldly that God the Father and God the Son were but different aspects of the One True God. Nonetheless, Muggletonians through the centuries defiantly clung to this article of belief with great insistence and passion.

In 1664 Muggleton explained and defended the Muggletonian teachings about Creation and the Godhead in print. Among the more unusual rationalizations contained in his apology is his insistence that God must have lived somewhere when he created the world; therefore the universe could not have been nothing. In Truth's Triumph, Thomas Tomkinson listed seven arguments to dispute the traditional understanding of the triune nature of God. First, he reasoned, if God is three persons, then there would be three gods. Second, if God was unbegotten and

387. Remonstrance, p. 12 Reeve also wrote "A Cloud of Unerring Witnesses plainly proveing there neither is, nor ever was any other God but Jesus Christ the Lord," and "To prove by holy Scriptures that Christ Jesus in the Onely God"; BL Add. 60177, eighteenth-century copies of Reeve's works.

388. Sabellians, so called after their founder Sabellius, in the late second century had taught that God the Father and God the Son were simply different aspects or modes of the One True God. Sabellians were sometimes called Modalists [after their insistence of God's different modes] or Patripassionists [after the implication of their teaching that God the Father himself had suffered on the cross]. See Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (New York: Penguin, 1967), p. 87.

389. Muggleton, A Letter Sent to Thomas Taylor, Quaker, in the year 1664.

uncreated yet Jesus was begotten and the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the
Son [as stated in the Latin Nicene Creed], then the three are not equal. Third, if in
humans the soul, body, and spirit are united, so too in the model upon which we were
created [i.e., God] the soul, body, and spirit must be united. Fourth, if the Son was
begotten and the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son, they all are
distinct from one another and comprise three distinct gods. Fifth, if the Son has a
body but the Father and Holy Ghost do not, how can there be any similitude among
them? Sixth, the Holy Ghost cannot both proceed from and be equal to the Father and
Son. Seventh, since there is one faith there must be just one God. The traditional
Latin Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Tomkinson charged, actually taught that there
are three gods, used witchcraft as an explanation for how God became Man, and
proposed a Son who was inferior to the Father. It was, he suggested, the very cause
of divisions and dissension within the Church:

Oh! Vain heads of the Churches of England and Rome, cannot you
agree in your worship; seeing you agree in your Gods, you might see
the fruits of your religion . . . to be nothing else but divisions and
strife, war and bloodshed. . . . Your dividing and mangling God into
parts and pieces, is the cause of your divisions and strifes as a
judgment upon you. . . . If you worshipped one God, in the person of
Jesus, then would that faith, life, grace or spirit that was given to
worship withal, knit you into unity. . . .

Robert Gregory, another early Believer, also disputed the traditional doctrine

392. Tomkinson, *Truth's Triumph*, p. 64. Tomkinson also wrote “None But
Christ” (n.d.), a work designed to prove scripturally, from both Old and New
Testaments, that God was Christ; see BL Add. 60206, fols. 100r–220r.
of the Trinity. He charged that Trinitarian beliefs grew from the writings of Athanasius, who was a "heathen," "never sent by god [as were Reeve and Muggleton] to write or interpret Scripture."\(^{393}\) To believe in the Athanasian Creed, Gregory insisted, is to deny Scripture, because Athanasius divided God into three persons when God was, in fact, one and eternal.\(^{394}\) Citing as evidence the first chapter of John,\(^{395}\) he argued that God should be understood to have three titles or attributes rather than to be three persons in one. Gregory also appealed to 1 John 5\(^{396}\) in support of the Muggletonian contention that the notion of a triune God is incorrect.\(^{397}\)

Laurence Claxton perhaps tried harder to reconcile orthodox Trinitarian doctrine with

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\(^{393}\) BL Add. 60187, fols. 38r: R. Gregory to Madam Stantleus and Madame Crawley, 13 April 1695.

\(^{394}\) BL Add. 80187, fol. 1. The Athanasian Creed affirms belief in "one Lord Jesus Christ, his [God's] son, God only-begotten...." Furthermore, it affirms belief in "a Father who is truly a Father, a Son who is truly Son and a Holy Spirit who is truly Holy Spirit, the titles not being given in a vague or meaningless way but accurately denoting the particular existence (or personality) and rank and glory of each that is so named, so that they are three in existence (personality) but one in agreement." See *Documents of the Christian Church*, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (1963; London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 40–41.

\(^{395}\) John 1:1–4: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (RSV). In this argument are, again, echoes of Sabellianism or modalism.

\(^{396}\) 1 John 5:6–8: "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the spirit is the witness, because the spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree" (RSV).

\(^{397}\) BL Add. 60187, fol. 38r: R. Gregory to Madam Stantleus and Madame Crawley, 13 April 1695.
Reeve’s teachings. He warned against using the word “person” to describe the Trinity, because its very use divides the Trinity. Rather, he explained—also following John 1:1–4—that there was one person, God, who bore three titles, viz., Father in Creation, Son in Redemption, and Holy Ghost in Justification.398

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Muggletonians were less anxious to dwell on explications of the specific nature of the Trinity (perhaps they simply were more wary of persecution399). Nonetheless, they maintained a staunch belief in God the Man Christ Jesus. The anonymous “Articles of the Three Records” flatly stated that Jesus is God.400 James Miller in 1743 strove to enunciate the nature of God in verse:

No father was there but the father Son
........................................
... ’tis plainly to be understood
Christ was not, only called the very God. . . .401

Muggletonians in the nineteenth century still clung to the belief that Jesus was both Creator and Son. The anonymous “Faith and Practice of the Muggletonians” affirmed that God was alone from eternity until he created angels and humankind but also that

398. BL Add. 60122: Claxton, A Paradisiacal Dialogue, ch. 16.
399. “Muggletonians would soon have been persecuted out of the earth [by the laws of Charles II and James II] because they were considered Blasphemers, Liars, and Deceivers. Therefore in love for spiritual communion they met privately, apparently for social friendship, admitting none but well-known believers,” wrote Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall on 3 March 1885 (BL Add. 60179, fol. 77r–v).
400. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 2r, article #4.
Christ is God in a body, not an omnipresent spirit.\textsuperscript{402} The obituary for Sarah Frost (d. 1845), published in the London \textit{Times}, read: “died . . . in the full assurance of a joyful resurrection to eternal Glory, purchased by the death of her only God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{403} Rebecca Burton’s obituary (d. 1847) in the Nottinghamshire newspaper noted that: “she died . . . in the full assurance of a resurrection of eternal joy purchased for her by the death of her God and Savior the Man Christ Jesus.”\textsuperscript{404} The obituary of John Dimock Aspland (d. 1877) explained that Muggletonians believe in the “unipersonality of God.”\textsuperscript{405}

One would expect such a materialist belief system to explain exactly how God could become the man Jesus, and Muggletonians do not disappoint. God the Creator “came down from the throne of his glory personally in a spirituall form, or likenesse of a Man,” explained Reeve.\textsuperscript{406} Then he:

personally entred into the body or womb of the Virgin Wife Mary, and in her womb uncreated himselfe, from his eternall immortall glory, and in the same moment created or conceived himselfe of the seed of the Virgin in pure mortality.

Finally, “in his appointed time,” that Creator God “became a child, a son, yea a perfect creature.” And so, Reeve concluded, “the immortall eternall Creator, for a season, became an absolute mortall man (or creature) sin only excepted.” God wholly

\textsuperscript{402} BL Add. 60170, fol. 12v, 1 January 1870.  
\textsuperscript{403} BL Add. 61950, fol. 132r.  
\textsuperscript{404} BL Add. 61950, fol. 131v.  
\textsuperscript{405} BL Add. 60170, fol. 40.  
\textsuperscript{406} Reeve, \textit{General Epistle}, p. 2. All quotes from Reeve in this paragraph are from this source, unless otherwise noted.
abided, remained, and dwelled in the body of the man Christ Jesus, Reeve insisted.407

Thus Jesus Christ is “the only true personal God.”408

Believers reiterated Reeve’s teachings in their own writings. Thomas Tomkinson explained, again in more poetic language:

In the fulness of time, his eternal Spirit moved him to descend from his throne (immediately after the forewarning of Mary the Virgin by his angel of his incoming), even as swift as thought, insomuch that the eternal God was in the womb of the Virgin before she was aware of him, only by a wonderful change in her soul she felt him converting his Godhead glory into flesh.409

John Saddington also explained that God left heaven, dissolved into seed in Mary’s womb, and was born flesh.410 He further insisted that it was God who, within the dead body of Christ, quickened to raise Christ’s body from death to life; now God lives in heaven in Christ’s physical body.411

The Muggletonian doctrine of the Godhead fused God and Jesus into one physical as well as spiritual being, and it is logical to ask where the Holy Spirit fits into such a Godhead. Muggletonians apparently asked, and Muggleton provided the answer. In traditional Trinitarian language, he affirmed that “the holy ghost is the spirit of god and doth proceed from god.”412 But he warned, “let not any man imagine
that this Holy Ghost was god and so ground three person in the trinity as the blind reason in man doth imagine." The Holy Ghost, he explained, was like an emanation from God or a sharing of God's spirit. "The Holy Ghost that descended in a bodily shape on Christ like a dove it was really so," he admitted. However, "none saw the Holy Ghost descend [in the form of a dove, at the baptism of Jesus] in a bodily shape," except Christ himself and John the Baptist. This descending of the Holy Ghost was Christ's "Commission from heaven to teach and preach and work miracle signs and wonders." Using language perilously close to that used by his foes the Quakers, Muggleton went on to explain that:

Every true believer may be said to receive the holy ghost or to have the spirit of god in him because he believed the report of those that have either the spirit of prophesy or revelation or that hath the holy ghost by way of vision as Christ has.

Muggleton's statement about true Believers having the spirit of god within them evidently did not captivate Believers. They did not reiterate this teaching in their own

413. BL Add. 60168, G-21, fol. 32v: Muggleton to Robert Peirce, 2 August 1680.
415. BL Add. 60168, G-21, fol. 35r: Muggleton to Robert Peirce, 2 Aug. 1680. This explanation does beg the question of how God, on earth in Christ's body, could send a Commission to Christ. Apparently, in such cases, Muggletonians were to follow Thomas Tomkinson's advice: "Beat not your brain about the secrets that are locked up in Adam's seed, for they will never be discovered unto you; for your eye is but the eye of reason"; Truth's Triumph, p. 181. See also the discussion below about Eliah and Moses.
416. BL Add. 60168, G-21, fol. 36v: Muggleton to Robert Peirce, 2 August 1680.
writings, and in 1794 Robert Sedgwick flatly stated that "No man is capable of the
indwelling spirit of God." 417 The Holy Ghost resides only in the person of God, he
maintained, although it inspired prophets. 418

Despite Tomkinson's admonition to "beat not your brain" (see n. 415 above),
Muggletonians seem to have been quite concerned to provide concrete and
understandable explanations for the mysteries of Christian belief. Their teachings
about the nature of God led them to question whether any divine presence had
remained in heaven while God was Jesus and to wonder what exactly occurred when
Jesus was crucified. "Where was God at the moment Jesus died on the cross?" they
wondered. Reeve had carefully explained that:

In that Heaven and earth above or beyond the Stars, where the persons
of the holy Angels are resident, the personal presence of God was
wholly absent from them, for that season, [when] the second man, the
Lord from Heaven, was resident on Earth. 419

When Jesus died, he continued, "the Creator of all life passed through hell, . . . the
whole Godhead being dead and buried for a moment . . . ." 420 Then,

by his own power . . . in that body of flesh wherein his soule died, in
death or out of death he quickened a new glorious life . . . he ascended
personally into that place of glory from whence he came, and now it is
he alone sitteth on the right hand 421 in the midst of the throne of the

417. BL Add. 601687, A/100, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 28
September 1794.
417. BL Add. 601687, A/100, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 28
September 1794.
419. Reeve, General Epistle, p. 2.
420. Reeve, General Epistle, p. 5.
421. It is fair to ask "the right hand of whom?" This is another case of
Muggletonians using traditional rhetoric despite their new beliefs.
Father's immortall Majestie, wisdome, power, and glory. . .

Tomkinson insisted that when God became Christ he left Heaven, both in body and soul. His body died at the crucifixion; his soul slept for three days, and then both body and soul ascended to Heaven. The anonymous Muggletonian creed “I Believe” likewise averred that “when Christ died the whole Godhead was absolutely void of all Life heat or Motion. Father Son and Holy Ghost became Extinct in Death.” The 1723 copy of “Articles of the Three Records” states that when Christ died on the cross, God died also. “All those who say it is impossible for God to die can have no benefit in the Death of Christ,” the author warned, “for no other blood but the Blood of the Eternal God could wash away the sins of the Elect.” The flesh of Christ was absolutely and wholly the flesh of God, the author insisted; the blood of Christ was absolutely and wholly the blood of God. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, Thomas Robinson insisted that God did not otherwise exist in heaven, separately from Christ, while Christ was on earth.

Christian orthodoxy quickly had silenced Sabellians by the fourth century, horrified at the implication of their teaching that God the Father himself had suffered

422. Reeve, General Epistle, p. 5.
425. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 7r.
426. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 7r–7v.
427. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 7v.
428. BL Add. 60169: Thomas Robinson to Mr. Hales, 6 February 1847.
and died on the Cross, thereby leaving a divine void in the universe.429 Muggletonians had no horror of any such implication of their teaching. They had a ready explanation.

"Before the eternall Creator became a pure mortall Creature," explained Reeve,

hee glorified the body of his Creature, the Prophet Elias in that Heaven and Earth without the Globe, and gave him a Commission to represent the glorious person of God the Creator, whilst God the Father went that sore Journey in flesh to redeem his elect ones. . . . 430

"So that," he continued, "it was the Prophet Elijah that my God, the man Jesus in mortalitie cried unto in all his extremities."431 Muggleton, following Reeve, asserted that Elijah had governed "the heavens above" and had watched over "Christ's person as god the father all that time that god was become flesh until he ascended."432 Muggleton appealed to scriptural authority for this teaching, specifically Matthew 17:3–8.433

Early Muggletonians clung to this explanation of the Trinity and Christ's passion. Laurence Claxton preached that "the father which Christ so often called upon when he was on earth" had been "Elias commissionated in glory," or else Christ, he reasoned, "could have made nothing," nor could he "by his own power have

432. BL Add. 60168, G-21, fol. 34v: Muggleton to Robert Peirce, 2 August 1680.
433. Matthew 17:3–8: "And behold, there appeared to them [the disciples Peter and James and John] Moses and Elijah, talking with him. . . . lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'. . . . And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (RSV).
quickened himself to life again.” John Saddington noted that Elias and Moses had been taken up to heaven bodily so that they could represent God while he became Jesus; they co-governed heaven while God was Jesus on earth. Likewise Thomas Tomkinson in 1692 wrote that God left Heaven in charge of his deputies, Moses and Elias, when he became Christ. When the words “this is my beloved Son, . . .” were spoken upon Jesus, Tomkinson explained, they came from Elias and Moses in heaven; and when Christ on the cross cried out, it was Elias to whom he cried. God had no fear of dying as Christ, Tomkinson maintained; it was impossible for death to keep him under, though it was possible for death to enter upon the life of God, for God did know that although he submitted unto death for the redemption of his seed, that his eternal Spirit had power of quickening into life again, and that his word of faith spoken unto Moses and Elias before, was of power sufficient to raise him.

With an innovative flourish Tomkinson further explained that Moses and Elias had been the two angels who guarded Christ’s tomb, gave news of the resurrection to the disciples, and spoke to the disciples at the Ascension.

The divergence of Muggletonian teachings on the nature of God from the

434. BL Add. 60188: Claxton, A Paradisiacal Dialogue, ch. 16.
438. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, pp. 78–79.

Moses and Elijah figured also in Joachim’s schema. He had equated Moses and Elijah with the angels sent to Sodom (see his Liber Concordie); and he had interpreted Moses and Elijah as representative of clergy and monks (see his Expositio in Apocalypsim); see Reeves, Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 142–43.
traditional Christian doctrine of God was breathtaking. Muggletonians passed over as
irrelevant the Creeds and Councils that were so central to the Church of England.
They totally disregarded the affirmations of a triune God contained in the Creeds and
the pronouncements made by Church Councils on the nature of the Trinity. While the
difficulty of explaining the nature of the Trinity in terms understandable to most
believers provoked much Christian thought and writing in the early centuries,
Muggletonians rejected all such explanations. Few other groups departed so radically
from mainstream teachings—and survived.440 Small wonder that Reeve and
Muggleton were imprisoned for blasphemy! Small wonder that Muggletonians tended
increasingly to keep their beliefs and meetings secret!441 Perhaps because of their
cautions, Muggletonian beliefs about the nature of God, about Creation, and about
how to understand the Trinity persisted for three full centuries. These beliefs were
intimately connected to the Muggletonian explanation for the presence of Good and
Evil in the world and were largely responsible for Believers’ conviction that they
were among God’s Elect. Muggletonians were convinced that their knowledge of the
ture nature of God set them apart from all other men and women, allowed them to

440. Sabellius’s teachings on the indivisibility of the godhead; Arius’s
teaching that, although God had no beginning, the Son did; and Adoptionism—the
teaching that Christ had been adopted in his humanity—all had been condemned and
eradicated by the Church in previous centuries; see Documents of the Early Church,
ed. Bettenson.
441. “Muggletonians are not anxious to talk, to the man in the street,
respecting their belief, for fear that the result should be either unpleasant comment or
ridicule,” remarked Williamson in 1919 (Lodowick Muggleton, p. 59).
understand the true nature and origin of Good and Evil, and marked them clearly as among God’s Elect, which assured them of eternal salvation.
THE TWO SEEDS

The absolute assurance of salvation that Believers expressed is one of the more remarkable aspects of Muggletonianism.\textsuperscript{442} Confidently they sang:

\begin{verbatim}
All glory and honor be to the
  Who shows such Mercy unto me
Thy pressus Blood by faith I see
  Which makes my Election sure.\textsuperscript{443}
\end{verbatim}

John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton began their ministry by blessing and cursing their fellow Englishmen and -women to eternal salvation or damnation. After Reeve died and as Muggleton advanced in years, Believers sought Muggleton’s blessing—often in writing—which was nothing less than Muggleton’s pronouncement that the Believer in question would surely be saved. Muggletonian songs throughout the centuries cheerfully proclaimed Believers’ conviction that they were the blessed who would, after death, be raised from the grave to live eternally in heaven with God the Man Christ Jesus. Obituaries not only announced deaths but also declared the deceased’s certainty of salvation.

The keen desire to be saved from the perils of hell was not unique to

\textsuperscript{442} Barry Reay maintained that, in fact, the “main attraction” of Muggletonianism was the “absolute assurance of salvation or eternal life” that it gave to Believers; “The Muggletonians: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Sectarianism,” pp. 35–36.

\textsuperscript{443} BL Add. 60189, fol. 49: A Song made by Thomas Cook (n.d.; 48 lines total).

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Muggletonians, of course; it has inspired Christians of all sorts and in all times. In seventeenth-century England, alternative understandings of the best way to achieve this escape led to the very existence of many differing religious groups. "The quest for salvation lay at the heart of the search for a true church, and unless this is understood the intensity of the conflicts and the debates amongst the radicals of this period cannot be comprehended." Quakers, for example, insisted that salvation was available to all men and women because a spark of the divine resided within all persons; any man or woman who sought and listened to the guidance provided by that spark and who let it guide him or her through life would be saved. "Jesus our Lord hath of his own free love, cast a spark of his divine fire into this earthly lump of ours," wrote the Quaker John Ladd to Thomas Tomkinson. Ranters actually rejected the whole idea of salvation: they taught that there was no material Heaven or Hell except in a man's own conscience; no judgment to salvation or damnation; no bodily resurrection. "When a man is converted, that is the last day," insisted the Ranter Richard Coppin. "Thou art therefore to expect Jesus to come to judgment in thee, and the end of the world to be in thee and in this life," wrote the Ranter Joseph

444. Acheson, Radical Puritans, p. 65.
445. BL Add. 60183, fol. 22r: John Ladd to Thomas Tomkinson (n.d., but seventeenth century).
Salmon. General Baptists distinguished themselves from Particular Baptists over the issue of salvation. General Baptists refused to accept a strict Calvinist doctrine of determinism and, in comparison to Particular Baptists, accorded a greater responsibility for salvation to the individual. Particular Baptists rejected the notion that Christ had died for the salvation of all men and clung to the Calvinist belief that only particular men and women—the Elect—would be saved. Within the Church of England herself, the emergence of the Arminian and Calvinist parties was, in part, the result of differing views of salvation—who could achieve it and how. Some within the Church for many years generally had accepted Calvin’s doctrine of salvation for only the predestined few—the Elect. As early as the sixteenth century, however, the noted preacher Lancelot Andrewes had questioned Calvin’s doctrine of predestination. By 1622, King James I had moved close to the notion of universal salvation, along the lines proposed by the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius; and by 1635, King Charles I and the major office-holders in the Church of England were avowed Arminians, believing in universal salvation. Just slightly later the so-called

Cambridge Platonists—including such churchmen as Ralph Cudwell, Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, and Thomas Traherne—would criticize Calvin's systematic theology and his rigid determinism as destructive to the Church of England and true religious belief.\textsuperscript{452}

Muggletonians were like other Christian groups in seeking salvation and trying to understand what it took to achieve that goal. But the prophets Reeve and Muggleton built upon Calvinist doctrine a unique system that detailed how and why salvation occurs. This chapter describes first their scheme in relatively general terms, remarking on their doctrine of predestination: why God predestines some men and women to salvation and others to damnation; whether men and women themselves can do anything to achieve salvation; and the duration of salvation. It then will detail the Muggletonian doctrine of the Two Seeds, which provided an elaborate rationale for the program of salvation.

In his own quest for salvation, John Reeve had affiliated with a variety of religious groups before he received his own revelation. He was a Puritan early in his life, a Ranter in the late 1640s, then affiliated with John Robins, who moved on the radical fringes of the Ranter movement.\textsuperscript{453} Reeve admitted that he had affiliated with

\textsuperscript{452} McAdoo, \textit{The Spirit of Anglicanism}, pp. 19, 81, 99, 119.
\textsuperscript{453} Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals, vol. 3, s.v. Reeve, John. His brother William, with whom Lodowick Muggleton also apprenticed, was a Puritan.
Ranters, astrologers, and pseudo-messiahs, had met John Tane, and had been "deeply influenced" by John Robins.454 Reeve recounts, in *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, how John Robins tormented him until God spoke to Reeve:

[Robins] did present the form of his face, looking me in the face in my bed, the most part of a night, insomuch that I cryed in my spirit unto the Lord, and the Lord by his Spirit revealed this great Antichrist unto me.455

He also claims to have seen firsthand how Robins tormented other of his followers. Robins "did plague their spirits and bodies at his pleasure, in a most dreadful manner, if they were not obedient to his commands," Reeve reports456 Apparently Reeve also toyed with Quakerism: he wrote to a Quaker about his own unsuccessful experience of seeking the Inner light: "Whilst I groped after Light of Life only within my self, behold I met with nothing but thick Darkness & a secret fear of an everlasting vengeance."457

Lodowick Muggleton, too, was consumed by a desire to achieve assurance of salvation. He reportedly became a "zealous Puritan" while an apprentice with his cousin, William Reeve, but he later refused to join either Presbyterian or Independent circles; around 1647 he withdrew from all worship.458 In 1650 he apparently "was attracted by the declarations of two 'prophets,' John Robins and Thomas Tany," and

457. BL Add. 60178, fol. 16r–v: Reeve, "An Epistle to a Quaker" (1657).  
he read "current English translations of Jacob Boehme."459 "My thoughts were
troubled about salvation and damnation and the dispute within me grew very great,"
he wrote.460 "Loath I was to be damned to Eternity and how to gain the Assurance of
Eternal Salvation I knew not. . . . This [despair] lay heavy upon my soul." Muggleton
found security only after he "was forst to submitt to Gods Perogative Power."
"Immediately after," he wrote, "I found rest to my soul." The reward of submitting
was great, in Muggleton's estimation, for:

not many hours after the heavens were opened and the windows there
of and it poured down showers of Revelations and Knowledge in the
Scriptures above all the men in this world at this day and it hath and
doeth remain with me to this day which is now almost 28 years.

As a result of their sectarian perambulations and quest for assurance of
salvation, both Reeve and Muggleton perceived that only a predetermined number of
men would be saved; all others would be damned. "Time was when I was strongly
deceived with an imagination of the etemall salvation of all mankind," confessed
Reeve, "tho' they liv'd and dyed under the power of all maner of unrighteousness
whatsoever."461 After he had been commissioned a prophet, Reeve saw the error of
his previous thinking. God had set apart a select number of men for salvation and,

459. DNB, s.v. Muggleton, Lodowicke. Thomas Robinson reported to
Alexander Gordon in 1884 that Muggleton had been familiar enough with Boehme's
works that he informed Believers who possessed Boehme's books of the errors they
contained, and he converted some Behmenists to Muggletonianism (BL Add. 60170,
fol. 57r: Thomas Robinson to Alexander Gordon, 1884).
460. BL Add. 60179, fol. 24r: Muggleton to Major John Denison, 24 February
1678. All subsequent quotes in this paragraph are from this source.
461. BL Add. 60178, fol. 15r: Reeve, "An Epistle to a Quaker" (1657).
likewise, had "fore-ordained that a generation of men and women should perish because of unbelief."  

Muggleton claimed to have arrived independently at the same conclusion:

A little before I was chosen of God or knew what Revelation was . . .
the motions of Faith . . . did prove to my Reason That there was a necessity That some men and Women should be saved and the greatest part of them should be damned.

This conviction of the necessity that some men and women should be damned was a favorite of Muggleton's. "If there be a number of people elected of God," he wrote, "there must be a necessity the other number of People to be reprobated of God." He reasoned, "for if all were elected what need there be any talk of Reprobation or Eternal Damnation."

Precisely who will be saved and who will be damned? And on what grounds? Very simply, those will be saved who believe in the prophets Reeve and Muggleton. Salvation, Muggleton explained, can be attained only by faith in God's messengers, viz., the prophets Reeve and Muggleton. "There is no Salvation under Heaven to be found in these Days, but in the Belief of this Commission of the Spirit given of God

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462. BL Add. 60178, fol. 19r: Reeve, "An Epistle to a Quaker" (1657).
463. BL Add. 60179, fol. 24r: Muggleton to Major John Denison, 24 February 1678.
464. BL Add. 60179, fols. 28v–29r: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.
465. BL Add. 60179, fols. 28v–29r: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.
466. BL Add. 60179, fol. 28v: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.
to John Reeve and myself," he insisted.467 "Justification of peace of mind,"
Muggleton explained, "arises first from the act of faith in the Messenger of God,"
which precedes and leads to faith in God himself.468 Believers whose faith in the
prophets persists, even in the face of persecution, can rest in the assurance that they
will be saved. "Every true believer in the Commission, who continues steadfast unto
the End" shall be saved, he insisted.469

Muggletonians never announced that they alone would be saved. They
acknowledged that there had been many elect men and women before the time of
Reeve and Muggleton. Those "ancients" who had "laid hold on" [i.e., believed] God's
promise that he would send a savior will be saved, they believed; likewise those who
heard of Christ and truly believed will be saved; and those who have heard Reeve and
Muggleton and believe in their Commission will also be saved.470 Belief in the truth
was the criterion for—even the evidence of—salvation. "All those that will have him
[God] to rule over them, are his elect, but all the rest are reprobates," wrote Tomkinson,
in his seventeenth-century explication of Muggletonian truths.471 Although

467. Copy of a letter sent from Muggleton to Sarah Coppin, Quaker, 14
February 1667; bound with A Looking-Glass for George Fox the Quaker (1756
468. BL Add. 60178, fols. 4r–v: Muggleton in Answer to Whitehead, 13 June
1682. Note that Muggleton by 1682 uses the singular Messenger rather than the
plural.
469. BL Add. 60178, fol. 2r: Muggleton in Answer to Whitehead, 13 June
1682.
Muggletonians acknowledged that others could be saved, they confidently asserted that only they could have assurance of Eternal Life. 472

How did Muggletonians arrive at their assurance of salvation? How did they know that they were elect? It was a simple result of correct belief. Muggleton warned that “no man or woman can know they are of the Elect Seed but by believing in those Messengers whom God doth send.” 473 The prophets were able to distinguish the Elect from the Reprobate, and they blessed and damned men and women accordingly. Believers damned men and women who flagrantly denied or opposed Muggletonian truths but in general were wary of judging others. “Who dares judge god’s Elect?” queried James Faulkner defensively in the eighteenth century:

am not I of that number, yea verily I am. Have not I seen with the eye of faith Jesus Christ the Eternal God. Have I not the Tree of Life for my salvation. Do not I know the very god and very Devil. Am I not a true believer in the Third and last Commission. There! 474

Belief did not always lead to unwavering assurance, however. Confidence in their salvation at times apparently ebbed among Believers. 475 Muggleton wrote at

472. Lamont, “A Vertical Approach,” p. 30. Lamont was right to clarify the fact that Muggletonians did not see themselves as a chosen people or as a group with exclusive rights to salvation. I believe he was wrong, however, to go on to assert that Muggletonians cut “themselves off from their Calvinist origins . . . in embracing a philosophy of salvation which is cast on Quaker-like generous lines” (p. 30). I see no evidence in any Muggletonian writings to indicate a “Quaker-like” or “generous” interpretation of salvation.

473. BL Add. 60179, fol. 29v: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.

475. Furthermore, the issue of assurance of salvation was key to the eighteenth-century Birchite schism among Muggletonians. “I can see by the Light of
least two detailed letters to Believers who queried whether a Believer could fall away from the truth and how such a fall would affect that Believer’s election. In carefully crafted responses, Muggleton took care to avoid slipping into the trap of Ranterism, which taught that a saved man or woman could not sin, that even lewd acts performed by a saved man or woman would cause no eternal punishment. Once assurance of everlasting life is attained, Muggleton wrote, a Believer can neither fall away nor be damned. But, he cautioned, this assurance must “abide” in the Believer; it must “sink down in his heart” and not remain only in his head and tongue. “I have observed three sorts of faith or conditions in man,” Muggleton wrote to Joseph Whitworth:

Some men I have seen to have faith and knowledge in the head and not in the heart. Others again I have observed to have Faith and true knowledge in the heart and not in the head. Others again I have observed to have true Faith and true knowledge in the head and the heart. . . . There is but one of these three that is capable to fall away. Namely he that hath it in his head only.

Thus, if belief in the Commission of Reeve and Muggleton is “brain knowledge or

God that I was a captive in Babylon . . .” wrote Thomas Joseph, a Birchite “I gloried in myself and said that I was assured of Eternal Life. . . . think what a crime it is to assume such an error. It is a sin to say heaven is ours. God never told us so. And I am sure the prophet Reeves nor Muggleton could not tell us so, but our imagination only . . .” (BL Add. 60168, fol. 139r: Thomas Joseph to Br. Treguno, 4 July 1774).

476. See Claxton’s A Single Eye (1650), written while he was a Ranter, before he became a Muggletonian: “There is no act whatsoever, that is impure in God, or sinful with or before God . . .” because all comes from God. Such acts as swearing, drunkenness, adultery, theft, etc. are thus “simply, yea nakedly, as acts . . . nothing distinct from Prayer and Praise” (quoted in Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium, pp. 313–14.

477. BL Add. 60178, fols. 3r–v: Muggleton to Whitehead, 13 June 1682.

478. BL Add. 60179, fol. 32r: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 16 May 1665.
only in the head . . . [a Believer] may fall back away and never be renewed.”

Some Believers do, Muggleton conceded, doubt their salvation, in the hour of death. This is caused, he explained to a concerned follower, by sin after initial belief, which itself was caused by a breach of the moral law written into the heart. Those that “fall from the Faith . . . in a true Commissionated Prophet . . . shall never return [to belief] again but will certainly be Damned to Eternity,” Muggleton concluded.

It is impossible, he reiterated in a letter to a Quaker, for anyone who first professes faith in the Commission and who then falls away to return to the Truth again; “neither can they possibly be saved.” Muggleton at other times indicated that Believers could fall from belief and yet could be saved. Even if a man walks contrary to the Commission after he is blessed and is therefore condemned, he explained, that condemnation shall not be to eternity,

because the remembrance of the prophet’s blessing is in him. . . . The prophet’s faith and love abideth in him and will uphold him so [his contrariness] shall all end in death and shall never be remembered in the resurrection.

Other than to believe in the prophets Reeve and Muggleton, there was little

479. BL Add. 60179, fol. 31v: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 16 May 1665.
480. BL Add. 60178, fol. 9v: Muggleton to Whitehead, 13 June 1682.
481. BL Add. 60179, fol. 32r: Muggleton to Whitworth, 16 May 1665.
482. Copy of a letter from Muggleton to Sarah Coppin, 13 February 1667; bound with A Looking-Glass for George Fox the Quaker (1756), pp. 104–05.
483. BL Add. 60181, fol. 15r: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671.
any man or woman could do to attain salvation. Muggleton explained:

> It lay in God's Prerogative Power to make me a Vessel of Wrath or a Vessel of Mercy which he pleased. I saw my Righteousness nor Prayer nor any good deeds I could doe would not save me if he had made me a Vessel of Wrath.\(^{484}\)

Tomkinson carried on this notion. “Election and rejection to eternal life and eternal death, is grounded upon the prerogative power, will, and pleasure of the Creator, and not upon the foresight of good or evil. . . .”\(^{485}\) Eternal election and rejection, Tomkinson insisted, “depends on God's will and pleasure, and not on man's.”\(^{486}\) Man has no free will to good from his own nature. Moreover, nothing man can do can win him salvation. Even if a man:

> continually preach and pray, read or hear, though he thunder in the skies, with pathetical cries, with Lord, Lord, open to me. . . yet this, and all that ever can be done by man, although he should shed rivers of tears, will not nor cannot move the eternal God to set that seal of divine love upon any, until he is graciously pleased of himself, from his own free and unconstrained love.\(^{487}\)

Salvation or damnation lies “not in the will power or desire of men or angels or any divine light received but from the prerogative power and pleasure of God,” concurred the anonymous author of the “Articles of the Three Records.”\(^{488}\) This treatise continues with a sentiment not found frequently in other Muggletonian writings:

\(^{484}\) BL Add. 60179, fol. 24r: Muggleton to Major John Denison, 24 February 1678.


\(^{488}\) BL Add. 60205A, fol. 5v: anon., “Articles of the Three Records.”
“Eternal Election and Rejection, spoken of in Holy Writ, had Relation to Persons of understanding and not unto Children that are uncapable of the breach of the Law, so all Children will find mercy.”

Human actions cannot impel salvation or damnation; only belief in the Truth promulgated by God’s prophets Reeve and Muggleton can do so. Sin or evil acts are not the cause of damnation but evidence of it. Tomkinson explained that “good motions are the blossoms of election, and good actions are the fruits; . . . likewise reprobation and the works of darkness and unbelief are unseparable”; thus “infidelity and disobedience is the mark of reprobation.”

Tomkinson explained to Believers why some men were destined for eternal Suffering: in order to make manifest God’s divine justice. In a remarkable underestimation of God’s creativity, Tomkinson wrote: “If the glorious Creator could possibly have known any other way for the making known his divine excellency unto men and angels, certainly he would never have created any thing on purpose for eternal suffering.” Muggletonians believed that God permitted humankind to sin for a similar reason: in order for sin “to lie as a black circle about his white righteousness, that it might cause it to appear more glorious.” This contrast of

489. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 6r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records.”
491. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 271.
492. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 262.
493. BL Add. 61950, fol. 32v: “The Saints Triumph and the Devils Downfal.”
opposites inspired Tomkinson to elaborate: "Things are best known by their contrarieties," he maintained; health is best known by sickness; liberty by bondage; light by darkness; mercy by justice; truth by error; love by envy; and riches by poverty. God makes "all things manifest by contraries."

Muggletonian expressions of belief in a strict determinism makes it difficult to assign the group a specific place on the seventeenth-century religious continuum. Their teachings about God the Man Christ Jesus flew in the face of traditional Church teachings about God and the Trinity and pushed them toward the radical end of the continuum. Most of the groups clustered here at the radical end of the continuum—although not all—upheld vociferously the doctrine of universal salvation, in opposition to the Calvinist doctrine of determinism. Yet the Muggletonians promulgated a rigid view of determinism along Calvinistic lines. Barry Reay has noted that Muggletonians were unusual among their more radical religious

494. Tomkinson, Truth's Triumph, p. 269.
495. BL Add. 61950, fol. 32r: "The Saints Triumph and the Devil's Downfal."
496. Quakers believed that the Inner Light in all persons guaranteed the possibility of salvation for all persons; General Baptists extended the possibility of salvation to all baptized believers; and Ranters believed that all men and women could be saved. Radicals did not have a monopoly on the doctrine of universal salvation, however; it was popular among groups spread across the continuum. Morton, World of the Ranters, p. 117, maintains that the doctrine of universal salvation divided "the more advanced sects [by this he means more radical sects] from the Presbyterians and very many of the Independents, who held the orthodox Calvinist views of predestination and the rigid divisions of mankind into the reprobate and the elect." He seems to conveniently forget that the Arminian party within the Church of England herself moved away from Calvin's theory and embraced universal salvation, and that Particular Baptists tended to ascribe more weight to predestination in salvation than to human effort or freely given grace.
compatriots precisely on this issue, that they accepted Calvin's theory of
predestination while such groups as Quakers, Ranters, General Baptists, and Diggers
reacted against it. Muggletonians did not wholeheartedly embrace Calvin's
doctrine of predestination, however. Some of their writings include overt criticism of
Calvin's doctrine and maintain that he had been incorrect.

Calvin had explained predestination as an aspect of redemption through
Christ. Because Christ died on the cross, humankind can be redeemed; Christ as
Son of Man had been redeemed and as Son of God redeems. Calvin had explained
that the salvation of men and women was a result of the election of Christ. For
Muggletonians like Tomkinson, this suggested two Gods: God first saved Christ, then
Christ saved men. Because he implied two Gods, charged Tomkinson, Calvin was a
false minister. More than one century later, Thomas Robinson expounded on
Muggletonian teachings about predestination ("the only true doctrine of

497. Reay, "The Muggletonians: An Introductory Survey," p. 27, claims that the
fact that Muggletonians accepted Calvin's theory of predestination set them apart from
their radical colleagues; most other radical sects reacted against Calvin's harshness, he
notes. Yet as will become clear later in this chapter, Muggletonians did not fully accept
Calvin's theory; they criticized him and advanced their own theory of election.
498. Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (1539), book 3,
discussed in Alister E. McGrath, Reformation Thought: An Introduction, 2nd ed.
(Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), chaps. 5 and 6, esp. the latter, pp. 120–33.
499. McGrath, Reformation Thought, p. 126.
500. See Tomkinson, Truth's Triumph, p. 272; and Otto Gründler, "Thomism
and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi" (Diss., Princeton Univ., 1961),
pp. 144–46.
predestination\textsuperscript{502}) and how they differed from Calvin's. Robinson summarized Calvin's doctrine thus: "God from eternity decreed and intended to create mankind both good and evil out of the same lump on this earth some to be elected and some to be rejected without any primary or original cause in either."\textsuperscript{503} Calvin indeed had taught that "God chooses some for the hope of life, and condemns others to eternal death. . . ."\textsuperscript{504} Robinson called this false, a misreading of Romans 9.\textsuperscript{505} The true doctrine of predestination, Robinson explained, was that although angels and Adam had been made from the same lump of clay, their "souls or natures were different. The soul or seed of the Angels, remarkably, is "all vice, evil, natural, and spiritual wickedness," but Adam's soul or seed is a reflection of God's own, that is, "all faith and goodness but in measure."\textsuperscript{506} Thus, although both Calvin and Muggletonians argued that certain men and women had been predestined by God for salvation and others predestined for damnation, Calvin taught that men and women were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{502} BL Add. 60170, fol. 64r: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
\item \textsuperscript{503} BL Add. 60170, fol. 63v: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
\item \textsuperscript{505} Romans 9:21–24: "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" (RSV).
\item \textsuperscript{506} BL Add. 60170, fol. 63v: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
\end{itemize}
predestined by God for salvation or damnation from the time of Creation, whereas Muggletonians taught that men or women were predestined for salvation or damnation only after sin entered the world, that is, only since the Fall. Against Calvin's supralapsarian doctrine of predestination Robinson projected the infralapsarian doctrine of the Muggletonians. Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve—but not before—"there have been evil as well as good men: evil men are known by their fallen reason, which justified oppression, war, murder, idolatry, self-righteousness, persecution, and blasphemy and [they] are predestined to damnation." The Elect, in contrast, will accept and be known for their acceptance of God's truth.

All of this begs the question: do the Elect and Reprobate play any role themselves in their salvation or damnation? The Muggletonian doctrine of the Two Seeds addresses this very question. This doctrine carefully articulates God's complex scheme of predestination and explains precisely why some men and women can never be saved. "None can understand [the true doctrine of predestination] not knowing the rise and fall of the two seeds," wrote Thomas Robinson in 1885.

507. Supralapsarian = those who believe that God's plan of salvation for some preceded the fall of man from grace, which itself had been predestined.
508. Infralapsarian = those who believe that God's plan of salvation for some people followed and was a consequence of the fall of man from grace.
509. BL Add. 60170, fol. 64r: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
510. BL Add. 60179, fol. 64r: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
According to the doctrine of the Two Seeds, God elects persons not after but before they are born, that is, “in the Seed.”\textsuperscript{511} He is able to do this because when he formed heaven and earth and all creatures, he formed two sorts of creatures. From “dust above the stars” God created angels, with “spiritual bodies” like God’s own\textsuperscript{512} but with physical bodies like men’s.\textsuperscript{513} From “dust of the earth” God formed Adam’s body; then he “breathed the breath of life into him, which became a living soul.”\textsuperscript{514} Adam was pure,\textsuperscript{515} and God’s “living soul” within him filled him with the virtues of “faith and goodness.”\textsuperscript{516} Angels, in contrast, had spirits of “pure reason, which is Desire Thirsting after the knowledge of the Creator.”\textsuperscript{517} Both creatures, angels and men, are “manifestations of God’s mercy and justice, created for God’s own glory.”\textsuperscript{518} Angels, however, are more unfortunate than men, for unlike men, they do not possess the virtues of God, even in small measure. Their spirits of pure reason do not lead

\textsuperscript{511.} BL Add. 60179, fol. 29r: Muggleton to Joseph Whitworth, 19 May 1665.
\textsuperscript{512.} BL Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #3.
\textsuperscript{513.} BL Add. 60168, A/100, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 26 November 1798. Sedgwick also notes that all angels were male.
\textsuperscript{514.} BL Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #7. It is interesting to note that Thomas Robinson in 1885 asserted that angels and Adam had been formed from the same lump of clay but had been given different “souls or natures” (BL Add. 60179 fol. 63v: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885).
\textsuperscript{515.} BL Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #8.
\textsuperscript{516.} BL Add. 60170, fol. 63v: Thomas Robinson to Alfred Hall, 3 March 1885.
\textsuperscript{517.} BL Add. 60168, A/100, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 26 November 1798. See also BL Add. 60205A, fol. 4r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,” which explains that “desire is want of something that is not inherent in its own nature.”
\textsuperscript{518.} BL Add. 60168, A/100, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 26 November 1798.
naturally to good or to God. "The Revelations of the overflowings of that Spirit of Faith from the person of God is that Food or spiritual manna to their desires, and so is their life, joy, and Glory, and keeps them in obedience." Although God provided this spiritual nourishment or inspiration of his spirit to the angels, he left one angel "to himself, to see what he would do"; not surprisingly, without spiritual nourishment from God, that angel "grew into cursed pride and rebellion... upon which the anger of the Lord did arise against him, and cast him down from the highest heaven to the lowest earth." John Saddington, a respected Muggletonian in the seventeenth century, elaborated: that angel began "to think himself more fit than God to rule over the rest of the angels. God punished such pride by flinging him down into this world and calling him a devil, a serpent."

This angel cast down to earth on account of pride is the devil, often called, in Muggletonian writings, the "serpent-angel." It is unclear whether Muggletonians believed that this angel actually took the physical form of a serpent (Muggleton

519. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 4v: anon., "Articles of the Three Records."
520. Tomkinson, Truth's Triumph, p. 268.
521. BL Add. 60206: Saddington, "48 Articles," article #5. See also the anonymous "Articles of the Three Records," (BL Add. 60205A, fol. 4v, article #14), which explains that one angel, "for want of spiritual food," became "all manner of impurity" and desired to govern above God himself. Therefore "he was thrown down to this earth where his desired Kingdom of God-like government was prepared for him." Muggleton in 1665 cleverly explained that the angel's sin was "to think that if he had been God, he would have made all things of nothing, he would have created all living creatures without substance or matter, that is to say, of nothing" (A Letter Sent to Thomas Taylor, Quaker, in the year 1664, p. 6)—both a dig at Ranter and traditional Christian teachings about Creation and a vindication of Muggleton's own Creation theory.
himself had scoffed at Quakers for teaching such doctrine) or whether they used the

term metaphorically. In any event, they believed that this serpent-angel was

responsible for the temptation of Eve and the Fall of Adam. The serpent-angel

overpowered Eve "by his subtlety, [and] caused her to consent to him, upon which
condencencion he entred her womb." 522 The "serpent-angel" dissolved himself into
seed to impregnate Eve, just as God himself later dissolved into seed to impregnate
Mary.

Upon Eve’s consenting to the Serpent angels counsel immediately his
angelical spiritual person entered into her womb and dissolved himself
into her Seed through which she conceived a serpent dragon devil into
a man child of flesh, blood and bone and brought forth her first
begotten son or devil called Cain or Cursed, who became the Belzebub
and Prince of Devils, the only Father of all Reprobates. 523

From this serpent-angel’s seed was born Cain, and with Cain’s birth Evil entered the
world. Through Cain’s progeny, evil has been passed from generation to generation.

Through the progeny of Adam (cited sometimes in Muggletonian writings as the

522. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 4. It is unclear how the serpent-angel

convinced Eve to “consent” to him. Muggleton had derided the belief that the devil in
the form of a serpent tempted Eve to eat a forbidden apple, and Tomkinson

emphatically agreed that evil was not caused by eating an apple (Truth’s Triumph, p.
107). "What a great deale adoe has beene abought the eateing of an Apple," wrote
one eighteenth-century Believer (BL Add. 60190, fol. 72, cited in Lamont,
Puritanism and Historical Controversy, p. 137). Muggleonians often described the
serpent as being one and the same as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (BL
Add. 60205A, fol. 4v, article #15: anon., “Articles of the Three Records”; and BL
Add. 60206: Saddington, “48 Articles,” article #15). In many Muggleonian
documents, the impregnation of Eve by the serpent-angel is conflated with the very
temptation of Eve and Fall of Adam.

523. BL Add. 60205A, fols. 4v–5r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records.”
offspring of Abel and sometimes as the offspring of Seth), in contrast, good has been passed from generation to generation. Muggletonians sang their acceptance of the doctrine of the Two Seeds:

The first created blessed pair,
The Lord made perfect pure and fair;
Planted a garden, placed them there
As lords of this creation.

The devil here seduced Eve,
By which two seeds we do perceive
Were introduced here to live
Until times last duration.

Two seeds or types of soul thus exist in within humankind according to Muggletonian teaching. One seed produces the Elect; it is the “Seed of Faith,” the “Law of Grace,” which gives rise to “peace, love, knowledge, patience, meekness, joy, in God, and assurance of everlasting life.” This is the “Seed of Adam,” which predestines men and women to eternal life. Adam, through his son Abel, passed on through the generations the purity God had originally given him: those virtues of faith and goodness which God planted in Adam when he first formed man. The other seed produces the Reprobate; it is the “Seed of the serpent,” which condemns men
inexorably to damnation. But since the offspring of Cain and Abel had intermarried and produced offspring of their own, Muggletonians acknowledged that each human being contains both seeds:

All men since the fall do participate of two seeds, so there are two wills in man, i.e., a will to act righteously, & a will to act wickedly, and the elect have a free-will in them to act righteously to be saved,—but not to act wickedly & be damned, & the reprobate has a free-will to act wickedly, & to be damned, but not to act righteously, & be saved. . . .

Here lieth the difference between the elect & the reprobate: the one refrains from sin out of fear of being damned, but the other refrains out of pure love & honor to God, because they know it is contrary to his divine nature: though since they do all participate of the seed of the Serpent, they may all be guilty of several errors. But then, through the seed of faith in them, they see all sin to proceed from the Devil, & to be at enmity to God.

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The author of “Saints Triumph” was careful to explain that God was not the origin of evil: Evil existed from eternity as an independent force. God merely called evil out from its pre-existence.

[Sin] was visible in the eyes of God in its root, enclosed in a body of thick darkness from Eternity; & extracted from thence, & created into a bodily & visible form by the powerful influence of the Word of God.

So the root of sin was not created by God, neither was it originally produced by accident, or frailty in nature . . . but it was a root of spiritual darkness from eternity, heterogeneal, or different in quality to the divine essence, of Spirit of God.

But if we hold that God created the Spirit, soul, or nature of the reprobate Angel or Devil in its root from nothing,—or from that which he originally created from nothing, or from something that was in its

528. Tomkinson, _Truth’s Triumph_, p. 6.
529. BL Add. 61950, fols. 35r–37r: “The Saints Triumph and the Devil’s Downfal.” Cf. Tertullian’s teaching (eventually condemned by the Church) that all of Adam’s descendents inherit, as a result of his sin, a “wounded” soul that has a propensity—but not compulsion—to sin. I thank Otto Gründler for bringing this connection to my attention.
faculty good before, we make God the author of all manner of Sin. The Spirit, or nature of the fallen Angel was a root of spiritual darkness from Eternity:—so then in its nature it is no part of God’s creation, but only as aforesaid, God called it forth or created it into a bodily form, by the powerful influence of his word, & exalted it to the highest degree of glory in heaven that he might manifest his power to the elect, in casting it down to the greatest degree of torment in hell, etc.530

Tomkinson also was concerned that an incorrect or incomplete understanding of the doctrine of the Two Seeds could lead to the assumption that God had created Evil. Ranters apparently affirmed precisely that: they held that the Devil was one aspect of God, the “backside” of God, and received his power from God.531 Tomkinson was careful to say that God formed creation and creatures rather than having created them. In Truth’s Triumph he stresses the fact that Muggletonians drew a distinction between create and form.

In the doctrine of the Two Seeds is a clue that helps clarify how Muggletonians could write about the devil existing only within each man and woman and yet could use such terms and phrases as “devil” and “serpent-angel,” “Fall of Adam,” and “Temptation of Eve.”532 The seed of evil that originated with the devil is transmitted

530. BL Add. 61950, fols. 6r–8r: “The Saints Triumph and the Devil’s Downfal.”
532. Contemporaries of Muggletonians and modern scholars alike often have confused Muggletonians with Ranters—or attributed Ranter-like beliefs to Muggletonians—because they interpreted Muggletonian teachings that “there is no devil other than the unclean spirit with you” as akin to Ranter beliefs that god, heaven, and hell were all inward concepts. Claxton, a former Ranter, perhaps contributed to this misunderstanding with pronouncements such as “there never was is or shall be any other devil but men and women” (BL Add. 60188, fol. 42v: “A Divine Prospect”).
by generation through the offspring of Cain. Once the seed of evil was sown in Eve’s womb, it had a life of its own, obviating the need for a separate, physical devil. Evil is transmitted and persists through the generations, and the serpent-angel or devil has ceased to exist as a discrete entity. “Give over looking for a devil (O, you sons of men) without you, but look into your heart, for that is the place of its conception,” Tomkinson warned.533 “No other devil exists but man and woman since the devil begat Cain,”534 wrote John Saddington. “Since the serpent-angel became flesh,” asserted the anonymous “Article of the Three Records,” “there is no evil spirit angel or devil that tempts man to any evil against God or man but that lying proud envious Devil [seed of Cain] living in Man.”535

Cain figured prominently in numerous theologies in seventeenth-century England. Typically Cain was portrayed as the ancestor from whom the rich, the powerful, and the wicked were descended; while Abel was portrayed as the ancestor from whom the poor, the oppressed, and the godly were descended. John Bunyan, for example, taught that “it is the lot of Cain’s brood to be lords and rulers first, while Abel and his generation have their necks under oppression.”536 Winstanley the Digger

charged that “Cain is still alive in all the great landlords.” Muggletonians, however, went further: they provided a detailed explanation of how Cain and Abel could be sources for evil and good behavior respectively, and their explanation reflected the realities of the world in which they lived. They saw that individual men and women sometimes behaved generously and lovingly but at other times behaved selfishly and contemptibly. They concluded that men and women were never wholly good or wholly evil but instead were a combination of good and evil impulses which reflected their dual inheritance. The seed of Cain and the seed of Adam/Abel were mixed together in each person, and the proportion of each seed determined whether that person was Elect or Reprobate. The doctrine of the Two Seeds explained how even the Elect could have foibles and doubts and how the Reprobate might be able to lure unsuspecting folk to false doctrine with pious words or behavior.

Muggletonians were a small group, but they marched through more than three centuries in quiet but full assurance that they were special. First they were Elect; they had more of the Seed of Adam/Abel in them than the Seed of Cain. Second, they and only they accepted, believed, and understood the prophets Reeve and Muggleton, who alone understood and could explicate Scripture. As Tomkinson wrote in the conclusion to his chapter on the doctrine of the Two Seeds: “my epistle . . . is not communicable to any but the seed of faith, being too sublime for the children of the

world to comprehend.” Finally, Muggletonians knew they were elect; they were confident that they would be saved. “She died,” read the obituary for Rebecca Burton in 1847, “in the belief of her soul sleeping in the grave until the last day and in the full assurance of a resurrection to eternal joy purchased for her by the death of her God and Savior the Man Christ Jesus.”

538. Truth’s Triumph, p. 33.
539. BL Add. 61950, fol. 131v: obituary in Nottinghamshire paper, 19 February 1847.
HEAVEN AND HELL

To what sort of "eternal joy" would Rebecca Burton and other Believers be raised on the last day? How and where would non-Believers suffer? How imminent was the last day? To men and women in seventeenth-century England, especially to those as interested in materialist explanations of religious concepts as were Muggletonians, these were exceedingly pertinent questions. This chapter sketches the changing time frame that Believers advanced for the end of the world and lays out the Muggletonian perceptions of Resurrection, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell.

John Reeve in his earliest writings expected and declared the imminent end of the world. "Suddenly after we have delivered this dreadful message, . . . God the man Jesus, will visibly appear," he predicted in Transcendent Spiritual Treatise.540 "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly," he prayed fervently in the preface to Divine Looking-Glass.541 Both Reeve and his co-prophet Lodowick Muggleton believed that the Second Coming would occur before they died; they believed that the times in which they were living were just "a little before his glorious coming."542 Within ten years of Reeve's first pronouncements, however, Believers no longer expected the world to end any day. They still expected the world to end—sooner rather than later—but they

540. TST, p. 1.
542. TST, p. 4.
viewed the end as an event likely to occur in the more distant future, perhaps within one or two generations. Laurence Claxton in 1659 predicted that the next generation “shall not be buried till the world be buried.”543 In 1798 R. Sedgwick expected Christ to “suddenly appear in the Clouds of Heaven to Judg Both the Quick and the Dead and to make an Everlasting Sepparation Between the Elect and the reprobate world”544 but gave no indication of when Believers might expect this sudden appearance. By the nineteenth century, the date for the anticipated end of the world had been pushed even further into the future. Muggletonians no longer expected the world to end imminently, nor did they even anticipate its end within several generations. Rather, they simply yearned for something they were certain would come, although they knew not when. Robert Dawson in 1803 opened his letter to London Believers with the salutation, “to all that long for the second appearing of our God.”545 Not thirty years later, Thomas Robinson closed his letter to London Believers in an analogous way: “waiting for the Coming of this Lord Jesus Christ.”546 Despite movement from imminent expectation to deferred anticipation to simple longing for the Second Coming, Muggletonians through the centuries barely budged from the details about this important event that John Reeve had first articulated in 1652 in his Transcendent Spiritual Treatise. Muggletonians believed that the Second

543. BL Add. 60187, fol. 7v: The Quakers Downfall, 1659.
544. BL Add. 60168, fol. 250: booklet by R. Sedgwick, 26 November 1798.
545. BL Add. 60169, fol. 10r, 15 September 1803.
546. BL Add. 60169, fol. 125r, 13 June 1834.
Coming would initiate three key events: Resurrection, Judgment, and eternal Salvation or Damnation.

In contrast to Quakers, who believed that the Second Coming was entirely spiritual and had, in fact, already occurred, Muggletonians expected a very visible, real, and physical return of God the Man Christ Jesus to Earth. They expected that the Second Coming, Judgment, and Resurrection would be virtually simultaneous. On the day that God the Man Christ Jesus shall return to earth in a cloud, Reeve predicted:

then shall all the Elect, in the twinkling of an eye, both those that slept in the dust, and those that are alive at that time, . . . I say, they shall all ascend together as one body, to meet their Head, the Lord Jesus in the Aire.\(^{548}\)

All those who “fell asleep in the believing of the visible coming of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of Heaven,” Reeve proclaimed, “their bodies shall be raised first out of the sleep of death.”\(^{549}\) The phrase “sleep of death” was important to Muggletonian doctrine and helps orient them with respect to other religious groups in the seventeenth century. Muggletonians believed that the souls of the Elect who die before the Second Coming fall into a deep sleep and, along with the

\(^{547}\) Quakers insisted that the Second Coming had already occurred; Christ was inside Believers. “Our kingdom and victory is not of this world, nor earthly,” wrote Edward Burrough, Quaker; quoted in Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 283. “The coming of Christ in the flesh . . . was one coming, and his appearance in Spirit, to save his people from sin, is another coming, which they that truly looked for Him receive . . .” explained George Whitehead, *Light and Life of Christ Within* [1668], p. 40; quoted in Underwood, *Primitivism*, p. 62.

\(^{548}\) *TST*, p. 45.

\(^{549}\) *TST*, p. 47.
physical body, await resurrection. "Body and Soul . . . are both generated and
begotten by procreation"; thus, "both are mortal and die, and turn to dust until the
Resurrection day."\textsuperscript{550} Souls, like bodies, are mortal, declared John Saddington, so "at
death souls die and lay with the body until resurrection."\textsuperscript{551} On the day of
resurrection, Saddington continued, God will raise all the dead—body and soul
together.\textsuperscript{552} Muggleton declared that he found "much peace of mind" in this
conviction.\textsuperscript{553} Claxton, too, described how on the day of resurrection the body and
soul together will be raised: "At the day of our glorious god's appearance each seed
or soul shall arise with bodies suitable to their natures."\textsuperscript{554}

\textsuperscript{550} BL Add. 6025A, fol. 7r: anon., "Articles of the Three Records."
\textsuperscript{551} BL Add. 60206: "48 Articles," article #12.
\textsuperscript{552} BL Add. 60206: "48 Articles," article #43.
\textsuperscript{553} Muggleton, \textit{Acts of the Witnesses} (1764), p. 25, quoted in Hill, "Irreligion
in the 'Puritan' Revolution," in \textit{Radical Religion}, pp. 201–02. The belief that after
death the soul does not at once proceed to Heaven or Hell is known generally as
"mortalism." Some mortalists were "annihilationists," denying any resurrection of the
soul whatsoever and insisting that the soul died with the body. Others insisted that the
soul died along with the body but that it was resurrected along with the body. Still
others were "soul sleepers," who believed that the soul merely slept until the ultimate
resurrection; see the discussion in Hill, "Irreligion in the 'Puritan' Revolution," pp.
201–02. He argues that Baptists, Ranters, and Quakers had flirted with mortalism if
they did not ultimately embrace it; that the Leveller Richard Overton, John Milton,
and Familists were mortalists who believed that the soul died along with the body;
and he claims that Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and the English Lollards had
been soul-sleepers. While mortalism may not have been mainstream, Gordon noted
that the 1562 Convocation of Bishops had refused to condemn it; see his "Ancient
and Modern Muggletonians," pp. 194–95. Muggletonians were mortalists of varying
degrees: Reeve and Muggleton were soul-sleepers, although Saddington and the
anonymous author of "Articles of the Third Record" appear to have believed that the
soul actually died and would be resurrected with the body.
\textsuperscript{554} BL Add. 60188, fol. 43r: Claxton, "A Divine Prospect."
The Second Coming will set off a sequence of events that will take place with blinding speed, taught Muggletonians, indeed, "in the twinkling of an eye." Immediately after the Second Coming God the Man Jesus will both raise the dead and pass judgment. Resurrection and Judgment, in fact, will be nearly simultaneous. Reeve predicted that:

All those who refuse to abide by God’s Law of Love will, come the Resurrection, have fiery bodies that will be constantly inflamed by all their former wickedness. They will be spiritually dark; the spirit in their bodies will be fiery devils who will keep them from remembering any past comfort—physical or spiritual. Their fiery bodies and spirits of fiery devils will burn together just where they resurrected; their Hell will be on this earth, where they committed all their unrighteous acts.

Later he reiterated, “those spirits and bodies that they shall appear with in the Resurrection shall be that lake of spiritual fire and brimstone, that by the decree of the Lord Jesus shall burn together in all eternity.” Perhaps more academically but no less vehemently, Thomas Tomkinson expounded:

In that it is said [in Scripture] that at the end of the world the children of the wicked one shall be cast into a furnace of fire, where shall be weeping and waiting and gnashing of teeth; from hence we collect, that the nature of the reprobate’s torment, is an eternal fiery vengeance upon both soul and body at the end of the world.

Another Muggletonian predicted that the “wicked deeds of their former bodies” will be conveyed into the resurrected bodies of the Reprobate, “as fuel to kindle the fire of

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555. TST, p. 45.
556. TST, pp. 11–12.
557. TST, p. 38.
The Reprobate surely deserve such a fiery fate, thought Believers. After all, they contained within them the Seed of the devil, the Seed of Cain, which expressed itself in evil acts and in denial of the truth of the prophets’ Commission. Specifically, though, who were the Reprobate? Reeve and Muggleton, of course, knew; God had given them the power of discernment, and they exercised their power frequently and vehemently as they cursed any who disbelieved in their Commission from God. Reeve in his *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise* not only had pronounced sentence of damnation on specific men, such as John Tane and John Robins, but also had indicted whole classes of men such as magistrates and churchmen. “The Dragon Magistrate, and the false Prophet his Serpent Ministers that committed spiritual fornication together,” he predicted, “and all those of their own spirits, shall every one of them, in the day of the Lord’s vengeance burn in their spirits and bodies together as a lake of fire.” Claxton, too, claimed the power of discernment. “I am the onely bishop or messenger in Revelation bearing witness against all gainsayers to the truth of spiritual commission,” he announced, to Muggleton’s chagrin. Later Believers were less

559. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 8v: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,” article #35.
560. TST, p. 38.
561. BL Add. 60188, fol. 42v: Claxton, “A Divine Prospect.” Pronouncements such as this impelled Muggleton to denounce Claxton in 1660 for “carrying himself so proud and Lord Like” over others, particularly Muggleton himself; see BL Add. 60179, fol. 4r, letter from Muggleton to Christopher Hill, 24 January 1660; and BL Add. 60251 fols. 64v–66v: Muggleton, “Laurence Claxton’s Excommunication,” 25 December 1660.
prone to damn specific persons, although John Lowden in 1773 threatened a
clergyman that, if he burnt Lowden's Muggletonian tracts, he would "pronounce you
damned in soul and body, from the presence of God, elect men and angels to all
eternity."\(^{562}\) Robert Dawson in 1803 did "pass sentence" of damnation: "Yesterday I
gave three master tradesmen the full sentence," he wrote, evidently with some
satisfaction.\(^{563}\) In general, however, later Muggletonians tended not to damn specific
persons but, rather, to regard certain groups as suspect and likely to be numbered
among the Reprobate. In song they charged churchmen and wealthy lawyers with
unbelief and evil deeds:

> The fat-gutted priest will roar for assistance;
The lawyer may say, he did plead for a fee;
But unto our God they have both shewn resistance,
They are damn'd without mercy to eternity.\(^{564}\)

Churchmen as a group, in fact, were virtually assured of damnation by their very
profession, in Muggletonian perception. "In the great day of judgment, the world then

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562. BL Add. 60183, fol. 14v: John Lowden to a Sussex clergyman, 5 August
1773.

563. BL Add. 60169, fol. 106v: Robert Dawson to Thomas Pickersgill, 25
November 1803. Damning apparently had given Muggleton immense satisfaction as
well; in answer to a Quaker's charge that his mouth was full of curses, Muggleton
admitted: "Full of this cursing I confess my mouth is, and I do rejoice in it too. I
know that God is well pleased in the damnation of those that I have cursed, and I am
wonderous well satisfied in giving judgement upon them, according to the tenor of
my Commission" ("Lodowick Muggleton's Answer to Samuel Hooton and WS," in
Neck of the Quakers Broken (1663 [1667]; University Microfilms International
M3048), p. 18).

564. Divine Songs (1829), song #169 (anon.; not separated from song #170 by
Rebecca Batt).
will fear./ And the priest like the people, in shame will appear” sang Believers in the
nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{565}

In contrast to the fiery fate of the Reprobate, the Elect will be raised—body
and soul—to a glorious life with God. “After the resurrection,” Reeve expounded,
“the Elect shall have spiritual bodies in . . . form like unto that in the dust [i.e., in
form like the physical bodies they inhabited while on earth].\textsuperscript{566} More remarkably, he
continued, these resurrected bodies of the Elect in addition shall have:

pure righteousness, the same nature of that holy spiritual faith, that
raised it out of death; yea, [each of the Elect shall have] a glorious
body, brighter then the Sun in its strength, and as swift as thought, yea,
[the Elect shall have] bodies of such a bright burning glory, that no
persecuting Canaanites can behold and live, because our spirits and
bodies . . . shall be made like unto the glorious body of God the man
Jesus.\textsuperscript{567}

Astonishingly, Reeve predicted the transformation of the Elect into God-like beings
in human-like bodies. “Not the same bodies or persons they lived in, and died in, shall
appear again any more,” he explained, but bodies purged of any trace of the Seed of
Cain:

but that spirit of faith mixt with pure love, and all other spiritual
virtues, that were in their former bodies, by the which they died unto
the power of sin, and lived unto the power of righteousness, that
divine seed of faith sowed in the former body died with the first body,
& immediately quickened a new life out of death by the decree of the

\textsuperscript{565} Divine Songs (1829), #140 (Boyer Glover, “Now the World are
affrighted”; 24 lines total).
\textsuperscript{566} TST, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{567} TST, p. 44.
The resurrected Elect shall have "bodies of righteousness, like unto their God the man
Jesus, visibly to behold face to face the glorious body of the God of all Righteous-
nesse," he insisted. Lest there be any misunderstanding, Reeve reiterated: "when
the Elect are thus glorified, they are absolutely of the very same glorious nature both
in spirit and body as God is." The righteous, Tomkinson anticipated, after
Judgment "shall shine forth as the Sun."

Just as body and soul are inseparable, which means that the physical and the
spiritual are eternally wedded to one another, so also are Heaven and Hell both
physical and spiritual in Muggletonian interpretation. When God threatened Reeve
that if he did not accept the Commission "thy body shall be thy hell and thy spirit
shall be the devill that shall torment thee to eternity," God put the lie to Ranter
claims that there was no Heaven or Hell. Nor was God talking about a Quaker-like
inward spirit or consciousness. He was not talking about a metaphorical place of
torment. He was warning that the body of the unbeliever literally would be Hell,
literally would be fire. The evil deeds of the unbeliever would provide limitless fuel
for this fire, so the unbeliever's soul and body would burn for eternity. "Their bodies
will be the Kingdom of Hell, and their Spirits will be the devils shut up in that body

568. TST, p. 47.
569. TST, p. 36.
570. TST, p. 45.
572. TST, 5.
or pit of darkness,” warned the anonymous “Articles of the Three Records.” This hellish torment will take place right on this earth, and justly so, for this earth was precisely where the Reprobate have committed their abominations:

The place of the Reprobates torment will be upon this earth in utter darkness . . . ; and they will never be able to stir from the place of their resurrection, neither will they see one another’s faces more, nor the face of God elect men and angels to all Eternity.

After the Resurrection and Judgment, indeed:

The sun, moon, and stars will vanish forever. This fruitful pleasant earth [shall] be like unto dry burning sand, the seas and all rivers or springs of water being dried up for evermore, . . . this whole creation being turned into a chaos of confusion, without forme, and void of all light or sap, either natural or spiritual, to all eternity.

A remarkable image indeed: pillars of fire—actually burning bodies—dotting a barren dark dry landscape upon which God has turned his back for evermore; a place “fitted only for persecuting Dragon-Serpent-Devils to lament, howl, and weep to all eternity.” This was Hell, a place that would come into existence only after Judgment Day. In the nineteenth century, Muggletonians reiterated this belief: “No such place exists at present but is only the wicked consciences of men and women.”

Such an earth would be no place for the Elect, of course, and Reeve scoffed at those who expected an earthly reign of God after his Second Coming. “Blind carnal

573. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 8v.
574. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 8v: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,” article #36.
575. TST, p. 12.
576. TST, p. 39.
577. BL Add. 60170, fol. 27r: anon., “Faith and Practice of the
hypocrites imagine,” he sneered, that God’s reigning with his Elect Ones will be on this bloody Earth, because they have no spiritual Eyes to see or know that new Heaven or new Earth, above or beyond the stars, where nothing but pure righteousness reigneth in glory for everlasting, or world without end, Amen.”578

This assuredly ends all debate as to whether Muggletonians were millenarians!

Muggletonians expected no terrestrial regeneration, no heaven on earth. Heaven, to which Believers will be raised immediately after their resurrection, will be “above the stars,” a garden of joy, full of “soul ravishing delights.”579 Just like Hell, which in no way will be only metaphorical, Heaven will be a concrete and physical place, “as visible to be seen, as this creation is seen in this earth beneath.”580 In fact, Heaven apparently will be somewhat like a Muggletonian gathering. The Elect, overflowing with joy and glory, will return that glory and praise to Jesus; they will continually receive “revelation of new Heavenly wisdom”; and they will “sing new glorious songs and praises unto their Redeemer”.581

In that most blessed place. . .

Where myriads of angels sing,
Melodiously they raise
Their voices to that mighty King,
In pure seraphic praise.582

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Muggletonians,” 1 January 1870.
578. TST, p. 17.
579. Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 7.
580. TST, p. 15.
581. TST, p. 45.
582. Divine Songs (1829), #80 (William Miller, “Believers, now let us rejoice”; 63 lines total).
Lest Heaven seem too prosaic, however, Muggletonians expected the spiritual bodies of the Elect in Heaven to be “in motion as swift as thought, and so capable to ascend with their God and his angels into his Kingdom of eternal Glory.” 583 The anonymous “Articles of the Three Records” generously predicted that all Believers will have thrones in Heaven. 584 Claxton described Heaven as “non-globical,” by which he presumably meant not at all constrained by rules that prevail on earth. In Heaven, he imagined, God and his angels will “with their bodies fly as swift as thought, ten thousand miles in a moment.” 585 With his imagination reaching feverish heights, Claxton concluded, “and when he pleaseth God can sit stand lie in as narrow a compass as myself.” 586

Thus Muggletonians first expected, then vaguely longed for, the Second Coming. This event, no matter how cataclysmic for the Reprobate, promised the Elect resurrection to “glorious bodies,” possession of “personal glory,” a face-to-face meeting with God himself, “astonishing new joys,” and unceasing spiritual nourishment. 587 Further, it promised them release from persecutions or hardships they suffered on earth. For three centuries, Muggletonians gathered together (albeit in ever-diminishing numbers) to encourage one another in their faith; to disseminate the

583. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 8r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,” article #34.
584. BL Add. 60205A, fol. 8r: anon., “Articles of the Three Records,” article #34.
585. BL Add. 60188, fol. 43r: “A Divine Prospect.”
586. BL Add. 60188, fol. 43r: “A Divine Prospect.”
587. See Tomkinson, Truth’s Triumph, p. 7, and citations from TST above.
writings of God's two last witnesses, John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton; and—in their own pre-figurement of Heaven's glories—to sing hymns of joy and praise to God.

All hail to our redeeming king,
For all his boundless love;
With raptur'd joy of praise we'll sing,
'Twill be our theme above;
Where discords will for ever cease,
Eternal love abide;
True saints shall all be crown'd with peace,
And pleasures sweetly glide.

Incessantly we there shall praise
This great and glorious God;
Eternal hallelujah's raise,
In that most bless'd abode.
What mortal can define the joy
That is laid up in sore,
Where nothing never shall annoy
The faithful anymore. 588

588. Divine Songs (1829), song #56 ([James] Miller, 1744; 16 lines total).
CONCLUSION

The discovery of three centuries'-worth of Muggletonian documents in 1978 and the death of the "Last Muggletonian," Philip Noakes, in 1979 led to renewed interest and research into the small group known as Muggletonians. This present work has focused on the theological beliefs of the group from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. It has examined the letters, verse, hymns, and actions of a wide spectrum of committed Believers. It has looked at Muggletonians against the backdrop of the context in which they emerged and has noted ways in which they distinguished themselves from their seventeenth-century contemporaries. This chapter will reiterate the theological beliefs that defined Muggletonians as a religious group and that set them apart from their contemporaries. It will resolve some of the contradictions expressed in previous scholarship about Muggletonian beliefs. In so doing it will evaluate Muggletonians in light of current scholarship on new religious movements and will point to ways in which Muggletonians set themselves apart from their contemporaries. All this will, as promised in the Introduction to this work, confirm the group as a serious religious movement and will point to the uniqueness of Muggletonian belief and practice.
Defining Beliefs

The tracts, letters, verses, and minutes written by Believers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and now housed in the British Library reveal that Muggletonians articulated a coherent, complete theology, cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology. Furthermore, Muggletonians engaged in activities that reflected their beliefs. For example, they read, copied, and disseminated the prophets’ words; they met on special anniversary days for community and spiritual discussion; and they sang songs of praise to God the Man Christ Jesus. Thus Muggletonians were first and foremost a religious group, not a political protest group or social reform group. Muggletonians, admittedly few in number, obscure, and frequently misunderstood, must be treated as a serious religious group that articulated a complete and coherent—albeit unique—religious program.

The Six Principles, first expressed by John Reeve and then by Lodowick Muggleton and later generations of Muggletonians, summarized the core theological beliefs of the group. The Six Principles changed but slightly over the years, as Table 1 shows. They constitute a clear statement of the theological concerns of Muggletonians—God, angels, heaven, devils, hell, and mortal man—but are more general statements of topics than clear assertions of belief. As such, they do not definitively describe the precise attributes of God, angels, or devils, of Heaven and Hell, or of humankind. Such details emerge only in tracts, letters, and verse written later by Reeve and, especially, by Muggleton and subsequent generations of Believers.
### Table 1

The Six Principles

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<th>Reeve(^{589}) 1654</th>
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<th>Tomkinson(^{591}) 1676</th>
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These later documents reveal that Muggletonians carried on the beliefs and practices established in the earliest years with little adjustment or alteration. They clung to the Six Principles as a base of belief and built upon those principles a solid set of theological beliefs.

Believers displayed an unwavering commitment to the authority of the prophets Reeve and Muggleton, an authority believed to have been conferred upon them by virtue of their Commission “by voyce of words” from God.593 Even after Reeve and Muggleton died, Believers continued to appeal to their authority and continued to revere their writings. Believers expressed the unshakable conviction that God became Jesus in body and soul, that God and Jesus were in all ways one being.594 They further understood that their own body and soul were inseparable—in life, in death, and come the Resurrection. Muggletonians believed that since the Fall there have existed two categories of human beings: the Elect and the Reprobate. They understood this to be the result of God’s plan for creation and salvation and affirmed

593. Thus I concur with Hill that the Commission was important and unique, but in contrast to Hill’s assessment that “Reeve’s doctrine . . . contains little that is original except the existence of the commission to the Two last Witnesses” (“John Reeve and the Origins of Muggletonianism,” in World, p. 77) I find other important and unique teachings also expressed in the Muggletonian documents.

594. I find it astonishing that only Reay has cited this teaching as unique. Although movements from the early Christian centuries (e.g., Gnostics, Adoptionists, Arians) had denied or offered alternative explanations of the Trinity and although other radicals in the seventeenth century (e.g., Ranters) denied the Trinity, no other group (save Sabellians) argued so passionately that God and Jesus were absolutely one and the same, body and soul.
this belief through their doctrine of the Two Seeds.\textsuperscript{595} Finally, Believers expected that the world would end soon, with the Second Coming of God in the body of Jesus; his resurrection and judgment of all men and women, living and dead; and his raising of the Elect to Heaven and condemnation of the Reprobate to Hell on earth. Some Believers expected the world would end very soon; some had a vague expectation that the world would end within their own lifetime; some merely longed for the end of the world; some anticipated the end as a glorious and joyful event; and some expected that the end would be cataclysmic. Nonetheless, they all expected an end in the future and all articulated a similar description of Heaven and Hell. In accordance with their beliefs, Muggletonians gathered together to read and disseminate the writings of Reeve and Muggleton and discuss the meaning of their words. Believers composed and sang their own verse and song in order to give expression to their beliefs. They avoided ritual and sacrament and church-going; they had no clergy; and they never evangelized. Through such beliefs and behavior they distinguished themselves from the Established Church and from other radical separatists of the seventeenth century and from Swedenborgians and Unitarians in the nineteenth.

\textsuperscript{595} Here I concur with Gordon and Thompson about the importance of the doctrine of the Two Seeds, but I do not find it the only or the most unique Muggletonian doctrine. I am surprised that only Reay connected the Muggletonian doctrine of the Two Seeds with their acceptance of Calvin's theory of determinism.
Resolution of Contradictions Found in Earlier Scholarship

Previous scholarship on the Muggletonians has been conducted largely with a social-history perspective. While scholars have agreed on the general importance of the Six Principles to Muggletonian theology, they have not delved deeper into the theology, have not studied it in relation to the theologies of other radical groups, and in fact have not always agreed on what precisely were the beliefs that defined Muggletonians. Their research, although ostensibly conducted for the purpose of explaining and clarifying Muggletonian beliefs, has thus left the impression that Muggletonian doctrine was, perhaps, less than coherent; that it was a hodge-podge of beliefs cobbled together from other groups; that it changed with the winds of time. It has further left unresolved a number of questions. For example, did Muggleton dramatically alter Reeve's teachings and therefore fundamentally change the movement? Were Muggletonians heavily influenced by the mysticism of Jacob Boehme? Similarly, did they actually develop from the Ranter tradition or did they detest the teachings of Ranters as well as Quakers? Were Heaven and Hell internal, psychological concepts for Muggletonians or were they concrete, physical places? Were Muggletonians millenarians? The answers to these questions have been discussed in the foregoing chapters; here they will be set forth directly and will be considered in the light of scholarship on new religious movements.

596. For details about this and the following questions raised in previous
Did Muggleton Alter Reeve's Teachings?

Christopher Hill claims that John Reeve has been much underestimated by scholars and was overshadowed by his cousin Lodowick Muggleton. He states that Muggleton "rewrote the history of what came to be called Muggletonianism," terms Muggleton’s contributions to the movement’s theology “puerile or non-existent,” and suggests that Muggleton deviously claimed authorship of works published by Reeve alone and, further, contradicted Reeve’s teachings, particularly with respect to Immediate Notice. Consider, however, that Reeve received his Commission in 1652 and died a mere six years later. During this short period he spoke of the acute imminence of the Second Coming and therefore—like the earliest Christians who also had expected the imminent return of Jesus and messianic groups no matter in which religious tradition—saw no need for organizational structure or firm statements of belief. Then, just two years after Reeve’s death, in 1660, the monarchy was restored and radical dissenters largely squelched. Faced with the death of one of the two Witnesses, with the apparent continuation of the world and, even, restoration of the political, social, and religious status quo—it seems eminently logical that, for the sake of survival, the remaining Witness (Muggleton) and his band of Believers would...
tone down their overt criticism of Church and Crown, would focus on the words of
the remaining prophet, would work to define themselves as a group, and would try to
reconcile Reeve’s writings and their beliefs with the contemporary situation. This is
precisely what the earliest Christian community did immediately after the death of
Jesus, for example. The questioning and clarification of Reeve’s teachings by
Muggleton are also predictable. Again referring to early Christianity, James, Peter,
and Paul each took a different approach in reconciling Jesus’s teachings with Jewish
custom and with the situation in which the new believers found themselves.

Some new religious movements disappear after the death of their founder,
unable to sustain themselves without the charismatic leadership. However, if the
movement has enough vision and coherence to speak to men’s and women’s needs
and thereby attract followers, it will persist. The role of the religion’s founder,
however important, will be only one of several elements, not the overwhelming

600. See Acts 1:12–26: “Then they returned to Jerusalem . . . and they went
up to the upper room. . . . All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer. . . .
In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all
about a hundred and twenty), and said, “Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled,
which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas
who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was
allotted his share in this ministry. . . . So one of the men who have accompanied us
during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . one of these men
must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they put forward two . . . and
they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of
these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship. . . .” And
they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the
eleven apostles (RSV).

601. See Acts 15 and Paul’s letter to the Galatians, esp. chap. 2.
Muggleton and the earliest Believers in fact responded to Reeve’s death in classic fashion. In his study of the fate of new religious movements after the founder’s death, J. Gordon Melton found that:

In simple terms, the average founder of a new religion, especially one that shows some success during the first generation, is obviously an important factor in the growth and development of his/her movement. . . . However, once the founder articulates the group’s teachings and practices, they exist independently of him/her and can and do develop a life of their own. Once the follower experiences the truth of the religion, that experience also exists independently.

Once John Reeve convinced not only his cousin Lodowick but also other men and women of the truth of his teachings, his ideas were poised to develop further. Although he did not live long enough to solidify or expand upon them, Reeve established a foundation for the group’s practices and teachings, viz., the Six Principles. “Once a single spokesperson for the founder arises,” Melton has observed, “the possibility of transmitting the truth of the religion independently of the founder has been posited.” Thus Reeve may have been the man to whom God initially spoke, and he may have established the basic tenets of belief for a new religious movement, but God also had appointed Muggleton to be Reeve’s “mouthpiece.” Muggleton was, in Melton’s terms, the spokesperson for the founder who would transmit the truth of the religion and would wield power of leadership in the

movement after the founder's death. Even the debates within Muggletonianism over Muggleton's authority vis-à-vis Reeve's conform to a classic pattern. When the passing of a founder leads to a power struggle, Melton has concluded, that power struggle should be seen not as a negative or destructive development but as "a clear sign that leadership was allowed to develop in the group."  

Reeve and Muggleton had only six years together to build their new religion. After Reeve's death, Muggleton continued the work of witnessing to God's truth alone. The years from the movement's founding in 1652 to Muggleton's death in 1698, then, may be considered the first generation of the movement, despite Reeve's death in 1658. Typically, the first generation of a new religion is a time of experimentation and rapid change:

The leader must discover the right elements to combine in a workable program, generate solutions to unexpected obstacles, choose and train capable leaders, and elaborate upon the initial ideas or vision that motivated the founding of the group in order to create a more complete theology.

This is precisely what Muggleton did. As Lamont notes, Muggletonians did not survive into the Restoration period and beyond "by some dramatic jettisoning of their earlier beliefs." Instead, Muggleton carried on Reeve's ideas; he tinkered only

606. His attempt to share the burden of leadership with Claxton ended in dismal failure in 1660; see BL Add. 60251, fol. 65v: "Laurence Claxton's Excommunication," 25 December 1660.
608. Lamont, "Lodowick Muggleton and Immediate Notice," p. 114. Lamont later states (pp. 115, 116) that Muggleton challenged the basic ideological presumption of earlier years, thereby assuring the movement's survival into a later age, an opinion that I do not fully share.
slightly with the Six Principles established by Reeve; he consolidated his leadership of the movement in the face of challenges to his authority; and he distinguished his group from rival groups, particularly Quakers. Muggleton’s “rewriting” of Muggletonian history and his “contradicting of Reeve’s teachings” in regard to Immediate Notice may be seen as nothing more than a natural stage in the development of a new religion, a step in the process of elaboration and adaptation that is characteristic of all new religions in their first generation.

Were Muggletonians Friends or Foes of Ranters, Quakers, and Behmenists?

Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson have hypothesized that the mysticism of Jacob Boehme was an important influence on the development of Muggletonian thought. James M. Lewis has countered that Muggletonians detested Boehme. A similar debate has taken place over Muggletonian relations with Ranters and Quakers: were Muggletonians an offshoot of Ranterism or Quakerism?

Considering the milieu in which Muggletonians emerged—a time of religious ferment, many new religious groups, and an ever-shifting membership in such groups—it is not surprising to find both similarities among the various groups and

609. For challenges to Muggleton’s authority, within his lifetime, see BL Add. 60251, fol. 65v: “Laurence Claxton’s Excommunication,” 25 December 1660; BL Add. 60181, fol. 15v: Muggleton’s Answers to Medgate’s Assertions, 1671; and Lamont, “Lodowick Muggleton and Immediate Notice.” Muggleton’s pamphlets against Quakers were published in 1663, 1668, 1669, and 1682; see n. 12 above.

strident condemnations of one another’s doctrine and practice. John Reeve had moved in Puritan and Ranter circles before God spoke to him in 1652. Lodowick Muggleton, too, had affiliated with Puritans and Ranters before being chosen as one of the two Last Witnesses. Both men, therefore, likely would have been familiar with Puritan and Ranter doctrine and practice and likely would have found them lacking or incorrect (else why would they have left?). Laurence Claxton had begun his life within the Church of England and had subsequently affiliated with Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Seekers, Levellers, and Ranters before joining the Muggletonian movement. He was for a time an army chaplain! He too surely would have been able to use the language and imagery of such movements to disparage them and elevate Muggletonianism above them. Barry Reay has traced the spiritual journeys of many early Muggletonians and has found that their paths frequently crossed through Ranter, Quaker, or Behmenist territory.611 He notes that Thomas Tomkinson had been a Presbyterian before he was converted by Laurence Claxton to the Muggletonian movement and that John Saddlington had traversed across Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist fields before settling as a Muggletonian. He identifies a number of Believers who had previously been Ranters: Jeremiah Maunte, Captain Clark, and Robert Phayre. Quakers emerged in the 1640s and were wildly successful; by 1689 they numbered nearly 50,000 adherents. Reay identifies a number of Believers who had previously been Quakers: George Gambel

[Gamble], Charles Yeeles, Thomas Miller, John White, and possibly Alexander Delamain [Delamaine]. All of Jacob Boehme's writings had been translated from German into English between 1647 and 1661 and thus were readily available to English readers.612 And Reay identifies at least two Believers who had been clearly influenced by Boehme's teachings: Edward Fewterell and Richard Sudbury. "I have drank of many waters," confessed Ellen Sudbury, one of the earliest Believers, "but never Drank of the Water of Life till I met with the Witnesses of the Spirit."613 Traces of Behmenist, Ranter, or Quaker ideas and language thus can be expected in Muggletonian doctrine. E. P. Thompson's identification of certain similarities between Behmenist and Muggletonian doctrine,614 his suggestion that Muggletonianism might be "understood as a Behmenist heresy,"615 and Christopher Hill's assertion that all points of Muggletonian doctrine had previously been espoused by one or another religious group, from Lollards, Anabaptists, Baptists, and Socinians to Diggers, Levellers, Ranters, Behmenists, and Quakers616 overemphasize the importance of similarities and minimize the independence and uniqueness of


613. BL Add. 60168, fol. 8r: Ellen Sudbury to Thomas Tomkinson, 10 August 1664.


Muggletonianism. What would be truly surprising would be the total absence of similarities among groups that arose in the same era, milieu, and location and were founded by men who had adhered to any number of such groups before founding their own. At the same time, James M. Lewis's intimation that Muggletonian denouncements of Quaker or Behmenist or Rant ideals somehow proves that the groups were diametrically opposed overemphasizes the differences among the groups.\textsuperscript{617}

Muggletonians were theologically poles apart from Ranters, Quakers, and Behmenists. They conceived of God as an external, physical being, not an Inner Light or inward spirit or individual conscience. They appealed to an authority that was totally external and located only in God's Two last Witnesses, not diffused through any elect group or among all Believers. They rejected all talk of human action having potential to lead to salvation.\textsuperscript{618} Moreover, Muggletonians vehemently criticized their radical colleagues. Reeve's tirades against Baptists and Ranters and Muggleton's invective against Quakers have already been mentioned. More than half of the 133 person whom Reeve and Muggleton damned between 1652 and 1677 were Quakers.\textsuperscript{619} "There is no public worship at this day in the world that enjoys perfect

\textsuperscript{617} Times Literary Supplement, 13 December 1974, 14 February 1975, and 21 March 1975.

\textsuperscript{618} Compare this to the Quaker emphasis on silent worship for the purpose of seeking the Inner Light or God and to Boehme's tracts, collected in his The Way to Christ, which address such topics as Repentance, Resignation, Regeneration, Divine Contemplation, and Divine Prayer.

unity in their assertions, ceremonies & persuasions—what discords, jarrings &
disputations!” decried Alexander Delamaine in 1677; [worship appears in] “several
forms & branches in one profession, and most of them full of vain janglings & dark
deep foolish controversies, till they lose themselves because out of the truth.”620
However, Muggletonians also shared many interests with Ranters, Quakers, and
Behmenists. They scorned the organized Church and its clergy. They expected the
imminent end of the world. They believed the soul was mortal. They rejected
sacraments and ritual. They had a very informal organization and were bound by
voluntary commitment to the movement. These similarities reveal common origins or
heritage.621 It is not unusual for groups that share common origins to denounce
bitterly and compete with one another. Jeffrey Kaplan’s observations about twentieth-
century radical American movements speak to this issue:

A remarkable feature of these highly diverse movements is the
difficulty of differentiating ideological appeals that have many
common beliefs yet at the same time are bitterly divisive and
competitive for the allegiance of a limited pool of adherents. Equally
striking is the fluidity with which seekers drift from one movement to
another.622

620. BL Add. 61950, fols. 130r–v: Alexander Delamaine to George Gamble,
1677.

621. E. P. Thompson has perceptively observed that “an intense sectarian
dispute is often the signal of an affinity, and while Muggletonian doctrine repudiated
the dispersed pantheism of the Behmenist tradition, of the Ranters, ... and of Tany
and the Quakers, and replaced it by a literal belief in a singular God/Christ in the
image of man, yet in other parts of the doctrine (the nature of Creation, the origin of
evil, the notion of contrarieties) Muggletonianism was grafted upon Behmenist or
Ranting stock” (Witness, p. 66).

622. Radical Religion in America. Millenarian Movements from the Far Right
Severe condemnation of their radical contemporaries who in fact shared many attitudes toward organized religion allowed Muggletonians to distinguish themselves from other religious groups that vied for the same pool of adherents and assured Believers already in the fold that they had made the correct choice. Years later such vehement language was unnecessary, as fewer rival groups vied for the same pool of adherents; furthermore, Baptists, Quakers, and Muggletonians were virtually the sole survivors from among the many radical groups of the seventeenth century. Thus, although Thomas Robinson in 1884 disputed the Reverend Augustus Jessop's assertion that Jacob Boehme had influenced Muggletonian doctrine, he did not consider Behmenists and Quakers the movement's most dangerous enemies. A new group seemed more threatening: Swedenborgians. Already in 1847 Robinson had accused Mr. Hales of incorporating "the Spirit of the Swedenborgian Principle" into his Muggletonian beliefs. In 1870 Alexander Gordon reported that the Believer who invited him to attend a Muggletonian meeting had damned "an unfortunate

to the Children of Noah (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. xvi.
623. In his Prophet of Walnut Tree Yard, a biography of Lodowick Muggleton.
624. BL Add. 60170, fol. 55v: Robinson to Jessop; and fol. 57v: Robinson to Alexander Gordon.
625. Swedenborgians are followers of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Swedenborgians have continued to survive until the present day.
626. BL Add. 60169, fol. 175r: Thomas Robinson to Mr. Hales, 6 February 1857. See also Lamont, "Lodowick Muggleton and Immediate Notice," pp. 138–39 and n. 80; and Thompson, Witness, pp. 146–49ff. for discussion of the Swedenborgian doctrine of "Divine Humanity," which asserts that God infused His own life into Christ's body.
Swedish-oriented lecturers. Unitarians were suspect also in the nineteenth century; Muggletonians published statements clarifying their doctrines in Unitarian magazines and debated the wisdom of allowing Gordon, a Unitarian minister, access to their meetings and documents. But by this time Muggletonians had settled into a routine that kept them largely withdrawn from the larger society of spiritual groups, and they had little room for proselytizing. In fact, they had little time for anything other than reading, copying, discussing, and disseminating Muggletonian publications and singing their divine songs. Gordon related that the Church—as Muggletonians called themselves—passed a resolution in 1798 stating that:

no natural affairs [i.e., no affair other than one concerning faith],
neither public nor private, shall be brought up in this church, so as to disturb the peace of it. And if any . . . shall [do so] . . . and . . . shall not comply . . . the Church [shall] leave the room, and leave the disturbers of it to themselves.

So, short of publicly addressing perceived misrepresentations of their group, Muggletonians by the nineteenth century cared little about other religious groups and felt little need to draw strict lines of demarcation between themselves and other religious groups. “What a happy, and a peculiar people are we!” a young Believer exclaimed in 1864.

628. Unitarians deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They believe the teachings of Jesus but deny his divinity.
629. See BL Add. 60182, fol. 10r: John Lowden to a Sussex clergyman, 5 August 1773, copied by Thomas Amor from a Unitarian magazine in 1824.
Muggletonian doctrine regarding Heaven and Hell can seem contradictory, and scholars have explained the doctrine variously. Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson have cited texts that describe Heaven and Hell as internal, psychological concepts, texts such as Reeve’s first revelation from God: “Look into thy own body, there thou shalt see the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of Hell.”632 Nineteenth-century Believers also described Hell as but the wicked consciences of men and women.633 James M. Lewis, in contrast, has cited texts that describe Heaven and Hell as very real and very physical, texts such as *A General Epistle*, which insists that Heaven is “above or beyond the stars” and the “angels are resident” there.634 In truth, Heaven and Hell for Muggletonians were both internal concepts and external places. From the moment God first formed the heavens and the earth, to the moment of his Second Coming and Judgment, they taught, Heaven has existed as the abode of God and the angels; earth has existed as the abode of humankind; and Hell has existed only in potential. Likewise the devil: there had been a very real devil, a serpent-angel who had impregnated Eve, but “there is no other Divel since the fall of Adam, but a man’s owne spirit of unclean reason, and wicked imagination,” Reeve

632. *TST*, p. 5.
proclaimed in *Remonstrance*. Because God created man in his own image, each human being contains within a vision or awareness of Heaven. After God returns to earth, raises the dead, and judges humankind, the Elect will ascend—body and soul—to Heaven to live with God. The Reprobate will burn—body and soul—for eternity on the surface of the earth, which will be converted to a barren wasteland: Hell. Thus Heaven before the Judgment is a physical place that can be envisioned through one’s soul. Hell becomes a physical place only as a result of God’s Judgment. This notion is uncommon but apparently not confined only to Muggletonians. Hill has noted that Francis Kett had taught as early as 1589 that no Hell existed before the Last Judgment.

**Were Muggletonians Millenarians?**

In that Muggletonians believed that God would come to earth suddenly, in a visible form, to judge humankind, separate the godly from the sinners, transport the godly to Heaven, and condemn the sinners to Hell, they seem to have differed but little from traditional Christian views of the end times. For example, 1 Thessalonians

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636. Hill cites the notion of Hell on earth as evidence of Boehme’s influence on Muggletonians. Boehme advanced the notion in his *The Aurora*, p. 498 (“John Reeve and the Origins of Muggletonianism,” in *World*, p. 82 and n. 75). James M. Lewis notes that Thomas Hobbes also believed that after the Apocalypse, earth would be the most suitable location for Hell (*Times Literary Supplement*, 12/13/74).
638. *TST*, esp. title page and pp. 14, 22, 44, 45, 47.
4:16-17 predicts that “the Lord will descend . . . and the dead will rise . . . and we who are alive [will go] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Further, 1 Thessalonians predicts that this Second Coming will be sudden, “like a thief in the night.” But closer analysis of Muggletonian documents reveals subtle differences that set Muggletonian eschatology apart from that espoused by traditional Christianity—and from that espoused by other radical separatists in the seventeenth century as well.

Eschatology—that is, doctrine about the end times of the world—is an umbrella-like term that encompasses several different types of teaching about the end times. For example, apocalypticism refers to a particular sub-type of eschatology, one that is intense and dramatic. Thus, Christian eschatology may acknowledge the reality of an antichrist figure, but Christian apocalypticism asserts that Antichrist is actually present and is directly responsible for all evil in these times. Millennialism is another subspecies of eschatology. It teaches broadly that there will, soon and suddenly, be a miraculous and total transformation of earth. This transformation will bring absolute perfection of the earth, to be enjoyed by all the faithful. Millennialism is not limited to Christianity but is found within many religious

639. 1 Thess. 5: 2.
641. McGinn, Visions of the End, p. 4. Christianson, Reformers and Babylon, p. 7, describes apocalypticism as the middle ground between eschatology, which is broad, and millennialism, which is more restrictive.
642. Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 15.
traditions of the world. *Millenarianism* is closely allied to millennialism but is a uniquely Christian subspecies of Christian eschatology. It teaches that, as foretold in the book of Revelation and other Biblical books, Christ will return to earth. He will either inaugurate his thousand-year reign on earth or will come after a thousand-year reign by his saints. In either interpretation, millenarianism always anticipates a thousand-year period of godly rule on a perfected earth.\(^6\)\(^4\)\(^3\) It typically has an apocalyptic tone as well, since in millenarianism the Second Coming is intimately connected with the Day of Judgment.

John Reeve anticipated a sudden, total, and miraculous transformation of earth, as do millennialism and Christian millenarianism. He often warned his readers about the Antichrist, who was embodied, he taught, in the false teachers he saw around him in seventeenth-century England.\(^6\)\(^4\)\(^4\) Lodowick Muggleton and other early Believers such as Thomas Tomkinson and John Saddington also warned against being deceived by Antichrist. But in Muggletonian teaching, the earth will be transformed into an eternal Hell, not an eternal paradise. The Reprobate will be resurrected along with the saints, but immediately they will burn in eternal fire. Nowhere in Muggletonian writings is there found allusion to a regenerated earth; nowhere is there mentioned a thousand-year reign by Christ or his saints, either before or after

\(^6\)\(^4\)\(^4\). TST, pp. 7–10.
Judgment Day. To the contrary, Reeve and Muggleton both scoffed at such ideas. Thus, Muggletonians were never, in the strict sense of the word, millenarian, despite their claim to authority based on the book of Revelation and despite their use of the rhetorical language of the apocalypse. They may be characterized as adventist, surely, and as apocalyptic at times, but certainly not millenarian, and they were millennial only in a perverse fashion (that is, they believed that the earth would be made over into Hell).

In their expectation of the end times, Muggletonian eschatology differed not only from traditional Christian millenarianism but also from that of their radical counterparts. Fifth Monarchists held perhaps the most radical ideas about the end times, in that they expected the apocalypse to be very physical. They planned rebellions in 1657 and 1661 with the intention of breaking and removing “all earthly governments, and worldly constitutions” so as to initiate the “Kingdom of Christ.”

They anticipated dramatic economic, social, and political changes under Christ’s rule: workers would no longer face unfair labor competition, and men would have more regular and comfortable work. The godly, currently obscure, would enjoy an “abundance of outward glory.” Finally, the national church would be swept away and mandatory church attendance and tithes would be abolished.

Quakers anticipated an inward or spiritual Second Coming. The movement’s founder, George Fox, nonetheless employed traditional apocalyptic rhetoric when he spoke about Judgment Day: “O ye great men and rich men of the earth! . . . Weep and howl for your misery that is coming. . . . The fire is kindled, the day of the Lord is appearing.” But Quakers taught that Christ had already returned to earth, in a spiritual way, within each person who accepted Quakerism. Their opponents perceptively accused them of believing “that [since] Christ is come to them, neither look they for any other coming: That the world is ended with them, neither look they for any other end: That the Judgment is past with them, neither look they for any other Judgment.”

Muggletonians were not traditional Christian millenarians. Nor were they radical millenarians in the Fifth Monarchist mold or “spiritual millennialists” in the Quaker mold. Muggletonians envisioned a new age more physical and literal than that envisioned by Quakers, yet not so earthly that held by the Fifth Monarchists. They expected a physical resurrection, a vivid Judgment, a very real Hell on a devastated earth, and a glorious Heavenly life for God’s Elect. Yet they did not expect a regenerated earth, a paradise on earth, or a golden age on earth. They did not predict the date or time of the Second Coming, nor did they connect it to any specific current

events. They thereby avoided the disappointment that so many apocalyptic groups experience when the projected time or date or event passes without divine rapture.\footnote{651}{See esp. Lantemari, \textit{Religions of the Oppressed}; and \textit{The Disappointed. Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century}, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 173–88.}

Furthermore, they avoided the necessity for active involvement in earthly affairs so as to help bring about Heaven on earth.

The Uniqueness of Muggletonians

Muggletonians were a small and obscure but serious religious group. They offered a complete and coherent world view and upheld teachings distinctly different from that of their contemporaries. Their contemporaries ranged from the Church of England to radical dissenters in the seventeenth century and from mainstream Christian denominations to mystics in subsequent centuries. Although Muggletonians in fact shared some beliefs and practices with both mainstream and radical Christians, they worked very hard to set themselves apart from all other religious groups. Ultimately they succeeded, for their religious beliefs and practices were quite unlike those of any other group. Muggletonians were unique, on several counts.

First, unlike many new religious movements, they survived not only beyond the death of their founder John Reeve but also beyond the death of the founder’s spokesman, Lodowick Muggleton. Unlike Diggers, Levellers, Seekers, Familists, and Fifth Monarchists who also arose in seventeenth-century England, Muggletonians did
not cease to exist after the first generation. Of all the radical dissenters who flourished in England between 1640 and 1660, only Quakers and Muggletonians survived beyond the first generation.

Second, although their beliefs and practices placed them at the radical end of the religious continuum in seventeenth-century England, Muggletonians distinguished themselves as unique among their radical contemporaries. They had no charismatic preachers. They did not proselytize. They did not support any political faction or involve themselves in political or social demonstrations. They shunned and cleverly avoided contact with civil authorities. Moreover, they upheld a strict Calvinist determinism, in contrast to most radical groups which embraced a doctrine of universal salvation.

Third, Muggletonian doctrine was remarkably non-mystical. Barry Reay has remarked on Muggleton's "no-damn-nonsense" attitude,\(^652\) and William Lamont has urged that the materialism of the Muggletonians "cannot be emphasized enough."\(^653\) Materialism indeed pervades all theological explanations offered by Muggletonians, throughout the centuries. No creation \textit{ex nihilo}; earth and water existed from eternity but without form, until God gave them form.\(^654\) God had a physical body in the form of a man; "how can righteousness and holiness—as well as mercy, justness,

\(\text{\正常}{652. \textit{Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals}, vol. 2, s.v. Muggleton, Lodowick.}\)  
\(\text{\正常}{653. \textit{Puritanism and Historical Controversy}, p. 137.}\)  
\(\text{\正常}{654. \text{See chapter on The Two Seeds, above, and, for example, BL Add. 60206: John Saddington, "48 Articles," article #6.}\)
meekness, and humility—act without a body?” queried Thomas Tomkinson. Both Reeve and Muggleton repeatedly used a logic that extrapolated from their own experience to cosmic truths. Muggleton assured a Believer that if worship in the way of the national church could give peace to the mind and could assure men of eternal life, then he would have found it when he had been a zealous Puritan. Just as a man’s semen impregnates a woman and results in the birth of a child, so also God’s semen had impregnated Mary and resulted in the birth of Jesus. Likewise, the devil’s semen impregnated Eve and had resulted in the birth of Cain, the father of all Reprobates. Just as humans substitute for one another in their absence from any duty, so also God had asked Moses and Elias to substitute in Heaven for him while he descended to earth to be Jesus. God and Jesus were one and the same body and soul. Similarly, a man’s body and soul are intimately connected and indivisible. At death, both slumber together until the final resurrection, when both will be raised to life again and will either ascend to Heaven (just six miles above earth) or burn in Hell (this very earth).

Fourth, although the century in which they emerged was one of revolution and reformation, Muggletonians cannot be classified as a reform group. Much religious sentiment in the seventeenth century looked backward and advocated returning to or recapturing a Golden Age of religious harmony, ostensibly embodied in primitive

655. BL Add. 60179, fol. 45v: Muggleton to Thomas Nosworthy, 4 November 1679.
Christianity. For example, the Council of Trent in 1547 had sought to *re-infuse* the Church with pastoral apostolic spirit and *restore* the episcopate.\(^{656}\) The First Book of Common Prayer (1549) had desired to *return* the Church to the liturgy of the primitive church.\(^{657}\) The Canons of 1640 had desired to *return* to Edwardian rules and ceremonies.\(^{658}\) Presbyterians and Independents in the seventeenth century held the early Christian community described in Acts as a model for current belief and practice; Baptists tried to replicate the New Testament model; and Quakers believed that time had already rolled back to the *illud tempus*.\(^{659}\) Puritans too sought to *recapture* the apostolic fervor of the primitive church, while the Arminian party within the Church of England sought to *restore* church practice to its rightful dignity. In contrast, Muggletonians never looked backward for inspiration. Despite being called heretics by their opponents, Muggletonian doctrine was not the *revival* of any previous early Christian or medieval heresy such as Gnosticism, Catharism, or Lollardy. Muggletonians never urged a *return* to an apostolic and therefore true Christianity. They sought authority in the present, in the persons and words of John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton. Later generations of Believers may have looked back at the lives and words of Reeve and Muggleton for guidance, but they did not describe the era in which the prophets lived as a Golden Age. Muggletonians were

\(^{657}\) *Book of Common Prayer*, Preface.
not re- anything: not re-formers, not re-volutionaries, not re-storers; they urged no re-vival, no re-turn, no re-infusion, no re-capture.

Fifth, the Muggletonian Third Commission or Third Age, their Age of the Spirit, reveals an affinity with the tradition of Joachim of Fiore. Yet Muggletonians were not true Joachites. They made no mention of an ordo novus; they displayed little concern with the pope or, indeed, any events outside of England; and they rarely tied contemporary events to descriptions found in the book of Revelation. Most important, their doctrine of the nature of God precluded acceptance of Joachim’s teaching that both the second and third status had their origins in the first status, just

660. See, for example, Muggleton’s exclamation: “I never could endure to concern myself with any Shipps or Sea Affaires,” indicating his great reluctance to consider places or events beyond the pale of his own [material] experience; BL Add. 60179, 45r: Muggleton to Thomas Nosworthy, 4 November 1679.

661. See, however, Reeve’s tribute to Oliver Cromwell, found in the 1760 edition of Divine Looking-Glass, that draws parallels between Cromwell’s Protectorate and the Kingdom of Heaven: “An epistle written by inspiration from the fiery glorious Spirit of Jesus Christ, that immortal Jew, and spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah, who alone is the Lord Protector of Heavens, Earth, Angels, and Men. Unto Oliver Cromwell, that mortal Jew, and natural lion of the same tribe according to the flesh; who is styled Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland . . . ” (fol. 33r). “Most heroic Cromwell, who art exalted unto temporal dignity beyond the foreknowledge of men or angels in the most holy name and nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the bended knees of our souls we most humbly beseech thee to peruse this Epistle with thine own eyes, . . . because there is something [in it] . . . which more principally concerns thee more than all other men within thy Territories. And in so doing . . . thou may’st in due season become the only Counsellor to thy Council above all earthly princes under Heaven; and not only so, but also a faithful Defender and Deliverer of all suffering people upon a spiritual account within thy dominions; and if so, what mortal persecuting powers can stand before thee, or serpentine cursed plots come near thee or thine for ever?” (fol. 33v).
as both the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father. However, like many groups since the time of Joachim, Muggletonians appropriated his language and part of his teachings. Among such Joachimist groups, Muggletonians again stand out as different.

Marjorie Reeves has argued that “the real Joachites among the Protestants were the visionaries who felt that they must interpret their religious experience in terms of a revolutionary new era of history.” Most such groups believed that they themselves must work to bring about the third status, the Age of the Spirit. “What characterizes this Christian revolutionary tradition from Joachim of Fiore to John Huss, from Thomas Münzer to the theologies of hope and political theologies of our own day,” Roger Garaudy has added, “is that the Kingdom of God is not conceived as another world in space and time, but as a different world, a changed world, a world changed by our own efforts.” Muggletonians had no illusion that their own efforts would bring about the Kingdom of God. They had no social agenda, no political agenda, no economic plan. They were content to hold their beliefs and engage in their practices, withdrawn from the mainstream society. Muggletonians expressed no urgency about preparing the way for the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God. They expected no reign of Christ or God on earth before Judgment Day; they

662. Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 19, 25.  
663. Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, p. 139.  
expected no Kingdom of God on earth after the Second Coming. To the contrary: Muggletonians believed that the Kingdom of God or the Third Age or the Sabbath Age had already arrived, with the Commission to the Two Witnesses, Reeve and Muggleton.\textsuperscript{665} They already were living in the best of times, bar only eternity.\textsuperscript{666}

This notion of a Sabbath Age within history, a belief that the Third Age of the Spirit would dawn before the Second Coming, was a fundamental aspect of Joachim’s scheme of history. For Joachim the \textit{status} of the Spirit would be “a triumph of humanity between the defeat of AntiChrist and the winding up of history at the Second Advent.”\textsuperscript{667} Yet only a minority of Joachimist groups have embraced the notion of a Sabbath Age within history. Other groups in seventeenth-century England may have adopted some of Joachim’s ideas and even held hope for a coming Age of the Spirit, but Muggletonians were rare in identifying the Third Age as the present era. In this sense, Muggletonians were true to Joachim and set themselves apart from other Joachimist groups.

Finally, Muggletonians elude categorization according to the classical taxonomy of religions that identifies churches, denominations, sects, and cults. Because they were such a small group, made virtually no impact society in any

\textsuperscript{665} Marjories Reeves has observed that only a minority of Joachimist groups through history believed that the Third Age would occur within, rather than after, history. And of them, an even smaller minority believed that no human action was necessary or helpful; see her \textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, p. 174–76.

\textsuperscript{666} Marjorie Reeves has argued that Joachim departed from Augustine and other Church Fathers when he proposed that the Sabbath Age would come \textit{before} the last Judgment rather than after it (\textit{Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future}, p. 8).
century, and were thought to have become extinct, most scholars before the 1970s treated Muggletonians as a cult. Scholars typically describe cults as either associated with and deriving from mystical religion or defined by their deviant or heterodox position in relation to the dominant societal culture, although scholars have not reached consensus on a firm definition. The following traits seem to be characteristic of cults in general: (a) individualistic and loosely structured, (b) make few demands on members, (c) tolerant of other organizations and faiths, (d) not exclusivist, (e) membership changes rapidly, (f) membership often transient, (g) either succeed very quickly and take over the characteristics of sects or fade away in the face of societal opposition or the absence of a charismatic leader, (h) undefined boundaries, (i) fluctuating belief systems, (j) rudimentary organization structures, and (k) frequently highly ephemeral. Muggletonians certainly were loosely structured and made few demands on members, but they were not at all tolerant of their

670. As summarized in Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” p. 121.
contemporaries. Muggleton had admonished Believers to avoid attendance at parish church services, but neither their membership nor their doctrine of salvation was exclusivist. After the first generation, their membership was not transient; in fact, many Believers had been transient until they found a secure home in Muggletonianism. Finally, the group did not fade away in the face of societal opposition or the absence of a charismatic leader.

Now that Muggletonians are known to have survived for three centuries, they are better classified as a sect. Yet Muggletonians do not fit this classification perfectly. The classical characteristics of sects include: (a) having a communal and cohesive organization, (b) being a clearly circumscribed entity, and (c) possessing a specifically formulated belief system and organizational structures which have a tendency to persist over time. It is hard to describe Muggletonians as having a communal and cohesive organization. Strong bonds of community did develop among Believers, however, as they met together to discuss the prophets’ words, to disseminate Muggletonian writings, to sing hymns of praise to God the Man Jesus, and to celebrate important anniversaries and occasions. Muggletonians were not a clearly circumscribed entity. They had no rituals of membership or initiation; an avowed belief in the Third Commission conferred “membership” on an individual. They were not readily identifiable, even when they gathered together for spiritual

fellowship; they did not share their spiritual beliefs unless approached$^{673}$ and gave their divine songs cover by setting them to popular tunes of the day. In one way, however, Muggletonians were clearly identifiable: they defined themselves, especially in their formative years, over and against competing religious groups. Muggletonians did not devise extensive organizational structures that persisted over time, although they did devise patterns of behavior that persisted and managed to establish a pattern for meetings and record-keeping that persisted through three centuries. Perhaps most important to their categorization as a sect is the fact that they did articulate a specific and complete belief system.

A People Apart

Muggletonians denounced the doctrines, sacraments, creeds, and worship of traditional Christianity and were therefore regarded as radical separatists in seventeenth-century England. But whereas most radical separatists engaged in fiery preaching, were millenarians, and worked actively to effect perfection on earth, Muggletonians shunned all such activities. They were more than a cult, but somewhat less than a sect. They never developed or grew into a denominations as did their counterparts the Baptists and Quakers in the seventeenth century. Yet they did not

$^{673}$ Lamont reports that Philip Noakes had not said anything about his beliefs to his own wife and daughters, because they had not inquired; he had, however, spoken freely with unsuspecting Jehovah Witnesses who called on his house (Lamont, "The Muggletonian Archive," p. 1).
fade from history after a brief period; they survived for three hundred years. They may have been a small and obscure group, they may have held unusual ideas about humankind and the universe, but they articulated a coherent theology in the seventeenth century and carried it forward with few alterations into the twentieth century. Along the way they asserted their own identity over and against the Church of England, Puritans, Ranters, Quakers, Swedenborgians, Spiritualists, and Unitarians. They combined elements from traditional Calvinist theology with elements from seventeenth-century radical separatist ideology, they drew on the medieval Joachimist tradition, they employed traditional Christian apocalyptic rhetoric, and they mixed in some new ideas of their own to form a unique ideology and establish themselves as A People Apart.
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