

*The Spiritual Quest Against
Religion*

Alec Ryrie

24 And straight way the father of the child crying with teares, said, Lord, I beleue: helpe my ^m vnbelief.

True faith, being
imperfect, is always
accompanied with
doubting.

William Perkins, *An exposition
of the Lord's Prayer* (1593)



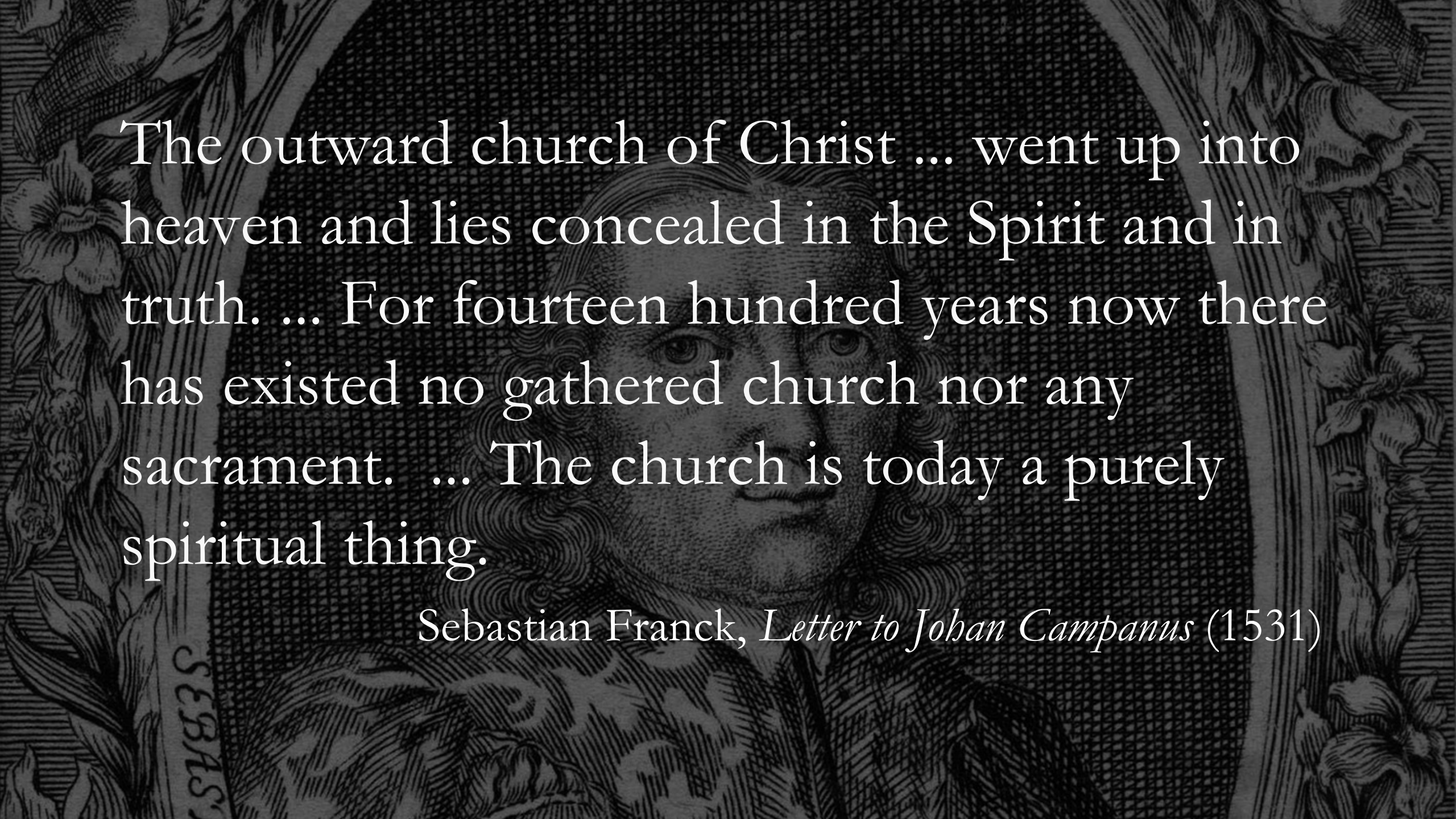




Sebastian
 Franck
 (1499-
 c.1543)

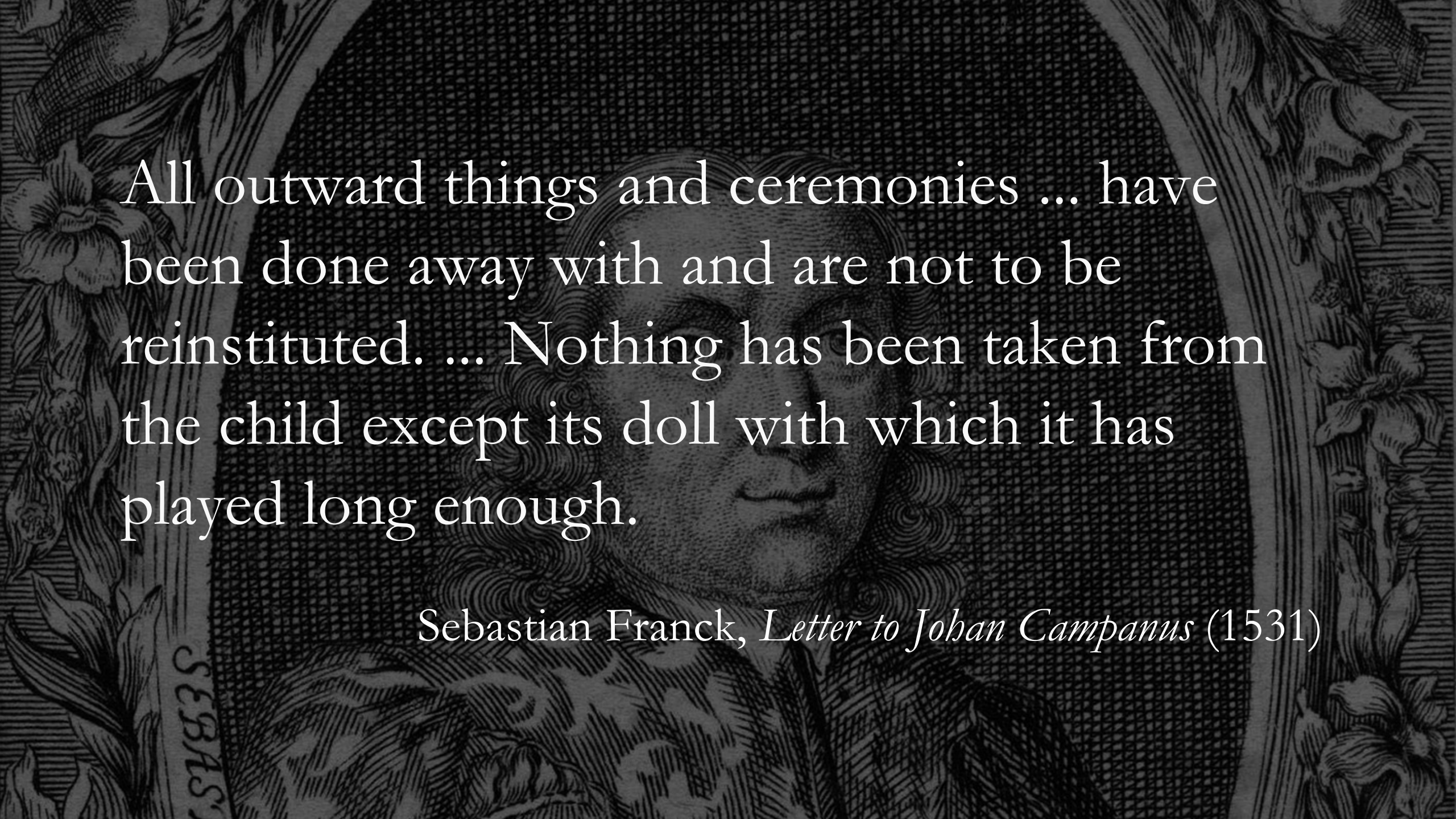
Caspar
 Schwenkfeld
 (1489/90-
 1561)





The outward church of Christ ... went up into
heaven and lies concealed in the Spirit and in
truth. ... For fourteen hundred years now there
has existed no gathered church nor any
sacrament. ... The church is today a purely
spiritual thing.

Sebastian Franck, *Letter to Johan Campanus* (1531)



All outward things and ceremonies ... have
been done away with and are not to be
reinstated. ... Nothing has been taken from
the child except its doll with which it has
played long enough.

Sebastian Franck, *Letter to Johan Campanus* (1531)

Caspar
Schwenkfeld
and the *stilstand*



A
'Collegiant'
meeting in
Amsterdam



ASSEMBLÉE de ceux qu'on appelle COLLEGIANS a Amsterdam.

259
T O
THE LAW,
AND TO
The TESTIMONIE:

O R,
A Propofall of certain Cafes of
Confcience by way of quære; chief-
ly touching the publick worfhip of the
New Testament; and other things ei-
ther neceffary or profitable for
Chriftianity; prefented to thofe Chur-
ches and Societies of Chriftians,
which profefle the Scripture of
the *Old and New Testament*
for the only Rule of
Faith & Manners.

Wherein the true and genuine way to
reconcile Chriftians is laid open

*Translated out of Latine into Englifh by a
lover of Truth and Peace.*

March 20 L O N D O N,
Printed for George Whittington at the *Blow*
Anchor in Cornhill neer the Royall Exchange, 1648

Their churches [are] ...
malignant societies;
whereinto the soul of a man
fearing God ... ought not to
enter.

Adam Boreel, *To the Law and to the
Testimony* (1645)

**Anabaptist Bartholomew Legatt —
Burned at the Stake at Smithfield in 1611,
Under Mandate of James I, as an
"Incorrigible Heretick."**



New Baptism there cannot be, till there come new Apostles. New Apostles there cannot be, who are not endowed (from above) with miracles.

Miracles we hear of none (only of idle dreams) and so consequently, no true Baptism in the earth, nor any one true visible Christian.

Bartholomew Legate, quoted in Henoeh Clapham, *Error on the right hand* (1608)

If I should say, Our Father, Give us this day our bread ... this should imply, that you and I were in communion or Christian fellowship. But before that miraculous Ministry (as afore) shall come ... there can be no such fellowship; and therefore no such prayer.

How sillily you speake. I have all this while taught you, that there is no Church.

Bartholomew Legate, quoted in Henoeh Clapham, *Error on the right hand* (1608)

The Familists of the Mount ... altogether deny all prayer, and the Resurrection of the body, or any heaven or hell, but what is in this life. ... Heaven is when they do laugh and are merry, and hell when they are in sorrow and pain. And at last they do believe that all things do come by nature.

Giles Creech, deposition to the court of High Commission,
1638 (National Archives, SP 16/520 fo. 126r

Radicalism's moment: England's Civil War years, 1640-1660

- A new Reformed, presbyterian church ...
- ... or 'new presbyter is but old priest writ large'?
- Is it those who leave churches who are atheists ...
- ... or those who stay?
- Did tolerance mean freedom of religion ...
- ... or freedom to be irreligious?

M A N S
M O R T A L I T I E: [2]

O R,
A T R E A T I S E

Wherein 'tis proved, both Theologically and Philosophically, that whole Man (as a *rationall Creature*) is a Compound wholly mortall, contrary to that common distinction of *Soule* and *Body*: And that the present going of the *Soule* into *Heaven* or *Hell* is a meer *Fiction*: And that at the *Resurrection* is the beginning of our *immortality*, and then *Actuall Condemnation*, and *Salvation*, and not before.

With all doubts and Objections Answered, and resolved, both by Scripture and Reason; discovering the multitude of *Blasphemies*, and Absurdities that arise from the fancy of the *Soule*.

Also divers other Mysteries, as, of Heaven, Hell, Christs humane residence, the extent of the Resurrection, the New Creation, &c. opened, and presented to the tryall of better judgments.

By R. O.

That which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them all: as the one dyeth, so dyeth the other; yea they have all one breath, so that man hath no preheminance above a beast; for all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 3. 19.

A M S T E R D A M,

Printed by *John Canne*. Anno Dom. 1644.

Richard Overton,
Mans mortalitie (1644)

Pulling out a little Bible, he showed it open to the People, saying, *Here is a Book you have in great veneration. ... I must tell you, it is abolished: It containeth beggarly rudiments, milk for babes. But now Christ is in Glory amongst us, and imparts a fuller measure of his Spirit to his Saints than this can afford; and therefore I am commanded to burne it before your faces:* so taking the Candle out of his lantern, he set fire to the leaves.

Report of a soldier in Walton-on-Thames in
[Clement Walker], *Anarchia Anglicana* (1649)

Samuel Bolton
(1605/6-1654), master
of Christ's College,
Cambridge



When a man sees abundance of *opinions* abroad, one saith this, another that, sure it will make a man to put the *question* to himself, upon what *foundation* do I stand? What is my bottom? And how can he have any rest till he have gotten a better foundation to build on, a foundation which none of these opinions can shake and unsettle? when he sees so many fair *buildings* ... not able to stand out the *blast* of trial and temptation, because they are houses built on the sands.

Samuel Bolton, *The arraignment of error* (1646)

[The godless:] The multitude of *opinions* doth draw him away, or else *Atheist* him, that he will be nothing.

[The elect:] It will make [such] a man to enquire after the rock, and endeavour to build there. ... The multitude of opinions ... doth *un-atheist* him, put him upon the search and examination what is the truth of God. ... These things do fire him out of his formality, and he can have no rest till he come to some bottom to stand on.

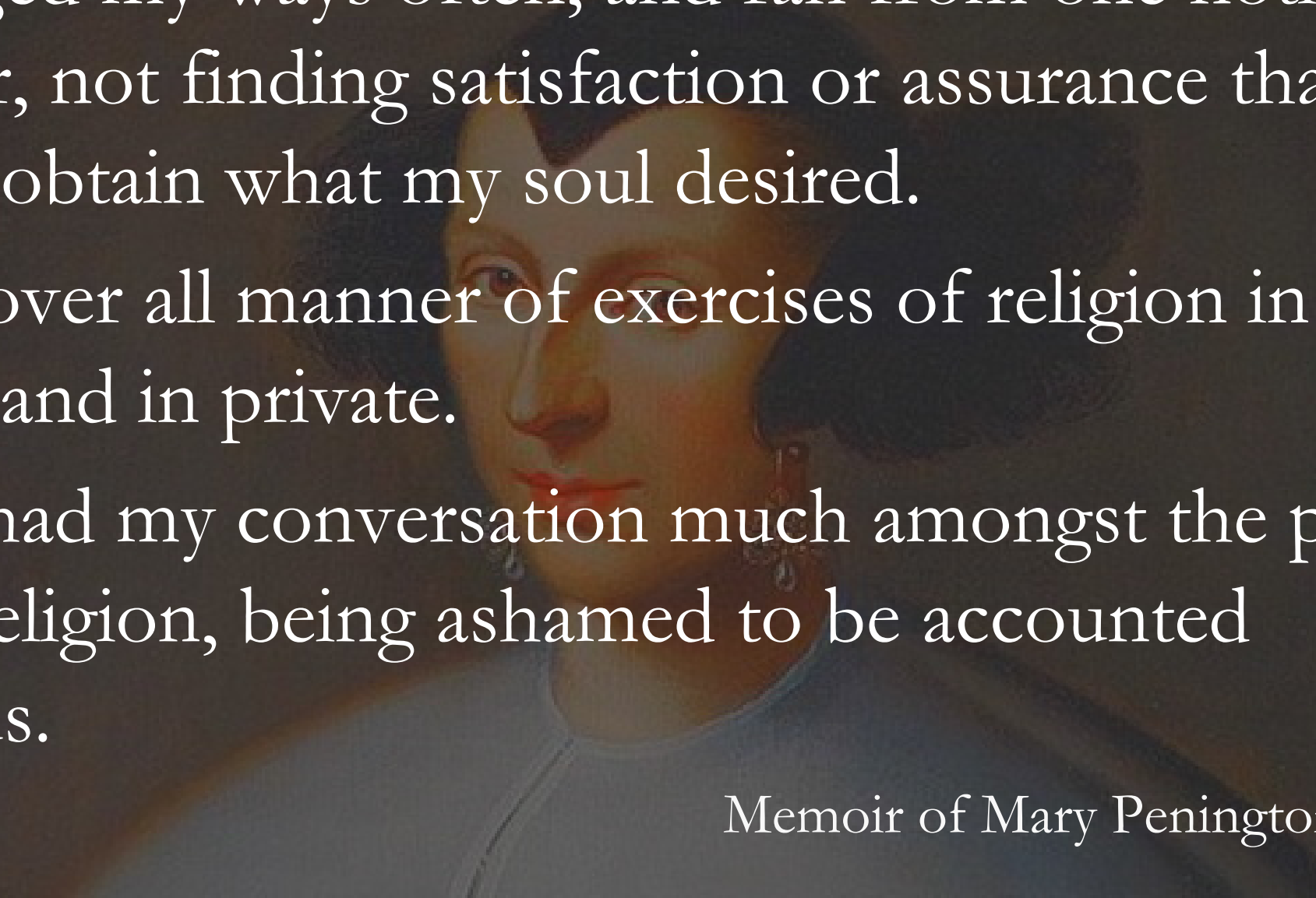
Samuel Bolton, *The arraignment of error* (1646)

‘Seekers’

- Scrupulous withdrawal from religious practice that might be tainted ...
- ... including infant baptism ...
- ... and adult baptism ...
- ... and churches ...
- ... and the Bible itself

Mary Springett
(Penington) (1623-82)



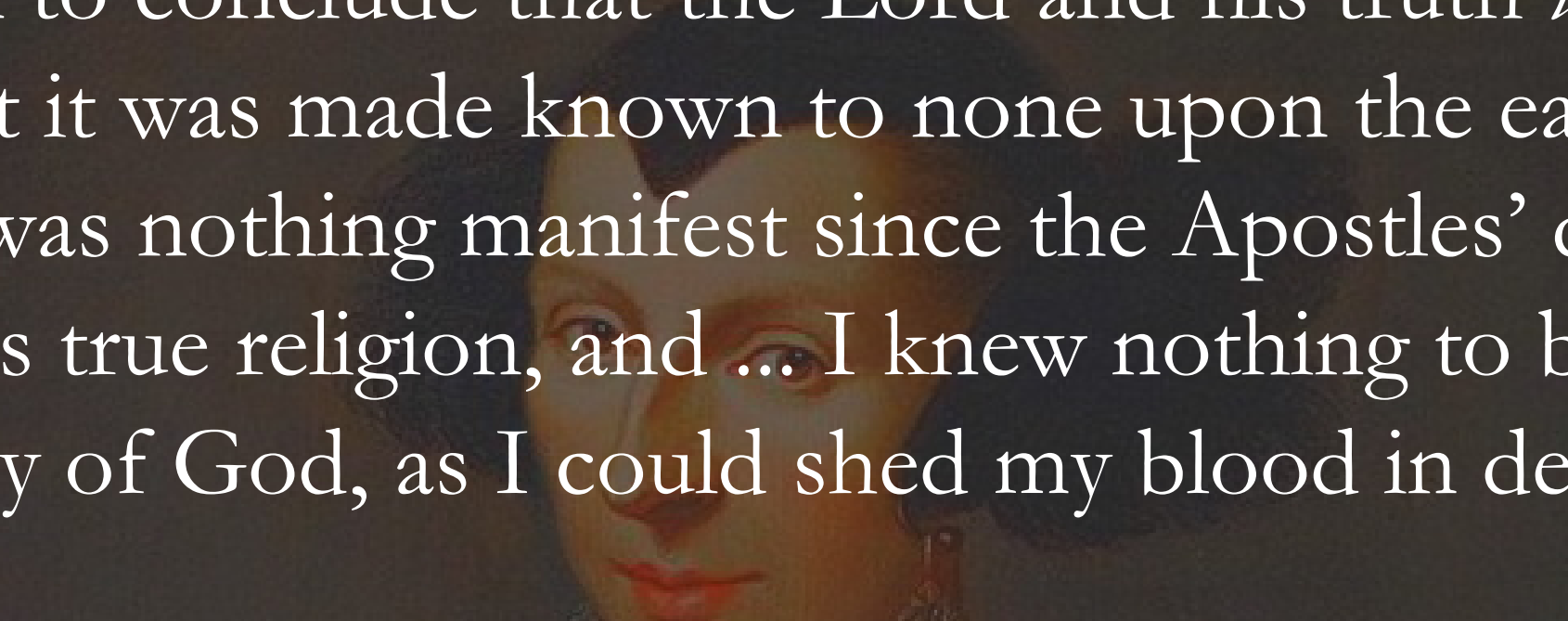
A portrait of Mary Penington, a woman with dark hair, wearing a blue garment and a large earring. The portrait is partially obscured by the text.

I changed my ways often, and ran from one notion to another, not finding satisfaction or assurance that I should obtain what my soul desired.

I gave over all manner of exercises of religion in my family, and in private.

I then had my conversation much amongst the people of no religion, being ashamed to be accounted religious.

Memoir of Mary Penington, after 1658

A portrait of Mary Penington, a woman with dark hair, wearing a blue dress and large earrings. The portrait is partially obscured by the text.

I began to conclude that the Lord and his truth *was*,
but that it was made known to none upon the earth. ...
There was nothing manifest since the Apostles' days
that was true religion, and ... I knew nothing to be so
certainly of God, as I could shed my blood in defence
of it.

I ... resolved in my heart I would ... be without a
religion until the Lord manifestly taught me one.

Memoir of Mary Penington, after 1658

‘Seekers’

- Scrupulous withdrawal from religious practice that might be tainted ...
- ... including infant baptism ...
- ... and adult baptism ...
- ... and churches ...
- ... and the Bible itself ...
- ... until nothing is left apart from ethics.

Laurence Claxton: from
Seeker idealism through
Ranter libertinism to
cynical atheism

The Lost sheep

F O U N D :

O R,

The Prodigal returned to his Fathers
house, after many a sad and weary
Journey through many Reli-
gious Countreys,

Where now, notwithstanding all his former Trans-
gressions, and breach of his Fathers Commands,
he is received in an eternal Favor, and all the
righteous and wicked Sons that he hath left be-
hinde, reserved for eternal misery ;

As all along every Church or Dispensation may
read in his Travels, their Portion after
this Life.

*Written by Laur. Claxton. the onely true converted
Messenger of Christ Jesus, Creator of
Heaven and Earth.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for the Author. 1660.



Thomas
Hobbes,
Leviathan
(1651):
the
impossibility
of religious
knowledge





Twelve Quakers quite still.

Baruch Spinoza
(1632-77): 'nature
is self-moving,
and creates itself'



Baruch Spinoza
(1632-77): the
Collegiant /
Quaker connection



Christ is ... not so much the prophet as the mouthpiece of God ... the voice of Christ may be called the voice of God.

Nature cannot be contravened. ... The only alternative is to assert that God has created nature so weak ... that he is repeatedly compelled to come afresh to her aid.

A miracle ... would, therefore, be in contravention to God's nature and laws, and, consequently, belief in it would throw doubt upon everything, and lead to Atheism.

Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670)

*The Spiritual Quest Against
Religion*

Alec Ryrie