

inversion to come, woman would no longer be a weaker vessel. Two themes were stressed in his writing of 1649. One was the end of property as a consequence of the practical effect of Christian ethics; the rich in giving to the poor would divest themselves of their wealth. Secondly, that it was religious formalism, of all types, which hypocritically stood in the way of this practical Christianity—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, fatherless and afflicted—the practical Christianity of the heart.¹⁴ These are still themes which are central to *A Fiery Flying Roll* when it appears in January 1650. The *Roll* is a deliberately controlled, but extraordinarily savage, attack upon every manifestation of formalism. Form without praxis is the cancer of hypocrisy. The marrow of true Christianity is in its practical charity. The consequences of the wholehearted pursuit of practical Christianity would be the undermining of a property system whose moral basis was covetousness and hardness of heart. The indebtedness of Coppe to the Levellers, with their emphasis on practical Christianity, and to Winstanley's indictment of covetousness is clear.¹⁵ But he rejects 'sword' levelling and Winstanley's 'digging' levelling for a levelling based on moral renewal inspired by God's spiritual informing of individuals; the setting at nought of things that are by God's use of the things that are not.¹⁶

The language of *A Fiery Flying Roll* is deliberately startling. It is meant to communicate the urgency of an imminent divine coming, both inward and outward in its effects, which is not so much comforting as unsettling, disturbing and overturning. In addition, Coppe had to impress upon his readers the awesome, distracting legitimacy of his own prophetic role. There is, accordingly, a good deal of semantic athleticism about the work, but it would be a confusion to suggest that there is anything of the mystical about it. Rather than a rejection of Scripture, the tract is a meditation upon two scriptural texts, Hosea ii.9 (with the Lord's threat to return and recover his corn, wool and flax) and the whole of The General Epistle of James, but especially chapter one's injunction to practical Christianity and chapter five's warning to the rich. In fact, rather than repudiating Scripture, Coppe rejects the allegorising of these texts. Scripture and spiritual illumination must co-exist, like a jewel and its cabinet. The thrust of the tract is a balanced attack on formalism with, on the other hand, a condemnation of sterile religious enthusiasm.

The heart of true Christianity is in the self-denying work of charity. 'He that hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in want, and shutteth up the bowells of compassion from him, the love of God dwelleth not in him; this man's Religion is in vain . . . he never yet broke bread—that hath not forgot his [meum].'¹⁷ As