



The Gospel and Religious Freedom

*Historical Studies in
Evangelicalism and
Political Engagement*

David W. Bebbington, *editor*

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FOREWORD

David W. Bebbington

“Everyone,” announces article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” “This right,” the article continues, “includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” The religious liberty enshrined in this document is a major concern of our day. On the one hand there is the general conviction of the international community, as expressed in the declaration, that this is a form of freedom that ought to be enjoyed by all; on the other, there is the experience of millions across the globe who are not allowed to follow the teachings of their faith or even worship according to their consciences. At the same time, many criticize advocates of religious emancipation as covert defenders of privilege, pointing out that assertions of freedom of religion may in fact serve to mask other forms of discrimination. Religious freedom is contested terrain.

The Christian faith has frequently been the victim of oppressive measures over the centuries. Members of the early church suffered harassment, torture, and execution, and martyrdom has been common ever since. Medieval and early modern Christendom saw sustained efforts to impose received orthodoxy, which resulted in the persecution of dissenters. Only gradually during the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries did freedom of belief come to be regarded as a desirable public policy, at least in Europe and later the United States. The divorce of church and state, though still far from universal in traditionally Christian nations, gradually followed. Evangelicals could be found on both sides of the issue, either defending the retention of an established church or championing the removal of all advantages for those of a particular persuasion. Often the main concern of evangelicals, however, was the opening of all parts of the world to their missionaries, in the face of resistance from Roman Catholics, Muslims and representatives of other faiths, among other actors. In the twentieth century Communists were sometimes their fiercest opponents. Because evangelicals were necessarily evangelistic, they seemed to many authorities a destabilizing element in society. Hence they were especially likely to suffer persecution. Evangelicals commonly protested against religious discrimination, but then they encountered a dilemma. Were they to demand an end to all religious oppression, thereby favoring Muslims and others whose views they rejected, or to urge only the protection of the like-minded? That tension was deeply embedded in evangelical attitudes.

Although the history of evangelical stances toward religious freedom has been widely addressed in scholarship in recent years, there is room for a great deal more study, whether on the persecuted, their would-be champions, or the censors of self-appointed advocates of liberty of conscience. In particular, there is scope for concentration on evangelicals alone, but with attention to several parts of the world. That is the field covered by this volume. The essays collected here were all originally given as papers at a conference at Baylor University, in Waco, Texas, in October 2021. The online event was the second conference of the Evangelical Studies Program sponsored by Baylor's Institute for Studies of Religion and Truett Seminary; I am grateful to both for their support. The program was conceived as a successor to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College, Illinois, which from 1982 to 2014 promoted historical research on the evangelical movement within the United States. The institute was responsible for a series of conferences and subsequent volumes that helped turn the history of evangelicalism into a thriving subdiscipline. The Baylor program aspires to do the same, but to take the entire world as its province. The papers from its first conference were published in 2022 by Baylor University Press as *The Gospel in Latin America*. Again I want to thank the press and its staff for issuing the present volume. Its articles address not a region but a theme

and so include coverage of developments in many parts of the globe. Once more they are designed to demonstrate something of the significance of the evangelical movement in the history of the modern world.

Baylor University
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INTRODUCTION

Robert J. Joustra

A discussion of the gospel professed by evangelicals *and* religious freedom across the world can land one in polarized cul-de-sacs. The term “evangelical” is subject to extensive debate. According to many, evangelicals are the advocates of New Testament Christianity; for others, they are bigoted religionists. “Religious freedom” is, if anything, even more contentious. For some progressives, it is a polite society shibboleth for white Protestant supremacy. For some conservatives, on the other hand, it is the foundation of democracy and a bulwark against conspiratorial globalists who harbor their own hegemonically ideological designs. When the two subjects are combined, the scope for noncommunication is enormous.

It is a bold, and therefore welcome, effort to publish a book that places these two provocative subjects *together*. The book in front of you is not arranged along historical, regional, theological, or even sociological lines. While the first five chapters address the American situation, they include historical biography, document study, institutional and movement history, and contemporary puzzles. The second half of the volume, “The World,” is even more diffuse, covering regions from Nigeria, to China, to Eastern Europe, and historical periods from Wilberforce to Vatican II, to the Cold War, to the advent of Trump. What they hold in common is a study of these hotly contested terms, “evangelicals” and “religious freedom,” and, perhaps most importantly of all, a commitment to *talk together* about subjects more often weaponized than scrutinized. It is often clear where the

authors themselves might land in these tribal times, but that does not preclude them from making a serious effort to engage with one another and collectively taking the temperature on a too-often over-boiling debate.

The reader will therefore not find here systematic surveys of periods or regions. Expert practitioners may find only a few chapters that address their particular desks or briefs, but what they will find is a sustained conversation, carried on in arguments but also in footnotes, that puts into dialogue many voices and ideas that are vanishingly rare to find together. The reader might, like this author, be left envying the conference from which the papers came, hoping that this book will prove a catalyst for repeating that experience.

To set the stage, I think it would help to do a small survey of the debates addressed in this book, to taste and see how the authors fit, or subvert, the literature, and to sustain—I hope—my initial premise, which is that they contribute temperately to a worthwhile serious debate. The structure of that survey will be twofold: first, I want to survey the ground, now well-trodden, on what exactly we mean by “evangelical,” offering contrasting theological and cultural definitions. Second, I want to advance the idea that religious freedom is an *essentially contested term* and in so doing lay out the necessarily deep fissures in any definition. This is not to say there can be *no* definition, for that would be amateur silliness. It is, however, to say that in offering a definition one necessarily makes intrinsic normative—even religious—claims about the world. And this fact helps explain, in part, why a religious subgrouping might have an especially intimate, if fraught, relationship with this core human right.

Evangelical: Historical, Theological, and Cultural Contours

If, as cheeky intellectual historians have put it, all philosophy is footnotes to Plato, it could likewise be said that all recent study of evangelicalism is footnotes to David Bebbington.¹ Bebbington’s pathbreaking way of characterizing the movement was originally formulated in relation to a country external to the United States, where it has been so lionized, specifically emerging in his study of evangelicalism in Great Britain. In the present book McDonald, in describing William Jennings Bryan, explicitly invokes Bebbington’s so-called Evangelical Quadrilateral: biblicism,

¹ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). For a more extended treatment, see David Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral*, vol. 1: *Characterizing the British Gospel Movement* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2021).

conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism. Likewise, Still's study of George Truett's address on Baptists and religious liberty, in arguing that Baptists have been "perennial protagonists for religious liberty and its complement, civil liberty," appeals to the four elements in the Bebbington characterization to locate the religious position of its subject.

Heimann, in her chapter on evangelicals under Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, is one of the few in this volume to devote an entire section to evangelicalism's ambiguity. She suggests that the movement was seen by the regimes as not just religious. Heimann cites both Bebbington and more popular definitions of evangelicalism, such as Jonathan Merritt's "anyone who likes Billy Graham."² But Heimann also highlights the necessarily political character of a seemingly religious movement, especially in the context of materialistic Marxism. She writes, "If Marxism looked to Westerners like a political religion, evangelicalism looked to Marxists like colonial imperialism by another name."

The question of whether evangelicalism should be understood only in religious terms is perhaps most pointedly addressed by historian Kristin Du Mez in her address to the American Historical Association, in which she asks whether "evangelicalism [is] a theological category, a cultural movement, a white religious brand, a diverse global movement? What if the answer is 'all of the above'?"³ There are, she argues, both in her address and in her popular book *Jesus and John Wayne*, "many evangelicals."⁴ The more interesting question, she goes on to say, is not which definition is *right*, but in what ways scholars have imagined evangelicalism and to what end. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson's famous treatise on nationalism, she argues that "if we consider evangelicalism an imagined religious community, imagined as inherently limited, bounded by insiders and outsiders, we must pay careful attention to questions of power."⁵

² Jonathan Merritt, "Defining Evangelical," *Atlantic*, December 7, 2015. See further Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, eds., *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

³ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "How Best to Define Evangelical," an address to the American Historical Association, January 8, 2019, available at <https://kristindumez.com/resources/how-best-to-define-evangelical-there-are-many-evangelicals-historian-says/>.

⁴ Du Mez, "How Best to Define Evangelical." For a full expansion of that argument, see Kristin Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

⁵ Du Mez, "How Best to Define Evangelical."

Several of the chapters do not pursue the question of the nature of evangelicalism, but that may make it all the more important to come to terms with overlapping or at times rival definitions. The traditional Bebbington Quadrilateral, for example, has often been seen to prioritize theology, since it proposes to set the parameters of a movement defined by its *commitments*, both practical (as in activism) and doctrinal (as in biblicism). That approach entails boundaries, certainly, but these are not boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, or partisan loyalty. This evangelicalism is inclusive in a creedal sense: people of any birth, race, socioeconomic status, or otherwise *can be* evangelicals, provided they confess and practice these four staple tenets.

How, then, could such a thing look like cultural imperialism, as the Communists described by Mary Heimann believed? One could imagine the charge from Orthodox Russian or Hindu nationalists that conversionism and activism catalyze a kind of missionary proselytization that is *itself* imperial in nature, contrary to their own preferred understanding of Russia as an “Orthodox civilization” and India as a “Hindu” subcontinent. The complaint against article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights bore a similar imprint after World War II. Some Islamic states felt that enshrining the right to *change religion or belief* was a right too far, at odds with blasphemy and apostasy laws in many Islamic states, laws that remain in force in many places in the world today.⁶ Does not even a traditional, theological definition of evangelicalism therefore suggest that it is something more than a set of doctrinal commitments? Does not a core commitment to activism (the public manifestation of faith)—and conversionism (a call to missionary proselytization)—suggest a political project, or at least imply a need for political power to make ready the highway for evangelicalism?

Whether we accept this criticism or not, it lays out at least one other important definitional trajectory of evangelicalism: a less intrinsically theological, more cultural, even racial, set of definitions. Here political scientists, like myself, are sometimes blamed for turning evangelicals into a political entity for the purposes of polling. In other words, the *use* of the term came into *political importance* because it began to represent an identifiable demographic that could be conscripted for political purposes,

⁶ See, for example, Paul Marshall and Nina Shea, *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and—ultimately—power. There is nothing intrinsically nefarious about this, as political scientists will hasten to remind us, since much of what such demographic segmenting is intended to do is simply to *describe* a campaign landscape, but inevitably such descriptions are operationalized and eventually these shorthand demographics become targets for winning votes and influence. They may end up creating as much as describing a social universe.

What is perhaps most interesting is the breathtaking transformation in the self-identification in that polling over the last generation. Nearly gone, it would seem, are the doctrinal enthusiasts checking off their Bebbington Quadrilateral before declaring themselves evangelical. Significant questions have even been raised about exactly how pious self-declared evangelicals in the United States are today. “Evangelical,” instead, seems to serve as a cultural or sociological label correlated strongly with espousing traditional Christian morality, being Republican, and being what Americans call “white” (itself a subject for a longer, important debate). It is also correlated strongly with the belief that immigration is more threat than promise, particular concerns over Islam, support of President Trump, and even the conviction that the 2020 American presidential election was stolen.⁷ These more sociological definitions even call into question whether one must be *Protestant* to be evangelical, or how—as John Maiden shows in this volume—boundaries have shifted between Catholics and Protestants over questions of religious liberty since Vatican II.

Few social scientists want to suggest that Bebbington’s quadrilateral has a direct *causal* relationship to these views, but it remains a cultural reality that these views and practices are indeed significantly represented among those in the United States who self-identify as evangelical. Do we simply dismiss these people as illiterates and simpletons? Or do we acknowledge that there is some sort of fierce definitional debate around evangelical, and that Du Mez might be right to say that we would do well to speak of “many evangelicalisms?”

It is increasingly rare to see productive dialogue between the two broad trajectories in defining evangelicalism, the theological and the cultural, and yet this volume gifts us exactly that. In several chapters, particularly those discussing older periods, you will find Bebbington’s quadrilateral

⁷ See, for example, Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

a perfect fit, a match for what is under discussion and how it relates to the intrinsic importance of religious freedom. In others, especially the more contemporary chapters, one can hardly overlook Melani McAlister's arresting use of the term "persecution politics." Here, the movement is seen in terms of a cultural definition relating to power, especially in American foreign policy. The chapters rarely speak *of* one another in focus and content, but in this debate over evangelicalism they do speak *to* each other. He who has ears, let him hear.

Religious Freedom: An Essentially Contested Term

Religious freedom, however defined, is intrinsically about the relationship between what we have come to call the boundary between the secular and the religious. That such a boundary exists at all is the subject of a major, violent, debate across the globe. That such a boundary is at the very least contested, even in the United States, should hardly merit mention. Daniel Philpott, for example, differentiates between no fewer than nine different concepts of the secular in political science today.⁸ Jonathan Fox, in detailing types of religious freedom, names no fewer than ten.⁹ A survey of just the public debates over the US and Canadian (defunct since 2016) Offices of Religious Freedom found at least six meaningfully rival visions of religious freedom.¹⁰

This book, too, will treat us to what might be called rival, or at least meaningfully distinct, understandings of religious freedom. Melani McAlister, for example, in her chapter on the advocacy of religious freedom in the United States, makes clear that she sees evangelical activism on the subject as "deeply problematic: built around fundamental assumptions about Islam as a danger, and organized by a set of emotional or affective practices that have allowed American evangelical believers to recast *themselves* as under siege." Religious freedom, for McAlister, is a kind of watchword for blending the significant existential danger religious minorities face across the globe with the perceived loss of prestige of white evangelicalism in the United States. This fusion is a kind of moral sleight of hand

⁸ Daniel Philpott, "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?" *Annual Political Science Review* 12 (2009): 183–202.

⁹ Jonathan Fox, *The Unfree Exercise of Religion: A World Survey of Religious Discrimination against Religious Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 45 (table 2.1).

¹⁰ Robert Joustra, *The Religious Problem with Religious Freedom: Why Foreign Policy Needs Political Theology* (London: Routledge, 2018), xiii–xiv (table 0.1).

that places the integrity of the whole movement in question. The politics of persecution, as she calls it, are less about the rights of minorities and more about a backlash against perceived secularization and the loss of majority power inside the United States. Religious freedom, in this sense, is paired somewhat incongruously with “Making America Great Again,” a nostalgic sense of return to a more racially and religiously homogenous time. As Barry Hankins writes in this book, “as the sense of being embattled grew, sometimes into a siege mentality, evangelicals have come to see themselves more and more as cultural dissenters who need religious liberty protection.” This kind of religious freedom is what John Coffey, in his chapter on evangelical toleration in the age of Wilberforce, calls “a technology of the powerful,” a kind of weaponization of the concept.

Nevertheless, as Coffey adds in the same breath, it has also been “a weapon of the weak.” Especially as we move abroad, as we do in Thompson’s evaluation of Christian-Muslim pluralism in Nigeria, or Wai Luen Kwok’s celebration of the catalyzing of liberties in China, we get a picture of religious freedom less as an imperial deployment and more as the sort of foundational human right that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and—indeed—the US Constitution have in mind. Certainly this is the legacy that Nicholas Miller invokes when he describes the charter of Roger Williams as a “second Magna Carta.” In fact, Hankins writes, one wonders if it is not what many American evangelicals *themselves* have in mind, and whether “there is more diversity among evangelicals than the media would lead us to believe.”

So, what is religious freedom? Is it an imperial colonization of hegemonic foreign policy, is it a shibboleth for perceived loss in prestige and power on the part of an American racial and religious group, or is it an international right—a bedrock political foundation—that secures the most basic premises of what makes for a free and just society? Like Du Mez’s comment on evangelicalism, and after reading these chapters, we might conclude that the answer is “all of the above.” As academics so famously like to say, *it depends*. Religious freedom, as Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Sullivan¹¹ have ably argued in previous decades, *depends* on particular constructions of the religious and the secular, of what both

¹¹ For Hurd, see especially Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and also idem, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). For Sullivan: Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

things are—if they are discretely separable at all—and where the boundaries of one should begin and end. In other words, any understanding or practice of religious freedom depends on moral, political—and yes, even religious—convictions. That this makes them contestable is the least interesting part of the discussion. What is possible for us now is to name with moral conviction the meanings, boundaries, and therefore definition of religious freedom, and to advance our policies in the clear light—and open debate—of that conviction. This, after all, is not a bad definition of politics itself. And there are worse places to start than the American experiment, but—like our authors—it also behooves us to move abroad, to visit our neighbors in not only time but geography, and to learn how best to serve our neighbor's dignity.

Conclusion

To say that there is disagreement over a thing, like evangelicalism or religious freedom, is not to say that this thing has *no meaning*. It is rather to say that there is quite a *lot of meaning*, and that these terms strike deep to the heart of moral, religious, and political convictions. It makes chapters like these more, not less, important. And it does not leave us with the soft option of shrugging our shoulders in regret that there is so much deep disagreement in our day. To say that there is considerable, even essentially contested, disagreement over a term is not the end of the matter, it is—at best—the beginning.

I believe this realization should also inspire some patience on our part. The story of evangelicalism and religious freedom is not one of a simple power play or self-interested ploy—although it clearly includes some power plays, and some self-interest! Nor, it seems, is it the equally simple morality play of righteous warriors safeguarding a world of persecuted minorities from atheistic globalists. It is, in truth, a bit of both, sometimes more one than the other, always a mixture of pieties and politics, some as oblique to us as they will be to those who tell the story after us. But we could do much worse than to have the kind and careful authors of this book's chapters tell that story, to work over the testimony of those who have come before, to tell that story *faithfully* to the people, to the politics, and to the pursuit of justice so badly needed in our world today.

I

America

Protestant Dissenters, a Second Magna Carta, and Religious Freedom

Nicholas P. Miller

Today in the United States we live in a rights-saturated society. Almost every special interest group—from environmental, to ecological, to animal advocates, to human interest groups of all types, including those advocating for sexual and gender minorities—has picked up the banner of rights associated with historically protected categories like religion, speech, association, race, and sex. Rights very frequently clash, as modern conceptions of rights are often in tension with more traditional views.

There is ongoing conflict in courts and legislatures over the balance between the freedoms of religious institutions, colleges, and universities to uphold standards that conflict with new orthodoxies regarding sexuality and gender. Another even more recent example is the growing tension between religious freedom and pandemic regulations, like quarantining and closing laws, as well as mask and vaccine requirements.

Part of the ongoing conceptual problem is the question of the basis of rights and the philosophy behind them. Many scholars would agree that the Supreme Court's definition of rights has become more and more detached from the documents in which they are ostensibly based, the US Constitution and its Bill of Rights. Scholars, especially more conservative ones, have for decades debated the historic and textual moorings of rights like national rights to abortion and birth control, and more recently to gay

marriage. The criticism is often made that rights are “found” in the political philosophical commitments of judges and justices, rather than having real footing in a historical text or the philosophy therein.

Evangelicals are often at the forefront of critiquing and criticizing such decisions, calling for the appointment of judges who will apply the Constitution and not their own opinions. Phrases like “strict construction” and “original intent” are invoked, on the premise that a return to these principles of interpretation would prevent the courts from egregiously expanding the Bill of Rights far beyond what the founders intended.

Part of the problem, however, is that for the founders themselves, the basis of construing rights appeared somewhat philosophical and not entirely textual. Indeed, most historians agree that John Locke’s conception of natural rights, as adopted and adapted by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, played a part, if not a central role, in how the founders thought about rights. The cryptic Ninth Amendment, which asserts that “the enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people,” provides textual, originalist support for the idea that rights not listed in the Constitution should be protected, somehow, by the body politic.

This reading of the Ninth Amendment bothers a lot of legal scholars, both conservative and progressive, because it seems to swing the doors wide open to all sorts of rights that could be conjured forth from nature; perhaps as a result, the amendment has largely not been used as a storehouse of unwritten rights. The Supreme Court generally uses other clauses, like those relating to due process, privacy, speech, or commerce, to cover broad areas that may not have been intended by the founders. Indeed, what founder would have thought that the commerce clause should be the basis of civil rights legislation?

But what if the Constitution, rather than being a *sui generis* fount of something entirely new, a complete revolution in nation and rights building, was rather a major evolutionary step forward, rooted in a history of developing rights and institutions that had textual authority, which could provide a more detailed basis for thinking about rights than a simple and vague invocation of nature? And further, what if this textual and institutional heritage had a special connection to the ancestors of modern-day evangelicals and could provide them with a special guide as to how such questions could be approached? That such a document and heritage exist

is the argument of this chapter, which seeks to show how this heritage impacted the American founding and the implications this might have for how evangelicals think about religious freedom today.

Roger Williams

To begin the story, we go back to an early American who is somewhat controversial in the religious freedom realm. Roger Williams, of Rhode Island fame, is appreciated by most commentators as an early apostle of religious freedom. At the same time, he is suspected by some of injecting the early DNA of the separation of church and state, which has morphed into the separation of morality and the state, into the American experience.

In 1644 Roger Williams was in England on a tricky mission to obtain a royal charter for his new colony, the Providence Plantation, forerunner of the state of Rhode Island. He had arrived in England in the middle of the English Civil War between King Charles and Parliament, following on the heels of agents of the Massachusetts Bay colony, from which Williams had been exiled, who were intent on obtaining a charter that would absorb Rhode Island into the Bay colony. Somehow, in the midst of these turbulent times and pressures exerted by political enemies, Williams not only was successful in obtaining a charter for his colony but also found time to write several treatises on church and state.¹

The most notable and remembered of these works was a four-hundred-page book known as *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*. Addressed to the English Parliament, the work was a sustained, passionate, and voluble criticism of the doctrine of civil persecution for the “cause of conscience.” Written in haste, under the deadline of his impending departure for Rhode Island, the book was not actually printed until after Williams set sail for home. That was probably a good thing—the contents landed like a bombshell in Parliament, generating fervent interest (a second edition had to be printed after only three weeks to meet demand) as well as profound outrage.

The outrage, at least initially, prevailed. One preacher, speaking to the combined houses of Parliament, demanded that they act “against the ungodly Toleration pleaded for under the pretense of LIBERTY of Conscience.”² Parliament responded rapidly to this and similar criticisms; within eight weeks of the treatise’s publication, they “Ordered,

¹ This trip has been most recently and colorfully described in John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Viking, 2012), 286–312, upon which my description relies.

² Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 338.

that Mr. White [the government hangman] do give Order for the Publick Burning of . . . Williams . . . booke . . . [for] the Tolerating of All Sorts of Religion.”³

Fortunately for him, by this time Williams was beyond the reach of English courts and Parliament, safely back home in Providence Plantation. The failure of English institutions and customs in protecting liberties had originally caused Williams’ departure for colonial America. This latest brush with censorious authority only underscored these limitations for him, strengthening his conviction that a new kind of government needed to be created in the wilderness of the New World.

It is unsurprising that Williams did not rely on or explicitly draw from English heritage and institutions in making his arguments for full religious liberty. Rather, his *Bloudy Tenent* abounds with arguments from Scripture and theological reasoning. History, outside of Scripture, is generally invoked to provide negative examples of the folly and suffering caused by the use of force in religious matters. There are at least a couple of exceptions, however, to this general pattern of negativity, and they both involve Magna Carta, one indirectly, the other more directly. The first is Williams’ mention and praise of his old patron and mentor Sir Edward Coke, the great jurist and politician who led the cause of Parliament against unbri-dled royal power under Charles I, basing his arguments on the limits provided by Magna Carta.⁴

The second, more direct, reference is a call Williams makes to the heritage and memory of Magna Carta itself. In one telling passage in *The Bloudy Tenent*, he invokes the Magna Carta as the model for a new guarantee of the right of religious liberty. If religious freedom were guaranteed by law, he argues, it would be “the Magna Charta of highest liberties,” and soon people and homes would be covered with the “Olive Branches of peace.”⁵

In the margin of the text, the heading reads “the blessed Magna Charta,” though whether this is a reference to the ancient document or the proposed new one that would protect religious freedom is not clear. But it is apparent that Williams finds laudable the idea of a fundamental set of laws, like Magna Carta, that would protect not just civil liberties and process but religious freedom itself. The ancient Magna Carta protected

³ Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, 338.

⁴ Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 56–57.

⁵ Williams, *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, 220.