

# Coleman Street

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TO LONDONERS of the Caroline and Civil War years, Coleman Street was the capital's most notorious—and therefore, for some, attractive—hive of religious radicalism. In its parish church, St. Stephen's, in the large merchants' houses lining the street itself, and in the overcrowded courts and tenements adjoining it to the east, Londoners believed they could find almost all the sects and schisms that plagued their world. It became a byword for successive scandalous movements: Lollardy in the early Tudor period; antinomianism in the pre-Civil War years; mortalism, Socinianism, and radical Independency in the 1640s; and Baptism, Quakerism, and Fifth Monarchism under Cromwell and during the early Restoration. In its taverns and inns, as well as in the church itself, godly preaching could be heard by audiences reputedly numbering a hundred or more at a time—one woman sectary claimed a thousand.<sup>1</sup> When authors, preachers, or politicians wished to gesture at all the perils of social chaos, they only needed to utter the words “Coleman Street.” When heresiographers such as Thomas Edwards wanted to find some really juicy subjects, they too knew exactly where to go. And by the same token, modern historians of radicalism have likewise known where to look for it: Christopher Hill famously called the place “the Faubourg St. Antoine of the English Revolution.”<sup>2</sup> So definitive of hot Protestantism was Coleman Street, in fact, that for the godly of the early Stuart era, *not* going there might tempt Providence. It was for failing to attend John Goodwin's preaching in St. Stephen's that God caused Nehemiah Wallington to gash his leg.<sup>3</sup>

While the settled notoriety of Coleman Street—and in particular of Swan Alley, which ran off to the east from the main north-south road—rested on its religious contentions, the area did not lack for notable examples of political and other activities. The controversial physicians Robert Fludd and Helkiah Crooke lived there in the 1630s. So did secret printers, such as the apparent antinomian Rice Boye, who was involved in

1. See, in general, D. A. Kirby, “The Radicals of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London, 1624–1642,” *Guildhall Miscellany* (1971): 98–119. References to the radicalism of Coleman Street, Swan Alley, and the parish of St. Stephen's can be found throughout the historiography of the early modern period. For the early presence there of Lollardy, see S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989 [1991]), 103, 635.

2. C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956), 255.

3. P. S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, Calif., 1985), 126.

the clandestine distribution of William Prynne's tracts against the Laudians. The five Members of Parliament whose thwarted arrest sparked the outbreak of war in 1642 sheltered in Coleman Street after they fled Westminster. They may well have found refuge there in the home of Isaac Pennington, the M.P. and soon-to-be Lord Mayor. Pennington was instrumental in driving forward root-and-branch measures to destroy episcopacy and in corralling City money for the Parliamentary war effort. During the 1640s the Leveller leader Richard Overton operated a hidden printing house in Coleman Street that stoked the fires of popular radicalism with tracts such as the spectacularly heretical *Mans mortalitie* (1643).<sup>4</sup> A little later Oliver Cromwell would meet with his officers at the Star inn. In the 1650s a Fifth Monarchist meeting place could be found in Swan Alley, where John Canne preached and Thomas Venner and his followers plotted uprisings against both Cromwell and, later, Charles II. Colonel Thomas Blood, too, conspired in Coleman Street to bring Edmund Ludlow back for a prospective alliance with Algernon Sidney. And it was no accident that the restored monarchy chose Coleman Street as the place to bring the most tumultuous twenty years in British history to a dramatic close, when it executed Venner in the street outside this meeting house in January 1661. Venner's desperate uprising had begun there, but in selecting this location the government was making a bigger point than merely its contempt for these millenarians. It was putting an emphatic full stop to everything that Coleman Street had represented for a century or more.

In broad terms, Coleman Street represented what modern historians tend to call "radicalism." Insofar as the word means a desire for a root-and-branch overhaul of the status quo, it is accurate enough as a description. But when it becomes more than a description—when, in effect, Coleman Street's radicalism is adduced almost as a "spirit of the place" to *explain* the stances of its denizens or the reactions of their enemies—it becomes more problematic. To say, as many historians have, that the flourishing of separatism, Leveller ideologies, radical Independency, or iconoclasm in this locale was unsurprising because of the radical nature of the place itself risks an evident circularity, and in any case fails to explain much of anything. Nor does it provide any insight into how this place's "radical" identity itself developed and changed. What it was to be radical in the mid-1630s, for example, was clearly distinct from what it was to be radical ten years later, to the extent that the earlier radicals became the conservative targets of the later ones—and yet both were seen as typical Coleman Street creatures.

In this essay I do not intend to advance an alternative account of radicalism or radical identity as such, although it does seem to me that such an account would be needed in order properly to understand Coleman Street's strangely consistent notoriety in the period. Instead, in the spirit of this volume I want to focus directly on the subjects of space and place themselves, and on how they were deployed in the constitution of "radical" communities. By the 1640s, if not before, the phrase "Coleman

4. B. Grob-Fitzgibbon, "Whatsoever yee would that men should doe unto you, even so doe yee unto them': An Analysis of the Effect of Religious Consciousness on the Origins of the Leveller Movement," *Historian* 65:4 (2003): 901–30, esp. 917–18.

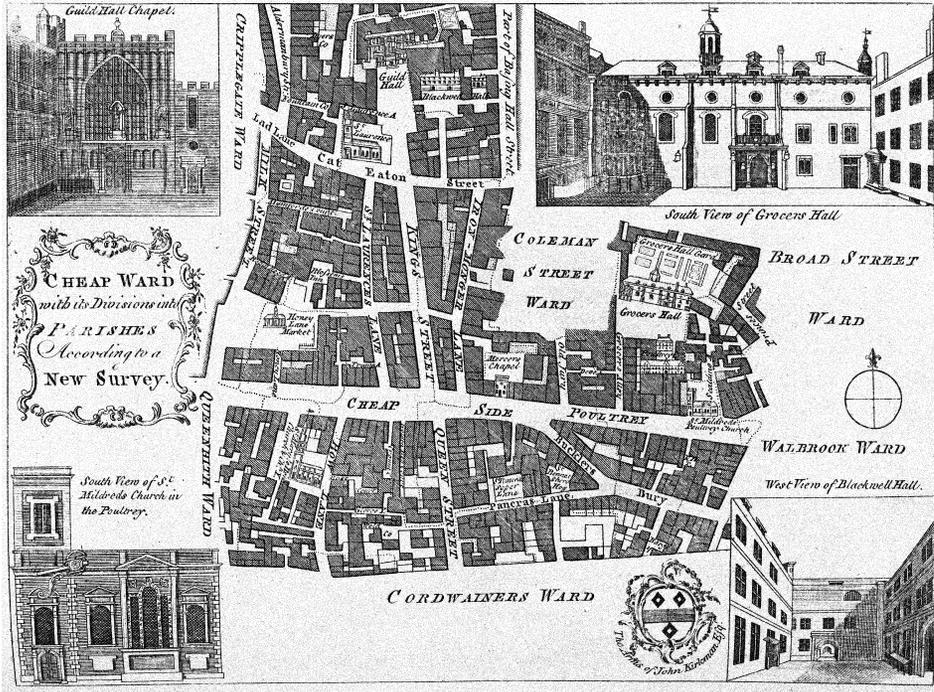


FIGURE 1. Cheap Ward, from John Noorthouck, *A New History of London* (1773). Huntington Library copy.

Street” certainly denoted an ideological location as well as a topographical one, and the shifting relation between the two is what concerns me. In particular, I shall argue that the topographical Coleman Street became the point around which a paradoxically placeless, “virtual” Coleman Street could be created. In the terms of its defenders, this virtual area sought to become an “enlightened” zone superimposed on Protestant London, encompassing a godly community irrespective of domicile. In the terms of its foes, however, it represented a miasma of anarchy and irreligion.

The placeless community known as “Coleman Street” was partly defined by hostile forces—forces that included not only the standard Presbyterian and royalist polemicists, but also erstwhile allies like the Leveller William Walwyn. But it was only partly a projection of enemy propaganda. It also represented a real aspiration of at least some Coleman Streeters themselves. They were ready and willing to uphold and justify a new “publican” space, as their enemies had called it, in the dangerously febrile context of revolutionary London. They did so by using print, correspondence, and preaching to justify its religious, political, and social nature. In this way the extrusion of a virtual Coleman Street exemplified the self-conscious creation of a print-, manuscript-, and speech-based realm of distributed reason. This was the kind of thing that might later be called a “public sphere.” How it did so will become a little clearer through an examination of two of the many polemics in which Coleman Street became involved in

the 1640s and 1650s. The first of them concerned the nature of a godly community, and the possibility of emancipating such a community from the physical territory of parish and ward. The second addressed the practice of communication that might hold such a community, and society in general, together—or might blow it apart.



Coleman Street was both typical of metropolitan parishes and unique among them. The parish and ward were large, indeed the largest in London to span both sides of the old city walls.<sup>5</sup> The area verged on the Guildhall to the west, and incorporated an area of large and wealthy mercantile dwellings to the south and along Coleman Street itself. But like all wards that bordered the wall, it had concentrations of poverty and overcrowding as well, which increased in the early decades of the seventeenth century as tenements were erected cheek-by-jowl to the north and east. There was also a growing but untraceable population of indigents and paupers. The libertine area of Moorfields lay to the north, while just to the northwest was Grub Street. It all added up to an unusually diverse range of constituencies: merchants, City politicians, pamphleteers, and artisans, not to mention tradespeople who moved into and out of the metropolis to the provinces and abroad.

Coleman Street's reach extended to the financial heart of the City, but also to its impoverished margins. In fact, during the late Jacobean and Caroline years its reach extended far beyond those margins. Coleman Street's mercantile community included wealthy gentlemen devoted to Calvinism as well as to Mammon, and with the means to communicate through trade with the Continent and beyond. As we shall see, the street's religious identity ultimately extended as far as the centers of international Protestantism and the Puritan colonies of the emerging empire in the New World. At the same time, all of these places influenced the everyday conversations that went on in Swan Alley and the pews of St. Stephen's.

There is a temptation to assert an underground continuity between early Lollard patterns of association and the radicalism of the Stuart age, but the latter was at least partly the result of an unusual arrangement that the local vestry secured only in the 1590s. After the parish (which was a poor one) had been vacant for a generation, the vestry reached an agreement that it could select its own vicar and supplement his income. This gave the local parishioners—or rather the fifty or so of them who voted in this body—an almost unique power in the Church of England to ignore the wishes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In Jacobean and Caroline times they elected two successive vicars who turned out to be leading Puritans. Both sought to extend the religious space of Coleman Street far beyond the bounds of the parish and ward, but in very different ways.

The first of them was John Davenport. Elected in 1624, against the express wishes of the bishop of London, Davenport attracted large crowds to hear his Calvinist preaching. Along with prominent Puritans such as Richard Sibbes and William

5. E. S. More, "Congregationalism and the Social Order: John Goodwin's Gathered Church, 1640–60," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987): 210–35, esp. 216.

Gouge, he acted to promote the placing of like-minded figures in church livings through the so-called Feoffees of Impropriation—a scheme to buy up the livings of vacant parishes across England in order to fill them with godly ministers.<sup>6</sup> Laud would later have the Feoffees suppressed, precisely for aspiring to create an alternative hierarchy in competition with the bishops'. Davenport also helped to print the works of leading Puritans such as Preston and to urge aid for the Protestant cause in continental Europe. Along with John Dury he pioneered calls for international Protestant unity. From Coleman Street he kept track of his allies through correspondence as they traveled in the Netherlands, assuring them of their place in his “secret prayers.”<sup>7</sup> And, as befitted a man appointed largely by Coleman Street’s group of international Calvinist merchants, Davenport was also one of the first patentees—secretly so, to evade Laudian scrutiny—for the Massachusetts Bay Company, which sought to develop a Calvinist Puritan colony in New England.

Locally, Davenport became increasingly associated with plans to adopt a Congregationalist “covenant” in his parish. His church accommodated some surprisingly risqué voices, and it was during his incumbency that a truly “spectacular” antinomian known only as Greene could be found preaching in St. Stephen’s.<sup>8</sup> Yet the representative of Coleman Street’s souls did not part decisively from the established church until he had to. That moment came in August 1633, when Laud was elevated to Canterbury. Davenport’s decision and his movements are shrouded in considerable mystery. Certainly, he had long viewed Laud with disquiet, mounting into apocalyptic foreboding as his elevation approached. Now Davenport reminded his correspondents once again of his fears, anticipating that a “fierce storme” was in the offing and that he himself might suffer its effects: the new bishop, he had heard, “hath a particular ayme at mee.”<sup>9</sup> When Laud ascended to the archbishopric, therefore, Davenport immediately went into hiding. But was he pushed? Davenport’s own allies insisted that he had in effect been driven out, allegedly for preaching against Arminianism. Yet he was never formally questioned or charged, and the Laudian authorities soon put it about that he himself had chosen separation.<sup>10</sup> Both versions—suppression and separation—have found their supporters among modern historians, tracking and reinforcing the ideological fault lines that pervade this scholarly community. At any rate, the Laudian rumor reached Holland. From his hiding place Davenport had to write to reassure his allies that he had not in fact meant to separate irreconcilably from the Church. He nonetheless conceded that he could no longer practice in conformity with the prescribed ceremonies, and confronted head-on the Laudian equivocators: “these things are not small, neither in themselves nor in the consequences of them.”<sup>11</sup> Before long even these kinds of remarks had to be tempered; Davenport found that he could no

6. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, 252–63.

7. B[ritish] L[ibrary], MS. Add. 4,275, fol. 158r.

8. D. R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England* (Stanford, Calif., 2004), 59, 331, 442.

9. BL, MS. Add. 4,275, fol. 160r.

10. D. R. Como, “Predestination and Political Conflict in Laud’s London,” *Historical Journal* 46:2 (2003): 263–94, esp. 287.

11. BL, MS. Add. 4,275, fol. 166r.

longer write plainly, “least my lettres should be opened by others, as some formerly hath bene.”<sup>12</sup> In secret meetings with Sibbes and others, he now abandoned hope of reconciliation with the regime. He left for exile. With the aid of the Book of Revelation he saw that an “hower of temptacion” was at hand for England’s Protestants. Unholy principles would be in the ascendancy for a while, and all too many would accede to them. Worse would surely ensue, culminating in the slaughter of the witnesses. Yet still he insisted that “the light which is now discovered in England, concerning church order & government, will never be wholly put out.”<sup>13</sup> It was a critically important symbolic moment, as both Peter Lake and Nicholas Tyacke have pointed out from their different perspectives. Davenport’s departure was the event that proved to English Puritans that Laud’s elevation had extinguished all hope of reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

This trigger event centrally concerned the nature of the Church as a community, and not just as a theological entity. The very idea of separation—of constituting one’s group as a distinct religious body, independent of the ecclesiastical hierarchy—had been mooted in the days of the Elizabethan Puritans but was freshly awakened by Davenport’s move. From the outset, Coleman Street was therefore the focus of this question of the nature, extent, and social constitution of the Church. Davenport himself meanwhile fled. He went first to Amsterdam. There he became embroiled in disputes with the exiled English Puritans over the propriety of out-and-out separatism, which turned on the question of child baptism. He found himself excluded from the local congregation.<sup>15</sup> From there he returned to Coleman Street briefly and in disguise in 1636, but only in order to encourage like-minded parishioners to sail with him into exile in New England. Several did. There they founded the Quinnipiac Colony, which was later renamed New Haven. It was, contemporaries thought, an extension of Davenport’s Coleman Street Puritan congregation—a “bible commonwealth . . . of the extremest type.” Forced out of Coleman Street and then exiled from the pre-eminent Continental community of English Puritans, Davenport had re-created godly rule in Connecticut, forging a community of congregations comprising only the elect.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-1630s, then, with Laudianism in the ascendant in London, Coleman Street was already seen as a hotbed of opposition. What made it notorious was only in part the presence of local Puritans and antinomians. The real threat lay in the fact that the parish seemed a focus for a rigorous Protestantism, the reach of which extended much further afield, to Amsterdam and to the Colonies. It was here, then, in the notion of a Coleman Street Protestantism, that communities both local and distant came to be aligned with a common set of standards for a rival ecclesiastical polity. By this time, Coleman Street was certainly recognized in the Low Countries as the center of London

12. *Ibid.*, fol. 167r.

13. *Ibid.* 4,275, fol. 173r.

14. N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987), 186–87; P. Lake, “The Laudian Style,” in K. Fincham, ed., *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642* (London, 1993), 161–85, esp. 182.

15. E.g., BL, MS. Add. 24,666, fols. 4rff, 39rff.

16. Kirby, “Radicals of St. Stephens,” 100, 104, 107–8, 112–13.

Puritanism, and Londoners for their part recognized it as the metropolitan point of contact for the exiled Protestant churches.

Yet the fact remained that the price of creating this relation between microcosm and macrocosm was the departure of its principal creator, Davenport. And he stayed away. Davenport could still be found heading his American conclave in 1660, providing refuge to escaping regicides and holding firm to the strict principles of his Puritan generation.<sup>17</sup> In the interim, the Civil War years had seen Coleman Street itself become the epicenter of a more local, but also more thoroughgoing and successful, experiment in shaking faith free from place.



After Davenport's disappearance, the Coleman Street vestry replaced him with a Cambridge-educated minister named John Goodwin. Goodwin was already a rather controversial figure, known to be inclined toward Calvinism. But he largely kept his head down during Laud's ascendancy. This changed in the early 1640s, however, as the bishops' power crumbled. Along with parishioners such as Penington, Goodwin was immediately in the forefront of anti-episcopal campaigns, moving more quickly than any other London minister to remove the font from its traditional position.<sup>18</sup> And for the next two decades he would be perhaps the most active and influential of all the so-called Independents.

Goodwin has always been a surprisingly difficult figure to characterize—far more so than most other prominent contributors to the debates of the 1640s, such as Prynne or John Lilburne. Theologically, he repudiated double-predestination with increasing confidence and clarity. He also insisted on the primacy of reason in matters of faith, maintaining consistently that Puritan biblicism was insufficient and overbearing. Above all he was an early proponent of toleration for diverse religious views and practices, including their circulation in print, as long as they did not extend to what he counted fundamentals (such as the Trinity: he was staunch in denying Socinianism, much as he was accused of perpetrating that very heresy, along with most others). In the end he was often thought to have become an Arminian, and therefore to represent an important theological link joining the pre-Civil War Church to the later views of the Latitudinarians.<sup>19</sup> But when, and to what extent, he really adopted such positions remains controversial. For example, Goodwin valued toleration highly enough that, when it came to Pride's Purge and the regicide, he could forthrightly uphold the use of force by a few military men in its name. Pride and his allies, Goodwin told his readers,

17. John Donoghue has very recently examined at length the Atlantic implications of Davenport's Coleman Street exodus. His analysis appeared too late for me to engage with it extensively; see J. Donoghue, "Radical Republicanism in England, America, and the Imperial Atlantic, 1624–1661" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006), 27–72.

18. K. Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, U.K., 1997), 260; J. Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, U.K., 2003), 169.

19. E. More, "John Goodwin and the Origins of the New Arminianism," *Journal of British Studies* 22:1 (1982): 50–70, esp. 58.

were entitled to intervene and uphold “the peace, liberties, and safety of the Kingdom” when Parliament had become “distracted” (that is, deranged) enough not to uphold them itself.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps we can understand Goodwin, along with Coleman Street, better—or at least differently—if we regard him as experimenting with the geography of faith. This was not such an alien concept to Coleman Streeters themselves. After Davenport, they were accustomed to dealing with theology in action at all levels, whether local (household and parochial), urban, Continental, or colonial. Their trading extended to the Netherlands and the New World, and so did their doctrines. To cite a metaphorical example, in a major defense of his views that he issued in 1642, Goodwin himself created an elaborate skein of place-based metaphors to describe the roles of reason in faith. Error, he declared, was a “region” where dragons were engendered. Truths might lie in places outside of the common paths and remain there undiscovered. This had, after all, been the case with America for many centuries. Revealing new doctrines was analogous to discovering new lands (and it surely cannot have escaped many in his Coleman Street congregation just which doctrines were to be discovered in America now). In the Last Days, as the book of Daniel said, many would run to and fro, and knowledge would be increased—the same ambitious reference to the Last Days that Francis Bacon had used to argue for an “instauration” of natural philosophy. The implication, perhaps, was that knowledge in religion too was now appropriately likened to a territory awaiting exploration and experimentation.<sup>21</sup>

In early modern England, of course, faith was in some ways a matter of territory. The Church placed everyone in a given parish, defined topographically, and allotted parishioners privileges and duties accordingly. As A. L. Beier argued some years ago, the notion of mobile, placeless men and women was in this context particularly disturbing to the authorities.<sup>22</sup> In the 1630s, however, Laudian attempts at “thorough” ecclesiastical oversight had strained this system. Starting with Davenport’s flight from Coleman Street, they provoked Puritans’ first serious attempts in a generation to conceive of separation as a real option. Goodwin himself was not won over at first. But while he maintained his parish role, by the mid-1630s he and a band of followers were nonetheless also meeting as a “congregation” in his own home in Swan Alley. In the end, this group would do more than merely separate. It would become the focus of a reconsideration of the place of place, as it were, in religious society.

By no means were all of Goodwin’s congregational followers of the lower orders; we know the identities of about fifty of them, and they included substantial merchants as well as tradesmen and artisans. Among them were a tavern-keeper, a brewer, a schoolmaster, a surgeon, a baker, and a bookseller—this last being Henry Overton,

20. J. Goodwin, *Right and might well met* (London, 1648 [1649]), 3–6.

21. J. Goodwin, *Imputatio Fidei* (London, 1642), sig. b4r. See also C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London, 1972/1975), 367. For the connection to Bacon, see C. Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform, 1626–1660* (London, 1975), 9, 19, 22–31.

22. A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640* (London, 1985).

who was involved in publishing many of Goodwin's works. Some hailed from Coleman Street itself, but others came there from outside the parish, attracted by Goodwin's growing renown as a godly preacher. And this was the point. By 1639, the group was beginning to think of itself as a "gathered" church—that is, as a church defined not by territory but by the election of the congregation itself.

Soon after this, Goodwin began a fateful attempt to extend the principles of this church into the London religious community at large.<sup>23</sup> First he ceased offering communion at his parish services except to individuals vetted by him and his followers. From now on, he explained, he would preach in his parish but provide communion only to this gathered church. The implications soon extended beyond Coleman Street itself. As episcopacy disintegrated and Laud went to the Tower, some new model of church and state would be needed, and fast. The Coleman Street model emerged as one candidate.

The basis for this model lay in a quite complex brew of philosophy, ecclesiastical history, and scriptural hermeneutics, as we shall see in a moment. But its social character was distinctive. Saintly congregants coming from all over the community would voluntarily submit to the oversight of a pastor like Goodwin himself. Since people would no longer be attached to a particular territorial parish, there would be no need for heavy-handed discipline of the kind that the ecclesiastical courts had meted out to men like Prynne—or, indeed, of the kind that Prynne himself was now inclined to advocate. Citizens who believed differently could simply and peacefully withdraw and go to another group. Within each gathered church itself, there would be lay and clerical officers, but no formal hierarchy would be insisted upon. To that extent every member would be equal. This even applied to women, as was made clear when Goodwin found himself invoked in an accusation by a rival named Samuel Chidley, a Haberdasher and prominent Leveller.<sup>24</sup> A naval officer named Goodson attended Chidley's own separated church, but Goodson's wife attended Goodwin's; Chidley complained that this precluded the Goodsones from living in spiritual domesticity. Goodwin replied that in his view Mrs. Goodson was free to join or leave his congregation as she wished. She was, in short, an autonomous soul. Coupled with allegations of extensive female preaching in Coleman Street, the case added a subversive gender element to the growing notoriety of the place.

Goodwin's ambition was at first unique, as far as we know. Others in these years were advancing gathered churches of one sort or another, some of them far more radical in their theology than Goodwin's. But none sought to take an existing parish and, while still using its physical buildings, transform it into an essentially placeless church. By December 1643 Goodwin was being quite explicit about this aim.

The ambition swiftly got him into trouble. Parishioners resident in Coleman Street itself found their minister denying them communion in favor of a group, many

23. The quarrel is alluded to in several modern works but discussed especially in M. Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616–1649* (Cambridge, 1977), 111–16; it may be followed to an extent in the vestry minutes at Guildhall Library, MS. 4458/1.

24. Brown, *Two conferences*, 9.

of whom—perhaps the majority—came from elsewhere. This group met *in* Coleman Street, indeed in the church itself, but was not *of* Coleman Street. (By the same token, the religious identity denoted by the phrase “Coleman Street” now extended far beyond the physical bounds of ward or parish.) Those among the regular parishioners who thought of themselves as godly but did not approve of Goodwin’s initiative were therefore faced with the stark prospect of being effectively removed from *any* church. They moved to confront this prospect by reasserting the placed character of a parish.

This developing conflict arose at a very sensitive moment indeed in terms of city and national religious politics. Parliament had endured a poor start to the war against the king, and had entered into alliance with the Scots in hopes of turning the military tide. This alliance involved a commitment to create a Presbyterian church order in England that included a parochial structure. As Goodwin moved forward with his own congregation, his actions came to be seen as a budding challenge to the entire Presbyterian plan. Attacks by Prynne, Edwards, John Vicars, and others on Goodwin’s congregational scheme thus rapidly multiplied.<sup>25</sup> As they escalated, they took on increasingly hyperbolic overtones. For these Presbyterian attack-dogs, Goodwin became a Socinian, an Arminian, and a denier of the revealed status of Scripture. His congregation became a hotbed of sectarian visionaries, ignorant lay preachers, millenarian insurrectionists, and visionary women. Coleman Street now came to represent everything that might threaten a new and comprehensive network of presbyteries. The social and political implications that followed from Goodwin’s plan were, according to Prynne, equally deep. Where would the patriarchal household be if the wife could freely set off to join another religious discipline? What would happen to the harmony of the home? And what would happen if the home, thus compromised, aspired to become the locus of a church? Edwards in particular assailed Goodwin’s use of his own home as a place of religious meetings, casually representing the deaths there of two of Goodwin’s children from plague as providential proof of his case.<sup>26</sup> And since everyone knew that the household was the foundation and microcosm of the nation, it was clear that in its corruption lay the seeds of national anarchy and doom.

Goodwin’s initiative was effectively an attempt to remodel London—and then the nation—as greater Coleman Street. And Edwards, Prynne, and the rest ensured that it was recognized as such. By this time his church had become, in Robert Brenner’s words, “the most politically pivotal Independent church in London.”<sup>27</sup> The Interregnum’s most important public debates on religion either took place in it or were inspired by it.<sup>28</sup> It brought together not only artisans and middling-sort householders

25. See, for example, T. Edwards, *The first and second part of Gangraena* (London, 1646); W. Prynne, *Faces about* (London, 1644); J. Vicars, *Coleman-street conclave visited* (London, 1648).

26. T. Edwards, *Gangraena* (London, 1646), 70; J. Goodwin, *Cretensis* (London, 1645/6), 36–37.

27. R. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton, N.J., 1993; reprint ed., 2003), 420. See also the perceptive comments in S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York, 2002 [1894]), 2:108–10.

28. Tolmie, *Triumph of the saints*, 123. For examples, see D. Brown, *Two conferences between some of those that are called Separatists & Independents, concerning their different tenents* (London, 1650), and [J. Goodwin], *The remedie of unreasonableness. Or the Substance of a speech intended at a conference or dispute, in All-hallows the Great, London. Feb. 11. 1649. Exhibiting the heads of Mr John Good-*

but also politically active merchants pushing for aggressive Protestant policies in Ireland, America, and the West Indies. This being so, the Presbyterians may well have been right about the potential scope of the project. It does indeed seem to have had an ambitious aspect to it that went far beyond the locale of Coleman Street itself. In the event, moreover, it was this ambition that undid the attempt. Goodwin's own parishioners brought charges against him. Penington, now the ex-mayor of London, led the campaign within Coleman Street. Parliament's Committee of Plundered Ministers—established, ironically, to purge Laudian priests—heard their complaints. Together, the local opposition and the parliamentary committee proved strong enough. Goodwin found himself removed from office and replaced by a reliable Presbyterian. The aspiration to separate place from faith had backfired.

This might be thought to have defeated Goodwin's project. In all probability, the Presbyterians thought it had. But they were still thinking in territorial terms, as though the parish was all. By the mid-1640s, with military events and social upheaval casting every structure of authority into doubt, this was by no means necessarily the case. In practice Goodwin's gathered church not merely survived but prospered. It just moved down the street to his Swan Alley home. Freed from what turned out to be the *encumbrance* of place, Goodwin's congregants proved all the more devoted and all the more diverse. They stuck with him over the next decade or more, with little sign of dissension and only one split (when a group of Baptists set up on their own). This stability was an extraordinary achievement by the standards of mid-seventeenth-century separatist religion. Probably no other Interregnum group lacking the support of a strong ecclesiastical hierarchy cohered with this degree of apparent harmony.

Not only that, but Goodwin's followers also proved more widely influential. Displaced altogether from the parish, their sphere of action was now the nation at large—or, indeed, that more numinous entity, “the public.” They included figures who became major promoters of radical political change. In particular, Goodwin's gathered congregation developed extended conversations, the details of which are hard to tease out now, with the Levellers. Walwyn certainly knew Goodwin well at this point, and heard some of his preaching; in early 1645 the two of them apparently met with Lilburne almost daily. The second *Agreement of the people* seems to have emerged from meetings between the Coleman Street group and the Levellers, and Goodwin himself attended the Whitehall debates in early 1649 to support it.<sup>29</sup>

Yet by the time of those debates the Levellers and the “Coleman Street Conclave” (as the Presbyterian John Vicars scornfully dubbed it) were parting company. Goodwin's group was increasingly throwing its lot in with Cromwell's officers and the regicide they had brought about. Goodwin himself became a principal defender of the army's actions, maintaining that kings were merely “creatures” of the people and could be deposed and executed, if appropriate. An alliance with Ireton and Cromwell necessitated a distancing from the Leveller leaders, who were leading mutinies against

*win's Judgement, concerning the Freeness, Fulness, Effectualness of the Grace of God* (London, 1650). This “conference” allegedly took place before “some thousands of people” (p. 3).

29. More, “John Goodwin,” 64; Gardiner, *History*, 4:277.

them—and Walwyn in particular reacted angrily, accusing Goodwin of exploiting his dispersed audience to spread rumors and slander against him.<sup>30</sup> This distancing, however, also brought Goodwin himself back into closer alignment with the powers in his own locale. By mid-1649, he was back in St. Stephen's. Penington, of all people, had facilitated the return. The parish received his preaching—and he received a large church in which his burgeoning group could meet.<sup>31</sup>



The Coleman Streeters—not just Goodwin himself, although I am focusing on him here—sought to separate place and faith by using all the means available in early modern London. For example, they manipulated rumor, or so the disenchanted Walwyn claimed.<sup>32</sup> More overtly, they preached—freely, widely, and frequently. From the outset, Coleman Street, and especially Goodwin's "conclave," was notorious as a place in which mechanick preachers learned how to hold forth. Marchamont Nedham referred to it revealingly as "the Divinity-School in *Coleman-University*," and he was far from alone. It soon became standard practice to refer to the place as akin to a school or college for unlicensed preachers.<sup>33</sup> A famous "pupil" was Samuel How, the cobbler (figure 2):

. . . at the Nags head, neare to Coleman-streete,  
A most pure crew of Brethren there did meete,  
Where their devotion was so strong and ample,  
To turne a sinfull Taverne to a Temple."<sup>34</sup>

But above all the Goodwinites used print. Their tracts—which ranged from eight-page pamphlets to six-hundred-page treatises—were dispersed across London and throughout the ranks of the army. In particular, they argued for what was perhaps Coleman Street's principal objective—namely, toleration for religious differences. I shall return to this issue in a moment. At any rate, their advocacy of this principle was, they said, "experimental"—that is, it rested in the same convictions of personal transformation to which so many godly congregations appealed and testified.<sup>35</sup> It was also the basis on which their own cohesion as a community rested. Goodwin's own prominence in this struggle was second to none. He denounced Presbyterian intolerance, and worked with Samuel Hartlib and John Dury to publish an English trans-

30. W. Walwyn, "Walwyns just defence" (London, 1649), in J. R. McMichael and B. Taft, eds., *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Athens, Ga., 1989), 407, 427.

31. P. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560–1662* (Stanford, Calif., 1970), 282.

32. For the power and practice of rumor see A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), 335–63.

33. M. Nedham, *The great accuser cast down; or, a publick trial of Mr John Goodwin* (London, 1657), 7–8, 42, 45.

34. J. Taylor, *A swarme of sectaries, and schismatiques* (London, 1641), 8.

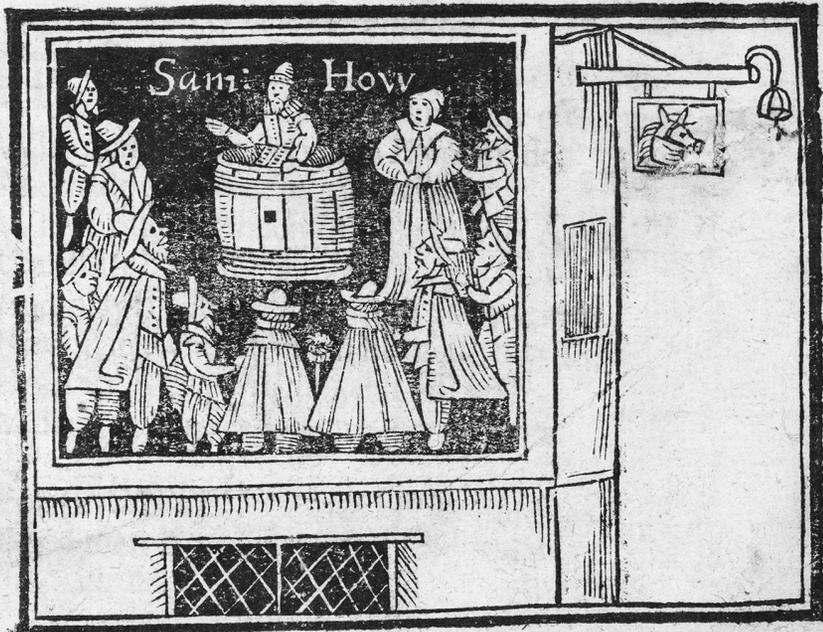
35. On "experimental faith" see N. Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), esp. 73–78.

A  
**SVV ARME**  
 OF  
**SECTARIES, AND**  
**SCHISMATIQVES:**

Wherein is discovered the strange preaching (or prating) of such as are by their Trades  
 Coblers, Tinkers, Pedlers, Weavers, Sowgelders,  
 and Chymney-Sweepers.

BY JOHN TAYLOR.

*The Cobler preaches, and his Audience are  
 As wise as Mofse was, when he caught his Mare.*



Printed luckily, and may be read unhappily, betwixt  
 hawke and buzzard, 1641.

FIGURE 2. Title page from John Taylor, *A Swarme of Sectaries* (1641). Huntington Library copy.

lation of Iacopo Aconcio's *Satans Stratagems*, one of the key skeptical and anti-dogmatic works of the previous century. He helped himself quietly to its arguments to make a case for toleration in his own works.<sup>36</sup> It was for this self-manifestation in print, as much as for their social practice, that Presbyterian writers like Edwards and Prynne assailed Goodwin and his followers so violently. Prominently at stake were the nature, basis, and limits of the space of print itself—the virtual forum that in future generations would succeed to the dominance previously enjoyed by placed concepts like the parish.

This confrontation demands a brief excursus into historiography. The kind of extended engagement through print that the Coleman Street group pursued tends to be examined today under the rubric of “the public sphere”—or perhaps under that of “a public sphere,” or under some otherwise qualified moniker such as “the early public sphere.”<sup>37</sup> In any case, the applicability of the concept to the mid-seventeenth century is problematic and has inspired much debate.<sup>38</sup> In part, however, our difficulties rest on the way we formulate our own questions. In particular, they inevitably attend an attempt to relate the practices of the period genealogically to a “sphere” that flourished later, and that we think we understand better.<sup>39</sup> Extending that concept back to the mid-seventeenth century involves compromises, because some of its defining elements either did not exist then or were only just developing. A periodical press is one such element; others include coffeehouses, an environment of academies and salons, a particular kind of shared practical culture of reading, a widely distributed aspiration to politeness, and a conviction as to the legitimacy of “public reason” itself. On the other hand, practices—such as rumor, for example—that may have been of greater importance in the seventeenth century risk neglect in investigations looking backward from the eighteenth.

None of this implies that we should stop talking about public spheres in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the contrary, a narrative of early modernity can

36. I. Aconcio (Jacobus Acontius), *Satans Stratagems* (London, 1648); More, “John Goodwin,” 58–61.

37. E.g., D. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); 21–35.

38. Peter Lake's work in this area offers perhaps the best attempt at a coherent overarching thesis; yet Lake's very scrupulosity in struggling to articulate exactly what it is that we are dealing with and when precisely it came into being means that his work lays bare uncertainties that can threaten to overwhelm the concept as soon as it is asked to do much analytical work. This is not to criticize, however; any history that did not agonize over these problems of interpretation would not do justice to the arguments that raged in the period itself over the nature, scope, authority, and history of print and its publics. See, for example, P. Lake and S. Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 270–92, esp. 273–89. Compare also the various chronologies and terms used in P. Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: “Orthodoxy,” “Heterodoxy,” and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), 358–66, 410–13; P. Lake and M. Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), x, xxii, xxvii, 255–62; and P. Lake and D. Como, “‘Orthodoxy’ and Its Discontents: Dispute Settlement and the Production of ‘Consensus’ in the London (Puritan) ‘Underground,’” *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 34–70, esp. 69.

39. See, of course, J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1989 [orig. 1962]).

and should rest on such a discussion. But it is necessary to forget Habermas for a while, and to try to articulate the extent and manner in which “the” public sphere of the eighteenth century emerged from earlier forms, rather than calibrating accounts of the earlier forms by reference to the later.<sup>40</sup> This amounts to insisting that we should define the field of investigation in terms of the practices, conventions, understandings, and expectations by which contemporaries of Goodwin projected various publics, attributed authority to them (or didn’t), and sought to stabilize or destabilize them. And we can indeed do so, because all this took work and left traces. The work took place not just discursively, and not just in political and religious debates, but also in such realms as philosophy, natural science, and medicine, and in the mundane labors of printers and booksellers. Here, then, is where we need to look: to the points of contact between intellectual work and everyday craft. The task requires contributions from at least three broadly related fields. The first is the history of communications—not just the printed book, but oral culture, scribal publication, and so on. The second is the history of reading. And the third is the history of communities of belief, including their institutions, such as churches, conventicles, and military units, and, later, academies and coffee-houses. It may well be that, rather than a convergence toward one model of a public sphere, the period exhibited a growing diversity of distinct, overlapping, and competing models. In this light, the compelling feature of Coleman Street’s bid to form a broad, placeless gathered church in the 1640s is that it represented an experiment in precisely these fields, carried out on the spot and with considerable success. In short, it provides one entry point to the broader inquiry we need.<sup>41</sup>

It is also certainly the case that the roots of the Enlightenment concept of a public lay in such appeals, and indeed Goodwin’s camp did once or twice use the term “enlightened” or its cognates to refer to their ideals. Yet in the 1640s there was no generally shared basis of practices and conventions—the kind of thing we think of when we refer to the public sphere—on which Londoners could rely. They may have read the same pages, but they seem to have done so with far less sense of participating in a common process. Quite the contrary: they were engaged in a violent, fundamental, providential, and epochal war. That is not to say that such a process could not have existed. It is to say that its ground rules were fundamentally unclear to participants, and that when they were clear they were unstable.<sup>42</sup> Writers like Milton or those centered on Coleman Street had to work out from scratch, and articulate, the most basic principles of a printed conversation, and they had to do so many times over. They had constantly to

40. Behind this proposal lies a good deal of argument in the realms of cultural history and the history of science and medicine, including Lorraine Daston’s proposals for “historical epistemology,” Ian Hacking’s for “historical ontology,” and Andrew Cunningham’s for a revived Collingwoodian approach to the cultural categories of knowledge enterprises. See I. Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); L. Daston, “The Moral Economy of Science,” *Osiris* 10 (1995): 2–24; A. Cunningham, “Getting the Game Right: Some Plain Words on the Identity and Invention of Science,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 29 (1991): 377–92.

41. An important study along similar lines for the immediately later period is Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005).

42. As Lake and Pincus put it, the post-Reformation public sphere was “by no means normalized”; “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 278.

specify which readerships they were appealing to, why the views of those readerships should be credited, and to what end. Nor was this merely a matter of rhetoric. They had to return repeatedly to mundane questions about the actual construction of print and the page: questions about the people and groups responsible for making, authorizing, distributing, and policing books and pamphlets; about the crafts of the book; and about the credit-worthiness of the texts themselves—including Scripture, which was the subject of Goodwin’s own most controversial work of all.<sup>43</sup> There was no common ground between different political or religious groups. Or rather, what common ground there was seemed always to be shifting. One could hypothesize that one reason for this instability was that there was no regular site for “public” reading—no site, that is, in which members of diverse groups routinely and as a matter of course read alongside each other peaceably. In that light, perhaps the motto of the next era could truly be said to be “no coffeehouse, no public.”<sup>44</sup> But in the meantime writers often got it wrong. They misjudged—sometimes with violent consequences—which audiences they were reaching, and the way their actual audiences would respond.

In all, the distinctive characteristic of the emerging “publics” of the seventeenth century was that they were what the anthropologist Christopher Kelty has called in a very different context *recursive* publics. They were constantly, consciously reflecting on their own constitution *as* publics, and insisted on the right to reflect in this fundamental way. The Coleman Streeters themselves seem to have held that such reflection was one thing that qualified them as a public at all. And they proclaimed their license to intervene at a basic level in the norms by which a public should and could be structured: the proprieties of private presses; the rules of entry into printing houses and libraries; the qualifications of authors; the powers of readers; the proper relation between orality, manuscripts, and print; and so on.<sup>45</sup>



For the Coleman Streeters the elements of this process of reflection and intervention were primarily theological. Goodwin himself adopted a complex position resting salvation on the primacy of reason in faith. He departed from strict Calvinism rather early—before the outbreak of the Civil War—but over time his views developed into what most contemporaries called Arminianism. That is, he came to hold that grace was not predetermined to a select few. Redemption was available to all, with its actual re-

43. J. Goodwin, *The divine authority of the Scriptures asserted* (London, 1647/8). This fascinating work—and the many others issued in these years on similar subjects—reveals how deeply understandings of print and its publics were conditioned by arguments about the ancient history of Christian and Judaic manuscripts, with all their contentions about fraud, forgery, misreading, faulty copying, and the like.

44. For an argument along these lines (more subtly drawn than here), see B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn., 2005).

45. C. Kelty, “Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics,” *Cultural Anthropology* 20:2 (2005): 185–214. It is notable in this context that many participants, including Goodwin and Davenport, were involved in practices like the running of illicit presses.

cept dependent on spiritual conduct. (Technically, it was not caused by individual merit, but was occasioned by it.) This view presented severe difficulties because it involved “imputing to God ignorance of future contingencies, *more Sociniano*.”<sup>46</sup> It was also associated with Laudianism or, worse, Catholicism, and so lent support to the popular Presbyterian charge that men like Goodwin were Jesuits in disguise. It certainly made him virtually unique among London’s separatist leaders. But what is germane here is that his view involved a prominent commitment to liberty of conscience and toleration of religious differences.

What preceded any commitment for or against doctrinal Arminianism in Goodwin’s writings was resistance to sheer intransigence. The Coleman Street conclave held that very few religious convictions could justly be accounted knowledge in an infallible sense, and therefore that almost none should be imposed on a community. Moreover, it was scarcely probable that any preacher, since apostolic days, had ever been completely free of error.<sup>47</sup> More specifically, Goodwin’s group maintained that the religion revealed in Scripture was certainly there, but that a reader needed reason to discern its true elements. That truth was distinctly Platonic, in that it abided in a high realm to which humans had only limited and partial access. Religious individuals and communities must therefore work hard, trying all things, ceaselessly, in a rather Miltonic effort to reach what parts of it they could. Goodwin himself expressly insisted that the different capacities of individual readers to discern God’s truth in what they read made their *labor* in reading especially important.<sup>48</sup> He further insisted that any imposed church system would impede this labor. Any imposition of uniformity would involve trying to force people to believe what had not been demonstrated to their reason; it would be not only impolitic, but impossible. This did not imply that participation in the placeless church would be without qualification: “we allow none to be capable of our Member-ship,” he wrote in 1647, “till we have had a sufficient triall of their Conversation, and have heard the confession of their Faith, and the evidences of the truth of their conversion, and till they have entred into a solemne Covenant, and have the joynt assent of the whole Congregation.” In all this, he added, “we come as neer as in us lies, to the forme observed by the Church at Jerusalem.” But these tests were all imposed by the gathered congregation on itself, not by outside or putatively higher authorities. Goodwin and his allies in fact attributed the very stubbornness with which people clung to diverse opinions in the 1640s to the illegitimate attempt by the bishops under Laud to extend their authority over consciences during the previous generation, and asserted that “any man the least inlightned” by toleration would be less inclined to violence.<sup>49</sup> In general, left to themselves, all but the most egregious errors would simply die out in a print struggle sanctioned by God. They would especially do so if the virtual space of reading communities came to resemble Goodwin’s own ideal

46. “Nullius Nominis,” *An apologie for the six book-sellers* (London, 1655), 12.

47. J. Goodwin, *Thirty queries* (London, 1652/53), 13.

48. Goodwin, *Divine authority of the Scriptures*, 157–58.

49. J. G[oodwin], *Independencie Gods Veritie: or, the necessitie of toleration* (London, 1647), 6, 8.

of a placeless, gathered church, entered into voluntarily and distinguished from the catchall popularity of the parochial system.<sup>50</sup>

The Presbyterians lost no opportunity to assail Goodwin and his followers for advancing such positions. To writers like Prynne and Edwards, Coleman Street meant opening the door to uncontrollable license. Once the notion of toleration was accepted, where would truth be defended? What would stop every mechanick preacher from launching his (or her) own church? In the second and third parts of *Gangraena*, Edwards in fact laid aside other targets in order to focus his attacks on the Coleman Streeters, singling them out as representative of every sectarian peril that the Presbyterians offered to suppress. Edwards denounced Goodwin and his crew as “monstrous, . . . a compound of Socinianisme, Arminianisme, Libertinisme, Antinomianisme, Independency, Popery, yea and of Scepticisme.”<sup>51</sup> His supporters went further still, charging that all the most desperate political radicals of the period “speake naturally M. John Goodwins language.”<sup>52</sup>

Is this where Coleman Street’s reputation for radicalism truly originates? Perhaps. While it is indeed possible to identify radicals in Coleman Street generations earlier, and while it was certainly linked to radicals and radical thought by the late Elizabethan period, its unique notoriety—its status as a kind of synecdoche for radicalism itself—dates from this confrontation. Indeed, once this reputation was in place, it could be used, by modern historians as well as Civil War polemicists, to explain away contemporary opinions arising there, and even to classify prior residents as “radical.” Robert Fludd is a good example: although his Paracelsian opinions had once caused ructions in the College of Physicians, he was in fact politically orthodox, and in religious terms probably a rather high episcopalian. If true, there is a certain irony in this. What produced the extreme identification of radicalism with a place—with Coleman Street—was precisely an attempt in Coleman Street itself to *decouple* place and opinion. Goodwin’s congregation sought to adopt toleration as the basis for a new, placeless space, and to use print to secure it.

Who populated that extended placeless space? It was a vitally important question, and the Presbyterians thought they knew the answer. They gave the Coleman Street constituency of readers a name. They dubbed them “publicans.” The term is archaic now, except in reference to barmen, but in the seventeenth century it had a specific and pointed meaning. Publicans were people who were “cut off from the body of Christ.” They were those excluded from the “True Church”—excommunicated souls, or never-admitted ones. The publicans were the barbarians at the pearly gates. The Presbyterians saw any plan to make this group into a church, perhaps rightly, as a radical inversion of authority, taking it from the ministry and placing it in the minds of the very readers whom they saw as ripe for evangelizing. Vicars had early on acknowl-

50. E.g., J. Goodwin, *Theomachia* (London, 1644), 15–16; [J. Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries concerning a late printed paper* (London, 1646); W. Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1955), 147–49.

51. A. Hughes, “*Gangraena*” and the Struggle for the English Revolution (Oxford, 2004), 172.

52. *Ibid.*, 352.

edged that Goodwin himself spoke of his Coleman Street auditors as if they were a rational audience; and he concentrated his polemical fire on this notion, insisting that they were but ignorant mechanicks, a “too-too credulous” crowd of “*Soul-murthered Proselytes of Coleman-street.*” What Goodwin and his Coleman Streeters were seeking to do, in short, was to transmute *publicans* into a *public*.<sup>53</sup>



It was for this reason that Coleman Street became the focus of the first sustained and open debate in English history on the concept of a free press. It took place in 1652–55, and was sparked by a group of Presbyterian booksellers. The booksellers triggered the exchange when they published a manifesto called *A beacon set on fire*, urging Parliament to enforce some kind of licensing system to rein in printed blasphemy, some of which was papist, some materialist, and some the product of Coleman Street.<sup>54</sup> One of the Stationers in particular, the veteran Michael Sparke (who had been Prynne’s bookseller in the 1630s), introduced what proved to be the flammable topic of Coleman Street itself, by name. Sparke warned that the old ideal of a learned ministry was disappearing, to be replaced by “new Praters or Preachers [who] have gifts[,] they will say, and that passes *Humane Learning.*” Their “Disputations,” he warned, were “begun in *Coleman-street,*” but if they were not snubbed out, they would end everywhere.<sup>55</sup>

The exchange that ensued ranged very widely. Colonel Thomas Pride recruited a group of fellow army officers, for example, and repaid Goodwin’s support for his Purge by employing the remarkable radical triumvirate of Henry Hills, Giles Calvert, and William Larnar to publish an indictment of the Stationers. Pride’s group accused them of selling the worst heresies themselves and of acting as stooges for a Presbyterian plot. If “equal liberty” be permitted to engage the works of popery and heresy in print, they charged, Christ’s truth would always win the day.<sup>56</sup> This notion of an open battleground soon became the focus of the debate—and, with that, Goodwin and what the Presbyterians called his “idol” of “*Universal Toleration.*” They did not share his and Pride’s optimism about the inevitable victory of truth in an open exchange. A major reason was their conviction that the enemy would not announce itself honestly. Universal toleration, they claimed, would permit the surreptitious advance of Jesuitical popery under the guise of Arminianism.<sup>57</sup> This was no fair fight, in which texts or authors could be taken at face value; indeed, the papists were well known to send out emissaries “disguised under the name of Army-men, Church-members and Anabaptists.”

53. Vicars, *Coleman Street conclave*, 34–36; J. Goodwin, *Sion-Colledg visited* (London, 1648), 27–29. The theological notion of publicans derives from Luke 18–19, with its accounts of Zacheus and of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The word is nowadays often parsed as “tax collector.”

54. L. Fawne, S. Gellibrand, J. Kirton, J. Rothwell, T. Underhill, and N. Webb, *A beacon set on fire* (London, 1652), 4.

55. M. Sparke, *A second beacon fired by Scintilla* (London, 1652), 8–10.

56. T. Pride, W. Gough, T. Bridge, R. Merest, W. Kiffen, I. Gray, G. Gosfright, and S. Richardson, *The beacons quenched* (London, 1652), 7.

57. L. Fawne, S. Gellibrand, T. Underhill, J. Rothwell, J. Kirton, and N. Webb, *The beacon flaming with a non obstante* (London, 1652).

Each side, in fact, saw the subject of printed books' credit as central. This was because "print" was no hypostasized entity to them, as it can tend to become in modern historians' work: it was a craft, exercised by flesh-and-blood craftsmen in a fallen world. It was the latest stage in a long and highly contested history of textual creation, transmission, and reading about which Protestant theologians were experts. Just such an expert cadre was essential to weed out deception in books, argued the Presbyterians. Mere Stationers, let alone readers, were incompetent to do so, so some system of licensing was essential to sustain a truly free and virtuous realm of print.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Goodwin accused the booksellers themselves of having committed "Forgerie" in quoting his own words, and inveighed against them for wanting to subject all learning to the wills of mere men deemed orthodox by the presbyters. These too were practices with long and legendary histories in Protestant circles. Licensing would simply authorize such falsification. Besides, it would deny the nation the "gifts, parts, experiments, diligence and labours" of its members. It was therefore "ill consistent with the interest and benefit of a free Commonwealth."<sup>59</sup>

In the end, therefore, the clash over a print-based public known as "Coleman Street" came down to a confrontation between two "arts" of providential import. One was the "black Art" that Goodwin allegedly practiced in Swan Alley "to undermine the authority of the Scriptures." The other was a rival "Art" that he charged the Presbyterians with following in their headquarters, Sion College, to falsify texts so as to present the upholders of true religion as its destroyers.<sup>60</sup> This first battle over a free press was therefore represented by both sides as a battle between Coleman Street and Blackfriars. Between these two places the nature and import of a 1650s public linked by print were contested. A line drawn between them would have neatly bisected the City of London.



It is appropriate to end by reflecting on the notion of "places and spaces" that inspired this volume and the conference from which it derives. Michel De Certeau cast the distinction in this way: "space," he declared, "is a practiced place." While a place was formed by the mere ordering of elements—the layout of buildings along a street, say—a *space* came into being when a place was supplemented with change occurring over time or across distance. So a street was a place, in his view, but a street full of people was a space. Certeau's other example, interestingly enough, was a printed page. "An act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place," he remarked, and described this as "a written text." Streets and pages were both places transformed into spaces by human use—by sociability, interaction, and flow. And mediating between

58. L. Fawne, S. Gellibrand, J. Kirton, J. Rothwell, T. Underhill, and N. Webb, *A second beacon fired* (London, 1654), 1, 3, 4.

59. Goodwin, *Fresh discovery*, 1, 4–6, 46–47; J.G[oodwin], *The six book-sellers proctor non-suited* (London, 1655), 10–11.

60. J. Goodwin, *A fresh discovery of the High-Presbyterian spirit* (London, 1654), 25–28.

places and spaces were stories—histories told by people, which constantly resituated the two with respect to each other and to new elements.<sup>61</sup>

In these terms, the identity of Coleman Street as a place was specific and unusual enough. Its identity as a space, however, may be described as telescopic: it could extend almost indefinitely, to encompass the rest of London, or Amsterdam and the New World. It could also contract down to a specific meeting house or home, however (such as Goodwin's), or even to an individual's own religious self. Any of these might be meant when people used the phrase "Coleman Street." Or, again, they might not mean a physical place at all, but a particular set of convictions. One can see this in Abraham Cowley's play *Cutter of Coleman Street*, which was adapted from a 1642 comedy, performed in 1661, and printed two years later. Although it made casual reference to Coleman Street religious radicalism, the play itself was not in fact set in any identifiable street.

In the end, the question Coleman Street posed was that of the essence of a community. Was that essence spatial (the parish) or spiritual (the gathering)? Goodwin's group in Coleman Street tried to make it spiritual: in Certeau's terms, they delinked place from space. This had a specific theological element, in Goodwin's commitment to reason, general redemption, and the embrace of "publicans." It may have had an aesthetic side too: Samuel Hering, a follower of Jacob Boehme and a member of Henry Jessey's Swan Alley congregation, maintained that churches should be painted black to remind congregants of "that blacknesse and darkenesse that is within them."<sup>62</sup> And the Presbyterians' association between Coleman Street and an anarchy of cheap print suggests a rather different genealogy—one that would trace the couple of hundred yards northwest from Coleman Street to Grub Street.<sup>63</sup> In any case, for contemporary Presbyterians the very question posed by Goodwin and his followers was profoundly threatening. That is why they identified Coleman Street so vehemently with every anarchic idea or practice they could think of. But in the next generation so-called Arminian ideas akin to Goodwin's would become central to Latitudinarian theology. And his commitment to publicans would become a commitment to the public.

Certeau had something to say about such points of ending and beginning. He remarked that the interplay of place and space in stories was resolved only with the imposition of a dead object, which he likened to a tomb—something that clamped down on history. (The thought takes on added eeriness when one realizes that some of these reflections about space and place in the city occurred to Certeau while he was looking out over New York from the top floor of the World Trade Center.)<sup>64</sup> In Coleman Street this sort of clamping down happened twice, first symbolically and then literally. First,

61. M. De Certeau, "Spatial stories," in S. Rendall, trans., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), 117–18.

62. Spraggon, *Puritan iconoclasm*, 55.

63. I owe this very interesting suggestion—which deserves a paper in its own right—to Deb Harkness.

64. M. De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in G. Ward, ed., *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford, 2000), 101–18, esp. 101–2.

the Restoration regime executed Venner in Swan Alley, his body becoming the full stop under the Great Rebellion. Second, in 1666 the Great Fire destroyed the place. What it was like after that can be gleaned from Samuel Pepys, who found himself lured into Coleman Street on a cold night in February 1668, more than a year after the fire. He suddenly found himself in a landscape of deserted ruins—a place, he wrote, “as cunning . . . to have done us a mischief in as any I know.”<sup>65</sup> The silence that unnerved Pepys was very different from what he would have found in Goodwin’s time, when talk, paper, and print filled the precincts. But Christopher Wren himself was about to start rebuilding St. Stephen’s. All that would survive from Goodwin’s ruined church was a mural of the apocalypse. Around Wren’s new church would rise the safely polite townhouses of the eighteenth century. It represented a turning point. Pepys witnessed the demise of Coleman Street as place. But as space it would leave a legacy.

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#### ABSTRACT

Coleman Street was notorious in seventeenth-century London as the fount of all radicalism. The notoriety of this quite specific place, Adrian Johns argues, arose not only from the fact that radicals did live there but also from an intense controversy those radicals ignited about the proper relation of place to politics and religion in general. When John Goodwin sought to disentangle religion from territory by supplanting the local parish with a “gathered” congregation, he sparked years of confrontation on this broader issue. His congregants conceived of themselves as a virtual community, held together by print—a boundless “greater Coleman Street,” as it were. It was this broader concept that contemporaries were invoking when they stuck the label *Coleman Street* onto all and sundry radical ideas. The effort triggered the first British debate over the freedom of the press and bequeathed to the Restoration a compelling concept of a public sphere. Keywords: the public sphere in the seventeenth century, “gathered” congregations in the seventeenth century, Arminianism, John Goodwin, John Davenport

65. S. Pepys, *Diary*, R. Latham and W. Matthews, eds., 11 vols. (London, 1995), 9:54–55. Pepys’s account here was an example (actually, rather a late one) of a commonly expressed rhetoric of loss and emptiness that grew up to describe the spaces destroyed by the Fire; see C. Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge, 1998), 3–38.