Hermann J. Real

Reading Swift:
Papers from
The Fifth Münster Symposium
on
Jonathan Swift

Wilhelm Fink

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Edited by
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Preface

To the best of my knowledge, the year 2006 was not a Swift tercentenary of any kind, but Swiftians, or Prestophiles as they are called in Münster, do not need an excuse to celebrate the man who has changed all their lives. To be sure, there was a moment of anxiety in the planning stages of *The Fifth Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift* during the previous year, as it turned out that *the* great event of 2006 might clash with an even greater one, the world championships in soccer, to be held in Germany from June to July. When that clash could be averted—thanks to the neat cooperation of the Alexander von Humboldt-Haus, our customary conference venue, and the Hotel Mövenpick—the many soccer fans among the Swiftians heaved a sigh of relief. “This news,” one of them wrote, “is a relief to those of us who thought we might have to smuggle radio receivers into lectures in order to keep abreast of the score.” “And,” being British, he continued tongue-in-cheekishly, “spares us the agony of deciding whether we should support Germany or Ireland during that week.” Under the circumstances, however, we were free to concentrate and to celebrate the good Dean with our best efforts in May—in no less than thirty-four lectures delivered on three days on an amazing variety of subjects and aspects. And in the evenings, too, the participants were able to indulge freely in their taste for the Westphalian *specialité* of the season, asparagus, and enjoy the atmosphere of friendship, fellowship, and hospitality that has been so distinctive of the Münster symposia on Jonathan Swift for more than twenty years. Many participants afterwards praised the intellectual stimulus and vitality they had experienced, calling the quality of the papers “uncommonly high” and “intellectually thrilling,” presenting in fact “food for thought for years.”

As on the four previous occasions, it was the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Council), and its perceptive readers, that made it all possible, due to two generous grants funding not only the Symposium but also the publication of its transactions, and my warmest thanks go to all who were involved in the decisions. Of course, a convenor needs more than one supporter to pull off a three-day event like the Symposium and to edit the lectures delivered on the occasion, and it is therefore a particular pleasure to extend my heartfelt gratitude to two understanding and active friends at Headquarters, Dr Dietmar Wilske and Dieter Heß. The Dean of the Faculty of Philology, Professor Jürgen Hein, a Professor of German, was kind enough to host a reception for the participants at the Ehrenpreis Centre, delighting us all by a charming and witty speech delivered fluently in impeccable English. And our dear friend Professor Andrew Carpenter, Dublin, also contributed greatly to the Symposium’s success with an entertaining curtain-raiser for a night’s carousal by playing, and introducing and commenting, a CD of his radio play, “Gulliver’s Travels.” During the three days of the Symposium,

I could always rely on the efforts of my dedicated team at the Ehrenpreis Centre, Esther F. Sommer and Sabine Wendel. Marlies Thöle, my former secretary, who for reasons too boring to tell had to watch from the sidelines this time, engaged herself in quiet, unobtrusive ways, too. I would like to assure them all that their assistance and support has not been forgotten. In editing and copy-editing these essays, the burden of my labours has been greatly eased by the wonderfully efficient Ulrich Elkmann and Sandra Simon. Finally, to satisfy the tale's demand for a neat closing twist, I wish to thank three of 'my people' who are very special from the bottom of my heart: my friend and collaborator in the Dean's vineyard, Dr Dirk Passmann, and his wife Maria, who before, during, and after the Symposium were at their indefatigable and hospitable best, and my darling Erika, whose footsteps, as the poet says, simply "pave the world with loveliness."

When Irvin Ehrenpreis, the greatest of twentieth-century Swift scholars, died in Münster in 1985, his mantle of doyen almost naturally fell on the shoulders of his friend David Woolley. There are presumably few in Swift studies today who did not become indebted to David Woolley for advice and assistance at one stage or another. As a student of the Dean of St Patrick's, both as editor and annotator, he was *nonpareil*; as a human being of exemplary warmth and kindness, he was unique in his generosity and his gift for friendship. The late Professor Michael Treadwell, who was himself extolled as "an iceberg of learning," wrote of David in June 2000 when the *Philosophische Fakultät* of the *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität*, Münster, awarded him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for his life's work: "David Woolley is not only one of the best; he simply is the best."

David Leon Talbot Woolley died in his home in Perth, Western Australia, on 27 October 2005, mourned by his wife Frances, their four children and eight grandchildren, as well as uncounted friends in the world of Swift scholarship. His erudite and genial presence was sorely missed at *The Fifth Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*. It is to David Woolley, fellow seeker after the Holy Grail, that this volume of essays is respectfully dedicated *in memoriam*.

HJR

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An Argument against Abolishing Christianity and its Contexts

ABSTRACT. This essay attempts to recover the specific polemical contexts and contemporary topical meaning of one of Swift's most famous and difficult satires. It argues that *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* is the great literary work to emerge out of the Socinian controversy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Swift's imaginative satire is situated in relation to the paper war involving anti-Trinitarians, Latitudinarian Low Churchmen, and heresy-hunting High Church pamphleteers, and is shown to be an exuberant intervention on the side of the Tory High Churchmen. The Socinian controversy is not the only context for understanding what is going on in Swift's satire, but it is an important one which has been neglected in the literary criticism on the work.

AN ARGUMENT To prove, That the Abolishing of CHRISTIANITY IN ENGLAND, May, as Things now Stand, be attended with some Inconveniencies, and perhaps, not produce those many good Effects proposed thereby, "Written in the YEAR 1708," was first published in Jonathan Swift's *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* in 1711.¹ The arresting title and the astonishing propositions and argument of the tract combine comic *élan* with real alarm. An immediate question is what prompted the *Argument's* assumption that Christianity exists in name only and that its abolition is being proposed. Formalist readings of the *Argument* cannot tell us. Modern critical discussions of the *Argument's* distinction between real and nominal Christianity and defence of nominal Christianity have commonly focused on Swift's attitude to his Christian faith and to religious hypocrisy rather than on trying to recover the work's contemporary polemical meaning. Accounts of the satiric parody in the *Argument* have been offered which do not identify what it is, or what works, Swift is parodying. Indeed, modern literary criticism has generally assumed that the putative proposal of abolishing Christianity is fictional. It is said that contemporaries of Swift, like informed modern readers, recognized that no such project

¹ "Reasons agt Abolishing Christianity" appears in a list of "*Subjects for a Volume*" made by Swift in October or November 1708; see Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, Appendix B, pp. 768 and 276n. All references to *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* are to *Prose Works*, II, 26-39, and are given in brackets within the text. I wish to thank Professor F. P. Lock who read a much earlier version of the argument presented here.

existed.² I think that it is more to the point to recognize that, in referring to the abolishing of Christianity, Swift is advancing a paradox: an apparently absurd statement that may be well founded. As Swift writes in the *Argument*, his was certainly a "paradoxical Age." It was particularly so in that other contemporary sense of the word "Paradox," with writers advancing tenets contrary to received or orthodox opinion.³

An Argument against Abolishing Christianity demands historical contextualization, which it has, of course, received. The body bags of this satire have been opened and several satiric victims have been identified. It has been argued that a main target of the satire is the opponents of the Sacramental Test Act who want it repealed. Frank H. Ellis, for example, considered "*An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* as an Argument against Abolishing the Test Act."⁴ The Deists have long been proposed as the work's principal target.⁵ It has been contended that the object of Swift's satire is Matthew Tindal's (paradoxically entitled) *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted, against the Romish, and All Other Priests who Claim an Independent Power over it* (1706).⁶ Irreligion and "the nominal Christian" who only pays lip service to the Faith have been seen as the primary targets.⁷ The *Argument* has been contextualized in relation to the "Church in Danger" crisis of 1705, and seen as taking "its place alongside a shelf-full of pamphlets" of High Church provenance directed at the alleged threat to the Established Church from "Deists, Dissenters, atheists, and Presbyterians" abetted by "Moderate" or "nominal" Christians within the Church of England itself. It is seen as "a particularly angry satire aimed not merely at the disparities between real and superficial belief," but at those who seemed to Swift to threaten the destruction of the Church.⁸

² See David Nokes, *Jonathan Swift, a Hypocrite Reversed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 98: a "mock-response to a non-existent proposal"; Judson B. Curry, "Arguing about the Project: Approaches to Swift's *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* and *A Project for the Advancement of Religion*," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 20 (1996), 67-79 (p. 69). On the importance of attention to context and the limitation of purely aesthetic approaches to the work as an imaginative literary fiction, see Roger D. Lund, "Swift's *Argument* and 'the Church in Danger,'" *Critical Approaches to Teaching Swift*, ed. Peter J. Schakel (New York: AMS, 1992), pp. 239-54, especially p. 241.

³ *Prose Works*, II, 27; *OED*, s.v. "paradox", senses 1.a; 2.a. See also John R. Clark, *Form and Frenzy in Swift's "Tale of a Tub"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), particularly pp. 181-230.

⁴ Frank H. Ellis, "An Argument against Abolishing Christianity as an Argument against Abolishing the Test Act," *Reading Swift: Papers from The Second Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, eds Richard H. Rodino and Hermann J. Real, with the assistance of Helgard Stöver-Leidig (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1993), pp. 127-39, and see p. 127n1 for a brief bibliography of earlier studies.

⁵ See Ricardo Quintana, *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965 [1936]), pp. 145-46.

⁶ See Robert M. Philmus, "Swift's 'Lost' Answer to Tindal," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 22 (1980), 369-93.

⁷ See especially Edward W. Rosenheim, Jr, *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967 [1963]), p. 43.

⁸ Lund, "Swift's *Argument* and 'the Church in Danger,'" pp. 245, 254.

This historical contextualization while obviously important for an adequate understanding of the satire has nevertheless not always been as apposite as it might have been. Often, it provides broad perspectives and generalizations when Swift's satire seems to be pointing with greater specificity. Importantly, Swift's satire alludes quite precisely to one of its principal targets and the source of the satire's infamous distinction of nominal and real Christianity. There is a small but significant signpost placed in this satire to the paper wars outside the text. The speaker—I will call him Swift—says: "I would not be mistaken; and must therefore be so bold as to borrow a Distinction from the Writers on the other Side, when they make a Difference between nominal and real *Trinitarians*." Swift will defend "*nominal* Christianity" in an anti-Christian world; "*real* Christianity" having been laid aside (pp. 27, 28). The "Writers on the other Side"—the side that wants to abolish Christianity; the writers who make a distinction between real and nominal Trinitarians—were contemporary Socinian pamphleteers. Swift is alluding to such Socinian works of the 1690s as *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians* (1695), *The Judgment of a Disinterested Person concerning the Controversy about the ... Trinity* (1696), and Matthew Tindal's *Letter to the Reverend the Clergy of Both Universities, concerning the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed* (1694). A seminal English Socinian work of the Trinitarian controversy was Stephen Nye's anonymous *A Brief History of the Unitarians Called also Socinians* (1687). It is the first Socinian work addressed in Charles Leslie's voluminous *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, published in 1708, in which the "Christian" in dialogue with the "Socinian" calls it "the Celebrated Book of your Party. Which therefore you have *Printed* and *Re-printed* often, in several *Volumes*, since the Year 1687 when you first did Publish it."⁹ Nye's writings advance a nominalist rather than realist understanding of the persons of the Trinity.¹⁰

Socinianism was the most prominent anti-Trinitarian heresy troubling orthodox clergymen in the first two decades after the Revolution of 1688–89. Socinianism denies the divinity of Christ. For Socinians, the Athanasian Creed (which declares that whoever will be saved must hold the Catholic Faith: "And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity") was an anathema.¹¹

⁹ Charles Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd: Wherein the Chief of the Socinian Tracts (Publish'd of Late Years here) are Consider'd* (London: G. Strahan, 1708), First Dialogue, p. 1.

¹⁰ See particularly [Stephen Nye], *The Agreement of the Unitarians, with the Catholick Church* (1697), pp. 19–21, 27, 32; Stephen Nye, *The Explication of the Articles of the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and Incarnation, Commonly Receiv'd in the Catholick Church, Asserted and Vindicated* (London: John Darby, 1715), pp. 84–88. Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, for example, noted that the "Socinians profess themselves Christians," but argues that the Unitarian books advance a deistic design under a show of religion and he interrogates Socinian nominalism; see *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: With an Answer to the Late Socinian Objections against it*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Mortlock, 1697), pp. xlvii, xlviii, and especially pp. 258–60.

¹¹ Socinianism, which derives its name from the sixteenth-century Italian anti-Trinitarian Faustus Socinus claims that God is one person not three. Jesus is not a co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial person in a triune Godhead, and the Holy Spirit is a power of God but not God. It denies the divinity of

Disputes among clerical exegetes within the Church of England over the doctrine of the Trinity had given impetus to Socinian pamphleteers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As Bishop Gilbert Burnet observed on the debate between Robert South (a High Church Tory) and William Sherlock (an apostate Jacobite) over their explanation of the Trinity and on the other clergy engaged in the dispute: "The Socinians triumphed, not a little upon all this: and, in several of their Books, they divided their Adversaries into real and nominal Trinitarians."¹² It "is too evident, what advantage our Socinian Adversaries have made, and hope still to make of this Controversy [over the Trinity]," William Sherlock wrote. "This has occasioned that scandalous Distinction between *Real and Nominal Trinitarians*."¹³ The Socinian author of *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians*, for example, stated that "the Nominal Trinitarians, who are truly and properly the Church, and who are by much the Majority of Christians, are altogether in the same Sentiments concerning Almighty GOD, and the Person of our Saviour; that we [the Socinians] are," and he distinguished "the *Nominal Trinitarians*" from the "*Real Trinitarians*" who are guilty of "Tritheism." Socinians wish that the Trinitarian names and terms used by the Nominal Trinitarians (who they claim are most of the clergy and people of England) "were abolish'd" since they make no sense and have no reality.¹⁴ The Socinian author of *The Judgment of a Disinterested Person concerning the ... Trinity* explains that the Socinians and the Church are Nominal

Christ and the Satisfaction for Sin. Socinianism asserts the importance of reason and common sense in religion and is characterized by its biblicism and credal minimalism. Socinians pressed for a de-mythified civil religion and liberty of conscience. Socinians were unitarian not Trinitarian, and their writers identified as "Unitarian" in the 1690s, regarding "Socinian" as a pejorative name imputed to them by their oppressors (see, for example, Nye, *The Agreement of the Unitarians, with the Catholick Church*, p. 3). Certainly, in the polemic of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, "Socinian" was used loosely for varieties of anti-Trinitarian heterodox writings. In this essay, I use the term "Socinian" rather than "Unitarian," as it was the name used by Swift, and by the "Church party" (as the Tories preferred to call themselves and with which Swift identified) in the Trinitarian controversy. On Socinianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Robert Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography: or, Sketches of the Lives and Writings of Distinguished Antitrinitarians*, 3 vols (London: E. T. Whitfield, 1850); C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (London: Longmans Green, 1906), pp. 197–226; H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); Gerard Reedy, SJ, "Socinians, John Toland, and the Anglican Rationalists," *Harvard Theological Review*, 70 (1977), 285–304; J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially pp. 99–132; Stephen Trowell, "Unitarian And/Or Anglican: The Relationship of Unitarianism to the Church from 1687 to 1698," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 78 (1996), 77–101; Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), especially pp. 67–84.

¹² *History of His Own Time*, 2 vols (London: Joseph Downing and Henry Woodfall, 1724, 1734), II, 213.

¹³ [William Sherlock], *The Distinction between Real and Nominal Trinitarians Examined* (London: William Rogers, 1696), p. 2.

¹⁴ *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians* (n. p., 1695), pp. 3–5, 18.

Trinitarians and out of custom profess a “*verbal Trinity*.” But “*Words and Names* are not the Natural, but the *Arbitrary Signs* or notations of *things*” and the Trinitarian words and terms (calling the Properties of God “*Persons*,” for instance) are merely customary.¹⁵

The controversy over the Trinity went through many phases in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The phase from around 1687 to 1708 principally involved Socinian or Unitarian polemicists, anticlerical writers who used Socinian arguments, and Latitudinarian and High Churchmen. There are some precise connections between Swift’s *Argument against Abolishing Christianity* and the pamphlet war of the 1690s and the first decade of the eighteenth century over the doctrine of the Trinity. The *Argument* has a specific provenance and location in this Socinian controversy, and a topical occasion in a flare-up of the controversy in 1707–1708 in which the high-profile polemicists were the former Dublin-based Socinian celebrity Thomas Emlyn and the Irish High-Churchman Charles Leslie. The principal target of Swift’s satire is anti-Trinitarian, specifically Socinian heresy. This specific historical context has been occluded in accounts of the work hitherto, although, of course, it has been noticed. Ehrenpreis, for example, noted that the controversy over the mystery of the Trinity is a “larger context in which the *Argument* can be set.” A context, he observes, that Swift explicitly invites the reader to call up. Ehrenpreis, however, did not relate the historical occasion to the *Argument*’s satiric strategy and complexities.¹⁶ The controversy needs to be brought into focus, as it is highly significant for an understanding of what is going on in this work.

As far as High Churchmen were concerned, the abolishing of Christianity *was* being proposed in print. One of the most famous of all High Church pamphlets, Francis Atterbury’s sensational *A Letter to a Convocation Man* of November 1696, opened its call for a Convocation of the Church to sit with Parliament and censure heresy with an account of the threat to the Christian faith from “Heresies of all kinds.” It observed that “the Trinity has been as openly denied by some, as the Unity of the Godhead sophistically opposed by others ... all Mysteries in Religion have been decried as Impositions on Men’s Understandings, and nothing is admitted as an Article of Faith but what we can fully and perfectly comprehend.” Citing startling revelations from “*Socinian*” sources, Atterbury announced that “there seems to be an universal Conspiracy amongst a sort of Men, under the Style of Deists, Socinians, Latitudinarians, Deniers of Mysteries, and pretending Explainers of them, to undermine and overthrow the Catholick Faith.” Such have

¹⁵ [Arthur Bury], *The Judgment of a Disinterested Person concerning the Controversy about the B. Trinity* (London: E. Whitlock, 1696), pp. 28, 53.

¹⁶ Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, p. 286. Norman Richard Wallis, “The Political Context of Jonathan Swift’s Tracts on Church and State, 1707–1709,” doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974, also points to this controversial context, but does not explore the work’s relation to the context in detail (see pp. 174–75). In this essay, I am developing ideas about the *Argument* first published in brief in my *Jonathan Swift, Writers and their Work* (Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), pp. 39–43.

been the effects among the laity, and the inferences drawn by "the Gentlemen of this Age" from "Opinions and Heresies of late Published and Vindicated," that unless Convocation acts, "the Faith and Doctrine of our English Church," even "the belief of any Revelation" and "that there is a Religion enjoined by Heaven" must be expected to disappear and "the next Age will believe none."¹⁷ By 1708, Atterbury was lamenting, in a pamphlet addressed to the members of the Convocation of Ireland, that the High Church lower clergy in England had been thwarted in their convocational attempt to suppress heretical literature.¹⁸ Atterbury's fear that the "next Age" would be without religious belief is imagined in the world of Swift's 1708 *Argument* where it is emphasized that it has happened in "half an Age" (p. 27). In the Preface to the sixth part of *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, published in 1708, Charles Leslie wrote that the "*Importance of the Socinian Controversy shews it self, and Needs no words to Enforce it. It is no less than whether what we Worship is God or a Creature.*" It is now "*Necessary to Appear in Defence of the Christian Faith, that it be not Lost among us; and to give some Check to these Socinian Pamphlets which Swarm, through this City especially.*"¹⁹ Leslie had demonstrated that anti-clerical infidels like Robert Howard borrowed "the Socinian Arms" against Christianity.²⁰ The Nonjuror Robert Jenkin wrote that "*in our days, Christianity, amongst Englishmen*" is no "*more than a Name, which is every where spoken against*":

The evident and declared Design of the *Socinians*, is, to retain no Mysteries, but by forced Interpretations of Scripture to expound them all to their own, that is, to a new and absurd Sense; and it is but too plain, that there is a combined Design carried on between Them and the Deists, who are contented to pass for Christians, with a Distinction, and without a Mystery: *Anti-Trinitarian* is a milder Word than *Anti-Christian*, and *Unitarian* is but a different Name for *Deist*.²¹

In the *Argument* of 1708, Swift uses "*Anti-Christian*" rather than the milder word "*Anti-Trinitarian*."

Of course, in 1708, Swift was also worried about attempts to repeal the Test Clause in Ireland. He wrote that there are too many for whom the question is "not onely about abolishing the Sacramental Test, but the Sacrament itself,"²² and he later wrote that Whig money behind another attempt in 1733 "is sufficient among

¹⁷ [Francis Atterbury], *A Letter to a Convocation Man concerning the Rights, Powers, and Priviledges of that Body* (London: E. Whitlock, 1696), pp. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7.

¹⁸ [Francis Atterbury], *Some Proceedings in the Convocation, A.D. 1705, Faithfully Represented* (London: Jonah Bowyer, 1708).

¹⁹ Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, Sixth Dialogue, Preface, p. i.

²⁰ *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered* (Edinburgh, 1695), p. 27.

²¹ Robert Jenkin, *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, I, 3rd ed. (London: Richard Sare, 1708), sig. A2v; p. xi.

²² *Prose Works*, II, 132.

us—to abolish Christianity it self.”²³ But when Swift refers to designs directly against Christianity—what the *Argument against Abolishing Christianity* is explicitly about—he seems to have one contemporary group above all in his sights, the anti-Trinitarians, particularly Socinians. In his “Thoughts on Religion,” Swift states: “To remove opinions fundamental in religion is impossible ... unless your avowed design be to abolish that religion altogether,” and he instances “the famous doctrine of Christ’s divinity” and the “proceedings of the Socinians” against it. The “article of Christ’s divinity” is “so fundamental a point of faith.”²⁴ Swift’s sermon “On the Trinity” elides the contemporary attack on the “great Doctrine of the Trinity” and on the Athanasian Creed with the rejection of the truth of Christianity and the whole Gospel.²⁵ The sermon is a statement of Swift’s Trinitarian orthodoxy, and might be regarded as supplying the implied Trinitarian Christian positive and orthodox gloss for the parodic irony of the *Argument*. It is perhaps indicative of Swift’s elision of Socinian with anti-Christian that in the Apology for *A Tale of a Tub* (and like the *Argument*, the Apology appears in Swift’s list of “Subjects for a Volume” in 1708) Swift substitutes “Socinian” for “Sceptick” in an allusion to Francis Gastrell’s anonymous *The Principles of Deism Truly Represented and Set in a Clear Light: In Two Dialogues between a Sceptick and a Deist, the First concerning the Christian Revelation, the Second concerning Natural Religion* (printed by John Morphew in 1708). Swift refers to “the Polite Author of a late Discourse between a Deist and a Socinian.”²⁶

In his *Miscellanies* of 1711, the author of *A Tale of a Tub* took precautions with his new ironic masterpiece to ensure that this satiric parody was not mistaken for what it parodies. *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* is placed between two works of Anglican orthodoxy (as if to enclose the imaginative extremity of the *Argument* and control reader response to it): *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man, with respect to Religion and Government* and *A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners*. The primacy of the Trinitarian controversy in the *Argument* is strongly indicated by the verbal parallels and echoes between the works. Just before referring to the Socinian distinction of nominal and real Trinitarians in the *Argument*, Swift writes that the “System of the Gospel” is “antiquated and exploded” (p. 27). In the *Project*, he complains that “the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ ... and even the Truth of all Revelation are daily exploded, and denied in Books openly printed.”²⁷ The first of Swift’s “Sentiments” on Religion begins:

²³ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 707.

²⁴ *Prose Works*, IX, 261, 262.

²⁵ *Prose Works*, IX, 159–60.

²⁶ *Prose Works*, I, 1. For the 1708 list, see Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, p. 768.

²⁷ *Prose Works*, II, 60–61.

AND here, although it makes an odd Sound, yet it is necessary to say, that whoever professeth himself a Member of the Church of *England*, ought to believe a God, and his Providence, together with revealed Religion, and the Divinity of *Christ*.²⁸

In the satiric *Argument*, it now appears an odd paradox, indeed singular and absurd, to be writing in defence of such a profession. In the non-ironic *Sentiments* and in the ironic *Argument*, Swift is specifically parodying Socinian language. The author of *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians*, for example, says that "the Socinians are content to wear a strange, and odd Badg" and for the sake of public peace will refer to these "canting un-scriptural Terms, *Trinity*, *Persons* (and such like) used by the Church" but (quoting Luther) "The word *Trinity* sounds oddly." The author wishes "that all these terms of the Realists were abolish'd."²⁹

How are we to understand Swift's defence of a Christianity in name only? In *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered* (1695), Leslie said the "great Art of the Socinians is in altering the meaning of Words," they are "great Masters" of "Distinctions" so much so that the "*Argument*" is now over "the very name of *Christians*." Leslie seems to mock the use of the word "*Argument*" by the rationalist Socinians in their tracts, and he highlights Tillotson's statement that the Socinians "*are a Pattern of the fair way of Disputing ... They generally argue matters with that Temper and Gravity; with that Freedom from Passion, and Transport which becomes a serious and Weighty Argument.*" Leslie writes that the "*Socinians ... retain nothing of Christianity but the Name.*" They are really anti-Christians who want to remove the Trinitarian terms of the Faith which are the "*Criterion*" and "*Test*" used by the "*Christian Church*" to keep these heretics out.³⁰ The debate is about nominal terms in order to defend the Christian faith. In his *Argument*, Swift personates a 'nominal' Trinitarian, a Christian in name only. He parodies a Socinian stance in the paper war. Socinians said that they would retain the Church's anachronistic Trinitarian language precisely because the signification was verbal only.³¹ Swift parodies the Nominal Trinitarian as a Nominal Christian who advises

²⁸ *Prose Works*, II, 4.

²⁹ *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians*, pp. 9, 15, 40.

³⁰ [Charles Leslie], *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered* (Edinburgh, 1695), pp. 3, 1, Preface, 10, 30, 31. See also *An Answer to the Unitarians Objections from Reason, against the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity* (London: R. Burrough, 1707), p. 23: "All the Hereticks from *Simon Magus*, down to *Faustus Socinus* ... allowed and used the Words of the Catholick Language; but then they pleaded they are not to be understood in Reality, but only in Shew, in Appearance, in Reputation or Opinion." The "*Socinians*" reject the Trinity "upon no Authority, beside that of the Strength of their own Wit" (p. 1). Compare Swift's anti-Christian Wits who discover "by the meer Force of natural Abilities" that there is "no God" (*Prose Works*, II, 28).

³¹ See *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians*, p. 15: "For Peace-sake we submit to the Language of the Church, as 'tis interpreted by the Nominals." The Nominal Trinitarian retains the terms "*Trinity*, &c." to "preserve the Church's Peace" (p. 19); *The Judgment of a Disinterested Person*, p. 56: "Our English Socinians Claim, in their late Writings; that they are the Discoverers, that the Feud between the Church and them, was ill-grounded: For that in very deed Both say the same

the retention of nominal Christianity on the grounds that real Christianity does not exist and that the Christian terms are merely harmless words (see pp. 33–34). With one satiric stroke, Swift replicates the High Church judgement that the Socinians are anti-Christian. He offers an argument for retaining “the very name of *Christians*” and the Church’s criteria and tests which depend on terminology.

The arguments for abolishing Christianity in this satire are certainly parodies of arguments used by contemporary anti-Trinitarians. Swift read the Socinians with attention and animus for this premeditated satiric killing. The formula of his title, “An Argument, To prove, That the Abolishing of Christianity in England,” may echo the section headings on the Contents page for the Sixth Part of Leslie’s *The Socinian Controversy Discuss’d*: “Arguments of the Socinians to Prove. 1. That the *Doctrin* of the *Trinity* is not *Fundamental* to *Christianity*. 2. That the *Socinians* ought not to be put under any *Penalties* by the *Law*. 3. That we ought to own them as our *Christian Brethren*.” Swift’s formulation recalls titles in the Trinitarian controversy and a notorious heterodox work by John Asgill, which was burned for containing “many Prophane and Blasphemous Expressions, highly reflecting upon the Christian Religion.”³² Even the title page of Swift’s tract in which “Argument” is the largest word and placed in bold capitals on the second line probably mimics an anti-Trinitarian like Thomas Emlyn. The alternate title of Emlyn’s notorious pamphlet of 1702 arguing that Christ was not supreme God is entitled *A Short Argument concerning the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ*: “Argument” is the largest word and is in bold capitals on the second line.³³ The following examples will give an indication of Swift’s intimate satiric parody of Socinian arguments as outrageous infidelity.

thing.” The Church is identified as “*the Nominals*” (p. 13); [Nye], *The Agreement of the Unitarians, with the Catholick Church*, p. 62: “Yet for Peace sake, we admit the Terms; interpreted in the known [nominalist] Sense of the Church.”

³² Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss’d*, Contents, The Sixth Dialogue; Daniel Allen, *The Moderate Trinitarian ... Being an Argument Shewing that Moderation May and Ought to Be Shewn by and to Persons of Different Conceptions concerning ... the Holy Trinity* (London: Mary Fabian, 1699) which presents “A general Argument to prove the Proposition” for moderation (p. 7); John Asgill, *An Argument Proving that according to the Covenant of Eternal Life ... Man May be Translated from Hence into that Eternal Life, without Passing through Death, altho the Humane Nature of Christ Himself Could not be thus Translated till he had Passed through Death* (1700). For proceedings against Asgill, see Abel Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne Digested into Annals: Year the Sixth* (London: Margaret Coggan, 1708), pp. 262, 294. Asgill is mentioned by name twice in the *Argument* as an anti-Christian (*Prose Works*, II, 29, 36).

³³ [Thomas Emlyn], *An Humble Inquiry into the Scripture-Account of Jesus Christ: or, A Short Argument concerning His Deity and Glory, according to the Gospel* (n. p., 1702). The short title on p. 1 is: “A Short| ARGUMENT,| Concerning the| DEITY of our| LORD JESUS CHRIST.” Swift’s title is also an inversion of the kind of arresting paradox directed against the Church which is a feature of anticlerical titles (as in Tindal’s *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* [1706]).

The Socinians argued that if all the Trinitarian terms "were abolish'd," it "would heal all our Breaches, and perfectly restore our Peace, not only in this, but in (almost) all other Questions and Strifes."³⁴ These are the great advantages of abolishing *Christianity* in Swift's satire (see pp. 31, 33). Socinians claimed that the Trinity was the invention of priestcraft and only preserved by prejudices of education and civil penalties. Its abolition would promote liberty of conscience.³⁵ Liberty of conscience is the first advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity in Swift's satire (see pp. 28–29). But in Swift's parody instead of just liberty of conscience, libertinism would be the result, and priests could be abolished along with priestcraft, and their property expropriated. The Socinians objected that the Trinity was "absurd, or contradictory and impossible," inconsistent "with Reason and natural Knowledg" and leading to problematic "Paradoxes." The "great Obstacle" the Socinians had against the Trinity and the Mysteries was that they were "unintelligible."³⁶ Swift's satire, like Leslie's anti-Socinian polemic, claims that it is belief in God which is really "too difficult" for the anti-Trinitarians or anti-Christians (p. 29).³⁷ An advantage of abolishing Christianity in Swift's satire is "the clear Gain of one Day in Seven" (p. 31). Socinians are again a principal target. The claim that Socinians believe "that the Lord's Day is a ceremonious Observance, abolished by the Gospel" was countered by Stephen Nye who explained their position, which was that "the *Seventh Day*, or Sabbath, is abolisht . . . the *Seventh-day-Sabbath* was Ceremonial, and is abolisht. It may better however be said, that the Sabbath is *transferred*, from the Seventh, to the First Day; than that 'tis *absolutely abolisht*, or taken away."³⁸ In the *Socinian Controversy Discussed* of 1708, Leslie republished a Socinian epistle meant for a visiting Moroccan ambassador in 1682, emphasizing

³⁴ *A Discourse concerning the Nominal and Real Trinitarians*, p. 40.

³⁵ See [Stephen Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians Called also Socinians* (n. p., 1687), pp. 168–69; Matthew Tindal's *A Letter to the Reverend the Clergy of Both Universities, concerning the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed* ([London], 1694) rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and the civil penalties compelling subscription to it.

³⁶ [Stephen Nye], *A Brief History of the Unitarians Called also Socinians*, p. 158; [Stephen Nye], *A Letter of Resolution concerning the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation* (n.p., n.d.), p. 14; Francis Fullwood, *The Socinian Controversie Touching the Son of God, Reduced: In a Brief Essay, to Prove the Son One in Essence with the Father, upon Socinian Principles, Concessions, and Reason. Concluded With an Humble and Serious Caution to the Friends of the Church of England, against the Approaches of Socinianism* (London: A. and J. Churchil[?], 1693), p. 16.

³⁷ See also Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, The Sixth Dialogue, where the Socinian says the Trinity cannot be fundamental as it is "Difficult to be Understood" and the Christian answers "So is the Nature of God . . . Yet you wou'd not exclude the *Belief of a God* from being a *Fundamental Article*" (p. 37).

³⁸ Nye, *The Agreement of the Unitarians, with the Catholick Church*, pp. 11–12.

links between Socinian or Unitarian belief and monotheistic Islam.³⁹ A notorious aspect of Socinian propaganda which scandalized its orthodox clerical opponents was an apparent preference for monotheistic Islam. Nye argued that "Christianity has already lost so much ground to *Mahometism* or *Turcism* ... not by Force and the Sword, for *Mahometans* grant Liberty of Religion to all the conquered Provinces of Christians; but by that one Truth in the *Alchoran*, the Unity of GOD. The *Naturalness* of their Belief of the Unity of God, and the unreconcilable Inconsistence of the Trinity with that Belief, make it impossible ever to reconcile the *Mahometans* (whether *Turks*, *Moors*, or *Persians*) to Christianity."⁴⁰ In the *Argument*, Swift mocks the hopes of anti-Christians who might look to the "*Turks*" as allies. It will be impossible for England's anti-Christians to be reconciled with the Turks because the Turks "believe a God; which is more than is required of us, even while we preserve the Name of Christians" (p. 38).⁴¹

The objections to abolition in *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* are exuberant re-animations of High Church objections to the Socinians in the pamphlet war. Leslie complained that the Socinians seem to think that religion only has civil ends, that the only considerations are worldly ones of civil peace, quiet, possessions and prosperity. Leslie claimed that they argued for a religion of "*this World*," a "Doctrine of *Mammon*."⁴² An instance of the consequences of Socinian Christology, which no doubt reinforced the perception that English Socinians had civil rather than spiritual concerns, was their apparent neglect of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.⁴³ Atterbury said that Church-Communion was now being regarded as "merely for *Society sake* ... to give Christians an Opportunity of *Eating and Drinking together*."⁴⁴ In the satiric world of *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, the Church and Christianity exist entirely for secular purposes. Leslie alleged that the supposedly Socinian Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson, seemed to think that nursing children was of greater necessity and more indispensable than belief in

³⁹ Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discussed, Sixth Dialogue*, Preface, pp. i-xxxviii. For this episode, see McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, pp. 318-20; Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, pp. 110-13.

⁴⁰ Nye, *A Letter of Resolution concerning the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation*, p. 18. For clerical reaction, see Fullwood, *The Socinian Controversie*, p. 22; Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, The Preface, p. lix.

⁴¹ Swift's phrase "preserve the Name of Christians" would have primarily signified the Socinians to Swift's readers. It was commonplace for opponents of Socinianism to claim that "Socinians ... hardly have any thing of Christianity besides the bare name" (J. Gailhard, *The Blasphemous Socinian Heresie Disproved and Confuted* [London: R. Wellington and J. Hartley, 1697], Preface).

⁴² Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discussed, Sixth Dialogue*, pp. 29-30; [Leslie], *The Charge of Socinianism*, p. 14.

⁴³ See McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, pp. 317-18.

⁴⁴ *The Axe laid to the Root of Christianity: or, A Specimen of the Prophaneness and Blasphemy that Abounds in Some Late Writings* (London: John Morphew, 1706), p. 4, citing *The Principle of the Protestant Reformation Explained: In a Letter of Resolution concerning Church-Communion* (London, 1704).

Christ.⁴⁵ Swift remixes such mockery: "Some scattered Notions about a superior Power" would furnish "excellent Materials to keep Children quiet" (p. 34). The "nominal" vision of the *Argument* does not have a spiritual care in the world. The clergy, for example, are seen as having several functions but never a spiritual one. In the *Argument*, the first consideration before abolishing the clergy to please the "young Gentlemen of Wit and Pleasure" is: "Whether it may not be thought necessary, that in certain Tracts of Country, like what we call Parishes, there should be *one* Man at least, of Abilities to read and write" (p. 30), Swift's extended reprise of the sardonic joke in the Dedication to Lord Somers of *A Tale of a Tub* about the Bookseller needing "to have recourse to the Curate of our Parish" as no one else understands Latin.⁴⁶

Considering "the Point of *Blasphemy*" and prosecutions for it as "Proofs" of "*Persecution*," Leslie wrote: "I am far from thinking every Error *Criminal*, much less *Capital* ... But in the present Case of *Blaspheming*, and ... *Ridiculing* of God ... Shall the Honour of the *King* be Guarded with *Death*, and *God* be Blasphem'd *Impune* in Print, and in the streets ... Not only to pass unpunished, but to be thought a *Grace* in Conversation, and the mark of a *Wit*!"⁴⁷ In 1708, Leslie could not see why Socinians "Desire a *Repeal* of the *Penal Laws*" for they are "as much *Suspended* towards the *Socinians*, as towards other *Dissenters*." The notorious Socinian Emlyn openly preached in London, and Leslie "heard *Socinianism* by Name Openly Defended in Publick *Coffee-Houses*, and the Persons own themselves to be *Socinians*, and no Notice taken! What *Liberty* wou'd they have? Or what *Persecution* do they fear?"⁴⁸ Also in 1708, Francis Gastrell, in the passage of *The Principles of Deism Truly Represented* in which he mentions *A Tale of a Tub*, has his Deist remark that without profane wit there would be "no Plays; no Raillery; no fine Conversation" and the Sceptic (or Socinian) opines: "If I were disposed to turn *Christian*, this would be one great Obstruction, that I should lose the best Fund of Conversation I have; And I know a great many pleasant Fellows of my Acquaintance, that would be quite broke for Wits too, if this Subject [*Christian Revelation*] were taken from them."⁴⁹ Swift's remake of all this is: "Great Wits love to be free with the highest Objects; and if they cannot be allowed a *God* to revile or renounce; they will *speak Evil of Dignities*, abuse the Government, and reflect upon the Ministry; which I am sure, few will deny to be of much more pernicious Consequence ... yet (to the Comfort of all those, who may be apprehensive of Persecution) Blasphemy we know is freely spoke a Million of Times in every Coffee-House and Tavern, or

⁴⁵ See *The Charge of Socinianism*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Prose Works*, I, 14.

⁴⁷ *The Charge of Socinianism*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, Sixth Dialogue, p. 40.

⁴⁹ [Gastrell], *The Principles of Deism Truly Represented*, pp. 54, 55. For similar reflections on blasphemous wit, see Jenkin, *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, pp. xvii–xviii.

where-ever else good *Company* meet." Modern Wit is "wholly turned upon Raillery and Invectives against Religion" and must not be deprived of "the only Topick we have left" (pp. 29, 36). While the Three Persons of the Trinity are blasphemed and priest-bashing goes on, "great Wits," Swift acidly notes, have their fun "without the least imaginable *Danger to their Persons*" (p. 36). ("Danger to their Persons" is italicized in the 1735 edition of the work, perhaps in case the pun was missed in 1711.⁵⁰)

The presence of the High Churchman behind Swift's nominalist is disclosed particularly when it is said that "the *Atheists, Deists, Socinians, Anti-Trinitarians*, and other Subdivisions of Free-Thinkers" are "for repealing the Sacramental Test" and do not "hold the *Jus Divinum* of Episcopacy" (pp. 36-37). In a pamphlet of 1707, Leslie identified the anti-Trinitarian heretic Arius as the first who opposed the divine apostolic succession of "*Episcopacy*."⁵¹ High Church hardliners in the Socinian controversy insisted against the moderates that the doctrine and terms of the Christian faith should not, and could not, be accommodated to the passions and notions of humankind. The *Argument's* stark satiric claim is that "*real Christianity*" is incompatible with modern society and to restore it would be "to dig up Foundations; to destroy at one Blow *all* the Wit, and *half* the Learning of the Kingdom; to break the entire Frame and Constitution of Things; to ruin Trade, extinguish Arts and Sciences with the Professors of them; in short, to turn our Courts, Exchanges and Shops into Desarts" (p. 27). The primary effect of the claim is the moral denunciation of polite and commercial Britons. For Swift, it is the "Foundations" of the Kingdom and the "entire Frame and Constitution" of modernity which would have to be destroyed to accommodate "*real Christianity*," and not the "Fabrick" of Christianity which has to be abolished to accommodate human nature (p. 38). The removal of "true Religion," of "*real Christianity*," was for Swift, in a letter to Archbishop King in 1709, the terrible sign of God's judgement on the wickedness of a nation.⁵²

An Argument against Abolishing Christianity as a whole is a brilliant appropriation of the proto-enlightenment language and emphases of the Socinians—reasoned argument, moderation, unprejudiced common-sense, conciliatory tone, tolerance and demystification, civil considerations—but this language is deployed to defend the orthodox distinguishing terms of the Faith and the privileged position of the Established Church of England and Ireland which depends upon them.⁵³ The

⁵⁰ See *Prose Works*, II, 278.

⁵¹ [Charles Leslie], *The Second Part of the Wolf Stript of His Shepherds Cloathing* (London, 1707), p. 1.

⁵² See *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 226.

⁵³ J.G.A. Pocock remarks "the extent to which all discourse of toleration, liberty, and enlightenment was a polemic against the orthodox theology of Christ's divinity, against the Trinity and the Incarnation, the Council of Nicea, the Athanasian Creed—which got into the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England—the Gospel according to St. John and the doctrine of the Word made Flesh" (J. G. A. Pocock, "Within the Margins: The Definition of Orthodoxy," *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox*

importance of the Socinian controversy as a major religious issue for interpreting Swift's work probably needs to be emphasized, since Socinianism and heresy hunts rarely rate a mention in the histories of the polite and commercial Britons, and within the secular paradigms in which literary history and much of the literary criticism on Swift is often written.

Socinian publicists and polemicists were especially active in the 1690s and in the first decade of the eighteenth century. The high-profile figures include Thomas Firmin, a friend of Archbishop Tillotson, who financed Socinian publications, Arthur Bury, Stephen Nye, and Thomas Emlyn. John Biddle's interregnum Socinian works were republished. The Socinian controversy was a life and death matter. *An Act for Exempting Their Majesties' Protestant Subjects Dissenting from the Church of England from the Penalties of Certain Laws*, the Toleration Act of 1689, only applied to Trinitarian Protestants. It expressly excludes from toleration "any person that shall deny in his preaching or writing the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity."⁵⁴ After the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695, *An Act for the More Effectual Suppressing of Blasphemy and Profaneness* of 1698 provided punishment for anti-Trinitarianism. The Act was aimed at Socinians and states: "That if any Person or Persons having been educated in or at any time having made Profession of the Christian Religion within this Realm shal by writing printing teaching or advised speaking deny any one of the Persons in the Holy Trinity to be God or shal assert or maintain there are more Gods than One or shal deny the Christian Religion to be true or the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of Divine Authority," then for a first offence they shall "be adjudged incapable and disabled in Law ... to have or enjoy any Office or Offices ... Ecclesiastical Civil or Military." For a second conviction, the Act prescribed loss of all legal rights and three years imprisonment without bail.⁵⁵ It is the 1698 Blasphemy Act, rather than the Sacramental Test Act, to which Swift principally refers in the rhetorical questions asked in the *Argument*:

Writing and Cultural Response, 1660–1750, ed. Roger D. Lund [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], p. 50). Champion argues that "the Socinian or Unitarian polemic of the 1690s was a crucial movement in the development of the Enlightenment idea of religion" (*The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, p. 101). It has been noticed that "much of Leslie's success as a polemicist derived from his ability to adapt the languages of Enlightenment to his counter-Enlightenment agenda;" see William Kolbrenner, "The Charge of Socinianism: Charles Leslie's High Church Defense of 'True Religion,'" *The Journal of the Historical Society*, 3 (2003), p. 20. Swift's imaginative satire is a brilliant literary display of such a polemical strategy. Swift's *Argument* is situated in an Irish counter-enlightenment philosophical context in David Berman, "The Irish Counter-Enlightenment," *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Richard Kearney (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), pp. 135, 139–40.

⁵⁴ Andrew Browning, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1660–1714*, VIII (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 403.

⁵⁵ See *The Statutes of the Realm*, VII (1820), 409.

Would any indifferent Foreigner, who should read the Trumpery lately written by *Asgill, Tindall, Toland, Coward*, and Forty more, imagine the Gospel to be our Rule of Faith, and confirmed by Parliaments? Does any Man ... find his Want of *Nominal* Faith a Disadvantage to him, in the Pursuit of any Civil, or Military Employment? What if there be an old dormant Statute or two against him? Are they not now obsolete? (pp. 29–30)

Earlier in the work Swift refers to an “*obsolete Law*” by which anti-Christians have been dismissed from military office “*only for Blasphemy*” (pp. 28, 29). By contrast, even the contemporary occasional conformist who sought to qualify for employment under the terms of the Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Acts (1673 and 1678) did need to demonstrate a nominal subscription to the faith by taking the sacrament of Holy Communion according to the liturgy of the Church of England. Swift’s satiric point here is more that anti-Christians, who blasphemously deny the triune God, do not even exhibit a nominal faith, yet they keep their jobs or in the rare cases of prosecution cry out “Persecution.” The *Argument* invites readers to believe that the Blasphemy Act has become a dormant statute widely evaded—the claim made by the High Church heresy hunters. But not everyone escaped. The real menace and violence of Swift’s satire is in its implied call for more vigorous execution of the law and its silence about the hangings and book burnings that did take place.

As Swift certainly understood, anti-Trinitarianism was “*a dangerous Meaning*” to have found in one’s work.⁵⁶ An Edinburgh student, Thomas Aikenhead, was hanged for his Socinian views in 1697 under the draconian Scottish laws against blasphemy despite a recantation.⁵⁷ Openly Socinian works were burned and their authors prosecuted.⁵⁸ Arthur Bury’s *The Naked Gospel* opposed the Athanasian Creed and favoured Socinianism. The book was burned, and Bury, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, was deprived and fined.⁵⁹ John Smith, a clockmaker, was prosecuted and his Socinian work burned.⁶⁰ Thomas Emlyn denied that Jesus Christ was supreme God in *An Humble Inquiry into the Scripture-Account of Jesus Christ*, published in Dublin in 1702. Emlyn was tried and found guilty of blasphemy

⁵⁶ See his Apology for *A Tale of a Tub*, *Prose Works*, I, 4.

⁵⁷ See “Proceedings against Thomas Aikenhead, for Blasphemy: 8 William III. A.D. 1696,” *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, ed. T. B. Howell (London: Longman *et al.*, 1812), XIII, cols 918–38.

⁵⁸ For burnt Socinian books, see Charles Ripley Gillett, *Burned Books: Neglected Chapters in British History and Literature*, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), I, 321–56.

⁵⁹ [Arthur Bury], *The Naked Gospel* (1690). For an anticlerical Whig response to Bury’s persecution, see *The Fire’s Continued at Oxford: or, The Decree of the Convocation for Burning the Naked Gospel, Considered* (dated 30 August 1690). See Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, pp. 107–8; Jim Benedict, “Bury, Arthur (1623/4–1713),” *ODNB*, s.v.

⁶⁰ John Smith, *A Designed End to the Socinian Controversy: or, A Rational and Plain Discourse to Prove that No Other Person but the Father of Christ is God Most High* (London, 1695); Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, III, 389–99.

and imprisoned for over two years in Ireland.⁶¹ The question of the authenticity of 1 John 5:7 ("For there are Three that bear Record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these Three are One") and variant readings of 1 Tim. 3:16, among other texts of Scripture, figure prominently in anti-Trinitarian exegesis. 1 John 5:7 is Swift's text in his surviving sermon "On the Trinity."⁶² Swift probably alludes to exegesis of Emlyn's kind when pointing to the anti-Christian consequences when libertines get to hear "of a Text brought for Proof of the Trinity, which in an antient Manuscript was differently read" (p. 38). More cautious Socinian authors appear as orthodox on the page, declaring their support for the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity (real meaning: the Trinity is unscriptural) or they declare for nominal Trinitarianism.⁶³ Swift's satire outs them as anti-Christians.

In targeting anti-Trinitarianism, and particularly the Socinians, Swift was attacking a heresy allegedly advanced by a range of anticlerical Whigs, among them John Locke,⁶⁴ John Toland,⁶⁵ Matthew Tindal,⁶⁶ and Anthony Collins.⁶⁷ Socinians drew heavily on Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), particularly Locke's attack on innate ideas and his analysis of nominal and real essence. In his "Remarks," written in 1708, on Tindal's *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, Swift observed of Locke's *Essay*: "It is not his *Human Understanding*, but other Works that People dislike, although in that there are some dangerous Tenets, as that of *innate Ideas*."⁶⁸ Swift calls Toland "the great Oracle of the *Anti-Christians*" (p. 37), and in 1710, Tindal is said to be the Whig party's "Apostle."⁶⁹ In 1713, Swift parodies Collins's anti-Trinitarianism as anti-Christianity:

⁶¹ On Emlyn's treatment in Ireland, see S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 175, 186; Alexander Gordon, "Emlyn, Thomas (1663–1741)," rev. H. J. McLachlan, *ODNB*, s.v.

⁶² See Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, p. 96; *Prose Works*, IX, 159. For Emlyn and Leslie disputing variant readings of a Scriptural text (Psalms 45.7), see [Thomas Emlyn], *A Vindication of the Remarks upon Mr. Cha. Leslie's First Dialogue on the Socinian Controversy* [London, 1708], p. 8; [Charles Leslie], *A Reply to the Vindication of the Remarks* (London: Geo. Strahan, 1708), p. 20.

⁶³ Stephen Nye was Rector of Little Horncastle in Hertfordshire. His discussion of the sense in which "Subscriptions and Oaths must be made and taken" when "Public Forms" are ambiguous or open to interpretation is revealing, see *The Explication of the Articles of the Divine Unity, the Trinity, and Incarnation* (London: John Darby, 1715), pp. 114–20.

⁶⁴ John Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism', and Unitarianism," *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 111–82.

⁶⁵ Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), and Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ Stephen Lalor, *Matthew Tindal, Freethinker: An Eighteenth-Century Assault on Religion* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).

⁶⁷ James O'Higgins, SJ, *Anthony Collins: The Man and his Works* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

⁶⁸ *Prose Works*, II, 97.

⁶⁹ *Prose Works*, III, 39.

The Priests dispute about explaining the *Trinity*; therefore a *Free Thinker* may reject one or two, or the whole three *Persons*; at least he may reject Christianity, because the *Trinity* is the most fundamental Doctrine of that Religion.⁷⁰

The theological controversy over Socinianism was politically charged after the Revolution.⁷¹ Alexander Pope reveals one of the implications when he opined in *An Essay on Criticism*: "The following Licence of a Foreign Reign / Did all the Dregs of bold *Socinus* drain; / Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation."⁷² Atterbury looks to "see how the Wind stands from *Holland*" and reports "that the Socinians and other Anti-Trinitarians there, and their Abettors, are free enough in claiming Our Church to their Party."⁷³ Swift believed "the *Trinity* is the most fundamental Doctrine" of Christianity, and he observed that "since the late Revolution, men have sate much looser in the true fundamentals both of religion and government."⁷⁴ Leslie's examination of Archbishop Tillotson's sermons and Bishop Burnet's Discourses on the Trinity and Divinity of Christ has a premeditated purpose: to expose an heretical episcopate elevated by the Erastian usurpation of 1690. Archbishop Sancroft had been replaced by an Heresiarch. The name of the Revolution's Archbishop of Canterbury, Leslie observed, appears "in the *Front* of ... *Anti-Christian Harangues* in Print." The "Ax was never laid more palpably at the very Root of all Christianity," Leslie said, than in Tillotson's "*Socinianism*."⁷⁵ *The Axe Laid to the Root of Christianity: or, A Specimen of the Profaneness and Blasphemy that Abounds in Some Late Writings* is the title of a pamphlet attributed to Atterbury, published by John Morphew in 1706. Atterbury led the High Church heresy hunt after the Latitudinarian episcopate in the Canterbury Convocation in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Archbishop John Tillotson, Bishop Gilbert Burnet, and Bishop Edward Fowler, "the weightiest Men in the weightiest

⁷⁰ *Prose Works*, IV, 35.

⁷¹ On the political-ecclesiastical dimension of the Socinian controversy, see especially J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 324-422 *passim*.

⁷² *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, eds E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969 [1961]), pp. 300-1 and n, ll. 544-46.

⁷³ *A Letter to a Convocation Man*, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Prose Works*, IV, 35; IX, 224.

⁷⁵ *The Charge of Socinianism*, pp. 32, 16.

⁷⁶ For which see Mark Goldie, "The Nonjurors, Episcopacy, and the Origins of the Convocation Controversy," *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689-1759*, ed. Eveline Cruickshanks (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), pp. 15-35; G. V. Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State, 1688-1730: The Career of Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 44-80; Martin Greig, "Heresy Hunt: Gilbert Burnet and the Convocation Controversy of 1701," *The Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), 569-92.

Stations," were among those suspected of Socinianism, of "pulling up those very Foundations, wherein all Christians have agreed."⁷⁷

Tillotson's sermons appear Trinitarian, and they have been pronounced orthodox by modern scholars attending to the evidence of the words on the page.⁷⁸ Leslie's reading of Tillotson's sermons is instructive in illustrating how contemporaries read in the paper wars of the period, especially on subjects which dare not speak their name, like Socinianism. Leslie explains that it is not the words on the page but what is meant by the words in context that is important: "For the Dispute is not about the words *Trinity*, or *Person*, but as to the *Sense* of these words as they are used by *Divines*. The *Socinians* own a *Trinity* ... But all the matter is in what *Sense* the word *Trinity* is us'd by our *Divines*, and by the *Socinians*."⁷⁹ Leslie looked for what the text does not say, its silences and omissions, and its tone. He found ambiguities, and positions that seemed susceptible to Socinian inflection when read in context. Socinians certainly approved the doctrine they found in Tillotson's sermons.⁸⁰ Leslie it seems was apposite. In his *Life of Gilbert Burnet*, affixed to Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, Thomas Burnet quoted a letter from Tillotson to Burnet in 1694 about Burnet's *Exposition of the Thirty Nine Articles* in which the Archbishop commented: "The Account given of *Athanasius's Creed*, seems to me no-wise satisfactory; I wish we were well rid of it." Against this sentence in the margin of John Lyon's copy of Burnet's *History*, Swift has drawn a pointing finger.⁸¹

Swift's satire on the anti-Christians has a political dimension. Some previous critical accounts of the *Argument* have seen it as a work of Whiggish provenance and moderation, evincing Swift's aversion to extremism, an essay in Shaftesburian ridicule and raillery rather than an intolerant "Church party" work of satiric severity.⁸² Swift would later claim that *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* was

⁷⁷ *Prose Works*, I, 3. For Burnet, see Martin Greig, "The Reasonableness of Christianity? Gilbert Burnet and the Trinitarian Controversy of the 1690s," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), 631–51, and his "Burnet, Gilbert (1643–1715)," *ODNB*, s. v. For Fowler, see Mark Goldie and John Spurr, "Politics and the Restoration Parish: Edward Fowler and the Struggle for St Giles Cripplegate," *English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), 572–96 (especially p. 582), and John Spurr, "Fowler, Edward (1631/2–1714)," *ODNB*, s. v.

⁷⁸ See *Sermons concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour: Preached in the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry* (London, 1693); Gerard Reedy, SJ, "Interpreting Tillotson," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 86 (1993), 81–103. Phillip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of "A Tale of a Tub"* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969 [1961]) accepts that Tillotson and the Latitudinarian Anglican Rationalists with whom he associates Swift were not doctrinally suspect (see especially pp. 31–32).

⁷⁹ *The Charge of Socinianism*, p. 13.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Nye's *The Agreement of the Unitarians with the Catholic Church*, p. 11.

⁸¹ *History of His Own Time*, II, 719; *Prose Works*, V, 294.

⁸² See Herbert Davis's Introduction to *Prose Works*, II, xix; Mary F. Robertson, "Swift's *Argument*: The Fact and the Fiction of Fighting with Beasts," *Modern Philology*, 74 (1976–77), 124–41; J. A.

one of the works he wrote against the "low-party" and its measures in 1708.⁸³ The evidence of the text indicates that this is a Church Party not a Whig work. There is pervasive parody of anticlerical Whig-speak throughout the *Argument*: words, catch-phrases and shibboleths in the Whig lexicon such as "Priest-Craft," "Prejudices of ... Education," "Persecution," "the Fundamental Law, that makes this Majority of Opinion [in the 'People'] the Voice of God," "Politeness" (which Swift links with "Rottenness"), and so on, are given satiric parodic attention. The Trinity was regarded by anticlerical Whigs as a principal fabrication of priestcraft. The Church party's ablest polemicists such as Charles Leslie and Francis Atterbury gave what Leslie called "this Modish word *Priest-Craft*" forensic attention pointing out, for instance, that Robert Howard in his *History of Religion* "Ridicules all *Reveal'd* Religion, and turns it into what he calls *Priest-Craft*." The men who are against "*Priest-Craft*" are "*Anti-Christ*s."⁸⁴ Swift's *Argument*, in which the majority voice of the people has rejected God, is politically consonant with Atterbury's anti-Whig *The Voice of the People, No Voice of God: or, The Mistaken Arguments of a Fiery Zealot, in a Late Pamphlet Entitl'd Vox Populi, Vox Dei, since Publish'd under the Title of the Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations, &c. Fully Confuted* (1710).

Swift's *Argument* begins with an allusion to an Order of Queen in Council of 22 May 1706 "importing that whosoever should be concerned in any seditious discourse, or libel, or laying wagers relating to the Union, should be prosecuted for such their offences, according to the utmost rigour of the law."⁸⁵ There were prosecutions and book burnings in 1706 for writing against the projected Union of England and Scotland, with Scots patriot and Jacobite opponents of the Union there complaining of "an inquisition and invasion upon the subjects liberty."⁸⁶ The Jacobite George Lockhart, citing popular agitation and addresses against the Union, had this sardonic rhetorical question for the Whigs: "What shall become of the *vox populi*, will it continue *vox Dei*?"⁸⁷ The English Tory opponents of the Union unleashed their fury in Parliament. A Tory leader in the Commons, Sir John Packington, spoke out in the Commons debate of 4 February 1707: "People without doors had been, for a long time, tongue-tied by a special order of council ... That,

Richardson, "Swift's *Argument*: Laughing Us into Religion," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 13, no 2 (1989), 35–45; Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 76–94.

⁸³ See *Prose Works*, VIII, 122.

⁸⁴ *The Charge of Socinianism against Dr. Tillotson Considered*, pp. 25, 29. See also Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, pp. 138–39.

⁸⁵ William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols (London: T. Curson Hansard, 1806–20), VI, col. 541.

⁸⁶ Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs: From September 1678 to April 1714*, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1857), VI, 97; see also 98, 115; Abel Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, Digested into Annals: Year the Fifth* (London: A. Roper, 1707), pp. 341–42, 406–7. For a Jacobite account, see "Scotland's Ruine": Lockhart of *Camwath's Memoirs of the Union*, ed. Daniel Szechi (Aberdeen: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1995).

⁸⁷ Lockhart of *Camwath's Memoirs of the Union*, ed. Szechi, p. 147.

for his part, he was absolutely against this incorporating Union, which he said, was like the marrying a woman against her consent: an Union that was carried on by corruption and bribery within doors, and by force and violence without."⁸⁸ Swift is mock-politic, but the irony directed against the Whig government is devastating:

I remember it was with great Justice, and a due Regard to the Freedom both of the Publick and the Press, forbidden upon severe Penalties to write or discourse, or lay Wagers against the *Union*, even before it was confirmed by Parliament: Because that was looked upon as a Design to oppose the Current of the People; which besides the Folly of it, is a manifest Breach of the Fundamental Law, that makes this Majority of Opinion the Voice of God. In like Manner, and for the very same Reasons, it may perhaps be neither safe nor prudent to argue against the Abolishing of Christianity. (p. 26)

Amusingly, in the first edition of 1711, the text enacts the censorship. There is a dash instead of the word *Union*: the word "*Union*" was not supplied until Faulkner's 1735 edition of the *Works*. Swift, of course, did think the Union was unspeakable, and he wrote against it in an unpublished work in 1707 describing it as a disaster for the episcopal Church.⁸⁹ This opening analogy in the *Argument* equates the political Union with the abolition of Christianity. In the *Examiner* of 1711, he described the Union as one of the former Whig ministry's "Models of Innovation in Church and State."⁹⁰

Swift is also mock-anxious about offending the Government with any hint that "the Church is in Danger":

NOR do I think it wholly groundless, or my Fears altogether imaginary; that the Abolishing of Christianity may perhaps bring the Church in Danger; or at least put the Senate to the Trouble of another Securing Vote. I desire, I may not be mistaken; I am far from presuming to affirm or think, that the Church is in Danger at present, or as Things now stand; but we know not how soon it may be so, when the Christian Religion is repealed. (p. 36)

In a parliamentary victory for the Whigs in December 1705, the Church was voted not to be in danger, with the "Queen's Proclamation concerning the Reports of the Church being in Danger" stating "that whosoever goes about to suggest and insinuate, that the church is in danger" will be proceeded against "with the utmost

⁸⁸ Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, VI, col. 560; Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, Digested into Annals: Year the Fifth*, p. 438.

⁸⁹ *Prose Works*, IX, 3-12; *Poems*, ed. Rogers, pp. 92-93.

⁹⁰ *Prose Works*, III, 95.

severity the law shall allow of.”⁹¹ “The Church in Danger” was a Tory shibboleth, and as recently as March 1707 the Irish High Churchman Francis Higgins had been taken into custody for preaching sermons insinuating “that the church was in danger, notwithstanding the declaration of the queen and parliament to the contrary.”⁹² Swift’s much-remarked paradox that the Church was not in danger but it might be if Christianity was abolished had been anticipated by Charles Leslie in a pamphlet supporting Higgins and his concerns about anti-Trinitarianism. Leslie wrote: “As to the Churches being in Danger, that’s over, and out of the Question: But it is too evident that Christianity is in Danger, from the many virulent Pamphlets and Books that daily come out against its Fundamental Principles.”⁹³ Swift did not publish *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* in 1708 under the Whig government, but waited until 1711 when the Tories or Church party were in power. The politics of this satire on anti-Christians would certainly not have been acceptable to the Whigs, for Swift really agrees with Higgins.

This imaginative satire says in far more arresting and interesting ways what High Churchmen were saying about the Socinians. It mimicks the Socinian nominalist and uses modish “enlightened” language for real, intolerant, counter-enlightenment ends. The Socinian controversy is not the only context for understanding what is going on in Swift’s satire, but it is an important one. I think *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* is the great literary work to emerge out of the Socinian controversy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

⁹¹ Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, VI, col. 510; Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, Digested into Annals: Year the Fourth* (London: Francis Coggan, 1706), pp. 203–14, and Appendix, Number XII, pp. 33–35.

⁹² Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs*, VI, 143–44; D. W. Hayton, “Higgins, Francis (1669/70–1728),” ODNB, s.v. For the furore and government response, see *The Church of England not in Danger: or, A Serious Answer to Severall False and Seditious Suggestions, Deliver’d by Mr. Higgins in a Sermon Preach’d at White-Hall, Feb. 26, 1706/7 Being Ash Wednesday* (London: J. Morphew, 1707). Higgins’s offending sermon applauded the prosecution of Asgill, Toland, and Emlyn in Ireland, condemned “*Antichristian Treatises*,” and expressed alarm at anti-Trinitarianism, observing that Emlyn was openly preaching in London; see Francis Higgins, *A Sermon Preach’d at the Royal Chappel at White-Hall; on Ash-Wednesday, Febr. 26, 1706/7* (London: B. Baker and C. King, 1707), especially pp. 8–10.

⁹³ [Charles Leslie], *A Postscript to Mr. Higgins’s Sermon, Very Necessary for the Better Understanding it* (Dublin: Edward Lloyd, 1707), p. 1, and *passim*.