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John Dury's Apocalyptic Thought: A Reassessment

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The Protestant divine John Dury has long been identified as holding millenarian beliefs. However a closer reading of his apocalyptic commentaries and a more clearly defined use of terms reveals that Dury's apocalyptic beliefs are more complex than previously recognised. This article offers a detailed analysis of his preface to the European millenarian tract Clavis apocalyptica *to demonstrate that apocalyptic and millenarian belief in the seventeenth century is in need of a careful reassessment.*

One of the major difficulties in the study of seventeenth-century millenarianism is the lack of any accepted definitions. Historical scholarship recognises that eschatological and apocalyptic belief was central in the religious outlook of individuals in this period. However, many recent studies assume that anyone interested in the 'last days', or related themes, such as the appearance of the AntiChrist, universal reformation or a hope of a renewed or purified society, held millenarian beliefs.[1] This article seeks to challenge these assumptions and to demonstrate,

I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp and the anonymous reader for this JOURNAL for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

[1] B. Ball, *A great expectation: eschatological thought in English Protestantism to 1660*, Leiden 1975; P. Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the Reformation to the eve of the Civil War*, Toronto 1978; P. Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the millennium and the future of Israel: Puritan eschatology, 1600–1660*, Cambridge 1970; E. Tuveson, *Millennium and utopia: a study in the background of the idea of progress*, Berkeley 1940. K. R. Firth, *The apocalyptic tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645*, Oxford 1979; C. A. Patrides and J. Wittreich (eds), *The apocalypse in Renaissance thought and literature*, Manchester 1984; Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: a study in seventeenth-century English millenarianism*, Totowa, NJ 1972; Margarita Stocker, *Apocalyptic Marvell: the second coming in seventeenth-century poetry*, Brighton 1986; Richard H. Popkin (ed.), *Millenarianism and messianism in English literature and thought, 1650–1800*, Leiden 1988; William Lamont, *Godly rule: politics and religion, 1603–1660*, London 1969; Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse theory and the ends of the world*, Cambridge 1995; Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: the Puritan divines and the Puritan revolution, 1640–1660*, The Hague 1973; Paul Christianson, 'From expectation to

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as Bernard Capp suggested over thirty years ago, that individuals in the seventeenth century 'did preserve an awareness of the distinction between millenarian and non-millenarian eschatology and that modern analyses should be correspondingly specific'.[2] As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the presence of millenarianism between, roughly, 1600 and 1647 was not as significant as previously asserted and, by applying a more rigorous definition, it is possible to look anew at eschatological, apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs in this period.[3]

The importance of clearly defined definitions of the terms 'apocalyptic' and 'millenarian' is suggested by Richard Emmerson, who argues that a lack of clarity in the use of these terms makes it 'difficult to determine if historians are examining similar phenomena or conflating or even confusing related phenomena that for analytical purposes would be better kept distinct'.[4] Applying the strictest definition, therefore, a seventeenth-century millenarian is an individual who expects the imminent advent of Christ who will completely transform earthly existence and reign for a thousand years alongside his elected saints. During the millennium Satan will be bound and loosed again for a short period at the end and finally destroyed at the last judgement when all men and women will be judged and either condemned to eternal damnation or saved to reign eternally in the kingdom of heaven. Most individuals in this period were apocalyptic in their outlook in that they fervently searched for signs of the end, and various commentators searched the prophetic texts, such as the Book of Revelation, to trace the course of world history or to predict the destruction of the AntiChrist.[5] Of course apocalyptic thought is more complex and detailed than can be outlined here, but the point to make is that not all those who commented on the Book of Revelation, or who awaited the final conflagration, held millenarian beliefs. Most individuals still awaited the last judgement rather than a millennial or post-millennial kingdom and a clear distinction must be made between these

militance: reformers and Babylon in the first two years of the Long Parliament', this JOURNAL xxix (1973), 225–44; Bernard Capp, 'Radical chiliasm in the English Revolution', *Pietismus und Neuzeit* xiv (1988), 125–33; Rodney L. Petersen, *Preaching in the last days: the theme of the 'two witnesses' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, Oxford 1993.

[2] Bernard Capp, 'The millennium and eschatology in England', in Charles Webster (ed.), *The intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century*, London–Boston 1974, 429.

[3] K. Gibson, 'Eschatology, apocalypse and millenarianism in seventeenth-century Protestant thought', unpubl. PhD diss, Nottingham Trent 1999.

[4] Richard K. Emmerson, 'The secret', *American Historical Review* iv (1999), 1603–14.

[5] For alternative interpretations of the prophetic books see Patrick J. O'Banion, 'The pastoral use of the book of Revelation in late Tudor England', this JOURNAL lvii (2006), 693–710.

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two modes of thinking if millenarian and non-millenarian eschatology is to be understood.

John Dury is an individual repeatedly identified as a millenarian. This is based on his association with the Hartlib circle and the contacts that both he and Samuel Hartlib shared with Joseph Mede. For example, Katherine Firth comments that 'both John Dury and Samuel Hartlib had been in contact with Mede, and had accepted his interpretation'. Charles Webster also argues that their association and acquaintance with the works of Alsted, Mede and Comenius led them to a millenarian position. Richard Popkin sees John Dury as someone who 'was actively pursuing the millennium for at least fifty years'.[6] These assumptions have, however, obscured more than clarified Dury's eschatological position and more recent scholarship has continued this tradition to argue for Dury's millenarianism. For example, Jeffrey Jue argues that Joseph Mede significantly influenced Samuel Hartlib and Dury, who were attempting 'to prepare the Church for the coming of the Lord and the inauguration of the millennial reign'. Alexandra Walsham relies on Popkin's interpretation to identify both Hartlib and Dury as millenarian and Howard Hotson assumes their millenarianism with his comment that 'we still lack careful accounts of the genesis of Hartlib and Dury's millenarianism'.[7]

What is perhaps remarkable about Dury, is that for the earlier part of his career there is virtually no evidence that offers a clear picture of his

[6] Firth, *Apocalyptic tradition*, 242; Charles Webster, *The great instauration: science, medicine and reform, 1626–1660*, London 1975, 32, 509; Richard Popkin, 'The end of a career of a great seventeenth-century millenarian: John Dury', *Pietismus und Neuzeit* iv (1988), 202–20; Richard Popkin, *The third force in seventeenth century thought*, Leiden 1992. Popkin argues here (p. 95) that Dury, from the early 1630s until his death, 'was dashing from one conference to another, trying to advance his millenarian projects'. See also his essay, 'The lost tribes, the Caraites and the English millenarians', *Journal of Jewish Studies* xxxvii (1986), 213–27, where he also asserts (p. 213) that 'Dury was always on the look-out for signs of the crucial pre-millennial events'. Dury was well known for his ecumenical projects and his extensive travels in Europe to achieve Christian reconciliation: Bruce Gordon, 'The second Bucer: John Dury's mission to the Swiss reformed Churches in 1654–55 and the search for confessional unity', in J. Headley, H. J. Hillerbrand and A. J. Papalas (eds), *Confessionalisation in Europe, 1555–1700: essays in honour of Bodo Nischan*. Aldershot 2004, 207–26; Steve Murdoch, 'Subverting confessionalism: the network of John Dury, 1628–1654', in S. Murdoch (ed.), *Network north: Scottish kin, commercial and covert associations in northern Europe, 1603–1746*, Leiden 2006, 280–312; and S. Mandelbrote, 'John Dury and the practice of irenicism', in N. Aston (ed.), *Religious change in Europe, 1650–1914: essays for John McManners*, Oxford 1997, 41–58.

[7] Jeffrey Jue, *Heaven upon earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the legacy of millenarianism*, Dordrecht 2006, 82; Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500–1700*, Manchester 2006, 245; Howard Hotson, *Paradise postponed: Johan Heinrich Alsted and the birth of Calvinist millenarianism*, Dordrecht 2000, 160. See also Richard W. Cogley, 'The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the restoration of Israel in the Judeo-centric strand of Puritan millenarianism', *Church History* xxii (2003), 304–32, and Stella Revard, *Milton and millenarianism: from nativity ode to paradise regained*, in Juliet Cummins (ed.), *Milton and the ends of time*, Cambridge 2003, 42–81, who both identify Dury as a millenarian.

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adherence to a millenarian position or even suggests that he had such an intense interest in the 'last days'. There is a substantial amount of evidence from his printed writings that his major concerns were, firstly, to find a uniform method to interpret Scripture, which would contribute towards the settlement of religious dispute, and help to unite the Churches of Europe. Secondly, he was deeply interested in the moral and ethical education of human beings, as he saw this as an essential part of the process towards peace and unification, in preparation for the 'apocalyptic marriage' between Christ and his redeemed people in the far and distant future. A brief summary of these concerns is set out below, as this is fundamental in gaining a clear picture of his eschatological ideas.

Dury's foremost statement on education became, as Webster points out, 'a leading influence on puritan educational thought and its effect was apparent on many college proposals which emerged from a variety of sources during the 1650s'.[8] Dury's educational ideas proved popular because they fitted in with the moral and ethical impulse that underlay much of Puritan thought throughout the seventeenth century. As Thomas Rae suggests, Dury 'laid continuing emphasis on the need to think of man as a social being, his duty to give service to his society in a constructive fashion'.[9] The fundamental task of Dury's Reformed School is, therefore, that children should be educated in serving the good of society and fundamental to this is that it should train children 'up to know God in Christ, that they may walk worthy of him in the gospel and become profitable instruments of the Commonwealth'. The root of society's evils lay, according to Dury, in 'the preposterous methods of teaching the same, by which not only their time is lost but their spirits and affections are inured to evil customs of disorderliness, of vanity, pride and self conceitedness, which is the root of all our contentions, about matters of learning and science falsely called'. To overcome these defects Dury put forward a number of proposals, one of them suggesting that children should be constantly occupied so 'that no time of day is to be lost without some teaching exercise'. Furthermore, 'nothing is to be counted a matter of true learning amongst men, which is not directly serviceable unto mankind towards the supply of some of these defects which deprive us of some part of our natural happiness'.[10]

Dury thus saw his educational ideas and the complete improvement of the educational system as a means to promote the public good, and to act as a basis for the encouragement of Christian unity. He strove all his life to promote peace and unity among the Churches of Europe. Although he met with continued opposition from all quarters, he was dedicated 'towards the endeavours of Ecclesiastical Pacification, and the taking away of scandals and

[8] Webster, *Great instauration*, 217.
[9] Thomas Rae, *John Dury: reformer of education*, Marburg–Lahn 1970, 132.
[10] John Dury, *The reformed school* (London 1650), ed. H. M. Knox, Liverpool 1958, 25–6, 38.

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differences amongst Protestants first, and then also if it be possible amongst all other Christians, that the first part of our Evangelical profession may be set forward to some perfection'.[11] Recent scholarship on Dury's unification projects has demonstrated his ambiguous position on this and, as Anthony Milton has argued convincingly, Dury 'consciously tailored his unification schemes to suit different audiences'. Despite his self image as someone 'free from partiality' he did make himself into 'a very effective political operator'.[12]

Notwithstanding this ambivalent position Dury did, however, receive considerable support from the Puritan community in England and other Protestants divines in Europe. Tom Webster has shown, for example, how Dury cultivated contacts with individuals such as Stephen Marshall, Thomas Taylor, Richard Sibbes and Samuel Ward of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. These individuals were also committed with him to a scheme for the 'preparation of a manual of practical divinity to be translated for European consumption'.[13] Although the publication of this manual never came to fruition, there was a continuing interest in the project; in 1658 Dury published a tract outlining the precise meaning of a body of practical divinity and 'What the reasons are, for which it ought to be published, How the work may be effected and imparted unto those that have sued for it at our hands.'[14] This tract reproduces a number of letters dating back to 1633, to justify the compiling of such a work and to demonstrate the rationale of compiling it for publishing at home as well as abroad. The content of these letters also reflects a shared interest in the 'Practice of piety'. Indeed, the author of the letter signed by the German divines, mentions the great value of Lewis Bayly's book of the same name, 'which hath taken so much with many godly souls, that we find thereby wrought in them a very great growth of that Religious disposition, which doth consist in a pure and modest Profession of heavenly truth'. The writers therefore supported the compilation of a manual of practical divinity 'so that by this means, the minds of many men may be drawn back from the endeavours of strife'. In the words of George Horn, a manual would serve a two-fold purpose, firstly because 'there is not a more

[11] Idem, 'A motion tending to the publick good of this age' (1642), in C. Webster, *Samuel Hartlib and the advancement of learning*, Cambridge 1970, 101–2. For a brief history of his union efforts see also *The effect of Master Dury's negotiations for the uniting of Protestants* (1657), Sheffield University, MS Hartlib electronic edn 1996, 14/2/1/1A-6B.

[12] Anthony Milton, 'The unchanged peacemaker? John Dury and the politics of irenicism in England, 1628–1643', in Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds), *Samuel Hartlib and universal reformation: studies in intellectual communication*, Cambridge 1994, 95–117.

[13] Tom Webster, *Godly clergy in early Stuart England: the Caroline Puritan movement, c. 1620–1643*, Cambridge 1997, 257. The full list of the names of his sponsors is contained in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 'John Durie's sponsors', *Transactions of the Congregational History Society* xvii (1952–5), 91.

[14] John Dury, *The earnest breathings of foreign Protestants, divines and others: to the ministers and other able Christians of these three nations for a compleat body of practical divinity* (1658) (Wing D2855), sig. A2v.

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Sovereign remedy then this for the putting an end to the controversies and quarrels now between Protestants: nor fitter for the Propagating of true piety, even among the Atheists and Heretics'.[15]

Linked to Dury's interest in the manual for practical divinity were his writings on scriptural analysis. It was through these that he wished 'to teach the common people the way how to make use of Scripture by reading and meditating in their ordinary course; and should show also unto the more learned the Rules of a more exact interpretation of the word than is hitherto used'. Such a method went well with his ideas on peace and unity because a common form of analysis would give a fundamental 'common and infallible method of interpretation known; for the finding out of the true sense thereof'.[16] It is important to note that Dury started to develop this method early in his career and that Sir Cheney Culpeper, an active member of Hartlib's circle, took an avid interest in his 'method of meditation'. They had frequent correspondence and shared a mutual interest in the most effective means to analyse the Scriptures. In 1641 Sir Cheney wrote to Dury and acknowledged that he had possession of 'two or three little tracts of yours concerning the analysing of the scriptures', and indicates that he would be pleased to accept any advice Dury could give him on this matter. Dury responded to this request in another letter where he advised that 'the first Principles of the Method which I think every one should follow that will walk by a Rule in ordering his thoughts for Meditation and consultation'. The four basic rules are:

> 1. That a Man is able to order his own thoughts. 2. That the means to bring <order> then is a certain rule by which he should walk. 3. That this Rule hath certain Principles of which I am chiefly to speak. 4. And the ends or rather the objects towards which the thought are to be ordered are the acts of Meditating and consulting.[17]

Of importance for assessing and revising Dury's eschatology is his ground rule of scriptural interpretation, a method he adopted in his analysis of the Book of Revelation and which is to be found in his preface to the European

[15] Ibid. sig. B1v. As John Batten observes 'the term practical divinity was applied by Dury to doctrines of faith and morals which were of a practical rather than a scholastic importance': *John Dury: advocate of Christian reunion*, Chicago 1944, 131. Horn was professor at the University of Leiden. For a reference to the desire of German divines to compile a book of practical divinity 'gathered out of English books' see also Lambeth Palace Library, Gibson papers 933, fo. 64 (1633).

[16] John Dury, *A motion tending to the publick good of this age* (1642) (Wing D2874), 102

[17] John Dury to Cheney Culpeper, Oct. 1641, and 1642, in M. J. Braddick and M. Greengrass (eds), *The letters of Sir Cheney Culpepper (1641–1657)* (Camden Miscellany xxxii, 5th ser. vii, 1996), 159, 379. See also Stephen Clucas, 'The correspondence of a XVII-century *chymicall gentleman*: Sir Cheney Culpeper and the chemical interests of the Hartlib Circle', *Ambix* xl (1993), 146–70.

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millenarian tract *Clavis apocalyptica*.[18] This method is 'to show the way both of finding out analytically the true literal, material and mystical sense thereof, and of demonstrating and delivering the same unto other according unto the several degrees, of their capacity compositively'.[19] For Dury, therefore, the perfection of the moral nature of human beings, an emphasis on the practice of the devotional life and a uniform method of analysing Scripture were all fundamental to his vision of peace and unity for the whole of Europe. His eschatology was also underpinned and informed by these concerns, as the following discussion will demonstrate.

The most comprehensive and revealing statement made by Dury on his eschatology is found in his preface to *Clavis apocalyptica*, and in his correspondence with Edward Lane, who criticised Dury for his interpretation of the passage from Revelation concerning the flight of the woman into the wilderness.[20] Originally Hugh Trevor-Roper argued that Abraham Van Franckenberg wrote the *Clavis apocalyptica*, but more recently Michael Gühler, a tax collector and former teacher from Brieg in Silesia, has been suggested as its author.[21] The *Clavis* is important because it reflects the general eschatological climate of seventeenth-century Europe and, moreover, it is often used as evidence to prove the millenarianism of the Hartlib circle. For example Charles Webster argues that the *Clavis* is evidence of the 'continuing millenarianism' of Dury and Hartlib and that the ideals of their schemes were presented in the *Clavis apocalyptica* 'in a more explicitly millennial context [as] … an essential part of the preparation for the emergence of the rule of the saints'.[22] The *Clavis apocalyptica* was certainly a millenarian tract, which dates the beginning of the millennium to 1655, but it

[18] Anon, *Clavis apocalyptica: Or, the revelation revealed: in which the great mysteries in the Revelation of St. John, and the Prophet Daniel are opened, it being made apparent that the propheticall numbers com to an end with the year of our Lord 1655* (1651) (Wing H979A). John Dury's preface and the *Clavis apocalyptica* are paginated separately. Throughout the text and in the footnotes the tract will be referred to as the *Clavis apocalyptica*, and John Dury's preface as *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*.

[19] Dury to Culpeper (1642), *Culpeper letters*, 389.

[20] Dury's correspondence with Edward Lane is found in the Hartlib Papers: Edward Lane to Drury, 10 June 1651, HP 1/32/1A-2B; Lane to Dury, 26 Aug. 1651, HP 1/32/7A-22B; Dury to Lane, 31 Oct., 6 Nov. 1651, HP/32/23A-28B. I have followed the convention of the editors of the electronic text of the Hartlib papers of placing marginal notes in the main body of the text in <>brackets. Edward Lane (1605–85) was the parish clergyman at Sparsholt, Hampshire, for fifty years: Dewey D. Wallace, Jr, 'Lane, Edward (1605–1685)', *ODNB*.

[21] Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Three foreigners: the philosophers of the Puritan Revolution', in *Religion, the Reformation and social change*, London–Basingstoke 1972, 277 n. 1; 292 n. 2; M. Muslow, 'Who was the author of the *Clavis apocalyptica* of 1651? Millenarianism and prophecy between Silesian mysticism and the Hartlib circle', in John Christian Laursen and Richard Popkin (eds), *Millenarianism and messianism in early modern European culture*, IV: *Continental millenarians: Protestants, Catholics, heretics*, Dordrecht 2001, 57–75.

[22] Webster, *Great instauration*, 509; John Batten also states that 'Dury recorded his agreement with the opinion of the author of the *Clavis Apocalyptica*': *John Dury*, 28.

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is doubtful whether Dury or even Hartlib agreed with its contents. In his accompanying letter Comenius observed that the author recommended his readers not to accept at face value the ideas he expressed and advises that the best way to approach its contents is to 'judge and censure'. That Comenius awaited a change in earthly conditions in the immediate future is very likely, but he probably followed the advice of the author, as he casts some doubt on the exact calculation of 1655 with the words 'if he has hit right'.[23]

The aim of the author of the *Clavis apocalyptica* was to defend the historical interpretation of the Book of Revelation and rebut those who argue 'that such things ought not to bee dived and searched into'. He was certainly influenced by Joseph Mede's methods and says that the most accurate way of interpretation is to observe the 'method and harmony' of the book because 'all things are set down in good order, what from time to time should com to pass, the Synchronisms or concurrencies of times are set down, one after another, and the revolutions and changes in the Ecclesiastical and civil states, are exactly and punctually distinguished'. Like Mede he expected the millennium to come in the future, but in contrast, utilised a range of sources and different methods of calculation to support his expectation of the millennium for 1655. In the short term the author expects a limited but final period of persecution for the saints and the

> end and issue of this war is, that the Beast and with him the false Prophet (that is, the Roman Empire and Popedom) shall be taken … but the dragon, as their General hath quarters given him in this war, he is laid hold on, and cast in the bottomless pit, and shut up, wherein he remains bound a thousand years.

In his long-term calculations he argues that the world began in 4345 BC and if it is to last six thousand years, then 1655 is the beginning of the seventh period. Therefore:

> the one thousand two hundred ninety years of the Prophet Daniel 12 verse 11, begun with the last abominable desolation of the Temple at Jerusalem, in the year of our Lord three hundred sixty fifth, and the Apocalyptical one thousand two hundred sixty years, with the invasion of the Roman Empire by the Goths, in the year three hundred ninety five, and that both together do expire with the one thousand six hundred fifty fifth year, which is now shortly at hand.

The author also demonstrates a breadth of reading in other apocalyptic commentaries and mentions names as various as John Napier and David Pareus.[24]

The following discussion argues that John Dury, in his preface to this tract, explicitly refutes the arguments put forward by its author and insists on a

[23] Comenius sent the *Clavis/Apocalyptica* to Hartlib and wrote an accompanying letter which is reproduced by him at the beginning of *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 2–3.

[24] *Clavis apocalyptica*, 149–50, 153, 25–6, 7, 24.

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spiritual reading of the Book of Revelation. As he argues, 'although a man should fully believe, and be able demonstratively to prove the truth of the accomplishment of all the events, as this author doth make them to me very probable; yet he might fall short of that spiritual understanding whereunto the promise is made'. What Dury actually proposes is that the historical interpretations of the apocalypse, which he designates the 'historical presignification of events', is only one part of any interpretation, and he suggests that another key is required 'to open it, then that which show's the basic accomplishment of events; and this is the Mystery of the Kingdom of Christ, in opposition to the Mystery of Iniquity'.[25] As Katherine Firth points out, Dury rejects 'the notion that events were the necessary means by which God revealed his will. It was not necessary to know history but only to have a vision of the perfectibility of man's nature and society'.[26] At the centre of Dury's method of approaching the prophetic texts are his 'universal rules of prophetical interpretation', the formulation of which can be traced back to at least the early 1640s. The basic rules of this method are firstly 'to proceed according to the Analogy of Faith', secondly 'to keep the form of sound words delivered in the Scriptures', and thirdly that 'wee must analyse, that is resolve and divide the text aright'. The most fundamental rule is, however, that 'we must not analyse and interpret them so, as if the Prophesies did relate only to particular occasions and circumstance of times, of places and of persons'.[27] This fundamental rule effectively challenged the interpretation of most of the major commentators that had appeared in print and were well known up to and including the date when Dury wrote this preface. An example of this is to be found in Dury's interpretation of the seven epistles to the seven churches as found in Revelation iii. Brightman's interpretation of these passages, which through the summarised versions of his commentary became well known, found correspondences between the Churches of apostolic times and those of past and present. Thus the Philadelphian Church corresponded to the then Genevan Church and the church of 'luke warm Laodicea' corresponded to the Church of England'. In Alsted's interpretation the seven Churches covered only the apostolic times. Dury, however, drew his reader's attention to his 'rule of scriptural interpretation', which said 'that no Prophesy is of private interpretation'. These Epistles, he argued, 'are by Christ intended, not only to those particular Churches, or to the Angels thereof alone, which are named; but to all the churches, which were then elsewhere in the world'.[28]

Although Dury downplayed the historical interpretation of the prophetic texts he retained the polarised view of the universe common to most individuals in the seventeenth century. Such a view of the world is described

[25] Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 14–16.
[26] Firth, *Apocalyptic tradition*, 244.
[27] Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 20–2
[28] Firth, *Apocalyptic tradition*, 166–7, 212; Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 34–6.

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in terms of 'binary opposition, inversion, or the argument from contraries'. This view, for example, perceived the world to be a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil, or between Christ and AntiChrist. As Peter Lake points out in his study of the role of AntiChrist, the divine William Bradshaw's attitude to popery was divided 'between a lurid image of the threat of Antichrist on the one hand, and an extremely exalted view of the unity and mutuality of the community of the godly on the other'.[29] John Dury retained such a view of the role of AntiChrist as a force of evil in the world, but his AntiChrist was a force of evil within human beings, rather than as an identifiable human being in the external world. His exalted view of goodness is the gradual perfectibility of all humans through the working of the Holy Spirit. Although at certain times in his career Dury did identify the pope as AntiChrist and changed his position on this issue for political purposes, he retained this spiritual view throughout his life.[30]

The fact that Dury saw the AntiChrist as an evil within human beings, and that he held this view at least from 1645 onwards, is significant if his eschatology is to be accurately identified. What he looked for in Revelation and in other prophetic texts was what he, in polarised terminology, called the 'mystery of godliness' (the 'mystery of the kingdom of Christ') opposed to the 'mystery of apostasy' (the 'mystery of iniquity'). His names and definitions for these two mysteries are sometimes expressed in different ways, but this should not be seen as a shift in his position, rather as a way of describing the concepts in varying ways. In his fast sermon Dury exhorted the gathered members of parliament to march out of Babylon unto Jerusalem, but these cities are for Dury not earthly cities, but either the inner positive qualities of Jerusalem, or the inner corruptions of Babylon found living in the human soul. Thus

> the foundation of the Mystery of Babylon, which is universal, is to be discovered; and is nothing else, but the universal corruption of the soul of man in his conscience, will, reason, and all the inferior faculties thereof; and the want of power in superior faculties to rule and subject the imaginations and affections unto the will of God.

According to Dury this corruption has been existent in human nature since the Fall and is the main cause of 'all of our Babylonian disorder and confusion, all our ambition, lust and strife'. It is the destiny of human beings to be 'involved and entangled under the power of the Babylonian captivity',

[29] Peter Lake, 'William Bradshaw, AntiChrist and the community of the godly', this JOURNAL xxxvi (1985), 572. See also his 'Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice', in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (eds), *Conflict in early Stuart England*, London 1989, 72–106, and Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, misrule and the meaning of witchcraft', *Past & Present* lxxxvii (1980), 98–127.

[30] Milton, *Unchanged peacemaker*, 114–15, states that at one point in the 1630s Dury had reservations about identifying the pope as AntiChrist and at other times 'embraced the polarised apocalyptic view and agreed that the pope was Antichrist'.

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but there is an escape and 'the way is open for us to march away from thence, and come to the spiritual Jerusalem'.[31]

In the *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, Dury showed how these inner negative qualities reveal themselves in the earthly realm and how, if the kingdom of Christ is to be realised on earth within human beings, they are to be overcome. He does this by giving a detailed description of his conception of the Beast, the False Prophet and the Whore, called collectively the 'mystery of iniquity', and their continuing warfare with the Lamb, the Two Witnesses and the Bride, called collectively the 'mystery of the kingdom of Christ'. These polar opposites, or opposing forces, have 'been long wrestling against one another in the public transactions of the present world'. The Beast, for example, is recognisable by the 'properties of his Nature' and how by this nature he has access to human beings. The properties of his nature are then related to the negative aspects of a Government which attempts to rule by absolutist principles 'without any other Rule or Law'. Dury argued that such rulers 'ruleth over others, as men use to rule over beasts, guiding them by mere sensual and imaginary inducements'. They who wrongly use their power in this way, he said, do so 'to satisfy the inclinations of flesh and blood … [and] are none other but the Dragon's Vice regents on earth'. Dury was careful not to enter into any lengthy discussion of whether he thought that any contemporary government ruled according to these principles but it was apparent to him how many have 'studied to be absolute over their subjects' so that he felt the need 'to say no more of it'.[32] In his discussion of the work of the False Prophet, Dury is very likely referring to the negative qualities to be found in the inner workings of the Church. He perceived the role of this entity as being to 'uphold and advance the interest of power, and the absoluteness of the beastly government' and argued how, 'he doth work upon the ignorant imaginations of silly people, strange impressions of admiration concerning the divinity of his own way: by deceitful persuasions which are a kind of witchcraft, whereby people are made to cleave unto his worldly interest as a slave unto the same'.[33] The 'third thing to be spoken of', said Dury 'is the Mystery of the Whore', who is the woman riding on the beast in Revelation xvii. 'By this woman is understood the Roman Hierarchy, which hath born Rule over all the world, and rid in triumph upon the minds of all men, as upon Beasts.' Here Dury did not directly identify the pope as the AntiChrist, but attributed to the whole succession of popes a variety of 'abominations [and] … sinful and unconscionable practises, which she doth allow of in all who serve her ends'. Furthermore he joined the long line of individuals who attacked the superstitious forms of worship and Rome's claim to be 'the unerring Church'.[34] The Two

[31] John Dury, *Israels call to march out of Babylon* (1645) (Wing D2867), 41–2, 43.
[32] Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 46–9.
[33] Ibid. 53, 59.
[34] Ibid. 60–1, 62.

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Witnesses, The Lamb and The Bride stood in direct contrast to the three negative forces of the Beast, False Prophet and Whore. The Two Witnesses, for example, 'are set forth as opposites unto the False Prophet', and their task is to 'bear witness unto Christ, by the manifestation of the Truth without humane interests'. The lamb-like properties of good government are compared to the dependency of the sheep on a shepherd when 'one goeth before, then all the rest do follow'. The Bride is that which is expected from heaven 'if we walk by faith to get an entrance into her'.[35]

The Mystery of Godliness, Dury observed, is not only the discovery of 'vice and error' and it is not enough 'to remedy the evil disposition of his Spirit … nothing can do this but God by the discovery of truth in the loveliness thereof; when he give faith to the elect by the engrafted word, wherein they receive love of truth, which purifies their souls, and make them obedient thereunto through the spirit'.[36] What Dury actually sought to demonstrate in most of his printed works dealing with these mysteries was the gradual 'manifestation of the spiritual Kingdom of Christ in the name of man, and in human societies so advanced that the works of the Devil are destroyed therein'. He did not, however, think that any society was so far advanced as to be able at 'the Bridegroom's coming, to enter with him into his wedding-Chamber'. He argued that the 'Laodicean temper is over us all' and if individuals do not repent and strive for unity in all matters then 'no doubt Christ will spew us all out of his mouth, and call unto him another people'.[37]

Dury was also very sober and reserved in his attitude to prophetical calculation and declared that 'I shall be a man of no great expectation, yet because I believe that these things shall come to pass; and by the armour of light the Children of Light will at last prevail … I am not inclined to make haste as some are inclined to do.' With this statement Dury did not want to dampen the 'hopes' that the author gave to the 'Protestant cause', but warned that the 'war with the Beast, and with the False Prophet … shall continue'. The continuance of this 'warfare' was not, however, attributable only to the deceptive workings of the Church of Rome, because the enemies of the Church are not only to be sought within the ranks of the papists, 'but even amongst those that are most fierce enemies to Popery and count themselves the best of Christians and reformed Protestants'. Dury also denied that the pope was the final enemy and thought that 'the Beast may rage over all Europe, against the Lamb-like state of Christianity, a long while after the destruction of the Pope; and the Protestants may, by the means of the false Prophet bee entangled among themselves, and embroiled into

[35] Ibid. 57, 50, 64.

[36] Idem, *A model of church government: Or, the grounds of the spirituall frame and government of the house of god* (1647) (Wing D2873), sig. C2v.

[37] Idem, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 17, 64.

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quarrels, and beastly animosities'. The final enemy for Dury was therefore continuing religious strife, against which he battled all his life.[38]

It was Dury's idea of the continuing religious conflict and his comparison of the visible Church with the woman in the wilderness that aroused the anger of Edward Lane, who exchanged a number of letters with him, accusing him of providing comfort for 'some Seducing Spirits, who are willing to catch at anything, to Strengthen their factions'. Lane claimed that Dury's *Epistolical discourse/Clavis* was used by some of the sects to justify their separation from the Church and some of the arguments in it fomented 'their errors, not sparing in a triumphant manner to make their boast that you doe fully agree with them in their opinion, concerning the nullity of a visible church to these times'.[39] Dury dismissed Lane's arguments. He pointed out that both mistook each other's interpretations, and he was 'glad your meaning was more harmless than I thought it was, it was my weakness, and not my wilfulness to mistake you'. In what appears to be the final letter between them, Dury vigorously defended the eschatological viewpoint that he put forward in the *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, but what are more revealing are his explicit statements concerning the precise nature of events leading up to the second coming of Christ.

Firstly, Dury expected 'the gradual perfection of faith and knowledge in the inward <depth of apprehension> as in the outward and visible profession, I believe there is a kind of growth whereunto at last all the Churches <on earth> shall come jointly which is proper to a perfect man and proportional unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. He then repeated his interpretation that despite the Churches attaining his vision of peace and unity, they still remain as the Church Militant on earth, and not before 'Gog and Magog be destroyed with fire from heaven' will she be completely delivered from her enemies. Dury then made a statement which is decisive in determining his picture of the final events:

> Yet I believe that she shall before the last day, <while she is yet under the dispensation obtained by her militia> have a full conquest of the beast, of the false prophet, of the whore and of the Kings of the earth, and for a certain space <after that conquest> be freed from the seduction and molestation of Satan.[40]

This is a clear indication that he expected a short space of time before the final event of Christ's second coming, which again from evidence in his correspondence, must be interpreted in terms of a mystical marriage between God and his redeemed people. In a letter to Mr Wiseaeus, the translator of Francis Rous's *The mystical marriage*, Dury demonstrated that his vision of the reunion of the purified bride with the divine bridegroom is a mystical or

[38] Ibid. 68–9, 74.
[39] Lane to Dury, 26 Aug. 1651, HP 1/32/8a. Lane is probably referring to the Seekers.
[40] Dury to Lane, 6 Nov. 1651, HP 1/32/27a.

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spiritual union and that this 'Mysticall Marriage of the Church with Christ, is the great joy of all the Saints in the Revelation. It follows immediately upon the destruction of Babylon.'[41]

This lends weight to the argument that Dury never awaited a temporal thousand-year rule of Christ with his elected saints, but had a vision of a spiritual apocalypse sometime in the far future, when the whole of society would be purged of spiritual corruption and would finally be ready for that marital union of God with his purified people.

It is possible to argue that Dury did not await any imminent transformation of earthly conditions, nor did he expect a 'Church Triumphant' in the immediate future, or the onset of a glorious millennium on earth. Indeed, there is evidence that he actually refuted belief in a future millennium and was quite comfortable in maintaining a quiet and reserved position on eschatological matters. He abhorred the prevailing atmosphere of the 1650s, the appearance of the radical religious groups and their calls for fundamental changes in the structures of society. In the following passage he demonstrates his intense dislike of the irreligious activities of radical groups like the Ranters:

> I cannot see that our warfare is yet as some would have it (and to their own particular station think it to bee) at an end; those upon that account having embraced the pleasures of brutishness and sensuality in this present world, have also made it part of their happiness to dethrone God and Christ in their ranting and blasphemous imagination.[42]

In 1654, writing to Hartlib from Zurich, Dury was quite explicit about his intense dislike of the millenarianism of the radical religious sects, and he even predicted their eventual downfall, in which he hoped to assist. He predicted that 'the millenary men in due time God will beat off from extravagancies and what I can contribute shall not be wanting if God give life and leisure'.[43]

In the final part of the *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, Dury also gave indications of his attitude towards millenarianism when he questioned the author's assertion that with the binding of the dragon for a thousand years 'the faithful Children of God have their rest'. Dury answered:

> I shall not conceive much of any sudden enjoyment of the glorious liberty of the Sons of God; nor of any full deliverance from the bondage; whereunto Satan by the power of darkness; and the spirituality of malice, hath brought our beastly nature.

[41] Dury to Mr Wisaeus, n.d., HP 4/3/41A. The full title of Francis Rous's book is *The mysticall marriage, Or experimentall discoveries of the heavenly marriage betweene a soul and her saviour* (1635) (*RSTC* 21343). Jerald C. Brauer, 'Types of Puritan piety', *Church History* lvi (1987), 39–58, states (p. 53) that Rous was a Puritan mystic who stood firmly within the mystical tradition which argued 'for the necessity of purging the total person in preparation for a heavenly visitation'.

[42] Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 9.

[43] Dury to Samuel Hartlib, 16 Dec. 1654, HP 4/3/66A-B.

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I watch therefore, and look out more after the appearances, and discoveries of these things, then after other outward events and change.

In addition to this he demonstrated his use of the prophetic mode of interpreting historical events by predicting that the Lord 'will spew us all out of his mouth and call unto him another people', and if the necessary reforms were not implemented then England would be doomed to suffer her deserved fate. This is hardly the attitude of a 'great millenarian' expecting the imminent transformation of the world with Christ's second coming.[44]

Richard Popkin argues that at the end of his career Dury settled down in Kassel and it was obvious that he was 'growing old, tired and dispirited'. He then asserts that in Dury's last book it is possible to find evidence of his rejection of the apocalyptic tradition and 'a transformation of the activist millenarianism that foresaw the coming of the Kingdom of God in historical time and in political terms into the concept of a spiritual brotherhood'. Popkin argues, therefore, for a change in Dury's methods of interpretation, because he insists that what motivated 'Dury from about 1630 to 1674' was his serious expectation 'of the pre-millennial events, preparing for the climax of history'.[45] It has been the argument of this article that John Dury was not a millenarian in the sense that he awaited the temporal reign of Christ with his elected saints for a thousand years. Indeed, if Richard Popkin's brief analysis of the *Touchant l'intelligence* is correct, it is possible to argue that this book, written in Kassel, is a reiteration of what Dury had been saying in his *Epistolicall discourse/Clavis*, and that it also reiterates methods of analysing Scripture that he had been developing from at least the year 1637.[46] Dury, therefore, did not change his mind about the coming millennium, as he had never been a millenarian. He was someone working consistently for harmony and reconciliation in the context of a continent being torn apart by religious conflict. Just as Dury's position has been misunderstood for decades, so a careful reassessment of other writers on Revelation is needed in order to distinguish between millenarians, of whatever hue, and those holding a wide range of other eschatological positions.

[44] Dury, *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*, 59, 64.

[45] Popkin, *End of a career*, 211, 216. There is in existence a letter to Richard Baxter from 1673 where the author discusses the time and dates for a fulfilment of the prophecy of Revelation in the eighteenth century. Although the editors tentatively identify the author of this letter as John Dury it is unlikely, given the discussion above, that Dury would speculate in this manner: *Calendar of the correspondence of Richard Baxter*, ed. N.H. Keeble and Geoffrey Nuttall, ii, Oxford 1991, 141, letter 901.

[46] Trevor-Roper, 'Three foreigners', notes (p. 292) that Dury settled in Kassel 'to reinterpret the Apocalypse without reference to the external world'. He also mentions Dury's insistence on interpreting Scripture by certain rules as found in the *Epistolical discourse/Clavis*.

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