

*The Flushing Remonstrance, the Bowne House, the Quaker Meeting House in Flushing,  
New York: A Trajectory of American Religious Freedom*

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*And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, Turk, or jew;  
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell  
There God is dwelling too*

William Blake, "The Divine Image" from *Songs of Innocence* (1789)

American religious freedom does not have a single point of origin. Its story is longer and more complicated than we have thought. No one person, place, or event can take credit as the primary cause or inspiration for religious freedom in America. Rather, it is the fruit of a cumulative process of struggles, innovations, and changes both political and religious. American religious freedom is indebted to a number of different people, places, and events. Its origins unfolded in different ways in the various colonies that eventually became the United States -- sometimes hardly at all. Rhode Island, begun in the 1630s, was one of the first and most radical examples. Virginia on the other hand, begun in 1607, was one of the strongest opponents of religious freedom until the American Revolution. Roger Williams, Maryland, William Penn, New York, Pennsylvania and more all contributed to the ultimate outcome, but none of them alone exercised the decisive influence. On the eve of the American Revolution, it seemed as if the Church of England was about to become the official religion of *all* the colonies. It had already gained that status everywhere south of the Mason-Dixon line. There was no consistent trend or tendency towards disestablishment religious freedom. The trajectory was ambivalent, uncertain, halting, faltering.

One important step in that process is represented by the Flushing Remonstrance of December 1657. Flushing is the English version of the name of an important Dutch port town at the time, Vlissingen, after which a town established in the Dutch colony of New Netherland (now New York) in 1645 was named. Twelve years later, thirty-one of its male inhabitants signed their names to a petition (or, in Dutch parlance, Remonstrance)

protesting a recent law forbidding them from welcoming Quaker missionaries into their community. None of the men was Quaker yet. Quakerism was still a new religion in 1657. Nonetheless, they expressed their willingness -- need, even -- to hear the Quakers' message. And, while several of the men and their neighbors (including John Bowne, who, while he did not sign the Remonstrance, later defended the Remonstrance's principles in support of his right to host Quaker meetings for worship in his house) eventually became Quakers, not all of them did. In 1657 this support for the Quakers' right to preach represented a new and still rare form of religious tolerance: the willingness to extend religious liberty to a new, virtually unknown, and controversial religion.<sup>1</sup>

While the Flushing Remonstrance has not received the same sort of attention in the story of American religious freedom as figures like William Penn and Thomas Jefferson or the colony of Maryland, it holds a distinctly important position in that larger story. Others have already argued that its appeal to religious freedom and liberty of conscience has rung down across the centuries.<sup>2</sup> In that sense, it is part of a broader discourse extant in colonial America that favored liberty of conscience. However, I would say it is also a unique contribution to the colonial American debate on religious liberty, both in terms of how it was produced and what it said. For, unlike all those other steps along America's path to religious freedom (including Roger Williams' Rhode Island), it represents what regular colonists, as opposed to their elite rulers, were willing to endorse: a vision that went far beyond what any elite thinker, including Roger Williams and William Penn, dared support. It appeared in a moment of defiance. It was the product of a meeting of townspeople to protest a law restricting religious liberty in the Dutch colony of New Netherland. It is altogether a unique document, representing the views of a community of common people who intended to live by those principles rather

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the Flushing Remonstrance in its immediate context, see Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> For a few of the works linking the Remonstrance more directly to later American Religious Freedom, see Harop A. Freeman, "A Remonstrance for Conscience," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 106, no. 6 (1958), 806-830; Tabettha Garmen, "Designed for the Good of All: The Flushing Remonstrance and Religious Freedom in America," (M.A. thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2006).

than just the ideas of a single thinker who may or may not have had the chance to put those ideas into practice with a wider community.

While not an immediate success in terms of changing official policy -- the Dutch authorities rejected its message and punished the town leaders who presented the Remonstrance to them -- the Flushing Remonstrance nevertheless is an important piece of the bigger story of American religious freedom for several reasons. It announced the philosophy of religious liberty that has been a cornerstone of Flushing for over three and a half centuries, creating a haven for religious freedom within New York which, on the whole, took a more conservative approach to religious liberty. This stance gave Flushing a strong regional importance in promoting religious pluralism in New York. It also represents a significant link between the ideas of Roger Williams and those of Quakers like William Penn: a number of the colonists had lived in Rhode Island and would have known Roger Williams's ideas, while some of them and their descendants became Quakers like Penn. The Flushing Remonstrance is also special for the way it shows colonists thinking in transnational terms. The signers were primarily English men but they presented their argument in terms of Dutch law and Dutch ideas of tolerance. That the Dutch authorities did not entirely agree with them does not diminish its significance as a uniquely international document: most contemporary texts on toleration were drawn up with just one national context in mind. It is also a deeply religious document, drawing much of its reasoning directly from the Christian Bible. Nevertheless, it was a generous reading of the Bible that did not restrict itself to Christians only, nor even to the religions known to Europeans of the time.

Ultimately, the Flushing Remonstrance is arguably of greater interest and relevance today than any other expression of religious freedom from colonial America because it is the one document that endorses tolerance for new and as yet unknown religions. This gesture sets it apart from all other statements in favor of religious liberty in colonial America, which restricted themselves to known religions. Roger Williams shared the Remonstrance's endorsement of toleration for non-Christians but opposed religious innovations. William Penn shared the Remonstrance's endorsement of liberty of conscience but restricted it to Christians only. Maryland, New York, and most of the other colonies that had some scheme of toleration likewise restricted their vision

officially to Christians (although New York's governors extended this to include Jews). Carolina, the one place where, in theory, non-Christians were to be tolerated, did not extend that toleration to new religions, only to those already known to exist. Thus, in its openness to both non-Christian religion as well as new revelations, the Flushing Remonstrance stands out as the one contribution to colonial America's debate on religious freedom that was open to the future rather than just focused on preserving the present status quo.<sup>3</sup>

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This essay takes as its primary task an analysis of the origins and significance of the Flushing Remonstrance and its connection to John Bowne. That is the most difficult link to establish in the chain between the Remonstrance, the Bowne House, and the Quaker Meeting House -- the latter two being clearly connected through the life and works of John Bowne. My task is a difficult one for, apart from the text of the Flushing Remonstrance itself, we have very little evidence to work with. Apart from examining the text itself, the best that can be done is to trace the lives of those who signed it to see what sort of intellectual and theological currents of thought they could have been exposed to that could then have contributed to the composition of the Remonstrance. That is an important task, for the Remonstrance is indeed a unique text that does not simply mimic the ideas of any single thinker at the time. It had to have had multiple sources, and those sources must have come from the men who signed it. No doubt there were other influences -- for example the women of the community who were not asked to sign -- but those are even more difficult to establish. Using the lives of the signers as a guide, then, this essay sets the origins of the Flushing Remonstrance in its widest possible contemporary context. It is an international, trans-Atlantic story involving some known and some not so well known contemporaries and their ideas.

Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged from the start that there is so little that we know, or ever can know, about the Remonstrance or the men of Flushing who

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the different policies of religious toleration in colonial America and the British Empire as a whole, see Evan Haefeli, "Toleration and Empire: The Origins of American Religious Diversity," in Stephen Foster, ed. *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, supplemental volume, William Roger Louis, ed. *Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 103-135.

composed and signed it. In 1789 a fire destroyed the home of the town's clerk, and with it the town's colonial archives, which might have given us a more detailed account of how it was composed and what the community did with it after 1657. Instead, we have to rely on various scraps of information from other archives to account for how and why it all came together as it did. We know that the document was composed after a meeting of the residents and reflects the ideas of at least some two dozen people, probably more, who had spent the previous two or three decades ruminating on the question of religious freedom. After all, their desire for it, combined with their experiences of dissent, persecution, and the struggle for a better life in colonial America, had brought them to Flushing in the first place. Thus, it represented more than the philosophy of a single person. This communal quality helps account for its slightly haphazard quality. After the meeting, and probably various other discussions, the town clerk drew up the petition. Then about thirty townsmen, including the sheriff and the town's blacksmith, signed it. Not all signed it at the same time, and not all who signed it were permanent residents. Some came from neighboring towns or soon moved away to other towns. Some Flushing residents who certainly agreed with its ideas did not sign it, most importantly John Bowne. There were also probably some in Flushing who did not agree with it. Alas, we do not know why some signed it and others did not, but it is clear that a minority within Flushing did not fully endorse the views of the Remonstrance and repeatedly complained to the Dutch and English authorities about their more radical neighbors.<sup>4</sup>

The Flushing Remonstrance thus represents both more and less than the communal consensus of Flushing at the time. It was not completely endorsed within Flushing, but was supported by people who lived in (or soon moved to) towns near Flushing (but still under Dutch rule). In the absence of additional information, we are reduced to a close study of the text itself and the lives of those who signed it (and their neighbors and relatives like Bowne) to explain its origins and significance. The text of the Remonstrance is short and distinctive enough to be worth reproducing before launching into a deeper analysis of its meaning and intellectual and theological sources. It begins by referencing the law it is protesting, then launches into an extended justification,

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<sup>4</sup> On religious divisions within seventeenth century Flushing and its neighboring towns under Dutch and English rule, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 146-147, 221-231, 261, 269.

in highly religious terms rooted in the Bible. One scholar has actually keyed lines in the text to a series of Scriptural passages (fifteen clear references to 13 different passages, highlighted and footnoted below).<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, its intellectual origins are fairly obscure. It emerges from the colonial records as something of a shock, completely different in tone from the other records that have survived from New Netherland:

*You have been pleased to send unto us a certain prohibition or command that we should not receive or entertain any of those people called Quakers because **they are supposed to be, by some, seducers of the people.***<sup>6</sup> *For our part we cannot condemn them in this case, **neither can we stretch out our hands against them,***<sup>7</sup> *for out of Christ God is a consuming fire,*<sup>8</sup> *and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*<sup>9</sup>

*Wee desire therefore in this case **not to judge least we be judged, neither to condemn least we be condemned,***<sup>10</sup> *but rather let every man stand or fall to his own Master.*<sup>11</sup> *Wee are bounde by the law to do good unto all men, **especially to those of the household of faith.***<sup>12</sup> *And though for the present we seem to be unsensible for the law and the Law giver, yet when death and the Law assault us, **if wee have our advocate to seeke,***<sup>13</sup> *who shall plead for us in this case of conscience betwixt God and our own souls;*

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<sup>5</sup> R. Ward Harrington, "Speaking Scripture: The Flushing Remonstrance of 1657," *Quaker History*, 82, no. 2 (1993), 104-109.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 13:22 "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise and show signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."

<sup>7</sup> Luke 22:52-3 "Then Jesus said to the Chief Priests and Captains of the Temple... 'When I was daily with you in the Temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour and the power of darkness.'"

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:29 "For out of God is a consuming fire."

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 10:31 "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

<sup>10</sup> Luke 6:37 "Judge not and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not and ye shall not be condemned: forgive and ye shall be forgiven."

<sup>11</sup> Romans 14:4 "Who art thou judgeth another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 6:10 "As we therefore have opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

<sup>13</sup> John 2:1 "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous."

*the powers of this world can neither attach us, neither excuse us, for **if God justifie who can condemn and if God condemn there is none can justifie.***<sup>14</sup>

*And for those jealousies and suspicions which some have of them, that they are destructive unto Magistracy and Ministrye, that cannot bee, for the Magistrate hath his sword in his hand and the Minister hath the sword in his hand, as witness those two great examples, which all Magistrates and Ministers are to follow, Moses and Christ, whom God raised up maintained and defended against all enemies both of flesh and spirit; and **therefore that of God will stand, and that which is of man will come to nothing.***<sup>15</sup> *And as the Lord hath taught Moses or the civil power to give an outward liberty in the state, by the law written in his heart designed for the good of all, and can truly judge who is good, who is evil, who is true, who is false, and can pass definitive sentence of life or death against that man which arises up against the fundamental law of the States General; soe he hath made his ministers **a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death.***<sup>16</sup>

*The law of love, peace and liberty in the states extending to Jews, Turks and Egyptians, as they are considered sons of Adam, which is the glory of the outward state of Holland, soe love, peace and liberty, extending to all in Christ Jesus, condemns hatred, war and bondage. And because our Saviour sayeth **it is impossible but that offences will come, but woe unto him by whom they cometh,***<sup>17</sup> *our desire is not to offend one of his little ones, in whatsoever form, name or title hee appears in, whether Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist or Quaker, but shall be glad to see anything of God in any of them, **desiring to doe unto all men as we desire all men should doe unto us,***<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:33-4 “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again who is even at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession for us.”

<sup>15</sup> Acts 5:38-9 “And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”

<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:16 “To one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things.”

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 18:7, also Luke 17:1 “Woe to the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come: but woe to that many by whom the offence cometh.”

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 7:12 “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”

*which is the true law both of Church and State; for our Saviour sayeth **this is the law and the prophets.***<sup>19</sup>

*Therefore if any of these said persons come in love unto us, we cannot in conscience lay violent hands upon them, but give them free egress and regress unto our Town, and houses, as God shall persuade our consciences, for we are bounde by the law of God and man **to doe good unto all men and evil to noe man.***<sup>20</sup> *And this is according to the patent and charter of our Towne, given unto us in the name of the States General, which we are not willing to infringe, and violate, but shall houlde to our patent and shall remaine, your humble subjects, the inhabitants of Vlishing.*

Clearly, the Flushing Remonstrance is an extraordinary document. It represents early Americans' willingness to defend what has now become a generally accepted principle of religious freedom for all. For this reason alone, the Remonstrance deserves special recognition. Until then, virtually all defenses of religious liberty tended to be either for one's own dissent from the established religion or to recognize a known, if now subordinated, religion -- like the question of whether and how to tolerate Roman Catholicism in the English world, or Protestantism in France. Even the question of Catholics tolerating Protestants (arguably a new religion) was not quite the same as what the Flushing Remonstrance proposed. Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the puritans of New England (including Roger Williams) claimed to be restoring the true original Christianity rather than inaugurating a newly revealed version of it. They claimed to be peeling away centuries of corruptions to get back to the simpler roots of Christianity, not innovating. The people of Flushing, on the other hand, were advocating tolerance for new revelations -- most immediately the Quaker message. Quakerism was a new religion for all of them as they had only just encountered it for the first time in the fall of 1657. They were not defending their existing religion but arguing for the rights of a new, largely unknown religion. Insofar as some of them were already sympathetic to the Quakers' message, this could be seen as having an element of self-interest. However, not all of the signers of the Remonstrance became Quakers. And the way the

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew 7:12

<sup>20</sup> Galatians 6:10 "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."



Remonstrance made its case for tolerating new religions as a matter of general principle was virtually unheard of at the time. Even more unusual was the linking of this argument to a vision of a religiously pluralistic society that granted the same rights to both Christians and non-Christians.

Where did the people of Flushing get all the ideas, apart from their clearly close reading of the Bible? Their Remonstrance represents a culmination of several decades of radical Protestant religious thinking in England, Holland, and America that, in the 1640s and 1650s, was producing dramatic religious and political changes on both sides of the Atlantic. The Protestant Dutch had finally, after eighty years of struggle, secured their independence as a Republic from Roman Catholic Spain in 1648; the English had fought each other in a short but bloody civil war that had ended with the abolition of their national church, the execution of their king, and the declaration of a Republic in 1649; both the Dutch and the English were busy colonizing what is now the northeastern United States. Flushing was the product of all of these influences. Established in 1645 with a patent from the Dutch governor, it was inhabited mostly by English immigrants who found in New Netherland a mix of economic prosperity and religious liberty then lacking within New England and the other English colonies.

The Remonstrance thus had Dutch and English elements to it. It claimed to be upholding the principles of the Dutch constitution -- at least insofar as these Englishmen (most of whom had never been to the Netherlands) understood it. New Netherland's religious policy was the same as that of the Dutch Republic, which allowed all inhabitants a basic right of liberty of conscience even though only the official religion of the Dutch Republic (or compatible churches from other nations) was permitted to be practiced in public: the Dutch Reformed Church and its Presbyterian allies from elsewhere. However, exactly what liberty of conscience meant in practice was something that varied across the Dutch world. The city of Amsterdam gave it a much more liberal gloss than anywhere else in the Dutch world, and that has skewed outsiders impressions of how generous Dutch liberty of conscience was ever since. In Amsterdam, Jews and Lutherans worshipped quite openly, while Catholics often worshipped in only thinly veiled establishments. People of many different religions mingled in its streets. However,

elsewhere in the provinces, Jews were not allowed, and Lutheran and Catholic places of worship were shut down if discovered.

The Dutch distinguished between belief (an individual right), and worship (a public right). Persecution for individual belief was unconstitutional. Unlike in England, inhabitants of the Dutch Republic or its colonies like New Netherland were not automatically considered members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Nor did they ever have to become such. The Dutch Republic's constitution contained a fundamental guarantee of liberty of conscience in ways that no element of the English constitution did. The Dutch abhorred physically coercing people into either believing its teachings or even joining in its worship services. That was what Spain and its Inquisition -- the forces against which the Dutch had fought for independence -- had done. However, most Dutch did not have a vision of religious freedom and pluralism to rival that of the people of Flushing. There were clear limits on Dutch liberty of conscience. Dutch law recognized only the Dutch Reformed Church as the so-called Public Church. It had a collective right over the public face of religion in the community that did not permit any other religion to enjoy similar rights of visible, public worship. No other church or religious institution was allowed to organize as a group, or build a religious house or temple for public worship. And, while not all government officials were required to be members of the Dutch Reformed Church, many of them were. If one wanted to worship as part of a group or have an important political career, one thus had to join the Public Church. That act was theoretically voluntary -- neither the church nor the state had the power to force individuals to join the church. Instead, the Dutch system encouraged people to join by depriving them of clear alternatives.<sup>21</sup>

Exactly how this system worked varied from place to place in the Dutch world. Authorities in some places, like Amsterdam, interpreted the rules very loosely. As long as people were not seen to directly challenge the power or prestige of the Dutch Reformed Church, they could organize so-called "hidden churches" in private homes or warehouses. In theory, they were worshipping in secret. In reality, in some cities, like Amsterdam, which tolerated religious diversity more generously than small towns in the

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of liberty of conscience in the Dutch Republic, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, chapters one and two.

Dutch countryside, or a colony like New Netherland, the operations of such hidden churches were essentially public knowledge. However, it was permissible as long as they did not challenge the status or authority of the Public Church. Stuyvesant on the other hand, as his gesture shows, adhered to a much stricter application of this policy of liberty of conscience. Consequently, he spent a considerable amount of time clamping down on efforts by various groups to organize congregations and worship outside the Dutch Reformed Church in New Netherland. When the Quakers arrived in 1657, he did what he could to keep them and their new religion out of his colony -- without, however, reverting to what even the most limited interpretation of liberty of conscience would consider religious persecution.<sup>22</sup>

The traditional Dutch right of liberty of conscience had been inscribed in the patent to Flushing, but it was not intended by the Dutch governors to be something distinct from the rest of the Dutch settlements (as the West India Company Directors later reminded John Bowne when he confronted them about the patent). Nevertheless, in New Netherland as elsewhere in the Dutch world, the boundaries of liberty of conscience had been contested since the 1640s. Lutherans, Jews, Catholics, and Baptists were struggling to assert their rights to practice their religion alongside the official religion, which in the colony as well as the Republic was that of the Dutch Reformed Church. For most of the colonial authorities, both in the Dutch Reformed Church and in the government, which in 1657 was headed by Peter Stuyvesant, liberty of conscience meant that individuals had the right to think and believe what they wanted. However, it did not extend to the right to act on those beliefs in performances of public worship or proselytization that deviated from the standards and control of the Dutch Reformed Church. Liberty of conscience was something internal to the individual. It did not bestow public rights. Those were the prerogative of the Dutch Reformed Church, which was known as the “Public Church.” In 1658, Stuyvesant illustrated the point in characteristically blunt terms in a debate with several English colonists. Debating the meaning of tolerance in the Dutch colony, he insisted that liberty of conscience “was in his breast, and withall [Sic] struck his hand on it.” The English believed he was “speaking against Liberty of Conscience.” They

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<sup>22</sup> On the Dutch religious establishment in the colonies, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, chapter three.

interpreted liberty of conscience according to its general meaning in the English world in those days and supported the rights of Quakers to preach publicly and organize congregations for worship.<sup>23</sup>

For all their close economic and other ties to the Dutch Republic, the English never fully grasped how the Dutch religious system worked. Virtually none of the signers of the Flushing Remonstrance had lived in the Dutch Republic. John Mastine (Marston) is the major exception. An Englishman who had enlisted as a soldier of the West India Company and probably spent some time in Holland before settling down in Flushing, he was by all accounts not particularly interested in radical religion. Another signer, Henry Sawtell, had lived in New Amsterdam before moving to Flushing, but it is not clear where he had been before that, but he had been born and raised in England.

In terms of personal experience, the majority of signers only knew the English world. Born and raised in England, they had settled in Flushing after experience in English colonies, primarily (but not only) in New England. Those colonies followed the rather different English model of enforcing the privileges and beliefs of a single Church. In England, it was the Church of England. In New England, it was the newly developed Congregational Church. The English system of a national established Church assumed that all English people belonged, or should belong, to the same church whether they chose to or not. The Church had a monopoly on education, social welfare, and even burial sites. While the Church of England claimed to respect liberty of conscience (it did not, for example, institute something like the Spanish Inquisition to police individuals' beliefs), it differed from the Public Church of the Dutch in that it had the power to punish people if they did not respect its authority or attend its religious services. Fines, imprisonment, or even physical punishments could be imposed on those who openly rejected the doctrines or liturgy of the Church of England, organized separate

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<sup>23</sup> Humphrey Norton and John Rous, *New-England's ensigne: it being the account of cruelty, the professor's pride, and the articles of their faith . . . : This being an account of the sufferings sustained by us in New-England (with the Dutch), written by us whom the Wicked in scorn call Quakers* (London, 1659), 19. On the struggles over liberty of conscience in New Netherland and other colonies before 1657, and the Dutch West India Company's comments to Bowne in 1663, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, chapters four and five, and 228-229.

congregations for worship, or preached without official authorization: all matters on which the puritans who migrated to New England had fallen afoul. Nonetheless, while those puritans disagreed with some of the doctrine and much of the practice of the Church of England, they essentially shared the belief in the importance of enforcing religious conformity and suppressing religious difference. They just disagreed over what the real religion should be. Once in Massachusetts, they set up their new Congregational Church order and punished those -- like Roger Williams -- who refused to conform to it. Williams was allowed to escape and found his refuge of Rhode Island, which went one step further than the Dutch and installed a religious liberty premised on the idea that no single church should enjoy a privileged position of any sort of state support. The more conservative English church establishment thus also produced a more radical reaction against it.

This contrast between the English and Dutch attitudes towards religious persecution can be seen in another incident from 1658 that illuminates the broader context within which the Flushing Remonstrance existed. A Quaker missionary, Humphrey Norton, traveling from Plymouth “to visit his seed under the Dutch government” (likely including some new converts in Flushing), stopped in South-hold, Long Island, then part of the New Haven colony. There, agents seized him and carried him to New Haven. After the colony’s leading minister, John Davenport, denounced Norton, its court sentenced him to be “severely whipt, and burnt in the hand with the letter H. for heresy.” He was then banished and fined ten pounds for the court costs. The sentence was carried out that very afternoon. Before a large crowd, Norton was “stretched forth and offered upon their Altar-Stocks in the view of all the people,” (as the Quaker account described it). He was then whipped and branded with a hot iron that burned “more deep then ever I saw any impression upon any quick creature” noted his fellow Quaker John Rous. Following Quaker principles that rejected such official punishment for religious beliefs, Norton then refused to pay the fine or to have anyone pay it for him even if it were “two pence.” Finally, “a Dutchman whose face he never saw before, ingaged unto them” to pay it without Norton’s “consent.” He insisted on it because he wanted to free Norton from the clutches of New Haven’s magistrates. Asked why he paid the fine, he “said his own spirit within him made him do it.” The

punishments meted out by the New Haven court no doubt reminded him somewhat of the notorious Inquisition, whose suppression of Protestantism within the Low Countries had been one of the principle causes behind the Dutch Revolt. As with those early independence fighters, his conscience, or, as these Englishmen transcribed it, “his own spirit within him,” could not countenance such flagrant acts of religious persecution.<sup>24</sup>

Stuyvesant and his fellow magistrates (some of them English), had no more love for Quakers than the leaders of the New Haven colony. However, Dutch law and culture prevented them from punishing Quakers purely for their beliefs, as heretics. Instead, they sought to combat the spread of Quakerism within their jurisdiction in a different way, by keeping them out of the colony. If they refused, they could be punished as disturbers of the peace (Quaker preaching in these early years could be loud, confrontational, and dramatic) but not as heretics. The Dutch ordinance against Quakers was passed probably in late October or November 1657, shortly after the first Quaker missionaries had arrived in the colony. It was the first and only law passed in New Netherland that targeted a specific religious group. Elsewhere, the Dutch had banished members of other religious groups before. Typically, the people subjected to such treatment were Jesuits and other Catholic priests who could be painted as a political threat to the Republic. For a few years after 1618, Dutch Remonstrants (a group of Protestant dissidents from the official church) had come in for similar treatment but that soon abated. To legislate specifically against another group of Protestants was highly unusual. But then, so were the Quakers.

The actual text of the anti-Quaker law has since been lost. The closest mention of it in a Dutch source comes from a September 1658 letter from two Dutch Reformed ministers complaining about the threat of “raving Quakers” to the colony that notes, “our government has issued orders against these fanatics.”<sup>25</sup> Otherwise, our knowledge of the law comes primarily from the opposition it raised. Apart from what the Flushing

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<sup>24</sup> Norton and Rous, *New-England's ensigne*, 50-51. Steven C. Harper and I. Gadd, ‘Norton, Humphrey (fl. 1655–1660)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Megapolensis and Drisius to Classis, 24 September 1658, Edward T. Corwin, ed. *Ecclesiastical Records: State of New York*, 7 vols. (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1901-16) (hereafter cited as ER) 1:433. Jaap Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest: Nieuw-Nederland in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Prometheus-Bert Bakker, 1999), 457n170, confirms the lack of direct information on the ordinance.

Remonstrance tells us, Quakers complained that it ordered that anyone who hosted a Quaker in his home was subject to a fine “of fifty pounds sterling, for every transgression, although it were but one person one night.” Quakers particularly resented that the law encouraged locals to turn informant against them by allocating “a third part” of the fine and promising anonymity “for the incouragement of base spirits to inform.” This last element was particularly disturbing, for Quakers and those who supported them could be informed on, “notwithstanding many of us did entertain them willingly, suffered them to speak in our houses, for which some were imprisoned, and some fined.”<sup>26</sup>

The law was rather unusual for the Dutch. Indeed, in passing it, the Dutch were following the policy of their English neighbors. Connecticut (in October 1656) and Plymouth (in June 1657) had recently passed laws fining those who hosted Quakers within the colony. The Quakers actually blamed Thomas Willet of Plymouth for giving Stuyvesant the idea for the law, which very much resembled that of Plymouth colony. The Quakers held Willet responsible for “incensing the Dutch Governor with several false reports of them that are called Quakers; for a little before this, Robert [Hodgson] was with the Dutch-Governor, and the Governor was very moderate to him. But since through misinformation, such a deadly enmity is grown up to him [Stuyvesant], that upon all occasions he doth seek to ruinate those that do receive or own the Quakers.” It also provided that “if any Vessel should bring a Quaker into their Jurisdiction, it should be forfeited with the goods.”<sup>27</sup>

The men of Flushing would have known that people were already suffering under the law when they drew up their Remonstrance. In December 1657, two Long Island colonists, Henry Townsend of Rustdorp (now Jamaica) and John Tilton of Gravesend, had been convicted under it. The two men were early and persistent supporters of the Quakers, providing them with a crucial entrée into the Dutch colony. Townsend, already convicted in September for organizing and attending conventicles, was presented to Stuyvesant’s court by “twelve of the principal inhabitants” of Jamaica. They claimed, “that the Quakers and their followers are lodged and provided with meat and drink and

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<sup>26</sup> Norton and Rous, *New-England’s ensigne*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Rous, Fox, and Cudworth, *Secret Works*, 12. On the intercolonial origins of the anti-Quaker law, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 156-169.

have an unusual correspondence in” their town thanks to the hospitality offered them at Townsend’s house. Townsend “openly” acknowledged this but did not beg forgiveness. In fact he still had not paid his fine from his September conviction. Now he was condemned to pay an exemplary fine of three hundred guilders and ordered “to remain in prison until the fine has been paid with the costs and mises of law as an example to others.” John Tilton, the former Clerk of Gravesend, was arrested and imprisoned for having “lodged a Quakeress,” one of the two who had been “banished from this Province of New Netherland” back in August. She had lived in Tilton’s house with “some persons of her following, adhering to the abominable sect of Quakers.” Apparently they were “neighbors” of Tilton’s and doubtless former Baptists (which had been the faith of the original settlers of Gravesend). Tilton claimed that the Quakers “came to his house during his absence,” begged forgiveness, and was given a reduced fine of twelve guilders. Townsend, like the Quaker missionaries, refused to pay the court’s fines and refused to let others pay the fine for him “being fearful to wrong a tender Conscience.” In the end his wife and friends, concerned for his health, being of “a weakly constitution and sickly” and likely to suffer from imprisonment in wintertime, collected “a pair of Oxen, and a Horse although he had no more, and gave them to the persecuters to free him out of their hands.”<sup>28</sup>

This was the immediate context that the Flushing Remonstrance was reacting to. However, the ideas that informed it must be traced out on a broader canvas. The basic principle of liberty of conscience was a vital part of Quaker beliefs. However, it was not an exclusively Quaker idea. Baptists, among others, had been advocating for it long before the Quakers appeared, and Baptists had come to Flushing shortly before the Quakers. According to previous scholars of the Flushing Remonstrance, another important source for this idea is Roger Williams, an apostle of religious liberty in colonial America and founder of Rhode Island.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1630s, Williams had

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<sup>28</sup> The cases of Townsend and Tilton, 8, 15 January 1658, Edmund B. O’Callaghan and Berthold Fernow eds. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany: Weed, Parson & Company, 1853-1887), vol. 14, 405-408; Norton and Rous, *New-England’s ensigne*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> For other historians’ thoughts on the Remonstrance, see Jeremy Bangs, “Dutch Contributions to Religious Toleration,” *Church History* 79, no. 3 (2010), 585-613;



advocated for a clear separation between religious and secular spheres, arguing they need not depend on each other. In fact, he believed the mixing of secular power with religion only tended to pollute religion. “Christendom” was his word for that mixture, and it was for him a degenerate form of Christian existence. To keep Christianity pure, one had to protect it from the influence of secular magistrates. For this reason, Rhode Island -- although a deeply Protestant Christian colony -- never formally established any church or religion, the first American colony to do so.

Indeed, much of the language of separation of church and state evident in the Flushing Remonstrance echoes statements by Roger Williams. For example, in 1643 he had asked readers of one of his first books “are you Moses’ or Christ’s followers?” Moses represented the idea of an established national religion, contained in the Old Testament stories about Israel. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, never insisted on or expected a similar sort of “national church.”<sup>30</sup> This statement was a Scripturally based way of expressing his idea that “the civil magistrate’s power extends only to the bodies and goods [and] outward state of men.” Williams insisted he had always “desired to be unfeignedly tender, acknowledging the ordinance of magistracy to be properly and adequately fitted by God to preserve the civil state in civil peace and order.”<sup>31</sup> He interpreted the Biblical passage of 2 Corinthians 10:4 “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” to mean that “God denies not civil weapons of to the civil magistrate,” but rather intended “a two-fold state, a civil state and a spiritual.” There should be “civil officers and spiritual, civil weapons and spiritual weapons, civil vengeance and punishment and a spiritual vengeance and punishment.” However, the two states were “of different natures and

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Tabetha Garman, "Designed for the Good of All: The Flushing Remonstrance and Religious Freedom in America," M.A. thesis (East Tennessee State University, 2006); Dennis J. Maika, "Commemoration and Context: The Flushing Remonstrance Then and Now," *Journal of American History*, 89, no. 1 (2008), 29-42; David William Voorhees, "The 1657 Flushing Remonstrance in Historical Perspective," *De Haelve Maen* 81, no. 1 (2008), 11-14.

<sup>30</sup> Roger Williams, “Queries of Highest Consideration (1643),” in James Calvin Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Williams, “Mr. Cotton’s Letter Lately Printed (1644),” in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 49, 52.

considerations, as far differing as spirit from flesh... civil weapons are most improper and unfitting in matters of the spiritual state and kingdom, though in the civil state most proper and suitable.”<sup>32</sup>

Another important element shared between the Flushing Remonstrance and Roger Williams is the theoretical openness to a range of different faiths, Christian and non-Christian. Williams was not the only contemporary to voice the argument that even non-Protestants had a right to toleration. His most famous and important book, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* insisted that “no persons -- Papists, Jews, Turks, or Indians [i.e. American Indians] -- be disturbed at their worship.” He was even capable of admiring other cultures’ capacity for toleration, noting that such persecution was “a thing the very Indians abhor to practice towards any.”<sup>33</sup> He also admired “the states of Holland who tolerate, though not own... the several sects amongst them which differ from them and are of another conscience and worship” suggesting it had “pleased the Lord to prosper the state above any other state in the world, beyond either England or Scotland, for the time since their wise permission?”<sup>34</sup>

This pluralistic vision, echoed in the Flushing Remonstrance’s reference to Jews, Turks and Egyptians derived more from Englishmen’s perceptions of what religious life was like in Holland than the reality of Dutch society. There was a growing Jewish community in Amsterdam. However, it was precisely because they were regarded as strangers, outside of the traditional Dutch community, that they were permitted their religious freedom. They were not tolerated as Jews, but as foreign, Portuguese, Jews.<sup>35</sup> There was no Muslim community in the Netherlands, be it Turkish or Egyptian. In Western Europe, only Venice (like Amsterdam, a major trading city) had a permanent community of Muslims, all merchants. They were allowed to worship as they saw fit

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Williams, “The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience (1644),” in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 115.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Williams, “The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience (1644),” in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 134.

<sup>34</sup> Roger Williams, “Queries of Highest Consideration (1643),” in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 321-322.

within a particular space, not unlike the Jewish ghetto. Occasionally a Muslim visited the Netherlands and was generally well treated, but no permanent community existed or practiced Islam in the Netherlands at the time. Even in Dutch East Asia, Muslims had to live their faith almost as covertly as Catholics.<sup>36</sup> As for the “Egyptians,” it is not exactly clear what the men of Flushing meant by the term. Most contemporary Egyptians had been Muslim for centuries by the 1650s, in which case they generally fell under the category of “Turks” as far as Western Europeans were concerned. Historian David Voorhees has suggested it is a reference to Gypsies, and that seems the best possible alternative. It was the term used for gypsies in the Netherlands. Perhaps, in the American context, it could also serve as a reference to Africans and indigenous Americans. Whether Gypsies, Africans, or Americans, the referent was a group of people excluded from the Public Church yet not recognized as having a separate church of their own. They were pagans or heathens of some sort or another, as the ancient Egyptians had been.<sup>37</sup>

Altogether, while the toleration of “*Jewes Turkes and Egiptians*” was a compelling idea, it was not quite the Dutch reality. It is, however, reminiscent of a common phrase that radical English tolerationists had used since the early seventeenth century. At various moments, Separatists, Baptists, and, later, Quakers all adopted some combination of this interfaith vision when advocating toleration and denouncing persecution. For the past several decades, when they spoke of religious freedom, they regularly asserted that toleration should be extended to “Jews, Turks, and pagans” or “Heathens and Pagans, Turkes and Jews” or “Turckes, Jewes, Pagans, and Infidels.” Exactly where the idea and phrasing originally came from was unclear, but by the 1650s it had become something of a stock phrase, reflecting a pervasive attitude that religious persecution of any group was wrong.<sup>38</sup> In 1666, for example, a Quaker imprisoned for his faith in England claimed that “Jews, Turks, and infidels would be ashamed to keep a man

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<sup>36</sup> Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 303-306.

<sup>37</sup> Voorhees, David William. “The 1657 Flushing Remonstrance in Historical Perspective,” *De Haelve Maen* 81:1 (2008), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Quotes in John Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution,” *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 4 (1998): 961-985.

in prison for such a cause, and it is high time for Christian magistrates to set the innocent free.”<sup>39</sup>

Still, there was something special about the English encounter with Dutch tolerance that seems to have inspired some to embrace, at least in theory, this pluralist vision of society. Baptists were the first to do so. Early Baptist leaders Thomas Helwys, John Murton, John Smyth, and Leonard Busher articulated the argument in print as early as the 1610s. All of these men had spent time in the Netherlands and used Dutch tolerance to criticize England’s comparative lack thereof. In 1612 and 1614 they published tracts arguing that religious liberty should be extended to “Jews, Turks, and pagans, so long as they are peaceable, and no malefactors.”<sup>40</sup> Baptists and radical Protestants would be the primary advocates of this sort of toleration during the English Revolution in the 1640s and 1650s.<sup>41</sup> The Quaker leader George Fox would later advocate religious liberty even for pagans “such as worship sun or moon or stocks and stones.” He claimed it was a sin to compel anyone’s conscience, whether they were “Jew, or Papist, or Turk, or Heathen, or Protestant, or what sort soever . . . let there be places set up where every one may bring forth his strength, and have free liberty to speak forth his mind and judgment.”<sup>42</sup>

The Flushing Remonstrance thus is more than simply a reflection of Roger Williams’ ideas: it is a distillation of radical English Protestant ideas from a number of sources, only some of which Williams agreed with. Williams was initially sympathetic to Baptists and briefly joined the Baptist community in Rhode Island, but ultimately left

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<sup>39</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles II, 1666-1667*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (London: Longman, 1864), 270, #115.

<sup>40</sup> Leonard Busher, *Religious peace or a plea for liberty of conscience* (London, 1646 edn) in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution, 1614-1661*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London, 1846), 33, cited in Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 234.

<sup>41</sup> See Coffey, “Puritanism and Liberty Revisited” and B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 181-4 on English millenarian tolerance of Turks and Infidels in the mid-seventeenth century.

<sup>42</sup> Fox quotes in Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 235 and Rosemary Moore, *The Light in their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 219. The later statement dates from 1661.

them. He also openly despised the Quakers. Its style of argument and reasoning is dramatically different from that of Williams. Where he based his arguments on history, reason, Scripture, and references to English law, the Remonstrance is almost entirely reliant on a much more mystical approach to Scripture, with no references to history, few appeals to reason, and claiming to be grounded in Dutch law (even though the colony's Dutch legal experts disagreed). It lacks some of Williams' key arguments, notably his image of the "ship of the commonwealth," wherein all passengers must "endeavor the common good,"<sup>43</sup> or the "hedge or wall of separation between the Garden of the church and the wilderness of the world,"<sup>44</sup> or the references to Biblical parable of the wheat and the tares, where Jesus suggests the Antichristian tares be preserved alongside the Christian wheat as "the only means to preserve the civil peace" until "the angles with their sharp and cutting sickles of eternal vengeance, shall down with them and bundle them up for the everlasting burnings."<sup>45</sup>

Rhode Island was not the only colony to defy the English norm of having an established religion. The governors of Maryland, another colonial experiment in religious tolerance founded in the 1630s, took a similar approach. However, they did so less by declaring religious liberty a virtue and than by avoiding their responsibility to officially support the Church of England within their jurisdiction. This lack of enforcement of England's official church provided a sheltered space within which Roman Catholicism -- officially proscribed throughout the English world -- could thrive. The men of Flushing no doubt would have much preferred the Rhode Island model than that of Maryland. Anti-Catholicism was a common factor in all the attempts at religious liberty in the Thirteen Colonies outside of Maryland, both Dutch and English, for Roman Catholicism and the papacy represented to these Protestants the complete opposite of religious liberty.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Williams, "The Examiner Defended in a Fair and Sober Answer (1652)," in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 238.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Williams, "Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed (1644)," in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience (1644)," in Davis, ed. *On Religious Liberty*, 109-110.

<sup>46</sup> For more on religious toleration in early Rhode Island and the comparison with Maryland, see Evan Haefeli, "How Special was Rhode Island? The Global Context of the

To understand what other sources could have informed the composition of the Flushing Remonstrance, we need to look at the life histories of the men who signed it to see what individuals, religious beliefs, and ideas about toleration they could have come into contact with before 1657. Their biographies, traced through painstaking genealogical research, confirm the deeply English and religiously radical roots of the signers, all of who had been born in England. Most had emigrated first to New England, where they lived for a time, often in more than one town, before settling in Flushing. These New Englanders had gone first to Massachusetts before moving on to other colonies: Plymouth, Connecticut, and, most importantly, Rhode Island. John Bowne was typical of this pattern. He moved down to Flushing in 1651 from Boston with his “brother Edward Farrington.” Edward, who later became one of the signers of the Remonstrance, had just married John's sister. After visiting Edward’s uncle Thomas, one of the original patentees of Flushing, they decided to stay.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, even though he was not a signer, Bowne was close to those who did and shared a similar background. Of those who, like Bowne, came to Flushing via Massachusetts, most had lived in Lynn (Michael Milner, Edward Farrington, William Thorne, Sr., William Thorne, Jr.) or Salem (Philip Udall and probably William Pigeon). Both towns were known to harbor more radical religious sentiments than elsewhere in Massachusetts, which may have influenced these men. Roger Williams had lived in Salem before his exile to Rhode Island and found much support there. This predilection led some of their inhabitants to look with interest on the ideas of Baptists (officially proscribed in Massachusetts). That religious interest, plus a lack of land, encouraged a number of people from Lynn in particular to follow the Baptist Lady Deborah Moody and migrate down to Long Island. There Moody and her followers established the town of

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1663 Charter,” in Chris Beneke and Chris Grenda, eds. *The Lively Experiment: Religious Toleration in America from Roger Williams to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 21-36.

<sup>47</sup> John Bowne, *Journal of John Bowne, 1650-1694*, ed. Herbert F. Ricard, preface by Kenneth Scott (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1975), 17. For the biographical and genealogical studies, see Purcell S. Robertson, "Profiles of selected Patentees under the Kieft Patent to Flushing, October 10, 1645," (Mss., March 1974) and Purcell B. Robertson, "Profiles of the Signers of the Flushing Remonstrance," (Brooklyn, 1973), both in Bowne House Archive, Flushing, New York.

Gravesend. Several of these migrants, including Thomas Farrington, eventually wound up in Flushing. Edward Griffin had also lived in Gravesend before coming to Flushing, although he had arrived via a different route, from Maryland to New Netherland. Nicholas Parsell seems to have followed a similar path.<sup>48</sup>

The connection to Lynn and Salem is important, because it connects several of the men of Flushing to the emerging Baptist movement in colonial New England and its most prominent early exponents: Roger Williams and Deborah Moody. Although he soon left the church behind, Williams helped establish the first Baptist church in colonial America, in Providence Rhode Island in 1639. Moody, with a town patent like Flushing's that provided for liberty of conscience under Dutch law, established a covert Baptist congregation in Gravesend in 1645. However, while Moody and Gravesend would later be supportive of Quakers (she died in 1659), Williams would denounce them as misguided and wrong, not to mention rude.<sup>49</sup>

The Baptist connection to Flushing had recently been strengthened before the crisis of 1657. In 1656, William Wickenden arrived to preach and baptize people in the local river. Wickenden had lived in Salem before moving to Providence in time to join Roger Williams in founding the new Baptist church in 1639. He remained a faithful member of it even after his neighbor Roger Williams left. His visit to Flushing was part of a broader effort by the Rhode Island Baptists to spread their faith out of Rhode Island. The main mission had gone to Massachusetts, where they suffered fines and imprisonment. In Flushing, on the other hand, the sheriff of was one of those Wickenden converted. However, Stuyvesant's government subsequently deprived him of his post for countenancing Wickenden and his illegal preaching.<sup>50</sup>

Baptist ideas thus certainly had an influence on the Flushing Remonstrance, most notably in its advocacy for a strict separation of church and state. Such a separation, and

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<sup>48</sup> The biographical information derives from Purcell B. Robertson, "Profiles of the Signers of the Flushing Remonstrance," (Brooklyn, 1973), typescript in Bowne House Archive, Flushing, New York.

<sup>49</sup> Francis J. Bremer, 'Williams, Roger (c.1606–1683)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; Carol Berkin, 'Moody, Deborah, Lady Moody (c.1585–1658/9)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> On Wickenden's visit to Flushing, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 146-47.

the principle of liberty of conscience that justified it, had been a precept of English Baptists from the beginning. In 1612, just a few years after the first English Baptist congregation had formed in Amsterdam, the eighty-fourth article of their published confession of faith was quite clear on the point: “That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel, men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man’s conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Romans xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc. for Christ is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James iv.12).” Thereafter, in England and colonial America, Baptists were among the most outspoken proponents of religious liberty, at least for Protestant Christians like themselves. Their advocacy of separation of Church and State carried over to America, where they found an ally in Roger Williams. Rhode Island thus became the home of the first permanent Baptist community in colonial America.<sup>51</sup>

Such ideas were part of what got the Baptists in trouble in Massachusetts when they sent a mission from Rhode Island to spread their faith. In Plymouth, authorities also objected to Baptist, Quakers, and other religious radicals, although not quite as fiercely. Some of the signers of the Remonstrance (George Clere, Edward Tarte (Tarne)) had passed through Plymouth colony before arriving in Flushing, and that connection provides another potential source of exposure to the debates about pluralism currently circulating around the English Atlantic and ultimately invoked in the Flushing Remonstrance. In 1645, the General Court of Plymouth received a petition for complete religious freedom. The petitioners asked that a law be made that would “allow and maintain full and free tolerance of religion to all men that would preserve the Civil peace, and submit unto Government. And there was no limitation or exception against Turk Jew Papist Arian Socinian Nicholaytan Familist or any other.” The magistrates heard the

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<sup>51</sup> William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, revised edition Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 2011), 128. John Coffey, “From Helwys to Leland: Baptists and religious toleration in England and America, 1612-1791,” in David Bebbington, ed. *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 13-37; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty,” *Church History* 75, no. 1 (March 2006), 69-93.



petitioners out, and some supported the idea, but it did not pass. Nonetheless, the ideas were debated and in the air. Some of those who spent time in Plymouth could have picked them up before moving to Flushing.<sup>52</sup>

The signers who spent time elsewhere in New England would not have had such exposure to radical ideas about tolerance and separation of Church and State. This no doubt helps explain why not everyone in Flushing completely agreed about the religious future of the community. Those signers who spent time in other Massachusetts towns besides Lynn or Salem held a mix of religious views, from conservative to radical. Elias Doughty, son of a Presbyterian minister, was religiously conservative. Richard Stockton, on the other hand, supported the Baptists and his son became a Quaker (and his great-grandson became a member of the Continental Congress from New Jersey and signer of the Declaration of Independence). The same goes for those who moved on to Connecticut (including New Haven, which at the time was a separate colony). None of these places had anything to offer the philosophy of tolerance expressed in Flushing. Sharing the Calvinist views of the Massachusetts authorities, it was in many ways the most religiously conservative and conformist colony in New England. Since those who settled there had been filtered first through Massachusetts, it lacked the sort of religious radicals who gave early Massachusetts so much grief. Moreover, it was much more effective than the other colonies at keeping out religious dissent, including the Quakers. The anecdote related above about the Quakers' reception in New Haven colony helps explain why neither they nor the Baptists gained any purchase in Connecticut, even though they managed to overcome resistance in all the other colonies establish at least small footholds in Massachusetts and Plymouth, and large communities in Rhode Island. Only a few signers spent any time there. Nicholas Blackford did as a boy before moving to Rhode Island. Tobias Feake had lived along the frontier between Connecticut and New Netherland, where he met and married a Dutch widow, before he moved to Flushing and became its sheriff. William Noble seems to have lived there for a time before serving as a

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from Edward Winslow to John Winthrop, Nov. 24, 1645, in Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, *Pilgrim Edward Winslow, New England's First International Diplomat, A Documentary Biography* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2004), 224-26.

surgeon on a Dutch privateer. John Store had lived for a time in New Haven colony. While his specific religious sentiments are not entirely clear, his son became a Quaker.

Overall, Rhode Island was undoubtedly the most important source of inspiration for the Flushing Remonstrance. Thirteen of the signers (Edward Hart, Nicholas Blackford, George Clere, Robert Field, Anthony Field, Robert Field, Jr. -- a family that later intermarried with the Bownes --, John Ford, Nathaniel Hazard, Benjamin Hubbard, John Townsend, Henry Townsend, Nathaniel Tue, and George Wright) had lived for some time there before settling in Flushing. Rhode Island was where Roger Williams lived. It was where the Baptists who proselytized in Flushing before the Remonstrance was drawn up were based. More significantly, Rhode Island was also where a hitherto overlooked but very powerful source of the ideas in the Flushing Remonstrance lived: Samuel Gorton.

Virtually unknown and little studied today, Samuel Gorton brought a distinctly mystical brand of radicalism to America when he arrived in Boston in 1636. At the time, Massachusetts authorities were busy suppressing those teaching unacceptable doctrines, from Anne Hutchinson to Roger Williams, which no doubt encouraged Gorton to move on to Plymouth colony as quickly as possible. There and elsewhere, his views soon made him the object of persecution as well, reinforcing his belief in religious liberty. Within two years, Plymouth's government banished him. Seeking refuge in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, he made friends with a number of Anne Hutchinson's followers. However, enemies of the local governor whipped and banished him to Providence. Roger Williams refused to let him settle down there, forcing him and his growing band of followers to move to the next town north, Pawtuxet. His new neighbors objected to his ideas so much that they put the town under the government of Massachusetts rather than live with him. Gorton and his followers then moved south to start their own town, today known as Warwick.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> On Gorton's life and beliefs, see Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), chapter 10; Carla Gardina Pestana, "Gorton, Samuel (*bap.* 1593, *d.* 1677)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007; Raymond D. Irwin, "Saints, sinners, and subjects: Rhode Island and Providence

There, too, Gorton ran into trouble. Some of his Rhode Island enemies joined with local Native Americans unhappy about the new settlement to persuade Massachusetts to claim the territory and intervene against the heretics. Massachusetts sent down a troop of soldiers who captured Gorton and his followers and brought them back for trial. Convicted for their defiance of Massachusetts' authority as much as their "errors," the Gortonists were sentenced to hard labor. Released after a year, they were able to return home while Gorton went to England where, like Roger Williams, he secured a formal patent for his colony and entered the debates currently raging over religion and toleration during the English civil war. In England, Gorton found many more eager listeners than in America. He also was able to publish his side of his story along with his somewhat cryptic views, which have since become one of the only sources available on his beliefs. Gorton returned to Warwick after several happy years in England, but no local evidence survives from about its religious life.

For the rest of the seventeenth century, Warwick remained a distinctive religious community. It belonged to none of the religious groups around it. Gorton was friendly and encouraging to the Quakers when they arrived, but believed they were wrong and held on to his distinctive mix of mystical views until his death in 1677. A few of his followers preserved his ideas into the eighteenth century, but the Gortonists never established a formal church or religious institution. The Townsend brothers who signed the Flushing Remonstrance would have been the primary conduit for Gorton's views into the town. They had spent much of the previous decade living in Warwick and would have been intimately familiar with Gorton's belief in religious liberty and his stories of persecution.

Gorton is the likely source of the Flushing Remonstrance's mystical openness to new beliefs and revelations. He termed his experiences of persecution "my passion," just one of several ways in which he seemed to equate himself with Jesus Christ.<sup>54</sup> Unlike

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plantations in transatlantic perspective, 1635–1665," PhD diss. (Ohio State University, 1996), chapter 3.

<sup>54</sup> "Samuel Gorton's letter to Nathaniel Morton, Warwick, June/ 30<sup>th</sup>, 1669," *Tracts and other papers, relating principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America from the Discovery of the Country to the Year 1776*, ed. Peter Force, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Wm. Q. Force, 1846), no. 7, 11.

Williams, who believed that all existing churches were wrong and insufficient but that the true one had yet to be revealed, Gorton was certain that he was an “Apostle” (his word) of the new truth. As he put it, “as a true Apostle suffers hardships in the world...once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwrack, a night and a day I have been in the deep...in perils among false brethren, in weariness, painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and in thirst...these are the true and real expressions of a faithful and true Apostle, with respect to the worlds carriage towards him, and his faithful dealing in the cause of God.” Gorton was also different from Williams in that he believed this new religious truth of his should be shared. As he noted, “it is said, go and preach the gospel to every creature, or as the word is, in every creature, that is, present Christ Jesus unto the world.”<sup>55</sup>

This Gortonite belief that apostles could still roam the world helps explain the willingness of the people of Flushing to accept the Quaker missionaries. Some of them were willing to believe that new revelations could be made and should be hearkened to. This was an important difference from Roger Williams, who essentially believed that Christian perfection had been achieved over a thousand years earlier, in the first few centuries after Christ. The challenge was to repent the corruption that had infected Christianity since the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, reject the religious practices and beliefs that had accrued since then, and return to the primitive truths of the church. Williams was not really expecting dramatic new religious revelations to appear. He was more or a restorationist, looking to bring things back to their ancient purity. New innovations he looked on with skepticism: Anabaptism initially seemed promising, but was not satisfactory. Quakerism he was sure was wrong. Gorton and his followers, on the other hand, were open to something new, even if they did not always agree with it.

Gorton believed that he was preaching a new truth. His followers who moved to Flushing seem to have turned their experience with his preaching into a predisposition towards a variety of new truths, not just that of Samuel Gorton. No Gortonist community took root in Flushing, but a Quaker community did, and the Townsends were leading proponents of it. Quakers were well organized and did not depend as much on the vision of a single leader. Where the Gortonists never really managed to expand beyond

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<sup>55</sup> Samuel Gorton, *An Antidote against the Common Plague of the world... the arraignment of false interpretours of the word of God...* (1657), [C4], E3.

Warwick, Rhode Island, the Quakers established a vast network of “meetings” (as they called their congregations) that stretched across the British Isles to the Caribbean and North America, where Rhode Island became the center of the Quaker movement in the decades before the establishment of the Quaker colonies of New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the late 1670s and 1680s.

However, Gorton was not the first or only figure to broach the idea that new and better religion might be in the offing. A number of new sects, beyond the Baptists and Quakers, were established in the revolutionary years of the 1640s and 1650s. However, the Congregationalism first developed in New England in the 1630s was probably the most significant. Often grouped with Baptists and other sectarians in England as Independents, the Congregationalists put a stop to Presbyterian ambitions to establish a reformulated national Church in the British Isles by relentlessly advocating for religious liberty and the rights of Dissent (albeit primarily for themselves). One of the most important leaders of this opposition was the London minister John Goodwin, someone Gorton very likely got to know during his time in the city in the 1640s. In 1644, just before Gorton arrived in London (and while Roger Williams was there soliciting the patent for Rhode Island), Goodwin published a couple of his sermons under the title of *Theomachia, or the grand impudence of men running the hazard of fighting against God, in suppressing any way, Doctrine or Practice, concerning which they know not certainly whether it be from God or not*. The general tone of the sermons reflects the more dry, rational habits of much puritan preaching, very different from the often almost impenetrable mystical language of Gorton, which had more of an impact on the overall tone of the Flushing Remonstrance. However, Goodwin's basic point is the same as that of the Remonstrance. He even includes on his title page the key Scriptural quote from the Remonstrance, Hebrews 10:31: “It is a fearefull thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”<sup>56</sup>

The Flushing Remonstrance, then, was not the first or only proclamation in favor of religious freedom to appear in either colonial America or the Dutch and English world

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<sup>56</sup> John Goodwin, *Theomachia, or the grand impudence of men running the hazard of fighting against God, in suppressing any way, Doctrine or Practice, concerning which they know not certainly whether it be from God or not* (1644)

more broadly. It was, instead, the culmination of decades of experience and debate, reflecting ideas held by a number of religious radicals (most of them English), but combined into a unique mix that cannot be attached to any single person (like Williams or Gorton) or group (like the Baptists or Quakers). That unique mix reflects the way the Remonstrance derived its principles from a variety of individuals who had encountered different versions of ideas about tolerance in the course of their lives previous to living in Flushing. While this has made it difficult to classify the Remonstrance, it is also what makes it unique. While others, like Roger Williams, advocated for separation of Church and State or, like William Penn, for liberty of conscience, one cannot find all of its elements -- especially the mystical qualities deriving primarily from Gorton -- together in the other important texts of American religious freedom. The Remonstrance encapsulates the religious hopes and ideas of a variety of English religious radicals in the 1650s. It was too much for the Dutch authorities, and even later advocates of religious liberty, like the Quakers, would tone down their rhetoric noticeably.

Linking the Flushing Remonstrance to the Bowne House and the Quaker Meeting House is John Bowne and the Quaker religion he stood for after his conversion in the years after the Flushing Remonstrance was drawn up. His home was the site of Quaker religious services until he helped build the Meeting House around the corner. His defense of his right to hold those services rested on the principles of the Flushing Remonstrance - - which he did not sign, although he possibly could have. His brother-in-law did. It is anyone's guess why Bowne did not sign the Flushing Remonstrance alongside him. Maybe he was out of town on business that day, or sick, but otherwise he was around and would have been aware of the debates it provoked. Thanks to his journal, we know he was in town doing business in November 1657. Unfortunately, we do not know where he was in December. A daughter was born to his wife in October 1658, suggesting he was around the previous February to impregnate her. However, there is no other record of his activities in the crucial months in between.<sup>57</sup>

Whether or not Bowne was in town to support the signing of the Remonstrance cannot be determined, but we do know that he was aware of and defended its principles

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<sup>57</sup> Bowne, *Journal*, 18, 47.

several years later, after he had become a Quaker. The exact date of his conversion is uncertain, but it must have been sometime between March 25, 1659, the last conventional date in his journal, and 1662, when he begins employing the Quaker custom of dating the months numerically (“11 month”). Once he converted, he became the leading Quaker in Flushing. In the 1660s he held Quaker religious services for which he was arrested in 1662 after the magistrates of today's Jamaica complained to the Dutch authorities. Sent for trial back to Holland, Bowne invoked both Flushing's patent, the peaceable nature of Quakers, and the lack of "justis and righteousnesse" of the law that had convicted him to defend his actions. We do not know if he cited the Flushing Remonstrance specifically, but elements of all those parts of his argument are contained within it, which suggests that he was arguing based on the spirit of Flushing Remonstrance if not the precise manuscript itself. The West India Company authorities in Amsterdam were more sympathetic than Stuyvesant's government in New Amsterdam, but they were not entirely persuaded to endorse Bowne's cause. They would not let him return home until he signed an agreement to obey all future ordinances. Still, they also urged Stuyvesant not to proceed so "rigorously" against religious dissenters like Bowne "as long as he behaves quietly and legally, gives no offense to his neighbors and does not oppose the government." By the time that message arrived in New Netherland in the spring of 1663, however, it was largely moot. The English colonists on Long Island were refusing to obey recognize Dutch authority and Stuyvesant was losing control of the colony. The following year an English fleet conquered the Dutch colony and transformed it into New York, which enacted a different policy of religious toleration. Rather than supporting an official church across the colony, New York allowed every town to choose its official religion, beginning the era in which Flushing's distinct religious atmosphere could flourish with little interference from the outside.<sup>58</sup>

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In conclusion, it is worth recapitulating the ways the Flushing Remonstrance stands out as a unique contribution to the story of American religious freedom. First, unlike the writings of important thinkers on religious freedom like Roger Williams,

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<sup>58</sup> Bowne, *Journal*, 18, 47, 48. For a discussion of Bowne's ordeal, see Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 224-231.

William Penn, or John Locke, it was authored by a group of people -- the inhabitants of Flushing gathered together. The Town Clerk, Edward Hart, wrote it up, but claimed he “gathered the utterances of the people when convened in the town meeting” and wrote it “according to the intentions of the people.” It represented “the general votes of the inhabitants,” not, as the Dutch authorities feared, the “proposition” or “order” of a single individual.<sup>59</sup> It thus represents the consensus of a community, reflecting principles it lived by, rather than the idea of a single thinker that were later adopted by a community. The Remonstrance's somewhat garbled if passionately held ideas are a reflection of the compromise that must have gone into this joint statement. In short, it bears witness to common peoples' ability to endorse and practice religious liberty, guided in large part by principles they learned from the Bible as well as a lifetime of engagement with puritanism and a number of its radical offshoots, from Roger Williams to the Baptists to mystics like Samuel Gorton.

Second, unlike other colonial American proclamations, the document was not a statement of official policy. Rather, it was written as a protest against religious discrimination by the government. The people of Flushing claimed that their town charter gave them the privilege and right to protect liberty of conscience within their community, but it was a local defiance of a provincial law. They were not insisting that everyone follow their model exactly, but they insisted that within their community they had the right and obligation to protect liberty of conscience as they saw fit. The government of New Netherland disagreed, and punished the town's leaders for not suppressing these sentiments within the town. However, since the Dutch authorities never found anyone who could impose order on Flushing, the ideas expressed in the Remonstrance lived on among a number of the colonists, most notably John Bowne. Notwithstanding the persecution by the Dutch authorities, the ability of Flushing's Quaker community to thrive is the most direct and immediate evidence of the Remonstrance's local impact. By securing the Quakers' first permanent base in the middle colonies, Flushing became the stepping stone to a development of national significance, for it was in the Quaker

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<sup>59</sup> Edmund B. O’Callaghan and Berthold Fernow eds. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany: Weed, Parson & Company, 1853-1887), vol. 14, 404-405.



colonies of New Jersey and Pennsylvania especially that colonial American religious pluralism reached its furthest extent.

Third, and again unlike most other statements in favor of religious liberty in other colonies, the Flushing Remonstrance advocated including non-Christians within the community's religious tolerance. They explicitly mentioned Jews, Muslims, and peoples of other beliefs and backgrounds ("Egyptians"). The only other colonies that came close to offering such extensive religious liberties were Rhode Island (where Roger Williams advocated a similar wide-ranging tolerance) and Carolina, established in the 1660s, but in Carolina the theory was never put into practice and there is no evidence that the colonists supported the idea. In Flushing the local people endorsed this principle, bringing an important (but largely neglected) strain of tolerationist thought from England to New York.

Fourth, the Flushing Remonstrance makes a strong case for a complete separation of Church and State, one hundred and thirty years before the Constitution and a century and a half before Thomas Jefferson's famous letter proclaiming the wall of separation between the two realms. It is thus a rare and unique testament to popular sentiment outside of Rhode Island in favor of what would become US law long before local colonial governments endorsed it. This fact makes it an important step along the path to our contemporary religious freedoms, even if the Dutch colonial government did not find the argument convincing enough to accept. Indeed, the principles of the Remonstrance proved a challenge even to the more tolerant Directors of the West India Company in Amsterdam who, while they refused to punish Bowne for his defiance of New Netherland's laws against religious gatherings, also insisted that Bowne agree to obey the laws in the future. At the same time, in hopes of avoiding another such clash in the future, they asked Stuyvesant not to force the issue. This uneasy compromise between the principles of the Remonstrance that Bowne and Flushing stood for and Dutch colonial law did not last long, for first Flushing and then all of New Netherland shortly fell out of Dutch hands.

Fifth, and most uniquely, the Flushing Remonstrance expresses an openness to new religions, not just tolerance for the existing and known religions. Its opposition to religious persecution rested on a belief that there was still more religious truth to be

discovered, and everyone should have the opportunity to learn more as their consciences saw fit. To do otherwise would be to harm religious truth. This, too, is a unique view for the time period in both America and Europe. Here, again, the Flushing Remonstrance serves as a better testament to the present and future of America than other sources of religious liberty from elsewhere which defended existing religions, or restricted themselves to Christian faiths (and then usually just Protestant Christianities).

It is difficult to trace the specific impact of the Flushing Remonstrance after 1657. The Dutch did not alter their policy in response to it, although many of the people in Flushing -- especially those, like John Bowne, who became Quakers -- clearly continued to adhere to its principles. Quakers were the most immediate and direct beneficiaries of the Flushing Remonstrance. One can see Bowne defending principles expressed in the Flushing Remonstrance when he is in Amsterdam, defending his right to hold Quaker worship services in his house in the 1660s. By the 1690s, under the rather different laws of English New York, Bowne was then able to join with others in buying the land to build the Quaker Meeting House. In this way, the Bowne House and Quaker Meeting House have a clear link to the Flushing Remonstrance through the town's Quaker community and the person of John Bowne, who was a leading figure within the Quaker community and someone who had been called to defend the principles of the Remonstrance before the Dutch authorities even if he had not signed the initial 1657 document. Although Bowne did not sign the Flushing Remonstrance, he was a close relative and neighbor of several of the men who did and there is no reason to doubt that he was aware of or supported its sentiments.

The Flushing Remonstrance is an important milestone in the development of religious freedom in early America. It pulled the ideas and agitation in favor of religious liberty circulating in New England (and possibly Maryland) into what is now New York and blended them with the prevailing Dutch laws on liberty of conscience. Those ideas were then carried deeper into the middle colonies as subsequent generations of the signers of the Remonstrance moved on to New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Again, these links to the better-known hearths of American religious pluralism are most evident through Flushing's Quaker community. However, the Quakers were not selfish advocates of toleration only for themselves. The Quaker commitment to religious liberty made

Flushing, like New Jersey and especially Pennsylvania, a welcoming community for religious minorities of various sorts. In Flushing, by the late twentieth century, that tradition helped make it the most religiously diverse community in all of America.<sup>60</sup> The combination of the Bowne House and Quaker Meeting House commemorate two distinct phases in the long, hard struggle that New Yorkers had to attain the religious freedoms that they now cherish. It is a very different, more difficult, story than that of the other states, but it is equally important -- perhaps even more so, as it reminds us in ways that the other colonies do now just how uncertain and fragile those religious liberties were, and how important people like Bowne and other Quakers were in fighting for rights that many others -- Christian and non-Christian -- would also benefit from in the future.

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<sup>60</sup> On this, see R. Scott Hanson, *City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration, and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).