

William Dell, 1607–1669, Parliamentary Army Chaplain, and Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Dell was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was appointed Rector of Yelden, a small village in Bedfordshire in 1641. From 1644 he served in the Parliamentary Army, and joined the New Model Army soon after its formation in 1645, serving under General Thomas Fairfax as a 'preacher of the army' in the campaigns of 1645–6, from the battle of Naseby to the siege of Oxford; and was the officiating minister at the marriage of General Henry Ireton to Oliver Cromwell's daughter Bridget, which took place at Holton in Oxfordshire in 1646, Holton being at that time the headquarters of Fairfax's army.

In June of 1646, he preached before Fairfax and the officers at Marston, a sermon entitled, 'The Building and the Glory of the Truly Spiritual and Christian Church,' which was published in the following year. In this message Dell referred to the New Model Army as a true spiritual church, and declared that the LORD would not allow this church to be overcome. In that same month of June, 1646, he entered Oxford, with the Army, which resulted in the surrender of the city. It would seem that he remained in Oxford for a few months where, according to Anthony Wood, {*Athenae Oxonienses*, 1691,} Dell became conspicuous by forcing himself into several of the churches in the town as a preacher. Wood {in accordance with his own royalist bigotry, and often fantastical interpretations} goes on to state, "when the forces belonging to the Parliament were entered, who were all Presbyterians, Independents or worse, were among them their Chaplains of the same persuasion, who forthwith, upon all occasions, thrust themselves into the pulpits, purposely by their rascally doctrine to obtain either proselytes, or to draw off from their loyal principles and orthodox religion the scholars and inhabitants of the city. Among them were Hugh Peters that diabolical villain and pulpit-buffoon, William Dell, who was chaplain to Sir Thomas Fairfax, John Saltmarsh, William Erbury, &c., and what they did there besides, during their stay, is too large a story now to tell you."

Dell preached before Parliament on Nov. 25, 1646, a Fast Day on which they also heard a sermon by Mr. Christopher Love, the defender of the Presbyterian cause. {As a quick side note, Love in 1651, became involved in a plot to overthrow the Parliamentary government of Cromwell, in hopes of restoring Charles II as King of England. In May of 1651, he was ordered to be arrested on charges of high treason and was confined to the Tower of London. Within three months Love was convicted of treason and sentenced to death, and was executed on Tower Hill in London on August 23, 1651.} Dell's message {from Hebrews 9:10} in which he attacked the Westminster Assembly, argued for a separation of Church and State, religious toleration, and first and foremost for Christ as the chief Reformer of his own church, was soon thereafter published under the title, "Right Reformation; or the Reformation of the Church of the New Testament represented in Gospel Light." In its Dedicatory Epistle, {addressed to the members of Parliament,} he makes the following statement, "if any think that I gave too much power to CHRIST, in the reforming of the Church, his own body; let them consider again, that too much cannot be given to CHRIST in GOD'S Kingdom, seeing he is all in all in it. Neither is that exaltation the Gospel gives to CHRIST in this business, any diminution to yourselves; neither by making CHRIST all in the Kingdom of GOD, are you made ever the less, in the kingdom of this world. But whatever power the Word of GOD hath given you, I will deny you none of it; nay, I will be among the first, that shall attribute it to you. And do desire, you would no more be displeased for attributing the Reformation of the Church to CHRIST alone, than the Redemption, Justification, Sanctification, or Glorification of it to CHRIST alone; the former being every whit, as great and glorious a work of CHRIST, as the latter. I do most willingly allow you your thrones in the Kingdoms of this World, but only desire to reserve to Christ his own throne in the Kingdom of GOD." Both the sermons of Dell and Love were published, with letters of mutual condemnation of one another's views, attached at the end. Dell's evaluation of Love's message can be summarized in his own words, "many other weak, passionate, inconsiderate, erroneous things fell from Mr. Love, neither worth the troubling of the reader with, nor myself; and so they may perish and rot in their own grave, if they will, for they shall never receive a resurrection from me." In the light of

such remarks Dell now became a marked man amongst many of the Presbyterian zealots, notably Baillie, Love and Rutherford, the latter remarking, {Rutherford's, Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist, London, 1647,} "among other Antinomians, Master Dell in his sermon before the House of Commons, excelleth in debasing the Scriptures, and all Ordinances, and setting up his enthusiastical spirit, not the Spirit of God."

On the day of the execution of King Charles, {January 30, 1649,} he was one of four ministers {the others being Joseph Caryl, Richard Vines & Edmund Calamy,} who presented themselves at St. James Palace, with a willingness to pray with, and speak to the King, if he would have allowed it. Another 'historian' {Cole} again intending to discredit Dell, and those in his connection, had these interesting remarks regarding this incident, "and on the morning of the martyrdom of King Charles, he, {Dell,} with other bold and insolent fanatical ministers, went with all the solemnity becoming a better cause, and all the confidence and assurance peculiar to the fanatical tribe, to offer their unhallowed services to the blessed martyr, whom they had just brought to the scaffold."

In April of 1649, Dr. Thomas Batchcroft was ejected from the headship of Caius College, {upon the restoration of the crown, he was reinstated in 1660,} and in the following month Dell was appointed by Parliament to succeed him. During his occupation of this office {which lasted until 1660} he repeatedly took the opportunity from the pulpit of St. Mary's of denouncing the role of the University in their manufacturing of so-called ministers of the Gospel, excluded from communion all who were suspected of royalist leanings, and wrought havoc against the trappings of Popery, as its tenets had infiltrated the church.

In 1653 he preached at St. Mary's, in reply to a sermon delivered from the same pulpit in the previous year by Sidrach Simpson, master of Pembroke College, and one of the leaders of the Independent faction in the Westminster Assembly. Simpson, in a commencement sermon, had attempted to set forth the importance of classical learning and university culture generally in the training of a minister for his vocation. Dell, in his reply, {which caused quite an uproar, being spoken from within the academic circle,} made his argument that human learning was essentially irrelevant to the education of a true minister of the Gospel, vehemently denouncing the notion that such attainments were of any value as a means towards the better understanding of scripture, and even associating his own University of Cambridge with antichrist, and calling it the "throne of the Beast." He says, "and herein, according to the grace of Christ, I both do and will contend against it forever, seeing human learning mingled with divinity, or the Gospel of Christ understood according to Aristotle, hath begun, continued and perfected the mystery of iniquity in the outward church. Wherefore I do in all boldness appear for Christ, the wisdom of God, against human learning, the wisdom of the world; knowing assuredly, that he is as very antichrist, who opposes Christ as the wisdom of God, as he that opposes him, as the power and righteousness of God, and men may as well bring into the church of God another righteousness than Christ, and another power than Christ, as another wisdom than Christ. Wherefore, as they who bring in human righteousness, that is, civil or moral righteousness, or any works or duties of men for righteousness, into the church of Christ, they are true antichrists in so doing; seeing herein they are contrary to, and do oppose Christ the righteousness of God, and as they who bring in human power, or the secular arm into the church of Christ, to do or leave undone, to reward or punish, to promise or threaten, to encourage or discourage by that, they are true antichrists in so doing; seeing herein they are contrary to, and do oppose Christ, the power of God. So also, they that bring in human wisdom, or the learning and philosophy of men, into the church of Christ, they also are true antichrists in so doing; for herein they are contrary to, and do oppose Christ, the wisdom of God; for Christ is, and is to be, the only power, the only wisdom, and the only righteousness in the church of God; and he that brings in any other power, wisdom or righteousness, besides Christ himself, that man is in very deed antichrist. And in this matter also, it was necessary that I should be bold for Christ against antichrist."

Upon the death of Cromwell, and the return of the King, Dell made post haste to abandon his position at Cambridge, and retired to his rectory at Yelden. This was in May of

1660, which was followed by a petition signed by thirty aggrieved parishioners from Yelden, who presented to the House of Lords, a request for his removal, naming amongst other things the fact that he allowed a tinker by the name of John Bunyan to preach in his pulpit on Christmas Day, 1659. A portion of the petition reads as follows. "He has reported that the King and his followers were like the Devil and his angels, and has approved of the murder of the King, and the taking away of the House of Lords; he has for twelve years past neglected the due administration of the Sacraments, in consequence of which many children are unbaptized; he has ceased to sing any psalms or read any chapters in the Holy Bible on the Lord's-day in the congregation... he has entrapped the gentry of the county into discourse, and then given false information against them; he hath declared in the public congregation that he had rather hear a plain country man speak in the church, that came from the plough, than the best orthodox minister that was in the county; upon Christmas Day, last one, Bunyan, a tinker, was countenanced and suffered to speak in his pulpit to the congregation, and no orthodox minister did officiate in the church that day. Since the restoration of the secluded members of Parliament he has declared that the power was now in the hands of the wicked, and that the land was like to be over flowed again with Popery; he hath put forth several seditious books, and before the horrid murder of the late King he declared publicly in the congregation that the King was no king to him, Christ was his King; Venice and Holland were without a king, and why might not we be without; and that he did not approve of earthly kings." Probably, the Parliament had more pressing issues at this time, so thankfully for Dell, it was set aside.

In 1662, when Dell refused to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity, {which prescribed the form of public prayers, administration of sacraments, and other rites of the Established Church of England, according to the rites and ceremonies prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer,} he was ejected from his living on the 24th of August. He then moved to the small village of Westoning, where he died on Nov.5, 1669.

Due to his outspokenness on many issues which separated him from other believers of his time, it would seem that Dell walked a relatively isolated path throughout his life, though we can evidently see the Lord's gracious reign of grace mercifully exerted on his behalf, in sustaining him, as he sought to faithfully preach the Gospel of Christ, in those years when so many were risen up against him.

Dell writes in 1653, "through dissent from so many worthy and gracious men, that have been, and are otherwise minded; yet it is the less grievous to me, because I differ from them, {I can say it in truth before the Lord,} not out of any desire to be singular, or for any worldly or carnal end whatever, but only that I might cleave to the clear and evident word of God alone; even there, where I see the very faithful to leave it; seeing I am rather to join to the word, without men, than to men without the word; and where I find the most holy men in the world, and the word parting, I am there to leave them, and to go along with the word." He concludes his *Stumbling Stone* treatise with the following paragraph, which seems a fitting conclusion. "But because I see this present generation so rooted and built up in the doctrines of men, I have the less hope that this truth will prevail with them; and therefore I appeal to the next generation; which will be further removed from those evils, and will be brought nearer to the word; but especially to that people, whom God hath and shall form by his Spirit for himself; for these only will be able to make just and righteous judgment in this matter, seeing they have the anointing to be their teacher, and the Lamb to be their light."